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Suffering in the Human Experience: An Examination of the Book of Job and King Lear

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Suffering in the Human Experience:

An Examination of the *Book of Job* and *King Lear*

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College of the Holy Cross

English Honors Program Thesis

Advised by Professor William Morse

Read by Professor Robert Cording

English Honors Program Director: Christine Coch

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I. Acknowledgements

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Lastly, thank you to my advisor, Professor William Morse: you truly have the “patience of Job.” You have been an incredible mentor to me over the past three years, and especially on this project. Meeting with you was always one of the highlights of my week. Your wisdom and kindness are unparalleled. Thank you for recognizing how much this project means to me, and for supporting me in my academic and personal quest to discover the meaning of life in our suffering world. I couldn’t have done it without you.

II. Introduction

On one of the first pages of my thesis notebook, I have “LIFE IS MEANINGLESS???” written across the top of the now faded, wrinkled paper. I remember writing it. I was in the middle of reading the *Book of Job* for the first time in two years, and was at the crux of Job’s suffering. In this moment, I was so engrossed in the pain of Job’s journey that I could not imagine the fulfilling conclusion of the whirlwind speech, even though I’d read the text before. Looking back, seeing this phrase scribbled in my notebook, makes me smile. It reminds me of when this project lay so vast, so incomplete before me that I could not imagine convincing even myself of what I originally set out to do. So I struggled through *Job*. I wrote many drafts. I received many pages with Professor Morse’s emphatic “NO! NO! NO!” written along the margins. At the end of the first semester, I was completely unsatisfied with where the chapter had gone, so much so that I hadn’t even completed it.

And then the irony of life, or its “random symmetry,” hit like a ton of bricks. Here I was writing a thesis on suffering, and I went home for winter break, and was thrown into an unexpected family trauma. I didn’t write a word on my thesis for over a month. But I did think about it, every day. I thought about why people suffer, why some suffer more than others, how to be there for a suffering person, and how best to respond to my own suffering and that of my family. When I returned, the words started flowing out of me in a way they hadn’t before. I could finally write a conclusion to the *Job* chapter that satisfied me, and I began writing on *Lear* speaking out of my own experience, not the abstract ideas that so guided my earlier work. Writing became coping. It was cathartic.

At the conclusion of my thesis, I will ask the questions: Haven’t you asked God, as Job does, “Why do you hide your face?” Haven’t you felt the guilt of Lear and the power of

Cordelia's forgiveness when she says, "No cause, no cause"? Haven't you questioned at times whether your suffering life can be meaningful at all? I will admit to you here, and now, that I have asked these questions myself, many times. They are the reason I chose this topic, and the reason that this thesis is so personal to me. I wanted to write this work because I longed for an answer to all the questions about the meaning of life that have arisen in my last four years here at Holy Cross.

I never expected this thesis to become so tied to my own life and my own experience, and yet, here we are. So as you're reading this, I hope you recognize that while I try to take you through the depths of Job's and Lear's journeys, that I am also taking you through my own. Even in this final project, you will see the "aha!" moments where everything makes sense to me; you'll feel how fully I sometimes "get it." There will be other moments where you might sense me struggling to express what I still do not understand. This is not a perfect thesis. It will never be published, or read by the masses. But it is the truth as I see it. That is the best way I can think to describe it. It is the truth of my own experience and interaction with these texts, which have become dearer to me than I ever imagined.

So pay attention to Job's journey, and Lear's journey, but also keep mine in mind. God will never speak to you as he does to Job, and you will never experience the perfectly selfless love of Cordelia, but I'm guessing there will be moments when you will feel as I have felt. You will struggle to understand as I have struggled. You will question as I have questioned. You will "get it" and you will not. You may see yourself in me, in this work, and maybe together, we will come to deny what's written on that faded, wrinkled page, that "LIFE IS MEANINGLESS???"

III. Chapter One: Book of Job

The Structure of the Book of Job

How can one reconcile a loving God with a suffering world? This question is raised in the *Book of Job*, as Job and his friends attempt to understand why tremendous sufferings have been inflicted upon the protagonist, a “blameless and upright” man who “fears God and turns away from evil” (*Job* 1:1). As Job finds himself suddenly plunged into the deepest depths of human suffering, he struggles to comprehend why he, a “blameless” man, has been made to suffer. Structured first by the frame tale, *Job* quickly moves to the three rounds of argumentation between Job and his friends, allowing each party to work through their misguided syllogisms regarding the place of suffering within the human experience. The friends cling to the assumption that since suffering comes from God, and God is just, Job must be guilty. This supposition results in their minimization of God’s covenant, reducing it to a personal covenant that can be understood within the limitations of human understanding. Contrarily, Job, knowing his innocence, ultimately conceives of a different way of interpreting his newfound suffering, that is: suffering comes from God, but Job is innocent; therefore, God must be unjust. Similar to his friends, Job trivializes the grandeur of the covenant, lessening it to the likes of a legally binding contract, which he believes God has broken. Consequently, Job asserts what he assumes to be his quasi-legal right by asking God for his “day in court,” desiring to “bring God to justice” as a consequence of His “violation” of the covenant. As the three rounds of argumentation progress, Job and his friends develop with increasing intensity their particular appeals to justice as they each understand it. These attempts are ultimately thwarted by the largesse of God’s voice from the whirlwind in *Job*’s final chapters, when God dispels the logical nature of the syllogisms

of Job and his friends, suggesting instead that suffering comes from God, God is just, and yet Job is innocent. Through the whirlwind speech, which ultimately restores Job, and us, to the awe-inspiring mystery of God, Job discovers wisdom in God's visionary response to the nature of his suffering. In the wake of his discovery of the largesse of creation as presented to him by God, Job's personal experience of suffering is reconciled with the chaotic world over which God presides.

The Hebrew Covenant in the *Book of Job*

"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your offspring after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of perpetual holding; and I will be their God." (Genesis 17: 4-8).

In the book of *Genesis*, God presented Abraham with the covenant He promises to the Hebrew nation; a powerful historical covenant representing the way in which He will relate to the Hebrew people past, present, and future. This covenant represents God's grandeur in the largesse of its promise: not only does God assure the seemingly impossible in promising that Abraham's elderly, barren wife will become "exceedingly fruitful," but more importantly, He pledges to *be* the God of Abraham's descendants (*Genesis* 17:6). God's promise *to be* is complex. As a figure of immeasurable power and love, it is clear that the way in which God will *be* in our world cannot be fully understood through human reason. This notion underscores the biblical story of Abraham, who must abandon his distrust of God and his tendency towards

human logic in order to fulfill the promise of God's covenant. Abraham's faithfulness is often tested by God, not as something he must pass, but as a way of helping him learn how to heed God's call. Initially, Abraham makes mistakes. Although God promises to protect Abraham, when he and Sarah arrive in Egypt, Abraham tells his wife to "Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account (12:13). Even though God promises Abraham that He will bear him a son, Abraham disregards God's word, instead following the word of Sarah when she urges, "the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her" (16:2). Abraham's original response to God's call is bound by the limitations of human rationality. Abraham is unable to look past the dangers of Egypt or the improbability that Sarah could conceive in favor of a more complex understanding of God. Ultimately, he must come to the realization that God provides. When God promises to *be* the God of Abraham, to *be* the God of the Hebrew people, He pledges to always keep His promise to His followers, even if doing so may seem impossible within the realm of human comprehension.

In order for Abraham to come to the understanding that God provides, and thus, to fulfill the covenant, he must recognize the cursed and fallen nature of human rationality. He must realize that in order to have a truly trusting, loving relationship with God, he must enter into the darkness beyond human logic. When God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham does not become alarmed, nor does he run away from God. Even though God has promised Abraham a great nation of descendants, Abraham does not question how the covenant will be fulfilled if he sacrifices his only heir. Rather, he "set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him" (22:3). While Abraham cannot possibly understand what God will provide through the sacrifice of his son, he continues on his way, trusting to his Lord. All of God's tests leading

up to this point have sought to defeat the untrusting, logical side of Abraham's reasoning. Through these tests, Abraham comes to realize that God will always give us what we need, though rarely in the way we expect, and hardly ever in a way that makes sense to us.

The essence of the covenant promises that God will never fail to provide for His people. We're asked to trust that this is true, has always been true, and always will be true, even if our human logic does not allow us to see how it could be. Human logic is the rope that binds us all; it defines human sight, resulting in our questioning of God's existence, His presence, and our faith. In order to understand the covenant, we must realize the fear of God in every place, and constantly remind ourselves of the awe-inspiring, incomprehensible nature of His creation. Doing so prevents us from reducing God to an entity we believe we can understand. Instead, we are able to focus on the covenant as an overarching historical promise between God and the many generations of His people, a covenant rooted in indefiniteness, guided by the informed faith that somehow, through His complex way of *being* our God, He will provide for us.

The Friends

However, Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, operate under the false assumption that they are protected by a personal covenant with God; they need to believe that they have been, and will continue to be, personally rewarded for being faithful servants of Him. Their entire worldview rests upon the principle that those who receive good fortune, as they have, have earned it as a gift from God, and, in contrast, that those who experience pain and adversity have also earned their fate, by sinning against God. Because they never doubt their inadequate human perception of a personal God who is "just" in their own terms, who "will not reject a blameless person," the friends are incapable of recognizing that God provides in ways that cannot be

understood within our limited human conception of justice (*Job* 8:20). Thus, though the friends are correct in asserting that God is loving and all powerful, they do not truly comprehend the complexity behind the meaning of this compelling statement. They fail to see, or deny, that they cannot understand God's way of *being* their God, of *being* in the human world. Of course, as evidenced through Abraham, divine knowledge will always be beyond our understanding. Rather than trusting in a God whose power lies beyond their comprehension, the friends minimize God, fearful of His otherness.

As the three rounds of argumentation develop, the three friends more and more fiercely cling to their idea of a personal covenant, airing their views with increasing intensity as they struggle to deny the implications of Job's position. The friends' escalating anger and insistence on his repentance is deeply rooted in their fear of the possibility that Job might, in fact, be "blameless" (1.1). If Job were innocent, it would disrupt their entire understanding of how the world works, and especially, their secure place in it. Thus, the friends must maintain that Job's suffering must be a consequence of his own wrongdoing, for if this is not true, then what might stop God from inflicting the same pain on them? If Job loses everything, though innocent, then everything that the friends believe about themselves, their lives, and their perception of God might be vulnerable, too. Their diminished understanding of the covenant, so deeply rooted in the historical Hebrew tradition, would fall apart before their eyes. In order to remain comfortable in this world, the friends must blame Job. They must turn a blind eye to his claim that his suffering is undeserved. Thus, in order to preserve their own moral certainty, to protect the comfortable lives they believe God has bestowed on them, they refuse to act in solidarity with Job. The friends are affluent and influential within their community, positions they attribute to their faithful keeping of God's commandments. To believe Job's claim of blamelessness would

be to abandon every notion the friends hold about themselves. It would be to give up a vision of a God who has protected them, who has sheltered them and their loved ones from evil and misfortune. It would be to admit the terrifying realization that Job's suffering, beyond that any human being should have to endure, is not based on this covenant, but remains independent of it; thus, to admit the same suffering could be inflicted on them in the blink of an eye. If God does not abide by a personal application of the covenant, in which the good and evil are rewarded and punished in their earthly lives, is there any safeguard against suffering at all?

Believing Job would force the friends to relinquish their belief in the God they understand in favor of a radically more indefinite perception of the nature of life, and the divine. It would call them to question their wealthy, comfortable lives and to deal with the guilt associated with having so much when others have so little. It would force them to engage the reality of Job's horrible condition; the reality of suffering itself, the incomprehensible pain it brings, and the damage it causes. It would mean living uncomfortably, questioning the nature of their own existence and experience. Believing in Job's innocence simply comes at too high a cost for the friends. Thus, rather than coming to a progressive understanding of Job's suffering through the three rounds, the friends' fear becomes increasingly intense the more Job seeks to disprove their personal application of the covenant.

The first round begins with the friends at their least vulnerable, before they feel threatened; it is the least intense and accusatory of the three. Eliphaz starts with consideration for Job's feelings: "If one ventures a word with you, will you be offended?" (4:2). His worldview has not yet been jeopardized by the possibility of Job's innocence; thus, he can attempt to be a friend to Job without giving up his own vision of God. Though he contends that Job must have sinned to have earned the suffering he endures, he assumes and does not press this issue, but

rather focuses on Job's potential return to the Kingdom of God. He urges Job to appeal to a God who forgives all sin and alleviates suffering: a God who punishes the sinner but rewards the righteous, who "wounds, but then binds up" (5:18). However, Eliphaz believes this principle based on an inadequate conception of the divine covenant, and within the parameters of the false promises of a guardian angel-like God. Eliphaz's understanding is contingent on the idea that God operates within the human system of cause and effect. He believes that, in following God's law, he upholds his side of the covenant; thus, for doing so, God rewards him in his earthly life. He is unable to look past this system, and conceives of God in his limited, human way. As a result, the "comforting" words he offers Job are merely platitudes that those who have not encountered suffering, as Job has, cling to in the face of the suffering world around them. Content with his easy existence as a man of privilege, Eliphaz calmly tries to preserve his vision of the divine by encouraging Job to repent, wholeheartedly believing that if Job does so, his suffering will be reversed by God. He attempts to convince Job to conform to his understanding, thus to admit his wrongdoing, in an effort to preserve his vision of God's justice while also preserving his friendship with Job.

Following Eliphaz's speech, however, Job once again appeals to his blamelessness. The result: Bildad and Zophar's subsequent attacks on Job. They do not approach Job in the considerate manner Eliphaz did, for Job has begun to mount a threatening challenge against their comfortable assumptions. In response, Bildad and Zophar argue against Job with increased intensity and decreased sympathy. Their real motive in "explaining" Job's suffering, of bringing it within the parameters of the personal covenant, becomes more clear. Bildad contends that through death, God delivered Job's children "into the power of their transgression," while Zophar suggests that Job is a "stupid person" (8:4, 11:12). In blaming Job's children for their

deaths, and insulting Job's intelligence, the friends defend their comfortable vision of God, a vision which allows the suffering of the world to be understood within human terms. Thus, Bildad assumes, "If you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore you to your rightful place"; and Zophar suggests, "do not let wickedness reside in your tents. Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish" (8:6, 11:14-15). While these assumptions about the nature of God would be correct if the covenant were considered with respect to its largesse and grandeur, the friends' application of these suppositions trivializes God's awesome power. As with Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar believe that if Job repents his sins, he will be restored to a comfortable existence. Because of their fear of a God who is larger than their ordered conception of Him and His universe, they must abide by this limited belief, continuing their attacks on Job in order to preserve their own comfortable existences.

