

REVENGE IN EMILY BRONTË'S NOVEL *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

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Abstract

The research seeks to uncover the causal factors and detrimental effects of revenge as depicted in Emily Brontë's novel, *Wuthering Heights*. Given its focus on societal phenomena, the chosen methodology is the descriptive qualitative approach, aimed at elucidating these social dynamics. The analysis draws upon theories of revenge proposed by Barcaccia et al. and Schwartz, which respectively delve into the underlying elements of vengeance. Revenge arises from a potent desire to seek retribution for perceived injustices, often manifesting as the infliction of harm or suffering upon the perceived wrongdoer. However, rather than achieving justice, revenge often perpetuates a cycle of retaliation, as individual interpretations of moral equilibrium seldom align. *Wuthering Heights* serves as the primary source of data, with textual excerpts informing the analysis. The findings reveal three primary instigators of revenge: betrayal, injustice, and insult, with resultant negative impacts including depression and anxiety.

Keywords: anxiety; betrayal; depression; injustice; insult

1. Introduction

Literature has long been a mirror to human nature, reflecting the multifaceted aspects of our existence, including our deepest desires, fears, and motivations. One such ubiquitous theme that resonates throughout literary works is revenge. Revenge, as a driving force, has the power to propel characters through intricate plots, unraveling moral dilemmas, and ethical quandaries. In this essay, we delve into the complexities of revenge as depicted in literary works, exploring its manifestations, implications, and the broader insights it offers into the human psyche.

Revenge, at its core, stems from a primal instinct for justice, the desire to right a perceived wrong. However, in literature, it often transcends mere retribution, evolving into a nuanced exploration of human emotions, morality, and the consequences of one's actions. Whether fueled by personal vendettas, societal injustices, or existential crises, revenge serves as a potent catalyst, driving characters to extremes as they navigate the blurred boundaries between righteousness and moral decay.

Central to the portrayal of revenge in literary works is the inherent moral ambiguity surrounding its execution. While protagonists may justify their actions as righteous, the collateral damage inflicted often raises profound ethical questions. Moreover, revenge in literature serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the cyclical

nature of violence and the futility of seeking solace through retribution. Characters who succumb to the lure of revenge often find themselves ensnared in a web of their own making, sacrificing their humanity in pursuit of hollow victories.

Emily Brontë's magnum opus, *Wuthering Heights*, transcends the bounds of conventional romance to delve into the darker recesses of the human psyche, where passion, obsession, and revenge intertwine. Set against the windswept moors of Yorkshire, Brontë's novel is a haunting exploration of the destructive power of vengeance, woven into the fabric of its complex characters and tumultuous narrative. In this essay, we navigate the windswept moors of *Wuthering Heights* to unravel the intricate tapestry of revenge that permeates the novel. From its inception, revenge casts a long shadow over the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, shaping their destinies and driving the narrative forward. At the heart of this vendetta is Heathcliff, a brooding and enigmatic figure whose quest for revenge against those who wronged him fuels the novel's tumultuous plot. Rejected by his adoptive family, tormented by unrequited love, Heathcliff becomes a harbinger of retribution, orchestrating a series of calculated schemes to exact his vengeance upon the Earnshaw and Linton families.

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Wuthering Heights, published in 1847 under the pseudonym Ellis Bell, is the only novel written by Emily Brontë, the middle of the three Brontë sisters. The novel was initially met with mixed reviews due to its dark themes and unconventional narrative structure, which diverged from the typical Victorian romance of the time. However, over the years, it has come to be regarded as a masterpiece of English literature and a seminal work of Gothic fiction. Set in the harsh landscape of the Yorkshire moors, *Wuthering Heights* tells the story of the passionate and tumultuous relationship between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, an orphan taken in by the Earnshaw family. Brontë weaves a narrative of love, betrayal, revenge, and redemption, exploring the depths of human emotion and the consequences of unchecked passion. Despite its initial reception, *Wuthering Heights* has endured as a classic of English literature, admired for its rich characterizations, evocative prose, and exploration of

complex themes. It continues to captivate readers with its haunting portrayal of love and loss against the backdrop of the windswept moors.

