

## Chapter Four

### The final catastrophes lead to reconciliation

Through experiencing suffering and enduring catastrophes, the four heroes—Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth gain their recognitions which leads them to their reconciliations. Certainly, the reconciling process causes confirmation of the hero's nobility as well as forgiveness for his rash and ignoble acts.

Aristotle expresses that, "A recognition, as the word itself indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge for a recognition and reversal will evoke pity and terror from the audience. (99)

Hamlet has made a series of terrible blunders: he cannot decide whether to seek revenge to kill Claudius, yet he feigns madness and betrays the woman he loves, two school fellows, and kills Laertes' father, Polonius. Hamlet's suffering is long-lasting and torments him as well. However, in the last scene, Ophelia's brother, Laertes reveals the murderous plot to Hamlet and Hamlet achieves his recognition. Besides, as for reconciliation, Hegel states that the general character of reconciliation is outward purification, such as Hamlet has purified his crime by gaining the forgiveness from Laertes; Othello, King Lear and Macbeth get their reconciliations by the same token. (Hegel 345)

Under Claudius's plot, Laertes and Hamlet fight in a duel. During the duel, both Laertes and Hamlet drop their swords, and in the scuffle, Hamlet grabs Laertes' sword and Laertes picks up Hamlet's. Hamlet then strikes Laertes with Laertes' poisoned sword. Before Laertes dies, he reveals the murderous plot to Hamlet and explains that the poisoned sword now rests in Hamlet's hands.

LAERTES It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain.

No medicine in the world can do thee good.

In thee there is not half an hour of life.  
 The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,  
 Unbated and envenomed. The foul practice  
 Hath turned itself on me. Lo, here I lie,  
 Never to rise again. Thy mother's poisoned.

I can no more. The King, the king's to blame. (Ham.5.2.256-63)

Facing the truth, Hamlet no longer hesitates and stops standing “like a neutral to his will and matter”. Hamlet attacks Claudius with a vengeance that has resided in his heart all along. He stabs Claudius with the sword and yells: “venom, to thy work.” (Ham.5.2.264) Before Claudius dies, for extra measure and for the significance of revenge for Gertrude (Gertrude dies from drinking the poisoned wine which was prepared by Claudius, so in a sense, Hamlet wants Claudius to drink the poisoned wine before he dies), Hamlet pours the poison down the King's throat. Hamlet overcomes his “paralysis” and kills King Claudius. (Stockton 98)

HAMLET Here, thou incestuous, murd'rous, damned Dane,  
 Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?

Follow my mother. King Claudius dies. (Ham.5.2.266-69)

After completing his vengeance, Hamlet turns to and reconciles with Laertes. The two men exchange pardons, and they consign one another to Christian heaven by releasing themselves from culpability for the lives they have taken.

LAERTES Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.

Mine and my father's death come out upon thee,  
 Nor thine on me.

HAMLET Heaven make thee free of it! I follow thee.

(Ham.5.2.271-75)

Laertes and Hamlet, forgive one another so that neither will prevent the other from entering heaven. At the end, Hamlet shows his nobility before he dies, and recognizes in Fortinbras a kindred spirit who can restore honor to Denmark as he claims the throne. Hamlet then releases himself to death once and for all. Hamlet's recognition ultimately allows him to die at peace with himself. Therefore, after asking his best and most loyal friend, Horatio to tell his story, Hamlet dies with the last words: "The rest is silence." (Ham.5.2.300)

Fortinbras takes immediate charge, listening to the story Horatio tells about Hamlet and immediately orders his soldiers to clean up the mess. He replaces the confusion with calm by ordering a hero's funeral for Hamlet.

FORTINBRAS Let four captains  
 Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,  
 For he was likely, had he been put on,  
 To have proved most royally; and for his passage,  
 The soldiers' music and the rites of war  
 Speak loudly for him (Ham.5.2.339-45)

Fortinbras orders that Hamlet be given military honors, and pledges to obliterate the corruption of Claudius' reign, and end what Horatio reported as the "carnal, bloody and unnatural acts" that have ruled Denmark. (Stockton 98) A new society is reconstructed.

