A BODY OF SUFFERING:

READING SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDIES

THROUGH COGNITIVE THEORY

By

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

In the following chapters I attempt to build and use a cognitive theory of tragedy. I base this theory upon the work of George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and Mark Turner, whose studies of embodied metaphor and conceptual blending offer a new linguistic understanding of the way human beings think. When applied to tragedy, these cognitive theories enable a radical rethinking of the tragic hero, catharsis, and suffering itself.

My thesis contains three major sections. In the first, I lay out the foundation of my theory, describing the basic processes of embodied metaphor and conceptual blending and linking these processes to theoretical accounts of paradigm shift and pattern, specifically those of Thomas Kuhn and Daniel Dennett. I then describe cognitive theory's relationship to traditional tragic theorists, including Aristotle, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Terry Eagleton. Finally, I offer a cognitive reading of two plays: *Romeo and Juliet* and *King Lear*.

Throughout, I hope to illustrate the links between thought, metaphor, and human action. Metaphors are not simply linguistic expressions: they are tools of the mind, and our use of those tools can bring great success or great tragedy. As such, tragedy is not merely an aesthetic genre. It is a cognitive event, a presentation of metaphor and of the consequences of metaphor.

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An Introduction

This project began with an intuition. Tragedy, and tragic theory, is obsessed with opposition: the love and hate of *Romeo and Juliet*, the pity and fear of Aristotle, the Apollonian and Dionysian of Nietzsche, the opposing moral goods of Hegel. I suspected that tragedy operates according to the archetype of the Buddha's Enlightenment. Like Siddhartha, I conjectured, the tragic protagonist must undergo a trial of opposites, a period of suffering between extremes. This trial is the gate of Enlightenment, the portal to a unique, tragic understanding of the universe.

There is no clear link, however, between Buddhism and Shakespearean tragedy. One might make a tenuous case for a universal archetype of the suffering hero (Dionysus, Buddha, and Christ), yet the foundation for such archetypes is often suspect. I cannot argue for a single tradition of world myths—an argument that ignores cultural contingency—nor will I seek to resurrect Jung's collective unconscious. Instead, I need a new Bodhi tree.

That tree is the human body. The one thing that all tragic protagonists share is a material body. From the perspective of cognitive theory, this simple truism becomes a powerful tool for reading; if tragic protagonists share the human body, then they share the strongest foundation of human cognition; if they share processes of cognition, then the ways they perceive the world are linked; and if readers, too, share the human body, then the body becomes a common foundation for viewing tragedy. The ways individuals conceptualize the world, the ways they craft

metaphors to explain and predict the wonders about them, are contingent upon local and temporal cultures, but are bound together through the shared experience of the corporeal body.

Shakespeare's tragic protagonists, like all human beings, experience the world via bodies, and like all human beings, they perceive the world through embodied metaphors. Yet those metaphors lead to both triumph and suffering, for human metaphors, like human vision, are partial. Just as physical sight is bound within a field of vision, so, too, cognitive sight is bound by the range of human attention and understanding. One cannot *see* everything at once; to watch one danger, an individual must always turn its back upon another. So it is with Shakespeare's protagonists: they embrace desire wholeheartedly, but fear pounces upon their backs; they live for nobility and honor, but envy and jealousy betray them to the darkness. Sometimes they pass through the gate of opposition, gaining a new insight about the world, about the tragedy of human cognition: that sight is always partial, and that cognitive monsters always lurk in the darkness, just outside of our vision. Sometimes the reader must travel alongside them, sympathizing with their suffering and completing their tragic journey: for like these tragic protagonists, we too have bodies; we too must experience the world through flesh and bone, and we can sympathize with the tragedy of that type of vision.

I begin this thesis with a survey of cognitive theory as it pertains to my project. I then present my own cognitive reading of tragedy, and I compare that reading to traditional tragic theories. Finally, I offer cognitive readings of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet*, in hopes that these readings will demonstrate the depth and versatility of my position. Throughout this piece, I hope to approach, if not answer, one central question:

How do we experience tragedy?

Tragic Cognition:
Guiding Metaphors as the Structure of Tragedy

Tragedy is not a genre. Tragedy is not a dramatic from. It does not require actors, a stage, or a script. It does not require kings, fate, or falls from fortune.

Shakespeare did not write tragedies.

Tragedy *is* an event. It requires a reader, a protagonist, and an occasion of suffering. It requires an act of interpretation. Tragedy can occur in everyday experience just as it can occur in art. Texts are often the locus of such an event, but they are by no means required. All that is necessary is a system of metaphors that links reader and protagonist through the occasion of suffering and a system that enables interpretation. Metaphors are not literary devices. Metaphors are primary principles of the mind.

By interpretation, I do not mean criticism. Whenever humans consciously process information they are engaging in interpretation. Tragedy does not demand a specific conclusion for such interpretation. Instead, it demands a certain, common viewpoint: the human body and the embodied, cognitive perspective that we all share. The reader views the suffering of the protagonist through the lens of the human body, blends themselves with that protagonist, and perceives the source of suffering as the cognitive process itself. To be precise, the reader sees that seeing is tragic.

Such a definition of tragedy is hardly straightforward or transparent. In the following pages, I will lay out the foundation of this definition and its interactions with traditional tragic

theory. In addition, throughout this study I will refer to tragedy as a genre and tragedies as texts for ease of communication and to adhere to critical conventions. Such references, however, will be metonymic: these texts are not self-sufficient; they stand for the events of which they are the loci.

My study of Shakespearean Tragedy—and by extension, tragedy in general—is rooted in Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive account of metaphor, as expressed in *Metaphors We Live By*. Cognitive theory at large is a loose affiliation of scientific and humanistic approaches to human cognition, including the fields of linguistics, psychology, neurology, artificial intelligence, and philosophy. Lakoff and Johnson's particular approach to cognitive theory harmonizes with literary study, for they posit that one fundamental cognitive process is in fact a poetic and literary one: "Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (3). Metaphor is not a highly specialized usage of language, found only in literary texts. Instead, it is the primary way that we deal with abstract concepts on a daily basis.

In order to isolate metaphor's role in cognition, Lakoff and Johnson work backwards from everyday language: "since communication is based on the same conceptual system that we use in thinking and acting, language is an important source of evidence for what that system is like" (3). Because of the close ties between language and cognition, Lakoff and Johnson infer that the way we manipulate concepts in language is akin to, if not synonymous with, the way we manipulate concepts in thought: a potentially political gesture, for if language is so closely linked to thought, then a reader prepared to witness the manipulation and the structuring of concepts is prepared to witness the machinations of writers and speakers. *Structural metaphors* such as "love is magic," "argument is war," and "life is a journey" allow one to view and manipulate

abstract concepts; they grant a viewpoint from which to consider these ideas, a set of similarities from which to draw inferences, and a convenient and expedient mode of manipulating advanced concepts. They also elide information in such a deft fashion as to be politically and existentially dangerous. This elision can cause suffering.

Naturally, metaphors do not incorporate all elements of each part—"argument" and "war," for example—into the final synthesis: "when we say that a concept is structured by a metaphor, we mean that it is partially structured and that it can be extended in some ways but not others" (13). When speaking of arguments, one normally uses such phrases as "the debate involved two opposing sides", "the confrontation heated up," "the combatants armed themselves," and "each defended their position from attack." However, one does not normally speak of camouflage, tanks, or a cavalry charge. One could say that "his argument was like a cavalry charge in its force," but such a metaphorical use extends the standard social metaphor "argument is war." Instead, metaphors only incorporate similar elements of each part. They elide the dissimilar: a dangerous but necessary move.

In addition to structural metaphors, there are *orientational metaphors*, which concern spatial orientations such as "up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral." These metaphors are *embodied metaphors*, for "these spatial orientations arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment" (14). While Lakoff and Johnson recognize that the evidence for their case is limited by the current scope of cognitive research, they assert that they "*feel that no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis*" (19). Lakoff and Johnson base this assertion upon the structural metaphor "ideas are objects," which entails that ideas can be treated as if they were physical entities: one can "grasp"

ideas, "fumble around" for them, or "throw them out" as if they were here in one's hands. They can have size—"that concept is too *big* for me to grasp"—and they can have abstract properties that can correspond metaphorically to physical ones—"that was a *dark* joke" (color or quantity of light as ethical quality); "the murder *weighs* upon my conscience" (physical weight as emotional consequence or *gravity*). One can also distinguish parts of these conceptual objects, dissecting and manipulating them as if they were concrete things: "understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substances allows us to pick out parts of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind" (25).

Expressions such as these lead one to an understanding of *embodied metaphor*: "our experiences with physical objects (especially our own bodies) provide the basis for an extraordinarily wide variety of ontological metaphors, that is, ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances" (25). The experience of living in human bodies is the basis of embodied metaphor. These embodied ways of viewing the world include: the experience of the world—and of the human body—as "a container, with a bounding surface and an in-out orientation" (29); the experience of physical viewpoint as a visual field: "we conceptualize our visual field as a container and conceptualize what we see as being inside it"; and the conceptualization of events and actions "as objects, activities as substances, and states as containers" (30). Consider the following examples from *Metaphors We Live By*:

> The ship is *coming into* view. [Visual Field as Container Object]
> There was *a lot of good running in* the race. ["running" as a Substance in a Container]
> He finally *emerged from* the catatonic state he had been *in* since the end of finals week. [State as Container Object] (30-2)

Once again, these metaphors are not definitions, they are points of view and ways of manipulation (note that "points of view" implies both a physical location and a physical act of

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seeing, while "ways of manipulation" invokes both paths and physical processes). Any

metaphor is a human one, which implies two things: first, that such metaphorical perspectives are

always contingent, for "true statements made in terms of human categories do not predicate

properties of objects in themselves but rather *interactional properties* that make sense only

relative to human functioning" (163-4); secondly, that factors such as point of view, the scope of

human vision, and the temporality of experience necessarily limit any human perspective: if

objects have insides and outside, front-sides and back-sides, and if "knowledge is seeing" as

embodied metaphors suggest, then any metaphor must be limited and particular rather than

holistic, and "to highlight certain properties is necessarily to downplay or hide others, which is

what happens whenever one categorizes something. Focusing on one set of properties shifts our

attention away from others" (163). Metaphors in particular and human cognition in general are

limited by the human perspective, and the act of seeing necessitates the omission or elision of

experiential phenomena. Monsters dwell beneath the sea of cognition, for people have chosen

not to see them.

Nothing in Lakoff and Johnson's account necessitates that one must believe metaphor is

the only ground for abstract thinking, or that physical embodiment is the prime ground for

cognition. On the contrary, Lakoff and Johnson assert only what language *is* within the context

of culture, not what it *is* by nature:

> We are not claiming that physical experience is in any way more basic than other
> kinds of experience, whether emotional, mental, cultural, or whatever. All these
> experiences may be just as basic as physical experiences. Rather, what we are
> claiming about grounding is that we typically conceptualize the nonphysical *in
> terms of* the physical. (59)

With the current state of cognitive research and theory, one cannot prove that physical

experience or embodied metaphors form the basis of cognition, and one certainly cannot assert

that these metaphors are timeless facets of human experience. Based on the linguistic evidence, however, one can assert that embodied metaphors are valuable tools for exploring the predominant ways people perceive and manipulate concepts, and have done so with regularity throughout the history of western culture: "inevitably, many primary metaphors are universal because everybody has basically the same kinds of bodies and brains and lives in basically the same kinds of environments, so far as the features relevant to metaphor are concerned" (257). Insofar as one can assume a shared bodily experience and a shared linguistic heritage (with respect to metaphor, not to native tongues), one can also assume a common view point and experience for the reader. Cultural variations will occur—localized in respect to time and place—but they will not override the basic driving metaphors.

In *The Literary Mind*, Mark Turner develops this cognitive theory of metaphor even further. Turner argues that the primary principle of mind is *parable*, or narrative imagining: "narrative imagining—story—is the fundamental instrument of thought. Rational capacities depend upon it. It is our chief means of looking into the future, of predicting, of planning, and of explaining" (Turner 4-5). Parable is the cognitive ability to first create a story—which may be as complex as an epic or as simple as sentences, comprised as they are of actors (subjects) and actions (verbs)—and then to blend that story with another source of input, be it one's understanding of the present, one's anticipation of the future, or one's grasp of concepts. The basic units of parables, therefore, are "small spatial stories," i.e. metaphorical sentences (15). Like Lakoff and Johnson, Turner is hesitant to assert that parable is the only way people interact with abstract concepts. He writes, however, that:

> We may say comfortably that our understanding of spatial and bodily stories is so rich, and our powers of parable so developed, that imagination can project spatial and bodily stories at will to any point of the conceptual compass. We may also

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say comfortably that for many abstract concepts, the spatial and bodily instances are the archetypes. (51)

Parable thus encompasses both basic metaphors—"small spatial stories" that structure concepts in terms of physical experience—and larger stories—which function as metaphors in their ability to combine different types of activities through similarity and comparison. Parable enables an individual to project a story of himself performing a given action against the backdrop of his current understanding of himself and the world around him. One blends the two stories together and uses that blend to predict, plan, and explain; one interprets the world through such blends.