The novel becomes the main of data source in the research, having a focus on revenge, with the points of discussion concerned with the causing factors and the negative impacts of revenge. Analyzing revenge in a novel is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, revenge is a deeply human emotion and motivation, one that has captivated storytellers and readers for centuries. By examining how revenge is portrayed in a novel, readers gain insights into the complexities of human nature, including the impulses, desires, and moral dilemmas that drive individuals to seek retribution. Through the lens of revenge, novels often explore broader themes such as justice, morality, power dynamics, and the consequences of one's actions. Additionally, studying revenge in literature allows readers to confront and reflect on their own attitudes and beliefs regarding justice and ethical behavior. Moreover, by delving into the motivations and consequences of revenge, readers can develop a deeper understanding of the characters and their relationships, as well as the broader social, cultural, and historical contexts in which the novel is set. Overall, analyzing revenge in a novel provides a rich and nuanced framework for exploring the complexities of the human experience and the moral dilemmas that shape our lives.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Revenge

Revenge, at its core, is a deeply ingrained human response to perceived injustice or wrongdoing. It is an emotional and often visceral reaction, driven by a desire to retaliate or seek retribution against those who have caused harm or offense. Revenge can manifest in various forms, from subtle acts of retaliation to elaborate schemes of vengeance, depending on the individual's motivations and circumstances. It is fueled by a complex interplay of emotions such as anger, resentment, and a thirst for justice, as well as a need to restore one's sense of power and control in the face of perceived victimization. However, revenge is also fraught with moral and ethical implications, often leading to a cycle of violence and further harm. While it may provide a temporary sense of satisfaction or closure, revenge is ultimately a destructive force that can perpetuate conflict and hinder the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation. Thus, the concept of revenge encompasses not only the act of seeking retribution but also the profound psychological, social, and moral ramifications that accompany it.

Frijda (1994: 263) states that revenge is one of the strongest human passions. Revenge can be caused by injustice act. Injustice is more dominant than justice (Fatmaliza & Asnani, 2023). This means that if someone has reached the limit of his patience, then at any time he can release his anger if he constantly feels threatened. When we want something in life, we must do and accept a consequence to get that (Mulia & Pardi, 2020). Like being hungry, one regards revenge as a need to be satisfied. The capacity to engage in revenge emerges in childhood (Chernyak et al., 2019).

According to McCullough (2008) revenge may enable victims to reduce their distress by restoring equity with the transgressor. Usually someone takes revenge because he has become a victim of an act or received very inhumane treatment. McCullough (2008) further states that revenge is a behavior that is rife and often appears in the form of aggression or conflict. The desire for revenge can be a motivation for someone to kill, hurt others and even international conflicts. Revenge is a response to restore self-esteem that is felt to be lost. (Boon, et al. 2011) states that revenge that is

carried out in addition to causing negative consequences also has positive consequences to restore the feelings of the avenger who is hurt, to teach the aggressor a lesson to improve relationships, to restore a sense of justice and self-esteem to the avenger.

Bloom & Waal (2001) then state that revenge is a wild justice, or justice gone wrong. Revenge as a response to unfair treatment, not appreciated, gives rise to efforts to uphold dignity and justice in a wild manner and is sometimes contrary to law and ethics. Everyone has different reasons and ways to fight for justice and self-esteem that they feel they have lost depending on how they internalize and interpret the value of self-esteem in everyday life.

2.1.1 Some Factors Influencing Revenge

2.1.1.1 Betrayal

Betrayal is one of moral crimes or social injuries that could break a trust of someone or even of society. Lifton (1983: 11) claims that the relation of moral development to trust betrayal has not been extensively developed in literature, nor has moral stage to be connected someone's personality, except in a few instances. Lifton (1983:11) adds that a long-term relationship cannot guarantee that there would be no betrayal in it, no matter how small it is betrayal still betrayal. Betrayal can occur between friends and beloved partner. When one feels cheated, one definitely feels angry, sad, and disappointed. In the end this betrayal can end up being a revenge.

