

**Setting the World Right:
A Psychoanalytic Reading of Revenge in *Hamlet* and in the *Harry Potter* Series**

*The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!*

Laura Sirola
University of Tampere
School of Language, Translation and Literary Studies
English Philology
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Tämän pro gradu -tutkimuksen aihe on kosto William Shakespearen näytelmässä *Hamlet* ja J.K. Rowlingin *Harry Potter* -kirjasarjassa. Kosto on ollut suosittu teema kirjallisuudessa antiikin ajoista nykypäivään. Tämä tutkimus pyrkii selvittämään, mikä koston viehättää lukijoita aika-kaudesta toiseen, ja onko teoksissa havaittavissa eroja koston liittyvissä asenteissa. Lähtökohtana on oletus, että ihmisillä on synnynnäinen taipumus koston, minkä vuoksi aihe kiehtoo niin lukijoita kuin kirjailijoitakin riippumatta kulloinkin vallitsevista moraali-käsityksistä.

Tutkimuksessa verrataan näissä eri aikakausina syntyneissä teoksissa esiintyviä näkemyksiä koston, sen psykologisista ja sosiaalisista motiiveista sekä koston moraalisesta oikeutuksesta. Psykologisena viitekehys on Sigmund Freudin psykoanalyttinen persoonallisuusteoria sekä muiden psykoanalyttikkojen koston teorioita yhdistelemällä syntynyt teoria erilaisista kosto- ja kostajatyypeistä. Eri koston tyypit jaotellaan varsinaiseen eli suunnitelmalliseen koston ja välittömään koston reaktioon eli takaisin iskemiseen. Kostajat puolestaan jaotellaan kohtuudellisiin ja patologisiin sen mukaan, miten kosto on suhteutettu alkuperäiseen loukkaukseen tai rikokseen. Lisäksi tutkimuksessa analysoidaan kostajien persoonallisuutta, koston motivaatiota ja seurauksia sekä kulttuurin vaikutusta kostonkäytännön kehittymiseen.

Etenkin *Hamletissa* kostonhimon ajatellaan olevan luonnollinen reaktio perheenjäsenen murhaan, mikä sopii Freudin näkemykseen koston synnynnäisenä, itse säilytysvaistoon liittyvänä viettinä. *Harry Potter* -sarjassa puolestaan on nähtävissä, että mitä nuorempia lapset ovat, sitä herkemmin he reagoivat loukkauksiin koston avulla, mutta oppivat aikuistuuksaan hillitsemään reaktioitaan. Havainto sopii Durhamin tutkimustulokseen, jonka mukaan lapset osaavat synnynnäisesti koston, mutta joutuvat opettelemaan anteeksiantoa.

Analyysistä käy ilmi, että tietyissä olosuhteissa koston pidetään oikeutettuna, mutta *Hamletin* tapauksessa koston oikeudenmukaisuuskaan ei suojaa kostajaa sen väistämättömältä seuraukselta: murhaa koston avulla myös kostajasta tulee murhaaja. Harry välttää *Hamletin* karun kohtalon siten, että hän ei lopulta surmaa perivihollistaan, vaan Voldemort kaatuu omaan kiroukseen. Kuitenkin Harry kohtaa samat koston keskittymisestä seuraavat ongelmat kuin *Hamletkin*, eikä kummallakaan ole muuta ulospääsyä tilanteesta kuin koston toteuttaminen.

Tutkimuksen lopputulos on, että *Hamletin* ja *Harry Potterin* koston kuvaukset sopivat psykoanalyttisiin koston teorioihin, jotka puolestaan vastaavat hyvin ihmisten arkisia käsityksiä koston. Kosto on selvästi osa ihmisen psyykeä, sillä koston ajattelu tuottaa aivokuvauksissa todennettavaa mielihyvää, mikä selittää koston tarinoiden pysyvän vetovoiman.

Avainsanat: revenge, psychoanalysis, Hamlet, Harry Potter, Shakespeare, Freud

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1. Introduction

Revenge has been a popular theme in literature and drama throughout the ages. There is something universally appealing in it, although most cultures do not encourage revenge as a means of solving conflicts. The aim of this thesis is to analyse revenge in two literary works from two different eras, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, to establish an understanding of revenge as a part of the human psyche, a motivating force that flourishes in fiction even if society censures it, an impulse that persists from one century to another. I will look to the psychological aspects of revenge in my chosen texts, exploring the various motives and outcomes of revenge. The focus of this thesis is on revenge as a psychological phenomenon because revenge falls naturally into the domain of psychology; the impulse to revenge is a part of the human psyche. The fictional portrayals of revenge in *Hamlet* and *Harry Potter* are descriptions of a real life phenomenon, but fiction is not directly comparable to the real world, although there is correlation between fiction and reality. Stories are written by people who act and think in the real world, and the human psyche can be observed in the stories. Revenge stories reflect our beliefs and attitudes concerning revenge. Furthermore, stories, myths and legends shape our identities. When we read or listen to stories, we gather information about the world, and adjust our thinking accordingly, whether we are conscious of the process or not. For that reason, a psychological reading of fictional characters is both rational and relevant.

