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# **Evolution and Treatment of Revenge in Literature from the Classical Master through Emile Bronte**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Of

M.A in English

The Department of English  
East West University  
April, 2007

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10-19-07

10-19-07

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## **Acknowledgement**

This paper is prepared to find out the concept of revenge in literature and its continuing role since the Classical master to Emily Bronte .I cordially give thanks to the people who helped me a lot to prepare this paper. First of all I would like to thank my respected teacher and advisor Mr.Asit Roy Choudhury, Associate Professor, Department of English East West University. Without his valuable help and guidance it would not be possible to prepare this paper. Then I give thanks to my brother who also helped me a lot for making this paper.Lastely I give thanks to the rich library of East west University. Without all of this, it would not be possible for me to prepare this paper. I am really grateful to all.

## **Preface**

I have prepared this dissertation in partial requirements for the degree of M.A in English. I decided to work on this topic because an investigation about the evolution and treatment of revenge in literature from the classical masters through Emile Bronte seemed fascinating to me. The idea actually crossed my mind when I talked to my sir Mr. Asit Roy Choudhury about my dissertation.

## **Evolution and treatment of Revenge in Literature**

"Revenge is a kind of wild justice, which the more man's nature runs to, the more ought to law to weed it out."

(FARANCIS BACON, Essays, "Of Revenge")

"Accidents don't happen to people who take accidents as a personal insult."

(MARIO PUZO, The Godfather )

" What though the field be lost?

All is not lost-the unconquerable will,

And study of revenge, immortal hate,

And courage never to submit or yield:

And what is else not to be overcome."

(JOHN MILTON, Paradise Lost,book-1)

Something of vengeance I had tasted for the first time. An aromatic wine it seemed, on swallowing, warm and racy, its first after-flavor, metallic and corroding, gave me a sensation as if I had been poisoned.

(CHARLOTTE BRONTE, Jane Eyre)

"I believe in consequences."

(CHARLES MCCARRY, The Tears of Autumn, 1974)

Forgive and forget. This admonition surely ranks as one of the most foolish clichés in any language. Remembrance is unquestionably a form of revenge, but, in one of the great

paradoxes of civilized life, it is equally necessary to practice the attainment of true forgiveness. The concept of just deserts, which was not a philosophical abstraction but a fact of life throughout most of human history, evokes a deep unease in modern men and women. We are comfortable with the notion of forgiving and forgetting, however unrealistic it may be, than with the private and public reality of revenge, with its echoes of the primitive and its inescapable reminder of the fragility of human order.

Revenge is one of the grand themes of western literature, an inspiration of epic and drama." It appears in every guise known Revenge, like love and the acquisition of worldly goods, is one of the grand themes of western literature to man and woman: as comedy and tragedy; as a sickness of the soul and as emotional liberation; as disgrace and as honor; as an enemy of social order and a restorer of cosmic order; as mortal sin and saving grace; as destructive self-indulgence and as justice"<sup>1</sup>. Unlike jealousy this, in literature as in life, invariably manifests itself as a corrosive and futile emotion-revenge is a mixed substance. It has both a private and a public aspect; its effects on the individual and on society are sometimes at odds.

Writing at a time when the control of private revenge was a difficult task faced by secular and religious authority, Milton managed to create a devil whose seductiveness arose not only from pride but from the pursuit of vengeance directed against divinity itself. It is not surprising that famous couplet "Revenge, at first though sweet,/Bitter ere long back on itself recoils" is one of the most misquoted (for unconscious as well as conscious reasons) passages in English literature. It is frequently transformed into a contrary aphorism: Revenge is sweet. Defenders of the faith have not been mistaken in their contention that

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<sup>1</sup> Lily B. Campbell, "Theories of Revenge in Renaissance England," P-121

Milton made the devil altogether too appealing to inspire sufficient fear of hell. Judged by human standards, Satan is the most recognizable actor in Milton's drama of pride and vengeance; his quest for recognition is, unmistakable, a human endeavor and his spirit remain unbroken in "dubious battle."

Actors in dramas of revenge, especially those created by great writers of genius, tend to be mixed characters. Fictional heroes are always undone by jealousy but they are occasionally restored to sanity-or man-age to restore themselves-through vengeance. Even when vindictiveness is seen as a ruinous force, destructive to individuals as well as social institutions," the literature of revenge is shaped by a persistent tension between moral condemnation and psychological fascination"<sup>2</sup>.

"Or if our substance be indeed divine,  
And cannot cease to be, we are at worst  
On this side nothing; and by proof we feel  
Our power sufficient to disturb his Heaven,  
And with perpetual inroads to alarm,  
Though inaccessible, his fatal throne;  
Which, if not victory, is yet revenge." (Milton,*Paradise Lost*,Book-2,lines 99-105)

From the earliest Semitic and Greek epics through the late Victorian era, the moral tension engendered by the subject of revenge has preoccupied artists at every level .This preoccupation has not diminished in the twentieth century, but it has lost some of the moral and literary stature formerly attached to questions of vengeance and honor. Nineteenth-century readers might address the problem of revenge on the level dictated by

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<sup>2</sup> Mary Bonaventure Mroz, *Divine Vengeance*. P-67

their literary tastes-in *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Moby Dick* or in the serials of the penny dreadful. Seventeenth-century theatrical audiences could choose to negotiate with the psychological complexities of a Hamlet or content themselves with the straightforward body count of *The Revenge's Tragedy* (enhanced by ingenious methods of dispatch, such as the concealment of a skull with an alluring poisoned mask in order to confuse the enemy into a fatal kiss). In classical Athens, one can assume, the audiences of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were also drawn to less lofty productions by artists whose works did not survive the political and cultural upheavals of the ancient world.

In our own century, revenge, with its relationship to honor and justice, occupies a much narrower area. For the most part, vengeance is confined to the territory of detective and spy novels; which-however seriously they may be taken by their readers and authors-are not taken seriously by most arbiters of culture. Detective fiction is generally regarded as escape reading; the dilemmas of its heroes and villains are thought (or wished) to have connection with "the real world." Detective and spy stories are accorded literary respect only insofar as they depart from the mechanics of crime and punishment to concentrate on the interior landscape of the spymaster, detective, or criminal.

The impulse toward revenge, like so many other disturbing human drives, has come to be regarded more as a form of mental illness than as a conscious combination of motivation and action with sufficient moral weight to demand a reckoning. When the question of revenge is raised today, it is usually discussed within the context of psychological and social deviance. The equation of vengeance with aberrant behavior offers one explanation for the theme's frequent appearance in murder mysteries and its comparative rarity in literary works concerned with more ordinary crimes of the heart.



Contemporary writers are, of course, as interested as their predecessors in deviant behavior, but true artists are generally drawn to forms of deviance that are clearly related, whether closely or distantly, to behavior that is considered normal. Without a standard of health, pathology has no meaning. Deviant sexual behavior, we now believe, exists on a continuum with "normal" sexuality; for writers (indeed, for anyone) much of the subject's endless fascination lies in the struggle to define boundaries. "To make sex interesting, one need not write a novel about incest or rape; relations between consenting adults offer enough possibilities for the active literary imagination. The boundary between the licit and the illicit is always shifting but it never vanished-not, at any rate, for an extended period of time-from our moral and emotional landscape"<sup>3</sup>.

The diminution of literary interest in revenge may be a relatively new phenomenon, but the projection of vengeful impulses onto more primitive peoples and cultures has always been a literary commonplace. In analyzing classics of revenge, successive generations of writers have abandoned common sense and suggested that the Greeks (or the Romans, or the Elizabethans) were preoccupied with the theme of vengeance because-bloodthirsty savages that they were!-they saw nothing wrong with tearing someone to pieces for retaining honor. Thus, critics in the third century A.D., or in the sixteenth century, or in the pre-Holocaust period of the twentieth century, have been inclined to thank themselves on their backs and thank the gods (or God) that they were fortunate enough to have been born into a truly civilized world.

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<sup>3</sup> Hubert J. Treiston, Poine: *A Study in Greek Blood-Revenge* P-1.

A 1929 edition of *Hamlet*, edited by Joseph Quincy Adams, offers a perfect example of the “we-must-realize-how-uncivilized-they-were-back-then” school of criticism. One of the best-known Shakespearean scholars of his generation Adams takes unnamed predecessors for suggesting that Hamlet’s indecisiveness arises, at least in part, from Shakespeare’s desire to condemn private revenge. “The notion that it was morally wrong for a son to avenge his father’s murder. was not entertained in Hamlet’s time” he argues. “On the contrary, revenge was believed to be necessary to the eternal rest of the murdered one. We must be careful not to import into the play modern conceptions of ethical propriety. To the people of his own time, and even to the audience of the Elizabethan age, Hamlet was called upon to perform a ‘dread’ (-sacred) duty.”<sup>4</sup> One imagines a scholarly critic of the twenty-third century, writing of Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint*: “The notion that a son ought to pay attention to his mother’s rules for sexual conduct was not entertained in Portnoy’s time. On the contrary, casual sex was believed to be necessary for the mental health of men (and, in the latter half of the twentieth century, of women as well). We must be careful not to import into the novel modern conceptions of ethical propriety. To the readers of the twentieth century, Portnoy was called upon to perform an essential duty.”<sup>5</sup> There is no surer guide to any epoch’s ethical and political preoccupations than the recurrence of an issue in literature. (Perhaps it is more accurate to state that there was no surer Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Kyd, Shakespeare, Webster, Milton, and Racine were not drawn to the theme of revenge because it was a socially acceptable, albeit bloody, common place of their times but because it was a source of intense, deeply felt moral and social controversy. The projection of revenge onto geographically or historically distant races is not a bias confined to critics of narrow vision; until the rise of drama with bourgeois heroes and settings, this tendency was an

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<sup>4</sup> *The Collected Works of Sophocles*, translated by Lewis Campbell, P-96.

