

‘The Bodie and the Letters Both’: Blending the Rules of Early Modern Religion

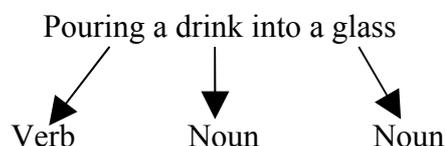
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In his groundbreaking work, *The Literary Mind* (1996), Turner proposes that ‘story’, traditionally conceived of as a literary phenomenon, is in fact a central function of the everyday mind. In addition to their salient role in conceptualising experience, stories can be perceived to be more or less plausible, particularly when considered as emanating from or structuring a specific world-view. Writing on the ideology of coherence in his essay on William Shakespeare’s *Othello*, Sinfield (1992) proposes that the way we conceive of experience, the manner by which we make it cohere, is through the construction of ‘plausible stories’. Sinfield (1992: 30) writes, ‘the action [in *Othello*] advances through a contest of stories, and *the conditions of plausibility* are therefore crucial – they determine which stories will be believed’. Explaining why these stories are so ideologically significant, Sinfield (1992: 32) writes: ‘Ideology produces, makes plausible, concepts and systems to explain who we are, who the others are, how the world works’. Plausible stories, then, are central to the internalisation and perpetuation of ideology; as Sinfield (1992: 31) argues, ‘it is very difficult not to be influenced by a story, even about yourself, when everyone else is insisting upon it’. This paper argues that Conceptual Integration Theory, the process of ‘blending’ what are essentially different ‘stories’ creates crucial conditions of plausibility. I aim to show how a blended analysis of the incremental stories within George Herbert’s sixteenth-century poem JESU, can be cognitively, if not always ideologically reconciled.

Turner (1996) argues that we construct and ‘project’ small spatial stories as a means of organising and conceptualising experience. This can be better expressed by way of example: consider the following simple ‘story’: ‘pouring a drink into a glass’. Referring to the ease with which the human mind processes this particular story Turner says:

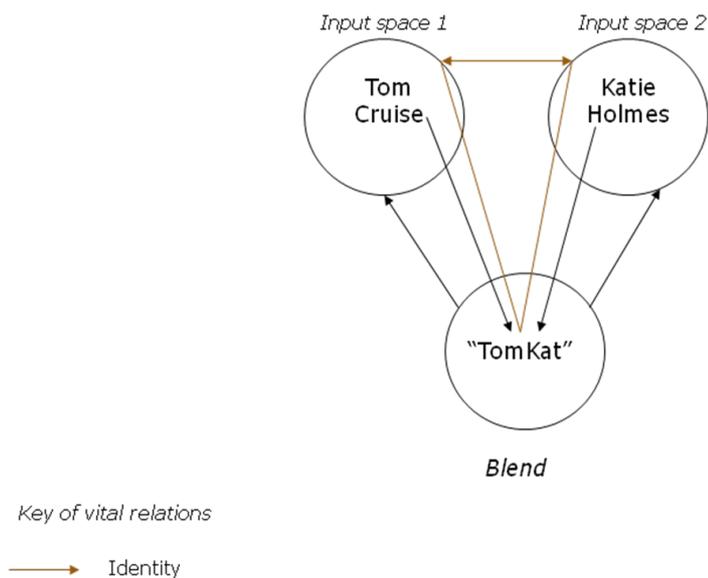
‘It is not possible for a human infant to fail to achieve the concept of a container, for example, or liquid, or pouring, or flowing, or a path, or movement along a path, or the product of these concepts: the small spatial story in which liquid is poured and flows along a path into a container (1996: 14).

Turner develops his basic principle by demonstrating how the ‘projection’ of story through ‘parable’ is fundamental in interpretations of ‘every level of our experience’. The individual stories in this example demonstrate our fundamental capacity to think parabolically; that is, to project what we know of one story onto another in order to understand concepts, experience, even language itself. Consider the following ‘story’:



This is an example of parabolic projection that goes back to Aristotle. In his work on categories he states: ‘a noun signifies this or that *by convention*. No sound is by nature a noun: it becomes one, becoming a symbol’ (1938: 117). The composition of stories ranges from the most basic, to the more complex, involving greater cognitive dexterity. Conceptual Integration Theory makes explicit the (generally unconscious) cognitive work we undertake in constructing, projecting, and making sense of all kinds of ‘stories’. Developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (1995; 1998; 2000; 2002) Conceptual Integration Theory, or ‘blending’, describes meaning ‘by specifying the nature of operations on cognitive constructs called *mental spaces*’, which, in Barbara Dancygier’s terms (2006: 5) are ‘temporary cognitive structures prompted by the use of linguistic forms.’

