

Confusing Matters: *Romeo and Juliet* and Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature**

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[Juliet's soul] is a torch lit by a spark, a bud, only now just touched by love, which stands there unexpectedly in full bloom, but the quicker it unfolds, the quicker too does it droop, its petals gone.

Hegel, *Aesthetics*¹

Fire [...] is therefore an existent ideality, the *existent* nature of air, the becoming-manifest of the reduction-to-show of what is other.

Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*²

Preamble

This paper is about how we generate continuity from the disparate; how experienced time, like fire, is a show, is tragic, and yet is also kindling cognition. I discuss this by looking at nature metaphors in *Romeo and Juliet* through the lens of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*.

I was motivated to write this, in part, as a response to Paul Kottman's beautiful article "Defying the Stars: Tragic Love as the Struggle for Freedom in *Romeo and Juliet*"³.

* An earlier version of this paper was an invited plenary presentation at the Symposium "Poetics Versus Philosophy: Life, Artifact, and Theory", Texas A & M University, April 11, 2013. I thank the organizer Theodore George.

¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, Engl. transl. by Thomas Malcolm Knox, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, 2 vols, vol. I, p. 582.

² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, Engl. transl. by Arnold V. Miller, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2004, paragraph 284, Zusatz, p. 113.

³ Paul A. Kottman, "Defying the Stars: Tragic Love as the Struggle for Freedom in *Romeo and Juliet*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 63:1 (Spring 2012), pp. 1-38. See Julia Reinhard Lupton's "Response to Paul A. Kottman, 'Defying the Stars: Tragic Love as

Kottman argues that the play's real issue is freedom: he draws in part on Hegel's discussion, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, of the rites of the ancient family and he contrasts those rites with the lovers' desire for freedom; Kottman argues that Romeo and Juliet battle against social determinism.

I reexamine determinism in a *natural* light. I show that, when we draw in other ways on Hegel, the play is not primarily about freedom. It is more about a natural catastrophe cast in nature metaphors. My claim that it is about a natural catastrophe aligns with Hegel's brief writings about the play⁴; that it is cast in metaphors which can be elucidated via Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, is new.

My premise is that not all tragedies are cultural or moral ones; they are, like the natural show in which we live, confused matters. This opens up interesting new perspectives. For example, in confusing the matters of Hegel's nature philosophy and *Romeo and Juliet*, we can see that tragedy is inorganic, that Paris' love for Juliet is phosphorous – a “shining without burning”⁵, whereas Romeo and Juliet's love is a chemical fire which “does not merely burn, but burns up”⁶. Conversely, using the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet we can explain Hegel's assertion that “the transition from inorganic to organic nature” is one from “the prose to the poetry of nature”⁷; we can, because the lovers consummate and die on that threshold⁸.

the Struggle for Freedom in *Romeo and Juliet*”, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 63:1 (Spring 2012), pp. 39-45.

⁴ My article is not about Hegel's account of *Romeo and Juliet*, though I discuss this briefly. For a longer discussion of Hegel and Shakespeare in general, see Jennifer Ann Bates, *Hegel and Shakespeare on Moral Imagination*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2010.

⁵ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 331, Z., p. 258.

⁶ “[I]t ceases to be indifferent – it has become an acid”, Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 331, Z., p. 258. One can also explain what Hegel means by an “amalgam” by looking at the forced marriage between Juliet and Paris.

⁷ “We have now to make the transition from inorganic to organic Nature, from the prose to the poetry of nature”, Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 336, Z., p. 270.

⁸ I could have written about the chemistry of love in *Romeo and Juliet* using “elective affinities” (along the lines of Goethe in his book by that title, in which Goethe shows how a husband and wife in two different couples are attracted to the opposite couple's wife and husband through the “chemistry” of personal affinities). But elective affinities in Hegel means “the [chemical] process in its Totality” (*Philosophy of Nature*, par. 333, p. 261) whereas what I want to focus on is a destructive moment in

In Part One, I begin the comparison of Hegel and Shakespeare by looking at two plant metaphors – the Friar's "plant" and Hegel's "rose in the cross". This comparison concerns the general issue of unifying opposites through mediation.

Part Two introduces Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*: I place the work in the context of his writings and summarize it.

Part Three is concerned with two ideas from the *Philosophy of Nature* about the "show" of nature. (It is these two ideas in particular which, in Part Four, I develop in relation to *Romeo and Juliet*.) The first idea concerns the point of contact between ideality and reality, a contact that generates matter; the second idea concerns ideality as increasingly complex forms of light. That is, it concerns how for Hegel light is progressively, dialectically en-mattered as increasingly complex forms of fire and time, and then as the self-kindling life of plants and animals. In this second idea, the light in chemical fire is the consuming and destructive tragic "prose of nature", a kind of existence directly prior to organic life, which latter is the living "poetry of nature".

Part Four brings all these topics and these two ideas in particular into play in *Romeo and Juliet*. For this discussion, I have shifted away from the politics of Verona and from any Hegelian or other phenomenology of the characters⁹. Instead, out of the play's abundant nature metaphors, I look at the language of light, fire, the role of the earth's elements in relation to the sun and stars, heat and the physical contact of lovers and duelers. In the play, I trace the en-mattering of light through fire, into chemical combustion; I trace the tragic show of the inability of these lovers to exist as the poetry of nature.

Part Five concludes with reflections on these confused matters.

chemistry before this totality is reached; that previous and destructive moment is the process of fire (par. 331). This fire is essential to the transition from the inorganic to the organic (the latter being, according to Hegel, a "self-kindling", par. 336, p. 270).

⁹ For phenomenological readings, see the special issue of *Criticism* on "Shakespeare and Phenomenology", eds James Kearney and Kevin Curran, 54:3 (2012), pp. 427-43.

Part One: "This weak flower" and "the rose in the cross"

a. Friar Lawrence

Within the infant rind of this weak flower
 Poison hath residence and medicine power;
 For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part;
 Being tasted, stays all senses with the heart.
 Two such opposed kings encamp them still
 In man as well as herbs – grace and rude will;
 And where the worser is predominant,
 Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.
 (*Romeo and Juliet*, II.iii.23-30¹⁰)

In these lines, grace and rude will are compared with the medicinal and deadly power of an herb. For the Friar, this knowledge of herbs is inseparable from reasoning about spiritual and political processes: his physics is inseparable from his meta-physical "ghostly" counsel¹¹.

The Friar attempts, using herbs and sacraments, to wed opposites: fire with light, lust with love, the real with the ideal, change with eternity. As we know, all his plans go terribly wrong. His explanation at the end is thin comfort.

b. Hegel

To recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present and thereby to enjoy the present, this is the rational insight which reconciles us to the actual, the reconciliation which philosophy affords to those in whom there has once arisen an inner voice bidding them to comprehend, not only to dwell in what is substantive while still retaining subjective freedom, but also to possess subjective freedom while standing not in anything particular and accidental but in what exists absolutely¹².

¹⁰ All quotations are from William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. J. A. Bryant, Jr., The Signet Classic Shakespeare, New York, Penguin, 2nd rev. ed. 1998.

