

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



Neither a Devil nor a Man: D'Amville in Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy*

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In his essay 'The Sexual Production of Western Subjectivity', which is an extended review of Peter Brown's *The Body and Society* (1988), Fredric Jameson underscores the 'autonomization' of sexuality through its own constitution by Augustine's hegemonic discourse of the Fall. Sexuality creates 'the space of a new inwardness' which, originating in the Desert Fathers' production of sexual temptation, 'allows the practice of a permanent self-examination, which itself also predicates the permanent existence of that new thing called the Self, of which Augustine is notoriously the inventor'.¹ Jameson's reading of Brown is pertinent to my argument that D'Amville, the protagonist of Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* (pub. 1611), is a hero without 'Self' and, therefore, the play forecloses the search of an interiority which would lead to his 'truth'. Sexuality is absent as the cause of D'Amville's 'corruption of the Will'² because his object of desire is not woman but government. The hero's adulterous and incestuous attempt to have sex with his daughter-in-law, Castabella, in default of his elder son, Rousard, whose sickness incapacitated him sexually, is simply an engine for the reproduction of the paternal (his) line and wealth.

I maintain that in D'Amville, transgressive sexuality does not open up a private and personal space where 'a new inwardness' emerges as constitutive of subjectivity. The hero resists psychological probing into some sort of inner kernel from which, once found, a modern subjectivity usually associated with secret desire and its problematisation, could surface. In this sense, he radically differs from Hamlet, for

¹ Fredric Jameson, 'The Sexual Production of Western Subjectivity' in *The Ideologies of Theory* (London: Verso, 2008), pp. 534-54 (p. 553).

² Ibid, p. 552.

example, whose constitution in terms of an intriguing inwardness promises precisely the discovery of this kind of subjectivity that surfaces in his confrontation with his mother's sexuality. His bitter ruminations on Gertrude's 'unmanageable' sexual appetite trigger an introspection that culminates in his sexualised understanding of death as 'consummation'.³ Irrespective of whether there are oedipal resonances in his perception of Gertrude's desire for Claudius it is her 'rampant' sexuality that intensifies his multiple and tortuous attempts to read himself in terms of an 'inner substance', which disclose a core at once ineffable and manifest as a 'within' as in his early declaration to his mother: 'But I have that within which passeth show' (1.2.85). Hamlet invokes a self-consciousness which invites the question of 'what is within'.⁴ Although this cannot be answered in terms of a unitary self, it definitely inscribes a complex interiority to which the 'incestuous' maternal body is perceived as a threat.⁵ In another early seventeenth-century famous paradigm of incestuous desire provided by *The Duchess of Malfi*, Ferdinand's language on the Duchess' transgressive sexuality indicates a dark inwardness registered in deranged sexual fantasies of his sister's body. The psychological (and formal) instability of the character in the face of his unrecognised or disavowed incestuous desire finally produces the utter dissolution of the self, his sinking into madness in the emblematic form of lycanthropy.

In D'Amville, incest, far from figuring as repressed desire that inscribes interiority, offers the very terms for the opposite, i.e. the hero's externalization. It operates as a crucial index for the lengths to which his will to property and status can go in the social overreaching of his position as a younger brother to a Baron. As such, it is flaunted as a premeditated move in the politics which serves his essentially transgressive desire for power. As will be shown, the hero's identity is constituted not in terms of psychological interiority but on the basis of contradictory forms of 'the unthinkable' at the specific cultural moment. If there is an interiority at all in D'Amville, this is of the

³ See Jonathan Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. xx.

⁴ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt and others (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), p. 1702. Also see p. 1684.

⁵ On the issue of Hamlet's subjectivity, see Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), who, like Francis Barker, Catherine Belsey and others, critiques the coherence and unity of character as the dominant essentialist humanist assumption. But, in contrast with them, he suggests that Hamlet inscribes 'too much' subjectivity which, however, produces no coherence since its effects are discontinuous (p. 65). For the concurrence of psychoanalytic approaches to *Hamlet* and Eliot's reading on the basis of female sexuality as the locus of 'psychic and literary disintegration', see Jacqueline Rose, "Sexuality in the Reading of Shakespeare: *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*" in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. by John Drakakis (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 95-118 (p. 103).

Machiavellian kind, which is tautological with his desire for power and therefore absolutely reducible to it. As Hugh Grady argues,

[i]n Machiavellian dynamics, there is a being-for-others, an outward appearance, which is theatrical, manipulated by the subject in order to manipulate others; and there is an inner self, occluded, but reducible to the desire for power and/or pleasure which generates the outer appearance.⁶

Central to this dynamics is hypocrisy as an engine which conceals the disjunction between the inner and outer selves. Its social utilitarianism is clearly hubristic as instanced in Renaissance polemical discourses of Catholics and Protestants against each other, both overlapping in their common construction of the enemy as someone who aspires to hide his inward truth from God's surveillance: 'So hypocrisy becomes not merely the concealment of one's motives from other human beings, but an implicit denial of God's existence and a subversive assumption of the divine prerogative'.⁷ Hypocrisy, the Machiavellian marker *par excellence*, is tantamount to atheism insofar as it challenges God's panoptical authority by presuming the subject's ability to hide his 'inner self' from divine surveillance and, therefore, assert an unwarranted free will. The bifurcation between sinister 'interiority' and empathetic exteriority is demonstrated in D'Amville's hypocritical lamenting of his brother Montferrers's, death, whom he himself had thrust into a pit to be killed by his trusted man, Borachio:

Drop out

Mine eye-balls, and let envious Fortune play
At tennis with 'em. Have I lived to this?
Malicious Nature, hadst thou born me blind,
Th'adst yet been something favourable to me.
No breath? No motion? Prithee tell me, Heaven,
Hast shut thine eye to wink at murder, or
Hast put this sable garment on to mourn
At's death? (2.4.29-35).⁸

⁶ Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 121.