As far as Othello is concerned, he is subject to Iago's cunning plot for over half of the play. Not until the last scene does Othello realize that he misjudged his wife, Desdemona. When he realizes that he misjudged his wife, he gets his recognition. Among the four protagonists, Othello is the most gullible one. He may be powerful in battle, but when it comes to understanding people on a personal, rather than

professional level, Othello does not succeed. (Maurer 198) When Emilia scolds Othello: “O gull, O dolt, / As ignorant as dirt! Thou hast done a deed”, and as Graziano laments for the dead Desdemona, Othello still attempts to justify his deed, and seeks affirmation from Iago. He still thinks Desdemona should be punished because she committed adultery with Cassio.

OTHELLO ‘Tis pitiful. But yet Iago knows  
 That she with Cassio hath the act of shame  
 A thousand times committed. Cassio confessed it,  
 And she did gratify his amorous works  
 With that recognizance and pledge of love  
 Which I first gave her. I saw it in his hand.  
 It was a handkerchief, an antique token  
 My father gave my mother. (Oth.5.2.217-24)

Othello still draws on the visual proof, the handkerchief, and ignores Emilia’s accusation of the party responsible for killing the sweetest innocent Desdemona. At the same time, Iago attempts to silence his wife, Emilia. However, despite threats and accusations from her husband, Emilia still confesses to Othello that she stole the handkerchief for Iago.

EMILIA O thou dull Moor, that handkerchief thou speak’st of  
 I found by fortune and did give my husband,  
 For often, with a solemn earnestness—  
 More than indeed belonged to such a trifle—  
 He begged of me to steal’t it.

IAGO Villainous whore!

EMILIA She give it Cassio? No, alas, I found it,

And I did give't my husband. (Oth.5.2.232-38)

At this moment, Othello realizes that he has made a huge mistake. He has gained knowledge, but at a tremendous cost.

Confronted with the truth and recognition, Othello turns to beg forgiveness from his friend, Cassio. Cassio asks, "Dear general, I never gave you cause" (Oth.5.2.305) and Othello answers, "I do believe it, and I ask your pardon." (Oth.5.2.306) In this fashion, Othello reconciles with his friend, Cassio. He goes on to reconcile with Desdemona by killing himself and kissing her before he dies.

OTHELLO I kissed thee ere I killed thee. No way but this:

Killing myself, to die upon a kiss. (Oth.5.2.368-69)

As McAlindon states, Othello's dying on a kiss carries the suggestion of an 'atonement' coextensive with the reintegration of self achieved by acknowledging and punishing the erring barbarian that he had become. (15) Othello refuses divine mercy and commits suicide with the conviction that he deserves the torments of Hell. This determination shows his nobility. Besides, when Iago taunts Othello with his devilish immortality, Othello finally assumes his former dignity, and replies that he is glad that Iago has not been killed.

IAGO I bleed, sir, but not killed.

OTHELLO I am not sorry, neither. I'd have thee live,

For in my sense 'tis happiness to die. (Oth.5.2.294-96)

Death, in Othello's mind, is too good to Iago. Death will bring release, while living will bring incalculable pain. In Othello's speech, we once again see the more positive and noble side of him. He has come to accept responsibility for what he has done.

OTHELLO Soft you, a word or two before you go.

