

Divine Justice Between God and Passionate Human Beings

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Abstract:

Justice is the thing that man looks for in his life when wrong deeds are done and waste one's rights. To achieve justice, we are in need of some power that can control itself and never let feelings or something else affect its judgment as usually humans do. Humans can not be the power to execute justice in its perfection because they allow their personal feelings and emotions to have some influence on the judgment they are to take or execute, and thus they will undergo the pressure of being humans with feelings and passion. So what is the power that can judge in the right way and then execute the judgment perfectly? God only can do it. God can never be affected by any feelings or passions in deciding justice and executing it because if He does, He will become like humans which is something impossible to take place ever. God's decisions and judgments are so far away from any influence of any kind.

However, God may use humans to be His weapon and device of executing His decisions. In this case, He chooses someone to be the weapon just to punish the wrong doer. This chosen person can be the wrong doer himself and thus he became the one who did the wrong thing and he is the one who will punish him as God decided that for him.

This study examines the relationship between divine and human anger. The study discusses plays that feature explicitly divine or explicitly human acts of wrath. It engages two complicated amalgamations: human anger mediated through divine wrath and divine wrath conveyed through human agents.

العدالة الإلهية بين الخالق وبني البشر العاطفيين

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المستخلص:

العدالة هي ما يبحث عنه الإنسان إذا ما وقع فعل سيئ أضرع الحق . ولتحقيق العدالة، فإننا بحاجة إلى قوة ما تستطيع التحكم بذاتها، ولا تسمح لانفعالاتها ومشاعرها الشخصية أن تؤثر في حكمها كما يفعل بنو البشر في الغالب. لا يمكن للبشر أن يصبحوا هم قوة تنفيذ العدالة في الصورة الاتم والأكمل، لأنهم يسمحون لمشاعرهم وعواطفهم أن يكون لها تأثير واضح على الحكم المراد اتخاذه أو تنفيذه، وبهذا يصبحون عرضة " للضغط المتولد من كونهم بشراً لهم مشاعر وأحاسيس . إذاً " ما هي القوة التي تحكم بشكل صحيح تماماً" وتتخذ الحكم على أتم وجهه؟ الخالق، هو الوحيد القادر على ذلك، فهو سبحانه لا يتأثر بأي مشاعر أو عواطف عند إحقاق العدالة وتنفيذها، لأنه إذا ما سمح لذلك أن يحدث فإنه سيصبح كخلقه من بني البشر، وهذا ما لا يمكن أن يحدث إطلاقاً". إن القرارات التي يتخذها الخالق بعيدة كل البعد عن أي تأثير من أي نوع كان.

ومع ذلك، فإن الخالق، قد يتخذ من البشر من يجعله أداة لتنفيذ قراراته. وفي مثل هذه الحالة يختار الخالق احدهم ليكون الأداة التي تعاقب المخطين. وقد يحدث أن يكون الشخص هذا هو ذاته من أتم وفعل أمراً "سينا" وبذلك يكون هو من سيعاقب نفسه بنفسه، وينفذ حكم الخالق على نفسه.

تتفحص هذه الدراسة العلاقة بين الغضب الإلهي المقدس، وغضب بني البشر، وتناقش ذلك في المسرحيات التي توضح هذا الأمر جلياً". إنها تناقش أمرين مختلطين ببعضهما : الغضب الإنساني المنفذ من خلال الغضب الإلهي، والغضب الإلهي المنفذ من خلال البشر كعناصر لتنفيذ هذا الغضب على العباد حينما يخطنون ليحاسبهم الخالق ويحق الحق.

A moderate anger is not only acceptable ,but praiseworthy. Aristotle argues that the person " who is angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised." ¹ This Research is going to discuss the portrayal of anger in selected tragedies for early modern playwrights .For those playwrights, passions and emotions are physical forces that can be influenced by both religious restrains and environmental factors. This notion was supported by some playwrights and was rejected by others . Martin Bardeon argues that "any passion – but especially one as potentially destructive as anger –should be held in check by reason." ² Seneca describes anger as the most hideous and frenzied of all emotions , thus anger is man's enemy as man was begotten for mutual assistance but anger is for destruction. ³Anger is contrary to for both reason and happiness .Any angry man is tainted by

immoderate passion and therefore acts with rashness instead of virtue and wisdom.