<sup>5</sup> Dan Jacobson, *The Story of Stories: The Chosen People and Its God*, P-83.

unbreakable convention of revenge tragedy. As the distinguished Italian scholar Mario Praz told an audience of his English colleagues, "In the same way as the Italian Seneca's placed their gruesome plots among barbarian peoples, the English dramatists chose for their favorite scene of their horrors, 'the darkened Italian palace, with its wrought-iron bars preventing escape; its embroidered carpets muffling the footsteps; its hidden, suddenly yawning trap-doors; its arras-hangings concealing masked ruffians; its garlands of poisoned flowers.'"<sup>6</sup> While the authors of Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedy were depicting florid Italian and Spanish scenes, Italian and Spanish dramatists of the same period chose equally exotic (to them) Turkish settings. This relegation of revenge to distant and mythic worlds was motivated by political and aesthetic consideration.

"In the world of the Renaissance, the removal of vengeance to an alien and bygone setting was not politically motivated in to an alien and bygone setting was not politically motivated in the narrowest sense, although it is certainly true that an Elizabethan playwright might reasonably have anticipated a firsthand taste of royal retribution were he to write about vendettas in Elizabeth's court instead of misunderstandings between twenty noble families in fourteenth-century Verona or machinations of eleventh-century Danish royalty"<sup>7</sup>. Rather, the projection of revenge was politic in the primary dictionary definition (i.e., prudent), not merely because it kept the author's head safely attached to his neck but because it afforded a measure of psychic distance between the audience and a profoundly disturbing subject.

Modern critics who believe that blood revenge was a "given" for audiences four hundred years ago are simply mistaken, in the usual fashion of those who wish to assert the

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<sup>6</sup> Heinrich von Kleist, Michael Kohlhaas, translated by James Kirkup, P-1.

<sup>7</sup> Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's "Histories". Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy, P-122.

superior moral vision of their own moment in history. Both theologians and literary critics (it is not always possible to distinguish between them) of the sixteenth century, in their eagerness to proclaim the superiority of Christian "forgiveness" to both paganism and Judaism, owing to misconceptions about the views of revenge embodied in Greek tragedy and in the Biblical and rabbinical writings of the Jews.

The revenge tragedy of classical Greece is of course fundamental to subsequent western interpretations of the relationship between justice and vengeance. Even today, advocates of capital punishment refer to the concept of homicide as pollution to support their contention that bloodstains in the fabric of society can only be eliminated by state-ordered shedding of more blood. "Moving beyond relatively narrow issues of criminal justice, the acts of vengeance woven through the plots of Attic tragedy have been transformed, in the post-Freudian world, into metaphors for the psychic underpinning of all human behavior"<sup>8</sup>.

Greek tragedy is invariably associated with a highly deterministic view of vengeance as constant in the moral universe. It is generally asserted-and not only in the survey courses in western civilization forced upon college freshmen-that the action of Greek drama must be viewed within a context allowing little or no latitude for human beings to affect their own destinies. In this interpretation, vengeance-like most other human acts-is presented not as a choice but as a moral imperative, a divine command to restore order when order has been violated. Blood cries out for blood, as capital-punishment advocates might say.

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther, *Works: The Vengeance in Society* edited by Franklin Sherman, translated by Martin H. Bertram, P-138-39.

“This view is not entirely accurate even when applied to the deterministic works of Aeschylus and Sophocles, but it is a totally inaccurate description of Euripides, the last (although he was outlived by the nonagenarian Sophocles) of the trio of Athenian playwrights usually lumped together as the Greeks.”<sup>9</sup> As the great scholar Moses Hadas observed, the Greeks all look alike to a near-sighted reader leafing through the collected plays. On second glance, though, it is clear that Euripides, while as obsessed with the revenge theme as Aeschylus and Sophocles, was concerned not with the place of vengeance in divine order but with its consequences in the world inhabited by real men and women. His characters “do not invite tragedy in order to illustrate the operation of some grand ethical abstraction and to achieve heroism; theirs is the humbler aim of surviving as tolerably as may be amid conventional constraints which make tolerable existence difficult.” said Hadas. The gods exist, but they are not always benign-and they do not provide sufficient justification for the vengeful passions that animate an Orestes or a Medea. Oh, there are explanations for the murderous violence. Euripides Orestes is something of a thug, and Medea is a wife and mother driven to savage acts by a society that offers no legal recourse for women or foreigners. “But these explanations are not justifications, any more than a scientist’s observation of a fatal bacillus under the microscope is a justification for the organism’s existence in the universe. Although the revenge tragedies of Euripides are based on classic myths, his empirical voice conveys a startlingly modern sensibility. One can more easily imagine him in conversation with Sand, Ibsen, or Shaw than with most of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists”<sup>10</sup>. (It would of course be ridiculous to suggest that Euripides “saw” women, or conflicts between men and women, in the same way as Shaw or Ibsen. However, it seems to me that the weight of evidence-both literary and historical-supports those critics who

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<sup>9</sup> *Eumenides*, from *The Plays of Aeschylus*, translated by Philip Vellacott, P-70.

<sup>10</sup> Maimonides, *The Book of Revenge and Justices*, translated by Hyman Klein, P-195.

maintain that Euripides' relationship to his own society was more analogous to Ibsen's than to, say, Shakespeare's.)

The story of Euripides' death is itself a revenge tragedy-one the playwright might have considered a comedy. According to legend, Euripides died near a Macedonian village where he confronted the king on behalf of some poor, hungry Thracians who had killed and eaten one of the royal Molossian hounds. The king decreed a penalty of a talent apiece for each villager, but Euripides persuaded him to cancel the fine because the Thracians could not afford to pay it. Soon after ward, some other Molossian hounds were set loose for a hunt; when they found the meddling Euripides sitting peacefully in a wood outside the village, they tore him to pieces. They were the children of the original hound, whose death had gone unavenged as a result of Euripides' well-intentioned interference.

As one might expect, there is no historical evidence supporting this tale of canine blood vengeance. Euripides did, however, die in Macedonia. It is believed that he left Athens in sheer aggravation at the drama critics of his day, who, by their dismissal of much of the poet's work, left incontrovertible evidence that the Golden Age of Greece produced its share of shortsighted cultural commentators-members of a species that did not acquire a definitive description until the nineteenth century, when Charles Dickens came up with "the lice of literature."

Euripides and Sophocles both spent their young manhood and middle age in the period of prosperity and cultural glory that followed the Athenian defeat of the invading Persian armies, and they both lived to see the economic, military, and moral decline of Athens in the exhausting Peloponnesian War, which began in 431 and ended with the victory of

Sparta in 404 B.C. “Although no writer as great as Sophocles could have been impervious to the upheavals of his civilization, he cast his lot with the moral universe of the past. His vision of the limited ability of mortals to influence a fate ordained by the gods, outlined most starkly in the drama of Oedipus, is close to that of Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.), who did not live to see the wrenching effect of the war on the civilization that had formed his art.”<sup>11</sup>

Blood revenge is a central theme of all Greek tragedy, but Euripides’ attitudes differ markedly from those of Aeschylus and Sophocles. In conformity with the conventions of the Attic stage, he retained the names and stories of classical myth-but that is as far as his conformity went. As Hades observes, Euripides imagined and developed his characters as contemporaries subject to contemporary pressures. The bloody acts of revenge committed in his plays are not the results of a preordained plan, either in the classic Greek religious or the modern psychoanalytic sense. The characters do what they do out of a combination of social pressures and individual strengths and weaknesses. The gods exist, but they are not to be blamed for the follies of men and women. Acts of revenge-whether initiated by individuals or by states exchanging the usual pretexts in defense of their honor-are neither glorious nor inevitable. They are the products of lust, greed, braggadocio, and the absence of social mechanisms to regulate expressions of vengeance.

Medea is essentially a social drama; the act of vengeance at the center of the play is at once a violation of the codes that govern familial relations and a logical outgrowth of those codes. Individual character does play a role in the action: Medea has the strength and heartlessness to act as other women do not, or cannot, and Jason is something of a

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Littell, *The Collected works of Oedipus*, P- 207.

dullard in his failure to perceive the vengeful force of his wife's nature. Nevertheless, the characters-and the act that transforms their lives-are products of a social system in which a married woman is her husband's property, to be retained or cast aside as he wishes. The gods have little to do with this tragedy. (The theatrical tour of force of Medea's departure in a chariot drawn by winged dragons is nothing more than a splendid opportunity for special-effects men to display their talents; it is "intentionally incredible.") .All revenge tragedy has a strong detective element; Oedipus the King is the first detective story in literary history. For the Greeks, the detection was purely psychological, since the one thing everyone in the audience knew was who committed the crime. The gap that separates Euripides from Aeschylus and Sophocles looms especially large in light of the familiarity of the Oresteian legends upon which every dramatic interpretation is based. Untroubled by the need to construct a whodunit, the Greeks were free to explore the question of why terrible deeds occur (or are permitted to occur). Aeschylus and Sophocles ask: Under what circumstances is revenge ordained by the gods as human fate? Euripides asks: Is revenge ordained? By whom? Why?