I have done the state some service, and they know't.  
 No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,  
 When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,  
 Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,  
 Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak  
 Of one that loved not wisely but too well,  
 Of one not easily jealous but, being wrought,  
 Perplexed in the extreme.... (Oth.5.2.347-55)

Lodovico, the representative of Venice, the land of civility and prosperity, once again tries to bring order to the wildness of the scene before us, questioning Othello as to what has happened to him. As a voice of moderation, reason, and authority, Lodovico questions what people will say about the fall of the great Othello. Othello's reply: "For naught I did in hate, but all in honour" (Oth.5.2.301), again brings out the play's underlying themes of public image, reputation, and abiding by the constructs that society tacitly creates. (Maurer 199) The honest Cassio gains charge of Cyprus, Desdemona's uncle, Gratiano, takes Othello's fortunes, and Iago faces his just punishment. According to Aristotle, only the finest tragedies can evoke the feeling of pity and fear from the audiences; and in Othello, the death of a perfect wife is indeed pitiable, and it is terrifying that the noble Othello's downfall is not caused by his wickedness but by his error of trusting a scheming friend who induces him to blind jealousy. This happening can strongly caution us against similar misbehaviors.

Unlike Hamlet and Othello, whose recognitions appear in the respective last scenes, King Lear's recognition progresses gradually. In the adverse environment created by Goneril, King Lear misses his young daughter, Cordelia. Especially after

hearing the discussion of “nothing” between Fool and Kent, King Lear unconsciously responds to Fool with the word “nothing”, which echoes Cordelia’s words from the beginning—“Nothing, my lord” (Lr.1.1.85)

KENT This is nothing, fool.

FOOL Then ‘tis like the breath of an unfee’d lawyer: you gave  
Me nothing for’t. [To Lear] Can you make no use of nothing,  
Nuncle?

LEAR Why no, boy. Nothing can be made out of nothing.

(Lr.1.4.114-18)

Confronted with Goneril’s disobedience, King Lear finally begins to understand that his foolishness has led to this current state of affairs. Lear’s self torment with respect to his treatment of Cordelia is obvious.

LEAR O most small fault,  
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! O Lear, Lear, Lear!  
Beat at this gate that let thy folly in  
And thy dear judgement out. (Lr.1.4.228-34)

King Lear realizes he has treated his young daughter, Cordelia poorly and admits his mistakes. With remorse for his behavior toward Cordelia, Lear realizes: “I did her wrong.” (Lr.1.5.22) It reveals that King Lear has had a flash of insight into his own conduct, actions that he has come to regret. Knowing Goneril’s cruel nature, King Lear is clearly frightened and apprehensive for his future, but continues to hope that Regan can be counted on to provide him with sanctuary. Lear expresses fear for his

future and sanity:

LEAR O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!

Keep me in temper. I would not be mad. (Lr.1.5.41-42)

King Lear tries to retain the rights and manner of a King, but remains King in name only: “Only we shall retain/ The name and all th’ addition to a king.” (Lr.1.1.133)

Goneril tries to reduce the number of knights in his service from one hundred to fifty.

Lear therefore feels disrespected and angry, and decides to move to Regan’s palace.

However, Regan does not comfort Lear. Instead, she urges Lear to restrain himself and behave in a manner befitting a man of his age. Regan also advises Lear to seek

Goneril’s forgiveness, which provokes Lear to anger and cursing.

REGAN Give ear, sir, to my sister;

For those that mingle reason with your passion

Must be content to think you old, (Lr.2.2.398-01)

Lear states that he would rather live outside under the stars or beg shelter in France than stay in the company of those who disrespect him as father and King. He is angered by Regan’s attitude; however, what makes Lear most angry is that Regan regards fifty knights as too many for Lear. She asks Lear to retain only twenty-five knights in his service: “To bring but five and twenty; to no more/ Will I give place or notice.” (Lr.2.2.413-14) For Lear, having one hundred knights in his service represented his last dignity and display of kingship. He gives everything to his two elder daughters and hopes that they will care for him with respect, but both disobey his will. Like Goneril, Regan proves herself to be unyielding and cruel. Neither daughter shows any love, tenderness, or gratitude towards their father, who gave them his entire kingdom. The loss of his daughters’ respect and the loss of his kingship bring Lear to a breaking point. Though He runs out and goes forth into a severe



storm, Goneril and Regan remain unmoved and unconcerned for their old father. He lets himself become surrounded and battered by the storm, and then he says: “My wits begin to turn.” (Lr.3.2.67) King Lear earns his recognition at last. He finally understands that flattery is a hazard to someone in high position, and thus, he gains enlightenment, even in the midst of his madness. Unlike Hamlet and Othello, King Lear’s recognition develops gradually through the process of his sufferings. Gloucester’s sudden recognition is similar to that of Hamlet and Othello. He always believes the words of Edmond, his bastard son. After his eyes are gouged out, he still cries for Edmond to avenge him:

GLOUCESTER Where’s my son Edmond?