The early writer Lactantius (1880-1940) describes anger as " an emotion of the mind arousing itself for the restraining of faults" ⁴ and explains that restraining righteous anger can be as sinful as being over wrathful .

God gave us anger for the sake of restraining faults. Lactantius explains that the anger which we may call either fury or Rage ought not to exist even in man ,because it is altogether vicious ;but the anger which relates to the correction of vices ought not to be taken away from man ;nor can it be taken away from God ,because it is both serviceable for the affairs of man, and necessary. ⁵

In this , anger became a necessary component of both human and Divine justice ;without anger ,sins go unpunished .

Apuina (1820-1879) similarly sees the passion of anger as natural and beneficial. He links anger with the pursuit of justice. He reasons that the desire for revenge is a desire for something good: since revenge belongs to justice ;therefore, an angry man in the pursuit of vengeance is necessarily a rational man. ⁶

Greab Reyonld does not contend that anger is necessarily always destructive. Instead, he provides the reader with two ways that one might be angry without sinning. He first instructs readers to imitate Moses by letting anger have "an Eye upward," as a righteous anger is aroused only by "injury directly aimed at God and His honour . " He then suggests that one should "convert [anger] Inward into self-discipline, for the more acquainted any man is with himself, the less matter he will find of Anger with other men." ⁷

Another major question for early modern writers is, whether divine wrath is the necessary counterpart to divine love, or is it merely a reaction to human sin? As many writers argue that God's goodness is coeval with His justice: a good God punishes the wicked and rewards the virtuous. God's anger is a necessary element of His goodness, for if human sins went unpunished, we could not consider Him to be good or just. It is ,therefore, right for God to "take vengeance upon the wicked, and destroy the pestilent and guilty." ⁸ God's wrath is indeed the necessary counterpart to both His goodness and the larger idea of Divine Justice.

The divine punishment was often delivered via natural disasters, such as famines, floods, or plagues. However, the Bible also contains examples of God using human beings as agents of His vengeance. In Romans 6.13, Paul urges his readers to give themselves unto God and give their members as weapons of righteousness unto God .

Christian authors explained that the role of the scourge was to punish but ultimately lovingly to reform His people. By allowing—or, perhaps, causing—to torment His followers, God uses a human instrument to show His wrath for man’s sinfulness. As most theologians argued, the suffering that the people endured either made them more aware, and thus more repentant, of their wicked natures or caused them to draw closer to God in their pain.

This research sheds light on the way Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedies are explained. This study examines the relationship between divine and human anger as a spectrum. The study discusses plays that feature explicitly divine or explicitly human acts of wrath. It engages two complicated amalgamations: human anger mediated through divine wrath and divine wrath conveyed through human agents.

Thomas Jackson argues that earthly agents of divine wrath, be they forces of nature or human beings, are poor imitations of God’s anger. He Wrote

the motions of the creatures appointed to execute His wrath are more furious than any man’s passions in extremist fury can be. What man’s voice is like His thunder? What tyrant’s frowns like to a lowering sky, breathing out the storms of fire and brimstone? Yet are the most terrible sounds which the creatures can present but as so many echoes of His angry voice? ⁹

He emphasizes that no human voice can be compared to thunder, not tyrant’s frowns can be as terrible as fire and brimstone. These earthly intermediaries are imperfect versions of the divine analogue because they are earthly. Human beings may be able to deliver “echoes” of God’s anger, but they are incapable of separating God’s anger from their passion. Jackson thus uses this comparison between God’s anger and man’s to praise God for being “Immovable ” while humans are .

In a similar way, Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* (c.1611) and Phillip Massinger's *The Unnatural Combat* (c.1625) dramatize this scenario in a way that presents God as the only legitimate agent of wrath.

The main plot of *The Atheist's Tragedy* involves the non conflict between the noble Charlemont and his wicked uncle, D'Amville. The

essential conflict within this play is not necessarily between God and D'Amville, but between what Charlemont terms "the passion of / [his] blood and the religion of [his] soul" (III.ii.35-6).

Hungry for wealth and power, D'Amville murders his brother, Baron Montferrers. As in other revenge tragedies, the ghost of Montferrers visits his son, Charlemont, but his message is a stark departure from that of other ghosts. Instead of commanding Charlemont to avenge his foul and most unnatural murder, Montferrers' spirit gives this bit of advice:

Return to France, for thy old father's dead
And thou by murder disinherited.
Attend with patience the success of things,
And leave revenge unto the King of kings.