¹¹ He is often referred to in the play as the "ghostly confessor" (e.g., Juliet calls him this in II.vi.21).

¹² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Engl. transl. by Thomas Malcolm Knox, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1952, p. 12.

The rose is a natural metaphor at the heart of Hegel's philosophy. As we will see shortly, it is also at the heart, though in a different way, of his reading of *Romeo and Juliet*.

The rose in the cross is a Christian metaphor which is reinterpreted by Hegel's post-Protestant philosophy. For Hegel, it means reconciliation with reality. In general, Hegel thought his speculative science was capable of bridging metaphysical idealism and realism.

Like the Friar, Hegel works with opposites. But Hegel does so dialectically, and for him, all things are already wedded – inter-determining – in the Notion (“Concept”/Begriff).

Hegelian reconciliation is expressed in a variety of ways throughout his works. For example, in the closing passage of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes that the reconciliation for spirit is the unity of phenomenology and history¹³. In the *Philosophy of Right*, he writes, famously, that “What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational”¹⁴. When Hegel lectured on the philosophy of nature in the first half of the 1800's, he thought he was reconciling metaphysical and religious ideas with his era's scientific knowledge of the natural world¹⁵.

For the Friar, the “weak flower” he is holding is the real and symbolic unity of opposites, it can cure or kill. In Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, “the Notion” – figuratively grasped as the rose in the cross – is the unity of opposites, the germ of generation and of destruction in all natural things.

If we fail to grasp the Notion in reality, according to Hegel, it is most often because we are using only our “Understanding”, rather than our reason as well. The Understanding is *too* logical. For example, in drama, the Understanding “emphasize[s] abstractly only one side of the character and stamp[s] it on the whole man as what alone rules him”¹⁶.

¹³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Engl. transl. by Arnold V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, par. 808, p. 493.

¹⁴ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p. 10.

¹⁵ Of all his works, Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* brings Hegel the most criticism. He was drawing on science that is now outdated (Hegel was writing before the discovery of dinosaurs or of the germ theory of disease, and before Darwin's theory of evolution) and he championed ideas now disproven (e.g., Goethe's theory of color against Newton's). Nonetheless, there is growing interest in this book today. For a good discussion, see Thomas Posch, “Hegel and the Sciences”, in *A Companion to Hegel*, eds Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur, Chichester, Blackwell, 2011, pp. 177-202.

¹⁶ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 240.

By contrast, reason in Hegel's speculative philosophy is capable of grasping what appears illogical:

[I]n the light of the *rationality* of what is inherently total and therefore living, this illogicality is precisely what is logical and right. For man is this: not only the bearer of the contradiction of his multiple nature but the sustainer of it, remaining therein equal and true to himself¹⁷.

In Shakespeare's play, Hegel's rose is on fire.

When Hegel writes about Juliet, he does not refer to the rose in the cross specifically, but he does use the rose as a metaphor:

Suddenly we see the development of the whole strength of this heart, of intrigue, circumspection, power to sacrifice everything and submit to the harshest treatment; so that now the whole thing looks like *the first blossoming of the whole rose at once in all its petals and folds*, like an infinite outpouring of the inmost genuine basis of the soul in which previously there was no inner differentiation, formation, and development, but which now comes on the scene as an immediate product of an awakened single interest, unbeknown to itself, in its beautiful fullness and force, out of a hitherto self-enclosed spirit. *It is a torch lit by a spark, a bud, only now just touched by love, which stands there unexpectedly in full bloom, but the quicker it unfolds, the quicker too does it droop, its petals gone*¹⁸.

Though Hegel does not discuss the rose in the cross here, a Hegelian must nonetheless try to think it, philosophically, in all places. The confusing matter of *tragic* reconciliation – this rose on fire – is at the center of my paper; more about this later.

Hegel uses the same rose metaphor for the whole play: he writes of Romeo's and Juliet's love as "a tender rose in the vale of this transitory world [...] withered by rude storms and tempests"¹⁹. The whole passage in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, from which this last citation is taken, is instructive. It shows what kind of tragedy Hegel thinks this play embodies. So let me cite it in full.

¹⁷ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, pp. 239-40.

¹⁸ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, pp. 581-82, my italics.

¹⁹ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, p. 1232.

Hegel begins in general about bad luck and then moves on to tragedy:

we are confronted by a purely horrible external necessity when we see fine minds, noble in themselves, perishing in such a battle against the misfortune of entirely external circumstances. Such a history may touch us acutely, and yet it seems only dreadful and we feel a pressing demand for a necessary correspondence between the external circumstances and what the inner nature of those fine characters really is. It is only from this point of view that we can feel ourselves reconciled in e.g. the fate of Hamlet or Juliet [...]. [In Hamlet's] melancholy and weakness, his worry, his disgust at all the affairs of life, we sense from the start that in all his terrible surroundings he is a lost man, almost consumed already by inner disgust before death comes to him from outside. The same is the case in Romeo and Juliet. The soil on which these tender blooms were planted is foreign to them, and we are left with nothing but to bewail the tragic transience of so beautiful a love which is shattered by the crazy calculations of a noble and well-meaning cleverness, just as a tender rose in the vale of this transitory world is withered by rude storms and tempests. But the woe that we feel is only a grievous reconciliation, an unhappy bliss in misfortune²⁰.

The first thing to notice here is that for Hegel not all reconciliations are comic. The second is that, in both Shakespeare's play and in Hegel's account of it, the collisions in the play, though social, are expressed in natural metaphors; the collisions themselves appear to be deterministic, inevitable, like storms.

In what follows, I show that nature metaphors – these confused matters, these elemental thoughts – are foundational to reflective existence, and why being more aware of them can help us to comprehend, and sometimes avoid tragedy.

Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, in particular, can teach us to properly grasp how "the show" of our existence is time as fire. The best antidote to tragedy is to remember (to take) that time of synthesis, to kindle ideas.

There is always "[s]ome consequence yet hanging in the stars" (I.iv.107). We do well to attend to and interpret these natural lights, especially as they become refracted in life.

²⁰ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, pp. 1231-32.

Part Two: Rekindling Hegel's Philosophy of Nature

a. Hegel's Speculative Philosophy and the role of the Philosophy of Nature in it

As I mentioned above, in Hegel's philosophy in general, Hegel rejects the work of the Understanding on its own. The Understanding reflects and dissects rather than comprehends; it generates rigid categories in which it captures the content of its reflection. To it, belong the one-sided philosophies of "reflection" and of "identity".

By contrast, Hegel thinks that his Speculative Philosophy, by means of its dialectical Notion, comprehends the "organic" truth of the unity of thought and being.

The Notion is as much subjective as objective; it carries with and loses itself in the other. Rather than holding identity and difference apart, it sublates contradiction.

The following citation highlights the way in which Hegel's wholes are inherent contradictions and interdependencies; wholes enliven themselves in and through their differences.