Edmond, enkindle all the sparks of nature

To quite this horrid act. (Lr.3.7.83-85)

But Regan reveals that Edmond, Gloucester’s beloved son, is the person who betrayed him.

REGAN Thou call’st on him that hates thee. It was he

That made the overture of thy treasons to us,

Who is too good to pity thee. (Lr.3.7.86-88)

Gloucester recognizes that he was wrong to banish Edgar, the one son who truly loved him: “O, my follies! Then Edgar was abused. / Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!” (Lr.3.7.89-91) For Gloucester, he gains his knowledge after losing his eyes:

GLOUCESTER I stumbled when I saw. Full oft ’tis seen

Our means secure us, and our mere defects

Prove our commodities. (Lr.4.1.19-21)

King Lear no longer sees himself as infallible. When Lear reunites with his

young daughter, Cordelia, he fully expects Cordelia to hate him because he wronged her so severely: “I know you do not love me; for your sisters/ Have, as I do remember, done me wrong. / You have some cause; they have not.” (Lr.4.6.66-68) He begs for and receives Cordelia’s forgiveness at the end. “You must bear with me. Pray you now, forget/ and forgive. I am old and foolish.” (Lr.4.6.76-77) At the end of the play, all the villains get what they deserve, and Cornwall, Edmond, Goneril and Regan all die untimely. However, unlike Iago in Othello, Edmond does repent and tries to rescind his order to execute Cordelia and Lear.

EDMOND I pant for life. Some good I mean to do,

Despite of mine own nature. Quickly send,

Be brief in it, to th’ castle; for my writ

Is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia

Nay, send in time. (Lr.5.3.217-21)

Through this small measure, he proves himself worthy of Gloucester’s blood, and shows his nobility. Both Gloucester and Lear also die because of their misjudgements. Albany reveals his wife, Goneril, and her plot and appoints Kent and Edgar to restore order. “Friends of my soul, you twain/ Rule in this realm, and the gored state sustain.” (Lr.5.3.294-95)

As far as Macbeth is concerned, his recognition comes about very early, not similar to King Lear’s gradual recognition. After committing regicide by killing King Duncan, Macbeth says:

MACBETH I ‘ll go no more.

I am afraid to think what I have done,

Look on’t again I dare not.

LADY MACBETH Infirm of purpose! (Mac.2.2.47-50)

In fact, Macbeth is a weak-minded person, which his wife is intimately aware of. Hence, before killing King Duncan, Macbeth hesitates; and after committing regicide, Macbeth still expresses his regret that killing Duncan was wrong. “But in these cases/ We still have judgement here” (Mac.1.7.8-9) No wonder Lady Macbeth calls Macbeth infirmed of purpose. Throughout the entire play, Macbeth knows that he is doing wrong. We can see this from many of his speeches:

MACBETH For Banquo’s issue have I filed my mind,  
 For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered,  
 Put rancours in the vessel of my peace  
 Only for them, and mine eternal jewel  
 Given to the common enemy of man  
 To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings. (Mac.3.1.66-72)

Moreover, Macbeth knows the people he kills are happier than him because they do not need to experience the torture:

MACBETH Better be with the dead,  
 Whom we to gain our peace have sent to peace,  
 Than on the torture of the mind to lie  
 In restless ecstasy. (Mac.3.2.21-24)

We can see Macbeth’s recognition after he kills King Duncan, and it remains until the end of the play. Morrow once points out that Macbeth feel agony of his decision in the beginning of the play rather than the end of his fall. (25)

MACBETH Had I but died an hour before this chance  
 I had lived a blessed time, for from this instant  
 There’s nothing serious in mortality.  
 All is but toys. Renown and grace is dead.