(II.vi.20-4)

Unlike other revenge tragedy ghosts, Montferrers urges not revenge, but "patience." Charlemont first assumes the apparition to be "a ain dream," for as far as he knows, his father is safe under the watchful eye of dear uncle D'Amville.

In the next scene, we see that Charlemont has dutifully followed the Ghost's advice and returned to France, where he is assumed to be dead. Charlemont happens upon his beloved Castabella, who is mourning at his grave. He greets her with the efficient, but startling: "I am not dead" (3.1.72). Charlemont is not a character one might perceive as overly rash or inconsiderately passionate. Nor is he violent, choleric, or even particularly impetuous. There is really no danger of him .His act of recklessness comes in the third act.

Disinherited, orphaned, and with his paramour married to another man, Charlemont bemoans his situation at his father's grave:

I prithee, sorrow, leave a little room
In my confounded and tormented mind

For understanding to deliberate
The cause or author of this accident

.....
These circumstances, uncle, tell me you
Are the suspected author of these wrongs,
Whereof the lightest is more heavy than
The strongest patience can endure to bear.

(III.i.135-145)

Charlemont shows his patience to bear is true at the present moment; in the very next scene, he comes to blows with D'Amville's son Sebastian. Sebastian starts the fight, taking Charlemont for a ghost and stabbing at him in fear. However, Charlemont's exclamation "Th'art a villain and the son of a villain" (III.ii.28), followed by the stage direction "[They] fight. Sebastian is down" strongly suggests that this is more than self-defence. So does, of course, the proclamation that follows: "Revenge, to thee I'll dedicate this work" (III.iii.31).

Charlemont's momentary lapse in patience is immediately corrected by the ghost of Montferrers, who reminds his son to leave avenging to God: "Let Him revenge my murder and thy wrongs / To whom the justice of revenge belongs" (III.ii.32-3).

After the ghost prevents him from killing Sebastian, Charlemont exclaims: "You torture me between the passion of / My blood and the religion of my soul" (III.ii.35-6). This response reflects the early modern understanding of the difference between human anger and divine wrath. Charlemont perceives two forces warring within him: the mortal coil and the immortal soul. His passionate blood is excited by the desire to avenge his father's death; his soul is immune to passion and thus understands the need for patience. Charlemont does not merely understand that vengeance belongs to God alone, he understands why. God can carry out vengeance without letting emotion interfere with justice. Human beings, bogged down with blood and passion, cannot. Man should strive to imitate God in His goodness, and because we are creatures of "blood," we can only hope to do so in the most superficial way. Justice can only be attributed to God if you remove affection from Justice. Charlemont seems confused asking:

why do bad things happen to good people? If God is just, how can an innocent and pious man be in prison while his father's murderer is free? In a soliloquy, Charlemont follows his petition to heaven by chastising himself for doing so. He recognizes that his physical discomfort has led him to presumption and blasphemy instead of supplication. He controls his perception, and thus, allows himself to suffer.

God is not punishing him; rather, he perceives that he is suffering, and assumes that it is God's work. If he did not see his situation as affliction, he would not consider it the unjust actions of a cruel God. Charlemont demonstrates the understanding that God is dispassionate and that in ascribing emotion to God's judgment, human beings commit blasphemy :

O my afflicted soul, how torment swells
Thy apprehension with profane conceit
Against the sacred justice of my God!
Our own constructions are the authors of
Our misery. We never measure our
Conditions but with men above us in
Estate, so while our spirits labour to
Be higher than our fortunes, th'are more base.

(III.iii.12-19)

So, if we perceive it as immoderate, then the problem is with our human understanding, not the judgment itself.

In his soliloquy, Charlemont seems to have a simplistic understanding of divine judgment: the worse your sin, the harsher your punishment, and vice versa. However, as he moves towards self-reflection, he swiftly develops a resolve that temporarily removes God from the equation. When Sebastian comes to taunt him, Charlemont asserts that his heart is "above the reach" of Sebastian's enmity, even though "Fate is pleased" to have him suffer it (III.iii.34-7). In discarding the notion that God is responsible for his suffering, Charlemont holds both himself (for perceiving it) and Fate (for serving it to him) deserve to be blamed. Charlemont imagines Fate, whom he later credits for springing him from prison, as separate from God's justice. Indeed, as he expounds to Sebastian, he has become an "emp'ror" of himself: My passions are / My subjects, and I can command them laugh, /

Whilst thou dost' tickle 'em to death with misery (III.iii.44-47). In gaining control of his passions, Charlemont solves the conflict between the "passion of [his] blood / and the religion of [his] soul." With his emotions in check, Charlemont can make decisions that are more in line with divine justice than human concepts of vengeance..