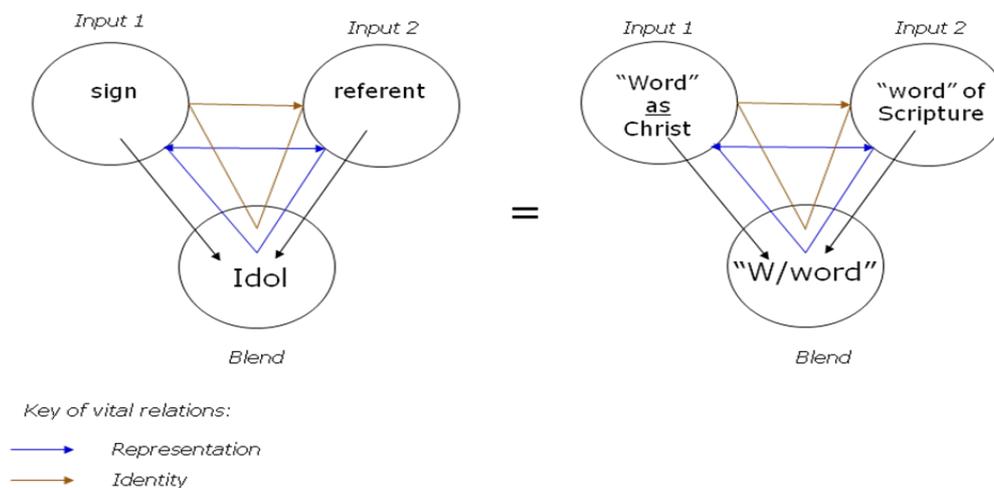
In a conceptual integration network, mental spaces act as input spaces from which we selectively project properties or elements into a blended space. Consider the following blended construction:



As the above example shows, both inputs contain individual elements, in this case, real people with a separate identity and separate signifier. However, following Cruise's mandate on Oprah Winfrey's sofa we now conceive of them as 'TomKat.' This is essentially a linguistic trigger, a blend of form and meaning that literally spells out their close relationship. The relation of identity that connects the elements across the input spaces is compressed within the blended space. TomKat is the blend's emergent structure. It now operates as an independent concept and crucially can project back to the input spaces so that when we encounter the conflated term 'TomKat' we immediately call to mind Tom Cruise. Or Katie Holmes. Formal blending has become a trend with new celebrity couples, where two previously unattached people are reconfigured as a singular entity. It also works with breeds of dog - I own a boxador.

I will now turn to the more sublime poet of sixteenth century England, George Herbert. I want to show how an application of blending theory in an early modern context can function to destabilise Reformation theology. I propose that the imaginatively creative blend that is Herbert's *Jesu*, generates at the same time as it seeks to dispel, its own set of ideological incongruities.

Published posthumously in 1633, Herbert's *The Temple* from which 'JESU' is derived emerged against a backdrop of religious change that was dominated by major theological debates over the means by which God could and should be represented. For Reformers, Christ's incarnation as *Logos* or the 'Word' meant that the 'word' of Scripture was imbued with a divine spirituality that contrasted sharply with the imagistic material objects or empty signs of Catholic veneration. Reformed theology decreed that the image was nothing but a crass *representation* of God, frequently espoused as a dilution of divinity. In terms of idolatry, this is made manifest in the construal of the image for that which it represents generating a host of (blasphemous) simulacra as a result. Idolatry, then, in cognitive terms, can be understood through a conceptual 'blend' of form and meaning (or sign and referent) in which the counterpart relations of 'representation' and 'identity' are compressed into 'uniqueness'. This can be represented to the left of the diagram below:



Crucially, as the right of the diagram shows, such cognitive compression also governs Reformers' own theology. This can be summarised through the blended formulation 'W/word' which, for explanatory purposes, distinguishes between the divine conception of Christ as the 'Word', or *Logos*, and the 'word' as a lexical sign or medium of representation. As Christ finds expression in Reformed doctrine through Scripture, the configuration 'W/word' also denotes the compression of representation and identity. For Reformers, this

compression yields an unwelcome ideological incongruity; yet it is a natural conceptual process that can be expressed through what Fauconnier terms the Access Principle (1997: 41), by which he states ‘an element in one mental space can be used to access a counterpart of that element in another mental space.’