The myth that forms the backdrop of the Oresteia is never made explicit in the plays, since it was familiar to all Greek audiences. Atreus, king of Argos, banished his brother Thyestes, whom he suspected. But Atreus devised a plan more cunning than any open attack: he killed Thyestes' children and arranged for them to be served to their father at a banquet. When Thyestes realized what his brother had done, he cursed the entire house of Atreus. The Oresteian trilogy follows the curse as it unfolds over several generations. For Aeschylus and Sophocles, acceptance of religious convention imposed inevitability upon every ensuing act of vengeance.



It is easy, even when one is familiar with the Greek myths, to forget who does what to whom in the *Oresteia*. (Who, apart from Biblical scholars and the truly pious, remembers the birth order of King David's sons or the name of the first disciple to see Jesus after the resurrection?) Agamemnon, slain at the beginning of the trilogy, is Atreus' son. He is murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra, in revenge for his sacrifice of their daughter Iphigenia. Iphigenia had to die because a seer informed Agamemnon that the Greek fleet would be destroyed before reaching Troy without the sacrifice of the king's own daughter. In Aeschylus' and Sophocles' universe, the sacrifice of Iphigenia is a reasonable act, performed by a monarch who chooses public obligation over private feeling. For Euripides, such an act can never be justified; it belongs to a sequence of vengeful folly that ensues when human beings assume roles inconsistent with human capabilities and limitations.

When the body of Agamemnon is discovered in Aeschylus' version, the chorus tries to fix the blame for the disaster on Helen of Troy and the Trojan War. No, says Clytemnestra. The curse is responsible, and the curse not only explains but justifies the murder of Agamemnon. Clytemnestra's lover, Aegisthus (recognized by the Greek audience as one of Thyestes' offspring who escaped being cooked in the fateful banquet), appears and exults over the deed:

“O happy day, when Justice comes into her own!  
Now I believe that gods, who dwell above the earth,  
See what men suffer, and award a recompense:  
Here, tangled in a net the avenging Furies wove,  
He lies, a sight to warm my heart; and pays his blood

In full atonement for his father's treacherous crime."<sup>12</sup>

The gods not only sanction vengeance; they demand it. Revenge is not only related to justice; it is justice. In the second part of the trilogy, Aeschylus and Sophocles never question the righteousness of burdening the next generation with the curse of blood revenge; Euripides does. The outline of the plot is, of course, virtually identical in all three versions: Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra's son Orestes returns to avenge his father's death by killing his mother. (The young Orestes was stolen away from the palace by his tutor to escape certain death at the hands of Aegisthus, who had taken Agamemnon's throne along with his wife.) Orestes' sister Electra, who is treated as a virtual slave by her mother and wicked stepfather, lives in the hope of her brother's return. When he does return, he carries out the mandate of the gods by murdering Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

In both Aeschylus and Sophocles, the heroes have the noble stature decreed by myth. They are dignified, carrying out the will of their ancestors and their gods. Other characters, who advocate compromise or pragmatism, are seen as pitiable at best and contemptible at worst. An exchange in Sophocles between Electra and Chrysothemis (who, unlike Orestes, was still hanging around her evil stepfather's palace and, unlike Electra, had chosen to hold her tongue) illustrates this attitude. Electra is, as usual, calling for revenge against her mother. Chrysothemis admonishes her.

"What have you come to say out of doors,  
Sister? Will you never learn, in all this time,

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<sup>12</sup> Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, from *the plays of Aeschylus*, translated by Philip Vellacott (penguin, Harmondsworth, 1959), P- 97.

Not to give way to your empty anger?  
Yet this much I know, and know my heart, too,  
That I am sick at what I see, so that  
If had strength, I would let them know how I feel.  
But under pain of punishment, I think,  
I must make my voyage with lowered sails,  
The I may not seem to do something and then prove  
Ineffectual. But justice, justice,  
Is not on my side but on yours. If I am  
To live and not as a prisoner, I must  
In all things listen to my lords.”

Electra answers :

“It is strange indeed that you who were born  
Of our father should forget him  
And heed your mother. All these warnings  
Of me you have learned from her. Nothing is your own.  
Now you must make a choice, one way or the other,  
Either to be a fool  
Or sensible-and to forget your friends.  
Here you are saying: “If I had the strength,  
I would show my hatred of them!” You who, when I  
Did everything to take vengeance for my father,  
Never did a thing to help-yes, discouraged the doer.  
Is not this cowardice on top of baseness?

I do not want to win your honor.

Nor would you if you were sound of mind.”(*sopholes*,vol-2)

When he returns, Orestes fulfills his sister’s vision of the noble avenger. Aeschylus draws a particularly awe-inspiring portrait of Orestes in *Choephoroe*, showing him temporarily losing his mind after the murder of his mother. Obedient to the injunctions of patriarchy and divinity, he carries out the task, but his human nature rebels at what he has done. He is only restored to himself by divine absolution in *Eumenides*, the conclusion of the trilogy.

In Euripides, acts of vengeance and their bloody consequences are not abstractions. Blind adherence to customs that have lost their original meaning-not gods or ancient curses-are responsible for the unfolding tragedies. To a modern audience, the posture of Euripides’ Orestes is analogous to that of the unfortunate Japanese soldiers who were left behind on isolated Pacific islands at the end of World War II and who emerged ten, fifteen, even twenty-five years later, still believing it was their obligation to fight and die for the Emperor. In *Trojan Women*, which remarkably was first performed at the height of Athenian enthusiasm for the Peloponnesian War, the shattered survivors can hardly remember the quarrels and curses and vows of retribution that brought them to ruin.

Revenge is not taken for granted in Euripides, and that, too, is remarkable within the context of his age. “Free will,” as understood in both Jewish and Christian tradition, is as absent from Euripides’ drama as it is from Aeschylus’ and Sophocles’. But Euripides, unlike his predecessors, invites us to consider the alternatives. What if Jason hadn’t been a bully and something of a fool? What if women had some socially sanctioned way of

defending their honor? What if Orestes had listened to the more gently voice of his heart, rejected Electra's call to vengeance, and decided to drop the vendetta, leaving to the gods the fulfillment of the curse on the house of Atreus-if that was their will? Of the three great Greek poets, Euripides alone asks: Must it come to this?

In the Elizabethan era, with its inescapable Christian theology, the distinction between godly public revenge and sinful private vengeance was basic to literature, religious thought, and historical analysis. To understand the revenge tragedies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is necessary to comprehend the grave error implicit in widespread modern assumptions about the moral indifference of Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences as they contemplated bloody dramatic spectacles of vengeance. Although the bonds linking revenge, justice, and honor have been persistent themes of all western literature, no other era has produced such an extraordinary outpouring of revenge tragedy, beginning with the crude, Seneca-descended melodramas of the early Elizabethan stage. Such preoccupation could never have emerged from a climate of moral indifference. The misconceptions of so many critics on this subject (perfectly embodied in Adams' 1929 introduction to Hamlet) can only be attributed to an understandable desire to deny vengeful impulses by relegating them to a more barbarous and distant past. For there is surely no lack of historical evidence demonstrating the deep concern over the morality of personal and political revenge that pervaded the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

What distinguishes the major from the minor literature of revenge-in drama, prose, and poetry-is not merely the glory of the language but the lofty balance between the emotional pull of revenge and its grave moral and civic consequences. In both Shakespeare and

Milton, for instance, the subject of revenge engenders a high moral tension that is somewhat diminished if not altogether absent-in the works of their lesser contemporaries. The difference lies not in the moral judgment regarding vengeance-all Christian writers were unswervingly negative in their conclusions-but in the weight accorded opposing arguments. No writer has ever painted a more terrible portrait of the consequences of revenge motivated by pride than Milton does in *Paradise Lost*, yet it is the devil that we remember and the devil that we understand. Satan's words move us; he would not be a true demon if his explanation left us indifferent.

"From what highth fallen: so much the stronger proved  
He with his thunder: and till then who knew  
The force of those dire arms? Yet not from those,  
Nor what the potent Victory in his rage  
Can else inflict, do I repent, or change,  
Though changed in outward lustre, that fixed mind,  
And high disdain from sense of injured merit,  
That with the Mightiest raised me to contend,  
And to the fierce contention brought along  
Innumerable force of Spirits armed,  
That durst dislike his reign, and, me preferring,  
His utmost power with adverse power opposed  
In dubious battle on the plains of Heaven,  
And shook his throne." (*Paradise Lost*, Book-1, lines 92-105)

Later, the devil justifies his temptation of men and women in terms of his quarrel with God.

“Thank him who puts me, loath, to this revenge  
On you, who wrong me not, for him who wronged.  
And, should I at your harmless innocence  
Melt, as I do, yet public reason just-  
Honour and empire with revenge enlarged  
By conquering this new World-compels me now  
To do what else, though damned, I should abhor.”(*Paradise Lost*, Book-4, lines 386-392)

Blake observed that the reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it. In a secular age, it is necessary to remind ourselves that much of the fascination inherent in the contest between Satan and God arises from a theology in which the devil is a fallen angel-and man only a little lower than the angels. In an age of faith, the drive toward revenge was regarded not as an alien intruder but as an integral part of the human soul. Control of this powerful drive-alluring precisely because of its appeal to divine aspirations in men and women-was essential for salvation.