The novelty of Turner's thought lies in this blend. While Lakoff and Johnson focus on the ways in which metaphor structured or manipulated concepts, Turner examines the power of blended metaphors and stories to fashion and utilize larger systems of meaning: "meanings are not mental objects bounded in conceptual places but rather complex operations of projection, binding, linking, blending, and integration over multiple spaces. Meaning is parabolic and literary" (57). Turner groups these meaning-constituting operations under the general term *conceptual blending*. In its simplest form, conceptual blending involves the formation of a metaphorical link between two or more input spaces. Certain attributes—selected according to their similarity—are carried over into a target space, or blended space (83). Let us return to the basic metaphor, "argument is war." In this conceptual blend, "argument" and "war" each occupy an input space. The conceptual blend—or final product of the process of blending—"argument is war" comprises the similarities between arguments and war and the inferences we may draw from those similarities; all these attributes are located in the target space. In addition, any individual expression of this conceptual blend is a spatial story, for each expression takes the form of a subject-verb sentence.
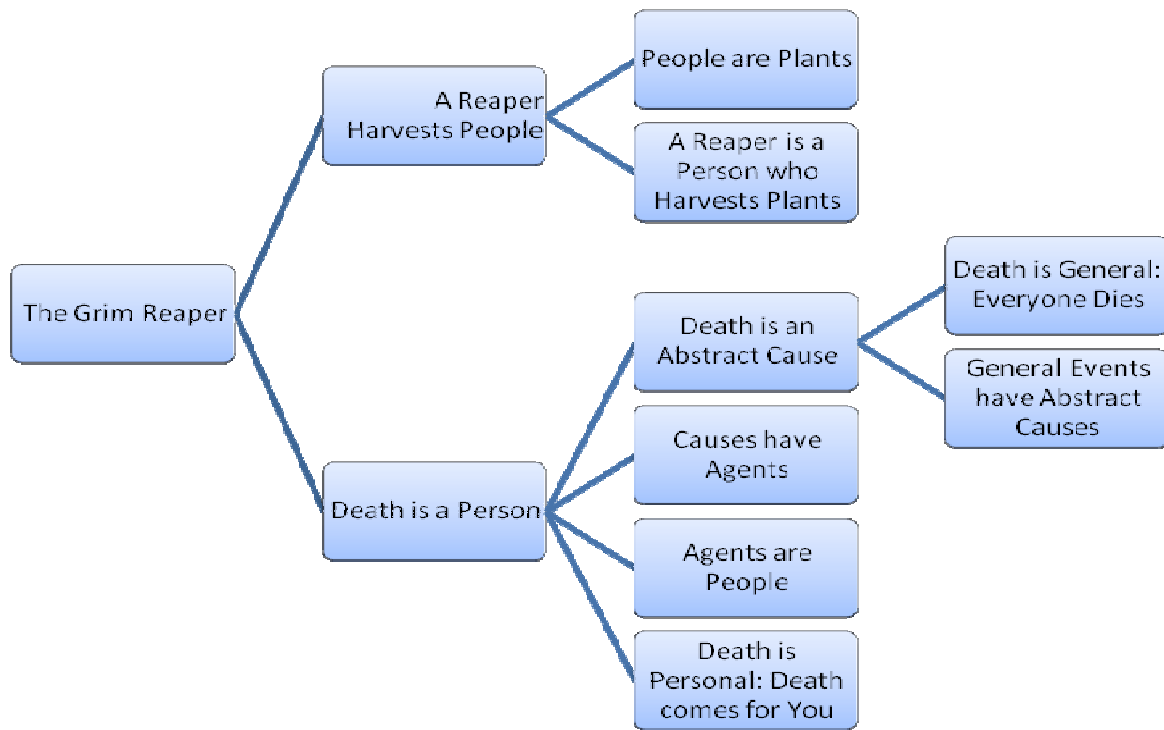
Figure 1: The Grim Reaper

There is no reason why conceptual blends must result from only two input spaces, nor any reason why the target space should not also be an input space for a more complex conceptual blend. Turner's example of such a complex blend is the Grim Reaper. This blend incorporates such metaphors as "people are plants," "Death (abstract personification) causes death (physical event)," "Death is general" (everyone dies), "Death is personal" (each person's death is not interchangeable with any other experience of death): therefore "death is a person who comes specifically for you, in the manner of a reaper." The images of the scythe, skeleton, and cloak are metonymic symbols drawn from reaping, death, and monastic rituals. Only applicable attributes from each input metaphor are drawn into the final target space: people, for example, do not stand in rows like corn or wheat, nor does the Grim Reaper harvest humans at a certain time of year, as with the harvest of plants. The final conceptual blend both combines certain details and omits others (76-82).

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Conceptual blending does not address merely the creation of myths or literary symbols. One may read many—if not all—cognitive activities as instances of blending. For example, any particular instance of reading or interpreting is inevitably a conceptual blend, because these acts involve the combination of a text with a reader's preexisting knowledge—input spaces—to form a reading or interpretation—target space (106). As in the blending of metaphors, such a blend of text and preexisting knowledge occurs via similarity; the reader applies only pertinent knowledge to the text at hand. One may also view categorical concepts as instances of blending: a horse is a horse, of course, because it possesses the parts of a horse and the shape of a horse (110). Viewpoints of the world are likewise conceptual blends: "as sensory beings, our view is always single and local because we have a single life and not a general life. As imaginative beings, we constantly construct meaning designed to transcend that singularity" (117). Conceptual blending is an intricate and powerful mechanism for combining the contradictions of human experience and perception into coherent and cohesive wholes:

> Blended spaces can absorb incompatibilities from the spaces they blend. In a blended space, a human being can be both donor and thief, giving and grasping. As the connections build over narrative mental spaces, the generic space becomes thinner but the blended space becomes ever more robust, intricate, and conflicted. (136)

If the measure of a critical theory is its ability to produce intricate and intriguing readings of diverse texts and situations, conceptual blending seems both promising and provocative.

Perhaps one of the most productive applications of conceptual blending is the study of *subject* and *self,* as Mary Thomas Crane mentions in *Shakespeare's Brain*. Regarding the modern individual, Crane writes that it is "the cognitive assumption that both subject and self are part of a metaphoric system through which we experience our subjectivity." Indeed, the challenge for cognitive theorists is not to choose between these metaphors, but to examine "how

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we rely on both metaphors, and the difference between them, for our sense of ourselves as persons" (19). Cognitive theory, therefore, can be the threshing floor upon which competing critical claims about subject and self may be sifted, sorted, and ultimately blended together. It does not explicitly reject any contemporary theoretical approach: "indeed, from a cognitive perspective, meaning is anchored (although ambiguously and insecurely) by a three-way tether: brain, culture, discourse" (24).

Cognitive theory views the competing claims of other critical schools as metaphors rather than totalizing narratives. The cognitive theorist, therefore, is free to blend together Foucault's statements concerning discourse, Derrida's words about the world as text, and Stanley Fish's arguments on reader-response. I do not suggest that these theories are consistent with one another, or that any theorist could maintain an equitable balance between them. On the contrary, these theorists conceptualize the self in radically different ways: discourse and text radically limit the agency of the individual (the one via culture, the other via language), while reader-response demands the agency of the reader for its validity. It is quite foolish to assert that people are entirely determined by culture, language, or personal agency. One constructs ideas of subject and self through an intricate conceptual blend combining the "contradiction and recursivity" of different personal experiences, different metaphors, and different theoretical perspectives (Crane 24). The cognitive theorist may pick and choose among these metaphors, creating a blend that best explains the text in question. There is no single best way to describe the self in all contexts. Cognitive theory, however, provides a supple and adaptive mode of interpretation.

Conceptual blending allows one to conceive of relatively stable selves as a metaphorical concord of memory, text, and culture. This concord, however, is rooted in the cognitive experience. Crane writes:

> Cognitive science suggests that the power of culture to shape individual selves must be filtered through the material, biological constructs of the brain, which are common, though in different forms, to all (normally functioning) people across cultures. It argues that there is a material basis for a limited sense of "essential" human attributes as well as space for individual arrangements of neurons. (23)

One may blend together subject and self to form a more holistic picture of the human experience, one rooted in the physical body but contingent upon text and discourse. The theories of Foucault, Derrida, and Fish, among others, are valid methods for describing the human experience. All these theories, however, must be rooted in the material body. Culture and language are contingent upon time and place, but the experience of the human body is largely constant throughout all times and all places. Cognition does not rest solely in the body, but it surely begins there. As such, it forms a relatively stable basis for a reading of tragedy.

Though he does not explicitly embrace embodied metaphor, Daniel Dennett offers a similar paradigm of cognition in his article "Real Patterns." His key terms are *pattern* and *noise*. Dennett depicts the world much as a mass of raw perception and experience. The human mind analyzes this data and attempts to find patterns within it. Since the human mind is finite, perception is limited, and since logic is imperfect, humans perceive noise in the world around them. Noise is any perception or experience that does not fit the conceptual pattern. Pragmatically speaking, one chooses patterns based upon their efficacy. When the influence of noise becomes intolerable, one seeks new patterns through which to understand the world. Thus, Dennett allows for the existence of competing patterns: multiple, effective ideologies that do not coincide yet are all efficacious. He writes:

> There could be two different, but equally real, patterns discernible in the noisy world. The rival theorists would not even agree on which parts of the world were pattern and which were noise, and yet nothing deeper would settle the issue. The choice of a pattern would indeed be up to the observer, a matter to be decided on idiosyncratic pragmatic grounds. (49)

For Dennett, patterns exist in the world, outside of human contexts. Theory is the understanding of pattern; in my terms, the metaphors that explain the world. The only test of a theory is its pragmatic value. If the theory effectively explains one's world, it is a metaphor worth living by. If it fails to suitably account for noise, one must find a new pattern in order to effectively interact with the world. Multiple efficacious patterns can exist for any given set of experiences, and the metaphors for such patterns will differ. No pattern, however, accounts for all noise.

Dennett's description of multiple valid patterns suggests three types of conceptual conflict: conflict between rival metaphors within an individual mind; conflict between rival metaphors within society; and conflict between a given metaphor and the intolerable influence of noise. One may restate these conceptual conflicts to include the activity of metaphor, since the theories that enable one to perceive patterns are essentially metaphorical blends that guide human behavior, explaining phenomena and enabling the prediction of future events. For the duration of the paper, I will be referring to such metaphors as *guiding metaphors*.

Guiding metaphors follow all the rules of cognitive metaphor and pattern. They also submit to Thomas Kuhn's observations about *paradigm* in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Paradigms are understandings of nature and experimentation that guide scientific practice through their explanatory and predictive power. Revolution occurs with the discovery of noise or, as Kuhn phrases it, anomaly. He writes:

> Discovery commences with the awareness of anomaly, i.e., with the recognition that nature has somehow violated the paradigm-induced expectations that govern normal science. It then continues with a more or less extended exploration of the area of anomaly. And it closes only when the paradigm theory has been adjusted so that the anomalous has become the expected. (52-3)

Revolution is a method of transferring explanatory and predictive power to a new paradigm. This revolution is necessarily a movement from one paradigm to another, not the original

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creation of a paradigm, for "novelty ordinarily emerges only for the man who, knowing *with precision* what he should expect, is able to recognize that something has gone wrong. Anomaly appears only against the background provided by the paradigm" (65). According to cognitive theory, the original human paradigms were probably embodied metaphors. As concepts became more abstract, however, and the metaphors required to manipulate such concepts likewise became more complex—through conceptual blending—revolutions from one guiding metaphor to another would have been required. Kuhn explains that new paradigms are born through intuitions that "gather up large portions of that experience and transform them to the rather different bundle of experience that will thereafter be linked piecemeal to the new paradigm but not to the old" (123). Paradigm shift involves seeing the world through different eyes—or in cognitive terms, through different metaphors.