By the second round of argumentation, it becomes clear that Job, in the consciousness of his innocence, will not give up his claim of blamelessness; he will not conform to the views of his friends. Job's refusal to admit to any wrongdoing acts as a mounting threat against the friends' vision of God and the nature of reality. Job's argumentative responses force the friends to deny his point of view. They are driven to proceed more forcefully against him in order to preserve the world as they understand it. As a result, the friends' aggressive attack against Job in the second round is immediately apparent. Eliphaz, formerly the most sympathetic towards Job, begins in a manner totally contrary to that of the first round, in which he approached Job gently, and with consideration for his feelings. Now, Eliphaz begins angrily: "Should the wise answer with windy knowledge, and fill themselves with the east wind?" (15:2). He proceeds to accuse Job of "doing away with the fear of God," contending that Job has been "seduced by sin" and that his tongue "flaps with deceit" (15:4, Mitchell 41). The other two follow suit: Bildad asserts,

“Surely the light of the wicked is put out”; and Zophar cries out “Pay attention! My thoughts urge me to answer, because of the agitation in me” (18:5, 20:2).

The conclusiveness of Bildad’s statement implies that he refuses to be questioned on the fate of the wicked; he refuses to consider a world in which God might not “put out” the light of the sinner during his earthly life (18:5). Ironically, Zophar accuses Job of being utterly blind to the ways God works in the human world, a crime punishable by the suffering Job has endured. Of course, Zophar himself, along with his friends, are more ignorant of the manner in which God operates in the human world. Through the second round, the friends reveal the lengths to which they will go to preserve what they believe themselves to understand. Any sympathy once presented to Job has disappeared in favor of the friends’ increasing fear that perhaps the way God works in the human world might not accord with their beliefs. As Job continues to speak against these beliefs, rather than conforming to them, the friends become incrementally more desperate and angry in their arguments against him.

By the third round of argumentation, the friends’ fear has become more intense: they now feel the full weight of Job’s argument. Increasingly afraid that their defenses against the uncertainty of life might be overthrown, the friends become more desperate in their interactions with Job. Rather than specifically addressing Job’s suffering as they had in rounds one and two, the friends talk past Job hysterically. They “do not speak to Job at all, they speak to their own terror at the thought of Job’s innocence” (Mitchell xiv). The friends have come to know that life is unpredictable. They can feel the earth moving under their feet, as they begin to sense that the stories they have told themselves might fail. Rather than attempting to grasp the unpredictability of life, to understand it, and thus, Job, in a meaningful way, the friends remain entirely blinded by their need to convince Job of his wrongheadedness. They have become increasingly agitated

over the previous rounds as their beliefs were called into question by Job. Now, when their way of being in the world feels most vulnerable and threatened, their resulting argument against Job becomes less pointed towards Job himself and more focused on the frightening implications of his argument. Eliphaz begins by asking Job, “Is not your wickedness great?” subsequently listing all of the terrible acts Job “must” have committed in order to have earned his fate (22:5). Eliphaz does not give Job the chance to answer his question. He needs Job to be guilty; he cannot bear to hear another argument of Job’s innocence, for doing so would only increase his anxiety about the apparent disorder of life. Thus, Eliphaz insists that Job’s iniquities must have been immeasurable: he alleges that Job has stripped his family naked, that he has “withheld bread from the hungry” and crushed the arms of orphans (22:6-7, 9). These accusations are extreme. There is no reason to believe that Job in fact committed these acts; rather, Eliphaz makes these claims out of his anxious desire to prove that Job’s suffering must result from his committing truly terrible crimes, crimes Eliphaz himself would never engage in.

Thus, Eliphaz attempts to distance himself from any resemblance to Job, painting Job as a portrait of evil, a man who turns against those most deserving of his love and compassion: his family, the hungry, and orphans. Doing so allows Eliphaz to maintain his own moral certainty and, by extension, the certainty and logic of the world around him: “the plans of the wicked are repugnant to me” (22:18). In essence, he, contrary to Job, has no connection to the hideously sinning, thus suffering, world. Though Eliphaz once again urges Job to repent his sins, to earn back his place in the Kingdom of God, this instruction is not sincere; rather, it suggests that Job should do what Eliphaz himself has done: “Agree with God, and be at peace”; and “Pray to Him and He will hear you, and you will pay your vows” (22:21, 27). Eliphaz must believe that if Job restores himself to the Kingdom of God (that is, by acting as he does in his own relationship with

God), Job's suffering will be alleviated. If Eliphaz's manner of following God does not result in this outcome, then there would seemingly be no logic to the way God works in the world, a conclusion Eliphaz simply cannot accept. Similar to Eliphaz, Bildad refuses to hear Job in the third round, once again too threatened by the apparent unpredictability of life and its implications on Bildad's own existence.

Zophar's lack of a third speech highlights the extreme nature of this round; finally, the arguments have come to a head, each party no longer able to attempt to understand the other. The first two rounds followed a rather consistent pattern: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar each spoke, respectively, with Job responding to each at the end of their speeches. The third round breaks from this arrangement. Zophar does not say anything; Bildad's speech is interrupted by Job. By the time the two men reach this point, each is so caught up in their own fears of the implications of Job's suffering, as evidenced by Eliphaz's speech, which is primarily directed at himself rather than Job. The moral certainty of the friends has been consistently queried by Job; everything they believe has been called into question. In response, Job has been attacked; horrible sins have been alleged against him. The friends are entirely wrapped up in the threat posed by Job's alleged blamelessness.

In response to the friends' failure to adequately communicate with Job, a fourth friend, Elihu, is mysteriously introduced at the end of the third round, providing the final word from Job's friends before the intervention of the whirlwind. Despite Elihu's claim that he holds more wisdom than the other three friends, he has little more to offer. As with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, Elihu confuses the nature of God's covenant, adhering to the personal covenant of the other three friends: "Shall one who hates justice govern? Will you condemn one who is righteous and mighty?" (34:17). Evidently, Elihu views justice with the same limited perspective as the

friends, concluding that Job's "answers are those of the wicked, for he adds rebellion to his sin" (34:36). Elihu, too, argues that Job "must" have sinned in order to have earned the suffering he endures. He contends that God "gives the afflicted their right," and that if the wicked turn back to God, "they complete their days in prosperity" (36:6, 11). But Elihu minimizes the power of God in presuming that he has an absolute understanding of Him. He claims to have "something to say on God's behalf," describing himself as "one who is perfect in knowledge" (36:2, 4). Elihu's failure to recognize that the ways of God cannot be understood, let alone fully represented, by human beings supports the fact that he refuses, out of his fear of suffering, to comprehend the covenant as God intended it to be taken. As with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, Elihu is driven by the fear of a God whose ways do not conform to his limited, human conception of the divine.

Through the three rounds of argumentation and Elihu's addendum, the friends resort to mere platitudes in addressing Job's suffering. Their fear of the possibility of Job's blamelessness does not allow them to engage with him or his suffering in any meaningful way. The easy comforts and consolations the friends offer Job shine a particularly bright light on our human world, present and past. Every person who has suffered, or has attempted to engage with the suffering other, struggles to find the "right" thing to say, the "right" way to respond to human pain. Often, as the friends do, we resort to mere platitudes regarding the nature of God in order to deny the terrifying mystery of life and suffering. Comments such as "Everything happens for a reason" and "God doesn't give us more than we can handle" often stand in as the adequate response to human suffering today. These are messages that the suffering person cannot bear to hear; they represent the platitudes that Job fights through the three rounds of argumentation. The suffering other, submerged in the depths of human despair, is unable to conceive of a plausible

explanation or justification for their suffering. Though the use of platitudes is not generally guided by ill intention, but rather, by fear of suffering, their use trivializes the experience of the suffering other, making him look guilty of his pain.

The *Book of Job* offers a harsh criticism of both Hebrew culture and our culture, as Job's friends represent such an inadequate response to human suffering. We are Job's friends in the way we change the channel when a UNICEF commercial comes on, or in the way we walk past a homeless person in the street and avert our eyes. We are Job's friends when we refuse to question the seemingly unjust nature of our world, when we do not struggle to form a meaningful relationship with God, and others, in the face of suffering. We are Job's friends because it is easier to believe we have a right to a comfortable existence, because it is simpler to live in a world we believe we can understand. Coming to terms with the way God works in the human world is a task only for those willing to enter into a questioning engagement with the nature of reality, for those willing to accept the indefiniteness of life in order to explore what it truly means to live. Instead of taking this path, the friends opt for the easy way out. We are sympathetic to them, as we often find ourselves employing many of the same attitudes and platitudes that they use. When God condemns the friends at the conclusion of *Job*, it becomes clear that the narrative seeks to wake us up from our misconceptions regarding the nature of the divine, and the place of suffering in the human world: "The Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: 'My wrath is kindled against you and your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has'" (42:7).

Job

In *Job*, Job goes through several stages in his response to suffering, before coming to an acceptance of it only upon encountering God in the whirlwind. Job begins the *Book* in health and wealth, a “good man” with a comfortable existence (1.1). In his sudden suffering, Job is driven to call upon his understanding of the covenant. Like his friends, Job initially cannot conceive of a world in which God does not abide by a personal application of the covenant. He is initially blinded by an inadequate fear of God, a fear grounded in his terror at the thought of divine retribution. Thus, he cannot recognize the awe-inspiring nature of God, as reflected in an understanding of the true covenant. Consequently, Job first responds by devoutly accepting his suffering, though he begins to sink deeper and deeper into despair at the apparent lack of reason behind this suffering. Only when Job loses all hope, spiritually dead in the face of a God he believes has betrayed him, does he begin to question God. He asks to “bring God to court” for adjudication, concluding that, on account of his own blamelessness and undeserved suffering, God must be unjust. The act of “proving his case” against God, of questioning His ways, spiritually awakens Job, and gives him a new reason to live: the prospect of bringing meaning and purpose to his suffering. Finally, God generously responds to Job’s inquiries, reminding Job of his misunderstanding of the true covenant, and ultimately restoring our sense of that true covenant through the gift of creation. In his pain, Job had forgotten that God exists outside of human time, space, and meaning: he diminished the mystery of God. Job must be reminded of this mystery, in order to think beyond his human mortality, and to restore his awareness of the awe-inspiring nature of the divine.

While Job is a “good and blameless man,” his understanding of God is grounded in a misconception of the nature of God’s covenant: like his friends, Job understands the covenant in

limited, personal terms (1.1). Consequently, Job's initial fear of God is inadequate, grounded in his terror at the thought of divine retribution. Thus, out of his fear as much as his goodness, Job does everything right. On feast days, Job sends burnt offerings to God for each of his children: "It may be that my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' This is what Job always did" (1:5). This passage suggests the depth of Job's limited conception of God and his anxiety at the thought of God's retribution. He prepares burnt offerings under the assumption that his children *may* have sinned, even without actual knowledge that sins have been committed. He assumes that if his children have not accounted for all of their wrongdoings, they will be punished by God. In Job's mind, his actions ensure that neither he nor his children will incur God's wrath. He "always" prepares the offerings, he is "always" fearful of the nature of the divine; thus, he should "always" be protected from harm (1:5). Job's actions represent this fearful understanding of how a faithful servant of God should act, thus revealing his belief in the personal covenant.

When Job is tested by his suffering, his first response is to remain faithful, a response inspired by both his goodness and his inadequate fear of God. As a faithful follower of God, upon hearing of the brutal murders of his cattle, his servants, and his family, Job devoutly accepts his suffering. He "fell on the ground and worshipped God: Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has given away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:20-21). Even after Job is afflicted with the "loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head," he continues to defend God (1:7). When Job's wife asks, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die," Job responds, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and not the bad?" (2:9-10). Job's faith presents an admirable response to his suffering, a response that attests to his

goodness; however, his faith is burdened by his fear. Job is afraid to question God, or to rebuke Him, because he fears how God will respond. Instead, Job fiercely clings to his vision of a just God who rewards the good. He is patient with God, waiting for God to restore him to his earned, rightful place in His Kingdom.

Because Job's patience is grounded in fear, seven days and seven nights pass in silence as Job falls into despair at the state of his suffering. Job's pain renders his entire life purposeless. In the consciousness of his suffering, he completely loses the will to live: "Let the day perish in which I was born" (3:3). This sentiment allows us to recognize and identify with the depths of Job's despair at his undeserved suffering. He pleads,

Why is light given to one in misery, and life to the bitter in soul, who long for death but it does not come, and dig for it more than for hidden treasures; who rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they find the grave? (3:20-22).

Job begs for the ease death would bring, for the comfort of not having to face the agony he experiences: "Now I would be lying down and quiet; I would sleep; then I would be at rest" (3:13). Death becomes a dream for Job, a reprieve from the constant nightmare of his life from which he cannot escape. He can no longer conceive of living in a world where he suffers for seemingly no reason, spending every moment spiritually empty and in physical pain. We live "with a sense of dread in the back of our minds- those moments, which we know will disrupt our lives entirely" (Cording 2). For Job, these moments have arrived, seemingly all at once: "Truly the thing I fear comes upon me" (3:25). Job, who spent his entire life attempting to guard himself from the pains of suffering, to remain in God's good graces, loses on both counts. His despair renders him spiritually dead, unable to fathom the question of his own existence.

But the discourse with his friends provokes Job to become increasingly angry at the friends' selfish assumptions with regards to the nature of his suffering. He starts to realize the limitations of his friends' way of thinking about the world; by extension, the inadequacies of his own way of thinking about the world; and finally, his place in it. While Job's responses cause his friends to cling with increasing intensity to their vision of a just God who abides by the personal covenant, Job's own perspective begins to change. When Eliphaz accuses Job of earning his fate through sin, Job begins to see the flawed nature of Eliphaz's reasoning. He challenges Eliphaz's fear, his refusal to consider that Job might be guiltless: "You see my calamity, and are afraid" (6:21). Job does not bring this sentiment to Eliphaz's attention out of anger. He is calling Eliphaz to recognize his fear out of insight-- because Job himself is equally terrified to consider the implications of his own suffering. Job desperately attempts to find a friend in Eliphaz, to engage with someone in the reality of his own senseless suffering. He tries to find meaning in a world that suddenly has become meaningless to him, to find someone to help him understand his anxieties regarding the increasingly complex nature of life.

The discourse with the friends jolts Job out of his despair, his spiritual death, awakening in him a questioning nature. He despaired because his ordered, just vision of the world fell away before him. Thus, the implications of Eliphaz's accusations against Job result in Job's first questioning of God: "Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul" (7:11). At this moment, Job's real faith in God begins. He is no longer afraid to question God; to truly consider what it means to be in relationship with the divine; to work towards the truth of human existence; to think about his experience of unjust suffering. As opposed to the blind devotion Job previously felt towards God, he now attempts to understand Him. No longer able to exist in a world spiritually dead,

where he unjustly suffers unimaginable trials and tribulations set forth by God, where he has nothing left to lose, Job speaks out.

While Job is not correct in asking “Why me?” (since doing so implies a personalization of the true covenant), through his questioning, Job finally becomes honest with himself about his relationship with God:

What are human beings, that you make so much of them, that you set your mind on them, visit them every morning, test them every moment? Will you not look away from me for a while, let me alone until I may swallow my spittle? If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of humanity, why have you made me your target? (7:17-20).

