

VESSELS OF VENGEANCE: DIVINE WRATH AND HUMAN INSTRUMENTS IN
EARLY MODERN REVENGE TRAGEDY

Genevieve Romeo

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English and Comparative Literature.

Chapel Hill
2010

Approved by:

Jessica Wolfe

Reid Barbour

Mary Floyd-Wilson

Darryl Gless

Ritchie Kendall

© 2010
Genevieve Romeo
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

GENEVIEVE ROMEO: Vessels of Vengeance: Divine Wrath and Human Instruments in
Early Modern Revenge Tragedy
(Under the direction of Jessica Wolfe)

This dissertation examines the intersections between human anger and divine wrath in Tudor and Stuart revenge tragedies. Traditional scholarship on Renaissance drama looks to the philosophical foundations of the passions, while more recent criticism focuses on the physiological origins of early modern conceptions of emotion. My work combines both of these approaches with a sustained investigation into the theological foundations and implications of the passions—specifically the passion of wrath as it finds both divine and human expression in revenge tragedy. My dissertation explores instances where divine and human anger collide—or, perhaps, collude—on the early modern stage by contextualizing plays such as William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Cyril Tourneur’s *The Atheist’s Tragedy*, and John Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge* with theological writings by John Calvin, Martin Luther, and Thomas Jackson, among others. My study analyzes the way authors used the anthropopathic conception of divine wrath as both an exhortation against human anger and as a metaphorical accommodation that legitimizes and sanctifies sinful, passionate human emotion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of many fine individuals. First, I simply cannot imagine having a kinder, wiser, or more helpful advisor than Jessica Wolfe. Without her dedication, insight, and inspiration, I am not sure that this project would have seen the light of day. Many thanks are also due to Reid Barbour for his enthusiastic encouragement throughout my graduate career. I am grateful to Mary Floyd-Wilson for her invaluable contributions to my development as a scholar and a teacher—she has been a wonderful mentor. I would also like to thank Darryl Gless for helping me see connections between even my most disjointed ideas and Ritchie Kendall, who has taught me that less is more when it comes to making jokes about *Hoffman*.

Thanks to my mom for reading to me when I was a baby; to my dad for making me truly believe that I could do just about anything; to my brother Ken for always listening; to my sister Pookie for being an amazing role model; to my Yia Yia for bragging about me to all of her friends; to my Thea Rita for always making me feel like the most special person on the planet; and to my Papou, who taught me how to appreciate the small things in life. I am also grateful for the friendship of Cameron Brewer, who has always kept me from taking myself too seriously. I feel deeply blessed to have all of you in my life.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband Dave, who is the most patient, genuine, loving person I have ever known. You make me want to be a better human being every day.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| CHAPTER ONE: Waiting on the God Who Waits: Divine Anger in <i>The Atheist's Tragedy</i> and <i>The Unnatural Combat</i> | 24 |
| CHAPTER TWO: Votaries of Vengeance: Human Anger and Human Cruelty in <i>Antonio's Revenge</i> | 54 |
| CHAPTER THREE: "When thunder claps, heaven likes the tragedy": The Influence of the Imprecatory Psalms on <i>Hoffman</i> and <i>The Revenger's Tragedy</i> | 85 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: "O My Prophetic Soul": <i>Hamlet</i> , Jeremiah, and Prophetic Drama | 119 |
| CONCLUSION | 158 |
| WORKS CITED..... | 159 |

INTRODUCTION

Gail Kern Paster begins her ground-breaking study of the early modern passions, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage*, with an excerpt from Bishop Edward Reynolds' *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man* (1640): "The *Passions* of sinfull men are many times like the tossings of the Sea, which bringeth up *mire and durt*, but the *Passions* of *Christ* were like the shaking of a pure Water in a cleane Vessell, which though it be thereby *troubled*, yet is not *fouled* at all."¹ As Paster notes, Reynolds uses this metaphor to counter the Neostoic condemnation of human passions; his words reveal that "it is human sinfulness that makes immoderate passions an instrument of self-harm—an instrument of excess and indecency—not the passions themselves."² Paster also observes that in comparing Christ to a "vessel of liquids," Reynolds demonstrates the early modern understanding of "the nature of the passions as liquid—contained or uncontained, clear or muddy."³ This notion of the passions as literal forces within our body is reflected in Galen's understanding of the passions as "one of the six factors (along with air, diet, repletion and evacuation, sleeping and walking, and exercise) that together determined the immediate state of well-being in a given body."⁴ The fact that several of these "non-

¹ Edward Reynolds. *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man*, ed. Margaret Lee Wiley (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1971), 49.

² Gail Kern Paster. *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage*. Chicago: University of Chicago P. (2004): 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

natural” factors depend on environment marks a significant divergence between modern and early modern concepts of emotion. As Mary Floyd-Wilson explains:

We understand emotion as internal, or part of our self, and not as an ecological or physiological force that moves in and out of the body. And yet early modern passions do cross the self’s shifting and fluid boundaries. The heart dilates or constricts in response to certain stimuli. When the emotions are stirred, people are moved to act or withdraw. Indeed, some early moderns construed the passion as residual environmental impressions, originally induced by an ecology that undermines any conception [of] a solid, static, or contained self.⁵

The work of Paster and Floyd-Wilson, among others, clearly establishes that, for the early moderns, passions and emotions were physical forces that could be influenced not only by religious restraint or *recta ratio*, but by environmental factors. Indeed, as Pastor argues, “the passions had an urgent practical character” of coequal importance to “their overarching theological significance.”⁶ But what is the nature of this “theological significance”? Do the passions have a “theological significance” beyond the “traditional” Neostoic castigation of passions? Furthermore, while the above passage from Reynolds reflects an early modern understanding of Christ’s passions, how did contemporary authors and theologians understand the emotions of God when He is not clothed in the flesh of Christ?

A complete investigation into the divine valence of every significant emotion is certainly beyond the scope of this present study. Instead, this dissertation takes a necessarily narrow approach by examining the portrayal of anger in select revenge tragedies as a case study. Drawing extensively from both pagan and Christian sources, revenge tragedies are a rich source for any discussion of the early modern passions; however, the violence that

⁵ Mary Floyd-Wilson. “English Mettle” in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*. Ed. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania P. 2004): 134.

⁶ Ibid., 7.

permeates these plays makes them a particularly productive location for a scrutiny of anger. However, while the Stoic dimension of anger in Renaissance tragedy has been thoroughly examined by critics such as Gordon Braden and Geoffrey Aggeler, sustained analyses of Judeo-Christian notions of divine wrath and human anger in revenge tragedy seem to have fallen out of current critical favor. The renewed interest in the physical valence of emotion that has been sparked by Gail Kern Paster and Mary Floyd-Wilson, among others, provides an opportunity for future scholarly consideration of how early modern Christian theology complicates or contributes to the physiological understanding of passion.

Richard Strier observes that “it is often taken as a basic truth about the whole ‘Western Tradition’ that the control of ‘passion’ by ‘reason’ is its fundamental ethical-physiological ideal.”⁷ Strier’s article, “Against the Rule of Reason,” dismantles this notion by providing a panoply of authors—from Aristotle to Herbert—who offer eloquent *apologiae* for the passions. Strier notes that “both the humanist and the Reformation traditions provided powerful defenses of the validity and even desirability of ordinary human emotions and passions.”⁸ These “defenses” suggest, among other things, that emotions like sorrow or grief are necessary elements of empathy, and thus, Christian charity.

Strier’s catalogue of apologists rightly begins with Aristotle, whose *Nicomachean Ethics* does not advocate quashing the passions, but moderating them. While immoderate emotions can be destructive, moderate versions can be beneficial to both the self and society. Aristotle argues that the individual “who is angry at the right things and with the right

⁷ Richard Strier. “Against the Rule of Reason: Praise of Passion from Petrarch to Luther to Shakespeare to Herbert.” in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*. Ed. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania P. (2004): 23.

⁸ Ibid., 32.

people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised.”⁹ According to Aristotle’s argument, a moderate anger is not only acceptable, but praiseworthy. This notion was, of course, rejected by the Stoics, who argued that any passion—but especially one as potentially destructive as anger—should be held in check by reason.¹⁰ In *De Ira*, Seneca calls anger “the most hideous and frenzied of all the emotions” and describes it as “all excitement and impulse.” Building on this depiction, he offers this vivid portrait of anger: “Raving with a desire that is utterly inhuman for instruments of pain and reparations in blood, careless of itself so long as it harms the other, it rushes onto the very spear-points, greedy for vengeance that draws down the avenger with it” (I.1.i).¹¹ Anger is thus man’s enemy, as “man was begotten for mutual assistance, anger for mutual destruction” (I.5.i).¹² Whereas Juvenal argues that the *vir bonus* must be angered by indignation, Seneca contends that the good man will not even be angry if his father has been slain and his mother raped (I.12.i).¹³ In a similar vein, the Epicurean philosopher Lucretius argues that “the nature of the gods enjoys everlasting in perfect peace, sundered and separated far away from our world. For free from all grief, free from danger, mighty in its own resources, never lacking aught of us, it is not won by virtuous service nor touched by wrath.”¹⁴ For both the Stoics and the Epicureans, then, anger is contrary to both reason and

⁹ Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. (Trans. David Ross. London: Oxford, 1998) 96-97.

¹⁰ For a thorough examination of the differences between Aristotelian and Stoic notions of passion, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994).

¹¹ Seneca. *Moral and Political Essays*. Translated by John M. Cooper and J.F. Procope. Cambridge: Cambridge UP (1995), 17.

¹² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁴ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*. Trans. Cyril Bailey. London: Oxford (1926): 87.

happiness. An angry individual is tainted by immoderate passion, and therefore acts with rashness instead of virtue.

Unlike the Stoics and Epicureans, who viewed anger as a necessarily destructive force, the early Christian writer Lactantius defines anger as “an emotion of the mind arousing itself for the restraining of faults,”¹⁵ and argues that being overly merciful or restraining a righteous anger can be just as sinful as being overly wrathful. Just as God made sex pleasurable for the sake of propagating the species, God gave us anger “for the sake of restraining faults.”¹⁶ However, anger can be misappropriated just as easily as sexual desire. For this reason, Lactantius advises 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.”¹⁷ Anger is thus a necessary component of both human and divine justice; without anger, sins go unpunished.

Aquinas similarly sees the passion of anger as natural and potentially beneficial. He makes this argument in the *Summa Theologicae* by, like Lactantius, linking anger with the pursuit of justice. Aquinas begins his argument by defining anger as a desire for vengeance, and vengeance as a means of corrective punishment. He reasons that “the desire for revenge is a desire for something good: since revenge belongs to justice. Therefore the object of anger

¹⁵ “A Treatise on the Anger of God” *The Works of Lactantius*, Vol II. Trans. William D. Fletcher. Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871): 36.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

is good.”¹⁸ He uses this definition of anger to counter Seneca’s claim that the angry man is irrational. According to Aquinas, desiring vengeance implies the ability to identify “a comparison between the punishment to be inflicted and the hurt done.” Making such a judgment requires reason; therefore, an angry man in the pursuit of vengeance is necessarily a rational man.¹⁹

Aquinas also argues that anger is beneficial because it can indirectly bring a man pleasure:

Anger arises from a wrong done that causes sorrow, for which sorrow vengeance is sought as a remedy. Consequently as soon as vengeance is present, pleasure ensues, and so much the greater as the sorrow was greater. Therefore if vengeance be really present, perfect pleasure ensues An angry man takes pleasure in thinking much about vengeance. This pleasure, however, is not perfect, so as to banish sorrow and consequently anger. The angry man does not grieve and rejoice at the same thing; he grieves for the wrong done, while he takes pleasure in the thought and hope of vengeance. Consequently sorrow is to anger as its beginning; while pleasure is the effect or terminus of anger.²⁰

The anger that yields vengeance, which is a rational act of justice, is thus a positive passion and not a sin. Vengeance is not only just in itself, but it also cures sorrow: an angry man can only gain perfect pleasure by acting on his anger. This directly contradicts Seneca’s appraisal of retribution. When his *adversarius* interjects: “ ‘But there is pleasure in anger – paying back pain is sweet,’” Seneca’s moralist replies: “Not in the slightest! ‘Retribution’ – an inhuman word and, what is more, accepted as right—is not very different from wrongdoing, except in the order of events. He who pays back pain with pain is doing wrong; it is only that

¹⁸ Q 46, Article II, p 509. All quotations from Thomas Aquinas refer to *Summa Theologica: literally translated by fathers of the English Dominican province*. (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1920-1925).

¹⁹ Q 46, Article IV, p. 512.

²⁰ Q. 48, Article I, p 532.

he is more readily excused for it” (II.32.i).²¹ According to Seneca, vengeance, which is *not* the same as anger, should therefore be viewed as something “useful,” but not “sweet.”

Bishop Edward Reynolds’ *Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man* (1640) offers a middle way between Aquinas’ apology and Seneca’s castigation. Reynolds observes that properly “obedient” anger excites reasonable judgment and helps one formulate a proper “means of Redresse.” Without an intact reason, however, one succumbs to anger’s “suddenness” and “violence.”²² When a man finds himself or his friends “sleighted and despised,” he experiences a desire to “make knowne unto the persons, who thus contemne him by some manner of face or tongue, or hand, or heart, or head ... that there is in him more courage, power, and worth than deserves so to be neglected.” Reynolds asserts that as long as this passion is governed by reason, that it is “alwaies allowable and right.” If, however, it springs from “Pride and Ambition,” it is “Irregular and Corrupt.”²³ Reynolds therefore allows for the possibility of anger as a means to righteous vengeance, but does not afford vengeance the same automatic guarantee of rationality that Aquinas does. On the contrary, he observes that anger, above all other passions, “hath the least recourse to Reason, being hasty, impetuous, full of Desires, Griefe, Selfe-love, Impatience, which spareth no persons, friends, or foes, no things, animate or inanimate, when they fit not our fancy.”²⁴ Reynolds then illustrates this dubious link between anger and reason with this colorful metaphor:

[Just as] Dogs, which, as soon as ever they heare a noise, barke presently before they know whether it be a stranger at the doore, or no: so Anger attends Reason thus long, till it receive

²¹ Seneca. *Moral and Political Essays*, 70.

²² Reynolds 317.

²³ *Ibid.*, 318.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 319.

warrant for the justness of seeking redresse, and then suddenly hastens away without any further listening to the rules of *Decorum* and *Justice*, which it should always observe in the prosecution thereof.²⁵

Reynolds explains that Anger uses Reason only so far as it provides justification for retributive punishment. Any advice that Reason might offer in the way of justice or mercy is summarily dismissed.

Even though anger lacks an intrinsic connection with reason, Reynolds does not contend that it is necessarily always destructive. Instead, he provides the reader with a thorough list of 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 himselfe, the lesse matter he will find of Anger with other men.” Reynolds also advises, among other things, to avoid both rashness and brooding, to ignore false rumors, and to “bee *Candid* in Interpreting the things wherein thou sufferest.”²⁶ His last bit of counsel on conquering Anger is to

wrastle not with that which pincheth thee. If it bee strong it will hurt, if cunning, it will hamper and entangle thee. Hee that strives with his burden makes it heavier. That Tempest breaks not the stalkes of Corne, which rends asunder the arms of an Oake, the one yeelds, the other withstands it. A humble weakness is safer from injury, than a stubborn strength.²⁷

Where Aquinas sanctions and Seneca condemns the angry man, Reynolds ultimately suggests that one bear indignities with patience and humility. Reynolds’ preference for “humble

²⁵ Ibid., 318-9.

²⁶ Ibid., 320-322.

²⁷ Ibid., 323-4.

weakness” recalls Aristotle’s observation that those who err on the side of excess make for unpleasant companions.

Robert Burton’s initial definition of anger in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) resembles that of Aquinas: he first glosses it as “a desire of revenge.”²⁸ He then, however, refers to it as “a pestiferous perturbation” that can heat the body too quickly, thus leading to madness.²⁹ Burton cites a wide variety of philosophers, theologians, and figures from both history and scripture as evidence of anger’s negative impact on human affairs. “Look into our Histories,” Burton advises, “and you shall almost meet with no other subject, but what a company of hare-brains have done in their rage!”³⁰ Burton describes the choleric as being “bold and impudent ... apt to quarrel and think of such things, battles, combats, and their manhood; furious, impatient in discourse, stiff, irrefragable, and prodigious in their tenents; and, if they be moved, most violent, outrageous, ready to disgrace, provoke any, to kill themselves and others.”³¹

In his discussion of anger, Burton also describes how choler is created and disseminated through the body. Choler, which is “hot and dry,” is “begotten of the hotter parts of the chylus, and gathered to the gall.”³² Aquinas partially bases his equation of anger with vengeance on these properties of heat and dryness. Aquinas observes that every

²⁸ Robert Burton. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Ed. Holbrook Jackson. (New York: New York Review of Books.2001), I.161.

²⁹ Ibid., 269-71.

³⁰ Ibid., 270.

³¹ Ibid., 401. Burton notes that Jerome Cardan seems to admire the choleric, describing them as “bold, hardy, fierce, and adventurous” and that they are prepared “to endure death itself, and all manner of torments, with invincible courage, and ‘tis a wonder to see with what alacrity they will undergo such tortures.” Burton’s response to Cardan’s praise: “he ascribes this generosity, fury, or rather stupidity, to this adustation of choler and melancholy: But I take these rather to be mad or desperate” (401-2).

³² Ibid., I.148.

“appetite” tends to use greater force to repel its contrary “appetite.” Because “the appetitive movement of anger is caused by some injury inflicted, as by a contrary that is present,” the appetite uses the desire of vengeance to repel the injury. However,

because the movement of anger is not one of recoil, which corresponds to the action of cold, but one of prosecution, which corresponds to the action of heat, the result is that the movement of anger produces fervor of the blood and vital spirits around the heart, which is the instrument of the soul’s passions.³³

Aquinas thus argues that the body naturally experiences vengeance as a counter to indignation. The heat of this emotion agitates the “vital spirits” surrounding the heart, which then directs the passions of the body.

The fact that anger is rooted in human physiology, however, does not prove that it is a beneficial passion. Seneca suggests that one of the causes of anger is “a natural endowment of heat in the mind” (II.19.ii).³⁴ He admits that the “natural” quality of this anger makes it difficult to overcome, as “once the elements have been mixed at birth, to alter them is out of the question,” but asserts that one can do things to avoid fanning the flames, so to speak, such as avoiding too much wine or food and getting plenty of exercise (II.20.i).³⁵ Contrary to Seneca’s estimation, Lactantius interprets this physiological connection as a divine sanctioning of anger. He argues that if God did not intend for us to be angry, then he would not have “inserted anger in the liver of man, since it is believed that the cause of this emotion is contained in the moisture of the gall.” Lactantius does add, however, that although God “does not altogether prohibit anger,” he does forbid us to “persevere in anger. For the anger

³³ Q. 48, Article 2, p 534.

³⁴ Seneca, *De Ire* 58.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

of mortals ought to be mortal; for if it is lasting, enmity is strengthened to lasting destruction.”³⁶ Milton’s appraisal of human anger in “An Apology” follows Lactantius’ interpretation. He argues that the passions are “made the proper mould and foundation of every mans peculiar guifts, and virtues.” Because the sanguine individual is not forced to “empty out all his sociable liveliness,” therefore, neither should “the cholerick to expel quite the unsinning predominance of his anger.”³⁷

While opinions as to the sinful nature of human anger differ, early modern writers and theologians share in a general consensus that God’s anger is good, righteous, merciful, and ultimately loving. This depiction of God’s perfect anger may seem somewhat at odds with the way God is portrayed in the Bible, especially the Old Testament. Although Nahum 1:3 gives us a Yahweh who is “slowe to angre,” Isaiah warns:

Beholde, the days of the Lord cometh cruel, with wrath and fierce anger to lay the land waste: and he shal destroy the sinners out of it Everie one that is found, shalbe stricken through: and whosoever joyneth him self, shal fall by the sworde. Their children also shalbe broken in pieces before their eies: their houses shalbe spoiled, and their wives ravished. (Isaiah 13:9;15-16)³⁸

Philosophers and theologians have examined this problematic notion of the “wrath of God” for millennia. As the *Anchor Bible* notes, the influence of Hellenic philosophy, such as Stoicism, gave rise to notions of God as detached or impassive.³⁹ This perception struck

³⁶ *De Ira Dei* 42.

³⁷ “An Apologie,” *The Works of John Milton*. Vol III. Ed. Frank Allen Patterson. (New York: Columbia UP, 1931): 3:313.

³⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Bible are from *The Geneva Bible, a facsimile of the 1560 edition*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

³⁹ “Wrath of God,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol 6. Ed. David Noel Freedman. (New York: Doubleday, 1992): 989.

many early modern theologians as inconsistent with the Biblical portrait of God, who clearly experienced anger, pity, sorrow, and love. But what is the nature of this experience? Does God “feel” these emotions, or do human beings simply use this familiar terminology of emotion to describe his actions? Erasmus addresses this question in his 1524 “Diatribes or Sermon Concerning Free Will”:

Holy Scripture knows how to adjust its language to our human condition. In it are passages where God is angry, grieved, indignant, furious; where he threatens and hates. Again in other places he has mercy, he regrets, he changes his intentions. This does not mean that such changes really take place in the nature of God. These are rather modes of expression, benefiting our weakmindedness and dullness.⁴⁰

Erasmus thus characterizes the Bible’s depiction of God’s wavering emotions as a human accommodation. God’s nature is never in flux; He does not feel angry one day and then merciful the next. Rather, human “weakmindedness” demands a portrait of God’s mind that we can understand. The Bible thus gives us a God whose emotional experience is at least somewhat similar to our own. Because of this, we should not understand God to suffer wrath as an emotional phenomenon, but as part of His ineffable nature. Erasmus does not deny the ontological reality of God’s wrath, but instead argues that we must never assume that it bears any legitimate correspondence to the human experience of anger or other emotions.

Thomas Adams makes a similar point in his aptly-named 1652 sermon, “God’s anger.” Although the majority of this sermon is devoted to reminding the audience that God is only angered by man’s sin (“There can be no cause but sin; we never read that God was angry for any thing else.”), Adams also draws a nuanced distinction between God’s anger and man’s:

⁴⁰ Erasmus, “A Diatribe or Sermon Concerning Free Will.” *Discourse on Free Will*. Trans. Ernst F. Winter. (London; New York: Continuum, 2005):8.

Man may be angry without sin, not without perturbation: God is angry without either perturbation or sin. His anger is in his nature, not by anthropopathie, but properly; being his corrective Justice, or vindicative Justice Our anger is an impotent passion: His a most clear, free, and just operation. By this affection in our selves, wee may guesse at the perfection that is in God.⁴¹

While human beings can feel anger without sinning, it is impossible for them to be angry without also suffering “perturbation”—some sort of agitation. God, however, experiences anger free of both sin and “perturbation.” Furthermore, where our anger is an “impotent passion,” God’s is a “just operation.” In other words, we *feel* anger imperfectly; God *does* anger perfectly. Anger is part of God’s nature because it is a necessary part of His Justice. Whereas Erasmus argues that the Bible uses human language and ideas to frame God’s mind in a way our own can comprehend, Adams suggests that we may look to our own “affection” of anger for a “guesse” at what God experiences. Our anger, then, is a hazy mirror of God’s.

Despite providing a rigorous *apologia* for anger, Aquinas is similarly quick to admit that man’s anger is not the same as God’s. He reminds us that “we speak of anger in God, not as of a passion of the soul but as a judgment of justice, inasmuch as He wills to take vengeance on sin.”⁴² Following his earlier argument, Aquinas equates anger with vengeance. Because the perpetrator of this revenge is God, there is no “passion” involved with either the formulation or execution of this vengeful justice. Whereas human anger can potentially be just, God’s anger *is* justice. Thomas Jackson expands on this idea by arguing that whatever affection God has is perfect in Him and imperfect in us, because God has these affections without passion. For example, God is loving, but is never “moved with love,” because He *is*

⁴¹ Thomas Adams. “God’s anger; and, Man’s comfort” (1652). Union Theological Seminary (New York, N. Y.) Early English Books Online. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library. 15 Feb 2010. 6-7.

⁴² Q.47. Article I. p 524.

Love. This argument also extends to the “irascible” passions: “He is most jealous of his glory, and a revenger of iniquity most severe; yet never moved with jealousy, yet never passionate in revenge; because, to such as provoke his punitive justice, he is eternally severity and revenge itself.”⁴³ Furthermore, Jackson stresses that God takes no pleasure in wreaking wrath, thereby contradicting both Thomas Aquinas and Seneca’s *adversarius*.

Jackson essentially argues that because God is dispassionate, He experiences the perfect Aristotelian mean of anger. He observes that although man usually returns God’s love with “unkindness and despite,” God is never swayed to exact “sudden revenge: quite contrary to the corrupt nature of man, (whose goodness usually is ill-thriven by his overgrowing greatness,) the irresistible strength of his almighty power is the unmovable pillar of moderation and merciful forbearance.”⁴⁴ This description recalls Aristotle’s depiction of the praiseworthy angry man, “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.”⁴⁵ Even Lactantius, who elsewhere defends human anger, admits that “the anger of man ought to be curbed, because he is often angry unjustly; and he has immediate emotion,” while God, who is “eternal and of perfect virtue ... is never angry unless deservedly.”⁴⁶

Another major question for early modern writers is, to borrow phrasing from the *Anchor Bible*, whether God’s wrath constitutes “a permanent attribute of God co-equal with love, or something more transient that is precipitated by man’s behavior.”⁴⁷ In other words, is

⁴³ *A Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes*. Vol V. (Oxford, Oxford UP: 1844): 205.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 129

⁴⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics* 96-97.

⁴⁶ “A Treatise on the Anger of God” 41.

⁴⁷ “Wrath of God” 989.

divine wrath the necessary counterpart to divine love, or is it merely a reaction to human sin? In some ways, this question is a false dilemma, as many writers argue that God's goodness is coeval with His justice: a good God punishes the wicked and rewards the virtuous. For this reason, Lactantius criticizes the Epicurean notion of a God who never experiences anger, as this suggests a God who never experiences kindness. In refusing to "concede to Him a vice," Lactantius argues, Epicurus "deprived Him also of a virtue."⁴⁸ He makes a similar argument against the Stoics, who claim that because God does not suffer, He is free from the earthly taint of anger. Lactantius contends that if God is not angered by "the impious and the unrighteous, it is clear that He does not love the pious and the righteous The loving of the good arises from the hatred of the wicked Because God is moved by kindness, therefore He is also liable to anger."⁴⁹ God's anger is thus a necessary element of his goodness, for if human sins went unpunished, we could not consider him to be good or just. It therefore is right for God to "take vengeance upon the wicked, and destroy the pestilent and guilty," so that the interests of "all good men" are furthered. "Thus," Lactantius concludes, "even in anger itself there is also contained a showing of kindness."⁵⁰ God's wrath is indeed the necessary counterpart to both His goodness and the larger idea of divine justice.

Lactantius' depiction of God is fraught with emotional terms: he ascribes to God feelings of love, hatred, anger, and kindness. Indeed, Lactantius never claims that God does not feel emotion; instead, he argues that God feels only "virtuous" emotions. God is not susceptible to "desire, fear, avarice, grief, and envy," but can and does experience "anger

⁴⁸ "A Treatise on the Anger of God," 5.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 7-8.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 32.

towards the wicked, regard towards the good, pity towards the afflicted.”⁵¹ Lactantius also stresses that because God is “eternal and of perfect virtue,” He exercises complete control over His wrath, and is “never angry unless deservedly.”⁵² In a similar vein, Thomas Jackson argues that wrath and severity are “the proper effects of his consequent will; that is, they are the infallible consequents of our neglecting and despising his will revealed for our good, or sweet promises of saving health.”⁵³

This notion of anger arising in God only as a reaction to man’s sin provides an inexorable link between divine wrath and divine vengeance that, in some ways, mirrors Aquinas’ link between human anger and the desire for vengeance. Interpreting God’s wrath as punishment necessarily eliminates the idea of divine anger as a wanton emotion and reinforces a providentialist reading of history. This interpretation was extremely popular in early modern England. As Alexandra Walsham notes, God was held responsible for “every inexplicable occurrence; He regularly stepped in to discipline sinners and bestow blessings upon the righteous and the good. History was the canvas on which the Lord etched His purpose and intentions.”⁵⁴ This reading of Providence into history had its roots in the Hebrew Bible. In Chronicles, for example, an impersonal wrath of God is portrayed as the driving force of history. War and other indirect misfortunes that befall Israel are explained as the result of God’s anger. On occasion, this wrath is described in such general terms that it is

⁵¹ Ibid., 32.

⁵² Ibid., 41.

⁵³ *A Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes* 189.

⁵⁴ Alexandra Walsham. *Providence in Early Modern England*. (Oxford: Oxford UP. 1999), 2.

not even specifically ascribed to God.⁵⁵ As the *Anchor Bible* argues, reading God's wrath as an act of justice requires one to draw distinctions between "passion" and "pathos." Passion is "an emotional convulsion" that makes it "impossible to exercise free consideration of principles and the determination of conduct in accordance with them."⁵⁶ Whereas passion signifies "a loss of self-control," pathos is

an act formed with care and intention, the result of determination and decision. It is not a 'fever of the mind' that disregards standards of justice and culminates in irrational and irresponsible action; it is intricately linked to 'ethos' and approximates what we mean by 'righteous indignation.' The wrath of God tends to be portrayed in this way in the Old Testament, especially in the prophets; it seems not to be an essential attribute or fundamental characteristic of Yahweh's persona but an expression of his will; it is a reaction to human history, an attitude called forth by human (mis)conduct.⁵⁷

According to the *Anchor Bible* editors, ascribing historical events to divine will requires an understanding that God acts with pathos, not passion. Or, in the words of a modern theologian, for God, "wrath *is* punishment, not the divine emotion which prompts or accompanies punishment."⁵⁸ God's anger is not a capricious whim but a just reaction to human sin that creates providential order.

This 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 your selves unto

⁵⁵ See, for example, 1Chron. 27:24: "And Ioab the sonne of Zeruiah began to number; but he finished it not, because there came wrath for it against Israel, nether was the number put into the Chronicles of King David."

⁵⁶ "Wrath of God" 991.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 991.

⁵⁸ Anthony Tyrell Hanson . *The Wrath of the Lamb* (London: SPCK, 1957) 97.

God ... and give your members as weapons of righteousness unto God .”⁵⁹ This notion is even clearer in Romans 13:4, where Paul reminds the wicked man to fear the sword of his earthly King, for “he is the minister of God to take vengeance on him that doeth evil.” In addition to using a just ruler as an implement of wrath, God can also use a wicked tyrant for the same purposes. Although this concept of the “scourge of God” appeared in both Plutarch and Plotinus, the idea gained far greater popularity with the advent of Christianity. The trope of the *flagellum dei* provided an answer to the question of how a just God could allow a wicked tyrant to wreak havoc on His beloved creation. Christian authors explained that the role of the scourge was to punish, but ultimately lovingly reform, His people. By allowing—or, perhaps, causing—a despot 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.⁶⁰

This idea that a human being may serve as God’s righteous “weapon” is also reflected in Bishop Joseph Hall’s 1627 work, “Heaven Upon Earth.” Hall writes: “God strikes some

⁵⁹Where the Geneva translation has “weapons,” the King James version has “instruments,” Wycliffe “arms,” Luther “*waffen*”, and the Vulgate *arma*. The original Greek word is *όπλα* (weapons).

⁶⁰ Perhaps the most famous Biblical example of this is in Exodus, where God hardens Pharaoh’s heart to prevent him from freeing the Israelites. This incident sparked lively debate amongst early modern theologians as to whether Pharaoh had any say in the matter of acting as the “scourge of God.” Did God create in Pharaoh ambition and obduracy, or did these traits merely incline God to choose him as His scourge. In *On Free Will*, Erasmus argues that Pharaoh “turned evil on his own account, since he preferred to follow his own inclination, rather than to obey God’s commandments. This malice of Pharaoh God has utilized for his honor and for the salvation of his people” (48). Pharaoh’s nefarious nature, therefore was not God’s doing, but His opportunity. Luther, on the other hand, contends that because all men are wicked, and God’s Omnipotence works in and through all men, then all of the men God works through are indeed wicked (130). Therefore, Pharaoh’s particular nature played no part in God’s choice of him as a scourge. For his part, Calvin argues in his *Institutes* that God used the evil will of Pharaoh and other scourges for His own purposes, as “while they [the scourges] were obeying their own unbridled lust, they were serving, unknowing, God’s righteousness. See! There is God; there they are—authors of the same work! But in the same work shines God’s righteousness; their iniquity” (46-7). God can use the unjust, even the pagan, as his scourge. However, this does not make either them or their work good; God is the only source of righteousness in this equation.

immediately from Heaven with his own arm, or with the arm of angels; others he buffets with their own hands; some by the revenging sword of an enemy; others with the fist of his dumb creatures: God strikes in all: his hand moves in theirs.”⁶¹ This notion raises an array of issues. God’s anger may be pure and passionless, but can it remain so when it is channeled through a human instrument? One might first look to Christ as an example of God’s dispassionate emotion channeled through a human instrument. Early modern translations of the *Nichomachean Ethics* suggest that the “anger” of Christ is, in fact, the perfect Aristotelian mean.

As with other passions, Aristotle advises that one should try to find the mean temperament between an excess and deficiency of anger; however, he seems unable to find precise terms for any of these states. A modern translation of Aristotle reads “Good temper is a mean with respect to anger; the middle state being unnamed, and the extremes almost without a name as well, we place good temper in the middle position, though it inclines towards the deficiency, which is without a name. The excess might be called a sort of ‘irascibility.’”⁶² Early modern translators, on the other hand, had an easier time in supplying names for these temperaments. John Wilkinson’s 1547 *The ethiques of Aristotle* reads: “In ire is a meane & an extreme, & the extremities have proper names, and the meane is called Mekenēs, and he that kepeth the meane, is called meke, and he that doth habound in ire is called Irefull. And he that is lesse angry then he ought to be is called Iniracible or

⁶¹ Qtd. in Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, 198.