Scientists do not reject a paradigm simply because it cannot explain a given anomaly: "The decision to reject one paradigm is always simultaneously the decision to accept another, and the judgment leading to that decision involves the comparison of both paradigms with nature *and* with each other" (77). Metaphors necessarily involve the elision of details; patterns necessarily involve the omission of noise. After all, "if any and every failure to fit were ground for theory rejection, all theories ought to be rejected at all times," for no theory is capable of explaining the whole of human experience, let alone facets of reality beyond human ken (146). The more you tighten your grip, Theory, the more noisy anomalies will slip through your fingers! There can be no totalizing narratives, and the progress of scientific and cognitive revolution does not move toward such an end. Kuhn explains:

> The developmental process described in this essay has been a process of evolution *from* primitive beginnings—a process whose successive stages are characterized by an increasingly detailed and refined understanding of nature. But nothing that has been or will be said makes it a process of evolution *toward* anything. (170-1)

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One may term newer guiding metaphors *progressive* insofar as they deal with salient anomalies, noises, and cognitive monsters more effectively than older metaphors. The measure of guiding metaphors is their efficacy in guiding human thought and action. Yet any change of metaphor focuses upon current, pressing anomalies; it does not—*cannot*—account for everything. Old cognitive monsters, once slain, may once again swim up from the depths, taking advantage of the change of perspective.

Efficacy alone, however, is not sufficient to evaluate guiding metaphors. One must evaluate them within the greater context of human perspective. On this issue, Barbara Herrnstein Smith's *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* brings invaluable perspective to the table. Describing literary value, Smith breaks down the classic dichotomy of subjective/objective in order to propose a more intricate study of value: *contingency.* She writes:

> If we recognize that literary value is "relative" in the sense of *contingent* (that is, a changing function of multiple variables) rather than *subjective* (that is, personally whimsical, locked into the consciousness of individual subjects and/or without interest or value for other people), then we may begin to investigate the dynamics of that relativity. (11)

Literary value—and value in general—is contingent upon aspects of human experience, including text, discourse, and cognitive processes. Though Smith recognizes the existence of "species-wide mechanisms of perception and cognition," she asserts that one cannot use such mechanisms as psychological absolutes:

> Everything is always in motion with respect to everything else. If there *are* constancies of literary value, they will be found *in those very motions*: that is, in the relations among variables. For, like all value, literary value is not the property of an object *or* of a subject but, rather, *the product of the dynamics of a system.* (15)

I apply Smith's depiction of literary value to the valuation of metaphors; by observing the way guiding metaphors are expressed, utilized, and valued within a given system—whether that

system be the mind of an individual character, the society of a play, or a historical culture at large—one can better approximate the total value of those metaphors, both as guiding principles and as goals of cognitive revolution. Even the revolutionary conflicts that metaphor engages in can be gauges of this value, for such conflicts highlight the use, exchange, and efficacy of the metaphors themselves.

Not only can one study the value of metaphors through conflict, one can also study that value *through* metaphor itself. Instead of appealing to standards of value—transcendental meaning or cultural mandate, for example—Smith looks to similarity for a basis of shared value:

> Our experience of the "value of the work" is equivalent to *our experience of the work in relation to the total economy of our existence*. And the reason our estimates of its probable value for other people may be quite accurate is that the total economy of *their* existence may, in fact, be quite similar to that or our own. (16)

Insofar as one may speak of a shared existence—such as that provided by embodiment, longstanding guiding traditions, and a shared aesthetic experience of similar works of art—one may suppose, not an ideal reader or audience, but a probable one, for "the value of some objects will be *relatively more uniform* than others among the members of some community—as will be, accordingly, the judgments concerning their value exchanged within that community" (101). Such a conception of value allows one to blend together the richness of cultural, historical, and individual experience, forging new guiding metaphors that enable one to engage with shared responses to texts, responses such as catharsis, the original metaphor for the tragic experience.

This concept of contingent value incorporates both the stability of objectivism and the flexibility of relativism: "stability and flexibility are both profitable, but…one is always bought at the cost of the other so that neither can be maximized at the same time or all the time" (Smith 123). Stable classificatory systems preserve time and energy under stable conditions, allowing

an organism to effectively predict and explain events in its environment. Flexibility allows that

same organism to adapt to rapidly changing conditions at the cost of reducing predictive and

explanatory power (122-3). Therefore, there must be a balance between standardized guiding

metaphors and revolutionary thought. After all, the efficacy of any guiding metaphor is not

merely its pragmatic value, a value irrespective of human contexts; it is also the personal value it

has for members of a given community (105).

Smith describes this conceptual blend of contingency as the defining characteristic of

humanity: "our irreducible *scrappiness*." This term suggests "not only that the elements that

interact to constitute our motives and behavior are incomplete, and heterogeneous, like scraps of

things, but also ("scrap" being a slang term for fight) that they are mutually conflicting or at least

always potentially at odds" (149). This depiction of humanity is akin to the conceptual blend of

self—cognition, text, and discourse—that I proposed earlier. The interaction between metaphors

of the self and guiding metaphors strikes a balance between stable explanatory and predictive

patterns and relatively radical revolutions of mind.

The periodic renegotiation of guiding metaphors allows one to navigate the hazards of

human experience. Revolution always comes at a cost, however: that cost is tragedy. In the

previous pages, I have been working to lay out a cognitive theory of the tragic. Lakoff, Johnson,

and Turner provide a method of reading and interpreting along cognitive lines, utilizing

metaphor and conceptual blending to analyze literary works, characters, and genres. Dennett and

Kuhn provide a model for viewing metaphor as a guiding principle in human behavior, a model

that entails specific human perspectives and the possibility of revolution from one metaphor to

another. Crane and Smith remind one that any conceptual blend is contingent upon divergent

and competing systems of value and meaning: discourse, culture, and cognition being the chief

of these systems. I intend to use these theories to explain the relationship guiding metaphor and tragedy.

At the opening of any Shakespearean Tragedy, the tragic protagonists operate via a number of metaphors, such as "sight need not pierce the body" for King Lear and "desire is a fire and a piercing" for Romeo and Juliet. Through these guiding metaphors, these characters construct predictive and explanatory patterns—guiding metaphors—that map out the world of human experience. This observation is a commonplace of cognitive theory, for all people live according to guiding metaphors. The creation of any guiding metaphor, however, necessarily omits or overlooks information about the world: a holistic metaphor is impossible according to the structure of metaphor laid out by Lakoff and Johnson. It is inevitable that some people at some times should fall prey to these sub-metaphorical entities, these creatures of cognitive darkness. When one suffers at the hands of such creatures, tragedy occurs. The tragic protagonist, who has lived a great and noble life according to one set of beliefs, suddenly finds his or her beliefs shattered by actual experience.

Again, such a theory of tragedy does not yet move beyond the commonplaces of cognitive theory: people live according to metaphors, and metaphors often fail them. Metaphors, however, are not simple linguistic expressions. It is not as if Lear or Romeo and Juliet live according to mantras, structuring their entire lives along the line of pithy statements. These metaphors are cornerstones, the textual marks of vast cognitive structures. These tragic protagonists speak of their experiences in certain ways: as a result, they think in certain ways, act in certain ways, and suffer in certain ways. Their metaphors—and their dogged adherence to them—predispose them to and limit them to tragic avenues of action. These guiding metaphors are not reductive expressions of causality: instead, they are the first signs of a vast network of

connections, and it is these numerous connections between text and mind, between thought and action, that warrant study and interest. One of these connections is catharsis: the metaphorical blend of tragic protagonist and reader that enables the completion of the tragic journey and defines tragedy.

Tragic protagonists are shattered because their guiding metaphors do not allow them to cope with their experiences. Such a shattering, by itself, does not produce tragedy. Tragedy and catharsis require the reader's recognition that source of the protagonist's suffering is the result of his or her guiding myths. The pattern they relied upon to bring them happiness, nobility, or excellence is the direct cause of their downfall. To successfully interact with the world, one needs predictive and explanatory metaphors, but those metaphors entail enormous risk. The guiding metaphor promises triumph to those who follow it, but it brings triumph *and* suffering.

Such an analysis of the text of tragedy is not enough, by itself, to explain catharsis. Such an explanation demands an analysis of the cathartic reader, the reader who sympathizes with the tragic protagonist in such a way that "sympathy is identity." Readers (and audiences) experience catharsis through conceptual blending. The reader and the tragic protagonist occupy the input spaces. The readers either reveres the guiding metaphor of the protagonist or reveres the protagonist's devotion to that metaphor; this reverence or appreciation constitutes a similarity between the input objects, a similarity reinforced by the shared metaphors and physical experiences of the reader and tragic protagonist. In the target space one finds the "tragic hero," a scapegoat both similar and alien to the reader, both sacred and taboo, both pitied and feared. The dual nature of the reader's involvement with the tragic protagonist arises from the nature of the conceptual blend. Metaphorical similarity draws the reader to the portions of the tragic protagonist that will enter the blend; the remainder of the tragic protagonist repels the reader.
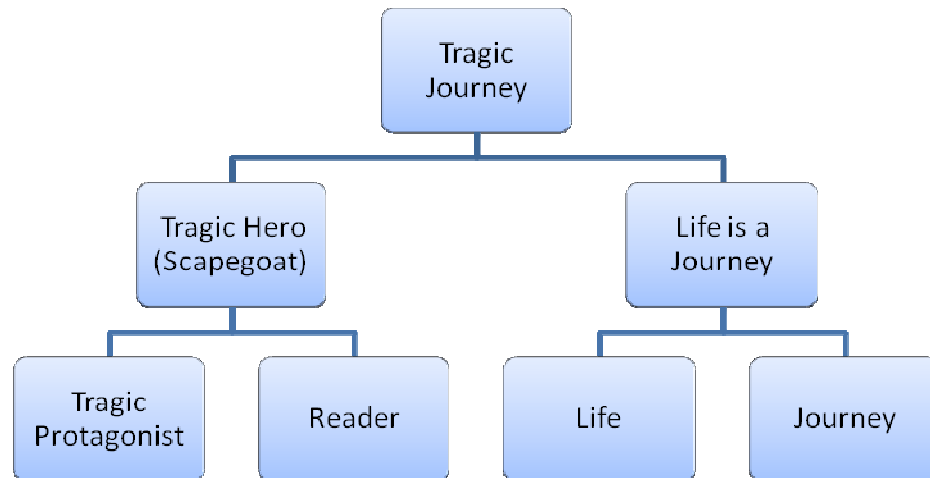
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Figure 2: The Tragic Journey

Another input space joins the conceptual blend: "life is a journey." Mapped onto the

tragic hero, the metaphor of journey suggests that the tragic movement is itself a journey, a trip

that has a beginning, middle, and end, a trip with a destination, a purpose, and a set of pilgrims.

By virtue of the conceptual blend, the reader takes this journey *alongside* and *as* the tragic

protagonist. The tragic hero incorporates these disparate elements into one narrative progression.

Since tragedy can lead to a cognitive revolution—a movement from one guiding metaphor to

another—the path of this shared journey is redemptive revolution, one that can free the reader—

and possibly the tragic protagonist—from old guiding metaphors that hide creatures of cognitive

darkness. Since this is a *shared* journey, however, it is *unnecessary* for the tragic protagonist to

complete it, whether through personal redemption, social reconciliation, or *anagnorisis*. When

the tragic protagonist dies, this event conceptually tears apart the tragic hero (a cognitive

sparagmos). The conceptual blend becomes broken apart: specifically, death severs the link

between the tragic protagonist and the blended tragic hero. The blend between the reader and the

tragic hero remains, now fully freed from any dissimilarity between the reader and the tragic

protagonist. The reader is therefore free to complete the tragic journey, possibly arriving at

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cognitive revolution. The reader, freed from suffering, pity, and fear by the death of the tragic

protagonist, can now valuate the guiding metaphor, the noise, triumph, and suffering according

to the contingencies of his or her current situation. The tragic protagonist has paid the price of

revolution. The reader reaps the benefits.

In the Shadows of the Giants:
Cognitive Theory meets Tragic Theory

The young life of any tragic theory is a difficult time. Such a theory cannot idly grow

without impediment. Instead, it must strive upward beneath the shadows of the giants: Aristotle,

Hegel, Nietzsche, and the newcomer Terry Eagleton—whose work, *Sweet Violence*, though it

does not constitute a classic example of tragic theory, still casts a shadow over any new growth.

The new tragic theory I am espousing does not seek to supplant or tear down previous theories;

instead, it models itself after the strongest parts of each.