2.1.2 Injustice

Injustice encompasses a broad spectrum of actions, situations, and systems that violate principles of fairness, equity, and human rights. It manifests in various forms, ranging from individual acts of discrimination and oppression to systemic inequalities ingrained within social, political, and economic structures. At its core, injustice entails the deprivation or denial of basic rights, opportunities, and dignity to individuals or groups based on factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, or sexual orientation. Injustice can be overt, such as blatant acts of prejudice and discrimination, or insidious, perpetuated through institutionalized biases and policies that disadvantage marginalized communities. Its effects are far-reaching, resulting in disparities in access to education, healthcare, employment, and justice, as well as perpetuating cycles of poverty, violence, and disenfranchisement. Moreover, injustice undermines the fundamental principles of equality and human dignity, eroding social cohesion and trust in institutions. Addressing injustice requires not only identifying and challenging discriminatory practices and systems but also advocating for systemic reforms that promote equity, inclusion, and respect for human rights for all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances (Zdaniuk & Bobocel, 2012).

2.1.3 Insult

An insult is a verbal, non-verbal, or symbolic expression that is intended to belittle, offend, or demean someone's dignity, worth, or reputation. Insults can take various forms, ranging from derogatory remarks and offensive gestures to mocking or humiliating actions. They are often used as a means of asserting dominance, expressing hostility, or provoking a reaction from the target. Insults can target a person's appearance, intelligence, abilities, beliefs, or any other aspect of their identity. While some insults may be delivered impulsively or in jest, others are calculated and deliberate, intended to inflict emotional harm or undermine the recipient's confidence

and self-esteem. Insults can have profound psychological and social consequences, leading to feelings of shame, anger, or inadequacy, as well as damaging interpersonal relationships and eroding trust. In sum, insults represent a form of verbal aggression that violates social norms of civility and respect, and their impact can extend far beyond the moment of their utterance (Brown & Levinson, 2010).

2.1.2 Negative Impacts of Revenge

A conflict results incompatibility in heated arguments, physical abuses and definitely loss of peace can create a revenge (Setiawati & Asnani, 2023). Someone who takes revenge actually gets some negative impacts instead of satisfaction, which is only felt in a short time. Barcaccia, et al (2022) state that there is a relationship among revenge with depression and anxiety.

2.2.2.1 Depression

According to the World Health Organization (2023) depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide. Depression comes in forms of ranging from major depression to dysthymia and seasonal affective disorder. Depressive episodes are also a feature of bipolar disorder. Depression is a complex condition, involving many systems of the body, including the immune system, either as cause or effect. It disrupts sleep and it interferes with appetite. In some cases, it causes weight loss or may it contribute to weight gain. Depression is also often accompanied by anxiety. Research indicates that not only do the two conditions occur but that they overlap in vulnerability patterns.

2.2.2.2 Anxiety

Everyone can feel anxious when they are about to face or are in a situation that is felt threatening or frightening. Bad experiences from bullying incidents make victims always vigilant. There is a fear that the incident will happen again, so he is always alert and anxious. People with anxiety disorders usually have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may avoid certain situations out of worry. They may also have physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness, or a rapid heartbeat (Adwas, Jbireal & Azab, 2019).

3. Research Method

Exploring the theme of revenge in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* requires a research method that can delve deeply into the complex emotions, character motivations, and narrative intricacies portrayed in the novel. A descriptive qualitative approach offers a suitable framework for this analysis, allowing for a nuanced examination of the multifaceted manifestations of revenge within the text (Sugiyono, 2009)

The data collection process involves a systematic examination of the text of *Wuthering Heights* to identify instances, themes, and motifs related to revenge. This will include close reading and textual analysis of key passages, character interactions, and plot developments that illuminate the various dimensions of revenge portrayed in the novel. Additionally, supplementary sources such as critical essays, author biographies, and historical context will be consulted to enrich our understanding of the text.

Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the collected data are analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, motifs, and character dynamics related to

revenge in *Wuthering Heights*. Themes may include the nature of vengeance, the motivations driving characters' actions, the consequences of revenge, and the broader societal implications depicted in the novel. Through iterative coding and thematic analysis, we aim to uncover the complexities and nuances of revenge as portrayed in the text. The findings of the analysis are interpreted within the broader context of the novel's themes, characters, and narrative structure. The significance of the findings is discussed in relation to existing scholarly interpretations of revenge in the novel highlighting key insights, theoretical implications, and areas for further research.

4. Discussion

In *Wuthering Height* betrayal, injustice and insult are some causing factors of revenge and the negative impacts of revenge are depression and anxiety.

4.1 Causing Factors of Revenge

4.1.1 Betrayal

Betrayal is a violation of trust or commitment that creates conflict within a relationship between individuals. Betrayal, mostly is synonymous with cheating. In the novel, Heathcliff receives a betrayal from Isabella, his wife, who has the heart to just leave without his knowledge. Heathcliff knows that Isabella is no longer able to live with him because he always tortures her as an outlet for his revenge against Edgar who has dared to take Catherine from his side. Still Isabella should not have left in order to be part of her allies. However, now Isabella's departure has made the hatred accumulate even more in Heathcliff's soul.

Mr. Heathcliff meeting me one day in the village, inquired where Isabella lived. I refused to tell. He remarked that it was not of any moment, only she must beware of coming to her brother, she should not be with him, if he had to keep her himself.

(Brontë, 1847: 184).

At a moment, Catherine tells Nelly that she has been proposed to by Edgar Linton and asks if it is her fault to accept it. Nelly replies that this is a big mistake that Catherine has made for a lifetime. If Catherine accepts Edgar Linton's love, it is tantamount to the woman already betraying Heathcliff, where they love each other. She chooses to marry Edgar Linton because Heathcliff is below her social status and getting married with Heathcliff is just degrading her status. She marries a man based on social class, and not love. Heathcliff dedicates himself to an elaborate plan for revenge.

Doubtless Catherine marked the difference between her friends, as one came in and the other went out. The contrast resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly, coal country for a beautiful fertile valley; and his voice and getting were as opposite as his aspect. He had a sweet, low manner of speaking, and pronounced his words as you do: that's less gruff than we talk here, and softer.

(Brontë, 1847: 84).

Heathcliff begins to have a vengeful and wild soul when he hear that Catherine had accepted Edgar Linton's marriage proposal. He fleeds for three years to Gimmerton and returns to *Wuthering Heights* as a man who looks more handsome, tall and has

well-groomed skin. Heathcliff also looks smart as if he has lost a bad trace of his past. Violence and revenge begin to emerge.

4.1.2 Injustice

Injustice is an arbitrary action. Injustice generally concerns the distribution of something to the rights of a person or group which is carried out disproportionately. Heathcliff receives the injustice from Hindley, who has harbored jealousy and envy for him since childhood. Heathcliff enters Earnshaw's family as an orphan, he soon becomes favourite of Mr. Earnshaw. This makes Hindley so jealous since his father has favoured an orphan than his own biological son. Hindley's jealousy makes him abuse and humiliate Heathcliff all the time.

“Take my colt, Gipsy, then!” said Hindley. “And I pray that he may break you neck. Take him, and be damned, you beggarly interloper! And wheedle my father out of all he has: only afterwards show him what you are, imp of Satan. –And take that, I hope he'll kick it out your brains!”
(Brontë 1847: 57).

Heathcliff also gets the injustice from Hindley who often torturs him when there are guests visiting Wuthering Heights as if Heathcliff is a very disgusting pile of rubbish. It can be seen that Heathcliff accepts the injustice.

“Get this young man out of the room, and take him up to the attic until dinner is over. If left alone for a minute, I'm afraid he'll stick his fingers into the tart and steal the fruit.”
(Brontë, 1847: 88)

Hindley asks Heathcliff not to join them in celebrating Christmas. But Heathcliff gets revengeful toward Hindley by rendering him homeless and then keeps his son away from the world.