In every era, the greatest revenge tragedies raise questions-implicitly or explicitly-about the relationship between justice and revenge and the validity of the distinction between just and unjust forms of revenge. These questions assert themselves as insistently in Shakespeare, who accepted the basic moral assumptions of his age, as they do in Euripides, whose views ran counter to those of his more popular contemporaries in

classical Athens. Shakespeare would never have questioned the divine prerogative of revenge (the demand that God justify his ways to man was Milton's-and contained enough blasphemy to justify Blake's comment), but his tragedies are filled with characters who, because they are God's appointed agents, firmly believe in the legitimacy of each of their vengeful acts. These beliefs may sometimes be justifiable according to the moral standards of their day (Hamlet, for example, is the lawful heir of the murdered king), but the heroes frequently founder on the shoals of unregulated passions that drive them to acts of revenge far beyond anything an Elizabethan God might be expected to sanction-even in his designated representatives. "These heroes also founder out of doubt and judgment, a reluctance to go too far dictated at times by mercy and at other times by prudence."<sup>14</sup> One of the most important distinctions between Shakespeare and lesser contemporaries is the fact that his tragic heroes are brought down by the best as well as the worst in their natures, and nowhere is this more evident than in the acts of revenge-usually committed in the name of justice-that complete their downfall. Before murdering Desdemona, Othello laments:

"Ah, balmy breath, that dost almost persuade  
Justice to break her sword! One more, one more.  
Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee,  
And love thee after. One more, and this the last:  
So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep,  
But they are cruel tears: this sorrow's heavenly;  
It strikes where it doth love."(Othello, Act-5, scene 2, lines 16-20.)

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<sup>14</sup> PhilipRush, *The Book of Duels*, p-195



Othello offers a perfect example of Lily Campbell's contention that all sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tragedy must be viewed as revenge drama. Any college freshman would surely say that Othello is a play "about" jealous-and, of course, it is. But the fatal unfolding of the action depends on vengeance, motivated in the first instance by Ingo's envy of Othello and in the second by Othello's jealousy of Desdemona. The classic crime of passion requires a rush to judgment on the basis of unsupported evidence and "unwritten law." Like many of Shakespeare's romantic tragedies, Othello is not simply a study of powerful emotions but of circumstances-among them, the absence of a formal proceeding to establish guilt or innocence-that unleash their destructive force. There is a telling contrast between the violent ending in Desdemona's bedchamber and an early scene in the Venetian council chamber, when Desdemona's father accuses Othello of seducing his daughter by force and witchcraft. In council, with witnesses speaking freely in the light of day, the ridiculousness of the father's vengeful accusation immediately becomes apparent.

"She loved me for the dangers I had passed.

And I loved her that she did pity them.

This only is the witchcraft I have used:

Here comes the lady; let her witness it." (Othello, Act 1, scene 3, lines 159-170.)

Philip Massinger's *The Fatal Dowry*, first performed in 1632, casts a particularly interesting light on the complexity of Elizabethan and Jacobean attitudes toward vengeance (although, in purely literary terms, it does not deserve to be classed with the works of Marlowe and Webster, much less Shakespeare). Unlike most dramas of the period, it features characters who might easily have been members of the audience-not kings and queens from distant legends or distant lands but lawyers, creditors, debtors, and

members of parliament. This is a bourgeois revenge tragedy; the only distance is afforded by the setting of the action-not the familiar English countryside but the more exotic (to London audiences) locale of Dijon. But France, unlike the courts of Venice or Byzantium, was a real place, albeit enemy territory, to the English. The characters were as familiar to a seventeenth-century audience as the distraught parents in *Kramer vs. Kramer* or the cheerful, quarrelsome family in *Cousin, Cousin* is to twentieth-century American and French audiences. Bourgeois greed, not the struggle for a throne, sets the action in motion.

A marshal who once rendered great services to the state dies in debtors' prison; his son, Charalois, offers to imprison himself so that the creditors will release his father's body for Christian burial. One of the creditors urges his fellow body-snatchers to accept the offer and notes that the handsome Charalois might easily avenge his father's death by seducing their wives and daughters.

"Accept it by all means. Let's shut him up:

He is well shaped, and has a villainous tongue

And, should he study this by way of revenge,

As I dare almost swear he loves a wench,

We have no wives, nor never shall get daughters

That will hold out against him." (Philip Massinger, *The Fatal Dowry*, Act 1, scene 2.)

After many twists and turns of the plot, Charalois marries a beautiful young woman named Beaumelle, who commits adultery with Novella, son of a creditor involved in his father's death. Charalois kills Novella in a duel; he also stabs Beaumelle to death. The

friends of both young men become involved in the quarrel; eventually, everyone is brought to court to answer for his actions. The one act of vengeance that does not fall within the jurisdiction of the court is Beaumelle's slaying. The death of a woman at the hands of her husband or father might be a human tragedy, as it is in *Othello*, but it only became a matter of civic importance when it led to demands for satisfaction and acts of revenge committed by the men of the family. Both the moral and civic importance of the act, in literature and in life, depended on the woman's virtue; *Othello's* tragedy is not that he killed Desdemona but that he was mistaken about her guilt. The death of the adulterous Beaumelle is a matter of minor import.

In fact, many of the revenge tragedies I classify as "minor"- without denying their importance in literary history-would have been far more effective as revenge's comedies than as revenge's tragedies. Few of the characters and plots of *Kyd*, *Turner*, and *Messenger* are sturdy enough to bear the weight of tragic revenge that seems appropriate in so much of *Shakespeare*, *Webster*, and *Racing*. *The Fatal Dowry*, for instance, begins with an irresistibly comic situation one can easily imagine in the hands of *Molier*: a living man is jailed in order to free a corpse. What a fine twist this might have been on the stead of the spirits of the dead exhorting the living to avenge them, a live man becomes the object of vengeance intended for the prisoner who had escaped his mortal coil.

In comic revenge, blood need not be spilled. Trickery, infidelity, simple humiliation will serve well enough as punishments to fit the crimes; proportionality, in both its private and public meanings, comes to the fore. *Falstaff* does not have to die for his ludicrous attempts to seduce *Mistresses Page* and *Ford* in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The women pretend to arrange an assignation, tell *Falstaff* he can only escape the wrath of their

husbands by being smuggled out of the house in a basket of dirty laundry, and unceremoniously dump the basket into the Thames. The husbands, instead of pursuing Falstaff with their swords, decide the whole affair is a good joke and arrange another tryst in which Falstaff is persuaded to disguise himself with a buck's head in order to meet the women in the park. The revelatory dialogue when Falstaff pulls off the head is a classic of comic revenge :

MISTRESS FORD: "Sir John, we have had ill luck; we could never meet. I will never take you for my love again; but I will always count you my deer."

FALSTAFF: I do begin to perceive that I am made an ass.

FORD: Ay, and an ox too: both the proofs are extant."(The Merry wives of Windsor, Act 5, Scene 5, lines 124-27.)

Elizabethan comedy provides an important counterpoint to the prohibition of private revenge that underlies so much of Elizabethan tragedy. The Elizabethan disapproval of revenge was directed less toward the impulse itself than toward the social consequences of its violent expression; in comedy, getting even and getting hurt (in any permanent way) are far from synonymous. The comic notion of revenge is truly sweet, because punishment-while it may be exquisitely appropriate is never allowed to magnify the importance of a trivial offense. A man who behaves like an ass is treated like an ass, and that is the end of the matter.

But comic resolution is inappropriate when it dismisses the question of responsibility for serious crimes. *Measure for Measure* is a perennially disturbing and unsatisfying play precisely because no real retribution is exacted for acts that are-by the standards of our own day as well as Shakespeare's-truly evil. The classic comic ending, in which everyone is forgiven and married off, is scarcely appropriate to the complex moral drama of hypocrisy, lust, and betrayal of public responsibility that Shakespeare has set in motion. A ruler's sworn deputy, having revived an ancient law specifying the death penalty for premarital seduction, offers to spare the young man in question if his sister will abandon her virtue and satisfy his lustful desires. The duke, who eventually pardons his deputy and everyone else, is deeply implicated, because he has disregarded his responsibilities as a ruler in order to view the results of an experiment in justice conducted under the auspices of his frail surrogate. Indeed, the duke deserves to be punished for having cast himself in the role of observer . Because of this disparity between the tragic dilemma and the comic resolution, the flaw in *Measure for Measure* is keenly felt.

In the minor revenge tragedies, with their abstract characters and predictable plots, there is no flaw to perceive because the plays work well enough on their own terms. What they lack is the unresolved dialogue concerning degrees of responsibility for crime and punishment-a dialogue that is equally lacking in the cops-and-robbers shows of television. The greatest revenge tragedies have a tantalizingly inconsistent quality; their authors always seem to be asking, "What if?" even as they assert, "It could not be otherwise."