Tragic theory, of course, begins with Aristotle's *Poetics*. His depiction of the motive

factors in tragedy forms the basis for a cognitive understanding of tragedy. Aristotle defines

tragedy thus:

> A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having
> magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind
> brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative
> form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis
> of such emotions. (1449b.24-28)

Tragedy is a dramatic imitation of an action that arouses pity and fear in order to accomplish

catharsis. The dramatic form reinforces the action of tragedy, for of all literary forms, drama

centers most closely upon action. Drama focuses upon a cast of human actors upon a set stage.

As such, the actions and words of those actors constitute the majority of the dramatic content.

Indeed, one finds it difficult to speak of drama without speaking of *actors,* thereby invoking the

central content of drama: *action*. The audience, of course, only has access to the outward form

of these actors: one cannot observe the inner life of characters in drama, only the outward actions

and utterances of the characters. Tragedy, therefore, by its very existence as dramatic art, is an

aesthetic and interpretive phenomenon.

Aristotle insists that the subject of tragedy is action, not character. He places the

emphasis upon actual events rather than personal causes; for him, ethics is action, not thought.

Within tragedy, action is paramount:

> Tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of
> happiness and misery. All human happiness or misery takes the form of action;
> the end for which we live is a certain kind of activity, not a quality. Character
> gives us qualities, but it is in our actions—what we do—that we are happy or the
> reverse. (1450a.16-20)

At first glance, such an emphasis upon action over intention would seem to argue against a

cognitive and metaphorical understanding of tragedy, an understanding preoccupied with the

metaphors that preface action. Aristotle, however, presents a structural poetics; it is completely

unnecessary, from a writer's point of view, to present the motivations of the characters, for such

motivations are completely invisible to the audience, who see only the actions and the utterances

of the characters. For cognitive theory, however, a study of the characters' words *is* a study of

motivation. In addition, the audience of tragedy attempts to understand the motivations of the

characters by contemplating their words and deeds. Motivation, therefore, is not Aristotle's

structural concern; instead, it is the purview of audience-response and cognitive theory. Kathy

Eden suggests a similar understanding of Aristotle's omission of character motivation. In

"Aristotle's *Poetics*: A Defense of Tragic Fiction," she writes:

> The tragic poet himself must understand the causes of human action in the ethical
> and intellectual qualities of the agents. Furthermore, he must know how to build
> these qualities of character and mind into the structure of events. Thus carefully

crafted, Aristotelian tragedy challenges and even sharpens its audience's ability to judge human action. (48)

Tragedy, therefore, serves a social purpose: to teach audiences to interpret human actions and, presumably, to then go forth and act accordingly. Cognitive theory strives to explain how this interpretation functions within the context of tragedy and catharsis, how human cognition provides a psychological model for Aristotle's structural statements about tragedy.

Aristotle characterizes the complex structural action of tragedy—the tragic movement—by either Peripety or Discovery. Peripety, of course, is "the change of the kind described from one state of things within the play to its opposite," while Discovery is "a change from ignorance to knowledge, and thus to either love or hate, in the personages marked for good or evil fortune" (1452a.22-3, 31-2). Metaphorically, Peripety is akin to Discovery. Cognitive theory states that one can express any change, whether physical or conceptual, as a metaphorical change of place, for "states of mind are places." The language of perspective, for example, suggests that any change is a change of place. One *sees* things with a new perspective because one sees them from a different *angle*, which implies a change of location. Metaphorical depictions of place, social status, and mental state—such as "looking down from my ivory tower" and "looking up from the gutter"—are embodied metaphors, for the perspective of a person in such locations is different, both physically and metaphorically. Therefore, any change of mental place is a change of metaphor, since metaphors are rooted in spatial understanding (both the experience of life within spatial bodies and the metaphorical conception of mental states as places). Peripety and Discovery are essentially different types of change, for one can describe either process through metaphors of place. The study of the nature of tragic change is the study of metaphor.

Concerning discovery, cognitive theory moves beyond the relationship between agents and metaphor to examine the connection between metaphor and cognitive blindness. The

selection of any guiding metaphor necessarily demands the simultaneous omission or elision of some perspective: one sees by not -seeing. Thus, the potential for tragic disaster is built into one's predictive and explanatory use of metaphor. As Aristotle writes, "The best of all Discoveries, however, is that arising from the incidents themselves, when the great surprise comes about through a probable incident" (1455b.17-19). Aristotle's view of tragedy, and catharsis, operates from the writer's point of view and is prescriptive. For Aristotle, the discovery of the link between guiding metaphors—which enable and incite the dramatic incidents—and the tragic action—the incidents themselves—is a mark of high tragedy. The tragic protagonist discovers the link, as occurs in *Oedipus Rex*, and Aristotle's Discovery occurs within the plot of the play. The *presence* of this link, however, is a mark of tragedy in general, and catharsis occurs when the audience discovers the link and strives to understand it. Aristotle proposes a tragic poetics for the writer—how to produce catharsis through a text; I propose a tragic theory that seeks to explain how the audience interacts with the play and thus experiences catharsis.

Hegel, too, finds action at the heart of tragedy, yet unlike in Aristotelian or cognitive readings of tragedy, this action emerges from the conflict between moral absolutes, such as love of family and respect for the state. In "The Greatness and Limits of Hegel's Theory of Tragedy," Mark W. Roche describes Hegel's depiction of morality. He writes, "According to Hegel tragedy presupposes profound identification with normative values, to which a hero is attached and for which the hero is willing to sacrifice herself" (Roche 58).The substance of tragedy is conflict among moral actions—particular human actions which appeal to one part or another of the moral unity. For Hegel, human action is particular because of both the individual character and temporal existence of human agents. Human beings, therefore, are unable to enact the whole

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moral unity that underlies existence. As such, any human action must appeal to a specific facet

of morality rather than the unity thereof. Inevitably, such *one-sided* action results in conflict:

> Individual action will then, under given conditions, realize an object or character,
> which, under such a presupposed state, inevitably stimulates the presence of a
> pathos opposed to itself, because it occupies a position of unique isolation in
> virtue of its independently fixed definition, and, by doing so, brings in its train
> unavoidable conflicts. (Hegel 48)

All human action is unavoidably conflicted because no single action can contain within itself the

totality of morality. Opposing concerns such as family vs. state and justice vs. mercy are

balanced throughout the whole of human existence, but may become frightfully out of sync

within local and temporal frameworks. Tragedy achieves a balance of opposing moral forces by

burning out the conflict through the medium of pain. Suffering transforms *one-sidedness* into a

reconciliation of moral forces by displaying the ultimate fragility of any temporal and local

action.

Hegel explains this foundation of human experience:

> In tragedy then that which is eternally substantive is triumphantly vindicated
> under the mode of reconciliation. It simply removes from the contentions of
> personality the false one-sidedness, and exhibits instead that which is the object of
> its volition, namely, positive reality, no longer under an asserted mediation of
> opposed factors, but as the real support of consistency. (51-2)

By *positive reality*, Hegel means a sum total of all human goods and goals, continuing here the

Aristotelian tradition that the true objects of human desire are goods, though they may appear

veiled by intermediary stages of cruelty and suffering. Roche comments upon *positive reality*:

"Hegelian tragedy is the conflict of two goods. What should be a single unity has been split into

two. For Hegel, this is an inevitable consequence of the absolute realizing itself in individuals"

(Roche 53). The *positive reality* of human goods supports human action because the conflict of

these goods balances out from an eternal and global perspective. An accumulation of human

action, though tempestuous in the particulars, will always eventually sum up to a net balance of good ends, whether in tragedy or in real life. Roche explains, "History progresses dialectically, through contradiction and negativity, toward an ever more comprehensive and rational goal" (53). Hegel recognizes, of course, that not all action is moral action, and not all conflict is tragic conflict: "If this is not so, then, for all who are really conscious of what is moral and right, such a conflict can only appear without worth or material significance" (Hegel 125). The conflict of tragedy, however, is always moral.

Such a reading of tragedy seems too restrictive to apply to more than a handful of plays. Roche comments, "Hegel's typology of tragedy, brilliant though it is, appears to exclude all but a dozen or so world tragedies" (Roche 65). It denies tragic status to such tyrants as Macbeth and Richard II, while leaving the fate of characters such as Coriolanus and Othello in doubt. Where is the moral action when Macbeth orders the deaths of Macduff's children? Where is the *positive reality* behind Othello's jealousy? I can find none, but I would be hard-pressed to deny that either play is tragic. Hegel offers two ways out of this dilemma. The first involves reconciliation. He writes:

> The twofold vindication of the mutually conflicting aspects is no doubt retained, but the *one-sided* mode is cancelled, and the undisturbed ideal harmony brings back again that condition of the chorus, which attributes without reserve equal honour to all the gods. The true course of dramatic development consists in the annulment of *contradictions* viewed as such, in the reconciliation of the forces of human action, which alternately strive to negate each other in their conflict. (Hegel 71)

Aha! So this mystical system of accounting known as tragedy eliminates the very *contradictions* Hegel speaks of—the contradictions between opposing moral goods! By describing the conflict between moral goods as a harmony or a balance, Hegel creates the problem he purports to solve. Hegel might suggest that the tyrannical and malevolent aspects of these characters results only

from their *one-sided* commitment to their goals, their unswerving quests for power; under the right circumstances, one may regard these men as the height of nobility and morality. Their specific local circumstances, however, valuate their actions as immoral.

This juxtaposition between the *timeless* and *contingent* morality of an action rings hollow. If, as I would suggest—following Barbara Herrnstein Smith's *Contingency of Value*— the morality or immorality of an action is partially contingent upon the action's context, then the *positive reality* of morality cannot balance human moral action without human aid. In the final equation, it is the *human* economy of value that finds balance between the good and evil people do, for *positive reality* is an absolute force. The value of actions, good and evil, is contingent upon their human contexts. It is an interpretive act to balance out such contingent actions. Compared to human beings, *positive reality* is incapable of agency and of interpretation, and therefore of coherently balancing good and evil.

Against a Greco-Roman backdrop, however, the divinity of all human action is easier to conceive: "We may affirm that many gods make their dwelling in one true man, or, rather, all the powers which are scattered throughout the heaven of the gods are enclosed within that one breast. It is co-extensive with the entire field of Olympus" (Hegel 153). There is a divinity in man's actions, for the gods are made in his image: yet each individual action can only engage a single aspect of divinity. Therefore, conflict is inevitable. If one reads *positive reality* as a metaphorical construct—one which affirms the anthropomorphism of the Olympians—then Hegel's assurances that opposing moral actions will balance out is a truism: the sum total of all human actions will balance out to equal the way things are. Such a statement is devoid of any real value. Hegel's invocation of Olympus, however, is largely rhetorical. *Positive reality* is beyond pagan anthropomorphism; it implies an active moral force that exerts an influence upon

the conflicts between one-sided human efforts; it enforces the balance of a normative morality, and it achieves that balance through human suffering.

Hegel's tragic theory is, however, an adequate method of reading tragedy produced in historical eras that embrace the transcendent value of morality, and of analyzing reader reactions in those times. For tragedies involving high moral forces, Hegel's writings are a useful theoretical tool. For tragedies that do not deal in high morality, however, a more comprehensive theory is needed. Fortunately, cognitive theory can complete just such a task: incorporating Hegel's moral forces into a larger theory of metaphorical conflict. If, as I propose, tragedy arises from the conflict of guiding metaphors and/or the conflict of such metaphors with the phenomenal world, one may view Hegel's theory as a specialized case of metaphorical conflict: one where the metaphors at stake are metaphors of morality. Such a reading frees one to look for alternative balances of morality where moral forces are abolished rather than balanced or where one spurns morality altogether in favor of a different paradigm.

One may view Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* largely as an amoral reading of Hegel's *positive reality*. Rather than placing the world upon a foundation of moral harmony, Nietzsche finds primal unity in the death of individuation, the return of the human being to the Dionysian state of ecstasy, our bodies and minds torn asunder and thrown to the four corners of the earth, our souls at one with the life of nature. Such self-annihilation, of course, renders the individual incapable of further action within the world. Here the Apollonian aesthetic steps in to render the transformation palatable to the individual ego. The individual is shattered upon Dionysian suffering and reborn through Apollonian aestheticism, in order to achieve the contradictory accord of the individual with the primal unity. This process is tragedy:

> We encounter Apollo as the deification of the *principium individuationis* in which alone the eternally attained goal of the primordial unity, its release and

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> redemption through semblance, come about; with sublime gestures he shows us
> that the whole world of agony is needed in order to compel the individual to
> generate the releasing and redemptive vision and then, lost in contemplation of
> that vision, to sit calmly in his rocking boat in the midst of the sea. (Nietzsche
> 26)

The supreme value of human life is now the aesthetic, for "man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art" (18). Indeed, "Our highest dignity lies in our significance as works of art—for only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*" (33). The morality of Hegel plays no part in this primal unity, for all actions—human and divine, moral and immoral—join together in this orgiastic understanding.