Knowing of his blamelessness, Job calls upon God to explain why He suddenly, unceasingly inflicts upon him intense suffering. He asks why God has singled him out despite his goodness. For the first time, Job speaks of his own experience, not out of platitudes, logic, or fear. Instead, out of his sense of God’s injustice, Job speaks from the complexity of his own dilemma, from the depths of his reflection. He finally calls upon God, and breaks through his fear of the divine to wrestle with the nature of God and His justice.

But the limitations of Job’s interpretation of the covenant results in his rational conclusion that God must be unjust. Job cannot conceive of a world in which he suffers and God is just; his perception of order does not extend beyond human dimensions. To Job, living in a world that does not make logical sense to the human mind is to live in an orderless world. Job never considers that divine justice and divine order could differ from his human understanding of these principles. Instead, when his suffering puts him in a position that challenges this understanding, he finds divine injustice to be the only conclusion that allows him to preserve his rational mindset. If Job were to admit that life is not defined by our human conception of justice,

yet, there is a just God, the contradiction would destroy his “nest” in the world (29:18). This “nest” represents the conceptual framework by which Job seeks to order his world, making it amenable to human reason, and thus comforting to him. If he were to consider that life is orderless, or guided by an order he does not understand, Job would be faced with terrifying questions regarding his own existence: What does it mean to exist in such a world, in which life is perpetually beyond human understanding? If life is without apparent order, then what gives life any meaning at all? Job’s fear of such a complex life is apparent: “I become afraid of all my suffering, for I know you will not hold me innocent. I shall be condemned; why then do I labor in vain?” (9:28). Unable to face the implications of his questions, and in order to make any sense out of his condition, Job comes to the only conclusion that appears logical to him: suffering comes from God, yet Job is innocent; therefore, God is unjust. He claims that God must “destroy both the blameless and the wicked,” asking, “if it is not he, who then is it?” (9:22, 24).

As a result of Job’s outrage, which drives him to speak out against God, his suffering is given a context of meaning. His questioning engagement with the nature of God and His justice draws him out of his despair as he fights for the greater cause of justice, as he sees it. Job calls upon God for his “day in court.” As Job views God’s covenant personally, God’s alleged breaking of this covenant is akin for Job to His breaking of a legally binding contract. Consequently, Job begins to feel that he has the right to challenge God for this “violation.” Job does not believe doing so will come without ramifications. He acknowledges the “wisdom and strength” of God, but he no longer fears the immediate consequences of His wrath (12:9). By this point, Job has moved beyond his fear of God, his despair at the nature of his suffering, instead focusing on his defense of justice: “See, he will kill me; I have no hope; but I will defend my ways to his face” (13:15). Job knows he will not prove himself correct in God’s eyes, but he

needs to be heard, he needs God to listen to his appeal to innocence. In a world where everything Job has ever believed has been effectively destroyed, where Job feels he has no prospect of regaining the Kingdom of God, proving his case against God becomes Job's version of salvation. If God would hear him and respond to him, Job would at last be assured of the nature of justice and order within the human experience, and how these concepts relate to his own suffering.

While Job grapples with the problem of suffering as he pleads his case against God, he really finds himself wrestling to determine the nature of this covenant. As he formulates his appeal to justice, Job struggles to understand how and why God "broke" the covenant with him. Job's suffering dispels his own initial belief in a God who rewards the good and punishes the wicked in their earthly lives. Knowing of his blamelessness, he asks God, "How many are my iniquities and my sins?" (13:23). Thus begins Job's deeper, more thought-provoking appeal, his questioning engagement with the nature of reality: "Why do you hide your face, and count me as your enemy?" (13:24). This question is one that anyone who has ever suffered, or who has acutely borne witness to suffering, has asked. Job is really questioning how he can reconcile God with his innocent suffering. Why does God seem to "hide his face" with regards to his experiences of great suffering? If He is truly just and all powerful, why doesn't He intervene and help those in need? Why does He turn a blind eye to pain and despair, even after He has been faithfully called upon time and time again? After enduring the suffering he has undeservedly experienced, Job can no longer believe in God's justice.

As a result of this conclusion, Job's eyes are opened to the unwarranted suffering of others. He recognizes that neither he nor his friends earned their comfortable status in society, and finds empathy for others in similar situations to his own. He considers how the poor are made invisible for the comfort of the wealthy, how they "go about naked, without clothing,"

shouting “wounded cries for help,” yet, “God pays no attention to their prayer” (24: 10, 12). He questions, “Why do the wicked live on, and grow mighty in power?” and “How often is the lamp of the wicked put out?” (21:7, 17). Job is not quick to come to these conclusions. He fondly recalls the “months of old, as in the days when God watched over me” (29:2). He longs for the comfort and security of his previous life, when he was “in his prime,” surrounded by his children and well-respected in society (29:4). He considers all that he did to build his life: “I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and I championed the cause of the stranger,” concluding, “Then I thought, ‘I shall die in my nest’” (29: 15-16, 18). But now that this vision of life has been dispelled through the suffering he experiences, Job’s mind is opened to the realities of human life, to a fuller, more comprehensive vision of the world around him.

However, despite his developing understanding, Job’s continued personalization of the covenant still results in his imposition of human norms on God, and shrinks the immeasurable to fit our own limited criteria. Through Job’s assertions and questions, he continues his attempt to prove God’s injustice. Job recounts to God his specific good deeds, as well as his sinlessness: “Did I not weep for those whose day was hard? Was not my soul grieved for the poor?” (30:25). He concludes by listing hypothetical sins he could have committed, followed by what he considers to be appropriate punishments for each, in an effort to prove his understanding of sin, and thus, his complete innocence:

If my land has cried out against me, and its furrows have wept together; if I have eaten its yield without payment, and caused the death of its owners; let thorns grow instead of wheat, and fowl weeds instead of barley (31:38-40).

So although Job has grown, his conception of God is still self-centered. He continues to imagine a “human” God who fits within human dimensions. If God has treated Job unjustly, then Job

believes he earns the right to complain about his condition, to “take God to court” for adjudication.

Job’s condition forces him to consider the unpredictability of life, the indefiniteness of it: the very aspects he and his friends feared the most. Although Job rightly criticizes his friends for using his pain to push away their own fears, by being “miserable comforters” to him, by using “windy words” and “empty nothings” in response to his suffering, Job himself responds to God in a way that does not directly address the root of his deepest fears (16:2-3, 21:34). Job is not eager to believe that his God, the God who had always loved and protected him, is unjust. Admitting this is terrifying in and of itself. By resigning himself to believing in an unjust God, Job accepts that his suffering may be without cause, and that it may be ever-lasting. He admits that the human parameters by which he defined the world and his place in it were limited; he is stripped of the “nest” he built for himself, of his home in the world, in favor of this less comforting reality (29:18).

But despite the comforts that Job gives up by finishing his appeal with a belief in an unjust God, Job still refuses to consider that perhaps the world does not follow a logical pattern that can be understood by the human mind. He will not consider that there is an order to the world beyond the realm of his comprehension. Why is the thought of an orderless world even more terrifying than a world in which God is unjust? Why is it easier to believe in an unjust God than to believe that Job is innocent and yet God is just? In Job’s mind, pleading his case against God and gaining salvation in doing so gives meaning to his experience of suffering. It allows Job to air all of his anxieties within a framework that still ultimately makes human sense to him. The act of proving his case provides Job with the smallest sense of validation with regards to his experience. If God is wrong and Job is right, Job, despite everything he goes through, emerges as

the hero of his story, as the man who bore immense, undeserved trials and tribulations for the cause of justice.

But in order to truly give meaning to his suffering, Job must accept the covenant in the manner God intended it to be taken. He must realize that although he did not earn his suffering, his experience somehow fits into a greater plan, incomprehensible to him, that he can never hope to understand. He must admit that he will not receive the type of validation he seeks, nor will he prove his righteousness to God by “bringing Him to court.” In order to come to the realization that God provides, Job must enter into the darkness where human logic makes no sense, as Abraham did in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac. Because Job has shrunk God to an entity he believes he can understand, he is incapable of comprehending the covenant in its true form: he can not believe that God will provide for him. In order to understand God as the complex being that He is, as the formulator of the great, powerful covenant in which He promises to *be* the God of the Hebrew nation past, present, and future, Job must be educated in the awe-inspiring nature of God. But first he must recognize the utter falsity of his logical framework.

Thus, although Job imposes misguided, human norms on God, thus misrepresenting the nature of the true covenant, he is a truer servant of God than his friends. God ultimately commends Job’s questioning of Him, chastising Eliphaz and praising Job: “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has” (42:7). The friends selfishly refused to consider anyone other than themselves in their discourse. They were unable to look past their limited, selfish assumptions about the nature of God and their relationships with Him. As a result, they resorted to mere platitudes in their arguments with Job; they failed to try to understand the suffering other in a meaningful way. Job, on the other hand, expands his vision of the world and of God through his questioning. Job’s

blind devotion to God in the beginning of *Job*, before he stated “Therefore I refuse to restrain my mouth,” resulted in his despair, rendering him spiritually dead, and thus, alienated from any true relation to God (7:11). He was without hope, begging for relief and for death. After moving past his inadequate fear of the divine through his questioning engagement with God, Job is spiritually awakened. His cause of “bringing God to court” instills in him a sense of hope and purpose that counteracts his despair at the apparent meaninglessness of life.

Through God’s commendation of Job’s questioning, *Job* suggests that our God is a God who responds to the search for wisdom. Although Job’s resulting assumptions about the nature of God’s justice were incorrect, they were honest. Though he misunderstands God, his questioning is still devout and right in many ways; he nobly rejects the easy platitudes the friends cling to, he gropes towards the truth that there is no causal justice in life’s experiences. Job never lies about the truth of his situation to pander to his fears; rather, he seeks the truth of human existence by entering into a questioning engagement with the nature of reality. Unlike the friends, Job honestly considers the experiences of the suffering other, as evidenced by his newfound empathy towards the poor. While the very essence of humanness depends on a questioning of suffering, it must not be done in the “Why me?” manner Job employs. As “perfect” as Job has been in his devotion to God, in doing good, and in questioning Him, Job’s understanding is still self-centered and within the realm of the temporal world.

The Whirlwind

When God speaks to Job from the whirlwind, He reveals the realm of creation beyond our human conception of it, creation that frames and gives meaning to our world and our experiences here. God calls on Job to recognize His creative presence within the rich, beautiful,

energetic world in which we truly live. By illustrating the largesse of creation to Job, God allows him, and us, a glimpse of His omnipotence, of the universe in its entirety, thus showing us a vision of creation ordered beyond the realm of human comprehension. Through meteorology, His mastery over the animal kingdom, and Behemoth and Leviathan, God illustrates a universe that only appears “imperfect” and “illogical” when viewed through limited human dimensions. When we learn to appreciate the richness and fertility of this world, its beauty and energy, we are restored to an awed sense of mystery towards the world in which we live, and towards God, the master of creation.

God begins by asking a series of rhetorical questions recapitulating the nature of creation, jolting Job out of his rational understanding of the way he believes the world to work: “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” and “Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?” (768 note 38.1-39:30, 38:4, 33). God calls Job to consider how “meteorological phenomena are carefully, if extravagantly, dispensed by God;” how God creates the rain, yet does not preside over each drop as it falls; how water may turn destructive in the forms of ice and snow, yet still contains beauty (768-769 note 38:22-30). Thus, the rain, a wonderful, beautiful aspect of God’s creation, can also play a role in causing human suffering: a car crash resulting from a slip on black ice, or a flood that destroys a home. But God does not directly intend for the rain to inflict harm: it is an aspect of the overwhelmingly complex nature of God’s creation, of divine order. We cannot have rain without accepting that it may bring about harm: would we instead choose to live in a world without rain? Without snow? Without anything that could possibly hurt us? What kind of world would that be?

The voice in the whirlwind then speaks of the structure of nature’s food chain, where creatures depend on one another for nourishment, a seemingly “illogical” or “irrational” formula

when viewed in human terms, though one that illustrates the perfect functionality of God's rich creation. The whirlwind asks, "Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?" (38:41). God created animals to prey on other creatures, is He thus unjust? If we lived in a rational world, wouldn't the prey somehow "deserve" its fate? But the creature that one animal eats has fed itself on its own prey, and thus, the cycle continues, yet functions in a strangely beautiful and perfect way. Through the whirlwind, God reveals himself as the creator of the animal world, as the master of the complexity this creativity brings:

the lions and ravens with their appetites, mountain goats and deer with their reproductive activities, the wild ass and wild ox with their freedom, the ostrich, both foolish and swift, the fearless battle-stallion, and the hawk and the vulture with the ability to soar up high (769 note 38:39-39:30).

Through this powerful recapitulation of the forces at play in God's creation, we and Job are educated in God's powerful role as the source of this grand creation. In His rhetorical questioning, God calls Job and us to recognize the world as radically bigger than ourselves and what we believe we understand, to realize the incomprehensible nature of the universe when viewed through the lens of human perception.

To educate Job on the largesse of His creation, God illustrates His mastery over the forces of chaos, good, and evil in the world, allowing Job to witness the manner in which He presides over our complex reality. The whirlwind introduces the mythical figures of Behemoth and Leviathan to show us a world beyond our human conceptions of "good" and "evil." *Genesis* tells us that on the fifth day, God created the "great creatures of the sea," reasonably inferred to include Leviathan, described in the whirlwind as "a sea monster symbolizing cosmic chaos,"

who “on earth has no equal:” no one is “so fierce as to stir it up,” no one “under the whole heaven” can “confront it and be safe” (*Genesis* 1:21, 773 note 41:1-34, *Job* 41:33, 41:10-11). Thus, the possibility of suffering has been part of our universe from its inception. Yet, despite Leviathan’s presence in creation, “God saw that it was good” (*Genesis* 1:21). In creating sea monsters, in creating human beings and giving us free will-- God made a good, not perfect, world inclusive of suffering. Like Leviathan, Behemoth, a “primeval monster, a mythical symbol of chaos and evil,” is a facet of God’s creation, just as Job is, and as we are: “Look at Behemoth, which I made just as I made you” (771 note 40:15-24, 40:15). Through the discussion of these mythical creatures, and God’s power to control them, we and Job are asked to understand that our world is not human centered, that we cannot contend with the forces of chaos over which God presides. We can see that God created a world that includes both violence and destructive energy as part of its creativity, giving us the ability to visualize not only God’s immense power to control these forces, but also, to evoke a sense of wonder at the power of creation itself. Through creation, God created something-- and something truly wonderful-- from nothing. There is no reason for our world to be, but it is, and it is good. Thus, creation is the greatest act of God’s love present to us: He did not have to create this world in which we live, and He did not have to ensure its goodness. But He did. And though this world includes the suffering that arises from the forces of creation itself, it is also full of awe, wonder, and mystery.