⁶² Ibid., 96.

irelesse.”⁶³ Meekness, a quality commonly associated with Christ, thus becomes the moderate ideal of anger.

Although Christ is indeed typically known for his “mekenes,” there are instances in the Bible where Christ shows anger, such as when he overturns the moneychangers’ tables in the temple. For his part, Aquinas uses the link he established between anger and vengeance to prove that the anger of Christ was just and holy. Aquinas admits that “it would seem that there was no anger in Christ,” and refers to James 1:20: “The anger of man worketh not the justice of God.” However, he contends that

when sorrow is inflicted upon someone, there arises within him a desire of the sensitive appetite to repel this injury brought upon himself or others. Hence anger is a passion composed of sorrow and the desire of revenge. Now it was said (A6) that sorrow could be in Christ. As to the desire of revenge it is sometimes with sin, i.e. when anyone seeks revenge beyond the order of reason: and in this way anger could not be in Christ, for this kind of anger is sinful. Sometimes, however, this desire is without sin—nay, is praiseworthy, e.g. when anyone seeks revenge according to justice, and this is zealous anger. For Augustine says (on Jn. 2:17) that “he is eaten up by zeal for the house of God, who seeks to better whatever He sees to be evil in it, and if he cannot right it, bears with it and sighs.” Such was the anger that was in Christ.⁶⁴

Aquinas thus establishes that because Christ experiences both sorrow *and* a sinless desire for revenge, he feels anger.

If we follow Aquinas’ argument and the precedent set in the Old Testament, Christ’s divinity makes his anger sinless and a just King can dispassionately execute a criminal. But can an ordinary individual who has suffered indignation righteously convey God’s wrath

⁶³ *The ethiques of Aristotile, that is to saye, preceptes of good behauoute and perfighte honestie, now newly tra[n]slated into English.* Trans. John Wilkinson. 1547. Early English Books Online. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library. 14 February 2010.

⁶⁴ Q. 15, Article IX.

while simultaneously exacting personal vengeance? Can a passionate human being be a legitimate conduit of God's dispassionate anger? To what degree did early moderns consider "the wrath of God" to be a metaphorical accommodation instead of an ontological reality?

This dissertation examines the way Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedies answer these questions by exploring instances where these two types of wrath collide—or, perhaps, collude—on the early modern stage by contextualizing plays such as William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy*, and John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* with theological writings by John Calvin, Bishop Edward Reynolds, and Thomas Jackson, among others. My study treats the relationship between divine and human anger as a spectrum. I begin by discussing plays that feature explicitly divine or explicitly human acts of wrath. I then engage two complicated amalgamations: human anger mediated through divine wrath and divine wrath conveyed through human agents.

The first chapter discusses revenge tragedies that feature ostensible acts of divine intervention: the accidental suicide of D'amville in Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* and the well-timed lightning bolt that strikes down Malefort Senior in Phillip Massinger's *The Unnatural Combat*. In both of these plays, the wicked characters are felled not by heroic protagonists but by God Himself. Tourneur's noble Charlemont refuses to avenge his father's death, constantly reminding both himself and the audience that vengeance belongs to God alone. In Massinger's play, the wronged Malefort Junior actually asks God *not* to intervene so that he himself can exact revenge. Junior's request for God to "forebeare [His] thunder" is granted, albeit with ironic timing, as God kills Senior after both Junior and his innocent half-sister are dead. By analyzing these plays alongside key passages from the Book of Isaiah, I

argue that these works function as exhortations against anger, rashness, and despair while simultaneously portraying human beings as inappropriate vessels for divine wrath.

In chapter two, I contend that the excessively emotional temperament of John Marston's Antonio is reflected in both his obsession with the physical body and the brutally sadistic punishment he levies against his enemies. The ending of *Antonio's Revenge* represents a marked departure from traditional revenge tragedy tropes, as the revengers not only survive, but vow to take holy orders. While many critics read this self-imposed exile as a rejection of corrupt society, I contend that it represents an attempt to retroactively instill their actions with heavenly approval, replacing their bodily fixations with apparent devotion to the spiritual. In so doing, Marston's play portrays divine wrath as a human construct, easily adapted to suit the characters' motivations.

The amalgamation between human and divine anger is first explored in chapter three, which discusses the way the construction of the "villain revenger" in Henry Chettle's *Hoffman* and Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* is informed by the imprecatory psalms. In these plays, the protagonists act on the belief that heaven applauds even their bloodiest deeds. Similarly, the writer of the imprecatory psalms assumes that God shares in his personal outrages, thus revealing a human wrath that is so thoroughly mediated through divine anger that the two become indistinguishable, perhaps even inseparable. Here, wrath connects the human mind and the divine. Vindice, Hoffman, and the psalmist willfully locate correspondences between their emotions and God's; however, only the villains believe that God wants them to personally exact His vengeance.

My final chapter approaches this amalgamation from the opposite view: a God-initiated link between divine wrath and human anger. I develop this argument by approaching

Hamlet as a secular Jeremiah. Many early modern authors, such as John Milton and John Donne, generally treat Jeremiah as either a righteous prophet promising destruction to the reprobates or as a distraught pariah who must watch his recalcitrant city perish. I argue that Shakespeare uses both of these Jeremiahs in developing Hamlet's character. Both Hamlet and Jeremiah are given supernatural directives to reform a wicked society: the Ghost impels Hamlet to revenge his murder and Yahweh uses Jeremiah to urge the Judeans to repent. This message from an otherworldly force stirs a range of emotions in both men. Hamlet and Jeremiah doubt themselves, dread their tasks, seethe with anger, and wish for their own deaths. In presenting figures who experience—and eloquently communicate—such intense personal anguish, both *Hamlet* and the Book of Jeremiah suggest that human emotion is necessary for connecting with the divine pathos. The massive body count at the end of *Hamlet*, however, indicates that human anger remains a defective articulation of the divine model.

CHAPTER ONE

Waiting on the God Who Waits: Divine Anger in *The Atheist's Tragedy* and *The Unnatural Combat*

In *A Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes* (1628), Thomas Jackson argues that God's "displeasure" is not "clothed" with the same passions that taint human anger.

Despite this fact,

the motions of the creatures appointed to execute his wrath are more furious than any man's passions in extremest 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; the most dreadful spectacles that heaven or earth, or the intermediate elements can afford, but copies of his ireful countenance: howbeit this change or alteration in the creature proceeds from him without any internal passion or alteration; *Immotus movet*; 'He moveth all things, being himself immovable.'⁶⁵

In this passage, Jackson suggests that earthly agents of divine wrath, be they forces of nature or human beings, are poor imitations of God's anger. No human voice can compare to thunder, no tyrant's frowns can be as terrible as fire and brimstone. But while these "intermediate elements" pale in comparison to God, they themselves undergo an exponential increase in passion: they become "more furious than any man's passions in extremest fury can be." Therefore, although God Himself remains emotionally detached during this process of inspiration, the agents appointed to "execute his wrath" are filled with even *more* passion. These earthly intermediaries are imperfect versions of the divine analogue *because* they are

⁶⁵ 197-8.

earthly. Human beings may be able to deliver “echoes” of God’s anger, but they are incapable of divorcing God’s anger from their passion.

Jackson makes these observations without condemning the human agents. He seems almost bemused by humankind’s futile attempts at conveying divine wrath: a lowly tyrant frowns while God rains down brimstone. Jackson thus uses this comparison between God’s anger and man’s to praise God for being “Immovable.” In a similar vein, 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. However, these plays also vividly demonstrate that human passions corrupt divine anger to a destructive degree.

The main plot of *The Atheist’s Tragedy* involves the (non)conflict between the noble Charlemont and his wicked uncle, D’Amville. Critics have traditionally suggested that this play is an overly simplistic dramatization of triumph of faith over atheism,⁶⁶ and that Tourneur has so thoroughly “bled” Charlemont of “every serious human weakness” that he is “neither believable nor tragic.”⁶⁷ But while Tourneur is no Shakespeare, *The Atheist’s Tragedy* is more than just a thinly veiled morality play. 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).⁶⁸

⁶⁶ See, for example, Fredson Bowers’ discussion of *The Atheist’s Tragedy* in *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642*. Princeton: Princeton UP (1940), 139-44. See also Richard Levin’s *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama*. (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1971), 75-85.

⁶⁷ Charles A. Hallett and Elaine S. Hallett. *The Revenger’s Madness: A Study of Revenge Tragedy Motifs*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press (1980), 273.

⁶⁸ All citations from this play refer to *The Atheist’s Tragedy*. Eds. Brian Morris and Roma Gill. London: Ernest Benn, 1977.

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." It seems that the only reason Montferrers would have his son return to France is to observe inertly the way events unfold. If his murder is to be avenged, it will be done by God. Charlemont first assumes the apparition to be "a vain dream," for as far as he knows, his father is safe under the watchful eye of dear uncle D'Amville. When the Musketeer not only sees the ghost but challenges it to a scuffle, Charlemont becomes starkly convinced of its reality. After an attempt to "*fearfully avoid*" (II.vi.60) the ghost, Charlemont swiftly apologizes for his doubt and the scene abruptly ends. Tourneur does not provide any glimpse into Charlemont's thought process in the aftermath of the Ghost's appearance. There is no ostensible inner struggle on the part of our hero; Charlemont's a soldier, not a philosopher. Granted, the ghost of Montferrers is never mistaken for a spirit of evil, and his directive (i.e., go back to France and see what happens) is both perfectly clear and seemingly innocuous.

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 understandably startling: "I am not dead" (3.1.72). As Charlemont tries to revive her from

the resulting swoon, he curses himself for acting with “rash / And inconsiderate passion,” in not realizing that his sudden appearance “might affright her sense” (3.1.73-6). But 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, say, butchering one of D’Amville’s sons in a fit of rage and then serving him for dinner later. His one 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’s lament that the least of his woes is too much for 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. It can conceivably be argued that Sebastian starts the fight, taking Charlemont for a ghost and stabbing at him in wild 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 this is more than self-defense. 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 the avenging to God: “Let Him revenge my murder and thy wrongs / To whom the justice of revenge belongs” (III.ii.32-3).

Dutiful, moderately intelligent, and somewhat smug, Charlemont is perhaps not the most dynamic character ever to grace the stage, but his response to this warning reveals a greater depth than most critics have traditionally allowed him. 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.

We also see this principle illustrated in Castabella’s explanation of the connection between mercy and justice:

mercy is an attribute
As high as justice, an essential part
Of His unbounded goodness, whose divine
Impression, form, and image man should bear,
And methinks man should love to imitate
His mercy, since the only countenance
Of justice were destruction, if the sweet
And loving favour of His mercy did
Not mediate between it and our weakness.
(III.iv.4-12)

According to Castabella, there are two visible signs of God’s justice on earth: mercy and destruction. Although our sinful nature deserves destruction, mercy intercedes on our behalf. 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. If a human being is incapable of

delivering dispassionate justice, it is better to err on the side of love, making mercy the best form of divine justice for man to appropriate. Justice can only be attributed to God if you remove affection from Justice.

Although Charlemont obediently chooses “religion” over “blood,” he is imprisoned for wounding Sebastian. Charlemont bemoans the injustice of his situation:

I grant thee, Heaven, thy goodness doth command
Our punishments, but yet no further than
The measure of our sins. How should they else
Be just? Or how should that good purpose of
Thy justice take effect by bounding men
Within the confines of humanity,
When our afflictions do exceed our crimes?
Then they do rather teach the bar'brous world
Examples that extend her cruelties
Beyond their own dimensions, and instruct
Our actions to be more, more barbarous.
(III.iii.1-11)

Charlemont seems mired in a universal conundrum: 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? Critics have seized upon this soliloquy as an example of Charlemont's unspectacular intellect. As Brian Morris and Roma Gill note, “Charlemont is no theologian: ten minutes with the Book of Job would have taught him that this line of enquiry is not only fruitless, it is naïve.”⁶⁹ Indeed, were Charlemont to end there, his words might certainly seem naïve. However, he follows this petition to heaven by chastising himself for doing so:

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

⁶⁹ *The Atheist's Tragedy*. Introduction (xxiii). They go on to say: “Tourneur, in his handling of the revenge them, does not attempt to explore the inner recesses of any character's soul. He is far more concerned with outward display, with the demonstration—sometimes in quite sketchy terms—of a proposition and its necessary outworking” (xxiii).

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)

Charlemont here recognizes that his physical discomfort in being incarcerated 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 a dispassionate actor and that in ascribing emotion to God's judgment, human beings commit blasphemy. Furthermore, *because* God is, to recall a phrase from Thomas Jackson, "the unmovable pillar of moderation and merciful forbearance,"⁷⁰ His wrath is just and moderate. If we perceive it as immoderate, then the problem is with our skewed human understanding, not the judgment itself.

In the first half of his soliloquy, Charlemont seems 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 Stoic 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) culpable. Charlemont imagines Fate, whom he later credits for springing him from prison, as separate from God's justice. This shifting of blame away from God not only avoids blasphemy—Charlemont no longer shakes his fist at the heavens—but it also allows him to think of

⁷⁰ *A Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes*, 129.

himself as both a Stoic *and* a Christian hero. 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). By being the master of his emotions, he mirrors the “undisturbed judgement” of Christ admired by Bishop Reynolds:

There is more honour, in the having Affections subdued, than in having none at all; the business of a wise man is not to be *without* them, but to be *above* them. And therefore our Savior himself sometimes loved, sometimes rejoiced, sometimes wept, sometimes desired, sometimes mourned and grieved, but these were not *Passions* that violently and immoderately troubled him; but he as he saw fit, did with them *trouble himself*. His *Reason excited, directed, moderated, repressed* them, according to the rule of perfect, cleare, and undisturbed judgement.⁷¹

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 theoretically make decisions that are more in line with divine justice than human concepts of vengeance. In this case, the decision requires calmly and freely accepting an undeserved death sentence. Unlike the vessels who, as Thomas Jackson describes, grow “more furious than any man’s passions in extremest fury can be,” Charlemont becomes the picture of Stoic restraint or Christian meekness.

However, *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. An atheist,⁷²

⁷¹. *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man*, 48.

⁷² For a thorough discussion of D’Amville’s atheism, see Robert Ornstein. “*The Atheist’s Tragedy* and Renaissance Naturalism.” *Studies in Philology*, 51:2 (1954), 194-207. Ornstein describes D’Amville as “a very curious compound of atheist, materialist, sensualist, nature worshipper, and politician” (195). John S. Wilks contends that D’Amville is a “post-Reformation consequence” of an “aggressive Renaissance secularism” earlier dramatized in Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus*. (*The Idea of Conscience in Renaissance Tragedy*. Routledge: London, 1990): 171.

D'Amville's only means of securing any sort of "eternal life" is by accruing wealth and then passing said wealth unto his progeny. In an effort to attain this pseudo-afterlife, D'Amville 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. 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 inebriated servants start using their torches to swat at one another, D'Amville has a ready excuse to send them (and their helpful light) out of the way. The moment they are offstage, D'Amville pushes the hapless Montferrers into the pit, where Borachio bludgeons 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 ostentatious tirade 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 is only too happy to bask in 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; emphasis added)

D'Amville realizes that his success depended on the help of "instruments." In the above 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. Both Montferrers and the servants are ignorant accomplices; the darkness, however, seems to D’Amville as an indication that Nature was complicit with his scheme. D’Amville heralds the “*thunder and lightning*” at line 140—signs often interpreted as evidence of divine displeasure—as applause and “encouragement” from Nature. Had the thunder sounded earlier, it would have caused Montferrers to retreat indoors; had the lightning flashed at a less fortunate time, it would have illuminated the dangerous pit in Montferrers’ path. Although D’Amville the atheist does not believe in providence, he does not seem to believe in coincidence either. Because Nature is sympathetic with D’Amville’s designs (for, as Borachio explains at II.v.164-5, she “herself decay doth hate,” and therefore favors “those that strengthen their estate”), she willingly serves as the “beauteous mistress of a murderer” (l. 177). This “mistress” 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 inadvertent suicide at the play’s end. Furthermore, his boast of receiving “instrumental help” is linguistically 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 too ignoble 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; emphasis added). Here, “instrument” refers to both the executioner’s ax and D’Amville himself. Although the ax will literally be striking Charlemont’s blood, the

weapon per se is not noble in the hands of the executioner. When D'Amville wields the ax, he imbues both 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. His intellect and desire for self-advancement gave him super-human status, causing Nature and circumstance to act in concert with his plans. In this scene, D'Amville is not merely acting with ambition or jealousy, but on the belief that Charlemont's death will somehow answer for the death of his sons. Therefore, D'Amville here sees both the ax and himself as instruments of a justice that transcends 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 notoriously inadvertent suicide: "*As he raises up the axe strikes out his own brains, staggers off the scaff*" (V.ii.241-2). Because the bizarre spectacle of D'Amville's self-murder is what makes the play famous (or, at the very least, infamous), it has been a source of much critical contention. Hallett and Hallett concisely sum up most scholarly opinion by referring to it as a "crude *deus ex machina*."⁷³ Most critics argue that aside from evincing Tourneur's lack of skills as a dramatist, D'Amville's unique stage death was seen by early modern audiences as

⁷³ *The Revenger's Madness* 277.

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.⁷⁴ 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 proove himselfe to be, in the evidence of those workes; then all the *Atheists* in the world can proove God not to be, by the efficacy of their words.⁷⁵

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 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.”⁷⁶

Although these arguments are insightful, they overlook a potential allusion to Isaiah 10.15-6, where Isaiah proclaims:

Shal the ax boast it self against him that heweth therwith? Or shal the sawe exalt itself against him that moueth it? As if the rod shulde lift up it self against him that taketh it up, or the staffe shulde exalt it self, as it were no wood. Therfore shal the Lord God of hosts send among his fat men, leanenes, and under his glorie he shal kindle a burning, like the burning of fyre.

⁷⁴ Robert Ornstein. “*The Atheist’s Tragedy* and Renaissance Naturalism.” *Studies in Philology*, 51: 2 (1954). 194-207.

⁷⁵ Qtd. in Ornstein 201.

⁷⁶ Huston Diehl. “‘Reduce Thy Understanding to Thine Eye’: Seeing and Interpreting in *The Atheist’s Tragedy*.” *Studies in Philology* 78.1 (1981):55.

In this passage, Yahweh rebukes Assyria for boasting about his prowess against Israel. The Lord is the wielder, and Assyria His ax, an instrument used to punish the Israelites for their sins. Assyria himself has no power, but has only succeeded because the Lord has allowed him to do so. The ax, therefore, should not “boast itself” against the one who uses it, nor should the rod “lift up it self” against the one who wields it. As the commentary to the Geneva Bible elucidates: “Here we se that no creature is able to do anie thing, but as God appointeth him, and that they are all but his instruments to do his worke, thought the intentions be diverse.”⁷⁷ Although Assyria claims to have defeated Israel with his strength and wisdom, he was merely acting as the instrument of God’s wrath. God unleashed Assyria to reveal His justice to the Israelites.

In this play, the ax indeed does “raise itself” against the wielder, as D’Amville wields an ax, and is accidentally killed by a wayward ax-fall. On a more figurative level, however, one could read D’Amville as the ax, and God as the wielder. If *The Atheist’s Tragedy* were to adhere to the traditional revenge tragedy protocol, Charlemont would kill the villain, thus serving as God’s “ax.” But because D’Amville accidentally offs himself, he is the instrument of his own demise; he is his own Assyria. If we follow the model provided in Isaiah, Charlemont would not be an appropriate instrument for divine wrath because he is not a heathen, as was Assyria and as is D’Amville.⁷⁸ Furthermore, as Thomas Jackson observes, human beings are imperfect vessels of divine wrath because their judgment is clouded with passion, which is no more keenly illustrated than in this scene: D’Amville is so fraught with rage that he accidentally kills himself in his attempt to exact justice. In believing that his

⁷⁷ Isa. 10:15. Comment K, 286.

⁷⁸ For an in-depth analysis of the connection between Isa. 10:5 and early modern ideas of the “scourge of God,” see Roy W. Battenhouse’s article “Tamburlaine, the ‘Scourge of God’” *PMLA*, 56.2. (1941), 337-348.

own naturalistic, self-serving definition of “justice” supersedes Christian doctrine, the “ax” that is D’Amville boasts itself above his wielder, God. And, just as He did with Assyria, God strikes down the boasting instrument.⁷⁹ Ultimately, the death of D’Amville serves the same purpose as the routing of the Israelites: God’s justice is revealed.

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 ax 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 judgement, 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; emphasis added)

In these lines, D’Amville not only admits that there is a 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

⁷⁹ See also Isa. 10:12-16; 10:24-27.

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 has made a fool out of D'Amville for his faith in naturalism and his attempt to achieve an earthly eternity through wealth and progeny. But He has also shown the folly of the judges, and, by extension, all of human justice. 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.

The greatest irony in the play is that after receiving his deathblow, the evil D'Amville understands God's designs better than any of the "good" characters in the play:

1 JUDGE

Strange is his death and judgement. With the hands
Of joy and justice I thus set you free.
The power of that eternal providence
Which overthrew his projects in their pride
Hath made your griefs the *instrument* to raise
Your blessings to a greater height than ever.

(V.ii.269-274; emphasis added)

These lines perhaps reveal why it was so easy for D'Amville to deceive the judges in the first place. Although the judges have seen D'Amville acting eccentrically, to say the least, surely they should have words more incisive than "Strange is his death and judgement." Furthermore, D'Amville's admittedly "strange" death and judgment has proven, if nothing

else, that the judges have no legitimate claims to true justice, thereby rendering the Judge's "With the hands / Of joy and justice I thus set you free" a laughably empty pronouncement. If D'Amville had not intervened, the Judge would have used those same "hands of justice" to send Charlemont to his death. The Judge's assertion that providence has raised Charlemont's blessings to unprecedented heights seems somewhat specious, considering that Charlemont has lost his father, his uncle, two cousins, and just barely avoided the scaffold himself. Providence may have used Charlemont's greifs as an "instrument" to achieve a greater good, but certainly not in the way the Judge describes it. Charlemont's response is not much more insightful:

Only to Heaven I attribute the work,
Those gracious motives made me still forbear
To be mine own revenger. Now I see
That *patience is the honest man's revenge*.
(V.ii.279-284; emphasis in original)

We see that Charlemont too has missed the mark. 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 bear. D'Amville's death via self-axing, with its parallels to Isaiah 10:15, and the timing and location of this act (in a courtroom right before innocents are about to be executed) shows that *The Atheist's Tragedy* is more about the failure of human judgment than the triumph of human patience.

Charlemont's simple platitude also reveals that he has a rather unchristian understanding of "patience."⁸⁰ Irving Ribner suggests that the word "patience" in this play

⁸⁰ Morris and Gill argue that "one would expect Tourneur, who is quite precise and detailed about D'Amville's brand of atheism, to be equally detailed about Charlemont's patience. But this is not the case. Where he uses the word, Tourneur ascribes no precise (and certainly no theological) meaning to it. The nearest he comes to describing the virtue is ... where he speaks of suffering the blows of Fate with fortitude Not until the very

refers to “uncomplaining acceptance of fate as a manifestation of divine will, coupled with faith and hope in a future felicity promised by Christ.”⁸¹ Although Charlemont does demonstrate an “uncomplaining acceptance” of his death sentence, he does not necessarily interpret “patience” the same way that Ribner suggests. Instead, he seems to view patience as his key to personal revenge; because he patiently put off killing D’Amville, God rewarded him with the spectacle of D’Amville’s demise. While the original scriptural location of “vengeance is mine” is Deuteronomy 32:35, where Moses reminds the Israelites that God will eventually punish their enemies. The more famous version (and one the more oft-quoted in Renaissance) hails from Romans 12:19: “Dearly beloved, avenge not your selves, but give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I wil repaye, saith the Lord.” As Morris and Gill note, this verse is followed by “Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feede him: if he thirst, give him drinke: for in so doing, thou shalt heape coles of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with goodness.” Morris and Gill argue that “Tournear’s play resolutely avoids this area of ethical concern. There is no question that Charlemont is seeking by his patience and his forbearance to ‘heap coals of fire’ on the head of D’Amville.”⁸² Indeed, Charlemont’s belief that he in some way “deserves” to see D’Amville die does not reflect a Christian understanding of “patience,” even as this play presents it. Let us return to Montferrers’ two bits of post-mortem fatherly advice:

Attend with patience the success of things,
And leave revenge unto the King of kings.
(II.vi.22-4)

end does Charlemont relate his patience specifically to the Grace of God, and the theme is not in any sense a dramatic counterweight to the naturalistic atheism of D’amville” (xxi-xxii, *n.* 31).

⁸¹ *The Atheist’s Tragedy* 55.

⁸² Introduction to *The Atheist’s Tragedy* xx.

Let Him revenge my murder and thy wrongs
To whom the justice of revenge belongs.
(III.ii.32-3)

On both occasions, Montferrers specifically says that the revenge belongs to God alone. No matter how “honest” a man Charlemont is, he never has a claim to any part of the revenge process. God exacts vengeance because it is God who has been wronged. Like Assyria before him, D’Amville is a covetous, hubristic, murderous heathen who brags of his own intellect and power.⁸³ It is God’s prerogative to dispense justice as He sees fit, and, as Castabella noted in Act III, this justice can take the form of either mercy or destruction. Perhaps the reason that God does not strike down D’Amville immediately after his crime is because He is showing mercy in the form of patience.

As Thomas Jackson explains, human beings lack patience because we have a limited scope of understanding. Because God is omniscient, He never runs out of patience. However,

as man's wit in this case is but finite, so his patience cannot be complete. Even the wisest will be moved to wrath or violence, or other foul play, if the game whereat he shoots be fair and good, and most of his strings already broken; nor can he be absolutely secure of good success so long as the issue is subject to contingency, and may fall without the horizon of his foresight and contrivance. But wisdom infinite doth completely arm the Omnipotent Majesty (if I may so speak) with infinite patience and long-suffering towards such as every minute of their lives violently thwart and cross some or other particular means which he had ordained for his glory and their good.⁸⁴

Our impatience is a result of our lack of foresight. Because we do not know what will come of our present misfortunes, we either rush to right them ourselves or grow frustrated when

⁸³ See Isa. 10:12-13, where the Lord promises to punish “the proude heart of the King of Asshur, and his glorious and proude lokes, because he said, By the power of mine owne hand have I done it, and by my wisdom, because I am wise: therefore I have removed the borders of the people, and have spoiled their treasures, and have pulled down the inhabitants like a valiant man.”

⁸⁴ *A Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes* 87.

God takes too long to punish the wrongdoers. Jackson thus credits impatience with causing “wrath or violence” in even the “wisest” of human beings, and urges us to trust that God will eventually make things right.

This notion is thoroughly supported throughout the Old Testament, but particularly by the book of Isaiah, where Yahweh is depicted as both requiring patience from and having patience for His people. In Isaiah 30:15-18, the prophet says:

In rest and quietnes shal ye be saved: in quietness and in confidence shalbe your strength, but ye wolde not. For ye have said, No, but we wil flee away upon horses. Therefore shal ye flee. We wil ride upon the swiftest. Therefore shall your persecutors be swifter. A thousand as one shall flee at the rebuke of one ... til ye be left as a shippe mast upon the top of a mountain Yet therefore wil thy Lord waite, that he may have mercy upon you, and therefore wil he be exalted, that he may have compassion upon you: for the Lord is the God of iudgement. Blessed are al they that waite for him.

Although the Lord has promised salvation for His people, they choose expediency over faith. As a result, they are persecuted and isolated by their enemies. The Lord, however, shows mercy and delivers them from their troubles. The Geneva commentary on this passage lauds “the great mercies of God who with pacience waiteth to call sinners to repentance.”⁸⁵

Similarly, in Romans 9:22-23, Paul writes:

What and if God wolde, to shewe his wrath, and to make his power knowen, suffer with long pacience the vessels of wrath, prepared to destruction? And that he might declare the riches of his glory upon the vessels of mercy, which he hathe prepared unto glorie?

Thus, in both the Old and New Testaments, God is depicted as a patient wielder of wrath. In Isaiah, His patience is mercy: He waits for Israel to recognize their sins and repent. In Romans, His patience is both mercy and a way for Him to reveal His glory to the faithful and

⁸⁵ Commentary on Isa. 30:18. Comment Q (293).

the wicked alike. In the same vein, Lactantius reminds us that “He who ceases to sin renders the anger of God mortal. For this reason He does not immediately punish every one who is guilty, that man may have the opportunity of coming to a right mind, and correcting himself.”⁸⁶

This concept of “waiting on the God who waits” has several implications for a discussion of early modern revenge tragedy. Montferrers, like Isaiah, warns Charlemont to patiently await God’s intervention instead of hastily rushing to avenge his murder. Charlemont should assume that God is aware of the injustice and that He will take action when He deems the time appropriate. Most revenge tragedies begin with the same elements of societal disarray: a wicked leader has murdered the protagonist’s close relative (usually a father). This act seems to have gone unpunished, leaving it up to the protagonist to set things right. More often than not, the protagonist’s widowed mother is also somehow aggrieved by the villain. This pattern of tyranny, fatherless-ness, and abuse of widows is described throughout Isaiah, but most specifically in 10:1-4:

Wo unto them that decre wicked decrees, and write grievous things,
To kepe backe the poore from iugement and to take awaie the iugement of the poore of my people, that widowes maie be their praie,
and that thei maie spoile the fatherless.

The prophet also describes the consequences of such sin:

What wil ye do now in the daie of visitation, and of destruction, which Shal come from farre? To whome wil ye flee for helpe? And where wil ye leave your glorie? Without me everie one shal fall among them ... thei shal fall downe among the slaine: yet for all this his wrath is not turned awaie, but his hand is stretched out stil.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ “A Treatise on the Anger of God” 43.

⁸⁷ See also Isa. 1:23-4: “Thy princes are rebellions and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, nether doeth the widowes cause come before them. Therefore saith the Lord God of hostes, the mighties one of Israel, Ah, I wil ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies.”

God is thus depicted as recognizing the troubles on earth, being moved by them, and promising to punish the wicked. The action in a revenge tragedy arises when a revenger either doubts this promise to avenge, becomes impatient in waiting for it to be fulfilled, or believes that it is his duty to carry it out on God's behalf. But part of having faith in God's omniscience is also having faith in His mercy: perhaps sinners seem to go unpunished because God is patiently, mercifully waiting for them to repent. If this is so, then revengers who "rush" God by killing the murderers themselves commit a heinous sin. Furthermore, most revengers erroneously believe that God's vengeance must equal the villain's death, precluding the possibility of the villain's repentance.

In virtually every revenge tragedy, the villain is given time, opportunity, and impetus to repent; *The Atheist's Tragedy* is no different. After being frightened by the disguised Charlemont in the graveyard, D'Amville "*starts at the sight of a death's head*" and feels a pang of conscience. He marvels that the sky once drew "the curtains of the clouds between / Those lights and me about this bed of earth / When that same strumpet, Murder, and myself / Committed sin together," but now that he wishes for darkness to "steal from [his] shame unseen," the sky accosts him "I' th' face with all her light corrupted eyes / To challenge payment o' me" (III.ii.216-230). Worse than this, D'Amville mistakes a cloud for the sheeted ghost of Montferrers hovering above him in the sky. A crisis of conscience has thus thrown D'Amville's naturalistic worldview out of joint. Whereas he once saw Nature as both his mistress and accomplice, he now sees her as an adversary, shining light on his misdeeds and tormenting him with his victim's likeness.

With Nature no longer acting as a co-conspirator, D'Amville instead wishes for obliteration by her hand: he longs to have his body "circumvolved" inside a cloud so that

“when the thunder tears / His passage open, it might scatter me / To nothing in the air!” (IV.iii.249-52). D’Amville’s desire to be destroyed by what consumes him is an ironic foreshadowing to his actual demise at the play’s end, where his passionate hatred for Charlemont indeed becomes his own undoing. Furthermore, his wish to be incorporated into a cloud and then shattered by thunder echoes Castabella’s plea roughly 80 lines earlier for a bolt from the heavens to strike D’Amville down and recalls the common connection between divine wrath and thunder.

D’Amville also has a more subtle confrontation with his conscience when faced with the deaths of his sons. D’Amville murders his brother to create and perpetuate his own dynasty, thus securing a worldly “eternity.” He likens this process to building a house, and, presumably brandishing the rock used to bludgeon Montferrers, proclaims: “Upon this ground I’ll build my manor house, / And this shall be the chiefest corner stone” (II.iv.99-100). Samuel Schuman identifies these lines as “a rather obvious parody of the New Testament,” and describes the building imagery as “a bit pedestrian,” but “perfectly workmanlike tools to communicate the notions of grand rise and ruinous fall.”⁸⁸ But both Schuman and earlier critics of the play miss a crucial set of lines that relate to this imagery. As Castabella is accosted by D’Amville, she cries:

O patient Heav’n, why doest thou not express
Thy wrath in thunderbolts, to tear the frame
Of man in pieces? How can earth endure
The burden of this wickedness without
An earthquake, or the angry face of Heaven
Be not enflamed with lightning?
(IV.iii.162-8)

⁸⁸ *Cyril Tourneur*, p. 123-4. Schuman also cites the work of Una Ellis-Fermor, who contends that imagery of “the founding, raising and subsequent fall of a building ... illustrate[s] the founding, rearing, and overthrowing of the family of D’Amville.” See Fermor’s “The Imagery of *The Revenger’s Tragedie* and *The Atheist’s Tragedie*.” *Modern Language Review*. 30.3 (Jul 1935): 290.