Like Hegel, however, Nietzsche finds the value of tragedy in the reconciliation of opposing forces. For both philosophers, human suffering is the means of reconciliation—in contrast to what I will later call the unfortunate price of revolution. In Nietzsche's case, suffering comes about from the division between human and divine worlds of action, and the necessary evil of heroic action that violates one or both realms. He writes:

> The sublime view that *active sin* is the true Promethean virtue; thereby we have
> also found the ethical foundation of pessimistic tragedy, its *justification* of the evil
> in human life, both in the sense of human guilt and in the sense of the suffering
> brought about by it. The curse in the nature of things, which the reflective Aryan
> is not inclined simply to explain away, the contradiction at the heart of the world,
> presents itself to him as a mixture of different worlds, e.g. a divine and a human
> one, each of which, taken individually, is in the right, but which, as one world
> existing alongside another, must suffer for the fact of its individuation. (50)

Here one finds Hegel's opposing moral virtues transformed into divine and human worlds. Like Prometheus, the tragic hero must act to create new potential for human life (through the theft of fire or knowledge), aware that such a creative act is fundamentally sinful in one or more contexts. Thus the sin and suffering of the hero bridge the gap between Olympus and earth, reinforcing the unity of action within the world and revealing joy and suffering to be two strands of the same fabric.

While Dionysius revels in the destructive redemption of humanity's role in the primal unity, Apollo seeks to codify this revolutionary experience by making tragedy aesthetic:

> Anyone who understands the innermost kernel of the legend of Prometheus—namely that wrongdoing is of necessity imposed on the titanically striving individual—is bound also to sense the un-Apolline quality of this pessimistic view of things, for it is the will of Apollo to bring rest and calm to individual beings precisely by drawing boundaries between them, and by reminding them constantly, with his demands for self-knowledge and measure, that these are the most sacred laws in the world. But lest this Apolline tendency should cause form to freeze into Egyptian stiffness and coldness, lest the attempt to prescribe the course and extent of each individual wave should cause the movement of the whole lake to die away, the flood-tide of the Dionysiac would destroy periodically all the small circles in which the one-sidedly Apolline will attempt to confine Hellenic life. (50-1)

There is a constant tension between the creative, destructive forces of Dionysus and the aesthetic, preservative forces of Apollo. The primal unity is in fact a dance between these two opposites, a dance necessitated by the individuation of human beings, spurred on by man's innate desire to return to the primal unity but delayed by the necessity of individual action within the world. Nietzschean tragedy is, therefore, a revolution in the full, orientational sense of the term: a circular motion from stasis to conflict and back again. The circular nature of this revolution undermines its political import, for the promise of constant change is no change at all (or at least no change for the better). I have been using revolution in the political or cognitive sense: a shift in power from one group—or metaphor—to another. For Nietzsche, however, all revolutions are circular movements, endless cycles of change that eventually return the world to a prior state. The change that such a circular revolution brings, therefore, is no change at all; it is merely an affirmation of the endless dance of existence. Nietzsche values actions insofar as they participate in this circular dance: the titanic strivings of Dionysus, and the aesthetic strokes of Apollo. Such actions are amoral rather than good or evil: they produce creative or destructive

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motion, not moral value. Yet any value they have is against the backdrop of the primal unity, not in terms of human constructions of meaning.

As it does with Hegelian tragic theory, cognitive theory has difficulty accepting Nietzsche's assumption of an abstract metaphysical basis for the value of human action—his notion of primal unity. Instead, cognitive theory asserts that the particularities of human experience form the basis for the evaluation of human actions. For playwrights and audiences that do not believe in such a universal, Nietzsche's theory falls flat. If one steps back and labels the Apollonian and Dionysian properly as guiding metaphors, one can place Nietzsche's theory within the larger scope of cognitive theory: as the portrayal of Promethean tragedy. Once again, a particular flavor of tragedy has been mistaken for the thing entire.

Furthermore, cognitive theory tempers Nietzsche's belief in the sole value of aesthetic portrayals of experience. Nietzsche argues that raw human experience is not the fit subject of art or contemplation. Joseph Porter comments on interpretive distance in "Nietzsche and Tragedy." He writes:

> Nietzsche's model is constructed not from the viewpoint of the tragic hero but rather from that of the observer: what matters is not the experience of Oedipus, say, but that of the audience coming close to, but never really touching, his experience. It is thus a model not of any immediacy of experience, but of mediating distance and of that distance's sublimation in the very experience of immediacy. (77)

In this analysis, Porter notes that the distance between audience and tragic protagonist enables the act of interpretation. The tragic protagonist, lacking distance from his or her own situation, can only suffer. For Nietzsche, tragedy demands an interpretive distance that raw suffering, in its immediacy, lacks. A suffering individual, therefore, would need to gain cognitive distance from his or her situation in order to experience tragedy. For the audience, the spatial movement

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is reversed: the initial distance sublimates into the "very experience of immediacy" within the theatre.

Spectatorship, then, becomes the ground and the mechanism for Nietzsche's aesthetics. Porter continues:

> Spectatorship is for this reason of the essence for Nietzsche…Qualifying the effacement through rapt absorption of the self in the visionary world that it beholds is the fact that the spectacle of the tragic always comes framed, whether by the horizon of a dream, the circle of a chorus, the context of a ritual, or the *skênê* of the stage (these are formally indistinguishable [for] Nietzsche, and they interpenetrate as well). (79)

One's ability to *see* is predicated upon a framework of cognitive distance. The audience can become immersed in a play because they are at first separate from that world. Interpretation, therefore, is sympathy; it involves the movement out of one's individual situation and, metaphorically, into another's. Nietzsche's aesthetics, therefore, is primarily an act of interpretation. Though it reveals the mystical primal unity, it does not rely upon some transcendental aesthetic, nor does it demand beauty or sublimity. Instead, Nietzsche's interpretive aesthetic involves the sympathetic interpretation of another's suffering. Human experience, as such, has no value, except *as experienced*. To contend otherwise would be to argue for an inherent valuation of things that is explicable outside of human contexts. Human experiences are always *human*, and always incorporate a valuating subject. The imposition of value upon an event, therefore, is an interpretive event.

In claiming that interpretation, not aesthetics, is the base requirement for tragedy, I am not privileging the critic over the writer or reader. On the contrary, I am privileging the individual and the individual's ability to give order to experience by ascribing value to actions and events. As Hegel and Nietzsche assert, human action occurs against a backdrop of unity: the sum total of all events. Interpretation allows one to see *individual* events and *individual* actors,

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rather than becoming mesmerized by the inaccessible understanding of the whole. Any balance the unity of events may have is a construction of human meaning, not a metaphysical truth.

While Nietzsche interprets tragedy as a circular movement, Eagleton views it largely in terms of political revolution. Eagleton disengages from previous tragic theory in stages, first emphasizing the relevance of tragedy to modern audiences: "If tragedy matters to modernity, it is as much as a theodicy, a metaphysical humanism, a critique of Enlightenment, a displaced form of religion or a political nostalgia as it is a question of the slaying at the crossroads, the stench of the Furies or the monster rising from the sea" (21). Modern tragedy, therefore, is concerned with modern action: theodicy rather than prophecy, humanism rather than fate, revolutionary thinking rather than the slaying of mythological beasts. Naturally, one may read classic tragedy metaphorically, interpreting prophecy, fate, and the monstrous as either the disastrous imposition of political, religious, or social power upon human freedom, or the destructive power of subconscious human desire. The actuality of fallen kings, broken kingdoms, and vicious beasts is irrelevant: the metaphorical power of falls, disjunctions, and desires is the real substance of tragedy. After all, "we do not need the gods to deprive us of choices, coerce us into tragic dilemmas or compel us down cul-de-sacs, since we are perfectly capable of doing all this for ourselves" (Eagleton 114).

If traditional markers of tragedy are metaphorical rather than substantive, one is free to view modern—and indeed, everyday—actions as tragedies. The foundation of the tragic is a certain way of viewing human suffering: "Most of what we need to know, for tragedy to occur, is that a man or woman is being destroyed—for who says 'humanity' now says 'ultimate value'" (Eagleton 94). There are no kings left to fall, but in many respects—the importance of the individual, notions of personal subjectivity, and the attention paid to the common man within art,

to name a few—democracy and humanism have made every man a king. There is certainly

continuity between the suffering of the mighty and the suffering of the meek. After all, "human

history includes the history of the body, which in respect of physical suffering has probably

changed little over the centuries" (xiv). While the Greeks may not have viewed the sufferings of

the common man as an event worthy of notice, the modern world has made human suffering

worthy of political action, metaphysical significance, and tragic substance. The question is not

whether a pauper suffers as much as a prince; the question is, "What audience cares about his or

her fall?" A fall is a change of state, and the motion thereof is relative to the observer's position.

When all men are created equal, all can fall equally far. The modern metaphor of equality

enables any person to be a tragic protagonist.

While actions do not have to have aesthetic appeal to be merited tragic status, they do

have to submit to a certain mode of interpretation. Eagleton does not suggest that tragedy simply

gives value to suffering. Instead, he grapples with the truth of tragedy: its ability to represent

human life without denying the depth of human suffering. He writes, "If tragedy ennobles

suffering, then it edifies only at the cost of the truth, since most real-life suffering is not in fact

ennobling. And nothing convinces like the truth. But if it tells the truth, then it is hard to see

how it can fulfill its function of justifying the ways of God to men" (29). Eagleton questions

whether or not a true theodicy can exist, for a theodicy must valuate suffering, and suffering does

not have value in-and-of-itself. Theodicy seeks to explain the real measure of evil in the world:

human pain. Yet, as Eagleton argues, to justify suffering by equating it with revolution is to lie

about the depth of such pain. Certainly, there are situations where suffering produces knowledge

or understanding. One needs not produce a metaphysical maxim or primal unity to explain this

process. *Breaking through to the truth* may be more than metaphor: it often requires personal

suffering:

> It may be, as modernity suspects, that common-or-garden consciousness is now so
> ineluctably false consciousness that only such a violent passage through hell will
> return it, purged and demystified, to true cognition. Breaking through to the truth
> is both ebullient and exacting, demanding a painful self-transformation. This is
> certainly true of Lear; but it is, so to speak, tragic that there need be such a
> tragedy. (34)

Yet suffering is not intrinsically valuable. Like any other commodity of exchange, suffering has

value only insofar as one may use it to procure other things, like self-knowledge or revolution.

Such an economy of suffering does, however, reveal the value of revolution: "It is in this sense

that value and tragic suffering finally converge—not that destruction is an inherent good, but that

when humanity reaches its nadir it becomes a symbol of everything that cries out for

transformation, and so a negative image of that renewal" (282). Where Hegel and Nietzsche

view tragic transformation as an inevitable facet of human existence, Eagleton characterizes it as

an *unfortunate* fact, one that proclaims just how far one has to go in a quest for a peaceful and

just society.

From this perspective, Eagleton interprets human suffering as the price of revolution:

> It is a measure of how catastrophic things are with us that change must be bought
> at so steep a cost. Only by some bruising encounter with the Real, to cast the case
> in Lacanian terms—a confrontation which we cannot survive undamaged, and
> which will leave its lethal scars silently imprinted on our existence—can we hope
> for genuine emancipation. (57-8)

This brutal revolution—one Eagleton cannot help but describe in terms of the body and of

physical suffering—is not strictly a political—socialist, democratic, or Marxist—revolution;

instead, it is a revolution of a broader *polis*, a revolution of human society. Contrary to

Eagleton's critical leanings, I argue that such *political* revolution is fundamentally metaphorical

revolution, for the stakes are not modes of government but ways of seeing the world. Whenever

tragedy occurs, one's guiding metaphors are in some way in conflict: suffering is not necessarily the only path toward a more effective understanding, but it is far too often the price of such a revolution. This truth of suffering is tragic. To ignore the immense weight of that payment, to equate suffering with revolution (metaphysical or political) rather than to express it as the *cost* of revolution is both to ignore the economic metaphor of use-value (money is exchanged for commodities, not equivalent to them) and to elide the depth of human suffering. One can sometimes exchange suffering for revolution, but this does not make suffering *equivalent* to revolution; instead, it is the unfortunate price thereof. In certain tragic contexts, suffering brings about revolution, but one should not value suffering *as* revolution. Suffering remains an abysmal experience, a blight upon human life, despite any good that tragedy may produce from it.