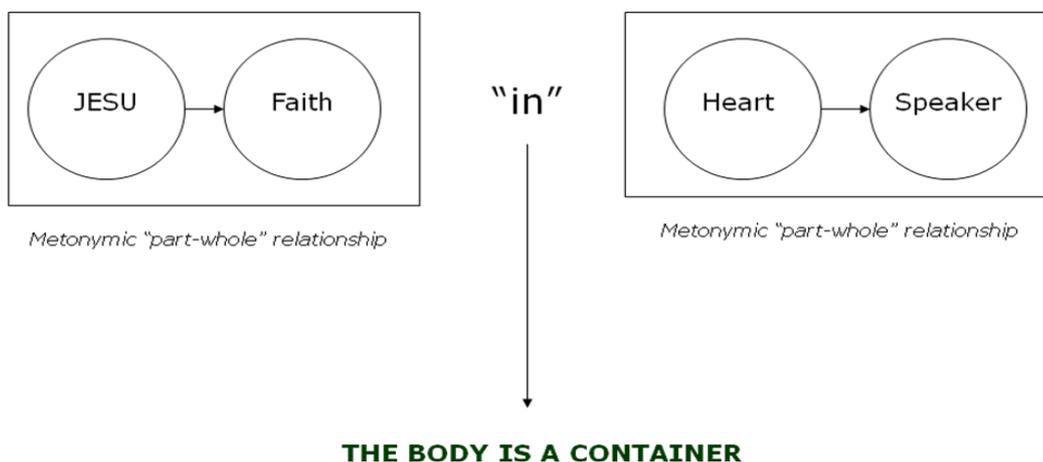
Hawkes (2001: 53) observes that ‘the critique of idolatry has generally been made on Aristotelian grounds’. Such an argument is predicated on the idea that the ‘proper’ telos of signs lies in their capacity to function as representations: no sign has value in itself, rather, signs operate as a means to an end. Conceiving of written signs as representing an inner discourse of the soul, Aristotelian logic (1938: 13) proposes a theory of ‘equivocation’ in which the ‘essence’ of a thing is differentiated from the ‘statement of that essence’, much in the same way we would differentiate between a person and their photographic representation. Calvin, a key Reformer, espouses a similar distinction in book IV of his Institutes between ‘matter’ and the ‘sign’ of matter, and cautions against ‘transferring to the one what belongs to the other’ (1960: 15). To compress or confuse the two was to imbue the sign with false ontological value, which was for Reformers, a reversal of natural teleology and thus idolatry. However, by focusing in poetic and exegetical discourse on the W/word as the only true manifestation of the divine as Herbert and Calvin do, Reformers also inverted natural teleology, the telos of signs. Collapsing the distinction between words and their referents in this way nullifies Reformed invectives against idolatry that depended on the conceptual polarity of sign and signified for their iconoclastic justification.

We see this semiotic tension at work in Herbert’s poem JESU

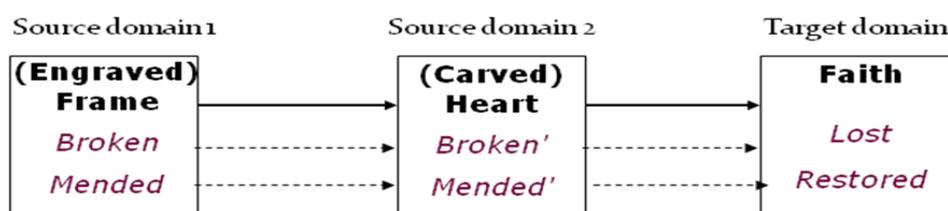
J E S U is in my heart, his sacred name
 I deeply carved there: but th’other week
 A great affliction broke the little frame,
 Ev’n all to pieces: which I went to seek:
 And first I found the corner, where was *J*,
 After, where *E S*, and next where *U* was graved.
 When I had got these parcels, instantly
 I sat me down to spell them, and perceived
 That to my broken heart he was *I ease you*,
 And to my whole is *J E S U*.

5

We can interpret the poem as a record of the speaker's temporary loss of faith that is both restored and strengthened after an epiphany. This can be summarised through the conceptual metaphor EVENTS ARE ACTIONS. In the poem, metaphors and metonyms interact in complex ways as is shown below:



JESU, as a proper noun metonymically represents the abstract state 'faith' in that the name stands for what it is conventionally associated with. This is also the case with the 'heart' which stands for the speaker. The *metaphoric* relationship between these two metonyms is generated by the preposition 'in'. This word invokes a skeletal image schema, that of a bounded space prompting the conceptual metaphor THE BODY IS A CONTAINER. That the speaker is 'in' a state of strong faith (Christ's name is deeply carved in his heart) is an instantiation of the conceptual generic metaphor STATES ARE LOCATIONS. The metaphoric mappings then for the opening lines of the poem are as follows:



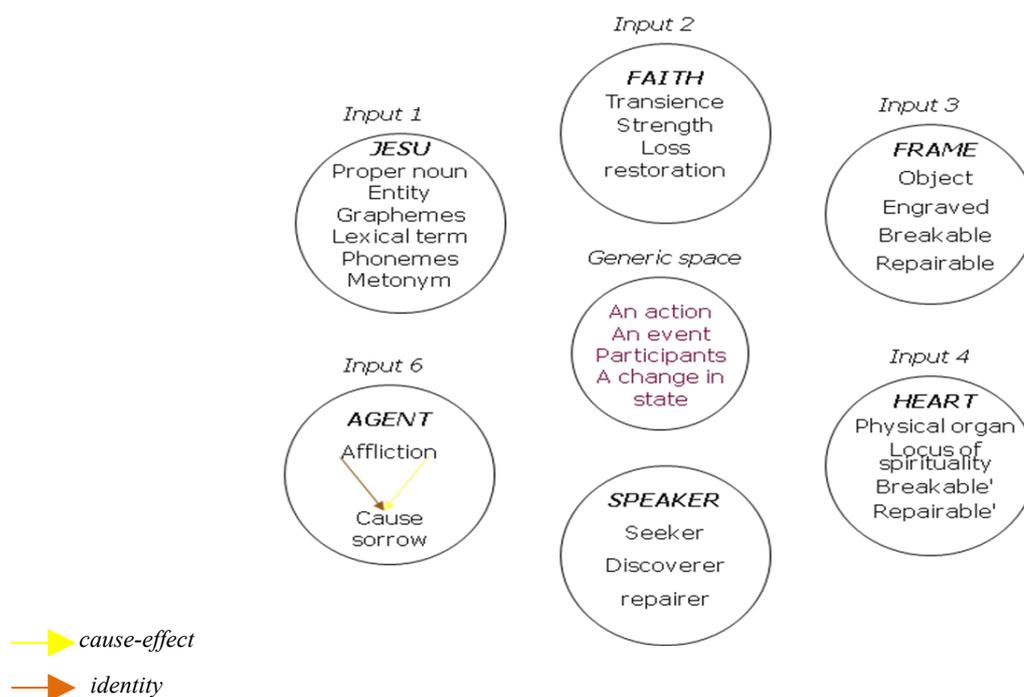
BODY PARTS ARE OBJECTS

The ‘loss’ property from the target domain ‘faith’ correlates to the slightly more accessible concept of a broken ‘heart’. The mapping is extended and given physical form as both ‘faith’ and the speaker’s ‘heart’ are reconceptualised in terms of a ‘frame’. These metaphors are elaborated throughout the poem: the speaker’s faith/(heart/frame) is broken by an abstract agent, ‘affliction’, the pieces of the frame map onto the broken heart, and the restored frame maps onto the restored heart/faith. The moment of epiphany comes upon seeing the restored frame, invoking another conceptual metaphor, KNOWING IS SEEING.

Yet there is more going on in this poem than can be fully explicated through the framework of conceptual metaphor theory; an effective interpretation of ‘JESU’ necessitates a more complex network of mappings in which information *and the relationships that connect the information* is projected *bi-directionally* not just from one, but many domains, accounting for the nuances and inferences embedded not only within each metaphorical instantiation, but in their integration throughout the poem, that is, their collective emergence as the ‘whole’ story.

Blending analysis:

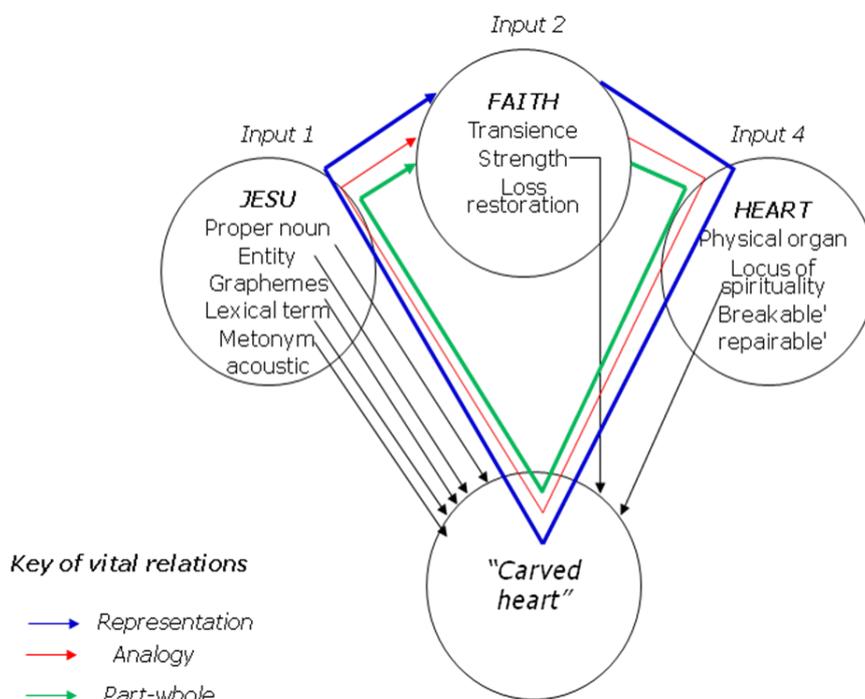
There are six input spaces that I will call the ‘JESU’ space, the ‘Faith’ space, the ‘Frame’ space, the ‘Heart’ space, the ‘Speaker’ space and the ‘Agent’ space. All of these inputs have internal structure that relates to their application in the poem, so for example the JESU space has ‘acoustic’, ‘lexical’, and metonymic’ properties in addition to the quality ‘entity’ as can be seen in the diagram below:



The ‘Agent’ space informs the JESU blend as a blend itself into which is projected a sorrowful event and a causative actor. As such, it functions as an input space having already compressed its internal structure, namely the relations of ‘identity’ and ‘cause-effect’. The generic space in the centre links the information contained in the input spaces by providing a coherent but skeletal structure that maps onto the poem’s structure; there is an event (the temporary loss of faith), there are participants incorporating both ‘actor’ and ‘affected’ (‘affliction’ and the speaker respectively); and a ‘change’ of state (the restoration of faith). Each of these inputs represents different and at times clashing ‘stories’ which collectively cohere in the blended space.

In the first two lines: ‘Jesu is in my heart, his sacred name I deeply carved there’, information is selected from the ‘JESU’ input, in the form of the proper noun and the entity property, accounting for the personification ‘his’. The graphemes property is also projected given that the speaker has ‘carved’ individual characters. As ‘JESU’ metonymically refers to the speaker’s faith, the ‘metonym’ property also projects to the blend. In addition, information is selected from input 4, the ‘Heart’ input, in the form of its figurative attributes

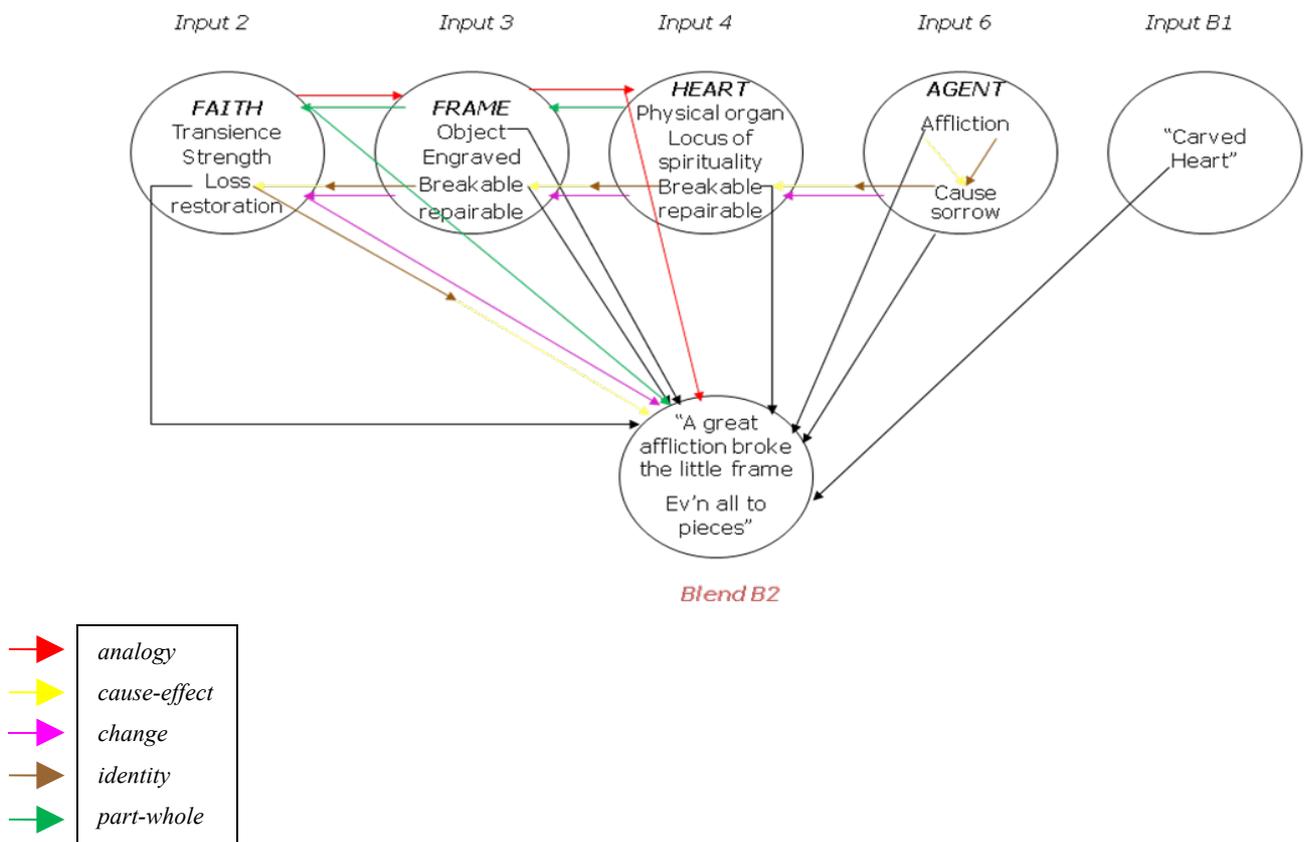
as the locus of spirituality. From the ‘Faith’ input, the ‘strength’ property is selected, as at this point we can infer from the speaker’s ‘deep’ ‘carving’ that his faith is strong. As the carving on the ‘Heart’ is of the ‘name’ of Christ the ‘lexical’ property from input 1 is added to the blend. The elements combine in the blended space, B1, to make plausible the anomalous concept of a ‘carved heart’.