In individuality developed into a totality, the moments themselves are determined as individual totalities, as whole particular bodies which, at the same time, are in relation only as different towards each other. This relation, as the identity of non-identical, independent bodies, is a contradiction, and hence is essentially *process*, the function of which, in conformity with the Notion, is the positing of the differentiated as identical, the removal of difference, and the differentiation of the identical, the enlivening and dissociation of it²¹.

For Hegel, identity is identity and difference. To stop at identity or difference, is to fail to be dialectical, to fail to grasp the Notion.

What role does the *Philosophy of Nature* play in our comprehension of these wholes? First, the *Philosophy of Nature* is the middle book in a series of three: the overarching advance of Hegel's Speculative Science in his *Encyclopedia* is from the *Logic* to the *Philosophy of Nature* to the *Philosophy of Spirit*.

There is a progression in these works: the *Logic* gives us the conceptual development of the Notion all by itself; nature and spirit

²¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 326, pp. 232-33.

arise as substantial and cognitional forms of it, respectively²². But the relation of logic to nature and to spirit is not simple. Hegel does not think that there is a logical, metaphysical "diamond net"²³ on or underlying nature or spirit.

According to him, the Notion is a dialectical process by means of which the object both is itself and is thinkable. Speculative science shows how differences are part and parcel of whatever identity one considers. Logic, nature and spirit are three spheres of this Notional reality.

Rather than imagining that Hegel imposes a logic on nature or spirit, we can think Hegelian reconciliation with reality more accurately when we grasp it as a four-way dialectical interdetermination of one-many with subject-substance²⁴.

We see this four-way dialectic when we consider Hegel's reading of *Romeo and Juliet*. The tension is between the one-many of their social lives (their being-object as a pair vs. the multiple interpretations of them by those around them), which in turn is in dialectical relation with the other polarity, that between their freedom as subjects and their being-object.

Romeo's and Juliet's freedom is not just constrained by its being-object: it is created and changed in and through being-object, just as their being-object, and the interpretation of it by others, are created and changed through their freedom.

However, my view is that this four-way interdependence in the play is best understood by paying attention, not just to the political, but rather, primarily, to the *natural* character of it.

To prepare for looking closely at this natural aspect in the play, let me briefly summarize Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* and then, in Part Three, pull out of it the ideas relevant to my discussion.

Following that, I turn to *Romeo and Juliet* to show how these ideas work in that play.

²² For a discussion of the different kinds of "advances" of the dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* vs. the *Logic* vs. *Philosophy of Nature*, see Jennifer Ann Bates, "Hegel and the Concept of Extinction", *Philosophy Compass*, Continental Series, ed. Andrew Cutrofello, editor-in-chief Elizabeth Barnes, forthcoming, 2014.

²³ Hegel, "Introduction to the *Philosophy of Nature*", in *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 11.

²⁴ For a discussion of this four-way dialectic, see Jennifer Ann Bates, "Organic or Inorganic Freedom?", in *Hegel on Freedom and History*, ed. Emila Angelova, under negotiation with University of Toronto Press.

b. *Summary of the Philosophy of Nature*

Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* is divided into three spheres: Mechanics, Physics and Organics²⁵. Just as, according to Hegel, there is no theory of evolution that can account for necessary developments of one species into another over time²⁶, there is no evolution of one sphere into the other. Each sphere is simply a greater, more complex embodiment of the Notional relationships present in the earlier spheres.

Thus, the mechanics of space, time, matter and motion, of the planetary bodies and the solar system – all of which make up the first sphere – are incorporated²⁷ in the second sphere of Physics. The *physical* Elements of planet earth – earth, air, fire and water – contain in them the mechanics of space and time, matter, motion and the solar system. These Elements (with all that is going on in them) are in turn incorporated into the earth's meteorological processes.

Chemistry, the moment in physics before the transition to the third, organic sphere, incorporates these previous mechanical and physical processes, as well as magnetic and electrical processes. Finally, in the organic sphere, organic bodies incorporate the inorganic processes as parts of their living, self-perpetuation. (In a moment, I will focus on how this process from inorganic mechanism and physics to life-forms, is traced by Hegel in terms of the ideality and reality of light and fire. For it is this material which illuminates Shakespeare's play.)

In the third and last sphere – organics – Hegel develops levels of self-subsisting life forms from the simplest (slime) up to the highest (the human animal capable of cognition). With this we have left the *Philosophy of Nature*, and entered the *Philosophy of Mind* (*Geist* or "Spirit"), the third book of Hegel's *Encyclopedia*. For with cognition comes spirit, the community of interpreters, doing science, reflecting on and knowing the world. The sciences we do, he claims, make

²⁵ Hegel starts with the most external and abstract – space – and works that via time and motion and place and matter, into the ever more complex entities of general mechanics, physics and organic life.

²⁶ Michael John Petry, "Introduction", in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, ed. Michael John Petry, London, George Allen and Unwin; New York, Humanities Press, 1970, 3 vols, vol. I, pp. 22-23.

²⁷ I use the term 'incorporate' and 'contain' loosely to capture a complex dialectical process of sublation into material existence.

explicit for us the implicit rationality in things²⁸. At that point, the door is opened to spirit's historical, anthropological, psychological, phenomenological, religious, artistic and philosophical self-comprehensions. With cognitive creatures doing *speculative* science, the truth is the whole.

The three spheres in the *Philosophy of Nature* show a 'transition' (for lack of a better word) from the abstract ideality of the Notion to increasingly *concrete* ideality, that is, to the existent *reality* of the Notion²⁹.

So much for my summary of the book. Now let me tease out some important ideas in it which I will take up later in relation to the play.

Hegelian reconciliation, the rose in the cross, is often cast by Hegel in terms of the unity of ideality and reality. Let us approach Hegelian reconciliation in these terms and then compare that rose with the rose of Verona.

Part Three: The rose of reconciliation qua ideality and reality

a. The point of contact

Generally speaking, ideality and reality are for Hegel, in each sphere, indeed in each thing, one. "*Reality* and *ideality* are frequently considered as a pair of determinations that confront one another with equal independence [...]. But ideality is not something that is given outside of and apart from reality. On the contrary, the concept of ideality expressly consists in its being the *truth* of reality, or in other words, reality posited as what it is in-itself proves itself to be ideality"³⁰.

There is, nonetheless, according to Hegel, a natural transition, both cognitive and material, between ideality and reality. Let us il-

²⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 337, Z., p. 276.

²⁹ That transition carries on into the *Philosophy of Mind*. So, the Idea (the unity of Notion and reality) is completed in the *nature* of free human cognition. This claim is the topic of another paper. See my notes 22 and 61.

³⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, Engl. transl. by Theodore F. Geraets, Wallis Arthur Suchting and Henry Stilton Harris, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1991, par. 96, Addition, p. 153. See also Mark C. Taylor's *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2000, p. 156.

lustrate this with a passage from the *Philosophy of Nature* about how the ideality of matter first comes about.