Cognitive theory emerges from this forest of theory with a simpler and broader reading of tragedy: *tragedy is an interpretation of human suffering that emphasizes the role of guiding metaphors in human agency, the inevitable conflict of those metaphors with each other and with the phenomenal world, and the evaluation of that conflict as the price of cognitive and social revolution.* This theory respects the politics of Eagleton, subsumes the conflict of Hegel and Nietzsche, and depicts Aristotelian action as the motive force of guiding metaphors, both within individuals and within society as a whole. It also points toward an astoundingly simple reading of catharsis, one I will describe through my reading of *King Lear*. Tragic heroes—both the tragic protagonists of the plays and their audiences—suffer because of the nature of the cognitive process. Insofar as that process is universal to human beings, an intuitive awareness of the pitfalls of that process allows one to empathize with the tragic hero. Suffering is not simply the price of revolution. It is also the price of interacting with the world. That is tragic. Catharsis,

then, is the emotional valuation of suffering: the pity for the human, the fear of the fall, and the

hope for a revolution to bring the *Rota Fortunae* full circle.

Fire-ey'd Fury Be My Conduct:
Embodied Metaphors of Desire in
Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

"Even though we live we yet harbour within us the seeds of our mortal end."

(MacKenzie 38)

Confronted by Benvolio in Act 1, Romeo describes his love for Rosaline: "Love is a smoke made with the fume of sighs; / Being purg'd, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes; / Being vex'd, a sea nourish'd with lovers' tears" (1.1.188-90). His desire for Rosaline manifests as an emotional fire, which Romeo describes via embodied metaphors. The interior heat produces "sighs" of "smoke," "sparkling" glances, and a passion to be "nourish'd"—rather than quenched—by "tears." The metaphorical similarities between fire and desire entail certain expansions of the metaphor. When Romeo first sees Juliet, he says, "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright" (1.5.43). On one level, Romeo is merely asserting that "beauty is light." On a literal level, however, the only thing that teaches a torch to burn bright is fire. In the previous scene, Romeo asked to be a torch-bearer at the feast, and may in fact be holding a torch as he utters these lines (1.4.11). Metonymically, Romeo is the torch, and Juliet's fire (her desirability and capacity to desire) causes his fire to burn in turn. Three things are necessary for a fire: a source of fuel, a source of ignition, and the actual process of combustion. If "desire is fire," then "desire is combustion:" yet once a fire has been lit, it is difficult to distinguish

between the burning and that which burns. Desire emerges from an individual just as it works upon that individual. Romeo and Juliet are each simultaneously fire and fuel.

The seed of a thing lies in its opposite: death in life, violence in love, pain in pleasure. Or so runs the metaphysical claim. Much of the Nietzsche-esque criticism about *R&J* suggests a Petrarchan, paradoxical worldview where binary oppositions such as life/death, love/hate, sex/violence are mystically linked. While the union of death and desire in *Romeo and Juliet* forms a cornerstone of a productive reading of the play, Shakespeare's presentation of these concepts is neither mere Petrarchan paradox nor some grand metaphysical schema. Shakespeare operates on the level of metaphor, carefully blending together desire and death into a final metaphor: Death is a desiring agent. Following the path of these metaphors will not only lead to a valuation of suffering and tragedy; it will also lead to the source of that tragedy: the two cultural metaphors "desire is a fire" and "desire pierces both desirer and desired."

A cognitive reading of *Romeo and Juliet* offers an understanding of love and hate based upon the embodied metaphors of desire. Relying upon the cognitive theory of George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and Mark Turner—specifically the theories of embodied metaphor and of conceptual blending found in *Metaphors We Live By* and *The Literary Mind*—I will explain how Shakespeare uses embodied metaphors of desire to portray the fundamental desire for recognition at any cost: even if that cost is the desire of death itself.

According to Lakoff and Johnson's embodied realism, our perception of the world is fundamentally structured upon our experience of our bodies. We breathe in and out; we eat and excrete; we bleed when cut; we see out of our bodies into a field of vision. Our bodies have insides and outsides; our identities and our worldviews emerge from this structural metaphor.

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Therefore, we should understand metaphors through their figurative relationship to human bodies. Embodied realism is not merely about corporeality; it's about embodied perspective.

Mark Turner's conceptual blending provides the cognitive mechanism behind embodied realism: we construct metaphors, narratives, and concepts through the blending of distinct yet similar inputs. A simple example might be Love is Fire; in this metaphor, the abstract emotion of love is blended together with the physical experience of fire and we infer based upon their similarity: heat, passion, consummation. Romeo's words concerning the fire of love are not merely poetic flourishes: they are revelations of the workings of his mind, metaphors that link his embodied experience to abstract concept. As such, we may analyze them to reconstruct Romeo's view of desire and to discover how that view ultimately leads to his downfall.

Within *Romeo and Juliet,* desire is not merely a fire: desire is also piercing. This metaphor is a blend of two other metaphors: "sight pierces like an arrow" and "love is an arrow from Cupid's bow" (I speak of myth here as a complex system of metaphors). Juliet evokes the first metaphor when her mother asks her to view Paris as a possible husband: "I'll look to like, if looking liking move, / But no more deep will I endart mine eye / Than your consent gives strength to make it fly" (1.3.97-9). Here visual perception—"looking"—motivates desire— "looking liking move." Specifically, sight pierces its object—in this case, Paris—by penetrating the container of that object—hence Juliet's sight can be "deep." Though the Petrarchan gaze is a commonplace of early modern romantic poetry, it gains a new aspect in the light of embodied realism. It is possible to merely pierce a container, to see inside an object. If sight pierces, however, it is nigh impossible to "see inside" a person without somehow wounding them.

Romeo evokes this wound when he defends his melancholy love of Rosaline to Mercutio:

> I am too sore enpierced with his shaft
> To soar with his light feathers, and so bound

             I cannot bound a pitch above dull woe.
             Under love's heavy burden do I sink. (1.4.19-22)

The physical weight of Cupid's arrows and the pain of being wounded by love are here the weight of melancholy, as Romeo experiences the emotion bodily. The "feathers" are simultaneously Cupid's wings—with which Romeo could soar with a light, airy feeling of love—and the arrow's fletching, metonymic for the arrow itself—which has wounded Romeo, weighing him down with melancholy. Here Romeo is the object of desire: as he is also the fuel of fire, so he is the target for Cupid's arrows. Desire pierces Romeo's container, wounding him in the process.

Between Romeo and Juliet, however, desire is a reciprocal piercing: the mutual recognition of lovers. Describing his love to Father Lawrence, Romeo says, "I have been feasting with mine enemy, / Where on a sudden one hath wounded me / That's by me wounded" (2.3.46-8). Here Romeo and Juliet are a pair of archers who have shot one another. Romeo and Juliet desire this wounding, this mutual recognition and piercing of the container. Their desire for wounding is a desire for the tender vulnerability of love. The container's exterior is social identity, while the container's interior is the self. To pierce a person through loving desire is to see behind their social mask, to break through their constructed identity into a vulnerable, personal knowledge of that individual.

Desire, therefore, is a piercing gaze of recognition. Upon learning Juliet's identity as a Capulet, Romeo cries, "My only love sprung from my only hate. / Too early seen unknown, and known too late" (1.5.137-8). Love springs from three separate containers in this sentence: a child is born, as Romeo's love Juliet literally springs from his hate, the Capulets, by emerging from Lady Capulet's womb; one emotion is born out of another, as his particular love for Juliet springs from his general hatred for the Capulets; and a personal self is born out of a social self, as

Romeo sees into Juliet's identity as a Capulet, perceiving her interior, personal self as what he desires. Yet this perceptual process is inverted, as Romeo recognizes: "too early seen unknown." His desiring gaze sees beyond Juliet's social container without first seeing that container: he knows her as his love before he knows her as a Capulet (the interaction of personal and social selves demands a more detailed image—perhaps that of Russian nesting dolls—and refers back to the complexity of conceptual blending and the blending of identity).

Love, of course, is not the only form of desire. Within the play, the hatred between Montague and Capulet is just as prominent as the love between Romeo and Juliet. Shakespeare depicts these two forms of desire with the same metaphors. Like loving desire, hatred, too, is a fire. Just before the climactic death of Mercutio, Benvolio depicts violence as heat:

> I pray thee, good Mercutio, let's retire;
> The day is hot, the Capels are abroad,
> And if we meet we shall not 'scape a brawl,
> For now these hot days is the mad blood stirring. (3.1.1-4)

The hot day stirs the hot blood of the Capulets—and of Mercutio as well. Physically, one experiences hatred in much the same terms as love: the hot blood, the quickened pulse, the flushed face. Even Romeo, the "fire-ey'd" lover, experiences hatred as heat. When Tybalt slays Mercutio, Romeo proclaims, "Away to heaven respective lenity, / And fire-ey'd fury be my conduct now!" (3.1.125-6). Love and hatred are both the internal fires of desire that pour forth from people's eyes.

The word "respective" bears a dual meaning. Most commonly, "respective" denotes a particular relationship among persons, one that is "regardful, attentive, considerate, careful." Romeo's abandoned "lenity" reinforces this definition. Yet "respective" also suggests "having relationship or reference *to* something" (respective, 1a, 5a, OED). Romeo will no longer be lenient or respectful, but he will still be respective. His actions will still engage him in a

reciprocal relationship with Tybalt, yet hatred has replaced love: "one fire burns out another's burning" (1.2.45). Romeo begins to act out of hatred for Tybalt instead of love for Juliet, yet his fiery action is still reciprocal, involving a mutual wounding among participants. The difference here is not the action of desire, it is the motivation behind that desire: if love is the desire to be wounded, the desire to become vulnerable and to reveal the self in mutual recognition, then hatred is the desire to wound, the desire to cause vulnerability in another, to take recognition by force. Tybalt demands recognition from Romeo, recompense for the "injury" to Tybalt's honor that Romeo committed by attending the Capulet feast. Romeo responds by wounding Tybalt yet again. He says, "I do protest I never injuried thee, / But love thee better than thou canst devise" (3.1.67-8). This love wounds Tybalt, thrusting upon him an unsought vulnerability. With Mercutio's death, Romeo realizes that Tybalt will not exchange one desire for another, and he gives Tybalt the recognition he so earnestly desires: a trial by combat and a literal piercing of the bodily container—though not the particular body Tybalt had in mind.

Love and hate, therefore, are not stark opposites: they are both desires for personal recognition, fires of the body that demand wounding and vulnerability. The substantial difference between them is an orientational difference rather than a categorical one: hatred desires to wound, while love desires to be wounded. The object of the piercing gaze—or rapier—is different, but the activity of desire is constant in each case. Desire is love and hate; thus the seed of a thing lies in its opposite, for these things are only opposites according to certain metaphorical frameworks. According to others, they are two instances of the same category—desire. Therefore, we may read the conflict between the love of Romeo and Juliet and the feud of Montague and Capulet as an articulation and renegotiation of desire.

This renegotiation of desire—of both love and hate—leads us to Death. Even loving desire has the innate capacity for violence. Sneaking into the Capulet gardens, Romeo sees Juliet's window and exclaims, "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east and Juliet is the sun! / Arise fair sun and kill the envious moon" (2.2.2-4). Juliet's light has the power to set Romeo's heart ablaze; it also has the power to kill. Fiery desire consumes lover and beloved alike, for fire burns away its fuel in the act of combustion: "These violent delights have violent ends / And in their triumph die, like fire and powder, / Which as they kiss consume" (2.6.9-11). Every fire is a metaphor of mortality, a moment of shining life before the cold, dark death of an extinguished flame. The hottest, brightest flames burn all too quickly. They are "too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden, / Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be / Ere one can say 'It lightens'" (2.2.118-20). Far too quickly, "Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day / Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops." Like Romeo, "we must be gone and live, or stay and die" (3.5.9-11).

Desire does not merely burn itself out, consuming the desirer; it also violently pierces the container of the self. Within the Capulet gardens, Juliet worries that her kinsmen will kill Romeo: "If they do see thee, they will murder thee." Yet Romeo protests that Juliet is the dangerous—and potentially murderous—one. He responds, "Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye / Than twenty of their swords" (2.2.73-5). The eye is a sword that pierces and kills the self. Mercutio, too, enjoys a piercing pun, mocking Romeo's love-sick state: "Alas poor Romeo, he is already dead, stabbed with / a white wench's black eye" (2.5.13-4). One might protest that, like Mercutio, such metaphors merely jest, for though desire may wound, it cannot really kill the body. Desire does not cause death. Desire merely breaks hearts, and no one has ever actually died of a broken heart. Have they?