In these lines, Castabella wonders why God has not shown wrath for D'Amville's sins. Castabella describes heaven as being so "patient" with D'Amville that God seems unmoved by his wickedness. But God does supply all three signs Castabella asks for—thunderbolts, "tear[ing] the frame of man in pieces," and an earthquake; He just does so according to His own time frame and, in the case of the earthquake, figuratively instead of literally. We will recall from Act II that there was thunder and lightning immediately after the murder of Montferrers, a sign D'Amville interpreted as Nature's approval instead of God's anger. The "tearing" of D'Amville's frame will come at the end of the play. The metaphorical "earthquake" that Castabella calls for comes figuratively in the form of the destruction of the D'Amville family line.

In Act V, D'Amville learns that his son Sebastian has been slain by the jealous Belforest. His other son, Rousard, is swiftly succumbing to illness. As Rousard moans in agony, D'Amville laments:

His gasping sighs are like the falling noise
Of some great building when the groundwork breaks.
On these two pillars stood the stately frame
And architecture of my lofty house.
An earthquake shakes 'em; the foundation shrinks.
Dear Nature, in whose honore I have raised
A work of glory to posterity,
O bury not the pride of that great action
Under the fall and ruin of itself.

(V.i.75-83)

Although D'Amville ascribes the death of his sons to "Nature," he himself makes the rhetorical link between his misfortune and God's wrath by referring to an earthquake, a common sign of God's wrath in the Old Testament.

It is this end of the D'Amville family line—completed, of course, by the death of D'Amville himself—that serves as God's vengeance. The fact that D'Amville himself

makes the link between his sons' deaths and an earthquake is significant, as it shows that he might, subconsciously at least, understand that his sins might be the reason for his misfortunes. The death of Rousard causes D'Amville's atheism to falter: "Sure there is some power above / [Nature] that controls her force" (V.ii.102-3). Unfortunately, this doubt does not propel D'Amville to belief in God; instead, it leads him to seek out earthly justice for his losses. D'Amville's passion for revenge against Charlemont causes him to be the one who rushes to revenge, thereby securing for himself the same fate that awaits almost every impatient revenger. Just as He does with the Israelites, God gives D'Amville time and opportunity to repent, thus reiterating Castabella's earlier claim that the two sides to God's justice are mercy and destruction. D'Amville's rejection of the former is an invitation to the latter.

Castabella's wish for God to "express [His] wrath in thunderbolts" is not literally granted in *The Atheist's Tragedy*. D'Amville's death—and thus, God's wrath—is delivered by means of a human instrument: D'Amville himself. 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 Jr. 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 ignominy to his already tarnished 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 oblivious 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 mens 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)⁸⁹

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 the 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 succumbs 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 “blustering Boreas,” likening the tempestuous weather to his inner turmoil:

I am posess’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

⁸⁹ All quotations from this work refer to: *The Unnatural Combat*. Ed. Robert Stockdale Telfer. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1932).

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, deriving perhaps from Hosea 10:8: ‘And they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us.’”⁹⁰ Malefort’s tempting of hell to release her furies is readily answered, as the bloody 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 revelatory 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 *per se*, 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

⁹⁰ Morris and Gill are commenting on a similar speech made by D’Amville at IV.iii.246, *n*80. They also note the reference in *Dr. Faustus*, V.ii.150-1.

being “long since resolv’d on” (II.i.46). Furthermore, as the duel approaches, Junior entreats his captains to “not entertain a false beleef / that I am mad,” and says his intact “discourse and reason” only makes his situation more devastating. This clear disavowal of madness (or even the pretense of madness) is quite a departure from most other characters charged with the prospect of revenge and obviously speaks to Junior’s rationality. The audience does not see Junior’s reaction to learning of his mother’s murder, therefore, nor are we privy to 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 axiom: “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 revengers 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. The repercussions of such a petition are readily evident: Junior is summarily 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. 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, albeit with ironic timing. God saves His vengeful thunder until both Junior and his innocent half-sister Theocrina are dead.

This scene can be taken as evidence that Massinger's God has a deep-seated appreciation of irony. 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 blaming fate and the stars for his sinful acts.⁹¹ God decides that He's heard just about enough and finally takes matters into His own hands. The other characters arrive on the scene shortly thereafter, and deduce from the unpleasant aroma wafting 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, "retaines 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 murther, and unnatural love" (V.ii.342-3).

⁹¹ A pointed reversal of II.i.200-215, where Malefort mutilates his son's corpse, reveling in his "power to be unnaturall" and proclaiming himself impervious to the buffets of Fate.

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 the unsavory 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 assuage his guilt by remembering that he is an accomplished sinner: “there’s something here that tels me / I stand accomptable for greater sinnes, / I never checked at” (V.ii.15-17). Malefort continues to quell his guilt by presenting a catalogue of felicitous partakers of incest, including the 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, on some level, 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). Lumping magic spells and penitence into the same cache of cures does little to establish the legitimacy of overt Christian overtones in the play, but, at the very least, it present Malefort with the idea that repentance is possible. 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. 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.

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 Sr. There is no “want” because, as Beaufort Senior words it in *The Unnatural Combat*, there “cannot be.” 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.

CHAPTER TWO

Votaries of Vengeance: Human Anger and Human Cruelty in *Antonio's Revenge*

A play brimming with linguistic superfluity and spectacular gore, John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* has been portrayed by critics as everything from a brilliant burlesque of revenge tragedies to a grotesquely overwrought literary disaster.⁹² While the play is, as the title might suggest, a revenge tragedy, the degree to which its author intended it to be seriously received as one is a matter of persistent critical contention.⁹³ Part of this confusion lies in the play's notorious excesses in language, characterization, and violence.⁹⁴ Most modern critics find the play problematic because of its bizarre ending: Antonio and his friends not only torture and kill the villainous Piero, they also murder and cook an innocent child. Furthermore, the revengers are heaped with praise, offered rewards, and then announce their plans to become religious hermits. While some critics argue that this ending belies

⁹² For an excellent summary of Marston's critical reception, see T.F. Wharton's *The Critical Fall and Rise of John Marston* (Columbia: Camden House, 1994).

⁹³ For a condensation of several persuasive arguments that Marston did not employ a burlesque style in this or any play, see Ann Blake's "The Humour of Children": John Marston's Plays in the Private Theatres." *The Review of English Studies*. 38:152. (1987): 471-82.

⁹⁴ Some critics have attributed these excesses in language and characterization to the fact that the play was written for child actors. R.A. Foakes argues that the exaggerated histrionics in both *Antonio* plays allowed the child actors to mock their adult counterparts performing revenge tragedies in other theaters. In his article, "John Marston's Fantastical Plays: *Antonio and Mellida* and *Antonio's Revenge*," Foakes contends: "The plays work from beginning to end as vehicles for child-actors consciously ranting in oversize parts, and we are not allowed to take their passions or motives seriously. Their grand speeches are undermined by bathos and parody, and spring from no developed emotional situation, so that we are not moved by them, and do not take them seriously enough to demand justice at the end" (224). In contrast, Ejner J. Jensen argues that "the history of the plays, playhouses, and actors of the early seventeenth century supplies a forceful argument that the boy actors, far from being inferior 'apes' capable only of the piquant charm of a masquerade, were in fact possessed of skill and talent sufficient not merely to achieve what the adults achieved—vital, moving drama—but to achieve it by the same means" ("The Style of the Boy Actors," *Comparative Drama*, 2, 1968: 106).

Marston's own personal sadistic bent,⁹⁵ others simply see it as evidence of his lack of skills as a dramatist.⁹⁶ T.S. Eliot, for example, has noted that this play, along with its predecessor *Antonio and Mellida* "give the effect of work done by a man who was so exasperated by having to write in a form he despised that he deliberately wrote worse than he could have written, in order to relieve his feelings."⁹⁷

Eliot's notion of Marston writing "to relieve his feelings" is not without merit when one considers the character of Antonio, who spends the entirety of the play either describing his feelings in melodramatic ecstasy or "relieving" them through murder. Antonio is perhaps one of the Jacobean stage's most overtly emotional characters; thus, *Antonio's Revenge* is, at least in part, a play about the effects of excess emotion. This idea is established in the Prologue, which promises that the play is not suited to those who are "uncapable of weighty passion." Those who have lived comfortable lives are advised to "hurry amain from our black-visaged shows." However, those who possess breasts "nailed to the earth with grief" or hearts "pierced through with anguish" are "most welcome" (Prol. 14-27).

In these first lines, the Prologue makes explicit the early modern connection between human emotion and human anatomy. This notion of emotion as a physiological phenomenon is reinforced in both *Antonio's Revenge* and its predecessor, *Antonio and Mellida*. Both plays are laden with descriptions of grief's effects on the heart, veins, arteries, entrails and blood itself. Furthermore, *Antonio's Revenge* is also laden with references to—and scenes featuring—the mutilation of these body parts. The extravagantly brutal nature of Antonio's

⁹⁵Samuel Schoenbaum seems especially keen on this opinion. See "The Precarious Balance of John Marston," *PMLA*, 67 (1957): 1078.

⁹⁶ In his article, "John Marston at the 'Mart of Woe: the 'Antonio' Plays," Rick Bowers instead argues that Marston's "oddities" should be regarded as "theatrical assertions" designed specifically for an audience familiar with the revenge tragedy tradition (19).

⁹⁷ "John Marston," in *Selected Essays*, 3rd ed., London (1951): 224.

actions is mirrored in both his emotions and in the exceedingly physical way that he describes his emotions. In portraying human rage as a shockingly cruel force, Marston vividly illustrates the differences between human wrath and its divine analogue.

In both *Antonio* plays, Antonio presents himself as a highly emotional character. He passionately delineates his woes, pronouncing himself “the most grief-full, despairing, wretched, / Accursed, miserable” before aposiopetically exclaiming “O, for heaven’s sake, / forsake me now” (II.ii.14-17).⁹⁸ Antonio seems to take a special delight in his miserable condition; he almost proudly proclaims that he has neither friends, nor country, nor father, but merely sits “In the dark cave of dusky misery” (*A&M* I.ii.211). Like many other revengers, Antonio uses this dramatic grieving to convey the depth of his suffering to the audience and the other characters. Unlike other revengers, however, Antonio is surrounded by those who share his grief: Maria has lost a husband, Pandulfo has lost a son, and Mellida has been falsely imprisoned for adultery. Antonio cannot claim any didactic purpose to his ostentatious lament, as most of the other characters sympathize with his grief. Rather than being comforted by this shared sorrow, Antonio rejects the idea that anyone else might suffer as intensely as he. Falling to the ground and weeping, Antonio wails: “Let none out-woe me; mine’s Herculean woe” (II.ii.134). He believes that his pain sets him apart from all other men, declaring: “May I be more cursed than heaven can make me / If I am not more wretched than man can conceive me,” and cannot imagine any act of “omnipotence” that might make a “sore forlorn orphan” like himself happy (II.ii.135-8). He also refuses to allow other characters to believe that they might be suffering to the extent that he does. When Pandulfo has the gall to utter “I am the miserablest soul that breathes,” Antonio, who has

⁹⁸ All quotes from *Antonio’s Revenge* and *Antonio and Mellida* are from *The Malcontent and Other Plays*, ed. Keith Sturges. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.

been lying on his back, “*sits up*” and says: “By th’heart of grief, thou liest! / I scourn’t that any wretched should survive / Outmounting me in that superlative: Most miserable / Most unmatched in woe. / Who dare assume that, but Antonio?” (IV.ii.75-81).

Antonio also chastises others for attempting to console him, wishing instead to be stricken with more grief:

Comfort’s a parasite, a flatt’ring jack,
And melts resolved despair. O boundless woe,
If there be any black yet unknown grief,
If there be any horror yet unfelt,
Unthought-of mischief in thy fiend-like power,
Dash it upon my miserable head;
Make me more wretch, more cursed if thou canst.
(I.ii.284-290)

Here, Antonio describes despair as a positive quality—it is “resolved”: firm, deliberate, and secure. Antonio thus wishes for more grief, as increased wretchedness yields increased stability. This property of grief as a hardening agent is also imagined in more overtly physiological ways. In *Antonio and Mellida*, Antonio wonders why his “veins, sinews, arteries” have not yet “burst and divulsed with anguish” (*A&M* I.i.3-4). He reports that “impatience cramps my cracked veins, / And curdles thick my blood with boiling rage!” (*A&M* II.i.195-6). In *Antonio’s Revenge*, he describes his “spirit” as feeling “heavy,” and observes that “the juice of life / Creeps slowly through my stiffened arteries” (I.ii.101-2). He further explains that his formerly “moist entrails” are parched with grief and that his heart is “punching anguish” through his ribs (I.ii.277-9). In these lines, grief is portrayed as a physical force that dries, weighs down, and threatens to burst the veins. Anything that dissipates this despair, such as comfort, “melts” it, thereby transforming a solid and resolute mindset into something watery and inconstant.

Although Antonio does describe impatience as curdling his blood, he does not necessarily suggest that patience, like comfort, acts as a softening agent. When Alberto urges him to be patient, Antonio retorts: “Patience is slave to fools, a chain that’s fixed / Only to posts and senseless log-like dolts” (I.ii.270-1). Patience is here described as something only appropriate for the “senseless”—those bereft of emotions. By describing it as a “chain that’s fixed,” Antonio appropriates the stoic language of the centered self. He rejects patience—and thus also stoicism—because he is neither a post nor a “senseless dolt.” Anguish, then, stiffens the body, but does not make it “senseless.” Comfort weakens resolve, but patience is only suitable for those who are so resolved that they lack emotion.

Alberto and Pandulfo, the voices of stoicism early in the play, remind Antonio that reason must triumph over affection. When Pandulfo learns that his son Felice has been unjustly executed, he informs Antonio that crying is an inappropriate response:

Wouldst have me cry, run raving up and down
For my son’s loss? Wouldst have me turn rank mad,
Or wring my face with mimic action?
Stamp, curse, weep, rage, and then my bosom strike?
Away! ‘Tis apish action, player-like.
If he be guiltless, why should tears be spent?
Thrice-blessed soul that dieth innocent.
(I.ii.311-17)

Because Felice was innocent, his soul is doubtlessly in heaven. Pandulfo therefore sees no reason to express any sort of hyperbolic emotion, which Antonio certainly has. However, Pandulfo’s criticism of “mimic action” or “apish action, player like” perhaps strikes a chord with Antonio. In the next act, Antonio meets his beloved Mellida outside of her prison. In their brief conversation through the grate, Mellida informs Antonio that she must die tomorrow and swears that she has remained faithful to him. She then asks that if Antonio

loves her, he will “welcome Heaven’s will.” Antonio, who either does not hear or does not regard this counsel, responds:

I will not swell like a tragedian
In forced passion of affected strains.
If I had present power of aught but pitying you,
I would be as ready to redress your wrongs
As to pursue your love. Throngs of thoughts
Crowd for their passage; somewhat I will do,
Reach me thy hand; think this is honour’s bent,
To live unslaved, to die innocent.
(II.ii.105-112)

Antonio seems to have taken Pandulfo’s rant against “mimic action” to heart; he vows not to put on any “forced passion.” But who, at this point in the play, could take this promise at face value? Antonio is a notorious purveyor of passion, be it forced or genuine. He is the essence of a swelled tragedian, both as his character is written as his character must necessarily be acted.⁹⁹ Antonio’s second point is also somewhat confusing. He claims that if he “had present power” to do anything besides pity Mellida, he surely would help her. This professed impotence can be read in several ways. First, we can understand that Antonio is powerless to free Mellida from her prison. He has neither the key nor the legal acumen to plead her case. But on another level, Antonio is admitting that he is only presently capable of pitying Mellida; he’s simply too overwhelmed by grief to do anything else. The “throngs of thoughts” that crowd his mind make render impossible any assertive action on his part. The only words of consolation he can muster echo Pandulfo’s earlier lauding of Felice as a “soul that dieth innocent.”

For her part, Mellida urges Antonio to “be patient” and “do not weep,” and that he should try to “drink and securely sleep,” to which Antonio simply replies: “I’faith, I cannot;

⁹⁹ For a thorough discussion of Antonio’s melodramatic (or possibly meta-dramatic) persona in *Antonio and Mellida*, see Allen Bergson’s “Dramatic Style as Parody in Marston’s *Antonio and Mellida*,” *Studies in English Literature. 1500-1900*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama (Spring, 1971), 307-325.

but I'll force my face / To palliate my sickness" (II.ii.115-7). By responding in this fashion, Antonio informs Mellida that he will not be comforted. He will, however, *pretend* to be comforted. Antonio here completely contradicts his earlier disavowal of "affected strains." Some editors argue that Antonio speaks these lines as an aside so as to allow Mellida the illusion of his well-being. If his words are an aside, that illusion is shattered—along with his promise to put on a strong façade—when Antonio flops down on the grate weeping ten lines later. This display suggests that Antonio simply cannot "force [his] face" to mask his feelings. Not only is he far too emotional—and far too pleased with his own wretchedness—to allow comfort, patience, or reason to palliate his misery, he is also too emotional to maintain a stoic façade for any measurable length of time.

It would seem then that Antonio disregards Pandulfo's advice because it requires him to rise above—and not wallow in—emotion. Pandulfo extols the virtues of the man whom "fortune's loudest thunder cannot daunt," who relies on "discretion" instead of "giddy humors." Doing so reveals a heart that "in valour even Jove out-goes; / Jove is without, but this 'bove sense of woes" (I.ii.329-5). Because God (Jove) either exists outside the scope of troubles or simply does not have them, it is no great feat for Him to be dispassionate. Man, on the other hand, must suffer. In rising above this suffering, man commits the more valorous action. Antonio does not respond to this idea here, but he does provide a retort upon later reading a related passage in Seneca:

Ferte fortiter: hoc est quo deum anteceditis. Ille enim extra patientiam malorum; vos supra. Contemnite dolorem: aut solvetur, aut solvet. Contemnite fortunatam: nullum telum, quo feriret animum habet."

[Endure with fortitude; in this you may surpass God; for he is beyond suffering of ills, you are above it. Despise grief; either it is relieved, or it relieves you. Despise fortune; it has no weapon with which to strike your soul]

This passage reinforces Pandulfo's earlier words: God is outside (*extra*) grief. Human beings can rise above (*supra*) that grief and use it to fortify themselves. Antonio sees little value in this counsel, as he and Seneca obviously have nothing in common:

Pish! Thy mother was not lately widowed,
 Thy dear affied love lately defamed
 With blemish of foul lust when thou wrot'st thus.
 Thou, wrapped in furs, beeking thy limbs 'fore fires,
 Forbid'st the frozen zone to shudder. Ha, ha! 'Tis nought
 But foamy bubbling of a phlegmy brain.
 Nought else but smoke. O, what dank, marish spirit
 But would be fired with impatience
 At my—
 No more, no more; he that was never blessed
 With height of birth, fair expectation
 Of mounted fortunes, knows not what it is
 To be the pitied object of the world.
 O poor Antonio, thou may'st sigh!
 (II.ii.50-63)

Because Seneca knows nothing of Antonio's troubles, his advice is completely irrelevant. Of course, Seneca is not alone in his irrelevance, as Antonio perceives himself to be a veritable phoenix of misery—no one else could possibly understand his unique position of being “the pitied object of the world.” But Seneca seems particularly unqualified to give Antonio counsel: Antonio imagines the philosopher happily basking in front of a fire while chastising those who live in “the frozen zone” for shivering. Antonio paradoxically reverses this language of warmth and cold when he disregards Seneca's words as the “foamy bubbling of a phlegmy brain.” Antonio here portrays the philosophy as flimsy and insubstantial, but also as cold and moist. Foam and bubbles arise from liquids; here, they are the product of a phlegmy brain. Here, as before, patience is an unwelcome intrusion; the fires of impatience keep the spirit from becoming “dank” and “marish” (marsh-like). Seneca's advice, because it

¹⁰⁰ All translations from Latin are by Sturges.

is from a cold, patient, rational mind, can offer no guidance for Antonio, who basks in the heat of impatience and emotion. As it is, Antonio accuses Heaven of being unkind by allowing him to feel. Were he a “senseless dolt,” then he would be spared “the stings of anguish” that “shoot through every vein” (IV.i.50-52).

Antonio’s tendency to link his emotions with his body is, of course, not unique to this play. The physical valence of emotion has been well documented in the work of many scholars of humoral theory. But Marston’s exploration of the physiology of suffering extends beyond Antonio bemoaning his own pain. Consider, for example, the very first lines of *Antonio’s Revenge*. Piero, “smeared in blood, a poniard in one hand, bloody,” instructs his lackey to tie Felice’s freshly dead corpse to “the panting side” of his daughter Mellida (I.i.1-2). These first lines do indeed set the stage for the rest of the play, as every character seems to take equal delight in using grotesque imagery to describe grief, anger, frustration, anxiety, or spiteful glee. Marston’s favorite word in these plays seems to be “gore,” often paired with adjectives such as “reeking,” “warm,” “fresh,” “putrid,” and “bubbling.” He also enjoys the words “ulcer,” “entrails,” “trunk,” and, of course, several charming variations on “blood.”

References to the body in this play are almost always negative: corpses rot, gelid wounds cry out, and ribcages burst with anguish. Because the human body is both the cause and conduit of this pain, emotions that arise from the body, such as rage or lust, are also necessarily negative. [I don’t think I’m saying this right. It might be easier to express this once I’ve laid some things out in the introduction]. In promising to avenge his father’s death, Antonio invites the desire for revenge to become part of his physical body. When the ghost of his father Andrugio instructs him to “revenge my blood,” Antonio vows:

May I be cursed by my father’s ghost
And blasted with the incensed breath of heaven

If my heart beat on aught but vengeance!
May I be numbed with horror and my veins
Pucker with singeing torture, if my brain
Digest a thought but of dire vengeance!
May I be fettered slave to coward chance,
If blood, heart, brain, plot aught save vengeance!
(III.ii.85-92)

In these lines, Antonio urges his blood, heart, and brain to be wholly consumed with revenge. His heart will “beat on” vengeance—that is, it will be both fixated on and be powered by the thought of revenge. He imagines that his brain will “digest” his thoughts, creating a doubly corporeal image. Furthermore, the consequences he imagines for himself—being “numbed with horror” and having his veins “pucker with singeing torture” reinforce the physicality of his vow to avenge his father’s death. But the language here also recalls his earlier dismissal of patience. In Act I, Antonio refers to patience as “a slave to fools, a chain that’s fixed / Only to posts and senseless log-like dolts.” Here, he suggests that if he fails to revenge, he will instead be a slave “fettered” to “coward chance.” Antonio thus recasts Pandulfo’s definition of a valorous man: one triumphs over fortune not by being patient, but by being *impatient* and taking vengeance. Avenging his father’s death is act of valor; it will also, however, be an act of bodily necessity. By committing all of his major organs to the act, Antonio makes revenge part of his physiology. In binding vengeance to the human body, Antonio builds on traditional early modern concepts of the dichotomy between the body and the soul. As the seat of sin, corruption, and decay, the body houses the base elements of human existence. Antonio uses this theory to justify all of the ghastly violence that follows.

Antonio’s *gore de force*, if you will, begins with his brutal slaughter of Piero’s son Julio. Of course, few revengers manage to murder *only* their enemies; innocent characters often become unsuspecting casualties. Polonius, while not the most laudatory figure in

Hamlet, does not necessarily merit Hamlet stabbing him behind the arras. An even less culpable figure is Castile in act IV of *The Spanish Tragedy*. Although never even suspected of murdering Horatio, Castile still falls victim to Hieronimo's vengeful fury.¹⁰¹ In *Antonio's Revenge*, Julio is not only a completely innocent child, he also professes to love Antonio "better than [his] father" (III.iii.5). Antonio responds: "Thy father?—Gracious, O bounteous heaven! / I do adore thy justice. *Venit in nostras manus / Tandem vindicta, venit et tota quidem* [at last vengeance has come into my hands, and come in full]" (III.ii.145-152). Antonio evidently sees Julio's presence as a gift from heaven given specifically to aid him in his pursuit of justice. He then embraces Julio and exclaims:

Time, place, and blood,
How fit you close together!
.....
O that I knew which joint, which side, which limb
Were father all and had no mother in't,
That I might rip it vein by vein and carve revenge
In bleeding rases!
(III.ii.157-166)

Circumstances have finally aligned themselves with "blood"—his bodily passion for vengeance. Antonio then proceeds to mentally dissect Julio in the hopes that he can discern exactly which parts of his body were wholly generated by his father. Julio pleads for his life, but the Ghost of Andrugio appears to egg Antonio on. In a misguided attempt to comfort Julio, Antonio reasons "were thy heart lapped up / In any flesh but in Piero's blood, / I would thus kiss it" (III.ii.181-2). Julio pitifully responds that as long as Antonio loves him, he can do what he will. Antonio takes this as his cue and stabs the boy to death. He then says that he has freed the "sprite of Julio," and all that remains is his body, which belongs completely to

¹⁰¹ M.D. Faber and Colin Skinner argue that Hieronimo's bloody rampage in Act IV of *The Spanish Tragedy* "makes perfect dramatic sense—psychologically, theatrically, structurally Hieronimo's frustrating, unsuccessful efforts to communicate his grievance lead steadily, inexorably to the outbreak of explosive violence." "*The Spanish Tragedy: Act IV.*" *Philological Quarterly*, 49 (1970): 444.

Piero: “He is all Piero, father all; this blood, / This breast, this heart, Piero all” (III.ii.199-200). In this exchange, Antonio reveals the grotesque consequences of his bodily fixations. By locating corruption, grief, and revenge wholly within the body, Antonio deduces that he can simply extricate evil from Julio’s flesh by killing the parts of him authored by Piero. Because Antonio cannot tell which particular parts of Julio this would include, he decides to be generous with his appraisal: since he cannot identify Piero-infected joints or limbs, the body must be thought of as “Piero all.” Antonio further reasons that Julio’s spirit is now free, no longer tainted by the presence of his father’s blood in his body. By killing Julio, Antonio has committed a doubly blessed act: he has begun the process of justice and sent Julio’s soul to heaven.

After committing the murder, Antonio revels in his deed. He sprinkles Julio’s “gore” around the tomb like incense, then cries aloud: “Lo, thus I heave my blood-dyed hands to heaven; / Even like instatiate hell crying ‘More!’ / My heart hath thirsting dropsies after gore / ... Blood cries for blood, and murder murder craves” (III.ii.211-215). Ironically, this immersion in bodily fluid leads Antonio to a renewed appreciation for his soul. In the next scene, he enters his mother’s bedroom with “*his arms bloody, [crying] a torch and a poniard.*” He proudly exclaims:

O, my soul’s enthroned
In the triumphant chariot of revenge.
Methinks I am all air and feel no weight
Of human dirt clog.
(III.iii.76-80)

Antonio thus perceives himself as an entirely spiritual being, free from the corrupting “clog” of human flesh. This transformation was made possible by murder: acting on the anger and grief that he earlier described as causing a heavy spirit and slowing the pace of blood through

his “stiffened arteries” (I.ii.101-2). Antonio’s response is, then, the complete opposite of Charelemont’s in *The Atheist’s Tragedy*. Charlemont defined revenge as a contest between “the passion of / My blood and the religion of my soul” (III.ii.35-6). For Charlemont, the soul cannot be satisfied by murder; Antonio obviously believes that the only way to free his spirit is to indulge in the blood’s passions.

The death of Mellida causes Antonio to reappraise this philosophy, but only momentarily. Upon hearing a rumor of Antonio’s drowning, Mellida faints and then dies. Despite the fact that Antonio is partially responsible for this—he could have informed her of his plan so that she would not take the news so harshly—he attributes her death to heaven’s will. “Ay, heaven,” he says, “thou may’st; thou may’st, Omnipotence.” Antonio reluctantly defers to God, realizing that as a “vermin bred of putrefacted slime,” Antonio should not “dare to expostulate” with heaven’s decrees (IV.ii.1-2). He then promises not to blaspheme and lies prostrate on the ground so that he can “vent a heaving sigh.” He provides further discourse about how miserable he is, then realizes that the only reason he is still alive is so that he can “numb some others’ cursed blood / With the dead palsy of like misery” (IV.ii.19-20). Antonio’s short-lived consideration of heaven’s claim to justice is immediately overwhelmed by his desire to inflict misery on others.

This brief mention of an Omnipotence calls attention to the fact that divine justice does indeed seem to be at work offstage. The dumb show at the beginning of Act V reveals that the senators and other nobles have all turned against Piero. Secret letters detailing the intricacies of Piero’s plot against Andrugio, Felice, and Mellida have been discovered, revealing the depths of Piero’s villainy and clearing Antonio’s name. Pandulfo even reports that the people are sick of “swallowing the bloody crudities” that is Piero’s government and

seek to oust him (V.ii.32). By the time the final act begins, Piero is set to be deposed and tried for his crimes. Even the Ghost of Andrugio seems satisfied by this turn of events; he enters the scene “*tossing his torch about his head in triumph*” and declares: “O, now triumphs my ghost, / Exclaiming, ‘Heaven’s just!’ for I shall see / The scourge of murder and impiety” (V.i.23-5). It would thus appear that there is little need for Antonio and the others to take the law into their own hands. This fact, coupled with the brutal nature of their punishment, makes the murder of Piero an even more sadistic act, and casts an extremely negative light on the enacting of human anger.

As the final scene begins, Piero has no idea that anything is amiss. He drinks wine and calls for song. Antonio, Alberto, and Pandulfo arrive disguised as a group of masquers. Pleased with their appearance, Piero he wonders aloud where his son Julio is: “Call Julio hither; where’s the little soul? / I saw him not today. Here’s sport alone / For him, i’ faith; for babes and fools, I know / Relish not substance but applaud the show” (V.iii.33-6). These lines are ironic on several levels. By referring to his son as a “little soul,” Piero recalls the language Antonio used when he slew Julio, freeing Julio’s “sprite.” Piero’s choice of words creates an ironic—and, perhaps, grotesquely comic—focus on Julio’s body, which, as the main course, is closer than his father knows.¹⁰²

Poised to unfurl his plan, Antonio is barely able to contain his joy. After confirming with his mother that the special dinner has been prepared, Antonio utters: “Then I will dance and whirl about the air. / Methinks I am all soul, all heart, all spirit” (V.iii. 47-8). Antonio’s mindset here evokes his earlier claim of bodilessness: being free from the weight of “human

¹⁰² These lines can also be read a commentary on the play itself. Although Piero seems pleased with their appearance, he suggests that only children and fools truly enjoy their “sport,” as it merely a “show” that lacks “substance.” This criticism could also be applied to *Antonio’s Revenge* itself; as a cavalcade of overwrought speeches, senseless violence, and egregious gore, the play—especially the acts of the masquers in this final scene—is perhaps meant to be taken as insubstantial entertainment.

dirt clog.” As before, this giddy, airy, light spirit owes itself to Antonio’s decision to act on murderous impulses. As the masquers dance, Piero calls for the meal to be served. When the plates arrive, the masquers convince Piero that he and Maria should dine in private with them. Antonio shouts—perhaps accusatorially, perhaps gleefully—“Murder and torture!” and, as the stage directions inform us, “*The Conspirators bind Piero, pluck out his tongue, and triumph over him.*” In removing Piero’s tongue, the masquers mimic the actions Tereus and Chrion and Demetrius from *Titus Andronicus*. In so doing, Antonio and his friends align themselves with literature’s most notorious rapists.¹⁰³ They also prevent Piero from repenting; Antonio asserts that there will be no “prayers” or “entreats” on his behalf (V.iii.64).¹⁰⁴

It quickly becomes obvious that Antonio and his friends are not content with killing Piero, but must delight in torturing him first. Simply cutting out Piero’s tongue, for example, does not suffice; Antonio must also hold it aloft and cry: “I hav’t, Pandulfo; the veins panting bleed, / Trickling fresh gore about my fist” (V.iii.66-7). Upon serving Julio’s limbs to Piero, they take turns taunting him: “Was he thy flesh, thy son, thy dearest son? / So was Andrugio my dearest father” (V.iii.81-2). In response, Piero “*seems to condole his son*” (sd V.iii.82). This act pleases Antonio, who affirms that the dish is indeed Piero’s “true-begotten, most legitimate / And loved issue” (V.i.95-6). This tableau—a bound, tongue-less man attempts to comfort his son’s mutilated limbs while a gaggle of bloody, costumed revengers mock him—

¹⁰³ This scene also echoes the death of the Duke in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*; see the discussion of that scene in chapter 1.

¹⁰⁴ It is, of course, impossible to know whether Piero would have actually repented. Furthermore, his swift apology at the end of *Antonio and Mellida* obviously proves insincere. However, as we have seen in the discussion of *The Unnatural Combat*, God seems willing to wait for quite some time to hear a villain’s confession. For an incisive discussion of tonguelessness in revenge tragedies, see J.L. Simmons. “The Tongue and Its Office in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*.” *PMLA* 92:1 (1977): 56-68.

presents a vivid portrait of human anger gone horribly awry. The masquers further vex Piero and then take turns stabbing him. Antonio exclaims that “pity, piety, [and] remorse” are “aliens to our thoughts,” and asserts that “grim fire-eyed rage / Possess us wholly” (V.iii.89-91). Proudly devoid of mercy, holiness, or guilt, Antonio invokes demonic imagery to describe their acts. Even if Antonio had not made this observation, there is little chance anyone would mistake their actions for anything resembling the hand of God. This fact does not prevent Antonio from summing his behavior up thusly: “Thus the hand of heaven chokes / The throat of murder” (V.iii.108-9), to which the Ghost adds: “Sons that revenge their father’s blood are blest” (V.iii.114).