[When two bodies come into contact] there is no empty space between the bodies (*Massen*) which are thrusting and pressing against each other, they are in *contact*; and it is in this contact now that the ideality of matter begins; and the interest lies in seeing how this inwardness of matter emerges into existence, just as the attainment of existence by the Notion is always the interesting thing. Thus, the two masses come into contact, that is to say, are for each other; this means that there are two material points or atoms, coinciding in a single point or in an identity: their being-for-self is *not* a being-for-self. No matter how hard and brittle the matter is imagined to be, one can imagine that there is still some space between them; but as soon as they touch each other they exist as *one* body, however small this point is conceived to be. This [synthesis] is the higher, materially existing continuity, a continuity which is not external and merely spatial, but real. Similarly, the point of time is a unity of past and future: the two points are in one, and at the same time they are also not in one. Motion is precisely this: to be in one place, and at the same time to be in another place, and yet not to be in another place but only in this place³¹.

The higher synthesis is one which does grasp the “existing continuity”. In this synthesizing, time plays a crucial role.

The continuity is not “merely spatial, but real”; time makes the moment of identity into a unity of moments, a synthesized continuity³².

This synthesizing makes use of time’s negation of negation, i.e., of the fact that time is not just determination against otherness but also the overcoming of that contradiction (determinateness against an other) *by means of* the realization that each side (determinateness, otherness) is determined *both* by what it is *and* what it is *not*. It is

³¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 265, Z., p. 50. It is interesting to note that according to Hegel “motion is *existent* contradiction”, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Engl. transl. by Arnold V. Miller, Atlantic Highlands, Humanities Press International, 1990, p. 440.

³² This is consistent with how Hegel introduces time into space at the start of the *Philosophy of Nature*: a point is spatial (there are infinite points in space); but the negation of a point is time. The negation of the time frame, in turn, is the return of space (a given, spatialized amount of time), what I call the “dovetailing” of space and time. See Jennifer Ann Bates, *Hegel’s Theory of Imagination*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2004, p. 41.

the holding together, the recollecting, of contradictory moments as constitutive of the whole³³.

Thus the synthesis *builds one out of contradiction*. Two are made into one³⁴. The point of contact which gives rise to matter is a synthesis in which two realities give rise to one ideality about them. In Part Four, we will see how love between two people is such an ideality.

So far, we have looked at a passage that has shown how the ideal "emerges" out of real contact. Now, let us look at the transition of ideality *into* reality; specifically, let us look at it in terms of light's en-matterings in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*.

The en-mattering of light is the natural "show" of the reconciliation of ideality and reality. The beauty and the problem with this show is that, like all movement and change, it is existent contradiction. It is thus *tragic*.

Following this analysis, we'll look at how both contact and light appear in the show that is *Romeo and Juliet*.

³³ One of the best accounts of how time is experienced dialectically is in chapter 2 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There, Hegel provides a *phenomenological* account of pointing out the "now": "In this pointing-out, then, we see merely a movement which takes the following course: (1) I point out the 'Now', and it is asserted to be the truth. I point it out, however, as something that *has been*, or as something that has been superseded; I set aside the first truth. (2) I now assert as the second truth that it *has been*, that it is superseded. (3) But what has been, *is not*; I set aside the second truth, its *having been*, its supersession, and thereby negate the negation of the 'Now', and thus return to the first assertion, that the 'Now' *is*. The 'Now', and pointing out the 'Now', are thus so constituted that neither the one nor the other is something immediate and simple, but a movement which contains various moments. [Hegel goes on in par. 109:] It is clear that the dialectic of sense-certainty is nothing else by the simple history of its movement or of its experience", Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, par. 107, pp. 63-64 and par. 109, p. 64. This phenomenological account is of course of consciousness and its content, not of the natural mechanics of space and time, which is supposed to be separate from consciousness' experience of it. However, in my reading of Hegel, we do the work of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in order to come to the conclusion that thought and being are not separable. Thus in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, even the simple mechanics of the generation of matter are also thoughts; the moments of time, therefore, constitute not just mechanical complexity, but always also their cognitive equivalent. If this were not the case, we would not know time's moments to be the matter at hand. This unity of thought and being is, as I read Hegel, what Hegel means when he writes that ideality and reality are in general the same thing.

³⁴ Hegel prefers to call this activity reason rather than productive imagination. I have argued that, according to Hegel's own lectures on psychology, the function of the imagination (*die Einbildungskraft*) is precisely what makes reason do this kind of good synthesis. See Bates, *Hegel's Theory of Imagination*.

b. Light's en-mattering³⁵ and matter's enlightenment: the natural completion of ideality in reality

One of the ways in which Hegel traces the transition of ideality into reality in the *Philosophy of Nature* is the way that the abstract ideality of light gets complicated in relation to matter, transformed in chemical combustion, and regenerated as self-kindling life.

Light, according to Hegel, is a primordial identity³⁶. As with all identity, it is abstract until it is made more real through difference. Light's first embodiment is that it is "the self of matter"³⁷. Then, in the "physics of the universal individuality", this embodiment of light is further implicated in otherness: as Hegel explains: "This existent, universal *self* of matter is *Light* – as an individuality it is a *star*; as a star which is a moment of a totality, it is the *sun*"³⁸. As the sun, light is a moment of a *totality*, because it is a part of the solar *system*: it is thus a moment of a continuous, self-sustaining, infinitely repeating process.

The more complexly light is en-mattered, the more there is – both in the sense of more reality, and more to be explained – about our solar system, its objects, and in particular, our earth. So when light hits the earth and matter is transformed by it, and later, when things grow because of it, light is part of an economy of matter and of life, it is that which consumes and is consumed.

In plant-life, light is the vitality within the individual plant, and then in the animal realm (which Hegel calls the "Fire Kingdom") it is the genus kindled by individuals.

In the animal, through sensation, light is also inwardized, a kind of self-perpetuating and self-sustaining internal system of recollection which, in humans, is further complexly developed as the light of reason³⁹.

³⁵ This is my term, not Hegel's, but it is legitimized by passages such as: "The plant now reveals itself here as the Notion which has materialized the light-principle and has converted the watery nature into a fiery one. The plant is itself the movement of the fiery nature within itself", Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 349, Z., p. 351.

³⁶ "Light, as the universal physical identity", Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 277, p. 94; "Light is the active identity which posits everything as identical", par. 278, Z., p. 98.

³⁷ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 275, p. 87.

³⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 275, p. 87.

³⁹ For Hegel, reason is en-mattered, embodied, dialectically determined through otherness and difference, a concrete system of knowing in and through the world.

Here is a telling passage about how plants relate to light differently from animals:

The self does not become for the plant, but the plant becomes a self to itself only in light; its lighting-up, its becoming light [...] does not mean that the plant itself becomes light, but that it is only in light [...] that it is produced. Consequently the selflike character of light as an objective presence [...] does not develop into vision: the sense of sight remains merely light, colour, in the plant, not the light which has been reborn in the midnight of sleep, in the darkness of the pure ego – not this spiritualized light as existent negativity⁴⁰.

In order to talk more in depth about the transition from physics to organic life, let me briefly return to Hegel's physics.