In allowing Job to see creation in all its magnificence, its inherent goodness, God brings Job to an understanding of His otherness, and thus, our inability to understand Him, or His ways. The whirlwind destroys the syllogistic logic of Job and his friends: “Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?” (40:8). In other words, “Do I have to be wrong for you to be right?” This question forces Job to look at the world with the wisdom to

recognize that though creation may not fit our rational definition of order, it is wonderfully, beautifully, mysteriously ordered all the same. The whirlwind allows Job to look beyond syllogistic logic, to recognize that God brings suffering, yet He is just; that Job is innocent, yet he suffers. Job sees divine justice as radically different than our human conception of justice, admitting that suffering cannot be made sense of within the realm of our limited human dimensions. Through creation, Job can finally realize God as more than his guardian angel; moreover, that it would be impossible to maintain real, authentic faith in a God who is directly responsible for each individual life. By viewing God as a guardian angel figure, or within the realm of a courtroom metaphor, Job pridefully turned God into a larger version of himself. Thus, he eliminated the mystery of God from his faith, the self-centered problem which brought him through the first forty-two chapters of *Job*.

After “filling the air around him with some of the most furious, courageous, tender, and exquisite language imaginable,” Job, who has “cursed the day of his birth and asked every hard question we have thought to ask,” falls silent in God’s presence: “I lay my hand on my mouth” (Cording 4, 40:4). Job’s silence represents his recognition of his inability to properly name or understand God. While the grandeur, the largesse of creation is always present to us, it can be impossible to see when we do not employ right worship and right perception with regards to the divine. Job’s journey of suffering educates him in the principles of right worship and right perception; he moves from being spiritually dead in his blindly devout faith to being spiritually awakened to a new, questioning faith. As a result of Job’s challenge to God, and of what he learns through the intense imagery of God’s response, Job can say, “now my eye sees you” (42:5). The whirlwind opens Job’s eyes to the actual nature of God, to His awesome power in creating and maintaining the forces of creation within our world. Job comes to a recognition of

the otherness of God and the mystery of His creation: “Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (42:3). He comes to realize God as the creator; and therefore, that living a full life means living in accord with Him and His creation.

In the presence of the terrible suffering of our world, it often seems easier, more rational to believe in an unjust God, or not to believe in God at all. It is often difficult to conceptualize how a loving God can be reconciled with the evil of the human world. In response, the *Book of Job* calls us to a much more difficult task: to believe in a God whom we cannot understand. Despite the fact that it is arduous and demanding to maintain faith when it is difficult to see the hope in our world, *Job* suggests that God gives us permission to question Him, to challenge Him: not only permits it, but encourages it. As Job learns through his journey of suffering, God wants us to seek the truth of human existence, he wants us to question the world and our place in it. God does not desire blindly devout followers. He yearns for His servants to employ a wise faith, a faith that is consistently tested, that calls us to continue to engage with God in a meaningful way each and every day. If we do this, we receive the reward of God’s creation: to experience the beauty, power, wonder, fertility, and energy it inspires.

The *Book of Job* indicates that real religious faith comes out of our gratitude for the majesty of God’s creation; when Job is given the eyes to see the largesse of creation, he realizes its energy, wonder, creativity, and power. This realization creates in Job an awe of God grounded in wisdom, an informed fear that utterly contrasts with Job’s inadequate fear at the beginning of *Job*. Rather than fearing God’s retribution and earthly punishment, Job now wonders at God, recognizing the awe-inspiring power of the divine and the mystery of his own existence. He now sees the covenant as God intended it to be taken, and is able to develop a truly faithful

relationship with the divine. Job is transformed from following God out of his limited sense of fear and duty to following Him with love and gratitude.

Job's reinvigorated relationship with God, grounded in questioning, awe, and gratitude, allows him to look at his suffering in a newly meaningful way. He is called to deepen the question of "Why me?" or "Why do I suffer?" to "What am I to do when I suffer?" God indicates that the largesse of creation, while it does not take away human struggle, may help to alleviate suffering in the sense that it reminds us that there is something greater than the physical, human pain we feel. Creation acts as a reminder that suffering is part of the complexity of our good universe; that although our universe is not perfect in the way we might like it to be, it functions in a strangely perfect way once we look beyond ourselves. The whirlwind interrupts Job's conception of linear time. It allows him to recognize that God exists outside of human time, space, and meaning, letting him believe again in the mystery of existence. We do not live in a humanly "perfect" world; we cannot even be dependent on the best things in our lives to always provide for us. Beauty, truth, and love, for instance, represent some of the aspects that make our human lives worth living, though they come with risks and consequences. Beauty fades, the truth can hurt, and love often leads to heartbreak and is always imperfect. Yet, we yearn for these things in our lives because of the benefits, the happiness they bring. Thus, although the world may not seem logical in our eyes, would we really want it any other way? If we lived in a human-created world where no one ever suffered, where there was no evil, no chaos, where would we find the meaningful aspects of our lives?

Job allows us to find merit in the apparent randomness of life, to see the beauty, truth, and love-- the goodness-- that living in the presence of God's creation allows us. Our ability to see beauty allows us to be present to the miracle of existence. We are given the eyes to see that

we live in a creation perpetually taking place, that paradise is everywhere for those who have the eyes to see it. Experiences of beauty bring us into a sense of our own existence, calling us to recognize that there is no reason for things to be the way they are, but they are. The world is beautiful and mysterious, everything can be seen as if for the first time. Our ability to grapple with the truth of human existence allows us to form real relationships with others, and to engage with others in a meaningful way. Through these interactions, we learn so much about the world and our place in it, about the mosaic of factors that makes a person who they are. And then there is love, perhaps the most compelling of human forces, our most significant defense against the evil and cruelty of the human world.

The whirlwind allows us to recognize that God intended the world to work in this complex way, as if it is directed by a random symmetry: with all of the forces at play in our creation, everything falls together in a strangely functional, wonderful, mysterious, divinely perfect manner. The vision of creation as presented in the whirlwind calls us to look beyond the logic we often use to make sense of our lives, to let go of the easy platitudes we employ to explain away or justify experiences we do not understand. In allowing Job to see the largesse of creation, to witness the world as so much bigger than himself, Job is restored to belief in a God who is omnipotent and awe-inspiring: he is restored to the mystery of life. By viewing the gift of creation with new eyes, Job realizes that God provides. He can view the covenant in the manner God intended to be taken, as His overarching promise to His people past, present, and future. He engages in a faithful relationship with God grounded in wisdom and admiration, allowing him to put his suffering into perspective with regards to the largesse of the world around him. Job stands in for all of us who look for an explanation for our own suffering in *Job*. Through Job, we, too,

are restored to a sense of the mystery of life, to wisdom, and perspective, as we are educated in maintaining a truly faithful relationship with our great creator.

IV. Chapter Two: *King Lear*

Connecting *Job* and *Lear*

While *Job* is set in a world inclusive of a redemptive God who ultimately sets things right, *Lear* occurs in a post-Christian world in which no such God exists. Thus, the dimensions of each story differ: *Job* is preoccupied with framing immanent reality within a transcendent one, while *King Lear* plays out on a human level, where even nature can be seen as reflecting the human will that drives the action. The stories consequently confront different realms of suffering. *Job* considers suffering as part of the accidental nature of our universe, using its final whirlwind speech to represent God's relationship to His creation. Through this speech, we come to understand suffering as an inherent aspect of our good world. Contrarily, *Lear* focuses on suffering as a result of human willfulness. As evidenced in *Job*, God created a world inclusive of suffering by giving us free will. *King Lear* explores the eruption of this will: the lust, desire, and drive for power that blinds us to our relation to the world by illustrating the destructive consequences of rejecting relationship in favor of a focus on the self.

Thus, *Lear* represents the archetypal image of the modern man, this immanent new form of human being who, so ignorant of his truest human nature and intoxicated by will, fails to realize the danger he puts himself in. By alienating himself from his perfectly selfless daughter, Cordelia, *Lear* forgoes the life-giving, life-affirming value of one's relationship to the other in the newly modern world. Unlike the medieval world, inclusive of God as the Other, this world is without divine relationship; thus, human relationship becomes essential to the nature of our existence. When we allow will to dominate our need for the other, we become cold, calculating animals. As the only aspect of creation requiring empathy, compassion, and love, we have a need

to realize ourselves through others, to allow people into our lives so that we might become the best versions of ourselves. Lear disregards this need: he lets his power and his status as king blind him to the spiritual reality of life. Lear thus shrinks life to an entity he believes he has the power to control. He becomes utterly intoxicated with materiality, and cannot see beyond what is visible to the eye. Lear quickly succumbs to the seductiveness of modernity, the freedom of will, the idea that he could be, or do, whatever he desires. We see this in Act 1 through Lear's disregard of his obligations as king, and, through his quick alienation from Cordelia, as a father. Lear naively accepts material humanity over the spiritual reality of life. His embrace of total autonomy, of selfish individuality, sends him into the downward spiral of Acts 2-5.

Through *Lear*, the play critiques the fall of the modern man; by illustrating Lear's utter madness, his incomplete nature when he is alienated from his daughter, Shakespeare inspires a renewed understanding of being in relationship with the other. The apocalyptic images throughout *Lear* indicate how just destructive Shakespeare believes this new culture to be. Lear's journey of adversity, which drives the plot, is created out of his own false understanding of himself as king and individual, allowing us to witness the crux of his own human nature. Through Lear's utter destruction, we begin to see beyond the material world to the spiritual reality of life. Lear's own willfulness causes his suffering and reveals his need for love, represented by his growth in understanding. We are educated in the dangers of modernity's pursuit of selfish will, as we see Lear flounder between these two visions of human nature. Lear acts as a kind of scapegoat for our own understanding: though he experiences insights throughout the play, his tragic, gut-wrenching journey out of society, onto the heath, to his rediscovery of society in his reunion with Cordelia, allows us to recognize our need to live in the spiritual reality of life, and to embrace more to existence than the pursuit of power and will.

While Lear acts as the archetypal figure of the crisis of modernity, Cordelia represents the dying idea of being in relation with others. She is the emblem of beauty, health, and vitality that lies in relationship. Unfazed by the seductiveness of the material world, Cordelia never falls prey to the false promises of selfish autonomy. Instead, she stays true to her “bond” to her father, even after he selfishly alienates himself from her (1.1 95). Cordelia almost takes the place of Christ in the post-Christian world of *Lear*; though achieving her level of selflessness is impossible in our fallen world, her relationship with Lear gives us an ideal to strive for. She allows us an understanding of love. As much as Cordelia represents the power of relationship, she simultaneously calls attention to the tragic reality of what is lost in a world without Christ. As a fictional character, Cordelia educates us in the value of the other, though she cannot promise total redemption as Christ does. She redeems Lear at the end of the play, but this redemption will not extend beyond his earthly life; the meaningful prospect of eternal salvation is absent in this post-Christian world.

While Job is ultimately restored to the mystery of existence through the largesse of creation, the utter otherness of God to human knowledge, the mystery in *Lear* lies in the mystery of human motive, the darkness to ourselves of the will that drives our actions. As Job struggles to form a faithful relationship with the divine in a suffering world, Lear works to develop a loving relationship with his perfectly selfless daughter. This storyline is closely paralleled by that of Gloucester and his son Edgar through the play. Lear’s and Gloucester’s journeys from willfulness allow us to realize the value of the other to ourselves-- that our relationships to one another reveal the core of our truest human nature.

Finally, as the *Book of Job* is framed by the Hebrew Covenant, and the misinterpretations of the meaning of this covenant, *King Lear* is framed by Lear’s own misunderstanding of the

familial covenant that ought to guide his relationship with his daughters. This covenant goes against modernity's excited embrace of the individual, reminding us of our truest human nature that lies in relation with the other. Through Lear's journey of adversity, we recognize that total autonomy betrays our most basic human nature: it goes against the power of the familial covenant to bring meaning and purpose to our lives, allowing us to be the truest versions of ourselves. Lear is restored to this covenant through his quasi-divine reunion with Cordelia, in which she appears as a Christ-like figure emanating the power of selfless love. We can never experience the utter selflessness portrayed by Cordelia: as a character, she is not a real human being, but rather, a representation of ideals. Instead, Lear's death upon his reunion with Cordelia occurs for the sake of our understanding of the power of selfless love. Through Cordelia, we see love's ability to give meaning to our fully complex lives, inclusive of our experiences of suffering. Lear's journey of madness, structuring Acts 2-5, allows us to realize that we are capable of love if we understand its value: if we see how fully relationship can give meaning to our lives, and our sense of ourselves.

The kind of love exhibited by Cordelia allows us to contextualize suffering, to see beyond ourselves to empathy, granting us the larger understanding that life is more than our experiences of suffering. We are educated in the reality that we have been created to create relationship; it is these relationships that distinguish us from the animal world, from the rest of creation, and define us as human. Our ability to give and receive empathy, compassion, and love brings meaning to humanity; it is what makes life worth living in our suffering world. Without the other, how can our existence move beyond the disheartening mantra, "life sucks and then you die?" In response to experiences of suffering-- whether it be a traumatic event in our lives, the death of someone close to us, or the sickness of a family member-- we often feel as if we are

drowning inside ourselves, that we are being weighed down by the pain and anger that suffering often incites. It becomes easy, then, to allow experiences of suffering to define our lives, resulting in a meaningless, lonely existence. Our relationships with others help to pull us out of the isolation of suffering; they remind us that life is meaningful even when it is difficult for us to see it.

Act 1

In Act 1, Scene 1, Lear's preference of rhetoric over true love represents his embrace of material, selfish autonomy and will. Blind to the spiritual reality of life, Lear carelessly values his individual identity as king over his human need for love. Consequently, he makes a fundamental mistake, and alienates himself from meaningful, human relationship. His will drives him to value mere extravagance and appearance; thus, he requests flattering praise from his daughters as he decides how to divide his kingdom. Promising to give the largest share to the daughter "we say doth love us most," rather than the child who truly does, his oldest children eagerly oblige his requests, giving long-winded, flashy responses (1.1 53). Lear eagerly affirms these false expressions of love, and promises shares of the kingdom to both Goneril and Regan. In doing so, he demonstrates his naive acceptance of material humanity and his utter inability to understand the true meaning of love. Lear initially equates love with empty self-flattery and praise; he is ignorant of the familial covenant that ought to disrupt his pursuit of will, and remind him of that which is truly meaningful.

Given his willful self-absorption, it is no surprise that when Lear calls upon Cordelia, he is blind to the honest expression of love that she gives. It is clear from the beginning that Cordelia's character is radically different from the selfish, calculating personas her sisters

exhibit. After Goneril speaks, Cordelia remarks in an aside, “What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent”: she cannot comprehend putting her love for her father into words, for no words could do justice to the emotion that she feels (1.1. 63-64). After Regan delivers her grandiose speech, Cordelia explicitly notes: “I am sure my love’s more ponderous than my tongue” (1.1 79-80). Cordelia recognizes what Lear initially does not: the power of love is a spiritual, not material, reality. The depths of the love between daughter and father cannot be honestly expressed through mere flattery and praise, but instead taps at the heart of our human nature: our need for the familial covenant as a meaningful response to the evil and cruelty of the human world. The bond the familial covenant ought to facilitate should be strong enough to soothe our anxieties at the meaninglessness of life, especially in a suffering world: it inherently provides meaningful relationship that allows us to look beyond ourselves to the other.