Racine's *Phaedra*, an avowed imitation of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, written at the end of an era of great revenge tragedy, embodies this characteristic in the same way as the portrait of the devil in *Paradise Lost*. By introducing the character of Alicia as the object of

Hippolytus' romantic interest, Racine actually improved upon Euripides: his Hippolytus is pure but also engenders more empathy than the inhumanly chaste youth of Greek myth. Euripides' Hippolytus, in his single-minded devotion to the goddess of the hunt, is the sort of boy more likely to have been teased to death by his schoolmates than destroyed by the lust of a guilty stepmother. Like Hippolytus, Racine's Phaedra is a more shaded character than the Phaedra of Greek tragedy. She oscillates between the tormented, "What if?" and an equally anguished acceptance of her fate, and her sense of personal guilt and responsibility coexists with a sense of predetermined destiny. (Phaedra was written while Racine was in the early stages of returning to his Jansenist religious faith, which is of course founded on the paradox of belief in predestination vis-à-vis the obligation to act as if one's fate might be changed by personal rectitude.) When Phaedra begs Hippolytus to avenge his father by killing her, she is asking him to free her from a desire so destructive and overwhelming that it appears to be a form of divine vengeance.

"I burn with love. Yet, even as I speak,  
Do not imagine I feel innocent,  
Nor think that my complacency has fed  
The poison of the love that clouds my mind.  
The hapless victim of heaven's vengeance,  
I loathe myself more than you ever will.  
The gods are witness, they who in my breast  
Have lit the fire fatal to all my line.  
Those gods whose cruel glory it has been  
To lead astray a feeble mortal's heart.  
Yourself recall to mind the past, and how

I shunned you, cruel one, nay, drove you forth.

I strove to seem to you inhuman, vile;

The better to resist, I sought your hate.

But what availed my needless sufferings?

You hated me the more, I loved not less.

Even your misfortunes lent you added charms.

I pined; I dropped, in torments and in tears.

Your eyes alone could see that it is son,

If for a moment you could look at me.

Nay, this confession to you, ah! the shame,

Think you I made it of my own free will?

I meant to beg you, trembling, not to hate

My helpless children, whom I dared, not fail.

My foolish heart, alas, too full of you,

Could talk to you of nothing but yourself.

Take vengeance. Punish me for loving you.

Come; prove yourself your father's worthy son,

And of a vicious monster rid the world."

(Racine, *Phedra*, translated by John Cairncross, Act 2, Scene 5, Penguin

Harmondsworth, 1970).

Another great theme of revenge tragedy is the connection between the thirst for vengeance and the thirst for justice. Revenge and justice were not seen as antipodes but as regions of the same moral territory: one might all too easily move from the permitted to the prohibited zone. "This proximity is responsible both for the force of the religious injunction against vengeance and increasing awareness of the need for social institutions

to dispense just retribution. In the sixteenth century, these institutions were thought of in relatively narrow terms—mainly as instruments of social order and criminal justice. Social justice, as we understand the term today, did not emerge as an explicit theme in literary investigations of revenge until the Enlightenment—and no writer would equal Euripides' grasp of the relationship between vengeance and the absence of social justice until the nineteenth century."<sup>16</sup>

Questions of justice and revenge loomed large in the minds of those nineteenth-century writers who stripped their heroines of the meekness that was regarded as an innate and essential feminine trait. When one has been a victim, the quest for justice is frequently difficult to distinguish from the quest for revenge; the delineation of that distinction is an important, and frequently overlooked, element in the Victorian novels and drams that offer a multilayered picture of the pressing social and economic questions of their day.

Revenge tragedy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries paralleled the rise of civic procedures designed to convince the populace that "retributive justice" was best left to duly constituted authority. These institutions gave new strength to traditional religious injunctions, which, in the absence of appropriate secular restraint, had been honored mainly in the breach. The view of revenge reflected in twentieth-century literature has been influenced by a number of long-range social changes: a diminution of religious faith—especially the kind of faith that regards God as the ultimate judge who will surely repay evil, declining confidence in the efficacy of the criminal-justice, with its blurring of individual responsibility for crime; and the recent emergence of a new feminist political

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<sup>16</sup> Maimonsworth, *The book of torts*, p. 255.



analysis regarding issues of sexual revenge that have always been, in some senses beyond the law.

Many of the portrayals of revenge in modern fiction run counter to the prevailing cultural myth of a dichotomy between justice and vengeance. These portraits are commonly and mistakenly viewed as simple escape reading, but they actually employ a time-honored device to put some distance between presumable civilized readers and the primitive theme of vengeance. The world of the spy and detective, like that of the Mafia, is a reliably exotic locale, offering a whiff of brimstone without the flames; it helps bridge the gap between private emotions and the public posture of "justice, not revenge." Mystery and spy novels provide an emotionally acceptable framework for discussions of revenge because their heroes, by virtue of their profession, receive dispensations from everyday rules of conduct. They live dual lives, if only for limited periods of time. As Clark Kent, they conform to the norms that prohibit revenge. As superman, they can do anything.

Charlie Heller, the hero of Robert Littell's *The Amateur*, is a mild-mannered code expert with the Central Intelligence Agency. On the side, he uses CIA computers to search Shakespeare's plays for ciphers to support the persistent speculation that Shakespeare was only a pseudonym and someone else was really the Bard of Avon. In the middle of an ordinary day, he learns that his fiancée has been seized as a hostage by terrorists in the waiting room of the American consulate in Munich, where she was handling a simple passport problem. She is the first hostage shot by the terrorists. After the murder, he is told the CIA knows the identity of the killers-international hit men financed by the Soviet secret police-but will do nothing to retaliate because of potential diplomatic repercussions.

In one sense, twentieth-century men and women accept the preaching of both traditional religion and modern psychiatry-that one must abandon the drive toward vengeance in order to attain emotional peace. But we also believe in the importance of retribution to civic and moral order, and this sense of righteousness is violated by the taboo attached to revenge. Both our negative and positive perceptions of retribution are satisfied by literature that is preoccupied with the subject of revenge but relegates it to the semi-legitimate world of spies, police, and Mafiosi.

But most modern chronicles of revenge are concerned with men and women who have no expectation that anyone, human or divine, will assume their psychic burden. They must discharge the burden themselves or be crushed themselves-and discharge it in a world that seems to lack any legitimate outlet for rage, any way of transforming revenge into justice. P.D. James offers her characters a way out, but the protagonists of most modern dramas of revenge cannot forgive in a world where others have forgotten.

## **REVENGE IN ELIZABETHAN DRAMA**

All revenge tragedies originally stemmed from the Greeks, who wrote and performed the first plays. After the Greeks came Seneca who was very influential to all Elizabethan tragedy writers. Seneca who was Roman, basically set all of the ideas and the norms for all revenge play writers in the Renaissance era including William Shakespeare. The two most famous English revenge tragedies written in the Elizabethan era were Hamlet, written by Shakespeare and The Spanish Tragedy, written by Thomas Kyd. These two plays used mostly all of the Elizabethan conventions for revenge tragedies in their plays

Seneca was among the greatest authors of classical tragedies and there was not one educated Elizabethan who was unaware of him or his plays. There were certain stylistic and different strategically thought out devices that Elizabethan playwrights including Shakespeare learned and used from Seneca's great tragedies. The five act structure, the appearance of some kind of ghost, the one line exchanges known as stichomythia, and Seneca's use of long rhetorical speeches were all later used in tragedies by Elizabethan playwrights. Some of Seneca's ideas were originally taken from the Greeks when the Romans conquered Greece, and with it they took home many Greek theatrical ideas. Some of Seneca's stories that originated from the

Greeks like Agamemnon and Thyestes which dealt with bloody family histories and revenge captivated the Elizabethans. Seneca's stories weren't really written for performance purposes, so if English playwrights liked his ideas, they had to figure out a way to make the story theatrically workable, relevant and exciting to the Elizabethan audience who were very demanding. Seneca's influence formed part of a developing tradition of tragedies whose plots hinge on political power, forbidden sexuality, family honor and private revenge. "There was no author who exercised a wider or deeper influence upon the Elizabethan mind or upon the Elizabethan form of tragedy than did Seneca." For the dramatists of Renaissance Italy, France and England, classical tragedy meant only the ten Latin plays of Seneca and not Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles

During the time of Elizabethan Theater, plays about tragedy and revenge were very common and a regular convention seemed to be formed on what aspects should be put into a typical revenge tragedy. In all revenge tragedies first and foremost, a crime is committed and for various reasons laws and justice cannot punish the crime so the individual who is the main character, goes through with the revenge in spite of everything. The main character then usually had a period of doubt, where he tries to decide whether or not to go through with the revenge, which usually involves tough and complex planning. Other

features that were typical were the appearance of a ghost, to get the revenger to go through with the deed. The revenger also usually had a very close relationship with the audience through soliloquies and asides. The original crime that will eventually be avenged is nearly always sexual or violent or both. The crime has been committed against a family member of the revenger. The revenger places himself outside the normal moral order of things, and often becomes more isolated as the play progresses-an isolation which at its most extreme becomes madness. The revenge must be the cause of a catastrophe and the beginning of the revenge must start immediately after the crisis. After the ghost persuades the revenger to commit his deed, a hesitation first occurs and then a delay by the avenger before killing the murderer, and his actual or acted out madness. The revenge must be taken out by the revenger or his trusted accomplices. The revenger and his accomplices may also die at the moment of success or even during the course of revenge.