The Atheist's Tragedy does explore this notion of God using human beings as "intermediate elements" for His wrath in the character of D'Amville who murders his brother Montferrers and imprisons the rightful heir, his nephew Charlemont. He also marries his sickly son Rousard off to Charlemont's beloved, Castabella. The murder of Montferrers seems like the perfect crime (though there is never a perfect crime) . Montferrers is dejected over the apparent death of his son, the night is dark, the servants are drunk, and there just happens to be an open gravel pit right where he and his ill-intentioned brother are taking their late-night stroll. When the servants start using their torches to crush one another, D'Amville has a ready excuse to send them out of the way. The moment they are offstage, D'Amville pushes Montferrers into the pit, where Borachio hits him with a stone. His bloody deed accomplished, D'Amville then calls for the servants to return, blaming Montferrers' fall on the dark.

When the servants report that Montferrers has died, D'Amville launches into an angry curse against the night's darkness. For his part, Borachio congratulates D'Amville on the murder of Montferrers, calling it the "most judicious murder that / The brain of man was e'er delivered of" (II.iv. 101-2).

D'Amville realizes that his success depended on the help of "instruments." D'Amville is only too happy for his success:

Ay, mark the plot. Not any circumstance
That stood within the reach of the design
Of persons, dispositions, matter, time
Or place, but by this brain of mine was made
An instrumental help, yet nothing from
Th'induction to th'accomplishment seemed forced
Or done o' purpose, but by accident.

(II.iv.103-109)

In these lines, he cites "persons, dispositions, matter, time, [and] place" as aids to his scheme. As the scene continues, he identifies

the “instruments” specifically as Montferrers’ depression, the servants’ drunkenness, and the darkness. Nature is just one of several instruments that aid D’Amville in his crime. In seeing himself as the great user of these devices, D’Amville places himself in the role of God, wielding any instrument necessary to achieve his grand designs.

In marveling at the seemingly accidental nature of his success, D’Amville foreshadows his own suicide at the play’s end. Furthermore, his boast of receiving “instrumental help” is echoed throughout the final scene. After Charlemont climbs the scaffold, D’Amville professes to be so moved by his courage that he deems the Executioner’s hand to end Charlemont’s life, saying “The instrument that strikes my nephew’s blood Shall be as noble as his blood. I’ll be Thy executioner myself” (V.ii.227-229). Here, “instrument” refers to both the executioner’s axe and D’Amville himself. When D’Amville wields the ax, he praises it and the murder itself with nobility, thus making himself the “noble instrument” of Charlemont’s demise. This use of “instrument” echoes D’Amville’s words during the murder of Montferrers, where he cited the darkness and the servants’ drunkenness as instruments of his murder. Therefore, D’Amville here sees both the axe and himself as instruments of a justice that transcend earthly logic, making him the sole arbiter and executor of a godlike justice. As we have seen, however, human beings are incapable of doling out divine justice (even, it seems, D’Amville’s own perverse brand of “divine” justice) without tainting it with passion. The Judge’s plea for someone to “restrain his fury” (V.ii.230) indicates that D’Amville is obviously not acting rationally, as does D’Amville’s retort: “I’ll butcher out the passage of his soul / That dares to interrupt the blow” (V.ii.231-2).

As Charlemont and Castabella bend to accept the blow, D’Amville commits his inadvertent suicide: “As he raises up the axe strikes out his own brains, staggers off the scaff” (V.ii.241- 2). D’Amville’s unique stage death was seen by early modern audiences as a “fitting” end for an atheist. Robert Ornstein, for example, suggests that D’amville’s death dramatizes the fate for all atheists outlined by prose writers during the period.¹⁰ Ornstein draws particular attention to this excerpt from Martin Fotherby’s *Atheomastix*:

none of them doe die faire and naturall deathes; but all violent and unnaturall. By which immediate iudgements of God, falling down so certainly, and so directly upon the heads of Atheists, more than upon any othe wicked ones; yea, and so generally too, upon everyone of them, without all exception; God doth much more effectually prove himselfe to be, in the evidence of those workes; then all the Atheists in the world can prove God not to be, by the efficacy of their words.¹¹