⁷ Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), p. 38. For hypocrisy as synonymous with atheism, see pp. 35-47.

⁸ Cyril Tourneur, *The Atheist's Tragedy in Four Revenge Tragedies*, ed. by Katharine Eisaman Maus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). All subsequent references are to this edition.

His speech at once disguises and discloses the speaker's intended meaning of the key concepts of 'Fortune' and 'Nature'. Although D'Amville uses 'Fortune' to denote his brother's fate which, 'envious' of his happiness, has struck him down, its convert meaning suggests 'position as determined by wealth'.⁹ Because he is envious of his brother's status in patrilineal descent, he is determined to change his own by usurping Montferrers's rightful position. Therefore, instead of conceding to 'Fortune' as fate, he semantically re-constitutes the word as its exact opposite, namely, (his criminal) agency. As for 'Nature', far from being 'Malicious' to him, it is benign because it serves throughout as the hero's ethical legitimation of his transgressive will. These verbal ambiguities conceal his 'evil' inner motives but simultaneously expose them, because his fortune makes him 'envious' and his nature is truly 'Malicious'. At the same time, they foreground the equation between hypocrisy and atheism, implied in D'Amville's challenge of God's all-encompassing and continuous surveillance. God is either reduced to the silent accomplice of his own crime or does not interfere in it, but figures merely as the passive mourner of the innocent victim's death. In either case, God's surveillance is faulty and, as such, it is at once replaced and cheated by his own vigilant agency, as is obvious in his boastful assessment of the murder: 'Here was a murder bravely carried through / The eye of observation, unobserved' (2.4.134-35).

If hypocrisy is constituted on the linguistic level as the willful resignification of concepts then his 'desire' for Castabella belongs to the same register. From D'Amville's language of 'passion' – 'The smallest ornament of thy sweet form, / That abstract of all pleasure, can command / The senses into passion [...]' (4.3.83-85) – what is absent is precisely the very thing that he professes, namely, his obtrusive sensuality. Far from having a 'prodigal' (4.3.99) body, his sexual spending is carefully calculated to supply for the lack of his elder son's. 'Pleasure', detached from physicality, is a verbal ploy meant to eroticise the purely pragmatic reasons for the incestuous adultery which he coolly proposes to her in the form of a commercial deal. Given Rousard's impotence, he offers in 'one sweet conjunction' (4.3.112), both pleasure *and* profit:

So that, besides the full performance of
 Thy empty husband's duty, thou shalt have
 The joy of children to continue the
 Succession of thy blood [...] (4.3.102-05)

⁹ This is the second meaning of 'fortune' additional to that of fate in the late sixteenth century. See Matthew Kendrick, 'Neostoicism and the Economics of Revenge in Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy*', *College Literature* 41.3 (2014), 7-26 (p. 8).

Incest is instrumental in D'Amville's grand plan of the founding of a dynasty, which, nonetheless, in the absence of progeny, would remain a personal fantasy. Consequently, there is no physical desire involved in his incestuous offer for what is in reality a business partnership. In place of lust there is simply the cultural ideologue of the atheist as a libertine, who transgresses the limits set by the legalities of desire. Incest, like atheism, violates 'allegedly "universal" patterns of moral behaviour'.¹⁰ Therefore, like hypocrisy, incest serves as a signifier of something else, the same thing, namely, atheism.

Does this lead to the conclusion that the key to his 'inner self' resides in his atheism? D'Amville commits fratricide, attempts the murder of his nephew and the incestuous rape of his daughter-in-law while, at the same time, avarice and treachery are his typical characteristics. All these crimes and qualities are subsumed by his atheism and make sense as its effects. Their conceptual reduction to atheism displays its extraordinary breadth since it covers all kinds of evil. Ironically, by the same token, that is, by their sheer number and their excessive nature (they typify the most heinous forms of villainy and hit at the core of the family as a nexus of bonding and allegiances to hierarchical position) they empty the criminal character of any interior essence. To Castabella's question '[a]re y' a devil or a man?' (4.3.97), the answer could be that he is devil as a man, and vice versa. He could be one of 'incarnate devils [who] are superficially indistinguishable from ordinary human beings. They look *exactly like us*, but in their incalculable depths they are wicked and alien'.¹¹ But the point is that there are no 'incalculable depths' to his alienness. In reality, the villainy which he shares with other 'machiavels' is devoid of the inwardness encountered in Hieronimo, Edmund and others, because it absolutely coincides with his purpose. It is activated solely by his transgressive project to subvert primogeniture, usurp its status privileges and appropriate his nephew's estate. His atheism, while being constitutive of his character, does not, therefore, hide a psychological kernel, a possible key to his inner truth. Although the structure of dramatic action is organised by the deployment of his agency and, thus, by the choices he makes, D'Amville is not entirely 'human'. And this could be one of the reasons that the play has not attracted much critical notice so far. As the title of the play suggests, there is no humanised hero but an atheist whose acts are driven in their entirety by his atheism. Drawing on Judith Butler's argument of what appears 'outside' culture but in reality is fully 'inside' it insofar as it is constituted by its discourses, I suggest that D'Amville's atheism enacts

¹⁰ Richard A. McCabe, *Incest, Drama and Nature's Law 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 219.

¹¹ Katharine Eisaman Maus refers to Thomas Lodge's *Wit's Misery and the World's Madness* (1596). Maus, *Inwardness*, p. 45.

