**The Divine Order - The Great Chain of Being**

|  |
| --- |
| In Elizabethan times, there was a different way of looking at life. People, including Shakespeare believed in a Divine Order, or Great Chain of Being. The Divine Order was the belief that everything in the universe has a specific place and rank in order of their perceived importance and "spiritual" nature. The more "spirit" a person or object had, the more power he or she had. ***The more spirit an object was thought to have, the higher they would be in the Divine Order. Here is the example of the Divine Order:***Most Amount of Spirit/Highest on the Divine Order * God
* Angels (seraphim, cherubim)
* Humans (kings, merchants, men women, etc.
* Animals (mouse, dogs, lions, etc.)
* Plants (grass, trees, etc.)
* http://3ehamlet.wikispaces.com/file/view/HierarchicalScale.gif/195802992/HierarchicalScale.gifLeast Amount of Spirit/ Lowest on the Divine Order- Nonliving Objects (rocks, metals, etc.)

***Within each category there were more specific cataloguing.*** ***For example humans were believed to have different amounts*** ***of spirits. Below is an example of the Divine Order for humans:***Most Amount of Spirit/Highest on the Divine Order * Kings
* Queens
* Nobles
* Merchants
* Least Amount of Spirit/ Lowest on the Divine Order- Peasants

W***ithin families there was even specific cataloguing. Below*** ***is an example of the Divine Order for humans:***Most Amount of Spirit/Highest on the Divine Order * Father
* Mothers
* Sons
* Daughter
* Least Amount of Spirit/ Lowest on the Divine Order- Servants

***What does all of this mean?***The more "spirit" the person or object had, the more power it had in its interactions with people or things below in the order. People in Elizabethan England believed that God set up this order and wanted it to be followed. If someone or something were to break the Divine Order by not being obedient to whatever was above it, the person or thing that went against the God's will would be punished. Bigger betrayals of the Divine Order were believed to bring bigger punishments by God, while smaller betrayals would bring about smaller punishments. For example, if a noble overthrew a king, Elizabethan people thought that a natural disaster (an earthquake, a hurricane, etc.) would strike. If a daughter disobeyed her father, Elizabethan people believed the daughter might fall ill. This was a very convenient way for people higher in the Divine Order to maintain their power. ***What does this have to do with Shakespeare?***Shakespeare sincerely believed in the Divine Order, and many of his plays revolve around this belief. Macbeth, Taming of the Shrew, Romeo and Juliet, and Hamlet are just a few of the plays that reflect Shakespeare's belief in the Great Chain of Being and his desire to maintain God's Order. |

***Structure of His Plays***