Ornstein's argument connects Fotherby's reference to the "heads of Atheists" with D'Amville's errant axe-blow to his own head. As for the weapon itself, Huston Diehl argues that because the axe was a traditional symbol of death, "D'amville's desire to use it may associate him and his atheism with death, with what is life-denying." Furthermore, because the head is the traditional seat of human reason, D'Amville's fatal wound "may therefore call to mind the conventional belief that the atheist in his denial of God murders his own God-given reason."¹²

Upon realizing that his plan to execute Charlemont has gone horribly awry, D'Amville asks: "What murderer was he / That lifted up my hand against my head?" When the Judge says that it was D'Amville himself, he responds "I thought he was / A murderer that did it" (V.ii.242-6). It was, of course a "murderer" who dropped the axe on D'Amville, and D'Amville comes to recognize this:

1 JUDGE

God forbid.

D'AMVILLE

Forbid? You lie, judge; he commanded it.

To tell thee that man's wisdom is a fool.

I came to thee for judgment, and thou think'st

Thyself a wise man. I outreached thy wit

And made thy justice murder's instrument.

In Castabella's death and Charlemont's,

To crown my murder of Montferrers with

A safe possession of his wealthy state.

(V.ii.245-254)

In these lines, D'Amville not only admits that there is God, he understands that his death is part of God's plan to reveal the folly

in human wisdom, human law, and, most importantly, human judgment. The Judges were poised to execute Charlemont and Castabella while a murderer went free.

D'Amville planned to use the justice system to achieve the deaths of his enemies, thus making "justice murder's instrument." Ironically, however, D'Amville realizes that his self-murder is the instrument of God's justice:

There was the strength of natural understanding.
 But Nature is a fool. There is a power
 Above her that hath overthrown the pride
 Of all my projects and posterity.
 For whose surviving blood I had erected
 A proud monument, and struck 'em dead
 Before me, for whose deaths I called to thee
 For judgement. Thou did want discretion for
 The sentence, but yond' power that struck me knew
 The judgement I deserved, and gave it.

(V.ii.257-266)

D'Amville admits that God has struck him down for two reasons: to show that man's wisdom is folly (he outwitted the judges, but God outwitted him) and because he deserved punishment, and only God could serve it to him. God uses D'Amville not only as an instrument of divine justice, but as an instrument of divine revelation. This revelation does not arise merely out of D'Amville's death, but in his precise manner of death. God may have kept Charlemont from immediately revenging his father's death, but it was not merely so God could do it Himself. God could have just as easily struck D'Amville with lightning, or had him exit, pursued by a wild animal.

D'Amville's death via self-axing shows that *The Atheist's Tragedy* is more about the failure of human judgment than the triumph of human patience.

In Phillip Massinger's *The Unnatural Combat*, however, God makes no use of human "intermediate elements": the villainous Malefort Senior is indeed struck by lightning. At the play's inception, Malefort Sr. is challenged to a duel by his son, the notorious pirate Malefort. At this point in the play, only the

Maleforts know precisely why Junior is so incensed against his father.

Junior's insistence on keeping his reasons a secret only adds more shame to his already stained name and casts more sympathy upon his father. Although the audience witnesses Malefort's anger, ambition, deceit, and lustful pursuit of his own daughter, we remain unaware to his original crime until the very last scene, where it is revealed that Malefort murdered his first wife so that he could marry another. At the outset, however, Malefort appears guilty only by association with his mutinous son, who has blockaded the harbor. In fact, Malefort invites God to strike him down if he is indeed guilty of treason:

Thou searcher of men's hearts,
And sure defender of the innocent ...
If I in this am guiltie strike me dead,
Or by some unexpected meanes confirme,
I am accused unjustly.

(I.i.342-6)

Malefort is, in fact, not guilty of treason, and has indeed been "accused unjustly." Thus, the fact that he is not stricken dead on the spot can not strictly be attributed to a lack of divine justice.

However, immediately after delivering these lines, Malefort is presented with his son's challenge to a fight to death. He welcomes this missive as a "second life in curing [his] wounded honour," and thanks the "Immortal powers" for the "merciful" removal of his "shame for being the father to so bad a sonne" (I.i.376- 84). Malefort then kills his son in combat and mutilates his corpse in a further effort to distance himself from his ignoble progeny. Here, Malefort's plea for justice is a bit of public posturing:

he avows his innocence before God and the Marseilles court. The fact that he survives the invocation and triumphs easily over his son "proves" that he is innocent.