The progressive embodiment of light in the physics is a movement from light (universal) to Fire (particular) to chemical combustion (the total, "infinite form"). Thus from the solar system and its universal sunlight, light is differentiated into the four Elements of the planet, one of which is Fire. (The others are Air, Water and Earth.)

[Fire] is materialized time or selfhood (light identical with heat), the absolutely restless and consuming Element; just as this Element destroys a body when attacking it from without, so too, conversely, does the self-consumption of body, e.g. in friction, burst into flame. In consuming an other it also consumes itself and thus passes over into neutrality⁴¹.

In this second, elemental moment of particularized light, the elements become a *process* – the planet's meteorological system. And then the elements in process combine to give rise to complex, particular bodies. Hegel explains: "The selfhood of light which was previously opposed to heavy matter [the dark], is now the selfhood of matter itself; this *infinite ideality* is now the nature of matter itself [...]. The earth separates itself into individualities possessing the entire form in themselves"⁴². Thus there arises, third, the physics of the total individuality.

⁴⁰ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 347, Z., p. 337.

⁴¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 283, p. 110.

⁴² Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 289, Z., p. 124, my italics.

The final moment of this total individuality of particulars is chemistry – that process in which individual matters synthesize or are destroyed upon contact.

In chemistry, chemical combustion – the “Process of Fire” – deserves close attention. For it is the transition between the inorganic and the organic.

c. From the prose to the poetry of nature: combustion in chemistry, self-kindling life (“Fire Kingdom”) and the beginnings of enlightened matter

The “Process of Fire” in chemistry is combustion during combination. It is “*Fire*, whereby what is in itself combustible (like sulphur) [...] is *kindled into flame*: whereby also [...] those bodies in which difference is still indifferent and inert [...] are energized into the *chemical opposition*”⁴³.

Chemical combustion is tragic. To explain this, let me draw out six things that Hegel says about it and then address tragedy directly.

First, chemical contact is dialectical: there is an urge of one side for the other. The two come together and in that contact, burn. According to Hegel, this burning happens in part because the *definition of combustible* is that it is already “inwardly a sheer opposition and so self-contradictory, it stands in need of its other, and only *is* in real connection with its other”⁴⁴; “[t]he individualized body, therefore, is the urge to overcome its one-sidedness and to posit the totality which, in its Notion, it already is”⁴⁵.

Second, combustion happens only in relation to the other elements: “The substances in conflict with each other in the process of fire come together only externally [...]. They are mediated with each other by Elements, i.e. *air* and *water*”⁴⁶; “Acids get hot, catch fire, when water is poured on them”⁴⁷.

Third, the “intrinsically combustible substance”, prior to combustion, is identified by Hegel as *sleeping Time*: it “is negativity in itself, Time which is inwardly realized but still *sleeps* [...] the quiescent ex-

⁴³ “of *acid* and (caustic) *alkali*”, Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 331, pp. 256-57.

⁴⁴ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 331, Z., p. 257.

⁴⁵ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 332, Z., p. 259.

⁴⁶ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 332, Z., p. 259.

⁴⁷ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 332, Z., p. 259.

istence of this sleeping Time [...] this negativity is its quality, not a mere form of its being, but its very being as this form – *sulfur* as the earthy basis [...]. (β) the *acids*"⁴⁸.

When that sleeping time of combustible nature actually burns, we have fire, which Hegel says "can be called *active Time*"⁴⁹.

Thus in chemical combustion, in this dialectical relation of elements, contact is a burning time, visible, "awake". In *this* contact, when two are made one, the whole burns, indeed the whole burns up.

Fourth, although chemical combustion expresses the dialectical process of all the systems heretofore, the process remains temporally finite (prosaic). This inorganic fire falls short of life's perpetual kindling.

Fifth, by contrast, "*the organism [is] the infinite process which spontaneously kindles and sustains itself*"⁵⁰. *The organism* is the "poetry" of nature⁵¹. It is *restless* time: "The sap circulates throughout the entire plant. This quivering of vitality within itself belongs to the plant because it is alive – *restless Time*"⁵².

Thus in life, the abstract Notion – the ideality of light – is en-mattered, indeed embodied reality. As *genus* it is a self-kindling fire.

Thus, sixth, Hegel calls this living Fire of Life "*objective Time*":

The chemical process is the highest to which the inorganic Nature can reach; in it she destroys herself and demonstrates her truth to be the infinite form alone. The chemical process is thus, through the dissolution of shape, the transition into the higher sphere of the organism where the infinite form makes itself, as infinite form, real; i.e. the infinite form is the Notion which here attains to its reality. [...] Here, therefore, Nature has risen to the existence (*Dasein*) of the Notion; the Notion is no longer merely immanent, is no longer submerged in Nature's mutual externality of being. It is a free Fire (α) as purged of matter, and (β) as materialized in existence (*Dasein*). The moments of what exists are

⁴⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 334, Z., p. 267.

⁴⁹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 334, Z., p. 267.

⁵⁰ The "unity which is the activity of negating this its one-sided form of reference-to-self, of *sundering* and particularizing itself into the moments of the Notion and equally of bringing them back into that unity, is *the organism* – the infinite process which spontaneously kindles and sustains itself", Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 336, p. 270.

⁵¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 329, Z., p. 242.

⁵² Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 346a, Z., p. 329. Also "in the subjectively living being which is its own time", par. 344, Z., p. 307.

themselves raised to this ideality, have only this being of ideality, and do not fall back into the restricted forms of existence: we thus have objective Time, an imperishable Fire, the Fire of Life; Heraclitus, too, declared the soul to be Fire, and the dry souls to be the best⁵³.

We have thus moved from sleeping time to waking time to a kind of eternity. It is through fire, the middle moment, that the abstract light of the Notion becomes existence as *show*. It is fire that allows for what Hegel calls “the *transition* from inorganic to organic Nature, from the prose to the poetry of nature”⁵⁴.

Now we can see how in *chemical combustion*, the show is tragic: “the process of fire is [...] an instant of spontaneous life, whose activity, however, hastens to its death”⁵⁵. Chemical fire is “the infinite form”, a kind of soul, but not one that keeps itself going. “For chemical processes do not hang together, otherwise we should have Life, the circular return of a process”⁵⁶.

By contrast, in *life*, the show is *tragi-comic*: life preserves itself through the destruction of its individuals: “The life-process is also a fire-process for it consists in the consumption of particularized existences; but it perpetually reproduces its material”⁵⁷.

In this organic, tragi-comic “poetry” of nature – life – the whole is all the previous processes of all spheres:

The free, independent members of the universal process, sun, comet, and moon, are now, in their truth, the Elements: Air as atmosphere, Water as the sea, but Fire as a terrestrial Element contained in the fructified, dissolved earth and separated off as the fructifying sun. The life of the earth is the process of atmosphere and sea in which it generates

⁵³ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 336, Z., pp. 271-72, my italics.

⁵⁴ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 336, Z., p. 270.

⁵⁵ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 336, Z., pp. 271-72.

⁵⁶ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 331, Z., p. 257.