[w]hat remains ‘unthinkable’ and ‘unsayable’ within the terms of an existing cultural form [which] is not necessarily what is excluded from the matrix of intelligibility within that form; on the contrary, it is the marginalized, not the excluded, the cultural possibility that calls for dread or, minimally, the loss of sanctions. [...] The ‘unthinkable’ is thus fully within culture, but fully excluded from *dominant* culture.¹²

My argument is that his atheism was not literally ‘unthinkable’ and ‘unsayable’. The play’s depiction of atheism is inscribed within historically specific theological concerns, as overwhelmingly demonstrated by dramatic criticism, and fully displayed not only in D’Amville but also in the figure of Snuffe whose Puritanism is presented as virtually atheistic.¹³ However, concepts and their linguistic imprints are produced not on the basis of a simple ‘representational’ relationship between content and word but acquire signification in the context of a specific cultural nexus of meanings and practices. As Stephen Greenblatt argues, in the late sixteenth century atheism ‘was almost always thinkable only as the thought of another’,¹⁴ something that forces the dominant culture to consider oppositional forms of perception of experience, though verbally relegating them to the ‘unthinkable’. The materialism displayed in his worship of Nature in place of God offers precisely an instance of ‘the unthinkable’ which is, however, located in ‘the matrix of intelligibility’. That materialism ‘calls for dread’ is emphasised in his view of moral choice as residing in human anatomy which would provide him with the knowledge of how conscience is constituted and where it originates. For this reason, he asks the judges to perform dissection on Charlemont’s body so that ‘I would find out by

¹² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 77. This is how I read Stephen Greenblatt’s statement that ‘[i]f the atheist did not exist, he would have to be invented’. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 23.

¹³ For the almost unanimous assessment of *The Atheist’s Tragedy* as a thesis, rather than a ‘psychological’ play, with the majority of critics focusing on the religious issues it raises, see, for example, Michael H. Higgins, ‘The Influence of Calvinistic Thought in Tourneur’s *Atheist’s Tragedy*’, *The Review of English Studies*, 19.75 (1943), 255-62; R. J. Kaufmann, ‘Theodicy, Tragedy and the Psalmist’: Tourneur’s *Atheist’s Tragedy*’, *Comparative Drama*, 3.4 (1969-70), 241-62, who argues that it belongs to ‘Dramas of Ethical Display’ whose heroes ‘are not fully humanized’ but neither are they allegorical in the sense of ‘canonized typological similes’ (p. 246); Huston Diehl, “‘Reduce Thy Understanding to Thine Eye’”: Seeing and Interpreting in *The Atheist’s Tragedy*’, *Studies in Philology*, 78.1 (1981), 47-60; Alan Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England 1560-1660* (1983; Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009); and Robert Ornstein, ‘*The Atheist’s Tragedy* and Renaissance Naturalism’, *Studies in Philology*, 51.2 (1954), 194-207. For Kendrick, the play ‘is unique in the way it explores the economic implications of Neostoicism, the Renaissance value system that combined Christian and Stoic ideas’, p. 7.

¹⁴ Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* p. 22 Also see, p. 25.

his anatomy / What thing there is in Nature more exact / Than in the constitution of myself' (5.2.144-46), which, while being the same as his nephew's, lacks 'the resolution [...] / To die with that assurance as he does' (149-50). '[A]theism, science, incest, the charnel house, violent death, and dissection seem to jostle one another within the play, as it investigates how an entirely amoral personality would function'.¹⁵ The point is how 'this entirely amoral personality' becomes culturally meaningful.

The Atheist's Tragedy outlines basic features of *The Jew of Malta* in Greenblatt's reading of Marlowe's play. D'Amville's self-fashioning is predicated on the 'subversive identification with the alien'¹⁶ as the atheist, the incestuous rapist, the treacherous and avaricious overreacher, the fratricide and would-be murderer of an innocent couple. His fate reproduces the pattern of 'the villain-undone-by-his-villainy'. In the same way that Borachio, in carrying out his master's pre-meditated murderous plan, knocked out Montferrers's brains, so D'Amville will eventually meet his own death precisely in the same manner. In the final scene, and while Charlemont and Castabella, facing their death sentence, are brought to the scaffold, D'Amville smashes his own skull with the axe intended for them. This preposterous act is nonetheless ideologically convincing for Tourneur's contemporary audience insofar as it inscribes poetic justice, given the obvious irony that his absurd death by his own hand is a gross miscalculation performed by a most calculating character.¹⁷ Moreover, it is psychologically pertinent because it reconfirms the atheist's stereotypical slipping into madness; in the words of the Second Judge, '[g]rief for his children's death distempers him' (5.2.94). Finally, values, such as love and honour, are embodied in the morally steadfast couple who are made to voice the Christian principles of endurance, chastity and unswerving faith in God, despite the calamities that have befallen them. But, as in Marlowe's play, in which conventional values are fragile, the piety of the couple is both inefficient and expressive of a moral and political intransigence that makes them priggish.

The 'Marlovian script', however, is superseded by D'Amville's project of unwarranted social ascent, which constitutes his secularised notion of (personal) salvation.

¹⁵ Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (Routledge: London, 1995), p. 84. For the interest in anatomy as a new science that offers 'physiological explanation for psychological phenomena' (p. 44), see Michael Neil's classic study, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 102-40.

¹⁶ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 203-04 (p. 203).

¹⁷ His absurd blunder could be seen in the light of contemporary religious tracts. Robert N. Watson refers to Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* which inscribes the atheist's dual nature as 'either too stupid or too clever to see the most obvious truths'. See *The Rest Is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 23.