Representing this idea of selfless love, when called to respond to Lear’s request for a speech, Cordelia replies, “Nothing, my lord” (1.1 89). Lear snidely retorts, “Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again” (1.1 92). Unlike her sisters, who are vying for their father’s kingdom, Cordelia doesn’t want “things,” she can only be honest about the nature of her relationship with her father. There is no “thing” Cordelia can give to Lear besides her truest expression of love. For Cordelia, to say “nothing” is to say everything. But Lear, so caught up in his kingly world, so estranged from any familial covenant in this moment, is unable to see that Cordelia’s assertion of “nothing,” or “no thing,” implies a far greater love than that of Goneril and Regan. Caught up in materiality, and driven by will, Lear is unable to see past “things,” beyond that which is visible to the eye. Cordelia’s “nothing” goes against the willful way Lear defines himself and his world. Intoxicated by his power and status as king, Lear remains blind to the familial covenant that ought to allow him to understand the great implications of what Cordelia says, and what she does

not say. Instead, he remains so absorbed by his selfish will, by appearances of affection rather than the reality of it, that he ultimately alienates himself from Cordelia and the spiritual humanity she represents: “Here I disclaim my paternal care” (1.1 115).

Cordelia’s rejection of rhetoric in favor of the silence of “nothing” represents her loyalty to spiritual relation, and her matching rejection of material appearances or any will to power. Even after Lear severs his familial covenant in this most radical way, Cordelia remains true to herself and her love for her father. Unlike Lear, Cordelia represents the implications of the familial covenant; she knows that love cannot be selfish: “I love your majesty according to my bond, no more nor less” (1.1 94-95). This “bond” represents the healthy understanding of human nature that Lear has lost. Contrarily, Cordelia never loses this fundamental understanding. When she responds to being disowned by Lear, Cordelia remains grateful that she is without the “still-soliciting eye” and “such a tongue” as her sisters, even though her selfless love has cost her favor in Lear’s eyes, and any chance of inheriting the kingdom (1.1 233). Again, when deciding whether to wed the King of France or the Duke of Burgundy, Cordelia chooses France because “respects of fortune” are all Burgundy offers, while France promises that it is “thee and thy virtues that I here seize upon” (1.1 250, 254). And though Lear continues to alienate himself from Cordelia, ordering her to “be gone without our grace, our love, our benison,” Cordelia selflessly tells her sisters to “Love well our father...I would prefer him to a better place” (1.1 266-267, 272-273, 276). Nothing can faze Cordelia’s sense of selfless love, thus revealing her as a symbol of this selfless love. Cordelia does not allow Lear’s blindness to her good nature to sever the familial covenant that it is natural for her to maintain with him. Even after Lear treats her cruelly, Cordelia still implores her sisters to love him “well;” to give him the respect and compassion he deserves, and to restore the familial bond with him. Though she leaves with the

promise of a better life in France, Cordelia still maintains that she would “prefer” to remain in meaningful relationship with Lear, whom she loves so perfectly.

Having rejected Cordelia because he rejects relation in favor of will, Lear then naturally discards the loyalty of Kent, one of the play’s consistently “good” characters. He puts his own volcanic will ahead of love, loyalty, and even reason. Kent pleads with Lear to realize the mistake that he is making: “Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least, nor are those empty-hearted whose low sounds reverb no hollowness” (1.1 154-156). He tells Lear to “see better,” underlining the whole fallacy on which Lear has built his identity. Kent calls attention to Lear’s own ignorance and utter inability to “see” himself, the world, and human nature in general. In his criticisms of Lear, Kent repeats and therefore generalizes Cordelia’s implicit critique of Lear. But as with Cordelia, Lear banishes Kent as well. When he sends Kent away, Lear isolates himself from the only other person in this world with whom he is truly in relationship.

Contrary to the expressions of selflessness and love exhibited by Cordelia and Kent in Act 1, Scene 1, Lear’s other daughters represent the excited embrace of the desire and will that rule the materialist world of the play. Quickly after Lear hands over his power to Goneril and Regan, they take advantage of him, calling him an “idle old man,” and claiming,

old fools are babes again, and must be used with checks as flatteries, when they are seen abused (1.3 17, 20-23).

Goneril and Regan take on the persona of thinking wolves: cruel, yet equally calculating. They recognize that Lear can be manipulated with false words and appearances. Regan acutely notes that Lear “hath ever but slenderly known himself” (1.1 295-296). This is true: up to this point, Lear has failed to recognize his human identity as man, and as father. Instead, he clings to his autonomy as king, aspiring to the power and status that this position provides. Lear has no

conception of what it means to know oneself, because he has alienated himself from relationship with others. By disregarding his responsibilities in pursuit of autonomy, he becomes entirely unable to look beyond himself and his own desires. Thus, Lear is easily manipulated; he naively allows his perceived relationships, born out of his pursuit of will, to guide his choices.

When his daughters betray him, Lear is finally exposed to the harsh world of selfish appearances that they represent, sending him on a journey of terrible adversity that also ultimately educates him, and us, in the falsities of selfish identity. We see Lear's downfall begin as the Fool calls him to recognize the mistake he has made in turning over his kingdom to his evil daughters. Though Lear was the king, supposedly a man of wisdom and power, the Fool makes it clear that Lear is more foolish than he, the Fool, himself: "For wise men grow foppish, and know not how their wits to wear, their manners are so apish" (1.4 171-173). The Fool is an ironic character in the play; though people generally dismiss what he says as "nonsense," he seems the wisest character in Acts 1-3, and voices Lear's repressed unconscious back to him. The Fool represents and brings to light Lear's repressed awareness of his love for Cordelia, his repressed understanding of self, and his new vulnerability in a world of selfish power. He makes explicit Lear's self-ignorance, his complete blindness to his need for relationship. He teases Lear about his inability to see the real meaning of Cordelia's "nothing": "Can you make no use of nothing, Nuncle?" (1.4 133-134). Lear, still oblivious to his spiritual humanity, responds as he answered Cordelia: "Nothing can be made out of nothing" (1.4 135-136).

The Fool's mockery of Lear is meant to educate him, and us, in his false materialist individualism; the mockery that will drive Lear mad also serves to disrobe him of his false identity, so that he will be ready to find his true identity underneath. Upon hearing the bare truth in the Fool's statements, Kent points out, "This is not altogether fool, my Lord," and calls Lear

to recognize the lessons with which Fool attempts to educate him (1.4 155). The Fool makes explicit that in giving away “all thy other titles,” his role as king and as father, Lear only maintains “that thou wast born with” (1.4 153-154). We and Lear must recognize that his status as king never exempted him from the familial covenant, and that his “title” as a father was the most meaningful one in his life. Without this title, Lear journeys towards “unaccommodated man,” the reality of willful individuality stripped of appearances and materiality; the utter clarification of the bareness, the isolation of our lives without the relation or love that grounds social identity (3.4 109). Lear’s destructive journey towards realizing the meaning of “unaccommodated man” results in his becoming a kind of scapegoat for our understanding of relationship. In order to allow us this understanding, Lear must be reeducated in what it means to be a self through the destruction of this false Lear, a process which will include madness, social exile, and the terrors of the heath in Acts 3-4.

After Goneril first humiliates Lear, he begins to see that his daughter has used him, preying on his receptiveness to flattery rather than acting out of love. Unable to cope with the fact that he has betrayed himself through his own blindness to false love, Lear begins to go mad, and questions the nature of his own existence:

Does anyone here know me? This is not Lear. Does Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where are his eyes?...Who is it that can tell me who I am? (1.4 230-233, 236).

These questions are those that we have been asking all along: Who is the true Lear, and how can he be so blind to the realities of life? Thus begins the necessary peeling away of the layers of Lear’s false identity, his journey towards “unaccommodated man” (3.4 109). Though Lear begins to recognize that the world does not work in the way he thought it did, he does not yet know how to make sense of a world that goes beyond what meets the eye. But Lear finally

begins to realize his mistake in disowning Cordelia, thus inciting his long journey towards real understanding:

How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show! Which, like an engine, wrenched my frame of nature from the fixed place, drew from my heart all love, and added to the gall (1.4 273-277).

Despite this first sign of reflection on his sin, Lear still thinks selfishly. He recognizes that Cordelia would have taken better care of him than Goneril and Regan, though he still fails to see the significance of Cordelia's inherent goodness and impulse towards love and relationship.

But, although Lear begins to realize his transgression in banishing Cordelia, he is still unable to see beyond the material world, as evidenced by his hope that Regan's expressions of love were true. He remains willfully confident that when Regan hears of the way Goneril has treated him, "with her nails she'll flay thy wolvisish visage," and will allow him to regain his former "shape," or kingly role (1.4 14-16). These expressions further attest to Lear's self-ignorance. He continues to cling to his materialism, not ready to give up his selfish pursuit of autonomy. Thus, he holds out false hope that Regan did not lie to him in claiming her love, still unwilling to recognize his daughters' betrayal.

Though Lear's materialist understanding of the world begins to fall apart by the conclusion of Act 1, Lear is not ready to accept this vision of the world as false. Still unwilling to admit the depth of his own self-betrayal, his naive acceptance of will, and his ignorance of true relationship in his life, Lear is left grasping at straws. He struggles to maintain his sanity in a world that has begun to deconstruct before his eyes. As he begins to literally drift into madness, we see the implicit, inherent madness of willful individuality, the delusion that lies in alienation from our truest sense of ourselves. Lear's growing madness, a heightened form of self-alienation,

begins to bring to the surface, and will eventually reveal, his longstanding self-ignorance of his true identity, discarded in Act 1.

Act 2

In Act 2, Lear's growing madness facilitates our developing recognition of the falseness of his original identity. Lear continues to be stripped of his own false sense of self, the terrible, dark, and painful destruction of him as a man-- the prerequisite to discovering what it might mean to be a real human being. While we begin to see more clearly what was wrong with the materialist individuality Lear had embraced, our understanding comes at the cost of Lear's sanity and identity; his terrible journey of adversity beginning in Act 1, Scene 4 renders Lear completely empty, a kind of scapegoat for our own understanding of the necessity of human relationship in our lives. Though Lear's madness separates him from his former self, rendering him incapable of the will and calculation that drives this new world, Shakespeare's toughness towards Lear is necessary: it forces us to experience to the last drop all the falseness and vulnerability that go along with these terribly false notions of human nature. This act serves as the direct cause of Lear's madness in the later acts, forcing him to confront the untruth of everything he thought he knew, as he begins to experience the full implications of his daughters' betrayal.

When Lear learns that Regan and Cornwall have disrespected him by punishing Kent, a fact he struggles to deny, and which will ultimately drive him mad, we experience another dark insight into the forces of will at play in this world: the play's "evil" characters only recognize power, not social identity, tradition, or custom of any kind. Although Kent asserts that he "serves the king," and thus, should be treated well by Regan and Cornwall, the pair punishes him for that

service, and refuses to recognize Lear's social identity in their uncompromising climb to power (2.2 130). Kent lays claim to this social identity, this custom, and remarks that punishing him in the stocks is treating him as inferior to a dog. Similarly, Gloucester claims a reprieve for Kent on behalf of both custom and tradition, and reminds his punishers that the stocks are usually reserved for the most common of criminals. But Regan and Cornwall refuse to recognize Kent and Gloucester's claims, revealing them as symbols of autonomous individuality, with its ferocious animosity to all that is beyond their own power.

Lear's first response to Regan and Cornwall's action: he doesn't dare believe it, for to do so would be to admit that he erred in embracing his false individuality, and had recognized the evil of their individual willfulness, grounded in nothing but power. He initially responds to Kent's chains in denial: "No, I say," "No, they would not," "By Jupiter, I swear no!" (2.4 16, 18, 20). Lear's repetition of "no" expresses his desperate rejection of the fact that his vision of the world is falling apart before his eyes. It reveals his extreme anxiety at admitting what he must give up; that is, the symbols of status and power by which he defined himself materially. In their punishment of Kent, Regan and Cornwall radically reject these symbols, and render them meaningless. Eventually, Lear is forced to recognize that what Kent says is the truth, woefully claiming, "Tis worse than murder" (2.4 23-24). Though Lear cannot deny that his daughter and her husband have disrespected him, he does not know what to make of this reality. Lear can only confront his daughter in an attempt to reconstruct his vision of the world, and thus, his own sense of self-identity, as he watches this false sense of self disintegrate before him. But Regan and Cornwall will stop at nothing, including Lear's feelings and life, in order to pursue power and will. Though we know this, Lear, whose own identity is at stake, refuses to accept that his family has intentionally denied him. To give up faith in his relationship with his daughter is to give up

everything. Lear has already foolishly renounced his title as king, entrusting himself entirely to the care of Goneril and Regan. To concede that they both have betrayed him leaves him with none of the signs of material humanity that drove his understanding of himself in the first place.

Though the Fool acutely points out that Lear's daughters have abused him, Lear confronts Regan and Cornwall in an attempt to prove the Fool wrong, and to reconstruct his material identity. But when he arrives, Lear finds that his daughter refuses to see him, driving him into a fit of rage that nears the edge of madness: "Vengeance, plague, death, confusion!" (2.4 93). As he looks upon Kent in the stocks, Lear realizes how far he has fallen: "Death on my state!" (2.4 109-110). He is no longer a king; he no longer possesses the power or status he once reveled in. Instead, Lear stands humiliated, a man whose own will has betrayed him. Now, he lies at the mercy of the will of others, who will stop at nothing to achieve their own selfish desires.

When Lear finally speaks with Regan, he finds that his daughters have united against him. This experience of suffering allows us to see Lear as fully human, and sympathetic, for the first time. As Lear's family unit is destroyed, the flimsiness of his material identity is revealed to us. When Lear first condemns Goneril, Regan responds by telling Lear to "say you have wronged her," thus allying herself with her sister and against Lear (2.4 151). By choosing Goneril over Lear, Regan effectively respects her own will to power over the ethical and familial bonds that ought to guide her relationship with her father. Lear, grasping at straws, pleads with Regan not to betray the familial covenant, ironically unable to let go of this last remaining "bond" (1.1 95). Lear has already forfeited his status as king, and his relationship with Cordelia. He has condemned Goneril. Thus, Regan is all he has left. Without her, Lear has, and is, nothing. But Regan does not care about her father as much as her own status and power.

As Lear pleads with each daughter for his knights, their denials suggest their will to power at the expense of their familial obligations, as well as the cruelty, betrayal, and madness Lear must experience for the sake of our understanding. For Lear, these knights represent his material identity, the status and power that go along with his position as king. To lose his knights is to lose this material identity, and thus, his own self. He has completely invested his sense of himself in material possessions, wealth, and power. But his daughters continue to deny social identity, custom, and tradition in their explicit humiliation and rejection of Lear, stripping him of his illusions of power. Consequently, Lear falls deeper and deeper into despair at the cruelty of his own children. Dejectedly, he laments, "I gave you all" (2.4 248). Of course, this statement refers to the material wealth Lear has given his children through the allotment of his kingdom. Lear has not yet come to understand the selfless love Cordelia represents; he still wrongly believes that he bestowed a great expression of love on Goneril and Regan by relinquishing his kingdom. While we realize that true love cannot be expressed in terms of material wealth, Lear has not yet separated himself from the grasp of materialism in order to even begin to understand this, despite the cruelty of his daughters' actions. He still has not admitted to himself that he was wrong in entrusting his kingdom to Goneril and Regan. Thus, Lear's use of the word "all" is terribly misguided; it represents how far Lear still has to go in order to come to the understanding that selfless love, as opposed to material wealth, is the only "all" that Lear should have given his daughters (2.4 248).