⁵⁷ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 283, Z., pp. 110-11. The highest form of life – animal life (which includes human life) – is the “Fire-Kingdom”. It rekindles itself in that the genus continues even though the individuals die: “Fire releases itself [...] into members, there is a perpetual passage into a product; and this is perpetually brought back to the unity of subjectivity, for the self-subsistence [of the members] is immediately consumed. Animal life is therefore the Notion which displays itself in space and time. Each member has within itself the entire soul [...] is not self-subsistent, but exists only as bound up with the Whole”, Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 337, Z., p. 277.

these Elements, each of which is an independent life for itself while all of them constitute only this process⁵⁸.

Life is a shining of greater worth than the starry heavens. In other words, Hegel would agree with the astronomer from Cambridge University I once heard, who said that what we see in outer space – giant nebulae and exploding stars – is far more easily explained than the amazing complexity of the colors of a butterfly's wing. Hegel favors slime over stars: "In fact I do rate what is concrete higher than what is abstract, and an animality that develops into no more than slime, higher than the starry host"⁵⁹. The sea, teeming with life, is for Hegel "an infinite shining"⁶⁰.

The reason life is an infinite shining greater than the starry heavens, is that in life the universal light becomes a stabilized reflectedness-into-self of the whole external universe:

in general, *the existence of organic being is the act of the whole earth, in which it individualizes and contracts itself, the reflection-into-self of the universal.* But equally it becomes a stabilized reflectedness-into-self; and the higher plants and animals are this established reflectedness-into-self⁶¹.

Part Four: Making two into one: The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet

Fire [...] is therefore an existent ideality, the *existent* nature of air, the becoming-manifest of the reduction-to-show of what is other⁶².

⁵⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 341, Z., p. 294. The above account of the en-mattering of light in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* is incomplete. I have given the main points in order to indicate generally how light is brought in and through the content of increasingly complex systems.

⁵⁹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 341, Z., p. 297.

⁶⁰ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 341, Z., p. 297.

⁶¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 343, Z., p. 302, my italics. Elsewhere I argue the following: a plant seed or "germ" is the "idea matrix" (Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 348, Z., p. 347) but that idea, in organic life, is, via *cognition*, a reflection of the entire idea matrix of the universe. In free human speculative thinking, the Notion and reality are one: that Idea is the *complete* unity of ideality and reality. It is more than merely objective time: it is eternity, unless we burn up. See Bates, "Hegel and the Concept of Extinction".

⁶² Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 284, Z., p. 113.

Theater, like fire, is a “reduction-to-show of what is other”. The play, too, is about this show.

Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* shows the en-mattering of light up to and including the moment of combustion. It moves from the abstract light of mere seeing-dreaming (Romeo about Rosaline) to the light of the sun (Juliet) to the fire of passion and conflict (marriage/duels), to the combustion of tragedy and the stupid neutrality of its last moments of resolution after the deaths.

The tragedy is a destructive chemical fire. The “star-crossed” lovers’ union is not a consummation of life’s process: Romeo and Juliet die on the threshold of that poetry of nature. The play is about light and fire; about our universal, temporal, natural condition and how we see its show.

a. The en-mattering of light

To begin, we watch Romeo pining selfishly over the unattainable Rosaline. His ego is like the sun’s light, which, in Hegel’s words, “lacks the infinitude of the return into self”. This “light is not self-consciousness; it is only the manifestation of itself, not for itself, but for another”⁶³. Romeo’s light falls on primordial contradictions: “Why then [...] O loving hate, / O anything, of nothing first created! / O heavy lightness” (I.i.179-81).

The play’s early scenes are all about looking and revolve around a masked ball in which looking and not being seen is the name of the game. Benvolio challenges Romeo to “examine other beauties” at the party by “giving liberty unto thine eyes” (I.i.230-31); Juliet says to her mother that, at the party, she will look at Paris, “I’ll look to like, if looking liking move” (I.iii.97). (Paris’ love for Juliet looks like a case of this abstract looking and loving, but I think rather that his ideal is more en-mattered: his love is like phosphorous substance which glows on its own. Hegel writes that phosphorous “does not receive difference from outside by combining with an actively different body, but [...] develops the negativity immanent in itself as its own self”; Paris is thus a “shining without burning”⁶⁴.) Romeo follows his friends to the party, saying “I’ll be a candleholder and look

⁶³ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 275, Z., p. 88.

⁶⁴ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 331, Z., p. 258.

on" (I.iv.38). On the way, Mercutio tells of how "Queen Mab" makes men see things in their dreams (I.iv.53).

Mercutio's Queen Mab speech ends after Romeo says that he speaks of "nothing" (I.iv.96). Mercutio agrees that these dreams are just "air". "True, I talk of dreams; / Which are the children of an idle brain, / Begot of nothing but vain fantasy; / Which is as thin of substance as the air" (I.iv.96-99).

But fire is immanent in these airy nothings. According to Hegel, "air [is] the invisible destroyer" because it gradually consumes everything (in it, water dries and metals rust⁶⁵); "The air does, indeed, seem to be neutral, but it is the stealthily destructive activity"⁶⁶. When air is ignited, the immanent consuming within it is made a visible flame⁶⁷.

If Romeo's "love" of Rosaline and Mercutio's imaginings are "air", further *realizations* of these idealities of love and of imagination are fiery contacts.

The Friar is right to fear that what's in the air in Verona will turn into fire. The problem, however, is not the en-mattering of light as fire. Both the Friar and Hegel see this as the natural course of things. Indeed, for Hegel, the "inability to pass to concrete existence, far from being worthy of admiration, is rather a defect"⁶⁸. As we have seen, for Hegel "[i]t is [...] absurd to regard the stars as superior, e.g., to plants. The Sun is not yet anything concrete"⁶⁹. True, Romeo says as he's leaving Juliet's balcony, "[a] thousand times the worse, to want thy light!" (II.ii.155). But Romeo would never be satisfied to just watch Juliet, the sun, rising in the East. He wants to consummate his love. He wants to "see" (with the) light differently⁷⁰.

⁶⁵ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 321, p. 217. Air is "a universal ideality of everything that is other to it, the universal in relation to other, by which everything particular is destroyed", Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 284, Z., p. 113.

⁶⁶ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 330, Z., p. 255.

⁶⁷ Hegel believes that air can be ignited, e.g., as lightning (Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 288, Z., p. 121).

⁶⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 275, Z., p. 90, my italics.

⁶⁹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 275, Z., p. 90.

⁷⁰ The sun is not a privileged source of light for Hegel: the more en-mattered light becomes, the more we realize that all things in the solar system are interrelated and inter-causal. He writes that this is as true of the Ego's relations to society as it is of the sun's relation to the planets: "the whole solar system exists together, since the sun is as much produced by the other bodies as *they* are produced by it. Similarly, the Ego is not yet Spirit, but finds its truth in the latter in the same way that light does in the

The problem is not the en-mattering of light, it is, rather, the destructive nature of fire. “[F]ire is this immanently negative, destructive being-for-self, the restless, really different Element whose outcome is the positing of difference”⁷¹. The problem, as the Friar says, lies “[i]n man as well as herbs – grace and rude will; / And where the worser is predominant, / Full soon the canker death eats up that plant” (II.iii.28-30). The Friar fears that the passions will ignite rude will rather than grace.