4.1.3 Insult

Insult is attacking someone's honor and good name. As a result of this attack, usually the sufferer will feel embarrassed. The honor being attacked here is not honor in the sexual sphere, but honor of reputation. In the novel *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff often gets insults from Hindley, Edgar Linton, and even Catherine. All their harsh words reserved for Heathcliff are stored in the man's memory until adult. So that, his inner wounds never heal, that is why Heathcliff takes revenge. It can be seen that Heathcliff accepts the insult.

“You must exchange horses with me. I don't like mine, and if you won't I shall tell your father of the three trashing you've given me this week, and show him my arm, which is black to shoulder.” Hindley put out his tongue, and cuffed him over the ears.

“You'd better do it once,” he persisted, escaping to the porch.

“You will have to and if I speak of these blows, you'll get them again with interest.”

“Off, dog!” cried Hindley, threatening him with an iron weight used for weighing potatoes and hay.

(Brontë, 1847: 57).

Hindley is a character who often gives curses to Heathcliff. Even without absolute reason, Hindley wrongs Heathcliff at will. This may have been based on the heartache of not being able to accept that his father adopts the gypsy boy.

There is a moment where Catherine insults Heathcliff right in front of the Linton family who is visiting *Wuthering Heights* so that Heathcliff feels humiliated.

"I did not mean to laugh at you," she said, "I could not hinder myself, Heathcliff, shake hands, at least! What is your sulky for? It was only that you looked odd—If you wash your face, and brush your hair it will be all right. But you are so dirty!" said Catherine.
(Brontë, 1847: 117).

Catherine has insulted him in front of Edgar and Isabella, even though in the past the woman does not mind no matter how dirty Heathcliff is, she still wants to play with him.

"They are long enough already," observed Master Linton, peeping from the door-way, "I wonder they don't make his headache. It's like a colt's mane over his eyes!"
(Brontë, 1847: 89).

In the quotations above, it can be seen that without Heathcliff's knowledge, Edgar often makes fun of him when talking to Hindley and Catherine even though according to Heathcliff he is a good man and not a typical human being who talks a lot if it is not important.

4.2 Negative Impacts of Revenge

The writers discuss two negative impacts of revenge: depression and anxiety.

4.2.1 Depression

Depression is a disease characterized by prolonged sadness and loss of interest in activities that we usually do with pleasure. Those who have depression usually have several symptoms such as, loss of energy, changes in appetite, sleep disturbances (can be excessive, can also be less than the usual length of sleep), anxiety, decreased ability to concentrate, inability to make decisions, unease, feelings of uselessness, guilt or hopelessness, and thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

In the novel, Heathcliff as the main character has problems with his emotions. Heathcliff feels it is sad that he makes a mistake in the past. His revenge is only briefly satisfied, but now he creates a home atmosphere in *Wuthering Heights* full of fear, sadness, and discomfort. Actually, other characters like Catherine also receives anxiety disorders until she dies, whereas the protagonist gets anxiety because she is often haunted by her mistakes in the past. According to him, every time he sees his daughters Catherine and Edgar Linton, he thinks back to how the betrayal he has in the past makes Heathcliff depressed.

"Heathcliff's not a human being," she retorted. "and he has no claim on my charity. I gave him my heart, and he took and pinched it to death, and he took and pinched it to death, and flung it back to me. People feel with their hearts, Ellen, and he has destroyed mine, I have not power to feel for him and I would not, though he groaned from this to his dying day, and wept tears of blood for Catherine! No,

indeed, indeed, I wouldn't it!" And here Isabella began to cry, but immediately dashing the water from her lashes, she recommenced. "You asked, what has driven me to flight at last? I was compelled to attempt it, because I had succeeded in rousing his rage a pitch above his malignity. Pulling out the nerves, with red hot pincers requires more coolness than knocking on the head. He was worked up to forget the fiendish prudence he boasted of, and proceeded to murderous violence. I experienced pleasure in being able to exasperate him, the sense of pleasure woke my instinct of self-preservation, so I fairly broke free, and if ever I come into his hands again he is welcome to a signal revenge."
(Brontë, 1847: 175-176).