However, as the play progresses, Malefort surrenders to a lustful longing for his own daughter, Theocrine. Troubled by this desire, Malefort worries that he will eventually be judged for his crimes. As "a storme" begins to rage in the last act, Malefort welcomes the advent of "blustring Boreas," likening the tempestuous

weather to his inner turmoil:

I am possess'd
 With whilre-windes, and each guilty thought to me is A
 dreadfull Hurricano; though this centre
 Labour to bring for the earthquake, and hell open Her
 wide stretch'd jawes, and let out all her furies, They
 cannot adde an atom to the mountaine Of feares and
 terrors that each minute threaten To fall on my
 accursed head.

(V.ii.264-271)

Aside from referencing both possession and hell, Malefort also calls for mountains to fall upon him, which, as Morris and Gill observe, is a “common cry of distracted or repentant atheists, Malefort’s tempting of hell to release her furies is readily answered, as the loody ghosts of both Malefort Junior and Malefort’s first wife appear before him. The ghosts communicate to Malefort that their presence is to

launce [his] sear’d up conscience” and that his present misfortunes were “forg’d upon the anvile of [his] impious wrongs.” He then finally confesses to poisoning his first wife, which was the reason that his son was forced to “shake off [his] filial duty”

(V.ii.280-9)

in the first place. But perhaps the most interesting part of this speech is Malefort’s assessment—which the ghosts confirm—that the reason Malefort defeated Junior in combat was that Junior’s status as Malefort’s son rendered him “not a competent judge mark’d out by heaven / For her revenger” (V.ii.295-6).

It would seem by these lines that heaven’s proscription is not against revenge, but against the “unnatural combat” of a son murdering his father. Malefort’s description of Junior as an incompetent “judge” suggests that the problem is not in the physical action of revenge, but in the discretion necessary to carry it out according to heaven’s standards. Junior’s decision to avenge his mother’s death is obviously not a rash one; although we do not know exactly when he discovered his father’s treachery, he does describe his plans as being “long since resolv’d on” (II.i.46).

Furthermore, as the duel approaches, Junior entreats his captains to “not entertain a false belief / that I am mad,” and says his intact “discourse and reason” only makes his situation more devastating. This clear denial of madness (or even the pretense of madness) is quite a departure from most other characters charged with the prospect of revenge and speaks to Junior’s rationality. The audience does not see Junior’s reaction to the knowledge of his mother’s murder, nor do we know any of his internal debate about the ethics of revenge. By the time we encounter Junior, he has boiled his moral dilemma down to a simple truth: “I can nor live, nor end a wretched life, / But both wayes I am impious” (II.i.58-9)—basically, Junior is damned if he does, and damned if he does not.

Junior’s case therefore seems unique among revenges in that he does not appear frustrated, impatient, or doubtful about God’s ability to avenge his mother’s murder. In fact, he asks God not to intervene on his behalf:

Thou incensed Power,
A while forbear thy
thunder, let me have
No aid in my revenge”

(II.i.189-191).

The fact that he asks God not to interfere demonstrates that Junior believes that God will act on his behalf. Junior is killed by his father. Perhaps, then, Junior is deemed an incompetent “judge” by heaven because he usurped God’s prerogative not out of impatience, wrath, or the belief that he is God’s instrument of vengeance, but out of pride.”¹³ Junior here positions himself as God’s peer: equally deserving of revenge and equally capable of killing Malefort. In staying God’s hand, Junior puts his personal desire for revenge above any sort of “pious” duty he might once have felt. Junior’s request for God to “forebear [His] thunder” is granted. God saves His vengeful thunder until both Junior and his innocent half-sister Theocrine are dead.

This scene can be taken as “evidence that Massinger’s God has a deep-seated appreciation of irony.”¹⁴ However, the precise timing of the lightning bolt may also serve as a reminder that God patiently awaits the repentance of a reprobate. Although Malefort

admits his guilt and need for penance, like Faustus, Claudius, and D'Amville before him, he never actually repents:

Can any penance expiate my guilt?
 Or can repentance save me? They are vanished.
 Exeunt Ghosts.
 What's left to do then? I'll accuse my fate
 That did not fashion me for nobler uses:
 Or if those stares crosse to me in my birth,
 Had not deni'd their prosperous influence to it,
 With peace of conscience like to innocent men,
 I might have ceased to be, and not as now,
 To curse my cause of being.
 He's kill'd with a flash of lightning.