The Friar’s solution is to bring fire under the sacrament of the church, so that the heat of passion is justified when two are made one flesh. But in the market square of Verona, the heat of day ignites tensions in the air: Mercutio and Tybalt enter into a deadly duel.

In each case, ideality and reality come together. The Friar thinks he can control the contradictory forces. But in the end, Verona’s youth burns up. And that is the show. To grasp why, let us look at how opposites evolve in the play.

*b. Duals and duels*⁷². *The heat of touch: joining hands and swords*

There are many dualities in the play. The primary is that of light and darkness. “It is the East and Juliet is the Sun” (II.ii.3), and she makes

concrete planet. I, alone by myself, to esteem this as the highest, is the negative vanity which is not Spirit. The Ego is certainly an absolute moment of Spirit, but not in so far as it isolates itself”, Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 280, Z., p. 104. Paul Kottman argues (“Defying the Stars”) that the lovers are seeking to achieve their freedom over against the social order of the “ancient family” as Hegel describes it. And one can see here that their freedom in Hegel would be subsumed in the greater whole. But one must not stop with that one-sided view: the Ego (sun) and Spirit (planetary system) are causes of each other. Without freedom there would be no social spirit, but without society, there would be no Ego and thus no freedom. Freedom by itself is necessarily tragic because, like fire, it consumes instead of communes. (See Hegel’s account of Freedom in the section entitled “Free Mind” in the *Philosophy of Mind*.) The higher order is life’s constant kindling, and beyond that, analogously, our communal interpretations, our enlightening shows.

⁷¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 329, Z., p. 244.

⁷² See Paul Kottman’s discussion of duels in “Defying the Stars”, pp. 7-8; he notes that he is saving “the full demonstration of this claim, that Shakespearean drama shows ‘duels’ to be of secondary significance in the drama of human freedom”, for a forthcoming essay, “Duel”, in *Early Modern Theatricality*, ed. Henry S. Turner, Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

the moon envious. Phoebus contends with nighttime, the stars with darkness; the morning lark with the nightingale. As Romeo leaves Juliet in the morning, he says "More light and light – more dark and dark our woes" (III.v.36).

One of the best examples of this light-dark opposition is picked up by Hegel in his discussion of similes:

in so far as passion, despite its unrest, concentrates itself on one object, it may toss to and fro in a variety of images and comparisons which are only conceits about one and the same object, and it does this in order to find in the surrounding external world a counterpart to its own inner being. Of this kind is, e.g., Juliet's monologue in *Romeo and Juliet* when she turns to the night and cries out [Act III, scene ii]:

Come night! Come Romeo! come, thou day in night!
 For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
 Whiter than new snow upon a raven's back. –
 Come, gentle night; come, loving, black-brow'd night,
 Give me my Romeo: and, when he shall die,
 Take him and cut him out in little stars,
 And he will make the face of heaven so fine,
 That all the world will be in love with night,
 And pay no worship to the garish sun⁷³.

The other three elements listed in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* are also at work in the play's chemistry. Out of their oppositions combustions arise. We have already discussed how the hot town air is ignited by the contact of Mercutio and Tybalt. Water plays a role in the chemistry of Juliet's gradual demise: after Tybalt is slain and Romeo banished, she is in tears. Her father notices these ebbing and flowing in the "sea" of her eyes; he calls her a water pipe ("A conduit") and refers to her heaving body as a bark upon a sea of tears (III.v.130, 133 and 132).

The earth too plays a role as fundamental origin of contradiction: as the Friar says: "The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb. / What is her burying grave, that is her womb" (II.iii.9-10).

But it is fire – its burning and lightening – which is the predominant element in the play. It is connected with time and consum-

⁷³ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 415.

mations which destroy instantly. Thus the Friar warns Romeo that Romeo's "violent delights" may be "like fire and powder, / Which, as they kiss, consume" (II.vi.9-11); and Romeo later requests a poison that will act "As violently as hasty powder fired / Doth hurry from the fatal cannon's womb" (V.i.64-65)⁷⁴.

These rude fires are themselves contrasted with idealities more gracefully joined with reality. For example, the first point of contact between Romeo and Juliet – the touching of Romeo's and Juliet's hands – creates a loving ideality:

ROMEO

If I profane with my unworhiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

JULIET

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

ROMEO

Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

JULIET

Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

ROMEO

O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do!
They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET

Saints do not move, though grant for prayer's sake.

ROMEO

Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.
Thus from my lips, by thine my sin is purged. [*Kisses her.*] (I.v.95-109)

(Recall too, Romeo's earlier wish: "O, that I were a glove upon that hand, / That I might touch that cheek!", II.ii.24-25. And the later case of banished Romeo, who wails that carrion flies "may seize / On the white wonder of dear Juliet's hand [...] / But Romeo may not", III.iii.35-40.)

⁷⁴ See too: "Like powder in a skillless soldier's flask, / Is set afire by thine own ignorance, / And thou dismemb'ed with thine own defense" (III.iii.132-34).

In the above citation, the image of the pilgrim's praying hands is mingled with the palm to palm of the lovers' hands and the kissing of lips. Matters are beautifully confused. But this confusion announces the problem of determining, as it were, the *matter* at hand, the ideality of reality; the problem of determining what kind of synthesis this is going to be. Contact and what it means is at the heart of this play's show.

Juliet worries that their loving contact is too much like fire, "too rash [...] / Too like the lightening, which doth cease to be / Ere one can say it lightens" (II.ii.118-20).

To secure that their love is not devouring fire, Romeo implores the Friar to join their hands in marriage: "come what sorrow can, / It cannot countervail the exchange of joy / That one short minute gives me in her sight. / *Do thou but close our hands with holy words,* / Then love-devouring death do what he dare – / It is enough I may but call her mine" (II.vi.3-8⁷⁵).

Despite the fact that the Friar fears that their violent delight might "have [a] violent end" (II.vi.9), he sees in their marriage the remedy "to turn [...] household's rancour to pure love" (II.iii.88). So he agrees: "you shall not stay alone / Till Holy Church incorporate two in one" (II.vi.36-37⁷⁶). For the Friar, the religious ideality of contact will secure the contact against the fire and time of rude will.

But fire is ignited elsewhere: Mercutio says he would readily brawl in the sweltering heat, and, in unknowing mockery of "two in one", says that, "and there were two such, we should have none shortly, for one would kill the other" (III.i.16-17).

The ensuing duel between Mercutio and Tybalt becomes a mortal contact which initiates the tragic process. It appears as rude will over against Romeo's and Juliet's graceful contact. But the religious import is not the only one: there are natural measures at work in these events.

Mercutio and Tybalt cause the shift in the play. The element *mercury* does not combust, but it is volatile and thus, like the temperature on Mercury, quick to change. It is the *air* that gets ignited.

⁷⁵ My italics.