‘Outer-space’ links (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 92-93) between inputs are compressed into ‘inner-space’ relations in the blend. In **B1**, the presence of the entity JESU, along with the metonymic figurative carving of his name on the speaker’s heart equally represent and are analogous with the concept ‘Faith’: so, cross-space connections between these three input spaces along the relations of representation, analogy and part-whole are compressed in the blended space.

The blended space, **B1**, now forms part of a hyper-blend as it operates as an input space to the next blend, maintaining the network established in the first few lines of the poem. This is called running the blend and allows the reader to make sense of the next lines, ‘but th’other week/ A great affliction broke the little frame,/ Ev’n all to pieces’. To make

plausible the breaking of a frame by a sorrowful event, information in B1 is combined with properties from the ‘heart’ input, specifically its ability to be figuratively broken. In order to conceive of such an abstract idea, we import an analogous event, the breaking of a frame, from the ‘Frame’ input space. Therefore, the property ‘a material object that can be broken’ is blended with the figurative ‘breaking’ of a life-sustaining biological organ. In order to develop the blended network, we need to take account of the change of state: what was wholly present before is now lost. The agent responsible for this change is the event ‘a great affliction’ itself a blend generated through the metaphor EVENTS ARE ACTIONS.

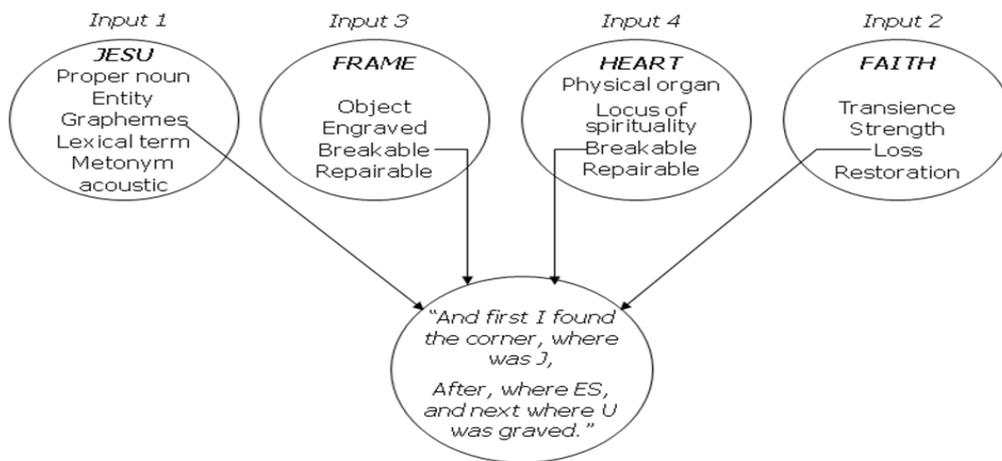


There are a number of cross-space connections established between the inputs, the most obvious being the analogous relationship between the faith, heart, and frame inputs, which can be evidenced by the red arrows. The agent ‘affliction’ is perceived to be the cause of the speaker’s loss of faith so the identity/cause-effect compression in input 6 is mapped across the analogous counterparts, inputs 4, 3 and 2. This fusion of relations is projected into the blended space. The agent ‘affliction’ institutes a ‘change’ in the subject (and the ‘part-whole’

analogues of ‘Heart’, ‘Faith’ and ‘Frame’). To summarise then, outer space relations of ‘identity’, ‘analogy’, ‘change’, ‘cause- effect’, and ‘part-whole’ are established and compressed into inner space relations in the blended space B2.

