

Kings in the Elizabethan Period

Cosmic order was a master theme of Elizabethan literature because there was great instability in many aspects of life:

- rediscovery of Greek and Roman thought
- rediscovery of America (*the map had to be redrawn*)
- discovery that the earth is not flat
- Galileo's new theory concerning the relationship between the Earth and Sun

This caused people to become fearful of the future, and they insisted that they must see **ORDER** in everything.

Shakespeare relied on this standard idea of the Elizabethans in producing his plays. Everything that happened in his play represented a universal lesson. Shakespeare's stage, **The Globe**, represented the whole of life.

Kings and queens were thought to be appointed by the ordinance of God. They were a representation of God on earth. The philosophy behind this was that order can only be restored if rulers supervise the social structure. Therefore, obedience was revered as a good trait in people and rebelliousness was seen as a negative one. This hierarchical social structure is referred to as **The Great Chain of Being**.

The Great Chain of Being

- 1) **God** - omnipotent, eternal.
- 2) **Angels** - pure spirit, with God, immortal.
- 3) **Mankind** - has reason, moral sense, soul, ambition (*kings, clergy, nobles, landowners, peasants and slaves*).
- 4) **Beasts** - they feel all five senses and have movement and memory.
- 5) **Plants** - have life; grow and decay.
- 6) **Stones** - mere physical existence.

It was believed that chaos would occur if one of these links were removed or altered (*i.e. Macbeth kills Duncan, the rightful king*).