Charlemont and Castabella are produced as the virtuous characters whose orthodoxy is meant to counter D'Amville's quest of self-salvation as 'unthinkable' while, at the same time, they serve it, making it thus 'thinkable'. Predictably, their version triumphs in the end along with considerable material rewards. The play closes with the political re-assertion of state justice which is identified with and reconfirms inherited status and wealth in the figures of the honorable couple. The [First] Judge's authoritative statement to Charlemont, 'I now salute you with more titles, both / Of wealth and dignity, than you were born to' (5.2.279-80), which interpellates him in terms of his position and privileges, marks the final obliteration of D'Amville's scenario. The closure also typically rewards female chastity through marriage; Castabella's last speech reveals the synergy between institutional (marital) sexuality, wealth and status: 'With all the titles due to me increase / The wealth and honour of my Charlemont, / Lord of Montferrers, Lord D'Amville, Belforest' (5.2.283-85, my emphasis). The restoration of normality is reinforced by the transgressor's preposterous mistake, the murder that turns into suicide, which foregrounds his entrapment in his own machinations.

However, this scenario of damnation and redemption is not simply reducible to the play's obvious intent to demonstrate to its audience the horrific implications for somebody's life when perdition no longer functions as a moral deterrent. It has a wider significance in the way it registers the anxieties, desires and demands of a culture marked by emerging forms of upward social mobility in a genre that persistently describes ambitious climbers as villains. While doing so, however, it deploys a perception of experience that admits to that mobility's cultural possibility, though morally condemnable. Although he is a nobleman, D'Amville, as a younger brother, partakes in the same ideological register as that of the middle classes. Those belonging in them 'who were upward mobile and gaining positions of power [...] could be expected to be sceptical of providentialist legitimations of the existing order'.¹⁸ Because of the much resented primogeniture, D'Amville's understanding of providence is similar: it ideologically sanctions a system of kinship which is unfair to individualist aspirations and, as such, it has to be desacralized. Divine providence has to be replaced and appropriated by instrumental reason, a 'value-free instrumental rationality', a concept which originates in Machiavelli's *The Prince* and pertains to a technical perception of reality, irrespective of ends.¹⁹ Its efficacy 'ultimately becomes its own end, corrosive to any other values or intents', and this is precisely what the play emphatically displays. At the same time, it discloses 'a will-to power', not lying

¹⁸ Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1986), pp. 87-88.

¹⁹ Grady, p. 61.

‘underneath’ instrumental reason,²⁰ but being the obtrusive motor of the hero’s agency defined by his quest for upward mobility.

In the first scene of the play the word ‘providence’ is used by D’Amville to suggest the efficacy of his instrumental reason in obtaining property for the founding and multiplying of his dynasty. Talking of his sons as branches of the paternal tree he expresses his certitude that ‘[a]s they increase, so should my providence’ (1.1.56). D’Amville dismisses divine providence and is staged as dehumanised villain in Montferrers’s death scene in which he and Borachio boast of their crime in a language reminiscent of other Jacobean Machiavellians such as, for example, Vindice. From his self-congratulatory speech on his meticulous plan and careful execution of ‘the plot’ – ‘nothing from / Th’induction to th’accomplishment seemed forced / Or done o’ purpose, but by accident’ (2.4.109-11) – there arises the specter of ‘self-made man’ as the product of murder. In his chilling statement, ‘[u]pon this ground I’ll build my manor house, / And this shall be the chiefest corner-stone’ (2.4.101-02), ambition as the engine of upward mobility is grounded literally in the death of the other.²¹ Within the same register of social advancement as transgressive desire, incest sexualises ambition;²² once the prohibition, which *par excellence* institutes culture, is violated any transgression is possible. So what emerges is not so much a dramatic character but a social class defined less by economic parameters and more as the totality of those individuals who, discontented with the positionalities assigned by birth, attempt to trespass upon forbidden territories of power. D’Amville serves as the nightmarish paradigm of exaggerated forms of criminality which the desire for social advancement can take in a genre that persistently presents it in an ambiguous manner, at once demonising and rationalising it. It is this desire that contains D’Amville but at the same time empties him of inwardness because it is essentially autotelic. There is no ‘essential’ subject insofar as his ‘essence’ coincides absolutely with the ‘telos’ of his desire. This lack of interiority is emphasised by the rarity of soliloquies, while the few ones that exist do not problematise D’Amville’s ethical choices. With a single exception, they focus on his instrumental reason which clearly emerges as ‘corrosive to any other values’.

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 65 and 66.

²¹ For the image of the building in connection with post-Reformation popular aspirations in ‘the building of a *family*, and the fathering of a business *house*’, see Kaufmann, p. 247.

²² For Boehrer Jacobean drama’s intense interest in incest is a theme which supports ‘its focus on social ambition and the decay of ascribed rank’, p. 93. Bruce Thomas Boehrer, *Monarchy and Incest in Renaissance England: Literature, Culture, Kinship, and Kingship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992). For the mapping of Renaissance plays dealing with incest, see Lois E. Bueler, ‘The Structural Uses of Incest in English Renaissance Drama’, *Renaissance Drama* 15 (1984), 115-45.