It should not be assumed that revenge plays parallel the moral expectations of the Elizabethan audience. Church, State and the regular morals of people in that age did not accept revenge, instead they thought that revenge would simply not under any circumstances be tolerated no matter what the original deed was. " It is repugnant on theological grounds, since Christian orthodoxy posits a world ordered

by Divine Providence, in which revenge is a sin and a blasphemy, endangering the soul of the revenger." The revenger by taking law into his own hands was in turn completely going against the total political authority of the state. People should therefore never think that revenge was expected by Elizabethan society. Although they loved to see it in plays, it was considered sinful and it was utterly condemned.

The Spanish Tragedy written by Thomas Kyd was an excellent example of a revenge tragedy. With this play, Elizabethan theater received its first great revenge tragedy, and because of the success of this play, the dramatic form had to be imitated. The play was performed from 1587 to 1589 and it gave people an everlasting remembrance of the story of a father who avenges the murder of his son. In this story, a man named Andrea is killed by Balthazar in the heat of battle. The death was considered by Elizabethan people as a fair one, therefore a problem occurred when Andrea's ghost appeared to seek vengeance on its killer. Kyd seemed to have used this to parallel a ghost named Achilles in Seneca's play Troades. Andrea's ghost comes and tells his father, Hieronimo that he must seek revenge. Hieronimo does not know who killed his son but he goes to find out. During his investigation, he receives a letter saying that Lorenzo killed his son, but he doubts this so he runs to the king for justice. Hieronimo

importantly secures his legal rights before taking justice into his own hands. The madness scene comes into effect when Hieronimo's wife, Usable goes mad, and Hieronimo is so stunned that his mind becomes once again unsettled. Finally Hieronimo decides to go through with the revenge, so he seeks out to murder Balthazar and Lorenzo, which he successfully does. Hieronimo becomes a blood thirsty maniac and when the king calls for his arrest, he commits suicide.

As well as the fact that Elizabethan theater had its rules about how a revenge tragedy had to be, so did Thomas Kyd. He came up with the Kydian Formula to distinguish revenge tragedies from other plays. His first point was that the fundamental motive was revenge, and the revenge is aided by an accomplice who both commit suicide after the revenge is achieved. The ghost of the slain watches the revenge on the person who killed him. The revenger goes through Justifiable hesitation before committing to revenge as a solution. Madness occurs due to the grieve of a loss. Intrigue is used against and by the revenger. There is bloody action and many deaths that occur throughout the entire play. The accomplices on both sides are killed. The villain is full of villainous devices. The revenge is accomplished terribly and fittingly. The final point that Thomas Kyd made about his play was that minor characters are left to deal with the situation at the end of the play.

The Spanish Tragedy follows these rules made by Kyd very closely, simply because Kyd developed these rules from the play. The fundamental motive was revenge because that was the central theme of the play. The ghost of Andrea sees his father kill the men who murdered Andrea originally. Hieronimo hesitates first because he goes to the king and then he is faced with Isabella's madness which is caused by Andrea's death. The play is filled with all kinds of bloody action and many people die throughout the course of the play. The accomplices in the play also all end up dead. Lorenzo who is the true villain, is full of all kinds of evil villainous devices. The revenge works out perfectly, in that both Lorenzo and Balthazar get murdered in the end by Hieronimo. The minor characters were left to clean up the mess of all of the deaths that occurred during the play. The Spanish Tragedy also follows the conventions of Elizabethan theater very closely. The murder was committed and Hieronimo had to take justice into his own hands, because true justice just simply wasn't available. Hieronimo then delays his revenge for many different reasons that occur in the play. The ghost of Andrea appeared and guided Hieronimo to the direction of his killer. Also at the end of the play, both Hieronimo and his accomplices die after they were



successful in committing the revenge. One important part of all revenge plays is that after the revenge is finally decided upon, the tragic hero delays the actual revenge until the end of the play.

Revenge although thought to be unlawful and against the Church was absolutely adored by all Elizabethan people. The Elizabethan audience always insisted on seeing eventual justice, and one who stained his hands with blood had to pay the penalty. That no revenges, no matter how just, ever wholly escapes the penalty for shedding blood, even in error.

## **Short Summary Of *Wuthering Heights***

Wuthering Heights is a novel that is told in a series of narratives, which are themselves told to the narrator, a gentleman named Lockwood rents a fine house and park called Thrushcross Grange in Yorkshire, and gradually learns more and more about the histories of two local families. This is what he learns from a housekeeper, Ellen Dean, who had been with one of the two families for all of her life:

In around 1760, a gentleman-farmer named Earnshaw went from his farm, Wuthering Height to Liverpool on a business trip. He found there a little boy who looked like a gypsy who had apparently been abandoned on the streets, and brought the child home with him, to join his own family of his wife, his son Hindley, his daughter Catherine, a manservant named Joseph and the little maid, Ellen. He named the boy Heathcliff after a son of his who had died. All the other members of the household were opposed to the introduction of a strange boy, except for Catherine, who was a little younger than Heathcliff and became fast friends with him. Hindley in particular felt as though Heathcliff had supplanted his place, although he was several years older, and the true son and heir. Hindley bullied Heathcliff when he could, and Heathcliff used his influence over Earnshaw to get his way. Heathcliff was a strange, silent boy, who appeared not to mind the blows he received from Hindley, although he was in fact very

vindictive. Earnshaw's wife died. Hindley was sent away to college in a last attempt to turn him into a worthy son, and to ease pressures at home.

After some years, Earnshaw's health declined and he grew increasingly alienated from his family: in his peevish old age he believed that everyone disliked Heathcliff, because he liked him. He did not like his daughter Catherine's charming and mischievous ways. Finally he died, and Catherine and Heathcliff were very grieved, but consoled each other with thoughts of heaven.

Hindley returned, now around twenty years old. Heathcliff was about twelve and Catherine was eleven. He was married to a young woman named Frances, to the surprise of everyone at Wuthering heights. Hindley used his new power to reduce Heathcliff to the level of a servant, although Heathcliff and Catherine continued their intimacy. Catherine taught Heathcliff her lessons, and would join him in the fields, or they would run away to the moors all day to play, never minding their punishments afterward.

One day they ran down to the Grange, a more civilized house where the Lintons lived with their children Edgar (13) and Isabella (11). They despised the spoiled, delicate Linton children, and made faces and yelled at them through the window. The Lintons called for help and the

wilder children fled, but Catherine was caught by a bulldog, and they were brought inside. When the Lintons found out that the girl was Miss Earnshaw, they took good care of her and threw Heathcliff out.

Catherine stayed at the Grange for 5 weeks, and came home dressed and acting like a proper young lady, to the delight of Hindley and his wife, and to Heathcliff's sorrow (he felt as though she had moved beyond him). In the next few years, Catherine struggled to maintain her relationship with Heathcliff, and to socialize with the elegant Linton children.

Frances gave birth to a son, Hareton, and died soon after of tuberculosis. Hindley gave into wild despair and alcoholism, and the household fell into chaos. Heathcliff was harshly treated, and came to hate Hindley more and more. Edgar Linton fell in love with Catherine, who was attracted by what he represented, although she loved Heathcliff much more seriously. They became engaged, and Heathcliff ran away. Catherine fell ill after looking for Heathcliff all night in a storm, and went to the Grange to get better. The older Lintons caught her fever and died of it. Edgar and Catherine were married when she was 18 or 19.

They lived fairly harmoniously together for almost a year then Heathcliff returned. He had mysteriously acquired gentlemanly

manners, education, and some money. Catherine was overjoyed to see him; Edgar considerably less so. Heathcliff stayed at Wuthering Heights, where he gradually gained financial control by paying Hindley's gambling debts. Heathcliff's relationship with the Linton household became more and more strained as Edgar became extremely unhappy with the situation. Finally there was a violent quarrel: Heathcliff left the Grange to avoid being thrown out by Edgar's servants, Catherine was angry at both of the men, and Edgar was furious at Heathcliff and displeased by his wife's behavior. Catherine shut herself in her room for several days. In the mean time, Heathcliff eloped with Isabella (who was struck by his romantic appearance) by way of revenge on Edgar. Edgar could not forgive his sister's betrayal of him, and didn't try to stop the marriage. Catherine became extremely ill, feverish and delirious, and nearly died though she was carefully tended by Edgar once he found out her condition.

A few months later, Catherine was still very delicate, and looked as though she would probably die. She was pregnant. Heathcliff and Isabella returned to The Wutherring Heights , and Isabella wrote to Ellen to describe how brutally she was mistreated by her savage husband, and how much she regretted her marriage. Ellen went to visit them, to see if she could improve Isabella's situation. She told them about Catherine's condition, and Heathcliff asked to see her.

A few days later, Heathcliff came to the Grange while Edgar was at church. He had a passionate reunion with Catherine, in which they forgave each other as much as possible for their mutual betrayals. Catherine fainted, Edgar came back, and Heathcliff left. Catherine died that night after giving birth to a daughter. Edgar was terribly grieved and Heathcliff wildly so he begged Catherine's ghost to haunt him. A few days later Hindley tried to murder Heathcliff, but Heathcliff almost murdered him instead. Isabella escaped from Wuthering heights and went to live close to London, where she gave birth to a son, Linton. Hindley died a few months after his sister Catherine.

Catherine and Edgar's daughter, Catherine, grew to be a beloved and charming child. She was brought up entirely within the confines of the Grange, and was entirely unaware of the existence of Wuthering Heights , Heathcliff, or her cousin Hareton there. Once she found the farmhouse while exploring the moors, and was upset to think that such an ignorant rustic as Hareton could be related to her. Ellen told her she could not return there.