It is only when Regan asks, "What need one?" with regard to Lear's knights, that he breaks from the material world, and delivers his first fully human speech (2.4 263). Though he is still bound by his selfish identity, the mercilessness of his daughters results in his crying out in the depths of the suffering he has endured at their hands: "You see me here, you gods, a poor old

man, as full of grief as age, wretched in both” (2.4 271-272). By Act 2, Scene 4, the powerful, wealthy Lear of Act 1, Scene 1 has been disrobed, leaving only a “poor old man” with no status or material wealth, completely at the mercy of his mercilessly cruel daughters (2.4 271).

Unable to cope with his daughters’ denial of the bond that ought to guide his family relationships, ironically mirroring his own rejection of this bond in his treatment of Cordelia, Lear descends into madness: “Oh Fool, I shall go mad!” (2.4 285). The lengths to which Lear’s own children have gone to destroy him, to disregard him as if he were less than a dog, to show no care for his well-being, makes us pity Lear in a way we did not before. But, despite the fact that Lear has cried out in extreme suffering, claiming that his “heart shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,” Goneril and Regan throw him out of Goneril’s palace into the raging storm, a natural echo of Lear’s own impending madness (2.4 284). Regan, feeling no pity, compassion, or sympathy for her poor father, dispassionately commands Gloucester to “Shut up your doors” (2.4 303).

As Lear sees his daughters sever the familial bond, he begins to become more cognizant of his own humanity: the flimsiness of his material identity is revealed to him. The pain Lear experiences at his daughters’ betrayal allows him to begin to see the value of love and relationship over empty self-flattery and the pursuit of will. Thus, Lear’s journey into madness represents the beginning of his full separation from his own willful nature. His daughters have cruelly stripped him of everything he once held to be important, of the false appearances that drove his misguided understanding of himself and his place in the world: his status as king, his power, his knights, and his dignity.

Though we know that Lear does not yet understand that living a meaningful life means living in Cordelia’s image, we also recognize that Lear is “a man more sinned against than

sinning” (3.2 58-59). Thus, while we previously disliked Lear, and blamed him for his blindness to the selflessness of Cordelia, Lear’s tragic descent into madness in Act 2 facilitates in us a deeper association with Lear as a character, and compassion for his pitiable condition.

Act 3

In Act 3, we are made to live with the depths of Lear’s madness, revealing the deepest meanings of the emptiness of his materialist ethic. The early scenes of the act illustrate the intensity of Lear’s madness that has resulted from his disrobing from materiality, selfishness, and will. We experience Lear’s insanity with him, as Lear’s own identity has been stripped to its barest form, “unaccommodated man” (3.4 109). The utter madness of the act leads Lear to the lowest point in the play, Act 3, Scene 6: the delusional mock trial of his two evil daughters, revealing his utter despair at their betrayal, and his search for the reasons behind this betrayal. Lear hasn’t yet accepted his own guilt. Thus, his trial ironically attempts to discern the very principles he himself employed in banishing Cordelia: the calculating pursuit of our selfish desires and an uncompromising will to power. Lear’s own blindness to these principles is finally made explicit in Act 3, Scene 7. The pernicious physical blinding of Gloucester figuratively reveals and brings to light Gloucester and Lear’s blindness to their true identity as men and fathers, the spiritual reality of life, and the dangers of the materialist world.

In Act 3, Scene 2, Lear’s madness represents the destructiveness of his journey towards “unaccommodated man” (3.4 109). Stripped of his material identity as king and his role as father, Lear can no longer conceive of how to live in this world, devoid of human relationship, and defined by the will to power. Thus, he demands the chaos of the raging storm to come upon him, an echo of his own ruinous insanity and the chaos of this new world of will: “Blow, winds, and

crack your cheeks. Rage, blow!” (3.2 1). In a world where everything Lear once knew has been turned against him, even nature seems to take the side of his “pernicious daughters,” reflecting the human will that drives the action of the play (3.2 22). The destructive, chaotic elements of the storm match Lear’s anger at the betrayal of his daughters: “I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness. I never gave you kingdom, called you children, you owe me no subscription” (3.2 16-18). Though Lear has a right to be enraged by the cruel treatment of his daughters, he has not yet realized that bestowing material wealth upon them could not “earn” him the familial bond, and that calling his daughters “children” did not mean he treated them selflessly as such. Lear, journeying towards “unaccommodated man,” remains blind to any other way of thinking about the world, even though his materialist vision has already betrayed him. Although we see how far Lear has fallen when he cries out on the heath that he is a “poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man,” we also realize that he still has a long way to go to discover his real humanity (3.2 20).

Though we are aware that Lear’s journey is far from over, his madness and despair in Act 3, Scene 2 deepens our association with him as a character as we sense in him ourselves, and our own false illusions about our visions of the world at stake. When Lear claims that he is a man more “sinned against than sinning,” we cannot help but think of our own fallen, human state (3.2 58-59). Contrary to Job, a “good and blameless man,” Lear is not blameless (*Job* 1:1). He has made a crucial, fundamental mistake in his banishment of Cordelia, a sin we could not forgive in Act 1, Scene 1 due to his blindness to the evil of his action. As Lear’s sin and victimage has blossomed into the fullness of his predicament, we find ourselves more fully sympathizing with Lear in his suffering, for his punishment exceeds his crime. As no human being can ever truly be “blameless,” we feel a connection with Lear, and struggle to understand the nature of suffering in our own lives. Lear’s tragic journey recalls the lesson in *Job* that suffering is not “deserved” or

“earned;” our sins do not “permit” great experiences of suffering to come upon us. Instead, *Lear* serves as a warning to all of us that this cruel, materialistic world represents the potential destiny of mankind, and that Lear’s sins are not so different from our own. Lear’s self-destructive madness calls us to consider our own false illusions about the way we believe the world to work; how we value status and power, how we deny our human relationships in order to fulfill our own selfish desires, how we often fail to choose love and selflessness over the promises of will. Lear’s journey becomes our journey as we begin to see ourselves and our world more clearly reflected in Lear and his world.

As we more fully identify with Lear, we see him come closer and closer to discovering sympathy for others. Recognizing that the Fool has ridden out the storm with him, Lear comments,

Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy?...Poor Fool and knave, I have one part in my heart that’s sorry yet for thee” (3.2 68, 74-75).

Finally, we see Lear think on “thee,” not “me.” Up to this point, Lear’s only concern has been for himself and his own suffering. In failing to acknowledge the importance of human relationship, Lear has been oblivious to the suffering world around him. Finally, though he despairs at his own situation, he begins to recognize the plight of others as well. As he comes to the hovel, Lear directs the Fool to enter before him: “In, boy; go first.” (3.4 26). Lear criticizes his former behavior as king, reflecting upon the plight of the homeless and the poor. With his newfound empathy, Lear recognizes that he should have used his power and status to help those in need: “O, I have ta’en too little care of this!” (3.4 33-34).

Guided by this newfound empathy, Lear’s interactions with Poor Tom allow him to finally recognize the state of “unaccommodated man” created by selfish materialism, which

represents Lear in his rawest, emptiest of forms (3.4 109). In looking upon the naked figure of Poor Tom, Lear considers,

Is man no more than this?...Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art (3.4 105, 109-110).

Poor Tom's nakedness shows Lear the human nature that he has unleashed on his world through his own willfulness: man stripped of appearances and material possessions, as animal in his barest form. We find it ironic that "unaccommodated man" represents little more than an animal, for Shakespeare has used animal imagery to define the materialist world of the play, where the evil characters strive for power in a way so cruel and calculating as to be inhuman. But through Poor Tom, it becomes clear that the embrace of our material nature makes us vulnerable, not powerful. At our core, we are not "kings of the jungle" or "thinking wolves," but "poor, bare, forked animals" (3.4 109). Though the evil characters cling to the supposed freedom of the material world, striving for power to feed their will, Shakespeare shows us the utter meaninglessness of this power, as we know the "poor, bare, forked animal" that lies beneath (3.4 109). When Lear rips off his own clothes, he discovers himself as "unaccommodated man": he recognizes the vulnerability of his rawest self. For a man previously so obsessed with power, status, and empty self-flattery, this is a huge step in Lear's journey. By opening himself, Lear can later begin to discover the human capacity for relationship that ultimately distinguishes man from animal, and brings meaning to human life.

Upon recognizing man in his barest form in Act 3, Scene 6, Lear, still utterly mad, puts his daughters on trial. He attempts to discern their evolution from daughters to women with such "hardened" hearts, representing his search for their false values, ironically his own in banishing Cordelia (3.6 77). This scene is one of the "maddest" in western literature, and shows us how

absolutely at sea Lear is upon the destruction of his false identity. Though his materialist vision of the world has betrayed him, Lear still cannot comprehend how his evil daughters could have treated him with such cruelty. He cannot recognize, as we now do, how completely our selfish desires and our will to power blind us to our spiritual needs. Unable to conceptualize a way of being separate from his material willfulness and that of his daughters, Lear madly questions the state of human nature: “Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?” (3.6 76-77). We know that there is no inherent difference between the hearts of any of the characters in the play: all began with the ability to choose whether to follow their animal instincts, or to embrace their humanity, and thus, need for human relationship. What sets Lear apart from the other characters, supporting the complete and utter madness of the trial, is that Lear no longer belongs to either path. He has no conception of how to live a meaningful life. The trial, then, is a dark, tragic grasping towards the truth. By figuring out the truth of what drives his daughters, Lear would have to admit what drove him to make the fundamental mistake of banishing Cordelia. If Lear could recognize why he was wrong, he could begin to see the meaning of Cordelia’s representation of selfless love. But because the protagonist is our scapegoat, we are granted these revelations while Lear is not; he remains utterly mad, alienated from both visions of human nature that dictate the plot.

The terrible blinding of Gloucester in Act 3, Scene 7 makes horribly vivid, in its parallelism, Lear’s own moral blindness to this point. But it also promises, through Gloucester’s insight, the possibility that Lear, too, may discover meaning in his madness. The physical blinding of Gloucester makes explicit what we have implicitly come to recognize already: Lear’s figurative blindness to his own identity as man and father, the spiritual reality of life, and the dangers of the materialist self. When Cornwall viciously plucks out Gloucester’s eyes, he does

physically what Lear did to himself figuratively in banishing Cordelia. Cornwall severs himself from the spiritual reality of life in favor of the will that guides this world. The animal imagery of the play is vivid: Cornwall and Regan, with their “cruel nails” and “boarish fangs,” are driven by will so explicitly that they appear inhuman (3.7 57, 59). Their evil actions graphically reveal the raw, animalistic nature of human willfulness when we deny our need for human relationship; we see the fundamental tension between will and love. Through Cornwall, the dangerousness of will is revealed, allowing us to recognize that will and love must be mutually exclusive, and deeply antagonistic. To pursue will is to deny relationship in favor of a focus on the self. When we become caught up in our own selfish desires, we fail to recognize the value of the other. Cornwall’s actions here illustrate how far we are capable of going when we embrace our animalistic instincts, driven by the will to power.

After Gloucester is savagely blinded, his blindness to Edgar’s good nature is revealed to him. Ironically, Shakespeare needs us to realize that both Gloucester and Lear must be blind before they can find the eyes to see the spiritual reality of life. After Gloucester is literally blinded to the material world, he immediately sees the spiritual world and the love of Edgar: “O my follies! Then Edgar was abused” (3.7 92). Lear’s spiritual journey parallels the excruciating experience of the physical plucking of Gloucester’s eyes, and makes clear to us the tragic cost of his journey. In Act 4, Scene 1, the blind Gloucester refuses to be led: “I stumbled when I saw” (4.1 19). Here, Gloucester highlights the contrast between material sight and spiritual insight. Lear’s journey seeks to educate us in this contrast as his material identity is painfully shed. All of the suffering Lear experiences suggests that when we only see what meets the eye, we are utterly blind to the meaningful aspects of human life. The importance of our existence lies, as Cordelia’s “nothing” suggests, in what cannot be seen: human relationship, empathy, compassion, and love.

In Act 1, Scene 1, Kent told Lear to “see better,” to look beyond himself, and appearances (1.1 160). At that point in the play, Lear was entirely incapable of doing so. Now, Lear’s destructive journey has rendered him capable of “seeing better,” but at the expense of everything he once thought he knew. While we are disgusted by the pure animal will that dictates Gloucester’s fate in Act 3, Scene 7, we are also immensely grateful to Shakespeare for creating scapegoats in Gloucester and Lear, through whom we can experience more fully this journey towards understanding, freed of the same cost.

When Cornwall’s own servant steps up to fight him, we see an utter contrast to their cruel, animalistic nature. The servant’s human impulse towards relationship serves as a parallel to Cordelia’s selfless love. Though it was unthinkable for a servant to challenge the will of his master, the servant cannot help but defend Gloucester in this moment, surely knowing that it will cost him his life. Despite the power of will that drives Act 3, Scene 7, the actions of the servant also remind us that there is an alternative to this evil world; that is, a deep human impulse towards relationship. As we have been engrossed for so long now in Lear’s journey, we almost forget how unnatural the pursuit of will, and thus, denial of our most basic human nature, truly is. The servant begins to restore us to this sense of our truest human nature that lies in relationship, for a moment pulling us out of the grasp of this evil world in preparation for Cordelia’s return.

Act 4

Act 4 continues the downward trajectory of the madness and blindness of Act 3 as we see Lear’s despair at the evil world he has unleashed. While Act 3 provides one kind of nadir to the play in the madness of Lear and the blindness of Gloucester, Act 4 is equally dark in Lear’s mad

social critique of all human society and Gloucester's despair. While the act begins in darkness, the pain of Lear and Gloucester dissipates as they reunite with their loving children. In Act 4, Scene 7, the selfless love of Cordelia begins to pull Lear out of his madness and despair; he grasps towards a life of meaningful relationship. We are prepared for Lear's reunion with Cordelia through the parallel Gloucester and Edgar story line, which, through Edgar's actions on the cliff, reminds us of the power of love to redeem suffering. As Lear and Gloucester struggle towards meaningful relationship, we are cautioned about the dangerous forces of will still at play in this world. The "evil" characters begin to turn on each other, spurred by Cornwall's death and Albany's goodness. Thus, although the play takes on an upward tangent with Lear and Cordelia's moving reunion at the end of the act, we know that this happiness will be short lived, since we have been educated in the uncompromising forces of human will in this world.