In the domain of psychology, the psychoanalytic theory is well suited for analysing literature because Freud delved into works of fiction as research material and proof for his theories. However, finding psychoanalytic theories on revenge was difficult and it seemed that psychoanalysts had not studied revenge. This was surprising because revenge is a recurring theme in Greek mythology,

which was a source of inspiration for Freud. Irwin Rosen also notes the scarcity of psychoanalytic study on revenge, pointing out that the psychoanalysts' inattention to revenge is strange, in view of the fact that Freud even named theories and concepts after characters in Greek mythology (2007, 597-599). Psychoanalytic literature on revenge seems scarce but it is a question of knowing how to find it. As Durham notes, the word *revenge* seldom appears in the index of psychoanalytic works, not because revenge is irrelevant to psychoanalysis but because the patients' expressions of anger and the desire to "show them" are not recognised as a thirst for revenge (2000, 9). According to Durham, it is a matter of interpretation, and the therapists may hesitate to label the patient's sentiments as revengeful because of the negative connotations of the word. Psychoanalysis relies on the therapist's impartiality, and using the word *revenge* in a therapeutic context may seem like making a moral assessment of the patient's feelings.

In addition to analysing the psychology of revenge, I will briefly discuss the influence of culture on revenge, especially the western culture, which is heavily shaped by Christianity. The Christian view on revenge is not prominent in either text, although both texts have been created under the influence of the western culture and thus inescapably, Christianity. The influence of religion was even stronger in Shakespeare's time, and if we assume that most people accepted Christian morals, then revenge should have been unacceptable for Shakespeare's contemporaries. However, in the past and the present alike, revenge seems to be more popular than turning the other cheek, at least in the world of fiction where it may serve as an outlet for the frustrations that cannot be resolved satisfactorily in real life.

My method of study is to conduct a close reading of the relevant parts of both texts, and to analyse the revengeful behaviour of the characters in view of the psychoanalytic theories. I will then draw conclusions about the psychological creditability of the characters, as well as the motives and

outcomes of revenge in both stories. I will try to show that the similarities in the two stories written hundreds of years apart from each other are due to unchanging qualities in the human mind, which the stories reflect. My initial hypothesis is that *Harry Potter* is a modern retelling of *Hamlet*. Both eponymous heroes seek to revenge the death of their fathers, which leads to similar inner conflict in both characters, though there are also significant differences in the two characters and their inner struggles.

The point of using psychoanalysis to analyse fictional characters is to observe, not only how they function in the story, but to what extent they are psychologically convincing. Psychological creditability is an interesting aspect in fictional characters because the more real the characters feel, the more the reader can sympathise with them. Applying psychoanalysis to literary characters does not imply treating them as real people, but we can learn something about the psyche of real people by analysing works of fiction. The problem with the psychological analysis of literary characters is that they are not necessarily written to have complex personalities. Sometimes fictional characters act in a certain way simply to advance the plot. Villains are villainous because the story requires a bad guy and respectively, heroes are heroic because that is their function in the story. In modern literature, however, such characters are considered bad writing. The reader expects characters to have motives and personalities in addition to functionality. According to Stephen Greenblatt, a shift towards modern, psychologically convincing characters was taking place at the time when Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*. Greenblatt writes,

. . . in its moral complexity, psychological depth, and philosophical power, *Hamlet* seems to mark an epochal shift not only in Shakespeare's own career but in Western drama; it is as if the play were giving birth to a whole new kind of literary subjectivity. (Greenblatt, 1997, 1661)

Hamlet actually refers to his own psyche, saying he has "that within which passeth show" (1.2.85).

However we interpret that speech, the fact remains that Hamlet demonstrates that he has an inner

self, a hidden layer of personality. Such understanding of the human mind conforms with Freud's paradigm that even seemingly irrational behaviour has a rational explanation in the psyche, even if it is not evident to the casual observer. Therefore, it is plausible to apply psychoanalytic theory to the analysis of a fictional text, even one that precedes Freud by centuries.

2 Subject Texts: *Harry Potter* and *Hamlet*

Revenge is prominent in both *Hamlet* and *Harry Potter*, though otherwise the texts are different in many ways. The most obvious difference is that *Hamlet* is a play, which means, in terms of volume, that it is a relatively short text consisting mostly of dialogue, and, as is the nature of plays, it is meant to be seen and heard, rather than read. Enjoying a play in the written form requires a certain measure of imagination, and in the case of old plays such as *Hamlet*, an understanding of the historical and social context of the play, as well as a specialised vocabulary.

The *Harry Potter* series consists of seven thick novels, so it provides much more material for my study than *Hamlet*. The *Harry Potter* books are aimed at younger readers but they have become so popular among adults that the series has been published as an adult version that, except for the covers, is identical to the children's version. Revenge in *Hamlet* has already been the research topic in many other studies¹ before mine, which means there is an abundance of secondary source material to build on in the case of the older text, whereas the revenge theme in *Harry Potter* is still a relatively new area in literary research. I will nevertheless aim for a balanced study, and divide my attention equally between the two texts.