The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees

Is left this vault to brag of. (Mac.2.3.88-93)

Although Macbeth's recognition shows up very early, he still holds the hope that one day he can be King. That is why even though he is full of sense of regret and guilt; he keeps trying to fulfill his ambition to be King. His full recognition shows up at the end of the play when he finds ways to fight with Macduff and others.

MACBETH My way of life

Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf,

And that which should accompany old age,

As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,

I must not look to have. (Mac.5.3.23-27)

At this moment, Macbeth knows he has no hope to enjoy his rest of life, and he realizes that all he has done is wrong. He then curses the three witches who filled him with the hope and pushed him into this situation. He realizes that all of their speeches were ambiguous and could not have been the prophecy.

MACBETH Accursed be that tongue that tells me so,

For it hath cowed my better part of man;

And be these juggling fiends no more believed,

That palter with us in a double sense,

And break it to our hope. (Mac.5.10.17-23)

Macbeth's nobility shows at this time as he chooses to die nobly even though he has committed a litany of wrongs.

MACBETH I will not yield

To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,

And to be baited with the rabble's curse. (Mac.5.10.27-30)

Macbeth keeps showing his nature: his determination on doing things. Even he determinates wrong thing and that against his moral conscience; he still let himself bathe with the struggle between moral and evil. Also Macbeth cries to the universe, like King Lear. “Blow wind, come wrack, / At least we’ll die with harness on our back.” (Mac.5.5.49-50) It is the bold cry of a hopeless man. Macbeth seeks a noble death to rest himself at the end instead of surrender or hiding from his enemy. His nobility shows up here.

ROSS The which no sooner had his prowess confirmed  
 In the unshrinking station where he fought,  
 But like a man he died. (Mac.5.11.7-9)

Macbeth’s noble death atones for his guilt and he harbors no debt after his noble death.

SIWARD He’s worth no more.  
 They say he parted well and paid his score,  
 And so God be with him. Here comes newer comfort.  
 (Mac.5.11.17-19)

At the end, Macbeth restores his nobility.

Lady Macbeth is not like Macbeth to fight until the last moment. She is similar to Othello, ending her life in order to seek repose. Lady Macbeth is tortured by nightmares. Even the doctor cannot cure her mental disease.

DOCTOR Unnatural deeds  
 Do breed unnatural troubles; infected minds  
 To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.  
 More needs she the divine than the physician. (Mac.5.1.61-64)

Her death is a suicide, but in a sense, she has not lived long before. Her

sleepwalking shows the restless and tortured spirit without release. Therefore, she follows, ironically, her doctor's remark, and finally rests herself by ending her own life.

DOCTOR This disease is beyond my practice. Yet I have known  
 Those which have walked in their sleep who have died holily in  
 Their beds. (Mac.5.1.49-51)

With regard to Lady Macbeth, only death can release her from her tortured spirit. At the end, King Duncan's son, Malcolm gets back his father's kingdom and restores the new country. In Malcolm's world, a treacherous cycle is to be replaced by transcendence, as his Thanes become earls.

MALCOLM My thanes and kinsmen,  
 Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland  
 In such an honour names. What's more to do  
 Which would be planted newly with the time,  
 As calling home our exiled friends abroad,  
 That fled the snares of watchful tyranny.... (Mac.5.11.28-34)

A whole new society is constructed. Garber points out that the play's real recuperation, its real recovery, comes only partly through Macbeth's personal confrontation with mortality and ending, and partly through Malcolm's public assurance of order and continuity. (722-23) Therefore, Macbeth's noble death brings about a new era and Malcolm regains the throne of his father, King Duncan.