Isabella died when Linton was about 12 years old, and Edgar went to fetch him to the Grange. Linton was a peevish and effeminate boy, but Catherine was pleased to have a playmate. That very day, however, Heathcliff sent Joseph to fetch his son to Wuthering Heights , and when Catherine woke up the next morning her cousin was gone.

Though sad at first, she soon got over it, and continued her happy childhood.

On her sixteenth birthday, Catherine and Ellen strayed onto Heathcliff's lands, and he invited them into Wuthering heights to see Linton. Catherine was pleased to renew her acquaintance, and Heathcliff was eager to promote a romance between the two cousins, so as to ensure himself of Edgar's land when he died. When they returned home, Edgar forbade her to continue visiting there, and said that Heathcliff was an evil man. Catherine then began a secret correspondence with Linton, which became an exchange of love letters. Ellen found out, and put an end to it.

Edgar became ill. Heathcliff asked Catherine to return to Wuthering Heights because Linton was breaking his heart for her. She did so, and found Linton to be a bullying invalid, but not without charm. Ellen fell ill as well and was unable to prevent Catherine from visiting Wuthering Heights every day. She felt obliged to help Linton, and despised Hareton for being clumsy and illiterate. Ellen told Edgar about the visits when she found out, and he forbade Catherine to go any more.

Edgar was in poor health and didn't know about Linton's equally bad health and bad character, so he thought it would be good for Catherine to marry him since Linton and not Catherine would inherit the Grange,

most likely. A system was fixed up in which Linton and Catherine met outside. Linton was increasingly ill, and seemed to be terrified of something his father was forcing him to court Catherine. Heathcliff feared Linton would die before Edgar did, so eventually he all but kidnapped Catherine and Ellen, and told them Catherine couldn't go home to see her dying father until she married Linton. Catherine did marry Linton, and escaped in time to see Edgar before he died.

After Edgar's funeral (he was buried next to his wife) Heathcliff fetched Catherine to Wuthering Heights to take care of Linton, who was dying, and to free up the Grange so he could rent it out (to Lockwood, in fact). He told Ellen that he was still obsessed by his beloved Catherine, and had gone to gaze at her long-dead body when her coffin was uncovered by the digging of Edgar's grave.

Catherine had to care of Linton alone, and when he died, she maintained an unfriendly attitude to the household: Heathcliff, Hareton (who was in love with her), and Zillah the housekeeper. As time passed, however, she became lonely enough to seek Hareton's company, and began teaching him to read.

This is around the time of Lockwood's time at the Grange. He left the area for several months, and when he returned, he found out that while he was gone:



Heathcliff began to act more and more strangely, and became incapable of concentrating on the world around him, as though Catherine's ghost wouldn't let him. He all but stopped eating and sleeping, and Ellen found him dead one morning, with a savage smile on his face. He was buried next to Catherine, as he had wished. Hareton grieved for him, but was too happy with the younger Catherine to be inconsolable. When the novel ends, they plan to marry and move to the Grange.

## **Revenge and Destructive Relationships in Wuthering Heights**

Many people in the world are trying to find a perfect companion.

Some of these may marry and not know what their new husband or wife is like.

This kind of situation often leads to separation or hostility. Other situations may develop between two friends that stem from jealousy, desire for revenge, uncaring parents, etc.

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* displays several characteristics of destructive relationships. Three of these are uncaring parents, marriage without knowing the person, and jealousy.

Uncaring or unsympathizing parents are shown throughout this story to be an element of destructive relationships. Because Heathcliff gained all the attention from Mr. Earnshaw, Hindley became disassociated from his father. This separation continued until after Mr. Earnshaw had died. Another example is between Hindley and Hareton. Hindley became such a drunk and a gambler that he could not properly care for young Hareton. This led to a separation between Hareton and his father as well. One primary example of an uncaring parent is shown between Heathcliff and his son Linton. Heathcliff did not even want his son for anything except enacting a part of his revenge. This is shown by Linton's fear of Heathcliff and Heathcliff's enmity toward his son. Linton even says "... my father threatened me, and I dread him - I dread him!"(244) to express his feeling about Heathcliff. The hostility and separation between father and son in this book shows that uncaring parents can cause serious damage in relationships with their children.

This element of destructive behavior may stem from an unhappy marriage in which the husbands or wives don't know each other. This had happened between Isabella and Heathcliff. Isabella did not really know Heathcliff when she married him, but after she had married him she saw that Heathcliff was not a gentleman at all. To declare her feelings she wrote " Is Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil? I shan't tell my reasons for making this inquiry; but I beseech you to explain, if you can, what I have married ..." (125). Another example of this is when Catherine married Edgar Linton. Although she had been happy at the beginning of the marriage, she thought having parties all the time was going to be fun. Yet, after a while, she became bored. She also realized that she loved Heathcliff more than Edgar and would always love Heathcliff.

This enlightenment created separation between Edgar and Catherine during the final years of Cathy's life. An additional marriage which was made that was doomed was the one between Catherine and Linton. Because this was a forced marriage, Cathy had not yet learned all she could about Linton. Because she did not know until after the marriage that Linton was selfish and inconsiderate, she became distressed and grew isolated in the house. These three failed marriages described in this novel show that knowing the person you will marry is very important.

While these marriages took place, jealousy also took a hold in some relationships. One example of this is when Mr. Earnshaw starts to favor Heathcliff over his own son, Hindley. Because of this, Hindley becomes jealous of young Heathcliff and sets out to make Heathcliff's life a

nightmare. Hindley's jealousy becomes evident when he says, "... be damned you beggarly interloper! and wheedle my father out of all he has; only afterwards show him what you are, imp of Satan."(35). Jealousy was also found very notably in the relationship between Heathcliff and Edgar Linton. The jealousy between them is expressed when Heathcliff and Edgar start a hostile conversation after Cathy's homecoming at Christmas near the beginning of the book. As the story progresses these two become bitter enemies who will not speak to one another. Another relationship which jealousy ruined is the one between Hareton and Linton. These two become jealous of each other over Cathy's affections. This relationship ends as Hareton and Linton hating each other. These relationships show that jealousy can ruin a relationship very quickly.

The jealousy, neglect, and unprepared nature of the many relationships in this book indicates that many of the relationships in this book have gone "sour". In spite of all these destructive elements one relationship may succeed. This is the one between Cathy and Hareton. Because there is no more jealousy or neglect, and because they are getting to know each other, their relationship has a good chance of succeeding. Because all the other failed relationships in this book containing the elements; jealousy, neglect, and ignorance concerning the nature of your companion; one can conclude that these elements will destroy any relationship.

There are many major themes of the book, but revenge is the most imminent theme, the factor that leads the protagonists to their dismal fate. Bronte proves there is no peace in eternal vengeance and in the end self-injury involved in serving revenge's purposes will be more damaging than the original wrong.

Heathcliff never finds peace through his revenge. In fact, the only time he truly finds happiness is when he gives up his plan for retaliation. Austin O'Malley states "Revenge is like biting a dog that bit you" (O'malley 1). O'Malley's quote reflects Heathcliff's immature need to propagate agony in those who have offended him. Heathcliff's plan for revenge on Edgar and Catherine is to marry Isabella, who is ignorant of love and of men because she has never experienced either. He wants to hurt Edgar because of his marriage to Catherine, and he wants to get revenge on Catherine by making her jealous. Catherine's death proves that this flawed plan of repayment helps nothing. Heathcliff, haunted by the ghost of Catherine because he is her "murderer," still is motivated by the need for revenge and tries to get young Cathy away from Edgar by having her marry his son, Linton. Heathcliff never finds peace until he gives up his plan for revenge just before he dies. When Heathcliff gives up his plan for revenge, he meets Catherine in death and truly becomes happy once more.

Catherine's revenge does not make things better for her. Her revenge on Heathcliff by blaming him for her upcoming death does not meliorate her

mind. Just before she dies, she ascribes Heathcliff for her "murder." "You have killed me, and thriven on it, I think" (Bronte 158). Catherine resembles what Oliver Goldsmith said, "When lovely woman stoops to folly, and finds too late that men betray, what charm can soothe her melancholy? What art can wash her guilt away? The only art her guilt to cover, To hide her shame from every eye, To give repentance to her lover, And wring his bosom, is—to die" (Oliver Goldsmith 1). Catherine's death is caused by her lack of emotional control and her dual personalities. She and Heathcliff "are" each other (Bronte 80), but her wants of social status and popularity draw her toward Edgar (Bronte 78). She does not love Edgar, but her selfish material wants control her. Catherine's revenge on Heathcliff does not assist her in finding happiness. She looks forward to dying and is "wearying to escape into that glorious world" (Bronte 160). Her death is, however, miserable as she wanders around the earth as a waif for 20 years occasionally visiting Heathcliff and torturing him.

Just as Heathcliff and Catherine's revenge make them miserable, Hindley's revenge on Heathcliff causes him to go bankrupt and eventually die. Hindley's attempt to kill Heathcliff only hurts himself in the process; it proves the point Isabella makes, "Treachery and violence are spears pointed at both ends; they wound those who resort to them worse than their enemies" (Bronte 177). The fact that Hindley is mistreated as a child reflects the built up anger and resentment inside him and towards others. The hurt that Hindley feels is clearly understood, but sympathy for Hindley is only temporary because it is still his own

fault for his predicaments. Hindley's loss of Wuthering Heights to Heathcliff and his mysterious death reflect how revenge does not make anything better, only worse.