Lines 5-6 read: ‘And first I found the corner, where was *J*,
After, where *E S*, and next where *U* was graved’. 5

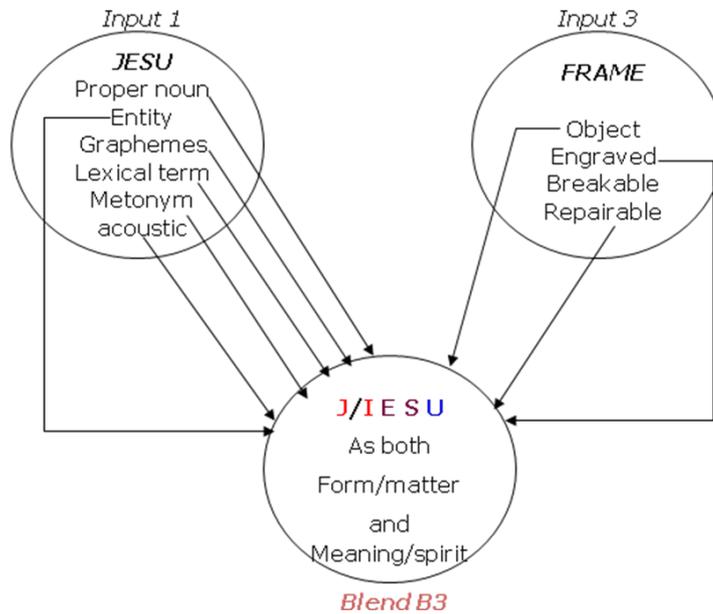
The fragmentation of the frame into four engraved pieces blend the graphemes <J>, <E>, <S>, and <U>, with the broken pieces of the frame, the speaker’s heart and the crisis of faith from inputs 1, 3, 4, and 2 respectively. This is represented below:



The proper noun ‘JESU’ is not projected into the blend at this stage so the individual letters create confusion as distinct graphemes, as incoherent parts of a whole. Like the speaker, the broken frame/heart is incomplete; linguistic disunification mirrors spiritual disunification in a blend of form and meaning.

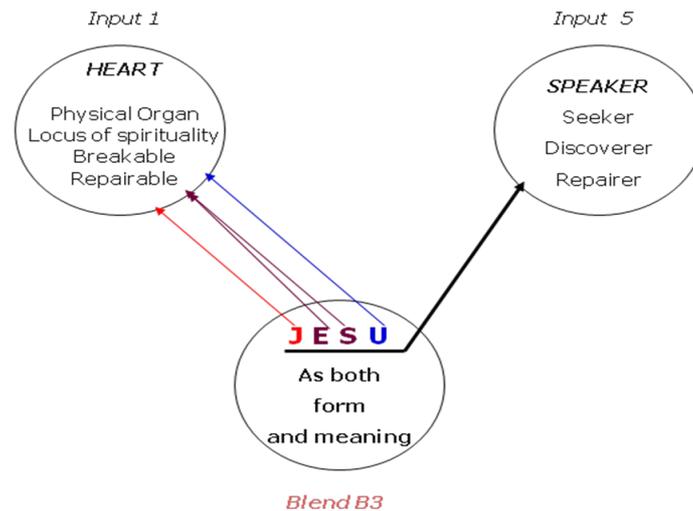
In the next lines, as the speaker ‘seeks’ out the pieces to make a coherent whole from the disparate linguistic parts he blends their physical, graphical and phonological properties; that is, the material engravings with their acoustic counterparts achieving a doubled message in the final lines of the poem. An added dimension of the formal blend is afforded by the opportunistic integration of an orthographic and grammatical ambiguity: the consonant <J> is ‘read’ as a vocalic <I>, a common feature of the early modern script. Putting the ‘parcels’ of the broken ‘Frame’ back together, therefore, prompts the speaker’s epiphany in which he

translates the re-formed lexical term, the proper noun, into a syntactic unit bearing the meaning or essence of the *entity* Christ so that, in the words of Elsky (1989: 149), meaning is ‘divinely ordained’ in both the word *and* its component parts:



These component parts, however, no longer function solely metonymically - they each have their own independent readable existence, each grapheme becoming a simulacrum of its lexical ‘parent’.

The blend is completed through the decompression of the relation of ‘identity’ (of *Jesu*) into ‘representation’ *and* ‘property’ enabling the conceptual integration of the metonymic signifier with the properties intrinsic to the referent denoted by that signifier. Put another way, through blending form and meaning, the linguistic units <J>, <E>, <S> and <U> compositely spell what the word in its unified form means, or metonymically stands for, generating a kind of linguistic transubstantiation:



This ‘transubstantiating’ Christ parallels the form of the poem itself: the speaker’s faith metaphorically transforms into the speaker’s ‘Heart’ which metamorphoses into the concrete image/object ‘Frame’. Of course the frame is now repaired which institutes changes in the speaker.