Upon hearing the news of Tybalt's death, Juliet grieves, "Some word there was, worser than Tybalt's death, / That murdered me" (3.2.108-9). Banishment. Word of Romeo's banishment murders Juliet. True, she does not die physically, but her heart is broken, and the container of her self is shattered. She can no longer bear to maintain her social façade amongst her parents, and instead endures "a thing like death to chide away this shame" and to return to Romeo's loving embrace: Friar Lawrence's cunning potion (4.1.74). When this plan fails, Juliet seeks actual death rather than mere semblance, choosing death over life without Romeo: "O happy dagger. / This is thy sheath. There rust, and let me die" (5.3.167-8). Like Romeo's final, orgasmic kiss, Juliet's death unites sexual desire with death. Loving desire, mortally wounded, leads to a desire for death: it shatters the container of self even if it leaves the body intact.

Yet Juliet does not desire death, the event: she desires Death, the person. Ordinary death is an empty word, a biological event that occurs to all living things. Death is a person that comes for you, specifically. He is both adversary and lover. As a personified force, Death can be both a desirer and a desired. Believing his daughter to be dead, Capulet says to Paris:

> O son, the night before thy wedding day
> Hath Death lain with thy wife. There she lies,
> Flower as she was, deflowered by him.
> My daughter he hath wedded. I will die,
> And leave him all: life, living, all is Death's. (4.5.35-40)

Here Death is both rapist and husband: rapist, in that he steals Juliet's life, deflowering her before her wedding day; husband, in that he marries Juliet and inherits Capulet's hopes and estates. Death, therefore, desires Juliet violently and lovingly, and while death comes for all men and women, here Death comes for Juliet alone. Death is free to desire each and every one of us, for the dance of desire cannot wound him: he has no body, no container to be pierced. Entering Juliet's tomb, Romeo speaks to Juliet's still, silent form:

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> Why are thou yet so fair? Shall I believe
> That unsubstantial Death is amorous,
> And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
> Thee here in dark to be his paramour? (5.3.102-5)

"Amorous" desire comes from a physical body; it manifests itself as a heated passion, and involves the yearning for vulnerability and a reciprocal piercing. Yet "unsubstantial," un-embodied death desires Juliet. Strictly speaking, this is not possible. Insofar as Death is a personification, however, rather than a biological event, he is capable of human emotions and activities. Having no body, Death can desire, lovingly and violently, without fear of being wounded. And he does desire. He desires us.

One should fear and value the desire of Death—which is simultaneously Death's desire and the human desire for Death: one fears the destruction that Death's hatred brings, while one values Death's loving desire. Through the violence of death—and through the "little death" of sex—Death takes recognition from men and women. He heaps honors upon himself by shattering the weak and strong alike. Through the love of Death, however, one gains recognition. An awareness of one's unique, irreplaceable mortality defines the individual. Jacques Derrida describes this irreplaceability in *The Gift of Death*: "Death is very much that which nobody else can undergo or confront in my place. My irreplaceability is therefore conferred, delivered, 'given,' one can say, by death." (41). We each meet Death alone. Even though Romeo and Juliet die in each other's arms, they die separately. Romeo dies thinking Juliet is dead; Juliet awakes after Romeo has died. Their physical proximity only highlights their existential distance.

One's relationship to death, be it one of love or hate, is defined by mutual piercing and recognition. When we recognize Death, he recognizes us, and gives us an awareness of our selves. One measures the value of life against the total self-annihilation of death, proclaiming

that the joy of life is worth the coming darkness. So Romeo begins his marriage with the

promise that any suffering is worth Juliet's love:

> Amen, amen, but come what sorrow can,
> It cannot countervail the exchange of joy
> That one short minute gives me in her sight.
> Do thou but close our hands with holy words,
> Then love-devouring death do what he dare:
> It is enough I may but call her mine. (2.6.3-8)

Death devours love, but he also enables it, just as the darkness of the night sky forms the

background against which the stars may shine. So, too, Romeo loves as he embraces the

darkness: "Thus with a kiss I die" (5.3.120).

The metaphors that Romeo and Juliet live by, the metaphors that enable them to love as

hotly, brightly, and passionately as they do—and through that burning love to burn out the feud

between their families (1.2.45)—lead inevitably on to this metaphor: death desires us, and we

desire death. The piercing of the container, the vulnerability of love and the wounding of hate

only have value against this metaphorical background of Death. The reader may forge new

metaphors for desire, and may find new methods for valuing life and love, but Romeo and Juliet

may not. They only possess the few tools that Verona has given them, and those tools do not

allow for love without pain, life without death, blessings without curses. Romeo and Juliet know

all this from the beginning. They know that, by such metaphors, the price of such passion is

mortality. From the start, theirs is a "death-mark'd love": death-marked, death-valued, and

death-desired (Prologue 9).

No-body Actually Eats King Lear:
Breaching the Container in Shakespeare's *King Lear*

> Nobody actually eats King Lear, though this is one of the few mishaps not to befall him. No doubt someone would have got round to it, had the drama stretched to another act. (Eagleton 284)

Terry Eagleton is absolutely right: no one ever *actually* eats King Lear. There is no Dionysian Eucharist in the play, no cannibalistic *sparagmos*. Metaphorically, however, Lear *is* eaten: by the audience, by his daughters, and by his fears—his anxieties concerning the power of eyesight and love to breach the contained human self and the threat of dissolution that such a breach implies. The gaze of love does not breach or destroy Lear: instead, as Stanley Cavell observes, his avoidance of love breaks him. Lear's anxiety denies the piercing power of sight, calcifying the container of his self, until that container shatters under the strain. Shakespeare's audience eats the pieces of a shattered Lear—at least, those not devoured by the fear of no-body and no-thing. Cognitive theories of embodied metaphor and conceptual blending explain this metaphorical Eucharist in terms of the psychology of the audience.

I begin my reading of *King Lear* with two metaphors: "sight is an arrow" and "selves are containers," basic cultural metaphors that Lear reacts against. When Kent begins to chastise Lear for banishing Cordelia, Lear introduces the first metaphor: "The bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft" (1.1.144). Here the bow is argument or words, while the implied arrow is the import of those words. An example of the conduit metaphor of language, this metaphor implies that language must not merely reach its target; it must pierce it (Reddy 286). Kent soon

blends this metaphor, "language is an arrow," with sight. When Lear says, "Out of my sight,"

Kent responds, "See better Lear, and let me still remain / The true blank of thine eye" (1.1.158-

60). The "blank" here is "the white spot in the centre of a target" (blank, n2, OED).   The

conceptual blending of "language is a piercing arrow" and sight produces the metaphor "sight is

a piercing arrow," which incorporates all of the implications of the conduit metaphor but maps

them onto sight instead of language. In this metaphor, sight contains meaning, moves from a

speaker to a receiver (or in this case, a seer and an object of perception), and pierces the receiver.

Lear pierces Kent with his eyesight, the embodiment of his power, recognition, and wrath. Other

examples of this metaphor include: (1) Lear's intention to analyze Goneril's negligent

hospitality—"I will look further into't" (1.4.69)—where the state of Goneril's mind is a

container that Lear will look into; (2) Lear's complaint to Regan about Goneril—"Her eyes are

fierce, but thine / Do comfort and not burn" (2.2.361-2)—where Goneril's sight now burns rather

than pierces Lear (burning is another embodied metaphor for wounding); (3) and Lear's tentative

recognition of Kent in the final scene—"This is a dull sight: are you not Kent?" (5.3.280)—

where the "dullness" of sight suggests its inability to pierce or to achieve insight (in-sight).

All of these metaphors of sight build upon the metaphor "the body is a container," which

emerges from the experience of human bodies as a container: one breathes in and out; one

consumes food and excretes it; one bleeds when wounded, and the body heals the breach.

Intuitively, one extends this embodied metaphor to an understanding of the self. Assaulted by

the storm upon the heath, Lear cries out, "Take physic, pomp, / Expose thyself to feel what

wretches feel" (3.4.33-4). Physically, Lear exposes his body to the storm, denying himself the

shelters of roof and clothing. Metaphorically, Lear exposes his *self* to poverty and suffering,

allowing the storm to breach the defenses of money, social position, and royal power. The

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container protects the self, a fragile substance. The Fool, for example, describes Lear as a cloven egg:

> Why, after I have cut the egg i'the middle and eat
> up the meat, the two crowns of the egg…
> …Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou
> gav'st they golden one away. (1.4.151-6)

The outer shell of the egg is the container of Lear's self: his kingly authority, his public persona, and his defenses against the outside world. The inner meat of the egg is the interior of Lear: his wits, his emotions, his pride, and his vulnerable parts. Lear is a fool because he inadvertently destroys his container. Human cognition is rooted in the experience of the body as a container, as well as the experience of the breach of that container. Every breach of the container, whether it be biological, communicative, or emotional, is a reaffirmation of shared bodily experience, a renegotiation of the differences and barriers between individuals, and a reminder of the threat of bodily disintegration. As Lakoff and Johnson write, "We are physical beings, bounded and set off from the rest of the world by the surface of our skins, and we experience the rest of the world as outside us" (29). A breach of the container reminds one of the presence of that container. To breach the container is to be wounded, and to be wounded is possibly to be destroyed, body and self. Lear allows a breach to become a break, then a total disintegration of the self. When Cordelia discovers her father's madness, she characterizes it as a wound of the mind: "O you kind gods, / Cure this great breach in his abused nature; / Th'untuned and jarring senses (4.7.14-6). Lear is breached and destroyed by the wounding gazes of his daughters: gazes of both love and despite.

Stanley Cavell's foundational reading, "The Avoidance of Love," describes Lear's anxiety over the eyes of his daughters: "Lear's dominating motivation...is to *avoid being recognized*. The isolation and avoidance of eyes is what the obsessive sight imagery of the play

underlines" (46). I read Cavell in terms of embodied metaphor: recognition is a mutual

communication, and therefore a mutual piercing of the container. Cavell argues that Lear fears

the interpenetration of love's eyesight because he believes he is incapable of love, and "to be

loved knowing you cannot return that love is the most radical of psychic tortures" (61). It is

difficult to receive love without breaching the container and risking a wound that devours both

container and self, for love emerges from the shared piercing of recognition, and therefore from

the shared vulnerability of a container breach. Lear, therefore, takes a Machiavellian route,

living in a way "in which the inner and outer worlds have become totally disconnected, and

man's life is all public, among strangers, seen only from outside" (67-8). Lear's abdication is

emotionally insincere. He is not under the misunderstanding that Goneril and Regan love him,

or that public displays of fawning gratitude are true displays of affection and loyalty. In the

terms of embodied metaphor, Lear fears the breach of his container, the emotional vulnerability

and reciprocity that love demands, so he demands an inauthentic display of love from his

daughters. He rejects the piercing quality of sight and constructs a court where only surface-

level interactions are necessary.

Cordelia's gaze of love—not just her sisters' withering glances—breaches Lear's

defenses. When she says, "Nothing, my lord," at Lear's abdication ceremony, she exposes the

radical difference between insides and outsides (1.1.76). Goneril and Regan, whom Lear knows

are faithless, bring to the ceremony elegant, empty platitudes. Cordelia, who "cannot heave" her

"heart" into "her mouth," appears empty on the outside but is in fact filled with the devotion that

Lear so earnestly craves and fears (1.1.91-2). When Cordelia looks upon Lear with genuine love

rather than feigned adoration, Lear breaks open. Lear fears the disconnection of appearance with

interior substance, for piercing the container implies a mutual vulnerability that threatens

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personal destruction. So it is that when a disguised Kent returns to Lear, he says, "I do profess to be no less than I seem" (1.4.13). Such a man is a comfort for Lear, who need not pierce him to see him. Lear avoids the wound of recognition, the wound that enables love and that threatens personal dissolution. He does not fear love itself, nor is he ashamed of his inability to love, as Cavell suggests (49). Instead, Lear fears the vulnerability that love demands: he fears to allow another person to breach his defenses, for such a wound brings with it the threat of self-destruction and the void.