Antonio and his cohort have already established themselves as unreliable interpreters of divine justice. Their assertion that they have done heaven’s work may therefore be disturbing, but it is certainly not surprising. The reaction of the Senators, however, is certainly another matter. As Piero breathes his last, all of the other characters return to the scene. One of the senators demands to know who is responsible for the “gory spectacle.”¹⁰⁵ The three men clamor like schoolchildren to receive credit for the deed before Alberto finally admits that that it was a group effort. Galeazzo and the Senators—presumably representatives of legal and moral authority—do not sentence them to death, but instead heap them with praise:

2nd SENATOR

Blest be you all, and may your honours live
Religiously held sacred, even for ever and ever.

GALEAZZO *To ANTONIO*

Thou art another Hercules to us

¹⁰⁵ It is not certain if the Senators are aware of the extent of Antonio’s violence. Were the Senators were too busy sifting through Piero’s “beadrolls of mischief” to hear the tumult in the banquet hall? Was there a dish of cooked limbs in full view next to Piero’s bloody corpse? Could they tell that Piero’s tongue had been ripped out? The only thing we know for sure is that it was indeed a “gory spectacle” and that they heartily approved.

In ridding huge pollution from our state.

.....
*I*st SENATOR

What satisfactions outward pomp can yield,
Our chiefest fortunes of the Venice state,
Claim freely.

(V.iii.124-129; 137-140)

The second Senator even attempts to offer pity for Antonio, calling him a “poor orphan.” Remarkably, Antonio rejects this pity because, for the first time in the play, he is content: “Poor? Standing triumphant over Beelzebub? / Having large interest for blood, and yet deemed poor?” (V.iii.135-137). Happiness comes to Antonio at last, not because he has somehow regained his father or his beloved, but because he has satisfied his bloodlust.

Despite being “amazed” at the “benignity” of the offer, Antonio swiftly refuses it, explaining that “other vows constrain another course” (V.iii.143-4). Limited by the Christian proscription against suicide, the revengers are prevented from shuffling off their own mortal coils. Religious seclusion—devotions to the soul at the expense of the body—thus provides the next best option. In eschewing death in favor of holy exile, Antonio and his followers overturn the customary ending to a revenge tragedy. The traditional plight of a revenger is to purify the community by killing the tyrant who has done him some grave personal wrong. In the process, the revenger himself is usually corrupted. With a few notable exceptions, all revengers are necessarily murderers. More often than not, these murders are grisly, gory, twisted affairs that startle, disgust, or even delight the spectators. In committing such an act, the revenger himself is morally compromised and, in order to truly purify the community, must then die himself. As Fredson Bowers notes, “the audience is sympathetic to [a] revenger so long as he does not become an Italianate intriguer, and so long as he does not revenge. At the conclusion the audience admits its sentimental satisfaction with the act of

personal justice but its ethical sense demands the penalty for the infraction of divine command.”¹⁰⁶ Of course, we might very well want certain revengers to live—perhaps we sympathize with their plight or simply enjoy their marvelous cleverness. Antonio, however, is neither particularly sympathetic nor exceptionally clever. His death at the end of the play should not only be warranted, but maybe even desired. That Antonio, having corrupted himself with heinous acts of brutality, remains alive at the play’s end marks a shocking deviation from generic norms. However, the idea that Antonio’s fate would disturb an audience *only* because it departs from convention is perhaps too simple. While numerous critics have similarly regarded this skewed ending as a sign of Marston’s incompetence as a dramatist,¹⁰⁷ others argue that it serves a number of ethical and/or aesthetic purposes. If, as many critics argue, *Antonio’s Revenge* is a burlesque of revenge tragedies, then this anomalous ending merely serves to enhance the parody.

There always exists the possibility that an audience’s disappointment at Antonio’s failure to die stems from their own appetite for carnage. Spectators well seasoned in revenge tragedy were used to extravagant carnage and massive body counts. Samuel Schoenbaum suggests that Marston was only too happy to feed his audience’s bloodlust, as “he was fortunate in that his own maladjustment coincided with the malaise of his age, and that he was temperamentally suited to gratify the tastes of his spectators.”¹⁰⁸ However, in allowing not only Antonio, but also Alberto, Pandulfo, Balurdo, and Maria to live, Marston deprives

¹⁰⁶ *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*. Princeton : Princeton UP, (1966), 95.

¹⁰⁷ See especially T.F. Wharton’s “Old Marston or New Marston: The *Antonio* Plays” *Essays in Criticism* 25 (1975): In response to Antonio’s desire to cleanse his hands after the murder, Wharton argues that “the naïve cathartic assumptions of these lines betray an ethic of revenge as involuntarily sanctimonious as it is collusively brutal. To find the detachment of parody in this play is to substitute for it the play we wish Marston had written, and to perceive less clearly than his own astuter contemporaries where his true force lay” (368).

¹⁰⁸ “The Precarious Balance of John Marston.” *PMLA*, 67 (1957): 1078.

his playgoers of five potentially spectacular stage deaths. Perhaps in denying his audience this violent end, Marston would bring them to a realization of their own sick fascination with bloodshed. Barbara J. Baines argues for viewing the ending as Marston's solution to the "moral and aesthetic problems" of a dramatist responding to this popular thirst for bloody revenge tragedies.¹⁰⁹ Maintaining that *Antonio's Revenge* is inherently metadramatic, Baines contends that the characters are completely aware of their own status as characters in a revenge tragedy. This self-awareness compels them to follow a code of aesthetics, not ethics. Thus constricted by the demands of aesthetics, Antonio is forced to act in a manner befitting a violent revenger. In creating an aesthetic work, Marston, like Antonio himself, is limited by generic constraints. Therefore, Marston's "treatment of the revenge conventions, culminating in his outrageous exoneration of his revenge protagonist at the end of the play, indicates his dissatisfaction with the dramatic genre and particularly with the sympathetic response that it fostered."¹¹⁰

But one might also argue that the play's conclusion is disturbing because in remaining alive, Antonio avoids paying his debt to both society and justice at large. If Antonio's murder of Piero was at least partially to purify the community—which is exactly how Galeazzo and the Senators view it—then one would assume that the revengers had some sort of vested interest in their society. As Gorden Braden observes, "the avenger is much more fully and consciously a member of the society whose restraints he violates than is the villain hero, and the avenger's dilemma can thus bring his dignity and the life around it to

¹⁰⁹ "Antonio's Revenge: Marston's Play on Revenge Plays." *Studies in English Literature* 23.2 (1983): 294.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 294.

extraordinarily close quarters.”¹¹¹ But, as other critics have noted, because the community has betrayed the revenger by allowing a tyrant to murder his loved ones, the revenger often perceives himself as a social outcast. Jonathan Dollimore argues that as victims of the corrupt society, “bereaved, dispossessed, and in peril of their lives,” these revengers “suffer extreme disorientation and are pushed to the very edge of mental collapse. Self-reintegration can only be achieved through social reintegration, the creation of a sub-culture dedicated to revenge.”¹¹² According to Dollimore, every violent action done in the name of vengeance is also (or even *actually*) done in the name of reintegration. Alienated since the beginning of *Antonio and Mellida*, Antonio endures his grief by “translating it into action, into an active search for reintegration. And by IV.ii he realises that the only path to reintegration is through the role of revenger.” He only achieves this reintegration, and thus his identity, “by purposefully re-engaging with society – albeit at the cost of brutalisation.”¹¹³

Dollimore’s argument, however incisive, fails to address the question of why Antonio and his co-conspirators reject society—especially a society ready to offer them rewards and praise instead of alienation—after successfully reintegrating themselves through “brutalisation.”¹¹⁴ The community does not demand justice in the form of Antonio’s death; rather, they laud him as a hero. But perhaps, as Dollimore also suggests, therein lies the rub.

As Dollimore maintains, the surprising fate of Antonio results from Marston’s understanding

¹¹¹ *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger’s Privilege*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1985, p 113.

¹¹² *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*. Chicago: Chicago UP, (1984) 29.

¹¹³ *Ibid* 34-6.

¹¹⁴ Raymond J. Rice proposes that by the play’s end, Antonio comes to recognize “all ideology, including that of revenge, as empty constructs.” Antonio’s voluntary religious exile, therefore, is a rejection of the society that has corrupted his morality by upholding a “symbolic Law that legitimates itself by means of revenge.” In denying this society, Rice contends that “Antonio points the way to the only absolutely ethical act, one that changes the definition of community—of *reality*—itself.” “Cannibalism and the Act of Revenge in Tudor-Stuart Drama.” *Studies in English Literature* 44, (2004): 297-316.

that vengeance is at odds with Christianity.¹¹⁵ In having the revenger Antonio become a religious hermit, Marston thrusts Christianity and vengeance into “an open disjunction in a deadly serious challenge to providentialist dogma as it related to revenge.” Insisting that “Providence has been discovered to be inoperative in a dislocated world where men destroy and alienate each other,” Dollimore explains Antonio’s revenge as a means for the alienated to re-create their identities. Moreover, as revengers, “far from being the instrument of divine providence, they actually *take over* its retributive function, appropriating it with a gesture of defiance and deliberate subversion.”¹¹⁶ Dollimore therefore suggests that because the revengers survive and are heralded as heroes, Marston obliterates the popular notion that Providence eliminates evil via similarly evil agents. In line with Dollimore’s argument, the ending is disturbing because it subverts the idea that Providence would demand the lives of Antonio and his fellow murderers. However, this perhaps creates the same problem of impatience with divine justice that leads many revengers (except, of course, Charlemont) to commit their bloody deeds. If Piero had been struck by lightning immediately after his first wicked act, one would ascribe that to divine justice at work. But, as in *The Unnatural Combat*, is the lack of said immediate lightning bolt an (in)action of either divine indifference or divine approval? Just because God does not immediately demand the life of Antonio should not necessarily suggest to the audience that Marston was attempting to subvert Providence.

¹¹⁵ Quotes here are taken from Dollimore’s article “Marston’s ‘Antonio’ Plays and Shakespeare’s ‘Troilus and Cressida’: The Birth of a Radical Drama. *Essays and Studies*. (1980): 58-9. Dollimore later expanded this article into a chapter in *Radical Tragedy*.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 59. To this point, Geoffrey Aggeler argues: “Marston does not wholly reject the providential scheme itself, nor do other dramatists who, like Marston, create skeptical characters who do. The vision of a dramatist is much more encompassing than that of any of his characters, and identifying any one of them as representative of his own point of view is questionable at best” (*Nobler in the Mind: The Stoic-Skeptic Dialectic in English Renaissance Tragedy*. Newark: University of Delaware P, 1998. p 47).

Indeed, perhaps the most troubling aspect of the ending of *Antonio's Revenge* is not that Antonio remains alive, but that he seems to feel no remorse for his actions. Geoffrey Aggeler contends that "the avengers are clearly prompted by a moral sense to seek atonement that has survived their vengeful abandonment."¹¹⁷ However, the text does not support any sense of the revengers seeking "atonement" by becoming religious exiles. By his own admission, Antonio has collected "large interest" on the blood Piero has owed him. He rejects the pity of the Senators, instead asserting his pride in "standing triumphant over Beelzebub." Consequently, his decision to take holy orders strikes a deeply dissonant chord. Antonio and his band of revengers make no expression of guilt. On the contrary, they revel in their bloody deeds. When a Senator asks who is responsible for the "gory spectacle" of the Revengers' Masque, Antonio, Pandulfo, and Alberto each clamor to be held accountable. Antonio himself proclaims: "I will not lose the glory of the deed, / Were all the tortures of the deepest hell / Fixed to my limbs. I pierced the monster's heart / With an undaunted hand" (V.vi.3-6). Far from seeking atonement, Antonio instead exhibits pride at the "glory" of his violence. When the Senators offer them rewards, Antonio does not refuse because he feels too corrupted by his bloody deed to deserve such an offer, but because he and his companions have already made other plans. Pandulfo clarifies:

We know the world, and did we know no more
 We would not live to know; but since constraint
 Of holy bands forceth us to keep this lodge
 Of dirt's corruption till dread power calls
 Our souls' appearance, we will live enclosed
 In holy verge of some religious order,
 Most constant votaries.

(V.iii.145-151)

¹¹⁷*Nobler in the Mind*, 92.

It would seem, therefore, that Antonio et al. are not exiling themselves as penance, but as a matter of preference. The decision to enter seclusion is not out of guilt, but *contemptus mundi*. In the words of Fredson Bowers, “they have lived enough to see the vanities of the world at their true value and to despise them and to wish to escape the world.”¹¹⁸ They disdain life, but cannot kill themselves; thus they will ascetically remove themselves from the world to prepare their souls for judgment. The language used by Pandulfo in these lines deliberately recalls Antonio’s earlier reference to shedding the weight of the “human dirt clog.” Because they are constrained by Christianity to keep their “dirt’s corruption,” they instead become votaries—essentially devoting the rest of their lives to spiritual pursuits at the expense of bodily comfort.

This abnegation of the flesh is a complete reversal of Antonio’s passionate behavior throughout the rest of the play. It also, of course, stands in sharp contrast to the murder that he and the others have just committed; as he speaks these words, Antonio is covered with Piero’s blood. Antonio’s newfound interest in Christianity does not erase the fact that he has, for the better part of the play, been acting more like a villain than Piero. Many critics have noted the similarities between Piero’s entrance at the beginning of the play and Antonio’s appearance in his mother’s closet: both enter smeared in blood, carrying a torch and poniard, and reveling in their vicious deeds. These critics also traditionally cite Julio’s murder and the overwhelmingly sadistic punishment of Piero as indefensible acts that categorically taint Antonio’s character. While Fredson Bowers shrugs this action off as “a purely gratuitous

¹¹⁸ 125-6. Bowers also notes that “superficially, Marston’s close is not unique, yet actually the morality is so different from the expiatory catastrophe of all other Elizabethan revenge tragedies that *Antonio’s Revenge* will always shave a certain importance in the history of the type.”

piece of business brought in merely to make the audience shudder,”¹¹⁹ other critics have noted the more serious ramifications of this event. Philip J. Finkelpearl observes that before murdering Julio, Antonio speaks the same lines as the bloodthirsty Atreus of *Thyestes*:

“Gracious, O bounteous heaven! / I do adore thy justice: *venit in nostras manus / Tandem vindicta, venit et tota quidem*” (III.iii.6-9). In referencing one of the most well-known stage villains and then committing his ghastly deed, Antonio “becomes a bloody conscienceless killer. He has come to resemble Piero, who thinks that Heaven approves his actions.”¹²⁰

In a similar vein, Geoffrey Aggeler observes that Antonio justifies his actions by comparing himself to Machiavelli (IV.i.23-5), which “simply confirms what the actions themselves have already revealed, that he has descended to Piero’s moral level.”¹²¹

While most critics share in this condemnation, there have been several “apologists” who contend that early modern audience member would have most likely viewed Antonio’s behavior as just, perhaps even god-like. Karen Robertson, for example, argues that the stabbing of Julio can be “seen as heroic.”¹²² She contends that the triumph of Antonio at the

¹¹⁹ *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*. (Princeton : Princeton UP, 1966): 123.

¹²⁰ *John Marston of the Middle Temple: an Elizabethan dramatist in his social setting*. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969): 153.

¹²¹ *Nobler in the Mind*, 88.

¹²² “*Antonio’s Revenge: The Tyrant, the Stoic, and the Passionate Man.*” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*. 4 (1989). Robertson argues that the murder of Julio had “contemporary English significance” for those men in the audience who swore to “take vengeance on an heir in punishment for the sins of the parent” when they joined the Bond of Association. Men who pledged the Bond of Association promised to kill not only those who attempted to assassinate the Queen, but their immediate heirs as well. Robertson argues that those in the audience who signed this Bond would not have received the slaughter of Julio with the same disgust that modern audiences do. While she admits that “that those in Marston’s original audience who demanded their fictions adhere to legal or homiletic dogma might have reacted with the horror displayed by these modern critics,” the people who signed that Bond probably only saw it as an “intriguing investigation” of “morally ambiguous actions” (93). This argument is interesting, but I believe that she is forcing a comparison between two wholly distinct situations. The Bond of Association was intended to protect the Queen and prevent an assassin’s heirs from benefiting from his crimes. This is a matter of national security, not private blood revenge. Robertson further undercuts her own argument by pointing out that the murder of Julio “dramatizes a dilemma conceptualized, *though not enacted*, in Elizabethan society” (94, emphasis added). Being theoretically

end shows that “the cleansing of the state is effected only through Antonio’s engagement in right passion, a ritual purification through the blood of Julio that is condoned by the entire onstage audience at the end of the play.”¹²³ Antonio’s brutal actions are done in the name of fulfilling a promise to his father: not just to avenge his murder, but to exceed it. Quoting Seneca’s *Thyestes*, Andrugio reminds Antonio: “*Scelera non ulcisceris, nisi vincis*” [you do not avenge crimes unless you surpass them] (III.ii.45-51). In so doing, Antonio not only kills Piero, he makes him weep, thereby achieving the seemingly impossible: stirring a villain’s emotions. This “true justice,” Robertson, is achieved through the “right passion” of Antonio’s actions, and not the “cool reason” espoused by Pandulfo.¹²⁴

Robertson bolsters her argument by drawing parallels to the Old Testament code of holding the son culpable for the sins of the father. Drawing on Andrugio’s command that Antonio “revenge my blood” and Antonio’s attempts to locate the parts of Julio that are “father all,” Robertson notes that “assertion of the equivalence of blood between father and son eradicates the differences between father and son.”¹²⁵ This argument problematically relies on the assumption that early modern readers subscribed to the belief that the Old Testament condoned punishing the sons for the sins of their father. There are several passages in the Old Testament that deal with the inheritable nature of a father’s sins. Exodus 34:6-7 states:

The Lord, thy Lord, strong, merciful, and gracious, slow to
angre, and abundant in goodness and trueth, Reserving mercie

committed to execute the heirs of one who attempts regicide is not the same as murdering your innocent young brother-in-law.

¹²³ Ibid, 92.

¹²⁴ Ibid 104.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 99.

for thousands, forgiving iniquitie and transgressions and sinne,
and not making the wicked innocent, visiting the iniquities of
the fathers upon the children, and upon childrens children, unto
the third and fourth generation.¹²⁶

In his commentary on this passage, Calvin is quick to point out we must first read this as evidence of “the greatness of His clemency, inasmuch as He not only pardons light offenses, but the very grossest sins; and again, remits not only sin in one case, but is propitious to sinners by whom He has been a hundred times offended. Hence, therefore, appears the extent of His goodness, since He blots out an infinite mass of iniquities.”¹²⁷ Nevertheless, Calvin does admit that punishing a child for his father’s transgressions does seem somewhat unjust, “for nothing is more unreasonable than that the innocent and guilty should be involved in the same punishment.”¹²⁸ To this point, Calvin argues that

when God declares that He will cast back the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of the children, He does not mean that He will take vengeance on poor wretches who have never deserved anything of the sort; but that he is at liberty to punish the crimes of the father upon their children and descendents, with the proviso that they too may be justly punished, as being the imitators of their fathers.¹²⁹

Calvin then characteristically adds that if this still doesn’t seem “agreeable” to us, “we should remember that His judgments are a great depth; and, therefore, if anything in his dealing is incomprehensible to us, we must bow to it with sobriety and reverence.”¹³⁰ Calvin thus argues that it is God’s special prerogative to punish the children of a wicked father, no

¹²⁶ This idea is basically restated in Exodus 20:9 and Deuteronomy 5:9.

¹²⁷ All quotations from Calvin’s commentaries refer to: *Commentaries*. Trans. Henry Beveridge. (Grand Rapids: Baker House. 22 Vols 1993). Vol.III, 387.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 113-4.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

matter how unjust this seems to mere mortals. He stresses, however, that because God is merciful, He never takes measures against the truly innocent.

If God may justly carry out this sort of judgment, is it therefore lawful for human beings to punish the children of guilty fathers? This question is addressed in Deuteronomy 24:16 and Ezekiel 18:20. The passage from Deuteronomy states: “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children put to death for the fathers, but every man shall be put to death for his own sinne.” Here, the Geneva commentary directs the reader to 2 Chronicles 25.4, where King Amaziah has the men who killed his father executed, but does not punish their sons. Ezekiel 18:20 provides that “the same soule that sinneth, shall dye: the sonne shall not beare the iniquitie of the father, neither shall the father beare the iniquitie of the sonne, but the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.” One of the ways Calvin interprets these passages is by reminding the readers of original sin. Because we are all “polluted from our birth,” we all die through the iniquity of our common father: Adam.¹³¹ Furthermore, no human being is truly innocent in the eyes of God. Since, therefore, all are responsible in some way for their own guilt, “it follows that the son does not bear his father’s iniquity, since he has to bear his own at the same time.”¹³²

Calvin interprets these passages as explicit condemnations of punishing a son for a father’s actions. I quote this passage at length because of the implications it has for the present discussion of Marston’s play:

Here also God manifests how great is His regard for human life, so that blood should not be shed indiscriminately, when he forbids that children should be involved in the punishment of

¹³¹ Ibid., 242.

¹³² Ibid., 243-4.

their parents. Nor was this Law by any means supererogatory, because on account of one man's crime his whole race was often severely dealt with. It is not without cause, therefore, that God interposes for the protection of the innocent, and does not allow the punishment to travel further than where the crime exists. And surely our natural common sense dictates that it is an act of barbarous madness to put children to death out of hatred to their father. If any should object, what we have already seen, that God avenges 'unto the third and fourth generation,' the reply is easy, that He is a law unto Himself, and that he does not rush by a blind impulse to the excess of vengeance, so as to confound the innocent with the reprobate, but that He so visits the iniquity of the fathers upon their children, as to temper extreme severity with the greatest equity. Moreover, He has not so bound Himself by an inflexible rule as not to be free, if it so pleases Him, to depart from the Law.¹³³

The crux of Calvin's argument rests on the essential difference between God's anger and man's: God is just, wise, and merciful, whereas man is hasty, cruel, and excessive. These passages in Deuteronomy and Ezekiel are included to curb man's impulse to "allow the punishment to travel further than where the crime exists," which is precisely what Andrugio's ghost advises Antonio to do, and also precisely what Antonio actually does. Calvin's claim that "our natural common sense" informs us that it is "barbarous madness to put children to death out of hatred to their father" suggests that, contrary to what Karen Robertson argues, early modern audience members would *not* indeed be likely to cheerfully applaud the murder of Julio.

It is this mention of "natural common sense" that makes me wary of Phoebe S. Spinrad's claims that we should not view Antonio as a purveyor of "barbarous madness." Spinrad notes that although we have ample warrant to see Antonio as a villain, "we simply cannot get away from the fact that no one in the play ever says [that we should], as would be

¹³³ *Commentaries* Vol III, 50.

customary in such plays.”¹³⁴ Furthermore, at end of the play, “the Second Senator has virtually canonized Antonio and his friends, making them not just good citizens but patron saints of Venice And Antonio himself refers to himself as ‘Standing triumphant over Beelzebub,’” language that evokes both Saint Michael and Christ.¹³⁵ This evidence, coupled with other Judeo-Christian imagery in the play,¹³⁶ creates

a religious stamp of approval on what Antonio has just called an act done ‘by the hand of heaven.’ We are not to pretend that our standards to not apply to pagans, but rather to accept revenge as Christian No one contradicts Andrugio’s claim that revengers are ‘blest,’ let alone claims that they are ‘curs’d.’ No one at all condemns Antonio and his friends; everyone celebrates them.¹³⁷

Spinrad is correct in her observation: indeed, no one on stage criticizes the murderers at the end of the play. However, this does not necessarily extend out into the viewing audience. Just because all of the other characters applaud the revengers’ actions does not mean that we must accept these characters as indubitable judges of moral behavior. Nor would early modern audiences be likely to “celebrate” Antonio and his friends if they subscribe to the views of Thomas Jackson, who contends:

Severe punishment for doing evil, without precedent loving instructions or good encouragement to do well, is the natural offspring of unnaturalness: it bears no shadow of that justice or equity whose glorious pattern shines most brightly in our

¹³⁴ “The Sacralization of Revenge in *Antonio’s Revenge*.” *Comparative Drama* 39.2 (2005): 181.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹³⁶ Spinrad argues that Marston draws on images from both the Old and New Testaments to “sacralize revenge” (170). For example, the fact that Julio’s blood is “sprinkled,” and not imbibed or poured out in a libation, weakens any similarities the scene has to either Catholic Mass or a pagan sacrifice. Instead, Spinrad suggests that Antonio most likely disperses the blood with his hands; in so doing, he evokes Moses’ sacrifice of a calf in Exodus 24 and/or as a “parodic inversion” of the story of Abraham and Isaac. (174-8) Spinrad also makes the fascinating observation that in the graveyard scene, Felice’s corpse was most likely placed across the prone Antonio so that the two men’s bodies formed a cross (179).

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 182.

heavenly Father To take pleasure in the pain or torture of notorious malefactors, is a note of inhumanity; their just punishment is only so far justly pleasant, as it procures either our own or others' welfare, or avoidance of those grievances which they more justly suffer than we or others of the same society should do.¹³⁸

An audience could be—and, in light of Jackson's and Calvin's comments, I contend *would* be—just as disturbed by the Senators' approval as they are with the revengers' actions themselves.

Moreover, I would argue that the audience has more reason to castigate Antonio's behavior than that of the other characters in the play. Antonio apologists are often quick to point out that Piero and Antonio commit murder for two vastly different reasons: Piero kills Andrugio because he won the affection of Piero's love, Maria, years ago. He kills Felice and falsely imprisons Mellida to hurt Antonio. The wickedness of these actions is compounded by the fact that as the Duke, Piero's villainy implicates the entirety of Venice. Antonio, on the other hand, suffered a personal loss at the hands of Piero. His actions are not only justified, but, as Robertson puts it, are "marked by grave and honorable purpose."¹³⁹ These obvious differences in motive, however, do not mitigate the exaggerated brutality of Antonio's actions. Furthermore, all of Piero's violent deeds are done offstage. Although we see the Felice's blood and corpse, we never see Piero stabbing him. Nor do we see the murder of Andrugio or the death of Mellida. The bloody murders of Julio and Piero, however, are on full display for the audience. The notion that we should ignore (or applaud) the grisly violence that we have *seen* and condemn the violence that we have merely heard about is, in many ways, impossible.

¹³⁸ *A Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes* 140;144.

¹³⁹ "Antonio's Revenge: The Tyrant, the Stoic, and the Passionate Man," 97.

Finally, Piero is, at the very least, aware that he is a villain. We can attribute his violent impulses to the fact that he is evil. Antonio is an overdramatic collector of woes who fancies himself a hero. To what does he owe *his* violent impulses? I believe that Marston is suggesting that Antonio's passions are the culprit. At the end, blood blurs the line between good and evil: human anger is human anger, no matter whose body it inhabits. The "open disjunction," to borrow a phrase from Dollimore, at the play's end only makes this notion more apparent. Without checks from the reason of Stoicism or the mercy of an earnest Christian, the passion of human anger begets what Calvin rightly terms "barbarous madness."

CHAPTER THREE

“When thunder claps, heaven likes the tragedy”: The Influence of the Imprecatory Psalms on *Hoffman* and *The Revenger’s Tragedy*

The Geneva editors’ introduction suggests that David’s¹⁴⁰ primary authorial concern in Psalm 58 is “shewing that the juste shal reioyce, when they se the punishment of the wicked to the glorie of God.” The psalmist’s method of revealing this particular truth involves petitioning God for a vividly violent display of His wrath:

Break their teeth, o God, in their mouthes: breake the jawes of the yong lions, o Lord. Let them melt like the waters, let them passe away Let him carie them away as with a whirle winde in his wrath. The righteous shal reioyce when he seeth the vengeance: he shal wash his fete in the blood of the wicked. And men shal say, Verely there is frute for the righteous: doutles there is a God that iudgeth in the earth.¹⁴¹

In his commentaries to the Psalms, Calvin admits that David’s invocation seems to lack mercy. However, he reminds his readers that “the affection which David means to impute to them is one of a pure and well-regulated kind; and in this case there is nothing absurd in supposing that believers, under the influence and guidance of the Holy Ghost, should reioyce in witnessing the execution of divine judgments.” Furthermore, Calvin stresses that those

¹⁴⁰ Although modern theologians agree that the Psalms had multiple authors, early modern writers traditionally ascribed the Psalter to David. George Wither’s *Preparation to the Psalms* asserts that there are “many probable Evidences” that “make it credible that David was at least composer of farre the greatest part, if not all of the Psalmes.” Also argues that only “the enemies of Christ thinke to make it an advantage on their parts, to deny him as much as may be of that sacred worke.” (London, 1619). Spenser Society reprint (New York, 1884, repr. 1967), 34. Unless specifically referring to early modern interpretations, I will identify the author of the Psalms as “the psalmist.”

¹⁴¹ Ps 58:9-11.

who feel “cruel satisfaction” when they witness the destruction of their enemies are possessed not by holy zeal, but by “unholy passions of hatred, anger, or impatience, inducing an inordinate desire of revenge.” But those who are filled with a righteous spirit receive the “frute” of God’s wrath: it is therefore “only natural that they should rejoice to see it inflicted, as proving the interest which God feels in their personal safety.”¹⁴²

Here, Calvin draws a distinction between the “unholy passions” of human beings and the “pure and well-regulated” anger inspired by the Holy Spirit. Because David is unquestionably a vessel for the Holy Spirit, his words are not blasphemy, but righteousness. In taking such pains to explain this to readers, however, Calvin necessarily admits how easily one might mistake David’s anger for the sinful human variety. Calvin thus also recognizes the perils of misappropriating David’s satisfaction in bathing in his enemies’ blood. This sort of reveling is permissible to David, because his main concern is God’s glory. Those distracted by more personal concerns are in danger of “inducing an inordinate desire of revenge.”

Calvin’s commentary on Psalm 58 illuminates Fredson Bowers’ observation on the differences between a villainous protagonist and the villain revenger. Bowers contends that villainous protagonists, such as Barrabas, “had always been conscious of their villainy—that they were damned souls—and gloried in their evil deeds because they were evil.” The villain revenger, on the other hand, may take satisfaction in achieving vengeance, but “always believes that his cause is pure.”¹⁴³ If we follow Bowers’ argument, the villainous protagonist succumbs to what Calvin terms “unholy passions of hatred.” But what of the villainous

¹⁴² *Commentaries* V.377-8.

¹⁴³ *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy* 129.

revenger? Does believing that “his cause is pure” give him any claim to righteousness? Or does the villain revenger need to acquaint himself with Calvin’s warning about mistaking holy anger for its corrupt human counterpart?

The ease with which one might misappropriate this psalm is, in fact, what made the psalms themselves so popular. In his Preface to his commentary, Calvin describes the Psalms as “‘An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul’” because “there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn this to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated.”¹⁴⁴ The psalms are such a rich source of inspiration because they reflect the breadth of human emotion, providing prayers appropriate for times of joy, despair, glory, shame, and anger. It was this wide appeal that, according to Lily B. Campbell, led to a massive dissemination of vernacular translations of the psalms. Campbell notes that “defenders of putting the Psalms into English all claimed that in the Psalms could be found guidance for men’s lives as well as a response to every emotional need.”¹⁴⁵ Nearly every major writer of the English Renaissance penned translations of psalms, including Thomas Wyatt, the Earl of Surrey, George Wither, Sir John Oldham, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir John Harington, King James I, and John Milton, just to name a few. Indeed, as scholar Hannibal Hamlin notes,

¹⁴⁴ *Commentaries* V.xxxvii.

¹⁴⁵ Lily B. Campbell. *Divine Poetry and Drama in Sixteenth Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP (1959): 40. Campbell credits the French poet Clement Marot with establishing the Psalms as “great poetry in the vernacular” during the Renaissance (36). According to Campbell, “Marot’s Psalms were set to music popular in that day, and they became the rage at court and in the country” (37). Campbell identifies Thomas Wyatt as the one primarily responsible for introducing the Psalms into “the stream of English literature, using the verse forms which he had brought from the continent to England” (35). For further background on the early history of the Psalm in England, see Campbell pp 34-54.

The Reformation opened the door to both vernacular translation and individual interpretation of the Bible, and one of the immediate and lasting results was a widespread “psalm culture,” in which poets, theologians, and devoted dilettantes produced hundreds of translations, paraphrases, and adaptations of the psalms, as well as meditations, sermons, and commentaries. Countless others turned to the psalms for inspiration, consolation, entertainment, and edification.¹⁴⁶

Among these psalms, some of the most popular—and, most troubling—have been the ones like Psalm 58: the imprecatory or “cursing” psalms. Often filled with vividly violent language, the imprecatory psalms implore God to barrage the psalmist’s enemies with His wrath. Although heathen nations such as Babylon are a frequent target, the psalmist sometimes has more specific concerns. Psalm 55, for example, is a bit more personal, as the psalmist asks the Lord to strike down a friend who has betrayed him: “Surely mine enemy did not diffame me: for I colde have borne it ... But it was thou, o man, even my companion, my guide and my familiar: [we] went into the House of God as companions. Let death sease upon them: let them go down quicke into the grave.”¹⁴⁷

The main concern most Christians have with these psalms is, of course, that they seem quite antithetical to the Christian commands to love and forgive our enemies. Early modern theologians attempted to reconcile Jesus’ teachings with the imprecatory psalms in a variety of ways. Hannibal Hamlin’s analysis of early modern English translations of Psalm 137 (also called the “Psalm of Exile”) provides an excellent case study for this phenomenon.

¹⁴⁶ Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. (2004): 225. Hamlin further observes that “The fact that Hebrew was so little known in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England meant that there was essentially no ‘original,’ no accessible, authoritative text with which to compare a translation, and as a result, for the vast majority of their readers, the English Psalms were the *only* Psalms (supplemented for some by ‘cognate’ versions in Latin, German, or French) Because of the central place of the Psalms in English daily life, and their vital functions within the body of English culture, they were thus, in a powerful if peculiar sense, *English* works” (6, emphasis in original).