Gloucester's conversation with Edgar's "Poor Tom" in Act 4, Scene 1, reflects his despair at the way the world works and at the discovery of his own sins. Blinded, Gloucester comes to the compelling realization, "I stumbled when I saw" (4.1 19). When he had his sight, Gloucester could not "see" beyond the materialist world before him, and trusted his bastard son over the selfless Edgar. Upon realizing his terrible sin, Gloucester recognizes the utter meaninglessness of the appearances that define this world. The anxiety of this meaninglessness leaves Gloucester in despair at his betrayal of Edgar, so that, broken, he longs for the oblivion of death: "As flies are to wanton boys are we to th' gods, they kill us for their sport" (4.1 36-37). He imagines the vicious gods playing with the existence of human beings in a cruel, orderless world, where our suffering lives are merely "sport," a game, to the presiding deities (4.1 37). Though Gloucester brought his situation upon himself by banishing Edgar, we feel that he, as with Lear, is a "man more sinned against than sinning" (3.2 58-59). Though Gloucester doesn't

fully recognize the lengths to which human will, not the gods, drives this materialist world, we do not blame him. Just as Lear put his daughters on trial in search for the truth of existence, Gloucester blames the gods in an effort to restore order to a seemingly orderless world.

By the end of Act 4, Scene 1, we see Gloucester finally discover his own sins as he thinks about justice in this world, representing his newfound ability to look beyond himself to the other. Now an outsider, Gloucester sees his own sinfulness-- "I am wretched"-- allowing him to recognize his own wrongdoings (4.1 68). He concludes that the fortunate who have everything, "the superfluous and lust-dieted man," should be made to feel the agony of those around him, as Gloucester now has, "so distribution should undo excess, and each man have enough" (4.1 69, 72-73). Here, we see a rejection of the material world that so guided Gloucester's life and his sense of himself. He finally realizes the evil of his own power and materialism while others went without. In looking beyond himself, Gloucester shows us the empathy and compassion that arises when he rediscovers meaningful relationship.

By Act 4, Scene 6, Gloucester's despair at his own actions drives him to the cliffs of Dover to take his own life: his imminent suicide represents the overwhelming isolation of suffering in a world devoid of human relationship. Since Act 4, Scene 1, Gloucester's immense guilt for his betrayal of the love of Edgar has rendered him unwilling to live in this world. He believes Edgar to be dead, and thus, beyond his ability to redeem. To Gloucester, there is no other choice but death. He must commit suicide to "renounce" this world and to "shake patiently my great affliction off" (4.6 35, 36). He believes he "deserves" death for what he did, and desires it as an escape from his own despair. As Edgar stands with Gloucester, his language has so filled Gloucester's imagination that he truly believes he is atop the cliff:

The fisherman that walk upon the beach appear like mice...The murmuring surge that on th' unnumb'ed idle pebble chafes cannot be heard so high (4.6 17, 20-22).

Even we, the audience, feel as if we are with Gloucester in this pivotal moment, calling attention to theatre's ability to carry us so fully into its fictive world. When Gloucester "jumps," we are engrossed in his suffering as he makes the choice to end his own life. We see the depths of Gloucester's despair as his guilt renders him unable to bear another minute in this evil world.

Edgar's deceit of Gloucester is meant to allow him a second chance to discover meaning in his life, while revealing to us the power of love to give life purpose in this world of pain. Act 4, Scene 6 represents one of the most significant displays of selfless love in the play, and prepares us for Lear and Cordelia's reunion in Act 4, Scene 7. Edgar reminds Gloucester, "Thy life's a miracle. Speak yet again" (4.6 55). Here, Edgar restores his father to the mystery of existence, and gives him the chance to see beyond his dismal vision of the world. By allowing Gloucester to experience the gift of life, Edgar "cures" his father's suffering and despair (4.6 35). He relieves Gloucester of the true cause of his attempted suicide, freeing him of the demons of his despair, brought on by his own sinfulness and his anxiety at the meaninglessness of life. Now, Gloucester can "bear free and patient thoughts" (4.6 77). He begins to recognize his life as a miracle, and thus, worth living.

Though Lear's madness continues into Act 4, Scene 7, his conversation with Gloucester on the heath reveals all of Lear's powerful insight into the corruption of human willfulness, especially its corruption of human society, justice, and life. This scene is dark in its just condemnation of materialist society, because it offers no alternative to this evil world. While Lear remains utterly mad, his criticisms of materialist reality result in "matter and impertinency mixed! Reason in madness!" (4.6 175-176). Lear's insanity reminds us of the cost of autonomous

individuality; we see his false identity painfully shed, rendering him incapable of maintaining any sense of self. But his newfound insights show us all that he has understood. He finally comes to recognize the meaninglessness of his evil daughters' empty self-flattery in Act 1, Scene 1: "Go to, they are not men o' their words: they told me I was everything; 'tis a lie" (4.6 105-106). Lear admits the falsities of his identity as king. When Lear claims he must wipe his hand as it "smells of mortality," he shows the honesty of materialist notions (4.6 135). After Gloucester claims that his blindness allows him to see the world "feelingly"-- with insight that transcends materialist reality-- Lear accurately claims, "A man may see how this world goes with no eyes" (4.6 152-153). As Lear recognizes the ironic power of Gloucester's physical blindness, we begin to see him move beyond his own figurative blindness to an understanding of will. He sees the social injustice of material power, "through tattered clothes small vices do appear; robes and furred gowns hide all" (4.6 166-167). His every criticism of materialist society reflects the society that he himself installed. Now recognizing the consequences of his will, Lear, still unable to believe in the love he has destroyed, despairs of any other reality than the evil one he sees around him.

Lear's condemnation of the material world is dark; but the Gloucester storyline has shown us that in a world of will and violence, something as precious as love can still exist. Thus, we begin to see that meaningful life is not knowable, or predicable, but a "miracle" (4.6 55). Gloucester's odyssey through Act 4 renders him capable of this understanding, as he comes to realize the world as ordered by something more than vicious, arbitrary gods. Through Gloucester, we are reminded of the miracle of life despite this apocalyptic world. We are finally given the eyes to see that "to treat life as less than a miracle is an act of human will whereby the will contracts the world or appropriates the world to the will's understanding" (Cording 1). Thus, Lear and Gloucester's presumption that they could control their world was utterly false, an

exercise of the very will that necessitates complete authority, especially over what seems unknowable and unpredictable. If we presume life to be under our control, we blind ourselves, as Lear and Gloucester did, to our need for human relationship and love, because we are so preoccupied with the pursuit of this will. We only recognize the extent of our error when we see Lear and Gloucester forcibly stripped of their false identities, which reveal to us the need for human relationship to bring meaning to our suffering lives.

Cordelia's return in Act 4, Scene 7 turns the tragedy towards redemption, and as we experience the power of her forgiveness, her selfless love contextualizes Lear's suffering. Her return is thrilling after the play's darkness, and reveals our deep longing for such relation. Before Cordelia reappears, we are reminded of her perfect goodness, as the Gentleman describes delivering Kent's letter of Lear's condition. Cordelia does not blame her father or her sisters for their wrongdoings, but she weeps: "the holy water from her heavenly eyes, and clamor moistened" (4.3 31-32). The Gentleman's "holy" and "heavenly" description of Cordelia puts her on a pedestal of reverence, and places the weight of the divine on a human level. As Cordelia searches for Lear, we see her selflessness and love: she promises "all my outward worth" to anyone who will help her father (4.4 10) This "outward worth" had defined the material reality of the play. We saw the destructiveness of stripping man of his "worth" through Lear's journey towards realizing what it might mean to be a real human being. But Cordelia, for whom the impulse towards relationship negates any tendency towards materiality, easily gives up her material worth for love. Cordelia's selfless nature is enforced as Shakespeare once again links her to Christ. Upon hearing of the approaching British powers, Cordelia cries out, "O dear father, it is thy business that I go about," a direct echo of Christ in the *Gospel of Luke*: "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be about my Father's business?" (4.4 23-24, *Luke*

2:49). Just as Christ fulfills God's "business" by offering salvation and redemption to man, Cordelia takes care of Lear's "business" by defending Lear not out of "ambition," or will, but "love," so that he can be rightfully restored to his kingdom (4.4 24, 27, 28).

Cordelia's moving reunion with Lear in Act 4, Scene 7 provides the most compelling demonstration of her perfect love as the only real antidote to suffering. As a shamed Lear drowns in his guilt, the peripeteia of the play illustrates how Lear's whole sense of himself is transformed. Still utterly mad, when Lear first sees Cordelia, he believes he is in hell: "You do me wrong to take me out of th' grave: Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound upon a wheel of fire" (4.7 45-47). So full of guilt that he can't believe he ever deserves to see Cordelia again, so full of the pain of remorse that he justly suffers in "hell," Lear begins the scene as a powerful figure of all the remorse of which a human being is capable. In order to fully appreciate the gift of Cordelia's love, we must realize how far gone in guilt Lear has been, how the pain of his remorse has rendered him incapable of even imagining love. Drowning in his own despair, Lear cannot even admit to himself that Cordelia stands before him, for he does not feel himself deserving of her presence.

When Lear kneels to Cordelia, he rejects the customs of the kingly world, and expresses his newfound humility: we see how far he has come on his journey from selfish will. The disbelieving Lear finally recognizes that he is speaking with Cordelia: "For, as I am a man, I think this lady to be my child Cordelia" (4.7 69-70). Lear's acceptance of himself as "man" is significant: he has truly shed his false identity as king and his adherence to the seductive promises of the material world. Although Lear has already been gravely punished for his sins, he tells Cordelia, "If you have poison for me, I will drink it" (4.7 72). Lear deserves to die for his sins, paralleling Gloucester on the cliff. But, as with Edgar, Cordelia's perfect selflessness

prevails over the false promises of vengeance. Unable to comprehend how Cordelia could still love him after he banished her with such cruelty, Lear laments,

I know you do not love me; for your sisters have, as I do remember, done me wrong. You have some cause, they do not (4.7 72-75).

But instead of agreeing with Lear, Cordelia replies, “No cause, no cause” (4.7 75). In this moment, we feel the power of Cordelia’s forgiveness and selfless love as the family covenant is restored, and brings Lear back into a world of meaningful relationship. We feel the miracle of life come to light as we find ourselves so deeply moved by Cordelia’s selfless assertion, a moment that suddenly brings deep meaning to Lear’s journey of suffering. Cordelia allows him to experience something as precious as love in this cruel, materialistic world. Though Lear has undergone the horrific experience of being stripped, step by step, of his false identity and worldview, it all seems worth it in this moment when Cordelia forgives him, restoring us to the miracle of life that arises after a journey of such extreme suffering.

Although Act 4, Scene 7 allows us to feel the renewing power of love, the powers of selfish will have also been growing in intensity as we turn to Act 5, and their clashing opposition creates in us an intense conflict between hope and fear. We see Goneril and Regan turn against each other as each develops a desire for Edmund, and Edmund plays the two sisters off of one another. Thus, while the conclusion of the act allows us to enter into the climatic Act 5 with a sense of satisfaction at the moving reunion between Lear and Cordelia, Shakespeare has not let us forget that they still struggle with this evil world of will.

Act 5

Act 5 provides the climatic conclusion to Shakespeare's darkest, most tragic drama as the will of the "evil" characters completely erupts in violence, resulting in the play's apocalyptic end: the horror of Cordelia's death and the littered stage of bodies. While the deaths of Cordelia and Lear are dark, Act 5 equally allows us to see the supreme value of Cordelia's love to give meaning to Lear's suffering. While the first four acts give us the mystery of life in all of its confusions and difficulties, Act 5 restores us to the miracle of life as all of the largesse and beauty of the world is vested in the person of Cordelia. Thus, though his death is tragic, Lear dies "smilingly" (5.3 201). Through his suffering, Lear comes to an understanding of the miracle of human life that lies in meaningful relationship with the other, and reveals the power of selfless love to bring meaning to life in our suffering world.

In Act 5, Scene 2, we are reminded of this miracle of life as Edgar converses with Gloucester, preparing us to feel its full power in the play's final scene. As Edgar leads Gloucester to rest by the tree, he tells his father, "If I ever return to you again, I'll bring you comfort" (5.2 4). By "comfort," Edgar means that he will finally reveal himself to Gloucester: he will alleviate Gloucester's guilt that he betrayed his good son. Edgar's promise of "comfort" allows us to imagine Gloucester resting himself in the selfless love of Edgar, an echo of Act 4, Scene 7, when Lear does so with Cordelia. Though Gloucester does not want to go with Edgar-- "a man may rot even here"-- Edgar asks him, "What, in ill thoughts again?" (5.3 8, 9). Here, we think back to Gloucester's "jump" from the cliff, after which Edgar reminded him, "Thy life's a miracle. Speak yet again" (4.6 55). Edgar refuses to allow his father's "ill thoughts" to overcome him in this moment, because he recognizes the gift of life, but also, because he knows he still has this final "comfort" to bring to his father.

When the manner of Gloucester's death is revealed to us in the following scene, we see how powerful this "comfort" proved to be, and how Edgar's selfless love saved his father from death of "ill thoughts," guilt, and despair. Before he confronts his brother, Edgar had told Gloucester of his true identity, "but his flawed heart- alack, too weak the conflict to support- 'twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief, burst smilingly" (5.3 200-201). Here lies the power of Edgar's final "comfort." Unable to bear the reality of Edgar's selfless love for him, Gloucester is first torn "'twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief.'" joy at being reunited with his son, but grief that results from his own sin and betrayal. Despite these "two extremes," Edgar reveals that Gloucester ultimately "burst smilingly": the joy of receiving his son's love overpowered his grief (5.3 201). Gloucester's "joyful" death allows us to recognize the power of human relationship to bring meaning to our lives, inclusive of our experiences of suffering. Gloucester dies in "joy" because he is so "comforted" by Edgar and his selfless love, an utter contrast to Act 3, Scene 7, when his journey of suffering nearly led him to death by his own guilt and despair.

When Lear and Cordelia are led in as prisoners in Act 5, Scene 3, we see Lear's acceptance of the mystery of life, because he has found love and can rest himself in the selflessness of Cordelia. Formerly, Lear was utterly blind to the power of Cordelia's love. Now, his relationship with Cordelia is all that matters to him. While Cordelia expects to confront her sisters, Lear refuses, wanting to spend time only with his selfless daughter, even if it is in prison: "Come, let's away to prison: we two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage" (5.3 8-9). Lear's use of the word "alone" makes explicit his desire to be with only Cordelia. Having recognized the falsities of his selfish identity, Lear no longer needs the presence of his court and his knights, his kingly status and title, to bring meaning to his life. Instead, he sees how utterly meaningless these material appearances are in life. Lear wants only to be with Cordelia, even caged.

Lear's desire to be with Cordelia allows us to recognize that he has embraced human relationship as more important than the false promises of human will. He imagines himself kneeling before Cordelia and asking for forgiveness, an act of pure love towards his perfectly selfless daughter. Lear envisions how they will

pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh...and take upon's the mystery of things, as if we were God's spies (5.3 12, 16-17).