In an early soliloquy his assumption of the divine prerogative over human life is presented as a simple means to his project's efficacy. In his cold calculation of how to substitute his own reproductive body for those of his two sons, his brother's death figures just as an asset not be wasted:

But let me call my projects to account.
For what effect and end I have engaged
Myself in all this blood. To leave a state
To the succession of my proper blood.
But how shall that succession be continued?
Not in my elder son, I fear. Disease
And weakness have disabled him for issue.
For th' t'other, his loose humour will endure
No bond of marriage [...]
[...]
O pity that the profitable end
Of such a prosp'rous murder should be lost!
Nature forbid. (4.2.29-41)

Ironically, his dream of succession is cracking along the lines of patrilineal reproduction because of his sons' faulty sexuality (either its lack or its excess). This is forcefully shown at the end when he hears Rousard's dying groans as 'the falling noise / Of some great building when the groundwork breaks' (5.1.75-76). The dynastic impasse to which he is led could have served as a warning for the perilousness of his overall project. But his relentless pragmatism, i.e., the fathering of his own offspring in lieu of his sons' so as not 'to lose my labour / For want of issue' (4.2.42-43), is forbidding of painful sentiment and inner meditation. In an unexpected twist, however, instrumental reason is relinquished in his later soliloquy when, in mistaking an unknown skull for that of his brother, he addresses it in terms of his troubled 'conscience'. In a language of exultant poetry, his remorse for his fratricide – 'but now that I begin to feel / The loathsome horror of my sin' (4.3.223-24) – and fear of God are intensely experienced in his wish '[t]o bury my face under my eyebrows and / Would steal from my shame unseen' (226-27). In stark juxtaposition to his earlier challenge of divine surveillance, his fearful desire to escape it could be seen as his eventual submission to providentialism. However, this invocation of religious orthodoxy is immediately dispelled, and so is his remorse caused by Montferrers's ghost which is soon dismissed as mere fantasy (234). Therefore, the soliloquy's closure subverts the expectation of the hero's deployment of

his inner 'truth' residing in mortification.²³ D'Amville is dehumanised in a deliberate gesture that pits his momentary pathos against his final relapse to stereotypical villainy. The utter loss of his humanness is displayed in his ghoulish wish 'to drink the fresh warm blood of him / I murdered' (241-42). In short, from this scene that promises psychological inwardness what emerges is the hero as the emblem of vampire individualism

D'Amville emerges as the monster from 'outside', and his lack of interiority performs the ethos of early capitalist individualism as absolute evil. However much the internal coherence and continuity of the fictive 'person' is wished for or assumed, his character exposes these attributes for what they are: 'not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility'.²⁴ He is constituted as 'intelligible' because his 'personhood' is structured in terms of a coherence fabricated as the result of social discourses of birth, wealth and progeny. At the same time, however, he is 'unintelligible', because he transgresses the social forms of 'personhood' constituted by hierarchical and disciplinary discourses of power. In short, he shows that "'identity" [is] a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience'²⁵ by countering its normative character with his own antinomic example which is intelligible as monstrosity. The 'normative' ideal in the play is embodied by the virtuous couple as paragons of civic virtue. Their absolute internalisation of the repressive order of the family and state justice is exemplified by Castabella's submission to her forced marriage to Rousard, despite the pre-contract that binds the two lovers (1.2.88-105), and Charlemont's passive acceptance of his death verdict. In the travesty of state justice, whereby D'Amville is granted permission by the judges to execute his nephew by himself, his response is '*I submit me*' (5.2.236, my emphasis), significantly echoed by Castabella's 'So do I' (237). This statement is emblematic of normative gender and civic identities produced by regulatory practices of religion and the state, which constitute these characters on the basis of obedience to a higher power, however unfair or abusive. Charlemont's full acceptance of the religious injunction to stay in his place in the hope of salvation ironically proves Machiavelli's point that the function of religion is civic obedience, 'as if its primary justification were not truth but expediency'.²⁶ This also explains his refusal to turn into revenger. Revenge would

²³ His two following soliloquies in 5.1, both interrupted by the appearance of Montferrers's ghost, are registered in the same paradigm. On his falling asleep the ghost appears but again it is dispelled as a 'foolish dream' (32).

²⁴ Butler, p. 17.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 16.

²⁶ Greenblatt, *Shakespearean*, p. 24. D'Amville's dialogue with Borachio on the hypocrisy of the (Puritan) clergy in the figure of Snuffe (1.2.207-14) exposes their professed purpose of salvation as self-

demand a (different) conception of identity not as ‘a normative ideal’ but ‘a descriptive feature of experience’, that is, his structuring as someone determined to take justice in his hands for the injustice and violence done to him. This would require a transgressive agency of Vindice’s kind but revenge is frustrated by the hero’s passivity.²⁷ However, Charlemont’s construction as the effect of political and religious discourses of obedience does not disallow agency, but, on the contrary serves as its ‘necessary scene... the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible’.²⁸ Therefore, the hero’s agency exists although in a seeming contradiction: it is precluded by divine providence through which his identity becomes intelligible as that of a Stoic, and, at the same time, ‘energised’ by being transferred to God. As Charlemont says, ‘*patience is the honest man’s revenge*’ (5.2.276), although the validity of this statement is ironically undercut by D’Amville’s ridiculous mistake.

Therefore, ‘identity’ as a normative ideal is not devoid of tensions which also characterise D’Amville’s antinomic position. Insofar as he aims at the perpetuation of the same system of power albeit under *his own* control his identity is essentially structured by the same desire as Montferrers’s (i.2.1-9). Tourneur invites us to see the two brothers as radically opposite while, at the same time, re-inscribing *at extremis* in the ‘villain’ the aristocratic ideology which institutes the same desire. D’Amville’s rationale for marrying Castabella to Rousard – ‘[t]his marriage will bring wealth. If that succeed, / I will increase it though my brother bleed’ (1.2.241-42) – re-iterates alliance for dynastic reasons as well as violence, both integral to aristocratic culture. However, he is offered as a paradigm antinomic to it for two basic reasons. First, not all violence is accepted but only socially legitimated forms of it.²⁹ Second, he performs the unacceptable intermingling of aristocratic position and early capitalist ethos by exhibiting the ‘malevolent’ early capitalist individualism from the position of an aristocrat:

interest. D’Amville’s statement, ‘[b]y that I am confirmed an atheist’ (214), serves as the appropriate comment.