¹⁴⁷ Ps. 55:12-15.

According to Hamlin, Psalm 137 was “one of the most widely known biblical texts in Renaissance England,” perhaps because it “provided consolation for spiritual and political exiles.”¹⁴⁸ Hamlin notes that “despite the historical specificity of Psalm 137, it has from the earliest times been interpreted as also prophesying the contemporary circumstances of its readers, both Jewish and Christian.” The enemy “Babylon” could be interpreted to refer to any oppressive party, “and it was in large part the ease with which this label could be applied to any temporal or spiritual oppressor which made the psalm so powerful a resource for those who felt alienated or oppressed.”¹⁴⁹ In addition to providing comfort for exiles, however, Psalm 137 also features one of the grisliest images in the Psalter. In the Geneva translation, the psalmist writes “O daughter of Babel, worthei to be destroyed ... Blessed shal he be that taketh and dasheth thy children against the stones.”¹⁵⁰

Some early modern authors were uncomfortable with this level of violence and allegorize the violence. Hamlin credits the inception of this tradition to St. Augustine, who wrote that the Babylonian babies were “evil desires at their birth.”¹⁵¹ Other writers “retain the curse, but avoid the children, like Edwin Sandys, who substitutes the more inclusive metonymy ‘thy cursed seed,’”¹⁵² However, as Hamlin astutely observes, “Other translators simply wallow in the gore. Fletcher, Davison, and Carew vie for the grisliest version, but Oldham, elsewhere a master of satiric invective, surpasses them all:

¹⁴⁸ Hannibal Hamlin. “Psalm Culture in the English Renaissance: Readings of Psalm 137 by Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, and Others.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 55:1 (2002): 224.

¹⁴⁹ Hannibal Hamlin. *Psalm Culture in Early Modern England*. 217-9.

¹⁵⁰ Ps. 137:8-9

¹⁵¹ Hamlin, Hannibal. “Psalm Culture in the English Renaissance.” 252. Hamlin here cites St. Augustine. *Expositions on the of Psalms*. Vols 5 and 6. Translated by H.M. Wilkins. Ed. John Henry Parker. Oxford, (1853), 176.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 251.

Blest, yea thrice-blest be that barbarous Hand
(O Grief! That I such dire Revenge commend)
Who tears out Infants from their mother's Womb,
And hurls 'em yet unborn unto their Tomb.
Blest he, who plucks 'em from their Parents' Arms,
That Sanctuary from all common Harms;
Who with their Skulls and Bones shall pave thy Streets all o'er
And fill thy glutted Channels with their scattr'd Brains & Gore.

Oldham's parenthetical grief at having to utter such a curse hardly mitigates his obvious relish in the charnelhouse details of his paraphrase."¹⁵³

Notwithstanding these efforts to justify, sanitize, or embellish upon the psalmist's words, the imprecatory psalms serve as evidence that God accepts prayers of anger just as He accepts prayers of praise, thanksgiving, or supplication. The imprecatory psalms are prayers of venting; there is never an indication that the one praying them should take any action on his own. There is nothing wrong with anger *per se*; the important thing is what you *do* with that anger. The psalms suggest that the only legitimate recourse is to bring that anger to God and let Him decide if, how, and when to dispense justice. A desire for vengeance is legitimate as long as one understands that the vengeance belongs to God alone. It is perhaps this legitimization of revenge that made the imprecatory psalms so well-received by the early moderns. The vogue for revenge plays, coupled with the political and religious turmoil of the time made prayers for vengeance quite appealing. As Hamlin argues, "the last verses of [Psalm 137], sanctioning and offering a model for vengeful cursing, proved especially attractive during these centuries of violent religious conflict."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Ibid., 252. Hamlin here cites *The Poems of John Oldham*. Ed. Harold F. Brooks and Ramen Selden. Oxford: Oxford UP (1987), 143.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 254.

The danger, then, lies not in the wrath itself, but in the universal applicability of these psalms. Although theoretically only “righteous” anger is warranted, who could help but read himself into the psalmist’s situation? The psalmist’s problems are not just with heathen nations, but with deceitful friends, slanderous rivals, flattering courtiers, and unjust authority figures. Any reader could feel justified in praying for his own enemies to be flung into pits. And, if the Lord is slow in exacting vengeance, one might perhaps feel justified to help speed things along. Furthermore, the psalms are unique among other books of the Bible in that they are explicitly human language—they are meant to be prayed or sung by human beings to the Lord. As John Calvin writes,

The other parts of Scripture contain the commandments which God enjoined his servants to announce to us. But here the prophets themselves, seeing they are exhibited to us as speaking to God, and laying open all their inmost thoughts and affections, call, or rather draw, each of us to the examination to himself in particular, in order that none of the many infirmities to which we are subject, and of the many vices with which we abound, may remain concealed.¹⁵⁵

Unlike other Biblical texts, the psalms are a unilateral conversation; readers see the prayers, but not the Lord’s replies. This one-sidedness creates another array of problems for the imprecatory psalms. Without God’s response, the psalmist’s anger is sanctioned for both him and the reading audience. Moreover, there is no differentiation between divine wrath and human anger. There is ample evidence elsewhere in scripture that God is angered by injustice, but the psalms presume that He is angered by the private indignities suffered by one man rather than the irreverence of heathen nations or the transgressions of the Israelites. In psalm 59, for example, the psalmist exclaims: “God wil let me se *my desire* vpon mine

¹⁵⁵ *Commentaries* V.xxxvii.

enemies.”¹⁵⁶ In this sense, the psalms are anthropopathic, as they suppose the Lord feels the same way the psalmist feels.

This assumed homogeny between heaven’s reaction and one man’s response to personal injustice is also a defining characteristic of villainous revengers, particularly Henry Chettle’s Hoffman and Cyril Tourneur’s Vindice.¹⁵⁷ Both *The Tragedy of Hoffman, or A Revenge for a Father* (1602) and *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (1607) feature protagonists who, like the psalmist, believe that heaven—or, at the very least, a supernatural force—shares in their personal outrage. Thus, in these plays and the imprecatory psalms, human anger is mediated through its divine counterpart. By perceiving or creating a link between their responses and divine wrath, these figures transform a sinful, passionate human emotion into a sacred, righteous one.

Chettle’s *Hoffman* features the most overtly villainous revenger in English drama. Hoffman gleefully murders his enemies without the slightest hint of remorse. Indeed, *The Tragedy of Hoffman* is perhaps the least aptly-named play of the era, as the death of Hoffman at the play’s end is not so much a tragedy as an obvious consequence of his insatiable bloodlust. Critics have long noted the two-dimensional nature of Hoffman’s character and other flaws in the play itself. In 1902, Ashley Thorndike lamented that Chettle “made little effort to give the story either imaginative intensity or philosophical significance.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Ps. 59:10. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁵⁷ The authorship of *The Revenger’s Tragedy* is a matter of long-standing critical debate. For a recent account of this discussion, see Brian Jay Corrigan, “Middleton, *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, and Crisis Literature.” *SEL* 38:2 (1998): 281-95. An interesting, if somewhat outdated study of the topic can also be found in M.W.A. Smith. “*The Revenger’s Tragedy*: The Interpretation of Statistical Results for Resolving Disputed Authorship.” *Computers and the Humanities*. 21:1 (1987): 21-55. Because the precise identity of the author does not seriously impact my discussion, for the sake of simplicity I will follow Brian Gibbons’ lead in ascribing authorship to Tourneur.

¹⁵⁸ “The Relations of *Hamlet* to Contemporary Revenge Plays.” *PMLA* 17:2 (1902): 193.

Hazelton Spencer's 1936 critique described *Hoffman* as "devoid of merit of any kind; a revenge melodrama of unrelieved sensationalism, [and] not even successfully macabre."¹⁵⁹

Like *The Revenger's Tragedy* after it, *Hoffman* begins long after the murder of the protagonist's loved one. The play's first lines introduce the protagonist and his plight seemingly at the moment where he decides to end his period of revenger's hesitation:

Hence Clouds of melancholy
Ile be no longer subiect to your schismes,
But thou deare soule, whose nerues and arteries
In dead resoundings summon vp reuenge,
And thou shalt hate, but be appeas'd sweete hearse
(ll. 1-5)¹⁶⁰

In these lines, Hoffman resolves to throw off the melancholy that has presumably been afflicting him since his father's death. He describes embracing vengeance as an almost physical enterprise, willing revenge to be siphoned into the nerves and arteries of his soul.¹⁶¹ Hoffman apparently does not need a ghost to inform him of the crime, identify the murderer, or urge him to vengeance. He already knows what has happened, who is guilty, and what he must do. What makes *now* the ideal time to do it is a mystery. All the audience knows is that his father's corpse has been egging him on in some fashion:

The dead remembrance of my liuing father,
And with a hart as aire, swift as thought

¹⁵⁹ Review of *The Life and Work of Henry Chettle* by Harold Jenkins. *Modern Language Notes* 51:8 (1936): 549-550, 550.

¹⁶⁰ All quotes from this play are taken from *The Tragedy of Hoffman*, edited by F. P. Wilson. Wilson conflated twelve versions of the 1631 quartos to form the text. I have modernized the long "s" and fixed obvious reversals of the "n" and "u." All other spellings are Wilson's. The text itself is in poor shape; as John Payne Collier notes, "it has been handed down to us in a state of deplorable mutilation, and the printer murdered the author with as little remorse as the author murdered his characters" (*The History of English Dramatic Poetry to the Time of Shakespeare*, 53).

¹⁶¹ This rejection of melancholy is certainly a jab at Hamlet, who spends most of the play in a state of melancholic vacillation. Hoffman's desire to summon revenge into his soul is reminiscent of Hamlet's reaction to the reports of his father's Ghost: "My fate cries out, and makes each petty Arterie / As hardy as the Nemean Lion's nerve" (I.iv.81-2). For further discussion of the physical valence of wrath, see chapter two.

I'll execute iustly in such a cause.
Where truth leadeth, what coward would not fight?
Ill acts moue some, but myne's a cause that's right.

(11.8-12)

Hoffman here separates himself from those who are driven by “ill acts,” averring that his cause is spurred by justice, truth, and righteousness. Thus assured of his motivations, Hoffman interprets the “*thunder and lightning*” that follow these lines as evidence of divine anger at his delay:

See the powers of heauen in apparitions,
And fright full aspects as incensed,
That I thus tardy am to doe an act
Which iustice and a fathers death excites,
Like threatening meteors antedates destruction. *thunder*
Again I come, I come, I come.

(11.12-20)

Hoffman then addresses the “effigies of faire virtue” in his cave, promising to take revenge on their enemies so that “hand in hand” they will walk to paradise. In these first twenty lines, Hoffman has resolved to take up the just cause of avenging his virtuous father's death. He believes that heaven is on his side, interpreting the thunder only as a sign of displeasure with his inaction. The audience has no reason to think otherwise, until it is revealed in line 128 that Hoffman Senior was not murdered in cold blood, but executed for piracy by the Duke of Luningberg.

Although we do not know what has suddenly compelled Hoffman to seek revenge (unless, of course, this was the first time he has heard thunder since his father's death), it does seem like quite a fortuitous time to make that decision, as he soon discovers that his enemy's son Otho has been shipwrecked near his cave. Hoffman marvels at his good fortune and explains his situation to Lorrique, Otho's servant:

Wouldst thou hauing lost a father as I haue,
Whose very name dissolves my eyes to teares

Could duty and thy loue so different proue,
Not to auenge his death whose better part
Was thine, thou his, when he fell part of tehe
Fell with him each drop, being part thine owne
And wouldst not be reveng'd.
(ll. 64-70)

The explanation Hoffman gives to Lorrique mirrors his earlier soliloquy: his father has been murdered and it has fallen upon him as the dutiful son to take vengeance. Lorrique readily sympathizes with Hoffman's plight, and is, in fact, not even dissuaded when Hoffman ups the ante by promising to advance beyond a simple "eye for an eye" and to murder anyone who "Has but one ounce of blood, of which hees part" (l.72).

Hoffman's vow to exact revenge on the murderer's progeny has a precedent in the Psalter. In Psalm 109, the speaker petitions:

Let there be none to extend mercie unto him: nether let there be
anie to shewe mercie upon his fatherless children. Let his
posteritie be destroyed, and in the generacion following let
their name be put out. Let the iniquitie of his fathers be had in
remembrance with the Lord: and let not the sinne of his mother
be done awaie.¹⁶²

The concept of the sons bearing the sins of their fathers is a common theme in the Old Testament, one that is both supported and renounced by scripture.¹⁶³ The difference between the psalmist and Hoffman, of course, is that the psalmist asks God to punish sinner's offspring, whereas, Hoffman assumes the role of not only the beseecher, but the enforcer. He assigns virtue to his father, guilt to Luningberg, and determines the proper course of justice.

Hoffman easily persuades Otho's servant Lorrique to join him in his revenge. And, just as easily, the two of them murder Otho with a burning crown, the same device used to execute Hoffman's father. Within the space of 234 lines, the protagonist has promised

¹⁶² Ps. 109:12-14.

¹⁶³ For further discussion of this theme, see chapter 2, pages 80-81.

vengeance, found a co-conspirator, and taunted, tortured, and killed an enemy in a creatively cruel manner. Unfortunately for everyone (the audience perhaps included), Hoffman sees this as merely “the prologue to the’nsuing play,” as the Duke of Luningberg has plenty of living relatives and Chettle has over 2000 more lines to write. Hoffman and Lorrique travel back to Luningberg, where Hoffman impersonates Prince Otho. No one there has apparently ever actually looked at the prince, because his disguise fools everyone. Hoffman himself acknowledges the ridiculousness of this situation:

So run on fate, my destines are good
Reuenge hath made me great by shedding blood:
I am suppos’d the heire of Luningberg,
By which I am of Prussia prince elect.
Good: who is wrong’d by this? onely a fool:
And ‘tis not fit that idiots should beare rule.
(ll. 642-648)

Hoffman proclaims that revenge has made him “great,” having propelled him from a cave-dwelling orphan to the apparent heir of Luningberg in record time. The fact that he has so easily duped the royal family is proof of their idiocy; their idiocy is proof that they are unfit rulers. According to this logic, Hoffman’s “good” actions harm only those who deserve punishment. His easy success justifies his deeds and supports his notion that taking “reuenge” is making him great. Lorrique observes: “this Clois is an honest villain, ha’s conscience in his killing of men: he kils none but his father enemies, and there issue, ‘tis admirable, ‘tis excellent, ‘tis well ‘tis meritorious, where? in heaven? No, hell” (ll. 660-4). As an “honest villain,” Hoffman is led by his “conscience” to kill none but Luningberg’s relatives. Although Lorrique admires Hoffman’s panache, he does not buy into his perverse logic, proclaiming his actions “admirable,” “excellent,” and “meritorious,” but only according to hell’s standards.

Like Hoffman, the psalmist assumes the righteousness of his motives and considers the downfall of his enemies proof of God's like-mindedness. Unlike the psalmist, however, Hoffman sees no problem in being the agent of their downfall. This, of course, might stem from the fact that Hoffman is not a Christian. He does, however, believe that various supernatural entities support his actions. When Hoffman learns that Luningberg has died of natural causes, thus eliminating Hoffman's entire *raison d'être*, he responds to this news with both frustration and swift resignation: "Had I Briareus hands, i'de striue with heauen / For executing wrath before the houre, / But wishes are in vaine, hee's gone" (1687-80). Hoffman's assumption that the Duke has died as a result of heaven's wrath belies a belief in a divine justice that is perfectly aligned with his own sense of justice. His half-hearted offer to strive with heaven over this untimely death quickly becomes an almost congenial acceptance of the fact, perhaps because he recognizes that his motivations have transformed from simple revenge to an unwavering obsession to extinguish his enemy's family line.

Accordingly, as his plot to kill Luningberg's brother-in-law Ferdinand advances, Hoffman exclaims:

Now Scarlet Mistris from thicke sable clouds
Thrust forth thy blood-staind hands, applaud my plot,
That giddy wonderers may amazed stand
While death smites downe suspctless Ferdinand.
(ll. 1356-1360)

Hoffman's entreaty to his Scarlet Mistris (probably Revenge, although he never specifies) is for approval, not aid. This applause, coupled with the plot itself, will "amaze" the witnesses of Ferdinand's untimely murder. His vengeance is done both to please heaven and to give him the satisfaction of gloating over his enemies. As we have seen, this reveling in bloodshed appears in several psalms, most notably 58 and 137. Although the psalmist himself is not

killing his enemies, he does both envision a future where he will bathe in their blood and beatify those who murder infants. These grisly scenes will reassure the righteous and prove God's existence to the heathens. Hoffman's motives may not be as "pure," but his imagination is no less gruesome.

Hoffman's plans proceed swimmingly until the arrival of Martha, Otho's mother. Because Martha would presumably be able to see through Hoffman's disguise, her appearance throws quite a wrinkle into Hoffman's scheme, and it is not because she is the only one who actually remembers what Otho looks like. As Hoffman prepares to strangle Martha in her sleep, he is inflamed with desire. When she wakes up, he informs her that Otho died in a shipwreck near his cave, and somehow convinces her to adopt him as her son and heir. This good fortune is only temporary, however, as Lorrique turns on Hoffman just as quickly as he earlier turned on Otho, and the remaining royal family of Luningberg immediately conspire to murder Hoffman. They have no intention of arresting, trying, or even simply killing Hoffman; rather, they believe that he must be captured and tortured. Saxony suggests that they "seeke out the hated wretch, / And with due torture let his life be forc'd / From his despised body" (ll. 2161-3). Even Martha, who showed young Hoffman mercy during his father's execution, exclaims: "hope of reuenge in wrath doth make mee smile" (l. 2130). Mathias argues that Hoffman should be deceived so that his punishment fits his crimes:

Reuenge should have proportion,
By slye deceit he acted euery wronge,
And by deceit I would haue him intrapt;
Then the reuenge were fit, iust, and square
And t'would more vex him that is all compos'd
Of craft and subtilty to be outstript
In his owne fashion, then a hundred deaths.
(ll. 2200-2206)

The justice in their revenge plot is not divine, but poetic. They are not concerned with reforming a sinner or glorifying God, but in vexing Hoffman “in his owne fashion.” Saxony and the others proceed to dupe Hoffman, restrain him, and fit him with a burning crown, thereby killing him in the same way that both Otho and Hoffman Senior were killed. Hoffman himself recognizes an added “justice” in his own demise by burning crown, as it punishes his “foolish idle braine / for giuing entertainment to loues thoughts.”¹⁶⁴

In using deceit and torture to mirror Hoffman’s murder methods, Lunenberg’s relatives must necessarily mirror Hoffman’s wickedness. After setting the crown on his head, they offer Hoffman forgiveness and urge him to repent. For his part, Hoffman refuses the pardon and will not forgive them in return. In his final words, he appears to be looking forward to an eternity in hell, although the text is too corrupt to know for sure:

Soe doe not I for yours, nor pardon you;
 You kild my father, my most warlike father,
 Thus as you deale by me, you did by him;
 But I deserue it that haue slackt reuenge
 Through fickle beauty, and a womans fraud;
 But Hell the hope of all dispayring men ,
 That wring the poore, and eate the people vp,
 As greedy beasts the haruest of their spring:
 That Hell, where cowards haue their seats prepar’d,
 And barbarous asses, such as haue rob’d soldiers of
 Reward, and punish true desert with scorned death ...
 (ll. 2608-ff)

Like most other villains in revenge tragedy,¹⁶⁵ Hoffman is given a chance to repent; unlike other villains, however, he is also given the opportunity to forgive his murderers. Considering the poor state of the manuscript, we can only assume that he never does either.

¹⁶⁴ ll. 2598-9.

¹⁶⁵ At least, of course, the villains who have intact tongues in the last scene.

He does, however, seem to believe that he deserves his fate, albeit not because he has killed so many people, but because he made the fatal error of choosing sex over murder. This may be a dubious display of morals, but at the very least, Hoffman does indeed prove himself an “honest villain” in his death. Hoffman rejects repentance and forgiveness because he knows that his prayers would be empty words: these notions are “to no purpose without charity,” a virtue he obviously lacks (l. 2605).¹⁶⁶ Hoffman’s enemies do not possess this same level of self-awareness. Their behavior at the end of the play only becomes more unsettling when one considers it alongside their final words to Hoffman. Martha advises him to “call vpon heauen” while Mathias offers pardon and prays for his soul, reminding the audience that they are Christians. This Christian posturing is certainly undercut by the fact that they have just set a burning crown upon Hoffman’s head.

This conflation of good and evil, vengeance and cruelty, and justice and “fitness” echoes the ambiguous nature of the imprecatory psalms. Taken out of context, Hoffman’s motivations seem just: he has suffered while his enemies have prospered. His desire to wipe out Luningberg’s issue reflects the psalmist’s plea for God to destroy his enemy’s posterity in psalm 109. The psalms themselves are also taken out of context, but in two different ways. Those who pray the psalms insert themselves into the psalmist’s position, turning his pleas into personal grievances by forgetting or disregarding the original circumstances. More importantly, however, the psalms are devoid of a divine response: we see only the psalmist’s entreaties. There is no way to gain contextual evidence of the psalmist’s righteousness, other than to assume that his calls for vengeance are indeed just. Something like psalm 35, for example, could be prayed by any offended party:

¹⁶⁶ Compare the failed repentance of Claudius in *Hamlet*, discussed in chapter four of this manuscript.

Let their waie be darke and slipperie and let the Angel of the Lord persecute them. For without cause thei haue hid the pit and their net for me: without cause haue they digged a pit for my soule. Let destruction come vpon him at vnawareds, and let his net, that the hathe laied priuely, take him: let him fall into the same destruction.¹⁶⁷

The commentary in the Geneva Bible does little to dissuade open interpretation: “we may not call God to be a reuenger, but onely for his glorie, and when our cause is iuste.”¹⁶⁸ There are no guidelines provided as to when one’s cause is “iuste,” save the notion that the vengeance must be done for God’s glory. Ultimately, the reader may make assumptions, but must remember that the final judgment is left in the hands of God. The psalmist does not act on his anger, but brings it to the Lord. In this way, the imprecatory psalms legitimize human anger, but also reaffirm God’s just nature.

Furthermore, while the psalmist does beg the Lord to send His wrath, he also reminds himself to have patience. Psalm 37 acknowledges the allure of turning to evil, as the wicked seem to thrive while the righteous suffer. However, the psalmist enjoins: “freate not thy self because of the wicked men, neither be envious for the evil doers. For they shal soone be cut done like grasse, and shal wither as the grene herbe. Trust thou in the Lord and do good.”¹⁶⁹ The Geneva commentary adds: “The godlie are assured that the power and the craft of the wicked shal not prevail against them, but fall on their owne neckes, and therefore oght patiently to abide Gods time, and in the meane while bewaiele their sinnes and offer up their teares as a sacrifice of their obedience.”¹⁷⁰ The righteous are sure to prosper and the wicked

¹⁶⁷ Ps. 35:6-8.

¹⁶⁸ Ps. 35:7e, 241.

¹⁶⁹ Ps. 37:1-3.

¹⁷⁰ Ps 37:20-22.

are sure to fall, but only when God decides the time is right. There is nothing for the victim to do but wait, pray, and be repentant in the meantime. Psalm 37's promise that the wicked will "fall on their owne neckes" may indeed suggest that Hoffman's death is an act of divine justice.¹⁷¹ After all, he is killed with his own murder weapon, much like Barrabas before him and D'Amville after him. Mathias and the others might then be considered divine instruments, as they effected Hoffman's just deserts. However, the fact that it is so difficult to distinguish the righteous revengers from the villain sheds some doubt on that assertion. After Hoffman becomes Martha's adopted son, he begs "iust heauen" that "the ground I wrong you in, may turne my graue" (ll. 1898-9). Hoffman's insincerity aside, this is the only instance in the play of a character asking for divine justice. Hoffman's Christian enemies never seek God's assistance or approval in their quest for retribution. Thus, the only plea for justice in this play is sought—and granted—ironically.

In addition to promising "fitting" divine justice, Psalm 37 also reinforces the importance of patience. As was noted in chapter one, patience is important not just because it demonstrates obedience and faith, but because it prevents the victim of injustice from becoming a villain himself. Psalm 37 underscores this idea:

Waite patiently vpon the Lord and hope in him: freat not thy self for him which prospereth in his way: nor for the man that bringeth his enterprises to passe. Cease from angre and leaue of wrath: freat not thy selfe also to do euil. For euil doers shalbe cut of, and they that waite vpon the Lord, they shal inherite the land.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ See also Ps.37:14-15: "The wicked haue drawne their sworde, and haue bent their bowe, to cast downe the poore and nedie, and to slay suche as be of vpright conuersation. But their sworde shal entre into their owne heart, and their bowes shal be broken."

¹⁷² Ps. 37:7-9. Psalm 69 also considers the impact of wrath on others: "O God, thou knowest my foolishness, and my fautes are not hid from thee. Let not them that trust in thee, o Lord God of hostes, be ashamed for me: let not those that seke thee, be confounded through me." The Geneva commentary explains: "Let not mine evil intreatie of the enemies be an occasion, that the faithful fall from thee" (Ps. 69:5-6. Commentary: 69:6, 249k).

Charlemont's patience in *The Atheist's Tragedy* is rewarded rather quickly; it seems that only a few days pass between the discovery of his father's murder and the culprit's execution. This brief time span is less a test of his faith in divine justice than a test of his impulse control. The audience also never learns exactly how much time has passed between the execution of Hoffman's father and Hoffman's decision to take vengeance; we can only assume it was at least as long as it took Hoffman Senior's body to skeletonize. In *The Revenger's Tragedy* on the other hand, we learn early in the play that Vindice has been toting Gloriana's skull around with him for nine years, an act that has become so familiar that his brother Hippolito's only reaction is to tease him about it: "Still sighing o'er Death's vizard?" (I.i.49). Traditionally, scholars have counted this waiting period against Vindice, arguing that Vindice spends precious time brooding and plotting instead of forgiving and forgetting. Fredson Bowers, for example, ascribes this nine-year moratorium not to patience, but creative maliciousness: "Seldom is this period of inactivity well motivated, for the revenger's ultimate course of action could as well have been adopted at the beginning as at the end." This waiting period is then only intended to "illustrate their over-bloodthirsty characters. No normal, sympathetic person by Elizabethan standards would harbor his wrath for such a time and withstand the promptings of religion for forgiveness."¹⁷³

Perhaps, however, this deferral of revenge can also make Vindice a more sympathetic figure. Lactantius reminds us that "the anger of man ought to be curbed, because he is often angry unjustly; and he has immediate emotion."¹⁷⁴ Similarly, Thomas Aquinas stresses because anger is caused by the memory of indignation, the strength of anger "is impaired

¹⁷³ *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy* 136n.

¹⁷⁴ "A Treatise on the Anger of God" 41.

little by little as time goes on, until at length it vanishes altogether.”¹⁷⁵ Seneca too suggests that “the greatest remedy for anger is postponement, which allows its initial heat to abate and the darkness that oppresses the mind to subside or thin out.”¹⁷⁶ Vindice obviously did not act upon “immediate emotion,” but at the same time, it is clear that his anger has not vanished altogether. Nine years have elapsed since the murder of his beloved. During this time, Vindice has watched the lecherous Duke and his depraved family flourish, turning the court into a den of sin and debauchery. The innocent are violated and the guilty freed by acts of nepotism. Vindice has exercised patience—even if it is more of an excuse to brood and scheme than a pious faith in God—for an admirably long time.

But what is the reason for Vindice’s delay? We have no evidence that he is deliberating over whether or not to kill the Duke, nor does the play give us any reason to think that he has simply been waiting for the perfect time to take revenge. This notion of “timing” is key, as it seems that many of the events that propel Vindice from malcontent to murderer happen by accident or coincidence, prompting Vindice, like Hoffman, to believe that a higher power approves. To address this issue, we must first examine Vindice’s idea of his role in the process of divine justice. Like other revengers, Vindice notes the corruption of his society. Disguised as Lussurioso’s servant Piato, Vindice laments:

Any kin next to the rim o' the sister
Is man's meat in these days, and in the morning,
When they are up and dressed and their mask on,
Who can perceive this, save that eternal eye
That sees through flesh and all?

(I.iii.63-7)

¹⁷⁵ *Summa Theologica*, Q 48, Article II, p 535.

¹⁷⁶ *Moral and Political Essays* (III.12.iv) (88).

Vindice's rant against false woman has numerous Biblical antecedents. In Kings 9:30, for example, the heathen princess Jezebel is described as painting her eyes and arranging her hair in an attempt to distract Jehu. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both portray women who adorn themselves with cosmetics and jewelry as shameless harlots.¹⁷⁷ Vindice's disgust with the current social climate partially stems from the fact that no one else seems perturbed. Women have gotten so good at dissembling that once they put their morning "masks" on, only God knows that they've spent their nights in lechery. Of course, although Vindice intimates that only God knows about this debauchery, he also necessarily includes himself by making the observation: both God and he see the truth. This "eternal eye," however, seems to observe without taking any sort of punitive action. Women continue to paint over their sins instead of reforming themselves, suggesting that society's perception is more important than God's because society's judgment is more present than God's.

Vindice notes this absence of divine punishment at several other points. Disgusted that his mother would allow his sister to be Lussurioso's whore, he exclaims: "Why does not heaven turn black or with a frown / Undo the world? Why does not earth start up / And strike the sins that tread upon it?" (II.i.250-3). Here, heaven either does not notice the sins of the world or does not care. Later, Lussurioso tells Vindice that Piato has solicited his sister and claims to have pushed Piato away in anger. Vindice replies: "Has not heaven an ear? Is all the lightning wasted?" (IV.ii.156). Although this could possibly be an aside, this could also be feigned outrage at Piato's behavior. Either way, Vindice's comment suggests a lack of divine justice, or, at the very least, palpable divine anger. Although Vindice earlier described an "eternal eye" that could see through masks of propriety, there is apparently no "eternal ear" that can hear any of it. The question "Is all the lightning wasted" can be

¹⁷⁷ For further discussion on Jeremiah's castigation of women, see chapter four, pages 125-8.

interpreted two different ways. In one sense, if the entire supply of lightning is “wasted,” then the finite supply of God’s wrath has been tapped dry. If we read “wasted” as a verb in the present tense, however, the question becomes about whether the lightning is “wasted” on targets who do not deserve punishment.

Vindice’s problem, therefore, is not a lack of faith in divine justice, but a frustration with divine patience. Like the Psalmist, Vindice assumes that there is a divine force who shares his anger with the royal family’s wickedness. In the play’s first lines, Vindice portrays “Vengeance” and “Revenge” as deities capable of both action and appeasement:

Vengeance, thou Murder's quit-rent, and whereby
Thou show'st thyself tenant to Tragedy,
Oh keep thy day, hour, minute, I beseech,
For those thou hast determined. Hum, who e'er knew
Murder unpaid, faith give Revenge her due
She's kept touch hitherto!

(I.i.39-44)

Here, Vindice asks Vengeance to keep her specified day of reckoning for the wicked and expresses complete faith that Revenge will prevail. Although this “prayer” is not addressed to Yahweh, its sentiment is notably similar to numerous passages in the Hebrew Bible, most notably the imprecatory psalms. Psalm 94, for example, begins: “O Lord God the avenger, O God the avenger, shew thyself clearly” (94.1). Throughout the Psalter, the psalmist portrays the Lord as a destroyer of the wicked. His prayers are not only of entreaty, but of affirmation: in addition to asking the Lord for vengeance, he also confidently proclaims that He will indeed punish the wicked.

Instead of merely expressing frustration with this divine patience, Vindice finally decides to take action. Like the Psalmist, Vindice believes that a divine force will exact justice against the wicked, but unlike the Psalmist, Vindice views himself as either a colleague or a willful agent of divine vengeance instead of a passive instrument, bystander,

or suppliant. After Lussurioso's exit, Vindice once again expresses his frustration with the fact that such a sordid bunch have been allowed to live so long:

Oh thou almighty patience 'tis my wonder,
That such a fellow, impudent and wicked,
Should not be cloven as he stood
Or with a secret wind burst open!
Is there no thunder left, or is't kept up
In stock for heavier vengeance?

(IV.ii.192-7)

Here, Vindice is not cursing God for inaction, begging Him to send His wrath, or asking whether he himself should have more patience. He simply marvels at the "almighty patience" with ironic admiration. This "wondering," while perhaps frustrated, is not so much an entreaty as an observation, putting Vindice on roughly equal footing with the Almighty. It seems to Vindice that the wicked should have been cloven and burst open by "secret wind" long ago, but God's exasperatingly infinite patience allows them to live. Because Vindice himself has already killed the Duke a few scenes earlier, he might be curious as to whether God is going to take care of the rest of the family. Vindice sees two reasons for why God has not acted: either there is no vengeance left or He is saving it up for something even worse. Both suggest a frustrated "wondering" at God's inscrutable patience similar to Psalm 35:17, where the psalmist exclaims: "Oh Lord! How long wilt thou look on?" In his commentaries on the Psalms, Calvin notes that "although God inculcates upon the faithful the duty of quietly and patiently waiting till the time arrive when he shall judge it proper to help them, yet he allows them to bewail in prayer the grief which they experience on account of his delay" (IV.i.590). In other words, we have to wait for God to act, but we are allowed to complain to Him about it.

Perhaps the more pressing question, then, is: why is God waiting? As discussed earlier, the answer could indeed be mercy; but it could also be what Vindice himself suggested: “heavier vengeance.” Calvin’s interpretation of several of the imprecatory psalms paints Yahweh as a revenger with an interest in both divine *and* poetic justice:

The wicked plotteth against the righteous, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. But the Lord shall laugh at him; for he seeth that his day is coming. The wicked draw their sword, and bend their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay those that are of upright ways. But their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bow shall be broken.