Lear's avoidance of the wound of love causes Cordelia's death. Cavell places the blame for Cordelia's death upon Lear's desire to be in prison with her, the desire to "accept his love, not by making room in the world for it, but by denying its relevance to the world" (69). When Lear allows his and Cordelia's imprisonment, he ensures her death, both metaphorically and literally. Even at the play's end, Lear refuses the vulnerability of public affection, instead insisting on a relationship with Cordelia contained by prison walls rather than personal barriers. The tragedy is that "he might have saved her, had he done what every love requires, put himself aside long enough to see through to her, and be seen through" (73). This is Lear's moment of *anagnorisis;* when, Cordelia's dead body in his arms, he says, "I might have saved her; now she's gone for ever" (5.3.268).

In order to avoid this final tragedy, all Lear needs to do is open his eyes to the costs of love: "what we need is not rebirth, or salvation, but the courage, or plain prudence, to see and to stop. To abdicate. But what do we need in order to do that? It would be salvation" (Cavell 81). Lear needs a salvation of sight: he needs someone, or some event, to take his eyes from him and give him new ways of seeing. Sight is both humanity's current damnation and its hope for salvation, for "it is the thing we do not know that can save us" (Cavell 97). In my reading of

Cavell, Lear fears the wound that leads to self-destruction, and so constructs a world that operates under false premises. He fears the sight that pierces the container, so he comes to hope and believe that outsides are the same as insides, ruling and abdicating rule according to the belief that a superficial sight is sufficient to navigating through one's life. Better to see just the surface, and to keep one's container whole. What Lear only realizes with Cordelia's death is that love can only exist in the midst of that threat of vulnerability and self-destruction. As a mutual piercing, love demands a breach of the container. Horrified by the void, Lear cannot see the positive potential of love and of vulnerability.

Fear of the void looms large in *King Lear*. In her essay, "The Physics of King Lear: Cognition in a Void," Mary Thomas Crane links Lear's anxieties concerning the breached container with early modern theories of atomism. Early modern thinkers such as Galileo, Kepler, Harriot, Digby, and Boyle all proposed variations of atomist theory, which suggested that matter was composed of indivisible particles (atoms) surrounded by empty space (Crane 7). Such theories run contrary to embodied experience: "Proponents of atomism were implicitly suggesting that what you can see only corresponds structurally—perhaps even obliquely and indirectly—with what can't be seen" (7). The surface of matter—the outer container accessible to physical sight—only corresponds metaphorically to the inner life of the world. The piercing gaze of insight discovers a void inside of things, an insidious nothing that threatens to undermine physical existence, a dark sea teeming with cognitive monsters.

Lear's anxiety concerning the interiority and permeability of selves extends to the world at large: the penetration of the world threatens to bring the void crashing in upon the world. Thus Lear progresses through a series of stances—or viewpoints—concerning the body: "The play offers not one coherent mental model of an orderly universe, but a series of attempts to

work out what the universe is made of, and how its sensible properties relate to what is invisible or insensible" (Crane 10). Instead of agreeing whole-heartedly with Lear's conception of hole-hearts—vacuous interiors that bring dissolution—Crane suggests a more tentative understanding of embodied metaphor, one that embraces the corporeal body as the source of metaphor, but simultaneously feels free to leap from the body to the blank, creative void: "instead of attempting to control matter, Lear comes to rely, instead, on his own feelings as the one clearly present phenomenon: his and Cordelia's tears, and his own sufferings, become the only tangible evidence of existence" (15). Holding Cordelia in his arms, Lear does not long for a heavenly reunion or a spiritual resurrection. Instead, he yearns to see her, the bodily evidence of her life. He comes face to face with the grim visage of "nothing": death. Death of the body, death of the self, death of cognition. To pierce the container is to deal in the "nothing" of death, to value the vulnerable reciprocity of love against the potentially destructive wound of the void, to recognize both the fragility of metaphorical thinking and the inability to reach beyond the body by any other means. It is to relish the smell of mortality rather than vault beyond the scope of human vision to dwell solely in a realm of interiority. Perhaps such a reading of *King Lear* is nihilistic: it is certainly humanistic.

A pattern emerges. Lear attempts to live according to a guiding metaphor, "outsides are equivalent to insides," a metaphor that allows him to function in a social world by ignoring the piercing quality of sight and recognition. In order to overcome his abiding fear of the void, of self-annihilation in the face of nothingness, Lear willfully ignores the permeability of the container. He assumes a world where outsides are equivalent to insides, where he is free to hide his self within a socially constructed shell, interacting with others only upon a superficial level. This metaphor—not just the underlying fear—destroys him, for when Cordelia's loving gaze

pierces his container, thrusting upon him an awareness of his vulnerability, Lear violently struggles to cope with the wound, a wounding he perceives as an assault rather than a genuine offer of love. Cordelia's wounding love is fatal because Lear lacks the metaphors to understand it.

This joint damnation and salvation through a single guiding metaphor does not create a tragedy: it merely sets the stage. Tragedy arises not from the mere presence of suffering, but the valuation of that suffering. Such a valuation occurs when the tragic protagonist perceives that the root cause of his suffering is identical with his guiding metaphor, the moment when the hero realizes that he must join the source of his success with the source of his suffering. This moment is *anagnorisis*, and it is the defining moment of tragedy. A nihilistic reading of the play would deny Lear any chance of *anagnorisis*, asserting that *King Lear* denies tragic conventions by failing to provide reconciliation in the fifth act. Speaking of Lear's death, A.D. Nutall writes, "By actually providing a false *anagnorisis* at the end Shakespeare makes his rejection of the final, classical insight completely inescapable" (97). Nutall argues that Shakespeare denies his audience any "clinching, final insight," instead teaching "a harder lesson: that sufferers may die without knowing why they have suffered" (103).

Lear shares this nescient knowledge. His final lines are a meditation on the finality of death. The climax of Lear's suffering occurs as he watches his daughter Cordelia die; he then must face a world defined by her absence:

> And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, no life!
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life
> And thou no breath at all? O thou'lt come no more,
> Never, never, never, never, never…
> …O, o, o, o.
> Do you see this? Look on her: look, her lips,
> Look there, look there!   *He dies*. (5.3.304-9)

There are two principal ways to read this scene: in the first, Lear knows that Cordelia is dead, but in his madness he hopes and prays for some miracle of rejuvenation. As Nutall argues, Shakespeare consciously thwarts this hope for tragic reconciliation by killing Cordelia in the first place, asserting that suffering pays no heed to innocence or guilt. Thus, in his madness, Lear sees breath upon Cordelia's lips: "If that her breath will mist or stain the stone, / Why then she lives" (5.3.260-1). The ironic juxtaposition of Lear's belief and the present reality heightens the pathos of the scene: the audience becomes aware of just how final Cordelia's death is. There is no promise of heaven here, only the cold darkness of physical death.

The second reading also hinges upon what Lear sees upon Cordelia's lips: *nothing*. Within the play, the first word Lear hears from Cordelia's lips is "nothing" (1.1.87). So too, the last thing Lear sees from Cordelia's lips is *nothing*. Lear achieves his moment of *anagnorisis*. He sees that Cordelia is dead: "No, no, no life!" Thus Lear's final exclamation, "Look there, look there!" is not the desperate cry of a madman: Lear is displaying to the audience the reality of death. *Look there!* he cries. *Do you see it? The absence of breath! The nothingness of mortality! She is gone, gone, gone.*

In both readings, the same pattern emerges. *Death* is the central character of the scene. *Death* has taken Cordelia, and no interpretation of suffering can undo that pain. Lear comes face to face with the void and either flees from it or acquiesces as it devours him. Lear can only valuate or interpret his suffering through his death, which is the annihilation of any knowledge he would gain in the act. The container is broken, and the mind dethroned. Nescience and nihilism reign.

One's entire interpretation of the play would seem to hinge upon what Lear sees, whether he dies in madness or in knowledge. On the contrary, I propose that it is irrelevant to the tragedy

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what Lear sees as he dies. Lear does not leave one with an insight. He leaves the audience with a command: "Look there, look there!" *Pierce this container, as I cannot! Look beyond the surface of the stage! Achieve anagnorisis. Valuate suffering.* Even if Lear does not see that Cordelia is dead, *the audience does.* Even if he cannot attempt to make sense of his suffering, *the audience can*. The ambiguity of this final scene kicks loose all the supports of tragedy; it forces the *audience* to actively engage with the play, to pierce the veil, to enter into the tragic process. Shakespeare has not denied tragedy; he has enabled it!

It is necessary for the tragic hero to achieve *anagnorisis*. It is *not* necessary for Lear in particular to achieve it. If sight is a piercing activity, a penetrating recognition of another human being, then in watching or reading *King Lear* the audience sees Lear, recognizes his humanity, and is recognized in turn. His life, his emotions, his sufferings penetrate the heart of the reader just as the reader peers into his. The reciprocal gaze wounds the reader's container, and the boundaries between the reader and Lear become more permeable and fluid. The reader conceptually blends together with Lear to form the tragic hero (Turner 83). To the extent that the reader sympathizes with Lear—whether that sympathy be with his guiding metaphor, his sufferings, or his essential humanity—the reader blends together with him through metaphorical similarity. His journey is the reader's journey, his sufferings the reader's sufferings. The spectator is the tragic hero.

Whether Lear realizes that Cordelia is dead or believes that she still lives, he has traversed the desert of doubt, leaving all his former beliefs in ruins. Cordelia dies because of the fallout of those limited beliefs, because of Lear's inability to admit to his vulnerability. Cordelia is dead. Lear is dead. Neither can weigh the suffering of the world against the beauty of love. Neither can craft new guiding metaphors, new ways of seeing each other. But blended together

with Lear, the reader as tragic hero has traveled the same road. The reader, too, has been rejected by daughters. He has stood naked upon the heath. He has held Cordelia in his arms and wondered: *Could I have prevented this?*

Insofar as the reader is similar to Lear, pity draws him to Lear. Insofar as the reader is different—whether through the extremity of Lear's actions or the extremity of his suffering—fear pushes him away. Lear is the scapegoat, simultaneously sacred and taboo. His death shatters the conceptual blend in a metaphorical *sparagmos*. His fear of no-body devours much of him: all the things that the reader, too, feared or abhorred. Yet the reader carries pieces of Lear inside himself, all those points of sympathy, those wounds of reciprocal recognition. He devours him in a theatrical and conceptual Eucharist. Lear is simultaneously cast out, into the darkness of death and of the fallen curtain, and drawn into the reader's heart. He has pierced the container. He is inside the reader. The reader is the tragic hero, and the journey is his to complete.

Whether the reader completes the journey, achieving some sort of catharsis, is an individual response, contingent upon the extent to which he has blended with Lear, the circumstances of his reading (or viewing), and his interpretive perspective. It would be impertinent to assume that catharsis always occurs, or that a play that does not produce catharsis in all its readers is not a tragedy. Tragedy is not a genre: it is a metaphorical event, a blending of a certain type of reader with a certain type of text. Catharsis, the assumed response to tragedy, does not always occur. When it does occur, however, it occurs via the conceptual blending of the reader with the tragic hero. When the reader faces the nothing upon Cordelia's lips and wonder what he has seen into, then he has completed the tragic journey. Then he has forged the metaphors that he lives by. Then he has opened his eyes and paid the price for his salvation.

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Conclusions?

As this project comes to a close, I find that I have uncovered more questions than I have answered: what are the implications of a cognitive framework for catharsis? If tragic protagonists suffer from an inability to transform their guiding metaphors in the midst of crisis, how do other individuals switch from one metaphor to another? How do early modern theories of the body affect my readings? Early modern theories of piercing and sexuality? There are an abundance of avenues to pursue through this cognitive reading of tragedy. Cognitive theory is a relative newcomer to literary theory, and the early modern period—with its emphasis upon transitional forms of subjectivity, extended metaphors, and tragic worldviews—should be filled with opportunities for new cognitive readings.

This study has, however, solidified several key concepts in my mind. I am convinced now, more than ever, of the pervasiveness of metaphor and of its power to bring both triumph and tragedy to individuals. Lakoff and Johnson's simple reminder that we have bodies and that our experience of those bodies helps structure our thoughts through metaphor has profound implications; it becomes a foundation for understanding cultural contingency and constructions of meaning, and it leads to an elegant yet complex method for reading text as an expression of thought. In addition, Turner's conceptual blending offers not only a way to break down simple metaphors, but also a way to analyze complex mythological constructs and to compare multiple narratives. My readings of *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet* have only scratched the surface of

cognitive theory, but I hope they display the potential richness of such readings. Tragedy is not

merely a literary genre: it is a facet of human experience, and cognitive theory shines light upon

it.

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