Heathcliff begins to have depression when he knows that Catherine has accepted Edgar Linton's marriage proposal. Heathcliff depression is seen when he admits that he has no desire for life just to eat and drink. He just wants the shadows and memories of Catherine to go to haunt him so he could calm down but it is like punishment for him so Heathcliff could not do anything. Obviously, Heathcliff feels depressed because he remembers the suffering he has poured out to everyone.

"Nelly, there is a strange change approaching; I'm in its shadow at present. I take so little interest in my daily life that I hardly remember to eat and drink. Those two who have left the room are the only objects which retain a distinct material appearance to me; and that appearance causes me pain, amounting to agony. About *her* I won't speak; and I don't desire to think; but I earnestly wish she were invisible: her presence invokes only maddening sensations. *He* moves me differently: and yet if I could do it without seeming insane, I'd never see him again! You'll perhaps think me rather inclined to become so,' he added, making an effort to smile, 'if I try to describe the thousand forms of past associations and ideas he awakens or embodies. But you'll not talk of what I tell you; and my mind is so eternally secluded in itself, it is tempting at last to turn it out to another".
(Brontë, 1847: 309)

4.2.2 Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe. Everyone can feel anxious when they are about to face or are in a situation that feels threatening or frightening. The anxiety response that Heathcliff gets after taking revenge is more; he is always unhappy every time he sees Cathy. People with anxiety will act or show anxiety symptoms such as avoiding eye contact. That is what has happened to Heathcliff as seen in the quotations below.

"No, no! A stranger is a stranger, he'll be rich or poor—it will not suit me to permit anyone the range of the place while I am off guard!" said the unmannerly wretch.
(Brontë, 1847: 38)

Heathcliff's anxiety is caused by a painful emotional experience. The experience leaves bad memories. The arrival of Mr. Lockwood is enough to make him anxious, because Heathcliff is used to his life being closed. Mr. Lockwood makes Heathcliff uncomfortable because Mr. Lockwood would surely criticize him for unknown reasons. In short something is wrong in *Wuthering Heights*. The building is located in the middle of a swamp, far from people's homes and the residents seem to live under.

5. Conclusion

The exploration of revenge within *Wuthering Heights* reveals the deep-seated effects of betrayal, injustice, and social ostracization on the protagonist, Heathcliff, and the subsequent ripple of negativity coursing through the narrative. Heathcliff's unyielding pursuit of vengeance stems from profound feelings of betrayal by those he once held dear, compounded by the perceived injustices of his social status and the incessant insults hurled upon him as an outsider. However, as the story progresses, it becomes increasingly apparent that Heathcliff's fixation on revenge exacts a heavy toll on his mental well-being, plunging him into depths of depression and anxiety. What begins as a quest for justice mutates into a consuming obsession, distorting Heathcliff's character into a vengeful antagonist fueled by animosity and despair. This relentless pursuit of retribution not only perpetuates a cycle of violence and anguish but also entangles innocent bystanders in its destructive path. Moreover, Heathcliff's inability to relinquish his thirst for revenge denies him the chance for genuine happiness or contentment, ensnaring him in a spiral of bitterness and seclusion. Through Heathcliff's tragic metamorphosis, *Wuthering Heights* emerges as a cautionary narrative, warning against the insidious nature of revenge and its far-reaching repercussions. By dissecting the causes and consequences of vengeance within the novel, readers confront the dual facets of human nature—capable of both profound love and profound destruction, while grappling with the perennial conflict between forgiveness and retribution. Ultimately, the analysis of revenge in *Wuthering Heights* serves as a poignant reminder of the timeless truth: that the pursuit of vengeance, far from offering solace or resolution, only perpetuates a legacy of anguish and regret, leaving behind a trail of sorrow and remorse.

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