(Ps. 37:12-15; Calvin’s translation)

The evil-doers are here depicted as “plotting,” but God is shown to be the master schemer, laughing while they make their plans. Just as in *Hoffman* and *The Atheist’s Tragedy*, the wicked are not simply killed; they are killed by their own weapons. This may not be immediate vengeance, but it is indeed *ironic* vengeance.

In Psalm 59, David actually asks God to hold off on smiting the reprobates. While this may initially seem similar to Malefort Jr.’s request in *The Unnatural Combat*, David asks not so he can take action himself, but so that the revenge lasts longer: “Slay them not, let my people forget: scatter them by thy power; and bring them down, O Lord!” (Ps.59:11). Calvin considers this a very “proper” request, observing that “We are apt to think, when God has not annihilated our enemies at once, that they have escaped out of his hands altogether; and we look upon it as properly no punishment, that they should be gradually and slowly destroyed.... Were the wicked exterminated in a moment, the remembrance of the event might speedily be effaced” (V.ii.389). Here, patience is rewarded by an even greater act of wrath. According to Calvin, David suggests we favor gradual destruction over instant eradication, thus providing a more “constant illustration of the wrath of God” (V.ii.390).

In these two psalms, God waits to take revenge not out of mercy, but in order to deliver a more fitting or more lasting punishment. Yahweh acts similarly to most stage revengers, most of whom, like Hamlet or Antonio, wait for particularly satisfying moments to avenge, and some of whom, like Hoffman or Vindice, wish to exterminate entire bloodlines. Of course, God's sense of irony is not always important to those waiting for Him to intervene, and "constant illustration" of God's wrath is not going to placate everyone. Calvin calls it a "proper trial of our patience" when "God does not come forth at once, armed for the discomfitures of the ungodly, but connives for a time and withholds his hand" (V.ii.28), but does admit that the patience is difficult even for David to muster. A lack of patience on David's (and, by extension, Vindice's) part is certainly forgivable: after all, they are only human. As Calvin notes, this Psalm is not only an exhortation for patience and a promise of justice, but an illustration of the difference between God and man. The psalmist shows us that

it is not meet that God, who sees the destruction of the wicked to be at hand, should rage and fret after the manner of men.
There is then a tacit distinction here made between God and men, who, amidst the troubles and confusions of the world, do not see the day of the wicked coming, and who, oppressed by cares and fears, cannot laugh, but because vengeance is delayed, rather become so impatient that they murmur and fret.
(V.ii.29)

God's omniscience and omnipotence allow him to laugh at the wicked; human beings, bogged down by doubt, passion, and irrationality, can only "murmur and fret."¹⁷⁸

There is, of course, certainly an alternative to merely murmuring and fretting: the taking matters into one's own hands. This proposition seems most enticing to Vindice,

¹⁷⁸ As we have seen in the work of Thomas Jackson, this infinitely long view of history also partially informs the essential difference between God's wrath and human anger.

especially after he receives what he perceives to be a sign from the heavens. Let us return to and expand upon an excerpt quoted above:

VINDICE

Is there no thunder left, or is't kept up
In stock for heavier vengeance? [*Thunder*] There it goes!

HIPPOLITO

Brother, we lose ourselves.

VINDICE

But I have found it,
'Twill hold, 'tis sure, thanks, thanks to any spirit
That mingled it 'mongst my inventions.

(IV.ii.196-201)

The thunder is problematic because it exists only as an editorial stage direction, and therefore could very well be a figment of Vindice's imagination.¹⁷⁹ Hippolito does not mention it, and there is no other textual evidence that suggests thunder had sounded. If it is indeed a figment of his imagination, then it's either a symptom of Vindice's growing mental instability or a self-created delusion that God approves (or both). Thunder is a sign of either divine anger or divine complicity; *imagined* thunder is a way for Vindice to imbue himself with divine authority by imagining complicity. Even if the thunder is not "real," Vindice views it as a divine response, and is suddenly inspired. Whether Vindice actually hears and interprets the thunder or imagines and interprets the thunder, it still belies a faith in and reliance on external signs of heaven's opinion.

A far less ambiguous clap of thunder sounds in the final scene. Vindice, Hippolito, and two nobles disguise themselves as masked revelers and crash Lussurioso's coronation party. The stage directions read: "*The revengers dance. At the end steal out their swords and these four kill the four at the table, in their chairs. It thunders.*" (V.iii.41 *sd*). Vindice, reacting to both the thunder and Lussurioso's death-knell, says: "Mark: thunder! Dost know thy cue, thou big-voiced cryer? / Duke's groans are thunder's watchwords" (V.iii.42-3).

¹⁷⁹ Thanks are due to Alan Dessen for suggesting this reading to me.

Vindice's command for all to "mark" the thunder adds further doubt to the reality of the earlier thunderclap. If the thunder in IV.ii was not heard by anyone else, Vindice would likely want to draw everyone's attention to this "real" thunder, as it proves some sort of divine audience is indeed observing. Furthermore, this thunder signals an actual event—the murder of Lussurioso, while the possibly imaginary thunder signaled an imperceptible event—the formulation of a plot to kill Lussurioso. Vindice interprets this thunder the same way he did before: divine approval. He adds: "No power is angry when the lustful die: / When thunder claps, heaven likes the tragedy" (V.iii.46-7). Vindice is obviously punning on thunder "claps" and applause, and clearly suggests that heaven appreciates his actions. But his use of the double negative here is somewhat perplexing: why assert that "no power is angry" instead of saying that "heaven is happy?" The double negative subtly suggests that "no power" is indeed in control above, giving Vindice even more agency in the act of vengeance. Heaven watches and applauds, but it is Vindice who both directs and acts.¹⁸⁰

After the possibly imaginary thunderclap in Act IV, Vindice tells his brother that he is certain that his plot will succeed, "thanks to any spirit / That mingled it 'mongst my inventions." The term "spirit" has a number of connotations, including the animating principle, breath, the soul, an evil spirit, the Holy Spirit, or, according to the *OED*, "The emotional part of man as the seat of hostile or angry feeling."¹⁸¹ Whether this "spirit" is demonic, holy, or simply a creative spark, Vindice sees it as a supernatural force that has intervened to perfect his plans. This is somewhat reminiscent of Calvin's frequent reiterations that the Psalms were inspired by the Holy Spirit, as he often justifies any seeming

¹⁸⁰ For a lively discussion of metatheatricity in this play, see Howard Pearce. "Virtu and Poesis in *The Revenger's Tragedy*." *ELH* 43:1 (1976): 19-37.

¹⁸¹ "spirit, n" *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 20 Aug. 2008 <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50233653>>.

bloodlust on the part of David by reminding the readers that the Holy Spirit has been guiding him. In the commentary for Psalm 35, for example, Calvin notes:

David pleads not simply his own cause, nor utters rashly the dictates of his passion, nor with unadvised zeal desires the destruction of his enemies; but under the guidance of the Holy Spirit he entertains and expresses against the reprobate such desires as were characterised by great moderation, and which were far removed from the spirit of those who are impelled either by desire of revenge or hatred, or some other inordinate emotion of the flesh. (IV.i. 579)

This comparison is certainly problematic, as Vindice never claims to follow any sort of Christian guidance, but there are important commonalities. To an observer, David's wish to see his enemies destroyed can indeed come across as a desire for revenge. Prayers like this: "Let the table before them be for a snare; and their prosperity for a net. Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see; and make their loins continually to tremble forever Let their habitation be desolate Let them be blotted out from the book of the living" (Ps.69:22-23; 25;28)¹⁸² sound not only immoderate, but downright passionate. Calvin's other point is that David's anger is impersonal, as it is "not simply his own cause." This can mean that David pleads either on behalf of the Israelites, or on behalf of God Himself, as a "holy zeal for the divine glory" impels him to "summon the wicked to God's judgment" (V.iii.67). Calvin also argues that the Holy Spirit prevents David from taking the rein of revenge into his own hands, and indeed even places these imprecations into his mouth. Since David has not acted rashly, and because the Holy Spirit has actually penned these cursing psalms, David has done nothing wrong.

¹⁸² Calvin's translation. Here, in his commentary for Psalm 35, Calvin assures us that "David did not allow himself recklessly to pour out his wrath, even as the greater part of men, when they feel themselves wronged, intemperately give way to their own passion; but, being under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he was kept from going beyond the bounds of duty, and simply called upon God to exercise just judgment against the reprobate" (V.iii.67).

Because David possesses “uprightness” and “moderation,” and, most importantly, because he does not “devote himself exclusively to his own private interests,” David is both blameless and justified. While this may be true for most psalms, that is not the case for Psalm 55, where a close friend has betrayed him:

It was not an enemy that cast reproach upon me, for then I
could have borne it: it was not an adversary that did magnify
himself against me, for then I would have hid myself from him.
But it was thou, a man of mine own order, my leader, and
mine acquaintance. We sweetly exchanged our most secret
thoughts; we walked into the house of God in company. Let
death seize upon them, let them descend alive into the grave:
for wickedness is in their dwelling, and in the midst of them.
(Ps.55:12-15; Calvin’s translation)

Although Calvin maintains that David’s words in this psalm were motivated by “holy and religious fervor,” and not private indignation, this claim seems to be undercut by the personal nature of the injuries. Calvin considers David’s imprecation to be motivated by the desire for justice: the offending party should be punished because he is a reprobate, not just because he has hurt David. However, there are many other psalms where David asks for God’s intervention in much more general terms. The reprobate in Psalm 55 is not only David’s friend, he’s a confidante and a fellow believer. Furthermore, David does not just wish for this person (or group of people) to be struck down, he asks God to “let them descend alive into the grave.” Contrary to Calvin’s argument, David’s prayer is not a dispassionate entreaty for justice in general, but an ardent plea for God to punish someone who has hurt him specifically.

In light of this, Vindice’s troubles seem somewhat more in line with Calvin’s defense of David. Although the Duke has wronged him personally by murdering Gloriana, the entire populace is affected by the corrupt court. Royal criminals go unpunished while lechery,

greed, envy, and deceit run rampant. It was precisely this atmosphere of injustice that inspired the most vicious imprecatory psalms; Vindice's prayers for thunder are as justifiable as David's. However, although Calvin and others would presumably take issue with the fact that Vindice takes revenge into his own hands instead of relying on divine intervention, Vindice's methods do, in some ways, mirror Yahweh's. Like Yahweh in Psalms 37 and 59, Vindice avenges with attention to timing and irony. By using the poisoned "lips" of Gloriana to force a corrosive kiss upon the Duke, Vindice not only achieves his revenge, but he also presents a morbid tableau that warns against the dangers of lechery, prostitution, cosmetics, and, perhaps, women in general. Just as David prayed for God to ensnare the wicked in their own nets, Vindice uses the Duke's lust to entrap him. As the Duke writhes in pain, Vindice and Hippolito prop his eyes open, forcing him to watch his wife and son have a romantic liaison. Vindice says that he's doing this "To stick thy soul with ulcers; I will make / Thy spirit grievous sore, it shall not rest / But like some pestilent man, toss in thy breast" (III.v.171-3). Simply murdering the Duke is not enough to constitute vengeance; Vindice must torture him and then exterminate the rest of the royal family. Some critics have counted the exquisite "fitness" of this punishment against Vindice. Maurice Charney, for example, argues that the more Vindice "applauds his own plotting as an approximation of the perfect logic and economy of God's, the more he undermines his claim to ethical integrity."¹⁸³ Likewise, Richard T. Brucher argues that "Vindice and Hippolito care less about the moral efficacy of the Duke's suffering than about its intensity and their freedom to inflict

¹⁸³ Maurice Charney, "The Persuasiveness of Violence in Elizabethan Plays," *Renaissance Drama*. 2 (1969): 67.

punishment.”¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, although the spectacle of the Duke’s punishment “aptly fits the crime,” the fact that Vindice “treats the Duke’s anguish comically ... but he insists on extreme suffering” ensures that “Vindice’s role as an agent of divine retribution remains ambiguous.”¹⁸⁵ On the contrary, as we have seen, Vindice’s interest in inflicting punishment both severe and “apt” punishment is reflected in the Psalter, where the Lord uses timing and irony to punish the wicked and reward His followers for faith.

Moreover, in both the Psalms and *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, vengeance is not only an act of justice, but tangible proof of the executor’s power. In the Psalms, the reprobates learn too late that Yahweh is the one true God and the faithful can rejoice in His glory. This revelation can only come, however, when someone (either the wicked or the righteous) recognizes the Lord as the source of said vengeance. This does not seem particularly challenging for Him to achieve, for in the Hebrew Bible, almost every major act, sign, or event is ascribed to God. Vindice has a more difficult time establishing himself as the author of the royal family’s downfall. Because he has spent much of the play disguised as Piato, Vindice actually has to announce his identity to the dying Duke: “‘Tis I, ‘tis Vindice, ‘tis I!” (III.v.165). Furthermore, Vindice’s plot to dress the dead Duke as Piato, thus framing Piato for the murder, prevents anyone else from crediting the murder to him. His plan to kill Lussurioso also involves disguise: he and three nobles invade Lussurioso’s dinner party in masque garb. The four of them kill Lussurioso and his followers. The nobles escape, but Vindice remains to watch events unfold. As soon as Vindice’s cohorts exit, Lussurioso’s murderous brothers arrive wearing similar costumes. Their plan was the same as Vindice’s;

¹⁸⁴ Richard T. Brucher. “Fantasies of Violence: *Hamlet* and *The Revenger’s Tragedy*.” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. 21:2 (1981): 261

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 259.

their timing, however, was not particularly good. In the masqued melee that follows, two brothers end up stabbing each other and the third is killed by Ambitioso's loyal lord. Vindice encourages further confusion by shouting "Pistols, treason, murder, help, guard!" and then pins the death of Lussurioso on Ambitioso's lord. As the supposed criminal is dragged away, Vindice kneels next to Lussurioso and whispers to him: "Now thou'lt not prate on't, 'twas Vindice murdered thee! Murdered thy father And I am he! Tell nobody" (V.iii.76-8).

Although quite pleased with his accomplishments, Vindice is ultimately left unsatisfied by gloating in asides and whispering to dying dukes. With the evil brood dead, Antonio surveys the scene and marvels at the events that have unfolded, praising the "law above" for being "just," and wondering how the old duke was murdered. Vindice cannot help but gleefully reveal: "'twas somewhat wittily carried / Though we say it. 'Twas we who murdered him!" (V.iii.97-8).¹⁸⁶ In the Old Testament, God is acclaimed for effecting every major event. In order for the concepts of Providence and divine justice to be legitimate, God must be seen as the prime mover behind wars, famines, plagues, or even errant axe-falls. God takes credit for these incidents (or, perhaps, has credit thrust upon Him) so as to perfect the notion of divine vengeance. Here, Vindice must identify himself as the perpetrator for a similar reason. If he is not recognized as the author of these murders, then his revenge becomes illegitimate. Throughout the play, Vindice has portrayed himself as a cohort of divine justice, working alongside (or in front of) heaven in righting society's wrongs. Vindice's tacit agreement with Antonio's observation of a "law above," followed by taking

¹⁸⁶ Heather Hirschfeld argues that this revelation is not an act of self-aggrandizement, but confession: "After each successful trick or murder, [Vindice] announces either to the victim or to a cohort his responsibility in the deed;" this makes his actions "less about obtaining an impossible justice and more about orchestrating scenes that allow him to proclaim his own sinfulness." Ironically, however, "his efforts, designed to efface a sinful self and give rise to someone new and pure, only mire him more deeply in his sinful origins" ("Compulsions of the Renaissance." *Shakespeare Studies*. 33. 2002: 115). While Hirschfeld's observation is intriguing, it lacks entirely persuasive evidence of Vindice's desire for contrition.

credit for the murders reemphasizes his position as heaven's co-conspirator. At no point does Vindice see himself as a passive human instrument of God's wrath. If he were to allow Antonio and the others to ascribe the play's events to God, then he would negate his own active part in the process.

Antonio responds to this confession by sentencing Vindice and Hippolito to death, just in case they one day decide to murder him as well. Although Hippolito seems distressed by this turn of events, Vindice has no regrets:

Thou hast no conscience: are we not revenged?
Is there one enemy left alive amongst those?
'Tis time to die when we are ourselves our foes.
When murderers shut deeds close this curse does seal 'em
If none disclose 'em, they themselves reveal 'em!
This murder might have slept in tongueless brass
But for ourselves, and the world died an ass.

.....
we have enough –
I' faith, we're well—our mother turned, our sister true,
We die after a nest of dukes! Adieu.

(V.iii.108-125)

Vindice's peace of mind comes from knowing that he has avenged his loved ones and from understanding his role as a dispenser of justice. His vengeance has been perfectly executed: all his foes have fallen. But if no one knows who felled them, Vindice would not *specifically* be avenged. Confessing to the crime is not merely a mistake made by a proud or loose-lipped murderer, but an important element to Vindice's status as a primary agent of divine vengeance.

Vindice's revenge thus mirrors the Psalmist's description of Yahweh's wrath in three key ways: it is "apt," it is severe, and it is specifically ascribed to one executor. These acts of vengeance thus both glorify the perpetrator and didactically reform society. Despite these similarities, however, Vindice's actions also show the most important difference between his

vengeance and the Lord's: unlike any models of Biblical anger (either human or divine), Vindice enjoys watching his enemies suffer. While Thomas Aquinas admits that the angry man "he takes pleasure in the thought and hope of vengeance,"¹⁸⁷ Thomas Jackson reminds us that God is "a revenger of iniquity most severe; yet never moved with jealousy, yet never passionate in revenge; because, to such as provoke his punitive justice, he is eternally severity and revenge itself."¹⁸⁸ Because God *is* wrath in the abstract, He acts with neither cruelty nor sadistic glee. Vindice's human vengeance could never be described in the same terms.

This difference will perhaps be most strikingly illustrated by a return to the Calvin commentary that opened this chapter. In his discussion of Psalm 58, Calvin notes that "when one is led by a holy zeal to sympathize with the justice of that vengeance which God may have inflicted, his joy will be as pure in beholding the retribution of the wicked, as his desire for their conversion and salvation was strong and unfeigned."¹⁸⁹ It is, therefore, possible for one to experience righteous pleasure in watching one's enemies suffer at the hands of God, provided that one delights not in the vengeance itself, but in the resulting repentance. This is, of course, not the case for Vindice, Hoffman, the Luningberg family, or the band of murderers in *Antonio's Revenge*, all of whom seem to enjoy engaging in the revenge act far more than actually avenging their loved ones, and none of whom seem genuinely concerned about the souls of their victims.

¹⁸⁷ Q. 48, Article I, p 532.

¹⁸⁸ *A Treatise of the Divine Attributes* 205.

¹⁸⁹ V. 377-8.

CHAPTER FOUR

“O My Prophetic Soul”: *Hamlet*, Jeremiah, and Prophetic Drama

As we have seen in previous chapters, the problems that plague revengers—a wicked tyrant, fatherlessness, and harsh treatment of widows, just to name a few—are also encountered by figures in the Old Testament. This pattern continues in *Hamlet*, as the Danish Prince confronts the same basic issues vexing other revengers and prophets alike. Indeed, Hamlet’s tirades against his country for drunkenness, dissembling, and worshipping a false King might well be termed “jeremiads.” But the parallels between *Hamlet* and the book of Jeremiah go beyond the fact that both men inhabit similarly corrupt societies and inveigh against that corruption. Hamlet, of course, is an anomaly among revenge tragedy protagonists. And, as many critics have noted, Hamlet is far more talkative than other revengers. Indeed, Hamlet chastises himself for spending more time talking than acting. Jeremiah is similarly unique amongst his peers. Famous for his introspective, doubt-filled soliloquies, Jeremiah uses first-person narration more than any other Old Testament prophet.¹⁹⁰ In these personal confessions, Jeremiah expresses anger, distress, and extreme frustration with the task of admonishing a people who refuse to repent.

¹⁹⁰ The so-called “Prophetic ‘I’” employed by Jeremiah is a matter of intense critical debate. Theologians argue variously that “I” refers to, among other things: Jeremiah the man, Jeremiah the prophet, God, the community, and the personified land of Judah. In his book, *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self*, Old Testament scholar Timothy Polk argues that the multivalenced referents of “I” in Jeremiah “articulated the prophet’s self-identification with both God and people” (58).

For Renaissance writers, this expression of emotion distinguished Jeremiah from his fellow prophets. Jeremiah was often depicted as a model satirist: filled with sadness for his fallen society, Jeremiah is led by the Holy Spirit to rebuke the wicked. The book of Lamentations, traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah, was primarily read as a woeful invective against Jerusalem's sins. Because London was often thought of as the New Jerusalem, early modern satirists saw immediate correlations between their plights and Jeremiah's. As Raymond-Jean Frontain notes, the expression of grief in Lamentations¹⁹¹ "was regularly employed as a source of consolation in times of national calamity," especially during outbreaks of plague, religious schism, and political tumult. However, it was also "appropriated when testifying against the sinful behaviors associated with a Renaissance city or a specific group of individuals."¹⁹² This use of Jeremiah's words is seen most clearly in Thomas Drant's *A Medicinable Morall* (1566), which pairs Horace's satires with Lamentations.¹⁹³ Although Drant gives no explicit reason for this particular pairing, he does note that Horace "jests" where Jeremiah laments, and that it is perfectly appropriate for both men to behave this way:

¹⁹¹ Although Lamentations is traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah, modern scholars doubt his authorship because of differences in diction and certain religious perspectives. For a thorough discussion of the poetic form of Lamentations, see Norman K. Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, Studies in Biblical Theology 14 (London: SCM Press) 1954.

¹⁹² Raymond-Jean Frontain. "the man which have affliction seen": Donne, Jeremiah, and the Fashioning of Lamentation." *Centered on the Word: Literature, Scripture, and the Tudor-Stuart Middle Way*. Ed. Daniel W. Doerkson and Christopher Hodgkins. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004 (136). Frontain argues that John Donne in particular was drawn to Jeremiah's "presentation of himself as *the* man, the only man who survives to speak, the man whose experience is emblematic for others" (137). He further contends that "Jeremiah's self-presentation also dovetails with Donne's emblematic sense of self—with his presentation of himself as the person who is preternaturally aware of the horrors of living in an irredeemably profane world—and is in keeping as well with Donne's self-presentation as Jeremiah elsewhere in his life and canon" (137).

¹⁹³ For a concise history and analysis of this text, see Neel Mukherjee's "Thomas Drant's Rewriting of Horace." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 40, No. 1, The English Renaissance (Winter, 2000).

The holy Prophete *Jermeie* dyd ruefully and waylingly lamente the deepe and massie enormities of his tymes, and earnestly prognosticate and forspeake the ... consequences that came after, and sauce with teares the hard plagues that had gone before. Therefore as it is mete for a man of god rather to wepe than to iest: and not undecent for a prophane writer to be iestyng, and merie spoken: I haue brought to passe that the plaintive Prophete Ieremie should wepe at synne: and the pleasant poet Horace should laugh at synne (sig. A3r).¹⁹⁴

Jeremiah's tears are part of his divine inspiration: it is "mete" for him to weep at the "massie enormities" plaguing Jerusalem. In his remarks to the reader, Drant describes Lamentations as: "an holy kynde of sadnesse, an exacte myrrour of a contrite soule, the heauy procedynges of iust God, against his vniust creatures." Drant thus depicts Lamentations in three distinct, but interrelated ways: Lamentations is itself a "holy kynde of sadnesse," but it is also both a textual mirror of Jeremiah's "contrite soule" and a written register of God's righteous judgment. God's wrath is conveyed through Jeremiah's words, but so is His sorrow.

Early modern English writers who focused on the Book of Jeremiah instead of Lamentations were more likely to cast the Prophet as a conduit for God's anger instead of his disappointment with humanity. However, whether these writers drew primarily upon Jeremiah's sorrow or his outrage, they did so in response to the political and social anxieties of their time. According to Steven Dobranski,

During the seventeenth century, allusions to Jeremiah's rhetoric and symbolism developed into a distinct political genre in both England and America: preachers and politicians ... adopted the stance of the Old Testament prophet, lamenting their countries' depravity, recalling an ideal past, and urging readers to repent and reform. These so-called *jeremiads* arose, like Jeremiah's original pronouncements, in response to the threat of a national

¹⁹⁴ Thomas Drant. *A Medicinable Morall, that is, the two Bookes of Horace his Satyres, Englyshed accordyng to the prescription of saint Hierome. The Wailynge of the Prophet Hieremie. Also epigrammes. T. Drant. Perused and allowed accordyng to the Quenes Maiesties iniunctions*, Imprinted at London : In Fletestrete by Thomas Marshe, M.D.LXVI. [1566]. Early English Books Online. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library. 18 January, 2010.

disaster The genre accordingly became most popular in England during the decline associated with the Civil War and, as written by Commonwealthmen, on the eve of the Restoration. In *The Reason of Church-Government* (1642), for example, Milton models himself after Jeremiah in attacking prelacy, and in *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660), he alludes to the prophet in warning English readers of the impending return to monarchy.¹⁹⁵

In Book II of *The Reason of Church Government*, Milton contends that it is the responsibility of anyone who has “obtain'd in more then the scantest measure to know any thing distinctly of God” to share this knowledge. This message is a burden “more pressing then any supportable toil, or waight, which the body can labour under.” The people, however, will reject these words of truth. It is for this reason, Milton argues, that “the sad Prophet *Ieremiah* laments, *Wo is me my mother, that thou hast born me a man of strife, and contention*. And although divine inspiration must certainly have been sweet to those ancient profets, yet the irksomnesse of that truth which they brought was so unpleasant to them that every where they call it a burden.”¹⁹⁶

The prominent twentieth-century theologian Abraham Heschel makes an observation similar to Milton's: “To be a prophet is both a distinction and an affliction. The mission he performs is distasteful to him and repugnant to others; no reward is promised him and no reward could temper its bitterness.”¹⁹⁷ Contrary to a modern understanding of “prophecy,” the role of an Old Testament prophet was not to predict the future, but to deliver God's message. This message was, more often than not, a warning that He would destroy the people

¹⁹⁵ Steven Dobranski. “Burghley's Emblem and the Heart of Milton's *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*.” *Milton Quarterly* 34.2 (2000):41. For other views on Milton and Jeremiah, see John Morkan. “Wrath and Laughter: Milton's Ideas on Satire.” *Studies in Philology*. 69 (1972) 475-95; and especially Reuben Sánchez, Jr. *Persona and Decorum in Milton's Prose*. (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 1997), esp. pp 60-76.

¹⁹⁶ John Milton. *Complete Poems and Major Prose*. Ed. Merritt T. Hughes. (Indianapolis: Odyssey Press, 1957) 665.

¹⁹⁷ Abraham J. Heschel. *The Prophets*. New York: Harper and Row, 1962 (17-18).

if they did not repent. Jeremiah's message is clear: Yahweh is angry because Judah has turned against Him. The common people are ignorant, the leaders are corrupt, false prophets abound, and the entire community is infected with dishonesty. Through Jeremiah, Yahweh warns that every man should be wary of his neighbor, as "everie brother wil use deceit, and everie friend wil deale deceitfully" (Jer. 9:4). Most damningly, the people have forgotten the covenant and worship Baal instead of the true God:

Thus saith the Lord, What iniquities have your fathers founde in me, that they are gone farre from me, and have walked after vanitie, and are become vaine? For they said not, Where is the Lord that broght us up out of the land of Egypt? That led us through the wildernes And I broght you into a plentiful country ... but when ye entred, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage and abominacion. (Jer. 2:5-7)

He further likens their behavior to forsaking "the fountaine of living waters to digge the pittes, even broken pittes, that can holde no water" (Jer. 2:13). Ungrateful, falsehearted, and faithless, Judah is doomed unless the people repent.

Although Denmark's problem is not idolatry *per se*, Hamlet's rant against Denmark bears similarities to Jeremiah's rebuke of Judah. Hamlet privately denounces the court for switching loyalty so quickly from his noble father to his disgraceful uncle—or, in Hamlet's words, from "Hyperion to a satyr" (I.ii.140).¹⁹⁸ He later marvels to Rosencrantz at how swiftly the masses have shifted allegiances from his father to his uncle, observing that "those that would make mouths at [Claudius] while my father lived give twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred ducats apiece for his picture in little" (II.ii.307-309). But Hamlet's most caustic invective is reserved for his mother, who has gone from loving a man upon whom "every god did seem to set his seal" to consorting with "a mildewed ear," "a murderer and a villain," "a vice of kings, / A cutpurse of the empire and the rule" (III.iv.61; 64; 96-99).

¹⁹⁸ This and all further references to *Hamlet* are from *Hamlet*, ed. A.R. Braunmuller. New York: Penguin, 2001.

Hamlet's vitriol at Gertrude's sexual relationship with Claudius has been the subject of lively critical discussion for over a century. His tirade against Gertrude—and, to a certain extent, Ophelia—has much in common with Jeremiah's castigation of Judah. Throughout the Bible, the relationship between God and His people is described as a marriage. In the Old Testament, Yahweh is the groom and the Israelites His bride. It makes sense, therefore, that the prophets should use metaphors of sexual infidelity to describe Judah's betrayal of Yahweh. Indeed, comparing the faithless Jerusalem to a harlot is common throughout the Hebrew Bible, perhaps most notably in Ezekiel. As Biblical scholar Thomas Jemielity so colorfully notes, Ezekiel's Jerusalem "has certainly done enough sleeping around in the Near East to pose a formidable challenge to Messalina, Juvenal's Olympic gold medalist in sex."¹⁹⁹ Jeremiah incredulously notes how quickly the people seem to have forgotten their covenant with God: in the space of two generations, they have turned from worshipping him to serving Baal. This fickleness leads Judah to be depicted as a prostitute: dressed in scarlet, covered in golden jewelry, and smeared in paint, she vainly seeks lovers who will ultimately kill her (Jer. 4:31). Jeremiah often colors his comparison with bestial overtones. Faithless Jerusalem is a female camel in heat, a wild ass luring a mate, a lusty stallion who "[neyes] after his neighbours wife" (Jer. 2:23-4; 5:8). Judah's animalistic lust is insatiable and indiscriminate. Through Jeremiah, Yahweh instructs the people to "lift up thine eyes unto the high places, and beholde, where thou hast not plaid the harlot ... polluted the land with thy whoredomes, and with why malice" (3:2). He identifies Himself as the one who has uncovered their sin:

I have also discovered thy skirts upon thy face, that thy shame
may appeare. I have sene thine adulteries, and thy neyings, the

¹⁹⁹ Thomas Jemielity. *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets*. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox. 1992): 103.

filthines of thy whoredome on the hills in the fields, and thine abominacions. Wo unto thee, o Jerusalem: wilt thou not be made cleane? (13:25-6)

Early modern theologians consistently interpret this adultery as idolatry. The Geneva commentary elucidates the phrase “thy hast plaied the harlot with manie lovers” with this instruction to readers: “that is, with idoles, and with them, whome thou hast put thy confidence in.”²⁰⁰ As for the above passage from Jeremiah 13, the Geneva provides this helpful clarification: “he compareth idolators to horses inflamed after mares.”²⁰¹ Calvin too reads “adulteries” as “idolatry” and reminds us of the metaphorical underpinnings – we are supposed to see God as “a husband to his people” and the Israelites as his faithless spouse. He further concludes that “the Jews in vain tried to escape by evasions, since God declares that he had *seen* them.”²⁰²

Hamlet’s frequent diatribes against Gertrude’s infidelity—or against women in general—are certainly motivated in part by misogyny, a prurient interest in his mother’s sexuality, his own sexual frustration, and the particular circumstances in Elsinore. But we should not dismiss the link between adultery and idolatry established in Jeremiah and other biblical texts. In Hamlet’s reckoning, his father was Yahweh: devoted, just, loving, and a constant provider. Gertrude has renounced him for the idol of Claudius: a vile, worthless imposter. Hamlet imagines their relationship in luridly sexual terms. Like Jeremiah, he marvels at how quickly she has forgotten her vows, noting that even “a beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourned longer” (I.ii.151-2). He describes her betrayal as both a replacement of good for evil and as a breach of a covenant:

²⁰⁰ Jer. 3:2. Comment C (307).

²⁰¹ Jer. 13:27, Comment N (312).

²⁰² Calvin Vol IX, 200, emphasis in original.

[It is] an act
 That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
 Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
 From the fair forehead of an innocent love,
 And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows
 As false as dicer's oaths. O, such a deed
 As from the body of contraction plucks
 The very soul, and sweet religion makes
 A rhapsody of words! Heaven's face does glow,
 O'er this solidity and compound mass,
 With heated visage.

(III.iv.41-50)

Hamlet's interactions with Ophelia also play on this theme. He vilifies her for using cosmetics and simpering: "God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another. You jig and amble, and you lisp. You nick-name God's creatures and make your wantonness your ignorance" (III.i.143-145). Hamlet accuses Ophelia of disguising herself with paint and coyness, replacing her natural, God-created self with an artificial façade so that she may more effectively lure men. To borrow from Jemielity's paraphrase of 4:31, Ophelia is "a streetwalker, seeking out whatever passersby appear, ironically unaware that all the street traffic despises her and seeks her life."²⁰³ If we consider Jeremiah and other prophetic books as valid context for this scene, we need not limit this imprecation only to women. In Jeremiah, all of Judah is guilty of adultery/idolatry: in *Hamlet*, all of Denmark is complicit in Claudius's sins. Fearful of Norway or seeking stability, the court has willfully disregarded Old Hamlet's suspicious death, Gertrude's hasty marriage, and Claudius's swift rise to power. Elsinore is filled with male *and* female dissemblers: people eavesdrop, flatter, lie, and ignore injustice to gain or maintain favor.²⁰⁴ Hamlet includes himself amongst the catalogue

²⁰³ *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets* 90.