⁷⁶ Even after Romeo is banished, the Friar places his hopes in "blazing" (publicly announcing) the marriage: he advises Romeo to go "to Mantua, / Where thou shalt live till we can find a time / To blaze your marriage, reconcile your friends, / Beg pardon of the Prince, and call thee back" (III.iii.148-51).

Fiery conflict has been implicit from the start of the play; it has been ‘in the air’⁷⁷. Now, the real air in the market place is heated. Mercutio’s encounter with Tybalt ignites it.

The situation is further inflamed when Romeo “twixt them rushes” (III.i.169): Mercutio slain, Romeo takes up the fight with Tybalt and, as Benvolio retells it to the Prince, “to’t they go like lightening” (III.i.174).

The chemical composition of the elements has led to this combustion. Prior to this duel, there were negations: the basic elements, the differences, contending opposites. But Mercutio’s and Tybalt’s deaths are negations of those negations: in the process of opposition, the individuals burn up. Fire is the “becoming manifest of the reduction to show of what is other”⁷⁸. In air, the change of elements is too slow to witness, but fire is the self-manifestation of that process: the burning is the show of consuming.

Thus with the duel, a new time begins, not the sleeping time of opposites kept apart – of night and day, of moon and sun – but of their process in things, the time of things and their burning, the show of their individuality, awake time. It is “Fire [...] the existent being-for-self, negativity as such”⁷⁹.

In this two-made-one, the unity of ideality and reality can be seen. And the seeing is possible because light is not just that of the sun, but also that of en-mattered reflection. Abstractly, the ideality of every “now” is a continuum between past, present and future: such abstraction is like air, or light. But fire is a visible “now”. As Hegel writes: “The first universality (air) is a dead affirmation; the veritable affirmation is fire. In fire, that which is not is posited as being, and vice versa; fire is accordingly *active (rege)* Time”⁸⁰.

The transition to this world of contradiction is spoken by Juliet: “I be not I, if there be such an ‘Ay’” (III.ii.49). Juliet is, as Hegel writes,

⁷⁷ Indeed it was briefly ignited at the start of the play: the Prince ends the brawl, the “fire of your pernicious rage” (I.i.87).

⁷⁸ “Fire is this same universality [as air] but as *manifest* and consequently in the form of being-for-self; it is therefore an existent ideality, the *existent* nature of air, the becoming-manifest of the reduction-to-show of what is other”, Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 284, Z., p. 113.

⁷⁹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 283, Z., p. 110.

⁸⁰ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 283, Z., pp. 110-11, my italics.

a rose, one that is "a torch lit by a spark"⁸¹. The show of her life is a blaze, and deadly. JULIET: "Then, window, let day in, and let life out" (III.v.41).

Fire is tragedy: the light of identity in its tragic show. Fire is time that consumes and dies out in that consuming: it is the time which both engenders and defies the continuity of life and of thought. It is that which, tragically, both inaugurates and cuts down, the germ of generation and destruction. Fire, like motion, is existent contradiction.

c. Neutrality as end: tragedy is chemical inorganicity

At the end of the play, after the self-destruction of the lovers, the parents stand around feeling stupid and vowing to make up. On the stage, we see neutralized left-overs, tepid nothings; the parents will make stone statues to honor Romeo and Juliet. The resolution of this tragic chemistry is inorganic.

The play has been a destructive confusion of matters. Would Friar Hegel, the organic philosopher-botanist, have had a plan that worked?⁸²

Hegel does not account for an evolutionary transition from chemistry to life. He simply gives an account of how life is a fuller, infinite actualization of the Notion, an actualization which chemistry expresses in a limited, finite way. Analogously, Romeo and Juliet's tragedy is inorganic. It expresses the Notion operating at that level. There is no evolution from its tragedy to comedy. The tragedy of Romeo and Juliet is simply a play about a natural catastrophe.

This is not so hard to think when we consider that it was, after all, the plague that prevented the Friar's messenger getting to Romeo (V.ii.10). Not all roses in the cross are *comic* reconciliations.

⁸¹ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 582.

⁸² To fully answer this question one has to open topics that I cannot cover here: Hegel's theory of tragedy (Bradley), whether the role of the negative in politics is, for Hegel, always going to lead to tragedy (Lukács), whether we ought to read Hegel's politics *through* his early theory of tragedy (de Boer), not to mention Hegel's own account of this particular tragedy in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*. See, respectively, Andrew Cecil Bradley, "Hegel's Theory of Tragedy", in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1965, pp. 69-95; Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations Between Dialectics and Economics*, Engl. transl. by Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1966; Karin de Boer, *On Hegel: The Sway of the Negative*, Renewing Philosophy Series, New York-Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

But is there no cure for such tragedy? Is our only choice that between an abstract ideality and a fire that consumes as it shows?

Part Five: Confusing matters

Confusion's cure lives not
In these confusions. (IV.v.65-66)

When the Friar says these words, he means that Juliet's grieving parents will not find the cure to what is going on by continuing to believe their eyes (for in reality, at this point, Juliet is not really dead). Their eyes see only contradictions. (CAPULET: "Our wedding cheer to a sad burial feast; / Our solemn hymns to sullen dirges change; / Our bridal flowers serve for a buried corse; / And all things change them to the contrary", IV.v.87-90.)

However, we know that the Friar's cures do not work either. We might well wonder whether all of us just tragically confuse matters even when we think we don't.

But there are lessons about the nature of reality here. The tragic one is that inside the moment of ideality's first arising, when one becomes two, inside the consummation of love, there is inevitable tragedy, for such consummation is the incarnation of (our) abstract being (light) into time and space. We realize that there is a natural germ of death – the prose of nature – inside the poetry of nature.

There is a comic lesson, too: this incarnation is also a light that becomes the show – the fire of life; and when that is reflected upon, as in theater, it is human enlightenment. We can enjoy the nature of human intelligence. For Hegel, this means using dialectical thinking, not just the understanding of opposites.

The comic lesson does not escape the tragic one, since through our enlightenment, through science and the arts, we don't overcome natural death and tragic chemistries. Concrete enlightenment can show us what is, in perhaps ever truer light, and can therefore help us plan. Nonetheless, the tragic moment in nature remains the *sine qua non* of our even having a sense of time, of our even having the ideality of a now, of a past, of a future. We can prevent some fires, and put some others out, but we cannot do without any fires. For fire is the collision of awake time. The rose in the cross is a torch lit by a spark.

In the end, Shakespeare and Hegel have reminded us – the living – about our tragi-comic existence; and they have reminded us *not* to understand things merely in terms of dualisms (metaphysics vs. reality, grace vs. crude will, religion vs. nature, light vs. fire, abstract philosophy vs. poetry). For when we merely *understand* the matter at hand, we see *only* contradictions; we think, for example, that tragedy is due only to the force of fate, or of the divine, or of some other force beyond our natural existence – even that force we call freedom. The truth of the matter is grasped speculatively – it is a *dialectical* (seeing of the) show.

There are other conclusions. I hope that *this* show of confusing matters has, in its own way, enlightened the matter at hand.