²⁷ For Kendrick, both Castabella and Charlemont embody Stoicism in their calm acceptance of death (p. 22). Also see, Maus for resonances of Stoicism in Charlemont. As she argues, the play ‘salvages the absolute power other revenge tragedies condemn, by associating it not with fallible human authorities but with a beneficent deity’ (‘Introduction’ to *Four Revenge*, p. xxix).

²⁸ Butler, p. 147.

²⁹ For the culture of violence amongst the aristocracy, see Laurence Stone’s classic work *The Crisis of the Aristocracy: 1558-1641* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967), pp. 107-24. Bravery as constitutive of the aristocratic ethos emerges in Charlemont’s speech to Montferrers (1.2.10-28), which draws on D’Amville’s extolling of ‘noble’ war, the origin of ‘honour’ bequeathed to nobility through ancestry (1.1.67-72).

This Castabella is a wealthy heir,
And by her marriage with my elder son
My house is honoured and my state increased.
This work alone deserves my industry;
But if it prosper, thou shalt see my brain
Make this but an induction to a point
So full of profitable policy
That it would make the soul of honesty
Ambitious to turn villain. (1.2.222-9) ³⁰

His discourse transcribes dynastic concerns in the language of business, which registers ‘industry’, ‘profitable’, ‘policy’, ‘providence’ etc. and employs business and financial images that disclose a meticulous technical knowledge of ‘trade, investment, contracts, indentures, repayment of debt and book-keeping’.³¹ Therefore, the ‘inappropriate’ mixture of aristocratic values with those of the entrepreneurial classes structures D’Amville as the monstrous oxymoron of a nobleman as a businessman:

Here are *my* sons—
There’s *my* eternity. *My* life in them
And their succession shall forever live,
And in *my* reason dwells the providence
To add to life as much of happiness.
Let all men lose, so I increase my gain:
I have no feeling of another’s pain. (1.1.123-29, my emphasis)

Individualist acquisitiveness is foregrounded through the obsessive use of the possessive pronoun and culminates in the *sententia* describing the emergent capitalist ethos as the pursuit of personal profit at the expense of the happiness and/or life of the other.

The hero’s ‘self’, therefore, is produced as a monstrous fantasy of the entrepreneurial man; it is, in reality, ‘an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse,

³⁰ I concur with Kendrick’s claim that ‘D’Amville’s figuration of a transitional socioeconomic moment is informed by an assimilation of bourgeois and aristocratic features’. However, it is rather hasty to describe his project in terms of a ‘capitalist restructuring of the family’ (p. 15).

³¹ U.M. Ellis-Fermor, ‘The Imagery of “The Revengers Tragedie” and “The Atheists Tragedie”’, *The Modern Language Review* 30.3 (1935), 289-301 (p. 291).

the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body'.³² The body, in this case, is by definition performative since it belongs to the actor who stages himself as a villain and by doing so he effects 'the public regulation' of the specter of the acquisitive, inhuman entrepreneur. His 'acts, gestures, enactments [...] are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means'.³³ D'Amville's staging foregrounds Butler's definition of identity by spectacularising it as the effect of corporeal signs sustained by apposite cultural expectations. His weeping for the death of his brother (2.4.73-74) is the physical manifestation of the stage Machiavelli's hypocrisy underscored by his satanic laughter, 'ha, ha, he' (86-7). His trying to kiss Castabella and force himself on her (4.3) performs another stereotype, that of the rapist.³⁴ These gestures/enactments would have simply re-iterated caricatured villainy had they not persistently and literally embodied his self-laudatory references to his 'brain' as '[a]n instrumental help' (108-09). Likewise, his handling of gold (5.1) would simply reproduce the familiar figure of the stage miser had it not been conceptually set within the same paradigm of efficacious rationality (5.1.37). Finally, the gesture *par excellence* performative of his identity as a self-defeated atheist, that is, his ludicrous self-execution, is refuted by his defiant re-confirmation of his rational efficacy. As he says to the [First] Judge,

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 estate. (5.2.248-52)

His celebration of himself as the embodiment of instrumental reason constructs a discourse in which, on the one hand, the desacralisation of providence is publically

³² Butler, p. 136. I am drawing on Butler's work for the notion of performativity in connection with identity, which, though pertaining to the construction of gender, is particularly useful in the decoding of the hero.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ This ironically replicates her metaphorical rape by her father, that is, her forced marriage, as described by Sebastian (1.4.126-27). In the figures of the younger brother, Sebastian, and the adulterous wife, Levidulcia, Belforest's young wife and step-mother to Castabella, an alternative sexual ethos emerges, which recognises the authority of the senses and the naturalness of pleasure. As such, it ironically comments on Castabella's rejection as a whore by Charlemont in his reaction to her supposed sexual betrayal (3.1.99-118). Predictably Sebastian and Levidulcia are punished, the latter committing suicide after 'properly' repenting for her sexual self-availability.

regulated through the fantasy of the transgressive subject as a monster. On the other, it offers autonomous will as a possibility for the emergent modern individual.