Bronte corroborates that revenge is not only a harsh and rash way to live life, but is counter-productive and hurtful. Out of all of her major themes, revenge is the most imminent. The self-hurt involved with vengeance shows there are better ways to solve conflicts. Bronte sends a great message across by showing how negative revenge can be. There is no solution to obeying the spontaneous reaction of this negative reprisal.

However, Heathcliff's vengeance, hit on exactly the most efficient method of revenging himself on Catherine. Torn between the love of her life and the husband she dotes on, she dies from grief. Thus, in the years following Catherine's death, Heathcliff transforms into a diabolical monster whose only bliss lies...in inflicting misery. Heathcliff deliberately manipulates Hindley's addiction to alcohol and gambling in order to draw the master of Wuthering Heights into debt. Therefore, with Hindley's death the estate reverts to Heathcliff because he holds the mortgage to the property. His actions refuted Victorian morals and exile him from the company of decent people. Heathcliff's character banishes him from everything good, respectable and kind. In the end, a generation is lost to the

oppressiveness of a strict society that forced conformity. As children, Heathcliff and Catherine were chastised for wandering the periphery of society, rejecting the chains of conformity. However, as they grew and attempted to abide by the restrictive rules, they were forced apart and each lived equally unhappy. In the Victorian Era, marriage and the expectations of society jailed the artist and restricted freedom of thought and action. The novel *Wuthering Heights* reflects the suppressed passion for life experienced by Emily Bronte.



## **Appendix**

### **Deconstructing the Arabesque of Revenge in Emily Bronte's "Wuthering Heights"**

By

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The theme of revenge has been shaped into a finely ornamented arabesque in Emily Bronte's "Wuthering Heights". The subsidiary themes of possession, social status incest, adultery, child abuse and treachery and violence have been curiously intertwined with the main theme of revenge to foreground it. The central motif in this exquisitely crafted arabesque is Heathcliff and his unquenchable thirst for revenge.

#### **Master and Servant**

The elder Earnshaw adopts Heathcliff and is partial to him. Consequently Hindley his own son regards Heathcliff as a "usurper of his father's affections and his privileges" (Ch.4) and hates him. After the death of Hindley's parents "Hindley became tyrannical" (Ch.6) and treat Heathcliff cruelly "compelling him to [labour] as hard as any other lad

on the farm." (Ch.6) Heathcliff plans to avenge all the abuse he suffers at the hands of his new master Hindley: "I'm trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back. I don't care how long I wait, if I can only do it at last" (Ch.7). Heathcliff succeeds in ruining Hindley who finally drinks himself to death. Heathcliff the former servant and at present a mere guest becomes "the master of Wuthering Height's" (Ch.17). But his thirst for revenge is not satisfied and is extended to the next generation: "I [Heathcliff] want the triumph of seeing my descendant fairly lord of their estates: my child hiring their children to till their father's lands for wages" (Ch.20). Heathcliff succeeds in avenging his lost childhood happiness by brutalizing Hindley's son Hareton Earnshaw who is the true heir of Wuthering Heights: "I've got him faster than his scoundrel of a father secured me and lower□c..You'll own that I've out-matched Hindley there" (Ch.21).

### **Incest**

After Hindley leaves for college the incestuous relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff develops faster and becomes stronger: "She was much too fond of Heathcliff" (Ch.5). But because of circumstances – "the luckless adventure at Thrushcross Grange" and its consequences (Ch.6 and 7); and the misunderstanding in ch.9: "it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now"- Heathcliff and Catherine are separated. Heathcliff leaves Wuthering Heights and Catherine marries Edgar Linton. Catherine and Heathcliff are frustrated because they realise that their passionate love for one another can never be consummated. It is this ardent desire for one another which prevents their love from turning to hate and seeking vengeance on one another: Catherine

tells Nelly in Ch.10 "I'll take no revenge on his folly", and in Ch.11 Heathcliff tells Catherine "I seek no revenge on you".

### **Adultery**

However both of them become embittered, and their marital relationship with their respective lawful spouses is blighted. Trapped between a jealous husband: " It is impossible for you to be my friend and his at the same time; and I absolutely require to know which you choose" and a passionate lover Catherine tells Nelly in Ch.11 " I'll try to break their hearts by breaking my own."

### **Romantic Love**

Heathcliff on his return to Wuthering Heights is lucky enough to find the means to wreak his vengeance on his childhood enemy Edgar who is now the lawful husband of Isabella. Isabella, Edgar's sister, and the future heir of Thrushcross Grange: "She's her brother's heir, is she not?" (Ch.10) becomes infatuated with Heathcliff. In spite of Catherine's and Nelly's advice Isabella elopes with Heathcliff, marries him and settles down at Wuthering Heights. Consequently brother and sister become estranged once and for all.

As soon as Heathcliff begins to ill treat Isabella she realizes her folly: "he wishes to provoke Edgar to desperation: he says he has married me on purpose to obtain hower

over him" (Ch.14). Isabella's romantic love turns to hate: "I do hate him -- I am wretched -- I have been a fool" (Ch.13), and her only pleasure "is to die, or to see him dead!" (Ch.14).

### **Estranged wife and common enemy**

Hindley the impoverished alcoholic urges Isabella to become his accomplice to murder Heathcliff his sworn enemy: "if we were neither of us cowards, we might combine to discharge it"; "treachery and violence are a just return for treachery and violence are a just return for treachery and violence!" cried Hindley. "Mrs. Heathcliff, I'll ask you do nothing, but sit still and be dumb" (Ch.17) Isabella, however, refuses: "I cannot commit murder" (Ch.17). But her desire to personally avenge all her disappointments in romantic love is always keen: "if I might cause his sufferings and he might know that I was the cause. Oh, I owe him so much. It is, if I may take an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; for every wrench of agony return a wrench: reduce him to my level" (Ch.17). Unlike Hindley who attempts to murder Heathcliff Isabella decides to torment him verbally: "pulling out the nerves with red hot pincers requires more coolness than knocking on the head" (Ch17). Both Hindley and Isabella experience Heathcliff's hatred and anger and are almost killed by him. Isabella flees from her husband and lives for a little more than twelve years after giving birth to a son named Linton Heathcliff. Hindley, meanwhile drinks himself to death and Heathcliff becomes "the master of Wuthering Heights" and Hareton its true heir a mere servant.

## **Generation Next**

Heathcliff continues to hate Edgar even after Isabella's death and plans to take revenge on him because he can inherit Thrushcross Grange only after Edgar's death. To accomplish this evil end he uses Edgar's own daughter younger Cathy. He traps and makes Cathy a prisoner in Wuthering Heights and gets her married hastily to his own dying son even as her own father Edgar lies on his deathbed. In spite of all her tearful pleas Heathcliff refuses to allow her to be at her father's bedside in his dying moments. Heathcliff exults malevolently: "I shall enjoy myself remarkably in thinking your father will be miserable" (Ch27). After Edgar dies Heathcliff becomes the owner of Thrushcross Grange also.

## **Father and Son**

Emily Bronte completes her arabesque by foregrounding Heathcliff's heartlessness when she portrays him as a cruel father ill treating his own dying son: "I (Nelly) could not picture a father treating a dying child as tyrannically and wickedly as I afterwards learnt Heathcliff had treated him" (Ch25). As his son is about to die Heathcliff remarks, "his life is not worth a farthing, and I won't spend a farthing on him" (Ch30). Heathcliff hates his own son because he reminds him of Isabella: "Thou art thy mother's child entirely! Where is my share in thee, puling chicken?" (Ch20); and as far as he is concerned he is only an instrument to take revenge on Edgar: "his property (Thruscross Grange) would go to me; but, to prevent disputes, I desire their union (Linton Heathcliff and the younger Cathy), and am resolved to bring it about" (Ch21).

To conclude, the novel seems to be a wholesale rejection of love and forgiveness. This is evident on deconstructing the arabesque of revenge which reveals to us that its binary opposition 'forgiveness' is marginalized for even when he knows that he is going to die Heathcliff does not seek anyone's forgiveness least of all Christ's: " I repent of nothing□c□c No minister need come; nor need anything be said over me" (Ch34). But at the penultimate moment the deconstructive aporia undoes the arabesque: Hareton Earnshaw and the younger Cathy fall romantically in love and the novel ends with the future hope of conjugal bliss: "the crown of all my wishes will be the union of those two. I shall envy no one on their wedding-day: there won't be a happier woman than myself in England!" (Ch32). The central logic of the text thus undoes itself.

## Conclusion

To conclude, we notice that the concept of revenge has undergone many changes since its entry in classical literature. At one stage it almost appears like a cult which couldn't be ignored. Initially revenge appears to be a very simple action like "an eye for eye" or "for a tooth for a tooth". Gradually the simple concept of revenge was turned into a complicated ritual which one found difficult to escape. The interesting point is revenge continues to be there as a driving force behind many works of literature. Often it is blunt and direct while at times it becomes subtle and suggestive. But the fact is, it continues to remain as a driving force in literature. Often it comes to the surface to make its presence conspicuous, at times it stays there as an undercurrent impact of which is inescapable.