²⁰⁴ I do not mean to suggest that portraying Judah/Denmark as a whore is not inherently misogynistic; it most assuredly is. I merely wish to argue that one need not read either as *exclusively* misogynistic.

of sinners, confessing that even though he is indifferent honest,” he could still be accused “of such things that it were better my mother had not borne [him]” (III.i.122-4).

Hamlet’s insistence that Ophelia hasten herself to a nunnery, with its notoriously ambiguous meaning, is both a further accusation of harlotry and a prescription for purification. Renouncing marriage would prevent Ophelia from becoming “a breeder of sinners.” Should she marry, however, Hamlet promises “calumny” as her dowry, even though she “be chaste as ice, as pure as snow” (III.i.122;135-7). Jeremiah receives a similar, but exponentially more horrifying, directive from Yahweh:

Thou shalt not take thee a wife, nor have sonnes nor daughters in this place. For thus saith the Lord concerning the sonnes, and concerning the daughters that are borne in this place, and concerning their mothers that beare them, and concerning their fathers, that beget them in this land. Thei shal dye of deaths and diseases: thei shal not be lamented, nether shal thei be buryed, but thei shalbe as dongue upon the earth, and thei shalbe consumed by the sworde, and by famine, and their carkeises shalbe meat for the soules of the heaven, and for the beastes of the earth. (Jer. 16: 1-4)

The Geneva Bible explicates this disturbing decree as follows: “the affliction shulde be so horrible in Ierusalem, that wife, and children shulde but increase his sorowe.”²⁰⁵ Calvin adds that this dramatic reversal of the command to “increase and multiply” shows that God has deemed the land “unworthy of this common and even general blessing enjoyed by the whole race of man.”²⁰⁶ Hamlet’s decree that “we will have no more marriage” mirrors this mandate from Yahweh. It would seem, then, that both Denmark and Judah have become so sordid, so thoroughly corrupted, that any new propagation would only generate more sin.

²⁰⁵ Jer. 16:1, Comment A (313).

²⁰⁶ Vol IX, 302. Calvin also provides some unsubtle anti-Semitism: “We hence see that in the person of Jeremiah God intended to show the Jews that they deserved to be exterminated from the earth.”

As the lone soul charged to reform his society, both Jeremiah and Hamlet are wary of their own abilities. Jeremiah's self-doubt is evident in the very first chapter. The Prophet reveals that the voice of God came to him, saying: "Before I formed you in the wombe, I knewe thee, and before thou camest out of the wombe, I sanctified thee, and ordained thee to be a Prophet unto the nations." Jeremiah's response reflects his insecurity: he protests that he is a "childe" who "can not speake." The Lord gently reproves Jeremiah, urging that he "saie not, I am a childe: for thou shalt go to all that I send thee, and whatsoever I commande thee, shalt thou speake." He then touches the Prophet's lips, declaring: "Beholde, I have put my words in thy mouth" and gives Jeremiah his mission: to warn the people that they will face His wrath if they do not repent. He also informs the Prophet that he will be scorned and assailed, but that the Lord will ultimately deliver him.²⁰⁷

The language used in the exchange between Yahweh and Jeremiah is unsurprisingly paternal. Indeed, God is portrayed throughout both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament as a father figure. As Jeremiah's Father, Yahweh is responsible for both his physical creation and his spiritual vocation. As God's child, Jeremiah feels inadequate for the task, a sentiment Calvin describes as "a laudable feeling" based in "modesty" and forgivable timidity.²⁰⁸ Calvin also reminds us to take the Prophet's words metaphorically; he is a child "not in age,

²⁰⁷ Jer. 1:5-19. This scene is similar to Isaiah's receipt of vocation in Isa 6:5. Isaiah receives his calling via a vision of God on His throne surrounded by seraphs. Upon seeing the glory of the Lord, Isaiah wails: "Wo is me: for I am undone, because I am a man of polluted lippes, and I dwell in the middes of a people of polluted lippes: for mine eyes have sene the King and Lord of hostes." The seraph replies by placing a hot coal on Isaiah's lips, thus cleansing him of any sin. Thus purified, Isaiah immediately volunteers to be God's servant. Following the purification, Isaiah does not reveal any misgivings about his aptitude for the job.

²⁰⁸ *Commentaries*. Vol IX, 38.

but in knowledge.”²⁰⁹ Yahweh’s reproof is a reminder that Jeremiah must obey his Father despite any of his own personal misgivings.

Yahweh’s reassurance comes with a visible sign: He touches Jeremiah’s mouth to show that He has imparted His word. Calvin argues that this action was not necessary—there is no reason to expect that “the tongues of all the teachers should be touched by the hand of God.” Therefore, contemporary prophets, perhaps such as Calvin himself, should not consider themselves illegitimate if they have yet to be physically touched by the hand of God. This action is simply God’s way of signifying this particular relationship with Jeremiah. Calvin elaborates:

There are here two things—the thing itself, and an external sign. As to the thing itself, a rule is prescribed to all God’s servants, that they bring not their own inventions, but simply deliver ... what they have received from God. But it was a special thing as to Jeremiah, that God, by stretching out his hand, *touched his mouth*; it was, that he might openly shew that his mouth was consecrated to himself.²¹⁰

The touching itself has no power; it is merely an “external sign” of consecration. As in Isaiah, where a hot coal is placed on the Prophet’s lips, God physically interacts with Jeremiah, seemingly for no intrinsic purpose. Why then, is this act included? As one might expect, Calvin interprets this as an inscrutable act of God’s will. But in his description of the event, Calvin writes: “A visible symbol was added, that there might be a stronger confirmation.”²¹¹ Calvin does not discuss for whom this confirmation is intended. Does Jeremiah require the validation or is it provided as a detail to convince the audience of his divine calling? If it is the former, then it underscores the human element in the Prophet that

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 39.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 43, italics in original.

²¹¹ Ibid, 43.

Calvin, as we shall see, sometimes labors to discount. If it is the latter, then it suggests that the Israelites, and, by extension, the early modern English Christians, were wary of accepting any man with a claim to divine communication *prima facie*. Hamlet's first meeting with the Ghost has similar elements to Jeremiah's consecration.²¹² This Ghost is—or at least, resembles—Hamlet's father. He therefore has both a paternal and a supernatural claim to authority.²¹³ That the Ghost will talk to Hamlet is most likely due to the fact that he is the murdered King's son, and thus the prime candidate to avenge his murder. But the fact that the Ghost converses only with Hamlet—though he is seen by the Watch—transforms Hamlet into a prophet. He alone is given a mandate directly from a supernatural source. Hamlet instantly understands his role, telling the Ghost that he is “bound to hear” his words. So too, the Ghost adds, will Hamlet be bound to act upon hearing his words. For a prophet in the Hebrew Bible, a promise to listen is also a promise to act: hearing God's voice without conveying His message is an act of blasphemy. Hamlet's exclamation upon hearing the details of his father's death—“O my prophetic soul!”—indicates that he has suspected Claudius all along, but it also suggests that he recognizes his role as a prophet figure, chosen to deliver a message from above (I.v.41).

²¹² Harold Fisch links this encounter with other events in the Old Testament, such as the revelation at Mount Sinai: “There too a Father had appeared to lay his command on his people. Only one of their number is called to ascend the mountain whilst the others stay below in terror and seek to distance themselves from the alarming sounds and sights. From now on the People of Israel are chosen, burdened with a task which they will forget or try to forget but which will never forget them. Hamlet has the same sense of being chosen and the same recoil from chosenness” (86). *The Biblical Presence in Shakespeare, Milton, and Blake: A Comparative Study*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.)

²¹³ I do not believe that the present discussion requires assurance of the Ghost's goodness. The fact that it is a supernatural being claiming authority and righteousness and directing Hamlet to act on his behalf bears enough similarity to Yahweh in the Book of Jeremiah to facilitate this comparison. In stating this, however, I am by no means attempting to render moot the rich critical history surrounding the ambiguous nature of this Ghost. Excellent recent studies include: Clinton P. E. Atchley, “Reconsidering the Ghost in *Hamlet*: Cohesion or Coercion?” *The Philological Review* 28.2 (Fall 2002): 5-20; Stephen Greenblatt, “Remember Me.” in *Hamlet in Purgatory*. By Greenblatt. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001. 205-57; Anthony Low. “Hamlet and the Ghost of Purgatory: Intimations of Killing the Father.” *English Literary Renaissance* 29 (1999) 443-67; Phoebe S. Spinrad. “The Fall of the Sparrow and the Map of Hamlet's Mind.” *Modern Philology*. 102.4 (2005), 453-477.

Hamlet's immediate reaction to the Ghost is strikingly different from Jeremiah's initial response to God's call. Where Jeremiah timidly declares himself a "childe" in the Lord's presence, Hamlet's spirit surges with courage. He proclaims that his "fate cries out / And makes each petty artirie in this body / As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve" (I.iv.80-3). He then urges the Ghost to quickly identify his murderer so that he may enact revenge "with wings as swift / As meditation of the thoughts of love" (I.v.29-30). Where Yahweh comforts Jeremiah with promise of deliverance; the Ghost's only words of assurance are "Fare thee well at once" (I.v. 88). Futhermore, while Yahweh reassures Jeremiah with a visible sign, the Ghost requires Hamlet to reassure *him* by means of a visible sign: having the others swear upon his sword. It is perhaps this lack of concrete reassurance that causes Hamlet's enthusiasm to quickly fade when the Ghost departs.

Despite his initial zeal for revenge, no sooner does the Ghost exit than Hamlet exclaims: "O cursed spite / That ever I was born to set it right!" (I.v.191-2). As the play progresses, his emotional state deteriorates further, no more eloquently evidenced than in the famous soliloquy of Act III. Critics have long identified Job, the righteous man unjustly stricken with intense physical and emotional pain, as the most likely Old Testament antecedent to Hamlet. In an 1892 article, George S. Goodspeed contends:

Shakespeare's Job is Hamlet, the sunshine of whose sky is clouded not at all by physical suffering but by the agonies of a mental and moral struggle; who finds himself in a world not, indeed, made miserable by degradation, poverty and pain but polluted by lust and crime ... and made horrid by the necessity laid upon him, as the destined minister of vengeance.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ George F. Goodspeed. "The Book of Job in other Literatures. II. *The Old and New Testament Student*. Vol. 15, (1892): 109.

A more modern example comes from Arthur McGee, who links Hamlet's reference to the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" to Job 41:28-9, which reads: "The arrow cannot make him flee; for him slingstones are turned to stubble."²¹⁵ Harold Jenkins sees an echo of Job 10:21 ("I go and shal not returne, even to the land of darkenes and shadow of death") in Hamlet's allusion to the "undiscovered country."²¹⁶ Such resonances are certainly possible; Steven Marx's incisive analysis of *King Lear* and the Book of Job suggests that Shakespeare was indeed conversant with that particular text.²¹⁷ And indeed, Hamlet's "O cursed spite" does sound similar to Job's lament in 3:3-11: "Let the day perish, wherein I was borne, and the night when it was said, There is a manchild conceived Why dyed I not in my birth? Or why dyed I not, when I came out of the wombe?" However, the dissimilarities between Hamlet's and Job's situations, thoroughly noted above by Goodspeed, make Jeremiah a more compelling candidate for an Old Testament predecessor. Hamlet and Jeremiah share what Hamlet and Job do not: a charge to reform an unrepentantly corrupt society.

Jeremiah's efforts are met with contempt, imprisonment, and revulsion. He asks of the Lord: "Why is mine heaviness continual? And my plague desperate and can not be healed? Why art thou unto me as a lyer, and as waters that faile" (15:18). His despair then grows more dire, leading him to make a declaration similar to, but perhaps even more blasphemous than, Job's:

O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I am deceived: thou art stronger then I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daiely: everie one mocketh me. For since I spake, I cryed out of

²¹⁵ Arthur McGee. *The Elizabethan Hamlet*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987). In the Geneva translation, this line is rendered "The archer can not make him flee; the stones of the sling are turned into stubble unto him" (Job 41:19).

²¹⁶ Harold Jenkins. *Hamlet*. (London: Methuen, 1982). 491.

²¹⁷ Stephen Marx. *Shakespeare and the Bible*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 59-78. See also Robert Pack, "Betrayal and Nothingness: The book of Job and *King Lear*," *The Long View* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 251-76.

wrong, and proclaimed desolation: therefore the worde of the Lord was made a reproche unto me, and in derision daiely. Then I said, I will not make mencion of him, nor speake any more in his Name. But his worde was in mine heart as a burning fyre shut up in my bones, and I was wearie with forbearing, and I could not stay. (20:7-9)

Cursed be the day wherein I was borne: and let not the day wherein my mother bare me, be blessed. Cursed be the man, that shewed my father, saying, A man childe is borne unto thee Because he hath not slayne me, even from the wombe, or that my mother might have been my grave, or her wombe a perpetual conception. How is it, that I came forthe of the wombe, to see labor and sorowe, that my daies shulde be consumed with shame? (20:14-18)

Here, Jeremiah bemoans not only his wretched life, but also his God-given vocation. Cursing the day of his birth is a thinly-veiled suicide wish: an obvious sacrilege. In addition, however, Jeremiah accuses the Lord of deceit and wishes to cease prophesying. Jeremiah thus reverses the Lord's first words to him: "Before I formed you in the wombe, I knewe thee, and before thou camest out of the wombe, I sanctified thee, and ordained thee to be a Prophet unto the nations." In essence, Jeremiah is struggling to deny the Lord and ignore His commands—precisely what he has been charged to reform in Judah.

Early modern readers saw the prophet's anguish as both troubling and comforting. While it was indeed disturbing that such a holy man would feel such emotional torment, it did provide a model for their own suffering. A 1618 sermon by John Barlow uses Jeremiah's struggle as an inspirational account for "young Converts" enduring the "pangs of regeneration." Barlow reminds the audience of how "*Jeremiah* complained, that his Mother had brought him forth, a man of Contention; he heard the rayling of many, all his familiars watched for his halting; saying, It may be that hee is deceiued; so shall wee preuaile against him, and execute our vengeance, vpon him," but despite this emotional torture, the prophet

remained faithful. As a result of his faith, God delivered him. This example should provide comfort to even those who imagine that “neuer any person hath found comfort in [their] condition,” as it promises that “thy feare shall be expelled, thy spirit healed, thy corruption weakned.”²¹⁸ The Geneva commentators see Jeremiah’s despair as more of an embarrassment than a potential for inspiration: the gloss ushers us swiftly past Jeremiah’s death wish, marveling: “How the children of God are overcome in this barrel of the flesh and the Spirit, and into what inconveniences they fall til God raise them up again.”²¹⁹ Here, “inconveniences” is best understood as “moral or ethical unsuitableness; unbecoming or unseemly behaviour; impropriety.”²²⁰

Calvin takes Jeremiah’s imprecation far more seriously. He begins by providing an apology for Jeremiah’s despair, writing that the Prophet is “not wholly exempt from sorrow and fear and other feelings of the flesh,” and reminding us that we must distinguish “the truth, which was pure, free from every imperfection” from the human being that spoke it. Calvin adds that even though they are holy men, prophets retain “some remnant of the flesh.” This inescapable human element causes Jeremiah to be “disturbed with anxiety and fear, and affected with weariness.”²²¹ At first, Calvin tries to undercut the blasphemy in Jeremiah’s outcry by arguing that it is essentially about gratitude. By showing the audience the depths of his sorrows, Jeremiah illustrates how truly magnificent God is to deliver him. Calvin does,

²¹⁸ John Barlow, *Hierons last fare-well* (12, 19).

²¹⁹ Jer. 20:14, Comment H (315).

²²⁰ “inconvenience, n²” *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. 20 July 2009. The *OED* also identifies a similar usage in Argument from the book of Numbers: “That either they fall not to such inconueniences, or else return to him quickly by true repentance.”

²²¹ John Calvin. *Commentaries*. Vol IX, 290. Calvin also notably likens Jeremiah’s plight to the Protestant struggle against the Papists: “We indeed see at this day that the doctrine of the Gospel does not restore all to obedience; but many give themselves a more unbridled license, as though the yoke of discipline was wholly removed” (Vol X, 32). He suggests that his spiritual comrades model themselves after Jeremiah and “manfully resist” the urge to give up.

however, address the gravity of Jeremiah's lamentation. He observes that in addition to being harangued by his enemies, the prophet is

distressed inwardly in his own mind, so that he was carried away contrary to reason and judgment, by turbulent emotions which even led him to give utterance to vile blasphemies. For what is here said cannot be extenuated; but the Prophet most grievously sinned when he became thus calumnious towards God; for a man must be in a state of despair when he curses the day in which he was born.²²²

Celebrating your birthday, Calvin argues, is a way of thanking God for bringing you to life. Cursing your birthday, therefore, is ungrateful, disrespectful, and profane. Calvin's only explanation is that Jeremiah has been "seized as it were with a sacrilegious madness."²²³ He then immediately softens his censure, contending that "the origin of [Jeremiah's] zeal was right." Jeremiah's lament was borne not out of material discomfort, but out of a Cassandra-like frustration and a desire to do God's will. Calvin further observes that if a Prophet is thus tempted to curse his birth and ignore his calling, weaker human beings must be doubly strong against despair.²²⁴ Hamlet's "O cursed spite / That ever I was born to set it right!" thus has more in common with Jeremiah's lament than Job's. Although Hamlet has lost his father, his physical well-being, material wealth, and relationships with friends and family are, thus far, completely intact. He curses not only his birth, but his vocation: righting the wrongs of his society. Indeed, the nature of this vocation—namely, murder—perhaps makes Hamlet's outcry initially less blasphemous than Jeremiah's. As the play develops, Hamlet embraces his role as a revenger, in spirit, if not in action.

²²² Vol X, p 45.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid, 46.

The spiritual gap that separates Jeremiah from his less holy peers is also a physical one: we learn that he is ostracized from society, but the Prophet suggests that this is, at least partially, his design. He informs the Lord in 15:17: “I sate not in the assemblie of the mockers, nether did I reioyce, but sate alone because of thy plague: for thou hast filled me with indignation.” Jeremiah is either blaming his exile on his unpopular prophecies or, as the Geneva commentary suggests, saying that he separates himself from society because he shares the Lord’s revulsion for “the wicked contemnners of the worlde,” and instead “lamented bitterly for the plagues: shewing what the faithfull shulde do with these tokens of Gods angre.”²²⁵ Calvin’s explanation sheds further light on Jeremiah’s self-exile. He notes that the Prophet “was hated by the whole people because he pleased God,” but adds that Jeremiah’s disgust is not so much for “wicked contemnners” in general as it is for “the chief men, who exercised authority and administered justice; for when he speaks of the assembly of the ungodly, he no doubt refers to wicked rulers.” Furthermore, Jeremiah separates himself because “he could not otherwise have obeyed God.”²²⁶ Righteousness demands disassociation from the community: to be integrated with society implies approval of its misdeeds.

We see a similarly strong demarcation between self and society in *Hamlet*. When we first meet the Prince, he stands apart, brooding and dressed in black. His appearance and biting sarcasm distinguish him instantly from the rest of the court, identifying him as a dissident mourner, not a reverential reveler. Both Claudius and Gertrude notice this display: Claudius asks how it is that “the clouds still hang” on Hamlet, while Gertrude urges him to

²²⁵ Comment Q (313).

²²⁶ *Commentaries*. Vol IX, 287). Calvin then extrapolates on this text by using Jeremiah’s self-imposed ostracism as a defense for Protestants who have separated themselves from the Papist church.

cast thy nighted color off.” These reactions suggest that Hamlet’s non-conformity is voluntary, peculiar, and unsettling to onlookers. When Gertrude asks why “it seems so particular” with him, Hamlet contends that his behavior and dress imperfectly reflect an inner righteousness:

Seems, madam? Nat, it is. I know not “seems.”
‘Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected havior of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
That can denote me truly. These indeed seem.
For they are actions that a man may play,
But I have that within which passes show –
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.
(I.ii.75-86)

Hamlet here rejects being characterized solely by his outward signs of grief: black clothes, sighs, tears, and a solemn countenance. He suggests that physical marks alone are incapable of truly defining him, as they are but superficial “actions” that any man might put on. His inner self, however, “passes show”: it surpasses, or perhaps transcends, any externalization of emotion, however sincere. But if this is the case, then why does Hamlet bother with the black clothes and “windy suspiration”? Hamlet’s flagrant mourning is a means of protest: his black clothes and loud sighs call attention to the fact that the rest of the court has accepted his father’s death, mother’s remarriage, and uncle’s crowning too quickly. Hamlet’s didactic grieving requires people to notice his “suits of woe;” without these outward appearances, everyone will assume that he approves of Claudius and Gertrude’s conduct. Hamlet, like Jeremiah, honors his father by standing apart from the “the assemblie of the mockers.”

Hamlet’s ostentatious grieving differentiates him from the court. Moreover, his insistence that this grief goes beyond “seeming” calls attention to the duplicity and hypocrisy

of the Danish court. Here, even before Hamlet has received his mission from the Ghost, he engages in what may be termed “prophetic drama.” Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the prophets deliver their messages not just with words, but with actions. Isaiah, for example walks barefoot and naked through the streets of Jerusalem for three full years as a sign of Egypt and Cush’s eventual destruction (Isa. 20), while Jeremiah breaks a piece of pottery to simulate the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 19). Modern theologians refer to these and similar events as “prophetic drama,” “symbolic actions,” “prophetic acts,” “prophetic symbolism,” “the acted sign,” “demonstration actions,” or “sign acts.” These acts do more than just convey information; they also invite the audience to participate in the emotion of the information. Old Testament scholar Kelvin Friebe explains that sign acts were “intentionally designed not only to communicate message-contents, but also to be interactive in the sense that they sought to alter the people’s thinking and subsequent behavior.”²²⁷ David Stacey, who prefers the term “prophetic drama,” argues that “an action intended simply to announce that the city would fall could well be called a sign, but an action intended to arouse the same anguish, the same shocked horror as the disaster itself is more than a simple sign.” He further contends that the prophets “were provoking, as they believed under divine compulsion, the same disquiet, fear, and remorse that the further acts of God would create when they eventually came to pass.”²²⁸ Stacey’s notion that prophetic drama portrays future emotion is by no means a critical consensus. Kelvin Friebe argues that some sign acts, such as Ezekiel groaning in 21.11, “did not represent the people’s future emotional reactions which they would perform when the destruction occurred, but rather were admonitions of

²²⁷ Kelvin G. Friebe. *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999): 384.

²²⁸ *Prophetic Drama in the Old Testament* 20-1.

how the people *should be reacting in the present* to the sinfulness and to the news of the coming destruction.”²²⁹

While modern scholars disagree on the terminology and precise significance of these prophetic acts, early modern theologians generally read them as literal actions carried out as per Yahweh’s directive. In book 19, Yahweh instructs Jeremiah to bring “an earthen bottle” to the city’s east gate. There, Jeremiah is to inform the audience that the Lord will lay waste to the city and its inhabitants if they do not reform their ways:

And I wil make this citie desolate and an hissing, so that everie one that passeth thereby, shalbe astonished and hisse because of all the plagues thereof. And I will fede them with the flesh of their sonnes and with the flesh of their daughters, and everie one shall eat the flesh of his friend in the siege and streitnes, wherewith their enemies that seke their lives, shal holde them strait. Then shalt thou breake the bottle in the sight of the men that go with thee, And shalt saie unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Even so wil I breake this people and this citie, as one breaketh a potters vessel, that can not be made whole againe. (Jer. 19:8-11)

Although Jeremiah had already delivered several equally horrific prophecies, the people had yet to repent, perhaps, as Calvin opines, because they were “not only ignorant and stupid, but, which is worse, perverse and obstinate.”²³⁰ The Prophet therefore here warns the people not only with words, but with action: just as Jeremiah destroys the bottle, so will God destroy Jerusalem. Calvin notes that breaking the vessel was more than a symbolic act: “it was also a solemn sealing of the prophecy” and a way to show, “by a visible act, the near approach of God’s vengeance, of which the Jews had no apprehension.”²³¹ The shards of the flask

²²⁹ Friebe 52, emphasis added.

²³⁰ Calvin Vol IX, 447.

²³¹ Ibid.

tangibly represent the remnants of a ruined city, the fragmentation of society, the broken covenant between man and God, and the physical destruction of the people themselves. Furthermore, as Friebel observes, “the message stressed not only the city’s shattering, but also the irreparable nature, and therefore, the finality, of the destruction.”²³²

Although Hamlet never receives direct instructions from either God or the Ghost to perform sign acts, we can read both his “antic disposition” and his plan to use *The Murder of Gonzago* as prophetic drama. Both are visible acts that invite the audience to participate in and be moved by the emotion propelling them. We first hear report of Hamlet’s “antic disposition” in action when Ophelia describes his surprise visit to her sewing closet. She tells Polonius that he came to her

with his doublet all unbraced,
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors.

.....
He took my by the wrist and held me hard.
Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
And with his other hand thus o’er his brow
He falls to such perusal of my face
As a would draw it. Long stayed he so,
At last, a little shaking of mine arm
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And with his head over his shoulder turned
He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
For out o’ doors he went without their helps
(II.i.85-98)

Although Hamlet’s intent may be to distract the court with feigned madness, his chosen guise conveys more than his own supposed personal insanity: it also communicates the dreadful

²³² *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts* 119.

nature of the Ghost and his message. Hamlet's physical appearance—disheveled, pale, and frightened—recalls his recent encounter with the Ghost. His countenance suggests to Ophelia that he has been let out of hell “to speak of horrors:” to warn, or, at the very least, impart the misery of damnation with others. Hamlet's pantomime, with its ritualized nodding and ominous stare, mirrors the Ghost's encounter with Horatio and the watchmen. Horatio reported that the apparition walked “thrice” around the men “with solemn march ... slow and stately.” He described the Ghost's face as “very pale” and that it stared at them “most constantly” (I.ii.197-235). By acting and looking like his father's apparition, Hamlet externalizes both the sense of foreboding inspired by the Ghost and his own inner anxiety.

In breaking the pottery, Jeremiah symbolically performs the destruction of Jerusalem for his audience. In this bit of drama, Jeremiah takes on the role of Yahweh, the shatterer, while the flask stands for the audience themselves. Although the prophet's message would have been quite clear without the prop, adding the sign act invites a greater degree of emotional participation from the audience. In seeing their symbolic selves fragmented upon the ground, the audience experiences, to return to Stacey's phrase, “the same shocked horror as the disaster itself.” Hamlet's antic disposition creates a similarly intense sense of anxiety in the court, one that would perhaps not be possible with mere words of warning or derision. Perplexed and troubled by Hamlet's behavior, the other characters become consumed by discovering the “method” in Hamlet's madness.

In the cases of both Jeremiah and Hamlet, prophetic drama takes a toll on the messenger, often creating in them the same distress they attempt to provoke. We learn in Jeremiah 20 that the Prophet has been imprisoned for his spectacle with the pottery. The prophet is beaten and placed into the stocks, his suffering mirroring the impending

punishment he proclaimed at the gate. As Stacy elaborates, “Jeremiah is broken long before the people whose fate he sees so clearly are broken. As a true representative, he takes the ills of the people first upon himself, even though, personally, he is not guilty of the sins which have brought doom upon them.”²³³

Similarly, many critics argue that Hamlet himself does indeed go mad; if this is the case, then he, like Jeremiah, suffers the anxiety that he attempts to project. In his discussion of the Hebrew Prophets, David Stacey contends that prophecy is not “a mechanism to bring about a particular effect,” but rather “the performance and the reality to which it relates are seen as different aspects of the same entity.”²³⁴ In the case of Jeremiah, the prophet’s breaking the flask does not cause the destruction of Jerusalem, but it is an integral part of the impending destruction. We can understand Hamlet’s antic disposition in the same fashion: the Prince’s feigned madness does not *cause* his actual madness; rather, as in prophetic literature, “the drama is bound up with what it represents so closely that it is reasonable to say that one is part of the other.”²³⁵

This entwinement between prophetic drama and reality in *Hamlet* is most clearly illustrated in *The Murder of Gonzago*. In staging a play to “catch” Claudius’ conscience, Hamlet eschews a direct approach in favor of dissembling, a practice thoroughly similar to Polonius and Claudius’ use of Ophelia, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern to investigate the root of Hamlet’s madness. *The Murder of Gonzago* thus functions as a type of prophetic drama in two ways. In a broad sense, the artifice of the theater itself represents the deceit of the Danish court; additionally, the duplicitous and violent events of the play mirror the court’s anxiety,

²³³ *Prophetic Drama in the Old Testament* 66.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 278.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 223.

perfidy, and, of course, bloodshed. More specifically, of course, the particular events of the play—a nephew murders his uncle—functions as a rather clear prophecy for what will surely happen to Claudius. On another level, the purpose of the play is to incite a particular emotional reaction from the audience—or, at the very least, from Claudius. On both of these levels, *The Murder of Gonzago* resembles prophetic sign acts to such a degree that the following comment by David Stacey might indeed have been written about *Hamlet*:

Drama and reality stand over against each other, mutually dependent and interpreting each other. The drama presents, focuses, interprets, and mediates the reality. It also modifies the reality, because, in so far as the attitude of the people is a significant element in the total event, response to the drama contributes something to the reality.²³⁶

The Murder of Gonzago stands over *Hamlet*, which in turn stands over reality itself, and all indeed depend upon and interpret one another. The king's response to *The Murder of Gonzago* completely changes the reality of *Hamlet* by revealing Claudius' guilt, heretofore hidden in a calculating, collected exterior.

Unlike Jeremiah, Hamlet does not deliver the prophetic drama himself, but instead leaves it in the hands of the players. He does, however, make significant additions to their script and dole out meticulous acting advice. Here, Hamlet takes on the role of Yahweh, allowing the players to function as his prophets. The players are Hamlet's intermediaries, speaking his words in their voices. In so doing, Hamlet runs the risk of having his prophecy distorted by his "mortal" intermediaries. To obviate this danger, Hamlet tells the players that the purpose of acting is "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone, or come tardy off, though it makes the unskillful laugh, cannot but make

²³⁶ *Prophetic Drama in the Old Testament* 282.

the judicious grieve” (III.2.21-6). These instructions are ostensibly provided to improve the play, but also function to ensure the success of the prophetic drama. If the players’ missteps serve only to amuse the “unskillful,” they fail as artists *and* as prophets.

Hamlet likely realizes the power of this drama because of his own reaction to the player’s monologue. Frustrated with his own inertia, Hamlet is deeply moved by the player’s seemingly intense emotion in relating the woes of Hecuba:

Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage waned,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing,
For Hecuba!
What’s Hecuba to him, or he to her,
That he should weep for her? What would he do
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appall the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears.
(II.ii.489-505)

It is “monstrous” to Hamlet that the player is so deeply affected by mere fiction while Hamlet himself has yet to act. On one level, Hamlet is chastising himself for inaction, but on another, he is recognizing the power of this fictive drama. The player has so convincingly portrayed the pain of Hecuba that it overtakes his visage, voice, and “whole function.” To Hamlet, this amounts to “nothing,” as Hecuba is a fictional character and the player is but carrying out “a dream of passion.” The actor is talented; however, his invented emotion pales in comparison to Hamlet’s own “real” feelings. Were this skilled player to have the same motivation as Hamlet, the impact of his drama would be monumental. Hamlet imagines that the effects

would extend beyond the actor himself, instead reaching “the general ear,” and stirring guilt, fear, confusion, and amazement in the audience watching. This, as we have seen, is the heart of prophetic drama. This realization propels Hamlet to formulate his plan. As Hamlet ruminates on the players, he muses:

I have heard that guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions.
(II.ii.528-31)

Hamlet does not attribute this information to any particular source. The audience, of course, can see that it is precisely what has just happened to Hamlet himself: his own conscience was just stirred by the player’s feigned emotion. The player’s masterful portrayal of but a “dream of passion” has reminded him of his failed vocation. Banking on this prophetic power of drama, Hamlet makes his additions to *The Murder of Gonzago*. Like Yahweh, Hamlet selects his vessels, composes his message, and watches the players deliver the message to the community. Like prophets, the players do not “foretell” doom or punishment, but instead “forthtell” by presenting the deceit and villainy of the King. And, like prophecy, the purpose of *The Murder of Gonzago* is to so profoundly affect the audience’s emotion that they will recognize their sins. The major difference between Jeremiah and Hamlet is what each man hopes will happen *after* this epiphany: Jeremiah seeks the sinners’ reconciliation with God, Hamlet thirsts for certainty of purpose and personal vengeance.

The motif of using drama or other fiction to bring about an epiphany in the listeners is a common motif in classical literature, but it also has roots in the Old and New Testaments alike.²³⁷ While Jesus used parables to teach the masses, prophets most often used them to

²³⁷ In 2 Samuel, David has his loyal soldier Uriah murdered so that he may wed Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba. Prompted by the Lord, the prophet Nathan tells David of a rich man who owned many sheep and a poor man

convey messages to kings. Although *The Murder of Gonzago* is more a simulacrum than an allegory, Claudius' response to the performance bears a striking resemblance to King David's reaction to Nathan's parable of the sheep in 2 Samuel 12:5-6.²³⁸ Upon hearing the moral of the parable, David immediately admits his sin. Nathan conveys the Lord's forgiveness, but also reveals that David and Bathsheba's first-born son will die. The commentary to the Geneva Bible here credits "the louing mercie of God" with sending Nathan to deliver this message, lest David become further "drowned in sinne." The "similitude" of this story to David's transgressions "waketh his conscience" and leads him to repent.²³⁹ The Lord forgives him, but promises the death of his first-born son as recompense.