The implication of this in an early modern context is that attributing value to the constituent elements of the sign – in this case, the name ‘JESU’ – literally fragments divinity, engendering an iconoclastic theology. Elsky (1989: 149) observes that in JESU, Herbert has created ‘a textual space in which words could be simultaneously icons and significant sounds and thus be both acoustically and visually meaningful’. Perhaps more importantly, Herbert has created a textual space in which words and the characters of which they are composed can also be *conceptually* meaningful. This is revealed throughout the path of the blend and most explicitly, through the blend’s emergent structure which is that signs and their composite parts have an ontological reality that can supposit for each other. In other words, sign and referent, spirit and matter, are fused into uniqueness. To quote from another of Herbert’s poems, ‘Love-Joy’, they are the ‘bodie and the letters both’. Indeed, this is what I have attempted to show: the component parts of the lexical term divide into three units reflecting the ‘attributive’ qualities of Christ. The formal structure, what Turner and Fauconnier call the ‘named elements’ (2002: 356) – in this case the proper noun

‘JESU’ – not only parallels, but crucially, becomes part of the conceptual structure within the blended network. This suggests a view that runs counter to Fauconnier and Turner’s perception that ‘formal expression in language is a way of prompting hearer and reader to assemble and develop conceptual constructions ... there is no encoding of concepts into words or decoding of words into concepts’ (1995: 183; 2002: 360). In ‘JESU’ the form of the word can be construed as representing one concept holistically, as in the proper noun ‘Christ’, or other concepts when decompressed into individual letters, such as what ‘Christ’ effectively means. This emergent structure functions bi-directionally in that it projects back to the inputs creating the conditions of plausibility and allowing the final lines of the poem to cohere. The co-ordinated arrows project the relationship of these component parts to the speaker’s ‘part’, as in line 9 of the poem, ‘to my broken heart he was I ease you’. Completing the formal blend, the single black arrow from B3 to input 5 denotes the relationship of the ‘whole’ Christ to the speaker’s ‘whole’, in line 10: ‘and to my whole is JESU’. The ‘JESU’ of the emergent structure is now fully restored to its nominal form, the configuration adopted at the poem’s opening. Yet the various instantiations of the term, established throughout the poem’s blended network, have become part of the term’s structure, making this particular JESU significantly more complex and polysemous than that of the poem’s opening. Consequently, the Christ reconfigured at the close of the poem is a multiplicative representation of Himself, that ‘means’ both literally and figuratively. Such a revelation raises questions about the status of the W/word in the context of early modern England in which the poem is set. Given that Reformers believed that the proliferation of ‘spurious relics’ and ‘pious frauds’ entailed an ‘infinite sub-division’ of divinity, it could be argued that attributing value to the constituent elements of the lexical term ‘JESU’ subdivides the essence of Christ and equates Him conceptually with the fetishised objects of Catholic worship. Thus, by celebrating the spirituality of the ‘sacred name’ of Christ I would suggest that Herbert inadvertently portrays

a fetishistic consciousness by objectifying the sign. That this ‘sign’ is the ‘W/word’ transforms Herbert’s ‘JESU’, as both sign and referent, into an ‘idol’.

I have examined how conceptual coherence is achieved through constructing an integration network. Now, I’d like briefly to consider ideological coherence because I believe that through a consideration of the material effects of the blend’s emergent structure, Reformed ideology is radically undermined. As I suggested earlier, in Aristotelian terms, written and spoken signs function as secondary means of signification as they merely *represent* ‘inner discourse’ the language of the soul. Developing this Aristotelian philosophy, William of Ockham writes: ‘the ‘sign’ ...is not the natural sign of anything’ (1974: 51). In Herbert’s ‘JESU’, the internal discourse of the soul combines with the secondary significations, the so-called ‘subordinated’ acoustic properties of the letters <J>, <E>, <S> and <U>. Yet, Herbert does not promote subordination of form, nor does he conceive of any division between form and matter. The ‘form’, that which is alluded to by the linguistic units, inheres in each configuration in the emergent structure. The point of the poem is that there can be no separation and so it refutes the Calvinist position that ‘we may not transfer to the one what belongs to the other’. Through the form/meaning blend the emergent structure of Herbert’s ‘JESU’ effectively generates a doubled form of signification: form and meaning intersect so that the sign not only denotes but becomes the referent. In opposition to the Ockham logic that posits the external or spoken sign as ‘not the natural sign of anything’, Herbert’s external sign is the natural sign of everything: every material incarnation has its own intrinsic value: every ‘word’ is effectively its own idol. Like the ‘man-made’ carnal representations of Christ that Reformers sought to obliterate through a systematic process of iconoclasm, the word itself ‘figures’ as idolatrous: issuing forth as ‘substance’ embodying both form and matter, sign and signified, the word not only writes, but actually is its own ‘story’.

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