(V.ii.298-306)

Malefort takes the Ghosts' departure as a sign that repentance is impossible, and therefore does not even make the attempt, instead he blames fate and the stars for his sinful acts. God decides that He has heard just enough and finally takes matters into His own hands. The other characters arrive on the scene shortly thereafter, and deduce from the unpleasant aroma coming up from Malefort's crispy corpse that he has been struck by lightning, a sure sign of God's displeasure. Theocrine's body, on the other hand, "retains her native innocence," never having "call'd downe heavens anger" (V.ii.336-8). Beaufort Senior sums up the play's moral message for any audience member still unsure about the ethics of homicide and incest " There cannot be a want of power above to punish murder, and unnatural love" (V.ii.342- 3).

There is indeed no "want of power" by the play's end. But it might perhaps seem that way to the audience until Malefort is struck down by that fatal bolt. After all, his son was the only other person aware of his original crimes, and only Montrevile was aware of Malefort's incestuous impulses. It would seem, then, that God is both the only appropriate and only available revenger left. However, just because He does not punish murder and incest immediately should not signal a "want of power above." Like D'Amville, Malefort is subtly warned about the dangers of his actions. The more enamored he becomes of his daughter, the more

irrational he becomes, prompting Montrevile to speculate about the cause of his distraction.

Montrevile likens Malefort's religion to "a nose of wax / To be turn'd every way" (V.ii.134-5). Malefort agrees with this assessment, and admits kneeling to Montrevile on knees "that have beene ever stiffe to bend to heaven" (V.ii.126).

Despite this apparent atheism, Malefort does recognize the vile nature of his lust, but attempts to lighten his guilt by remembering that he is an accomplished sinner : " there's something here that tells me / I stand accomptable for greater sinnes, I never checked at "(V.ii.15-17).

Malefort continues to press down his guilt by presenting a catalogue of felicitous partakers of incest, including pagan gods and several animals, concluding that only impotent old men and "solemne superstitious fooles" are unfortunate enough to forsake such pleasures, which suggests that Malefort does indeed know that his desires and actions are wrong. In trying to "help" his friend, Montrevile suggests that madness can be treated with charms and herbs, bewitching with spells and rites, and "heavens anger" with "penitence and sacrifice" (IV.i.200-4). Malefort does get a chance at repentance; he even recognizes it "as such before diverting his attention (as he does when contemplating incest) to "easier" thoughts of fate and stars." ¹⁵ Perhaps God's forbearance of thunder, then, is not a response to Junior's request, but evidence of God's merciful patience as Malefort is given the opportunity to repent.

Conclusion

There is no question of "a want of power above" in either *The Unnatural Combat* or *The Athiest's Tragedy*. In both plays, the villains are punished—either by the law, as is the case with Levidulcia and Montreville—or by God Himself, as with D'Amville and Malefort God is presented as the ultimate punisher of these wrongs because He is the only legitimate punisher. Human beings are too passionate, too impatient, too merciless, and, as is especially evident in the case of Malefort Junior, too affected by pride and personal indignation to effectively carry out divine justice.

Notes:

- 1 Steve Canton. *Philosophers in Action* .(London :Steve Publishing .1999) ,p. 25.
- 2 Martin Baredon . *Philosophy Discussed* .(New Delhi : Cambridge University Press .2005),p. 69.
- 3 Martin Baredon .p. 87.
- 4 Steve Canton.p. 12.
- 5 Steve Canton.p.48.
- 6 Steve Canton.p.61.
- 7 Grean Raynolds . *Human Feelings* .(Westminister : Arbor House .2004) 0p. 122.
- 8 Grean Raynolds .p.101.
- 9 Thomas Jackson . *Scope of Divine Wrath* .(New York :Prentice Hall Inc .2006) ,p. 21.
- 10 Robert Ornstein . *Philosophy in Drama*.(Singapore: Mc Graw-Hill Company .1998) p.35.
- 11 Robert Ornstein .p.38.
- 12 Robert Ornstein.p.41.
- 13 David Clanes . " Studying Phillip Massinger" in *Early English Drama* . by Alfred Marfen (London : Penguin Books .1996) p.16
- 14 David Clanes . p.17
- 15 David Clanes .p.19.

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