The Murder of Gonzago has a similar effect on Claudius. His reaction resembles King David's in its haste and virulence: he rises, calls for lights, and storms off in anger. Whereas David immediately orders the death of the rich man, Claudius instead immediately orders the exile (and execution) of Hamlet. However, like David, Claudius' conscience is indeed awakened, albeit not enough to actually make him repent. Alone in the castle, Claudius admits his crime:

O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven;
 It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
 A brother's murder. Pray can I not,
 Though inclination be sharp as will.

 What if this cursed hand
 Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
 Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens

who had only one small ewe. According to the story, the poor man treasured his ewe, even allowing it to share his family's food. When a stranger arrived looking to buy a sheep, the rich man refused to sell his own animals and instead had the poor man's ewe killed. David is outraged by this story, declaring that "As the Lord liueth, the man that hathe done this thing shal surely dye, and he shal restore the lambe foure folde, because he did this thing, and had no pitie thereof."

²³⁸ 2 Samuel 12.5-6.

²³⁹ Geneva commentary 2 Samuel 12.1, Comment A (140).

To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offense?
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,
Or pardoned being down? Then I'll look up.

[III.iii.36-50]

According to Claudius, there is a limitless supply of mercy in heaven that can—and will—wash away even the most heinous sin. Furthermore, prayer can both keep us from transgressing and bring pardon if we fail. Encouraged by these remedies, Claudius decides to try praying, but quickly learns that there is indeed a catch:

O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? “Forgive me my foul murder”?
That cannot be, since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardoned and still retain th’ offense?

[III.iii.51-56]

Claudius realizes that absolution would require him to give up everything he gained by murdering his brother. He then considers the benefits of life on earth, where wicked men like himself can prosper, versus life in heaven, where “there is no shuffling” and justice reigns. He finally decides to attempt to pray, or at the very least, force his body into the physical posture of prayer, hoping that bending his knees will in turn soften his heart. Unbeknownst to Claudius, this guise of prayer temporarily saves his life, as Hamlet refuses to kill the kneeling king. Hamlet exits and Claudius observes: “My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts never to heaven go,” revealing that his display of repentance has been superficial and thus ineffective.

Hamlet believes that killing his uncle mid-prayer would send Claudius’ soul to heaven, and therefore instead decides to overtake him drinking, raging, gambling, or fornicating so as to ensure damnation. In essence, Hamlet wishes to catch Claudius as

Yahweh has caught Jerusalem in Jeremiah 13:25: with his “skirts upon [his] face.” Yet, as the audience knows, Claudius does not actually repent in this scene: he merely realizes that penance would necessitate sacrifice on his part. Hamlet here thus mistakes Claudius’ external appearance—his “trappings and suits of woe,” so to speak—for genuine piety, thereby allowing “seeming” to triumph over what actuality is. The greater irony, however, lies in Hamlet’s perception of his role as an instrument of divine justice. In believing that his actions alone will determine the fate of Claudius’ soul, Hamlet usurps God’s prerogative as judge.

In attempting to negate Claudius’ apparent repentance, Hamlet unequivocally separates himself from Biblical prophets. Both Hamlet and Jeremiah are disgusted by states of their respective communities. Jeremiah notes that the world was once a “noble vine, whose plants were all natural,” but has now turned into “a strange vine” that grows wild (Jer. 2:21). Hamlet denounces the world as “an unweeded garden / That grows to seed” (I.ii.135-6). But while both men seek to reform their societies, only Jeremiah is truly invested in reconciling each sinner with God. In addition to railing against Judah’s sins, Jeremiah also bemoans the people’s fates. He begs the Lord to have mercy on the people and urges Jerusalem to “wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou maiest be saved” (Jer. 4:14). The Prophet’s distress at their impending doom is so great that he bears it as physical pain: “My bely, my bely, I am peined, even at the very heart: mine heart is troubled within me: I can not be styl” (Jer. 4:19). The Geneva commentary deems Jeremiah’s reaction as that of a “true minister,” one who is “lively touched with the calamities of the church, so that all the partes

of their bodie fele the grief of their heart, albeit with zeale to Gods glorie thei pronounce his judgements to against the people.”²⁴⁰

Other early modern theologians interpret Jeremiah’s pain in 4:19 similarly to the Geneva editors. Nehemiah Rogers, for example, attributes his suffering to grief at “at the transgressions of the people.”²⁴¹ Calvin disagrees fervently with this assessment. He admits that the prophets were often moved by compassion for sinners, even as they delivered gruesome promises of destruction. He describes this contrast between compassion and vocation as a conflict between “two feelings.” When they acted as “the heralds of God’s vengeance, they necessarily forgot their own sensibilities; but this courage did not prevent them from feeling sorrow for others; for they could not but sympathize with their brethren, when they saw them, even their own flesh, doomed to ruin.”²⁴² Prophets therefore possess bifurcated selves: they have enough “courage” to ignore their own “sensibilities” and deliver God’s message, but they still grieve for their brethren, the reprobates. In this particular case, however, Calvin contends that Jeremiah

seems not so much to mourn the calamities of the people, but employs the figurative terms in order to awaken their stupor, for he saw that they were torpid, and that they neither feared God nor were touched with any shame. Since then there was so much insensibility of the people, it was necessary for Jeremiah and other servants of God to embellish their discourses, so as not simply to teach, but also forcibly and strongly to rouse their dormant minds.²⁴³

Whether Jeremiah’s pain was real or merely a prophetic “embellishment,” Hamlet’s plan to ensure Claudius’ damnation—coupled, of course, with his murder of Polonius and the

²⁴⁰ Jer. 4:19. Comment Q (308).

²⁴¹ *A strange vineyard in Palaestina*, 202.

²⁴² Calvin Vol. IX, 228.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

remorseless execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—indeed prevents him from being considered a “true minister,” despite his claim to be heaven’s “scourge and minister” (III.iv.175).²⁴⁴ Although several critics interpret “scourge” and “minister” to be synonymous terms,²⁴⁵ Fredson Bowers argues that “Shakespeare always means minister in a good sense unless he specifies that the minister is of hell.” In this case, “minister” is meant as a scourge who carries out a retributive function of divine justice: one who “may visit God's wrath on sin but only as the necessary final act to the overthrow of evil.”²⁴⁶ Bowers elaborates that the difference between a wicked scourge and a righteous minister is the difference between personal revenge and positive law. Hamlet’s conundrum is that

he must contrive a public vengeance which will demonstrate him to be a minister of Heaven's justice. Yet the secret murder of his father, so far as he can see, prevents all hope of public justice; and therefore the circumstances appear to him to enforce a criminal private revenge even after he realizes that he has been supernaturally appointed as a minister.”²⁴⁷

Bowers here condenses Hamlet’s dilemma to a struggle between private desire and public good. “Minister” and “scourge” are thus two sides of the same coin, but either way you flip it, the coin is “justice.” Reading “minister” according to the Geneva commentary to Jeremiah 4:19, however, makes the word less about vengeance and more about mercy. As a

²⁴⁴ For a thorough discussion of this line, refer to Fredson Bowers, “Hamlet as Minister and Scourge,” *PMLA* 70 (1955), 740-749. For a response to Bowers’ argument, see R.W. Dent in “Hamlet: Scourge and Minister,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29:1 (1978), 82-84; see also Eleanor Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge*. Stanford: Stanford UP. (1967) 200-1. Prosser’s main argument here boils down to the fact that : “So long as Hamlet loathes Claudius, so long as he desires to kill, so long as he consciously intends still further ‘knavery,’ it is doubtful that Shakespeare’s audience could consider him the minister of divine justice.”

²⁴⁵ Philip Ayres, for example, argues that Elizabethans “occasionally distinguished between the minister of God and the scourge. Both are agents of God’s retribution, but the scourge acts wantonly without any desire to be, and usually without any realization that he is, an agent. The minister, unlike the scourge, is not tainted by executing God’s vengeance.” “Degrees of Heresy: Justified Revenge and Elizabethan Narratives.” *Studies in Philology*. 69:4 (1972): 468.

²⁴⁶ “Hamlet as Minister and Scourge,” 743-4.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 744.

“true minister,” Jeremiah scourges the people with his words, but never commits any violence himself. Hamlet’s interaction with Gertrude in her closet reflects this notion of ministering: he delivers a scathing verbal attack, but never physically accosts her. Hamlet’s diatribe against the Queen, like Jeremiah’s call to Judah, is biting, humiliating, and graphically sexual. He accuses her of living “in the rank sweat of an enseamed bed / Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty.” This invective apparently hits the mark: Gertrude says that Hamlet has turned “[her] eyes into [her] very soul,” allowing her to see the “black and grained spots” of her sin (III.iv.89-94). Hamlet urges Gertrude to “confess [herself] to heaven / Repent what’s past, avoid what is to come, And do not spread the compost on the weeds / To make them ranker” (III.iv.149-152). It would seem, then, that Hamlet does not view murder as the panacea for a sinful nation; for some, such as Gertrude, repentance would suffice. A selective apportioning of mercy based on personal preferences, however, is not righteousness or “ministry” *par excellence*.

If we follow the Geneva editor’s assessment, the “true minister” we encounter in Jeremiah 4:19 feels physical pain at Jerusalem’s separation from God. He derives no pleasure from “scourging” Judah with his words, nor does he relish his task as a messenger of doom. His sole goal is the reincorporation of Judah into God’s kingdom. But the desire for revenge is not alien to the Prophet. Unheeded, imprisoned, beaten, and derided, on several occasions Jeremiah implores Yahweh to take vengeance upon his persecutors. In Jeremiah 11:20, for example, the Prophet learns that the citizens of Judah have been plotting to kill him. He prays to the Lord, “let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause.” The Geneva editors swiftly assure readers that “he spake not for hatred, but being moved with the Spirit of God, he desireth the advancement of Gods glorie and the verifying of his worde,

which is by the destruction of his enemies.”²⁴⁸ Calvin agrees, stressing that Jeremiah was not interested in retaliation against “private wrongs.” He adds:

And doubtless, whosoever allows his own feelings to prevail in the least degree, cannot teach in sincerity; for he who prepares himself for the prophetic office, ought to put off all the affectations of the flesh, and to manifest a pure, and, so to speak, a limpid zeal, and also a calm mind, so that he may seek nothing, and have no object but the glory of God and the salvation of those to whom he is sent a teacher. Whosoever then is under the influence of private feelings cannot act otherwise than violently.²⁴⁹

According to Calvin, human beings are subject to “the influence of private feelings.” The intrusion of human emotion creates the presence of other desires besides God’s glory. Born of passion, these desires are necessarily sinful. In this case, they manifest themselves in violence. But because Jeremiah is a true prophet, his cry for vengeance is not tainted by his mortal coil. His desire for vengeance is the product of “a limpid zeal,” and is therefore pure.

This argument gets somewhat more complicated as the book progresses. In Jeremiah 15:15, the Prophet prays:

O Lord, thou knowest, remembre me, and visit me, and reuenge me of my persecuters: take me not awaie in the continuance of thine angre: knowe that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke.

As in 11:20, the Geneva commentary discounts any desire for revenge in Jeremiah’s words, arguing that Jeremiah merely wishes “that God wolde deliver his Church of those whome he knewe to be hardened and incorrigible.”²⁵⁰ Jeremiah’s entreaty is less a prayer for personal vengeance than a desire to see his community purged of the reprobates. Calvin begins by

²⁴⁸ Jer 11:20, Comment P (311).

²⁴⁹ *Commentaries* Vol IX, 110.

²⁵⁰ Jer. 15:15-16, Comment O (313).

apparently taking a harder tack: he argues that Jeremiah “seems here to have been more angry than he ought to have been, for revenge is a passion unbecoming to the children of God. How was it, then, that the Prophet was so indignant against the people that he desired revenge?” But instead of answering this question, Calvin instead emphasizes the disparity between Jeremiah and ourselves. Echoing his earlier comments, he says that readers must

distinguish between private and public feelings, and also between the passions of the flesh, which keep within no limits, and the zeal of the Spirit. It is certain that the Prophet had no regard to himself when he thus spoke; but he dismissed every regard for himself, and had regard only to the cause of God: for inconsiderate zeal often creeps in, so that we wish all to be condemned of whom we do not approve But it is necessary not only to be moved by a pious zeal, but also to be guided by a right judgment.²⁵¹

He then adds that because Jeremiah had both zeal and judgment, “it was lawful to ask for vengeance on the reprobate,” and reminds the readers that any time we see a Prophet praying for revenge, we must understand that he is “filled by the Spirit of Christ,” the same spirit that inspired David’s imprecatory psalms.²⁵²

This holy mindset—which Calvin typologically understands to be Spirit of Christ—allows Jeremiah to transcend the desire for personal vengeance, but he also describes the Prophet as transcending compassion. Although Calvin hinted at this notion in his discussion of Jeremiah 4:19, he expands upon this idea more fully in his commentary on Jeremiah 15:16. In this passage, the Prophet expresses joy at delivering the message of God’s wrath, saying: “Thy words were sounde by me, and I did eat them, and thy worde was unto me the ioye and reioycing of mine heart.” Calvin wonders how the apparently contradictory

²⁵¹ *Commentaries* Vol IX, 278.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

emotions “the grief and sorrow which the holy man felt for God’s judgments and the joy and gladness which he now mentions” can simultaneously exist in Jeremiah’s heart. He explains:

These two feelings, though apparently repugnant, were connected together in the Prophets; they as men deplored and mourned for the ruin of the people, and yet, through the power of the Spirit, they performed their office, and approved of the just vengeance of God. Thus then the word of God became joy to the Prophet, not that he was not touched by a deep feeling for the destruction of the people, but that he rose above all human feelings, so as fully to approve of God’s judgments.²⁵³

According to Calvin, although Jeremiah might be aggrieved by Judah’s destruction, his holy zeal allows him to triumph over “all human feelings.” Because of this transcendent spirit, he rejoices in delivering a message of doom. He feels neither sorrow nor spiteful glee; rather, he is so perfectly in tune with the mind of God that he completely understands and “approves of” the need for God’s wrath.

Old Testament scholar Abraham Heschel describes this mindset experienced by Jeremiah and other prophets as “sympathy with the divine pathos.”²⁵⁴ It is this connection that makes prophecy “a crossing point of God and man.”²⁵⁵ Without the window into divine pathos, a prophet is entirely too susceptible to being consumed by passion and personal biases. This, of course, is Hamlet’s problem. God does not reach out and touch Hamlet’s mouth; instead, he is visited by a frightening, perhaps demonic, apparition of his dead father. Hamlet is not told to warn Denmark, but to revenge his father’s death. His mission is therefore more personal than Jeremiah’s: his response, therefore, is far more passionate. He

²⁵³ Ibid, Vol IX, 284-5.

²⁵⁴ *The Prophets* 26. Heschel further argues that the prophet “dwells upon God’s inner motives, not only upon His historical decisions. He discloses a *divine pathos*, not just a divine judgment. The pages of the prophetic writings are filled with echoes of divine love and disappointment, mercy and indignation. The God of Israel is never impersonal” (24, emphasis in original).

²⁵⁵ *The Prophets* 5.

boils with rage against Claudius, rails against his mother, torments Ophelia, hastily murders Polonius, and remorselessly orders the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. None of these acts bear the marks of prophetic holiness. But while *Hamlet* is not a play about dispassionate judgment, neither is the Book of Jeremiah about a dispassionate vessel of God's word. Despite Calvin's efforts to portray Jeremiah as so moved by holy zeal, so fully in tune with divine judgment, and so filled with a typological "Spirit of Christ" that he is "above all human feelings," even Calvin admits that Jeremiah is fully human, and thus vulnerable to the "remnant of the flesh" that causes anxiety, fear, and even blasphemy.

Furthermore, according to early modern humoral theory, it is this "remnant of the flesh" that allows Jeremiah to physically feel God's anger as Yahweh channels it through him. But perhaps more importantly than this fleshly connection, a prophet has an ineffable *spiritual* link with God Himself. God speaks to and through the prophet. A prophet is not merely God's messenger, but God's vessel. Revengers, like Hamlet, may perceive a sympathy with heaven, but never experience the intense spiritual communication that prophets have with Yahweh. Perhaps, then, Hamlet is best understood as latter-day prophet without the direct, consuming connection to God that Jeremiah experienced: indeed, a prophet of an early modern era replete with epistemological crises, identity shifts, and religious upheaval. Without this certain connection, Hamlet is just like any other human being: acutely susceptible to his passions, and therefore an imperfect conduit for God's wrath.

In *Hamlet and the Rethinking of Man*, Eric Levy suggests that one of the play's central conflicts is between "Stoic insistence on the *elimination* of emotion" and the "hyperbolic *display* of emotion" showcased by the Player. Levy further explains that neither

option is optimal: “the defects in the Stoic and theatrical moralities competing in the play can be compactly summarized: the first encourages the denial of emotion that *is* felt; the second encourages dramatic expression of emotion that is *not* sincerely felt.”²⁵⁶ According to Levy, Hamlet ultimately rejects both Stoic and overly theatrical approaches to emotion, coming instead to embrace the notion that “pain is not merely an affliction to be endured (as with Stoicism) or hyperbolically flourished.”²⁵⁷

I believe that Levy’s deduction can be translated onto a larger consideration of human anger in early modern England. Despite the pervasive influence of Neostoicism, there was a strong undercurrent of support for human anger amongst theologians and poets alike. Because anger is necessarily tied to vengeance for both God *and* human beings, many authors suggest that the elimination of anger would also yield an elimination of justice. Extravagant displays—or, perhaps, “hyperbolical flourishes”—of this anger, however, is never sanctioned for human beings. Instead, human beings are advised to adopt some sort of middle ground that both allows for anger and restricts their expression of it. As Thomas Jackson writes, while revenge is never truly warranted, when one “tempers” an “excess of anger” with “matter of equity,”

it makes those actions of patient men much abused seem excusable which in others would be intolerable. The ideal perfection of this rule of equity, though often corrupted by human passions, is in the divine nature without mixture of such passion or perturbation as is pictured out to the terror of the ungodly in the prophetic characters or descriptions of his anger.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ *Hamlet and the Rethinking of Man* 114.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁵⁸ *A Treatise of the Divine Attributes* 195-6.

Here, Jackson observes that people who are continually vexed are rightly moved to anger. By bearing these indignities with patience, however, the individual earns a greater license for anger. One who takes actions after suffering injuries over a great period of time is more easily excused than one who reacts immediately.

Jackson admits that achieving this “equity” of mind is difficult, if not impossible for human beings, who are necessarily “corrupted by human passions.” God, who can experience anger without “passion or perturbation,” continually suffers indignities at the hands of men. However, while God is infinitely patient, He is also a righteous judge: God does not suffer indignities without also wreaking wrath. To do so would infer a collapse in divine justice. Therefore, when God does enact His wrath, He does so in a way that is not only utterly “excusable,” but also moderate and dispassionate.

But this passage from Jackson does more than just reiterate the differences between God’s wrath and man’s: it also acknowledges a place where the two intertwine: in the words (or person) of the Prophet. As Jackson argues, the true portrait of divine anger is revealed in descriptions of “the terror of the ungodly in the prophetic characters or descriptions of his anger.” As a conduit for God’s wrath, a Prophet is charged with translating God’s anger into human language. Even though Jeremiah shares in the divine pathos, he cannot help but respond to both his task and the message with intense emotion. Perhaps, then, Jeremiah’s actions represent the only righteous way for a human being to experience anger: as an impetus for nonviolent social reform.

CONCLUSION

This study of one dominant passion in Renaissance drama incorporates discussions of theological problems and questions into a field currently dominated by medical discourse. While anger does have its roots in physiology, there is also an undeniable theological valence. Divine wrath was an actual force that could—and did—intercede in human affairs. The lightning bolt that strikes down Malefort Senior is just one symbolic instance of the way early moderns perceived God as wreaking vengeance through forces of nature. But God could also use human beings as intermediaries. This fact, coupled with the idea that human beings were created in the image of God, gave rise to the notion of a human wrath that is inextricably bound together with its divine analogue, something we see in both the imprecatory psalms and plays like Chettle's *Hoffman*. However, it is the way human beings experience this wrath—as a visceral, bodily, passionate response to personal indignity, that makes them profane vessels. To the early moderns, divine wrath was a legitimate force that could be *felt* by a human being, but our mortal coil muddies it, making it impossible for us to safely or sacredly *enact* this wrath.

WORKS CITED

- Adams, Thomas. "God's anger; and, Man's comfort" (1652). Union Theological Seminary (New York, N. Y.) Early English Books Online. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library. 15 Feb 2010.
http://eebo.chadwyck.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/search/fulltext?SOURCE=var_spell.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=D00000124878440000&WARN=N&SIZE=144&FILE=../session/1268517141_8414&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&DISPLAY=AUTHOR&ECCO=default.
- Aquinas, Thomas, Saint. *Summa Theologica: literally translated by fathers of the English Dominican province*. London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1920-1925.
- Aristotle. *The ethiques of Aristotle, that is to saye, preceptes of good behauoute [sic] and perfighte honestie, now newly tra[n]slated into English*. Trans. John Wilkinson. 1547. Early English Books Online. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library. 14 February 2010.
http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/fulltext?SOURCE=var_spell.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=D00000998401630000&WARN=N&SIZE=123&FILE=../session/1268673193_4658&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&DISPLAY=AUTHOR&ECCO=default.
- . *The Nicomachean Ethics*. trans. David Ross. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998.
- Atchley, Clinton P. E. "Reconsidering the Ghost in *Hamlet*: Cohesion or Coercion?" *The Philological Review* 28.2 (Fall 2002): 5-20.
- Ayres, Philip. "Degrees of Heresy: Justified Revenge and Elizabethan Narratives." *Studies in Philology*. 69:4 (1972): 468.
- Baines, Barbara. "Antonio's Revenge: Marston's Play on Revenge Plays." *Studies in English Literature* 23.2 (1983): 277-94.
- Barlow, John. *Hierons last fare-vvell A sermon preached at Modbury in Devon, at the funerall of that reuerend and faithfull seruant of Iesus Christ, Master Samuel Hieron, sometimes Preacher there. By I. B. , London : Printed by William Stansby for William Butler, and are to be sold at his shop in Saint Dunstanes Church-yard in Fleetstreet, 1618*. Early English Books Online. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library. 10 January, 2010.
http://eebo.chadwyck.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgthumbs.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=99839968&FILE=../session/1268614117_15484&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&SEARCHCONFIG=var_spell.cfg&DISPLAY=AUTHOR
- Battenhouse, Roy W. "Tamburlaine, the 'Scourge of God'" *PMLA*, 56:2. (1941): 337-348.

- Bergson, Allen. "Dramatic Style as Parody in Marston's *Antonio and Mellida*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama (Spring, 1971), 307-325.
- Blake, Ann. " 'The Humour of Children': John Marston's Plays in the Private Theatres." *The Review of English Studies* 38:152 (1987): 471-82.
- Bowers, Fredson. *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*. Princeton : Princeton UP, 1966.
- , "Hamlet as Minister and Scourge," *PMLA* 70 (1955), 740-749.
- Braden, Gordon. *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1985.
- Brucher, Richard T. "Fantasies of Violence: *Hamlet* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. 21:2 (1981): 261
- Burton, Robert. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Ed. Holbrook Jackson. (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001.
- Calvin, John. *Commentaries*. Trans. Henry Beveridge. Grand Rapids: Baker House. 22 Vols 1993.
- Campbell, Lily B. *Divine Poetry and Drama in Sixteenth-Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1959.
- Charney, Maurice. "The Persuasiveness of Violence in Elizabethan Plays," *Renaissance Drama*. 2 (1969): 67.
- Chettle, Henry. *The Tragedy of Hoffman or A Revenge for a Father*. Ed. F. P. Wilson. Oxford: The Malone Society Reprints, 1950.
- Collier, John Payne. *The History of English Dramatic Poetry to the Time of Shakespeare and Annals of the Stage to the Restoration..* Vol 3. London: George Bell and Sons, 1879.
- Corrigan, Brian Jay. "Middleton, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and Crisis Literature." *SEL* 38:2 (1998): 281-95.
- Danby, John F. "King Lear and Christian Patience: A Culmination," in Danby, *Poets on Fortune's Hill: Studies in Sidney, Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952), 108-122.
- Dent, R.W., "Hamlet: Scourge and Minister." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29:1 (1978), 82-4.

- Diehl, Huston. "“Reduce Thy Understanding to Thine Eye’: Seeing and Interpreting in *The Atheist’s Tragedy*.” *Studies in Philology* 78.1 (1981): 47-60.
- Dobranski, Steven. “Burghley’s Emblem and the Heart of Milton’s *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*.” *Milton Quarterly* 34.2 (2000) 33-48.
- Dollimore, Jonathan. “Marston’s ‘Antonio’ Plays and Shakespeare’s ‘Troilus and Cressida’: The Birth of a Radical Drama. *Essays and Studies* (1980): 48-69.
- , *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1984.
- Drant, Thomas. *A Medicinable Morall, that is, the two Bookes of Horace his Satyres, Englyshed accordyng to the prescription of saint Hierome. The Wailynge of the Prophet Hieremiah. Also epigrammes. T. Drant. Perused and allowed accordyng to the Quenes Maiesties Iniunctions*, Imprinted at London : In Fletestrete by Thomas Marshe, M.D.LXVI. [1566]. Early English Books Online. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library. 18 January, 2010.
http://eebo.chadwyck.com/libproxy.lib.unc.edu/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgthumbs.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=99839968&FILE=../session/1268614117_15484&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&SEARCHCONFIG=var_spell.cfg&DISPLAY=AUTHOR
- Eliot, T.S. “John Marston,” in *Selected Essays*, 3rd ed, London, 1951.
- Ellis-Fermor, Una. “The Imagery of *The Revenger’s Tragedie* and *The Atheists Tragedie*.” *Modern Language Review*. 30:3 (1935): 290.
- Erasmus, Desiderius and Luther, Martin. *Discourse on Free Will*. Trans. Ernst F. Winter. London; New York: Continuum, 2005.
- Faber, M.D. and Skinner, Colin. “*The Spanish Tragedy*: Act IV.” *Philological Quarterly*, 49 (1970): 444-59.
- Finkelpearl, Philip J. *John Marston of the Middle Temple: an Elizabethan dramatist in his social setting*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969.
- Fisch, Harold. *The Biblical Presence in Shakespeare, Milton, and Blake: A Comparative Study*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.
- Floyd-Wilson, Mary. “English Mettle.” *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*. Ed. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania P. 2004: 130-146.
- Foakes, R.A. “John Marston’s Fantastical Plays: *Antonio and Mellida* and *Antonio’s Revenge*.” *Philological Quarterly*, 41 (1962): 236.

- Friebel, Kelvin G. *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.
- Frontain, Raymond-Jean. "the man which have affliction seen": Donne, Jeremiah, and the Fashioning of Lamentation." *Centered on the Word: Literature, Scripture, and the Tudor- Stuart Middle Way*. Ed. Daniel W. Doerkson and Christopher Hodgkins. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004. 127-147.
- The Geneva Bible, a facsimile of the 1560 edition*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.
- Goodspeed, George F. "The Book of Job in other Literatures. II. *The Old and New Testament Student*. Vol. 15, 1892.
- Gottwald, Norman K. *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, Studies in Biblical Theology 14 London: SCM Press, 1954.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. "Remember Me." *Hamlet in Purgatory*. By Greenblatt. Princeton: ' Princeton UP, 2001. 205-57.
- Hamlin, Hannibal. *Psalm Culture in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 2004.
- Hanson, Anthony Tyrell. *The Wrath of the Lamb*. London: SPCK, 1957.
- , "Psalm Culture in the English Renaissance: Readings of Psalm 137 by Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, and Others." *Renaissance Quarterly* 55 (2002): 224-257.
- Heschel, Abraham J. *The Prophets*. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.
- Hirschfeld, Heather. "Compulsions of the Renaissance." *Shakespeare Studies*. 33. 2002: 115.
- Hunter, G.K. Introduction. *Antonio's Revenge*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1965. ix-xxi.
- "inconvenience, n²" *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 20 July 2009. <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50114715?>
- Jackson, Thomas. *A Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes*. Vol V. Oxford, Oxford UP: 1844.
- Jemielity, Thomas. *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox. 1992.

- Jensen, Ejner J. "The Style of the Boy Actors," *Comparative Drama*, 2 (1968): 100-114.
- Lactantius. "A Treatise on the Anger of God." *The Works of Lactantius, Vol II*. Trans. William D. Fletcher. Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871.
- Levin, Richard. *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1971.
- Levy, Eric. *Hamlet and the Rethinking of Man*. Madison: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2008.
- Low, Anthony. "Hamlet and the Ghost of Purgatory: Intimations of Killing the Father." *English Literary Renaissance* 29 (1999) 443-67;
- Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*. Trans. Cyril Bailey. London: Oxford, 1926.
- Marston, John. *Antonio and Mellida*, in *The Malcontent and Other Plays*. ed. Keith Sturges. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.
- *Antonio's Revenge*, in *The Malcontent and Other Plays*. ed. Keith Sturges. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.
- Marx, Stephen. *Shakespeare and the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.
- Massinger, Philip. *The Unnatural Combat*. Eds. Philip Edwards and Colin Gibson. *The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger*. Vol II. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976. 2 vols.
- McGee, Arthur. *The Elizabethan Hamlet*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1987.
- Milton, John. "An Apologie." in *The Works of John Milton*. Vol. III. Ed. Frank Allen Patterson. New York: Columbia UP, 1931.
- *Complete Poems and Major Prose*. Ed. Merritt T. Hughes. Indianapolis: Odyssey Press, 1957.
- Morkan, Joel. "Wrath and Laughter: Milton's Ideas on Satire." *Studies in Philology*. 69 (1972):475-95.
- Morris, Brian, and Roma Gill, eds. *The Atheist's Tragedy*. By Cyril Tourneur. London: Ernest Benn, 1977.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994.

- Pack, Robert. "Betrayal and Nothingness: The book of Job and *King Lear*," *The Long View*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991.
- Paster, Gail Kern. *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage*. Chicago: University of Chicago P. 2004.
- Pearce, Howard. "Virtu and Poesis in *The Revenger's Tragedy*." *ELH* 43:1 (1976): 19-37.
- Polk, Timothy. *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984.
- Prosser, Eleanor. *Hamlet and Revenge*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1967.
- Marx, Stephen. *Shakespeare and the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.
- Massinger, Philip. *The Unnatural Combat*. Ed. Robert Stockdale Telfer. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1932.
- McGee, Arthur. *The Elizabethan Hamlet*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1987.
- Mukherjee, Neel. "Thomas Drant's Rewriting of Horace." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 40.1, 2000.
- Reynolds, Edward. *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man*, ed. Margaret Lee Wiley (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1971).
- Ribner, Irving. ed. *The Atheist's Tragedy*. By Cyril Tourneur. Cambridge: Harvard UP. 1963.
- Rice, Raymond J. "Cannibalism and the Act of Revenge in Tudor-Stuart Drama." *Studies in English Literature* 44 (2004): 297-316.
- Robertson, Karen. "*Antonio's Revenge*: The Tyrant, the Stoic, and the Passionate Man," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama* 4 (1989): 91-106.
- Rogers, Nehemiah. *A strange vineyard in Palaestina in an exposition of Isaiahs parabolical song of the beloued, discovered: to which Gods vineyard in this our land is paralleld. By Nehemiah Rogers, Master in Arts, and pastor of the congregation at Messing in Essex.*, London: Printed by Iohn Hauiland for Edward Brewster, and are to be sold at his shop at the signe of the Starre at the west-end of Pauls, 1623.
- Sánchez, Reuben Jr. *Persona and Decorum in Milton's Prose*. Madison: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 1997.
- Schoenbaum, Samuel. "The Precarious Balance of John Marston." *PMLA*, 67 (1957):

1069-1078.

Schuman, Samuel. *Cyril Tourner*. Boston: Twayne, 1977.

Seneca. *Moral and Political Essays*. Ed and Trans. John M. Cooper and J.F. Procopé. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*, ed. A.R. Braunmuller. New York: Penguin, 2001.

Simmons, J.L. "The Tongue and Its Office in *The Revenger's Tragedy*." *PMLA* 92:1 (1977): 56-68

Smith, M.W.A. "*The Revenger's Tragedy*: The Interpretation of Statistical Results for Resolving Disputed Authorship." *Computers and the Humanities*. 21:1 (1987): 21-55.

Spencer, Hazelton. Review of *The Life and Work of Henry Chettle* by Harold Jenkins. *Modern Language Notes* 51:8 (1936): 549-550.

Spinrad, Phoebe S. "The Fall of the Sparrow and the Map of Hamlet's Mind." *Modern Philology*. 102.4 (2005), 453-477.

----- "The Sacralization of Revenge." *Comparative Drama* 39.2 (2005): 169-185.

"spirit, n" *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press. 20 Aug. 2008 <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50233653>>.

Stacey, David. *Prophetic Drama in the Old Testament*. London: Epworth, 1990.

Strier, Richard. "Against the Rule of Reason: Praise of Passion from Petrarch to Luther to Shakespeare to Herbert." in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*. Ed. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania P. 2004: 23-42.

Thorndike, Ashley. "The Relations of *Hamlet* to Contemporary Revenge Plays." *PMLA* 17:2 (1902): 125-220.

Tourneur, Cyril. *The Atheist's Tragedy*. Ed. Brian Morris and Roma Gill. London: Ernest Benn, 1977.

-----, *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Ed. Brian Gibbons. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967.

Walsham, Alexandra. *Providence in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.

Wilks, John S. *The Idea of Conscience in Renaissance Tragedy*. London: Routledge, 1990.

Wither, George. *Preparation to the Psalms*. (London, 1619). Spenser Society reprint
New York, 1884, repr. 1967.

“Wrath of God.” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Vol. 6. Ed. David Noel Freedman. New
York: Doubleday, 1992.

Wright, Thomas. *The Passions of the Minde in Generall*. 1604. Reprint. Ed. Thomas O.
Sloane. Urbana: University of Illinois P, 1971.