These gestures, which perform at once stereotypical villainy and emergent individualist ideologies disclose the stitches of identity, normally occluded by assumptions of the 'naturalness' of dramatic character. *The Atheist's Tragedy* is one of those plays which 'dramatize points of stress in the ethical system, issues on which the engines of doubt are being brought to bear'.³⁵ Here, such points of stress appear at the level of the family in connection with hierarchical positionality and sexuality within it. The nodal point is the issue of government and, more specifically, the right to self-government, which is articulated in D'Amville's critical attitude to institutional power. It originates in the issue of justice or, rather, the naturalised injustice of primogeniture, which forfeits him of privileges that legally belong to Montferrers. His overturning of primogeniture is his 'rightful' cause which transforms him into a revenger against social injustice and its providentialist validations. The replacement of the rightful revenger, Charlemont, by D'Amville offers precisely the space for the individual will to create its own emancipatory project against sanctioned forms of government. That this venture, for all its horrific implications, is not entirely uncalled-for is shown in D'Amville's accusation against his nephew, this time, '[t]hat he unjustly hath conspired with Fate' so as to become '*the heir to my possessions*' (5.2.114 and 116, my emphasis). In his ironical appropriation for himself of what could be Montferrers's indictment of his own acts, there lurks the implicit cultural recognition that the theft of the estate from the rightful owner creates 'legitimate' ownership. Therefore, D'Amville's quest for an 'alternative' justice, however personal, shows that new forms of legitimacy of status and property resulting from the subversion of primogeniture might be unethical but not impossible. Social mobility in defiance of the ideology of inherited rank, however coopted by the restoration of status to the legitimate heir, becomes thinkable. And so is the idea of what Michel Foucault defines as 'not wanted to be governed like that', which constitutes one of the three 'anchoring points' inherent in 'the critical attitude' from the sixteenth century on:

“[T]o not to want to be governed” is of course *not* accepting as true [...] what an authority tells you is true, or at least not accepting it because an authority tells you that it is true, but rather accepting it only if one considers valid the reasons

³⁵ Kaufmann, p. 245.

for doing so. And this time, critique finds its anchoring point in the problem of certainty in its confrontation with authority.³⁶

D'Amville fully displays his wish 'not to be governed like that' because 'what an authority tells you is true' in his debate with Castabella on incest, from which emerges critique as 'the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and [...] power on its discourses of truth'.³⁷ In his defence of incest the rationalisation of what constitutes an 'unthinkable' transgression is articulated in a language demonstrating that '[c]riticism indeed consists of *analyzing and reflecting upon limits*'.³⁸ More specifically, D'Amville's interrogation of the 'naturalness' of the incest prohibition poses the Foucauldian question: '[I]n what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?'³⁹

The scene is preceded by Castabella's plea to him to have mercy on Charlemont for Borachio's murder, grounded in her perception of a naturalised hierarchical order whereby D'Amville's 'greatness' sets him 'nearer Heav'n in place' (iii. 4. 14-15): 'Let Nature, which in savages, in beasts, / Can stir to pity, tell you that he is / Your kinsman' (22-23). The semantic collapsibility of "benevolence" and "blood-relatedness" in Renaissance English' into 'Kindship'⁴⁰ makes sense within Castabella's conception of the family as a natural unit, which is countered by D'Amville's discourse of incest. His deconstruction of precisely its 'naturalness' is demonstrated by the complicated trajectory of the definition of incest in England, that foregrounds the family as the effect of juridical concepts and implementations of legal regulations.⁴¹ In an impressive display of instrumental reason, D'Amville argues to Castabella for the mutual social and material benefits of 'incestuous adultery' (4.3.102-16). He points out the cultural relativity of the incest taboo and coolly discloses the imperative that it serves: the subjection of 'natural' freedom to the preservation of hierarchical power. His speech contends that acceptable forms of sexuality are essentially the effect of the law:

³⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer, trans. by Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007), p. 46.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 47.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 113.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Maus, *Inwardness*, p. 60.

⁴¹ The cultural relativity of incest is evidenced in the long history of its definitions on the basis of meticulous religious and legal classifications of consanguinity and affinity since the thirteenth century. See Sybil Wolfram, *In-Laws and Outlaws: Kinship and Marriage in England* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1987). Wolfram argues that 'it is worth stressing that consanguinity and affinity were on precisely the same footing with regard not only to the voidability of marriage but also to incest' (p. 29).

Incest? Tush.
 These distances affinity observes
 Are articles of bondage cast upon
 Our freedoms by our own subjections.
 Nature allows a gen'ral liberty
 Of generation to all creatures else.
 Shall man, to whose command and use all creatures
 Were made subject, be less free than they? (4.3.124-30)

The 'universal, necessary and obligatory' prohibition of incest is produced by 'articles of bondage' set on sexuality by institutional power at the level of the family, which also dictates the limits that prevent the tampering of affinity. For D'Amville, therefore, sexuality does not exist before the law, whose purpose is universal subjection, but is effected by it. But, simultaneously, by invoking a natural 'gen'ral liberty of generation' which the law seeks to repress, an 'original' and free sexuality is premised as antecedent to legal regulations. His argument is contradictory insofar as it deconstructs received definitions of sexuality as legal expediencies but, simultaneously, invokes an 'original' sexual liberty which humans are deprived of. In this sense, sexuality figures as a nodal point in a rational analysis premised on the idea that 'what an authority tells you is true' is not true. Because D'Amville does 'not want to be governed like that', i.e. in terms of 'subjections' to power whose discourses of truth he interrogates and finds contingent, his attempted incest is a gesture targeting the prohibition *par excellence* constitutive of society. His argument could be rephrased as follows: 'If free sexuality is by nature given to all creatures why not to man who is superior to them?' Castabella's response re-instates the orthodox reading of the natural order in terms of the radical hierarchical distinction between humans and beasts whereby human superiority implicitly resides in sexual repression (4.3.134-40). Her rhetorical question, 'are y' an atheist?' (160), offers the only available position from which the early modern subject's unorthodox stance can be expressed in the face of universal and obligatory discourses of truth. In short, D'Amville's atheism produces an alternative understanding of the workings of power, although its singular insights are cancelled as synonymous with evil.