However, this speech is tragic; given the forces of will at play in this world, we know that Lear's hopes can never be realized. Cordelia foreshadows the pair's certain fate: "We are not the first who with best meaning have incurred the worst" (5.3 3-4). But, despite the tragedy of Lear's vision, his desire to spend time with Cordelia in song and laughter reveals his eagerness towards engaging in a world of human relationship. When Lear claims that he and Cordelia will "take upon's the mystery of things," we realize how fully his relationship with his selfless daughter has restored him to the mystery, the miracle of human life (5.3 16-17). Through Cordelia's love, Lear finds reason to live amidst his suffering world. He is ready to rest himself in the spiritual reality of life that she represents. No longer concerned with appearances and materiality, Lear now feels entirely comfortable with Cordelia and the power of her love.

Despite Lear's developing understanding, his transition is not yet complete. At the beginning of Act 5, Scene 3, we see how fully Lear loves Cordelia, though he still fails to serve her. He imagines the joy of spending time with his daughter; he thinks of what it would mean to enjoy her love. Though it is significant that the prison, which represents a complete absence of materiality, is enough for Lear, it is also telling that Lear does not see the problem of the "cage." He still thinks selfishly. As he becomes so caught up in enjoying Cordelia's love, he fails to think about how he might protect or save her from impending danger.

When Edgar confronts Edmund, we begin to hope that Lear and Cordelia might actually be saved, revealing our deep desire that the forces of good can conquer the forces of evil in this world. Even Edmund repents his deeds: “What you have charged me with, that have I done...Tis past, and so am I” (5.3 163, 166). But as Edmund makes a last-ditch effort to save Cordelia, the play begins to take a deadly turn, and we are reminded of the evil of this world. As the brothers reconcile, the Gentleman enters announcing the deaths of Goneril and Regan, and reveals the dark forces of will still at play in this tragic world. We have become so distracted by the reunion of the brothers, Goneril’s poisoning of Regan, and her subsequent suicide, that we have nearly forgotten about the impending fate of Lear and Cordelia. When Kent appears looking for his master, Albany cries out, “Great thing of us forgot!” reminding us of their situation, and representing our own ability to get so caught up in the chaos of life: we forget about what is truly important (5.3 237). Here, we feel so guilty about how quickly we have abandoned the plight of Lear and Cordelia in favor of the entertainment of the swordplay, deaths, and romance. By allowing us to become so caught up in the action, Shakespeare prepares us for the play’s final scene: he makes us aware of our own inadequacies, so that we can more fully empathize with Lear and his inadequacies. We are reminded of Lear’s selfishness when he desired to be with Cordelia in prison; how he was so caught up in enjoying her love that he failed to protect her from danger. Selfishly, we, too, have become so engrossed in enjoying the action Shakespeare has created for us that we have failed to remember the desperate situation of our protagonist. Thus, burdened by our own guilt, and our own faults, we are able to more fully identify with Lear at the conclusion of the play.

When Lear enters with the deceased Cordelia in his arms, a reverse pieta, we are torn apart by the injustice of her death, and feel Lear’s immense pain as he cries out, “Howl, howl

howl, howl!” (5.3 259). This “howl” reminds us of Lear’s insight that man is no more than a “poor, bare, forked animal” (3.4 109). Ravaged by his grief, Lear’s animal cries show how he has been reduced to his barest, rawest self. The reverse pieta tragically reveals the cost of Lear becoming one with Cordelia’s values and with her love. The reverse pieta calls us to see just how strongly Shakespeare values the human relationship and selfless love that she represents. At the same time, when Lear walks in with his dead child in his arms, we are ravaged by the horror of Cordelia’s death, and feel so acutely the pain of Lear as he cries out in his loss. The death of Cordelia represents the loss of all that is right in this tragic world; we are devastated as we mourn our own loss as much as Lear’s loss.

After Lear’s journey of suffering, the “most piteous tale...that ear ever received,” Cordelia’s death throws Lear into an entirely new realm of suffering, his hope for a newly meaningful life lost (5.3 216-217). Lear’s expression of selfless love upon his daughter’s death, his supposition that if she lives “it is a chance that does redeem all sorrows that I have ever felt,” leaves us wanting to believe that Lear is now capable of living in Cordelia’s image (5.3 269-270). However, we feel that her death has taken away Lear’s chance at redemption, his chance of living a meaningful life. In this moment, it seems that Lear’s journey was all for nothing. We find ourselves asking: What is the point of living in a world with such an utter absence of goodness and justice? Lear wonders this himself: “Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, and thou no breath at all?” (5.3 309-310). We are reminded that we are in a world absent the Christian cosmos, where there is no redemptive God to set things right. Even Kent is so overwhelmed by the horror of Cordelia’s death that he asks, “Is this the promised end?” (5.3 265). This direct reference to the apocalypse makes explicit the darkness of this world as we feel utterly devastated by our loss of Cordelia.

But the tragic conclusion of *King Lear* ultimately educates us not only in the cost of autonomous individuality, but, by contrast, in the supreme value of selfless love for the other. This love transforms the suffering of Lear's journey into his final relation to Cordelia. For Lear, the scene goes back and forth "twixt two extremes of passion": the terrible loss represented by Cordelia's death, and Lear's moments of hope that she is alive (5.3 200). Entirely overcome by his suffering, Lear feels physically suffocated, calling to Kent, "Pray you, undo this button" (5.3 311). But in the brief moment of relief the loosened button provides, Lear believes he witnesses his daughter stir: "Do you see this? Look, her lips, look there, look there" (5.3 312-313). Here, we are reminded of Edgar's earlier line, "Thy life's a miracle. Speak yet again" (4.6 55). In this moment, the thought of seeing life on Cordelia's lips restores Lear to the mystery, the miracle of love, and allows him to "speak yet again." Instead of speaking out of his own misguided sense of the world, as he did in the earlier acts, here, we see Lear speak out of nothing but selfless love.

Joyfully overwhelmed by the thought that his daughter is alive, Lear's heart "bursts smilingly" (5.3 201). In believing that Cordelia has not died as a result of his initial sin, Lear leaves this world in a state of selfless love. Even in her death, Cordelia has the power to redeem Lear. Though his death is tragic, and we are devastated by it (Kent voices our own conscious wish, "Break, heart; I prithee, break"), we also feel that a sense of value and meaning has been restored in Lear's world (5.3 315). While love cannot conquer the evil and cruelty of this human world, nor allow Lear to escape suffering, love does allow Lear to die a meaningful death. His reaction when he believes he sees Cordelia stir shows us that this destructive journey has been for something. It allows us to realize that selfless love, and by extension, human relationship, is the only thing that can give meaning and value to life. Lear dies in joy not because he believes he has been spared, but because his love for the other is so strong that her life is more important to

him than his own. Though our hearts break for Cordelia, for Lear, and for the fate of this world, we cannot help but feel the power of love and relationship to bring meaning to their lives and ours, even amidst such experiences of suffering.

Though Shakespeare provides us with this powerful display of selfless love to contextualize Lear's suffering, we are still privy to the tragedy of this evil world. Characteristic of tragedy as a genre, much more has to be lost in order to find that pearl of infinite value that provides meaning in our quest to understand the mystery of life. At the conclusion of the play, the corpses of the evil characters lay alongside the good characters, and Kent, Albany, and Edgar are left with the task of reigning over this "cheerless, dark and deadly" world of "general woe" (5.3 293-294, 321). Since we have experienced the power of Cordelia's love by living through Lear's journey along with him, we are thus capable of seeing the meaningfulness of Lear's reunion with Cordelia, both in the "No cause, no cause" moment, and when Lear believes he sees life on her lips, "Look there, look there" (4.7 75, 5.3 313). But Kent, Albany, and Edgar only see the horror of Lear and Cordelia's deaths: they are still left with the apocalyptic vision of the world that so defined the play's earlier acts.

Love's inability to transcend the evil and cruelty of this world reveals the post-Christian limitations of Shakespeare's vision of selfless relation to the other. Though we feel the power of Cordelia's selfless love through the play, and most powerfully in the moment of Lear's death, the dark ending of *King Lear* forces us to recognize the transience of meaning in this world. Through Cordelia, we see all the more vividly what is still lost in this world without Christ. Because *King Lear* lies beyond the Christian cosmos, there is no promise of divine salvation. Unlike Christ, Cordelia is merely mortal: the redemptive power of her love cannot transcend this world of will. She cannot bear the weight of being a Christ figure, of the redeeming love of the divine. Should

we refuse to believe in Christ in our own lives, we can only find life's meaning in relation to another imperfect, suffering person. Cordelia is too perfect to accurately reflect our fallen, human world. But, despite these limitations, Shakespeare wants us to dwell in the powerful alternative he presents to this cruel, materialistic world, namely, the impulse towards human relationship and selfless love, rather than focusing on what is lost with the absence of Christ.

As a kind of scapegoat for our understanding, Lear represents all of the suffering of the human world. His journey through life moves towards a sense of the bountiful meaningfulness of life, a meaning that allows us to put suffering in perspective, and to find a way to make peace with it for the sake of all that life can give us. At the same time, it forces us through all that life can take from us, the pain, horror, desperation, and despair. At times, we are so engrossed in the destructiveness of Lear's journey that we cannot see how our suffering lives could be meaningful at all. But Lear's moving reunion with Cordelia, when she forgives the sins that have destroyed him, when she relieves his guilt at all that he has done-- "No cause, no cause"-- here, we feel the immense satisfaction that life can have meaning despite our tragic world (4.7 75). We are so moved by the power of Cordelia's love because we now understand the value of the other to ourselves, the reality that relation to the other can powerfully dispel our anxieties of the meaninglessness of life in a suffering world.

The darkness of *King Lear* ultimately tasks us with the responsibility of resisting this world defined by the will to power, by moving towards love and human relationship. Unlike Lear, we may have the power to make choices in our lives without undergoing quite such a harrowing experience. By giving us Lear as a kind of scapegoat for the sake of our understanding, Shakespeare challenges us to reject the seductive promises of autonomy, calling

us to embrace the power of human relationship to restore us to all the largesse and beauty of the human world.

V. Conclusion

Both Job and Lear limit their world: they see it in rational terms, and working according to their own human understanding. As a result, Job and Lear eliminate mystery from their lives. They become bogged down in attempting to understand how the world works, reducing the miracle of life-- its unpredictability, and indefiniteness-- to something like a problem to be solved. Consequently, rationality and will reign supreme in these texts. Job is a rule follower; he believes that if he does only good, only good will come to him. He doesn't love God so much as fear God. Lear, of course, sees being king as the "be all and end all" to human life. He knows materiality, status, and power, but not love. When he is stripped of this false sense of the world, he is unable to even conceive of another way of being.

But Job's and Lear's suffering journeys call them to question life and its meaning, and in this questioning, they, and we, are restored to the mystery of creation and the miracle of love. Job's whirlwind experience enlarges his perspective, and destroys his vision of a rational world when viewed through our limited, human dimensions. By overcoming his inadequate fear of God, and speaking out of his own experience, Job pulls himself out of his despair. He rediscovers hope, and finally, through the whirlwind, can find meaning in his suffering. By living through the depths of Job's suffering, with him, we discover the grandeur and wonder of creation. Thus, at the conclusion of *Job*, we feel so completely satisfied, for we have seen the mystery of creation: we now understand that we live in an inherently good world, of which suffering is but a part.

When Lear misuses his free will, he shrinks life to an entity he believes he has the power to control. Stripped of this power, Lear goes mad, unable to comprehend a world beyond his own

authority. Lear's journey renders him completely empty as he grasps towards an understanding of the meaningfulness of his suffering life. This meaning is restored only when Lear discovers the miracle of love: that love has "no cause." In the text, all rationality would say that Cordelia should despise Lear, that she should at least get some revenge in affirming Lear's wrongheadedness. But she does not. She loves freely, and unconditionally. And while the idea that love has "no cause" does imply Cordelia's forgiveness, it also taps at the core of the very miracle of love itself: it has "no cause"-- no rational reason for being.

Though *Lear* is not a Christian text, as a Christian reader, one can see the parallel between the mystery of life, as shown to us in *Job*, and the mystery of love, which is revealed to us in *Lear*. Edgar's assertion that "Thy life's a miracle" shows us not only the miracle of human love, but also, the mystery of love itself, and how this love can restore us to the miracle of creation-- that there is something, though there need not be. At its core, the gift of creation, which is freely given, is an act of love. When we experience the very givenness of this world, we are restored to the primal relationship with God of being, and of knowing that we are loved. When Lear speaks "yet again" at the conclusion of the play, his gratitude for the miracle of love reminds us of Job's gratitude for the mystery of creation. In the moment he believes he sees Cordelia stir, Lear is restored to the largesse of his world; he knows that this world is beyond his control, but in an awe-inspiring, truly wonderful way. Lear's perspective is thus enlarged by the gift of human love. But for us, this moment reveals the mystery of love itself, which begins with God, His creation, and our being. Though the mystery of love supersedes our own understanding, it grants us peace, because it allows us to experience the miracle that there is more to life than the knowable and predictable.

So in the end, these are not just stories of suffering, but of miracles. These authors do not want us to focus merely on suffering in the human experience, but rather, on our responses to this suffering. *Job* and *Lear* restore us to the sense that life is meaningful and miraculous, even when it can be difficult to appreciate as such. Now, I want to be careful not to suggest that we must all go through Job's journey, or Lear's journey, to appreciate the value and meaning of human life, nor that we should characterize suffering as "beneficial," for to do so is to justify, and, thus, trivialize it. We have literary characters such as Job and Lear in order to exempt us from all the suffering of the world that they experience, so that we, too, might be restored to the meaning and miracle of human life. But, it is undeniable that human life is riddled with experiences of suffering. Some people suffer more than others, and everyone experiences different realms of suffering. But Job and Lear speak to the universality of suffering, so that everyone, individual life experiences aside, can identify with them in one way or another. Haven't you asked God, as Job does, "Why do you hide your face?" Haven't you felt the guilt of Lear and the power of Cordelia's forgiveness when she says "No cause, no cause"? Haven't you questioned at times whether your suffering life can be meaningful at all?

I chose the texts of *Job* and *Lear* because their authors find such a value in life, even when they do not spare their protagonists a minute of pain. In reading these texts, we feel how completely Job and Lear suffer. But by being thrown so entirely into the suffering world, beyond that which any human being should have to endure, we feel how powerful these responses to suffering can be. At the conclusion of these texts, we cannot deny the gift, the meaning, the miracle of life. We feel the harmony and wholeness of human life that lies beyond those perceptions of incompleteness and disorder that often define our way of being in the world. While God will never speak to us from the whirlwind, as he does with Job, and while Cordelia is

too perfect to reflect our own complex character, both Job and Lear represent their audience as we come to comprehend what is at stake in how we understand ourselves and our world. They ultimately allow us to appreciate the mystery of human life-- the largesse, beauty, wonder, and love of it all-- that can result in our denial of the meaninglessness of life in a suffering world.

VI. Works Cited

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