If D'Amville inscribes the instruction 'dare to know', that is, a 'way out' of 'immaturity' as 'a certain state of our will that makes us accept someone else's authority to lead us in areas where the use of reason is called for',⁴² does his interrogation of authority give rise to an emancipatory call for an alternative perception of power? On

⁴² Foucault, p. 100.

the one hand, his desire for self-government contains a critical analysis and reflection ‘upon limits’ of the thinkable. On the other, the same desire articulates a logic of power whose efficacy is predicated on the government of all the others. His not wanting ‘to be governed like that’, therefore, dismisses the second important anchoring point of criticism, which is ‘not wanting to accept these laws because they are unjust [...] confronted with government and the obedience it stipulates, critique means putting forth universal and infeasible rights to which every government [...] will have to submit’.⁴³ D’Amville’s self-fashioning as a dissident voice, far from inscribing rudiments of a new form of government based on justice as a universal principle, displays nothing more than a self-interested critique; this is the deeper sense of the play’s conservatism. He questions the laws which he deems unjust only to the extent that they stipulate his own subjection, and deconstructs their legitimacy insofar as they cancel his egotistic will. Consequently, his discursive position is particularly contradictory. At the climactic moments of his confrontation with his sons’ deaths, D’Amville emerges as an ideologically problematical figure by straddling two antithetical terrains. His speech on Rousard’s death instances his relapse to the metaphysics of providence, ‘when a spiritual director takes the place of our conscience’.⁴⁴ The legal terms he employs to speak of the ‘spiritual director’ ironically showcase the effective recuperation of his language of property and business by moral convention:

Now to myself I am ridiculous.
 Nature, thou art a traitor to my soul.
 Thou hast abused my trust. I will complain
 To a superior court to right my wrong.
 I’ll prove thee a forger of false assurances.
 In yond Star Chamber thou shalt answer it. (5.1.115-20)

But when his two sons’ dead bodies are brought on stage his speech to the judges expresses the exact opposite: the justice of his project, which inheres in his entrepreneurial ethos, against the state apparatuses’ system of social discriminations. The entrepreneur as the ‘new’ man counters to the injustice of inherited landed wealth the vision of a fairer distribution of power, which the market economy promises:

I
 Had wisely raised a competent estate
 To my posterity; and is there not

⁴³ Ibid, p. 46.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.100.

More wisdom and more charity in that,
Than for your lordship, or your father, or
Your grandsire to prolong the torment and
The rack of rent from age to age upon
Your poor penurious tenants, yet perhaps
Without a penny profit to your heir?
Is 't not more wise, more charitable? Speak! (5.2.73-82)⁴⁵

From D'Amville's speech arises the possibility that the emergent class of entrepreneurs might be both more 'charitable' to the lower strata and economically wiser to their progeny than the landed gentry. But again his invocation of social justice through charity is unconvincing because it is strictly demarcated by class antagonism whereby his superior status is unquestionable and, as such, cancels any egalitarian appeal. By consequence, while social mobility is offered as a fairer and more viable alternative to aristocratic government in reality it is admissible only to the already privileged.

The hero's final moments, when he is confronted with the utter catastrophe of his project and his death is approaching, would conventionally offer the terrain for the much expected revelation of a hidden interiority, but not so in D'Amville. In place of confession as the locus of the truth about oneself, which, once uttered and through the very process of utterance, brings redemption for one's crimes there is lame didacticism in his recognition that above his powerful 'natural understanding' '[t]here is a power / [...] that hath overthrown the pride / Of all my projects and posterity' (5.2.256-58). Instead of decoding D'Amville's 'hidden truth', his acknowledgment that divine providence rather than his brains engineered his fate demonstrates the obverse, namely, that there is no such truth. There is simply identity as a constitution of gestures that perform something and, in this case, 'confession' as 'the obligation of truth'.⁴⁶ More than anything else D'Amville's moralist avowal of his defeat by a superior power displays confession as Christianity's compulsory practice whereby the individual has to reveal his/her 'truth' whether or not this is constructed by discourses of another's authority.

The play conventionally describes the defeat of an overreacher by divine providence and the dominant system of values that it morally legitimises. However, it also inscribes cultural tensions and conflicts produced by emergent forms of social experience, which

⁴⁵ For this passage, also see Kendrick, pp. 12-13; and Maus, *Four Revenge*, p. 420 n. 79.

⁴⁶ Foucault, p. 170. I concur with McCabe's argument that '[t]he failure of his crimes confounds him, not their gravity' and the closure shows 'divine "providence"' as 'almost as sinister as D'Amville's own' (p. 221).

require the subject's emancipation from submission to strict social hierarchies and their stifling ideologies. But in so far as this demand has not yet been constituted in terms of a new ethics which would sanction social ambition, the construction of the hero takes the form of that thing which appears as the horrific 'outside' to culture. Therefore, D'Amville as a character without 'self' serves as an empty signifier that stands for a wide variety of 'unthinkable', because socially unsanctioned, practices in which society reads all possible transgressions. His emptying of inwardness is instrumental in a text which is predicated on and condemns human will as an autelic system that it transcribes as atheism. In this sense, D'Amville is comprehensible in the context of a 'cultural possibility that calls for dread', namely, uninhibited individual agency, which has to be expressed as monstrosity.