The film adaptations of *Harry Potter* are not included in my study because, although they are popular and they influence people's ideas about the story and the characters, they do not bring anything new to the story. The novel, as a form of literature, does not necessarily need a visual

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Thordike, *The Relations of Hamlet to Contemporary Revenge Plays* (1902)
 See for example,
 Gottschalk, *Hamlet and the Scanning of Revenge* (1979)
 Brucher, *Fantasies of Violence: Hamlet and the Revenger's Tragedy* (1989)
 Nardo, *Hamlet, "A Man to Double Business Bound"* (1983)
 Stearns, *Hamlet and Freud* (1949)
 Warhaft, *The Mystery of Hamlet* (1963)

representation to make the story understandable or the characters identifiable. A play, on the other hand, depends on being put on the stage because as a text it is rather minimalist. It is written to convey only the bare necessities for the actors, directors, set and costume designers and make-up artists, so that they can transform the dialogue and the stage directions into a complete story with all the nuances that may not come across in the script, except to a practised reader. An essential characteristic of a play is that each production and each performance presents a unique interpretation of the same story. By varying the tone of voice, gestures and facial expressions, an actor can give a number of different meanings to a line in a play. The mood of a given scene depends, for example, on the pacing of the dialogue, the appearance of the costumes and the make-up of the actors, the setting of the stage, the lighting and the possible background music and sound effects. Because of all these variables, the same text in the case of a play can be interpreted in countless different ways, whereas a “scene” in a novel usually offers a smaller number of alternative interpretations.

I do not have the opportunity to analyse actual stage productions of *Hamlet*, nor do I intend to include analysis of the different film versions of the play in this thesis. My focus will be on *Hamlet* as a text, although it is impossible not to be influenced by the various film and stage productions that I have seen. The same applies to *Harry Potter*. I will leave the film adaptations outside my analysis but my interpretation of the characters may have been influenced by the film versions.

2.1 Revenge tragedies

Hamlet, *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet* are among Shakespeare’s most well known plays. They are iconic, in the sense that even those who are not familiar with Shakespeare’s works will have at least heard of these plays, and will recognise them as Shakespeare. Interestingly, all of the plays with the

most staying power are tragedies where revenge has a central role. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Capulets and the Montagues are engaged in a blood feud that eventually results in the death of the young lovers. Macbeth meets his end through the hand of a rightful avenger and Hamlet is obsessed with revenge. Revenge is also an element in *Othello*, where Iago destroys Othello because he, Iago, has been overlooked for promotion, and because he suspects that Othello has seduced his wife. Revenge has the power to enthrall the audiences from one century to the next, as the lasting popularity of these plays attests.

Irwin Rosen remarks that the oldest surviving stories and records humanity has produced are concerned with revenge, citing such examples as Adam and Eve's banishment from Eden, the Egyptian plagues, and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, which are, as Rosen writes, "tales of an offended, outraged God avenging disobedience" (Rosen, 2007, 599). Revenge tragedies as an art form are a tradition that can be traced back thousands of years in history. The Mahabharata, an Indian epic that pre-dates the Bible, is also full of stories about revenge. The stories of Greek mythology are the oldest surviving pieces of the western tradition of revenge tragedy, and Aristotle formulated the characteristics of those stories into a set of rules for tragedy that authors adhered to for centuries. George Boas notes *The Evolution of a Tragic Hero*, that Renaissance writers, Shakespeare among them, still followed Aristotle's rules, such as the requirement for the hero of a tragedy to be either a god or a royal. The Renaissance writers thus passed Aristotle's principles on to us (Boas, 1955-1956, 11). Another relevant example of Aristotle's rules was that the tragic hero had to have a fatal character flaw that would lead to the hero's demise. A flawed character is also more sympathetic than unrealistic, perfect heroes, so the audience is more likely to empathise with a flawed hero. Shakespeare gave his tragic heroes even more psychological depth than the Aristotelian rule of the fatal character flaw requires, and as Boas writes, in Shakespeare's plays the

characters' psychology determines the outcome of the tragedy rather than purely moral considerations, as was the convention in the Greek tragedies (1955-1956, 16).

Elements of Greek revenge tragedies continue to be found in modern versions of the genre, but rather than following Aristotle's rules to the letter, modern authors adapt the conventions. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* is a good example of this. The hero is just a normal boy, which seemingly breaks the Aristotelian formula that dictates the tragic hero should be a royal or a deity. However, although Harry Potter is not a prince in the literal sense, he is a very important person in his community. His parents were outstanding members of the magical society: both were accomplished, popular and well connected, and they passed on a considerable fortune to Harry. The inheritance comes as a surprise to Harry after eleven years of deprived childhood. Harry himself becomes an instant celebrity in the magical world due to his exceptional background of having been the only person ever to survive a death curse. So, although Harry is not literally a prince or a deity, he is someone significant and he has supernatural powers that impress even other witches and wizards. On top of that, Harry turns out to be a natural leader. The character is a combination of Cinderella and the classic tragic hero which, especially combined with the revenge theme, is guaranteed to appeal to the readers.

Part of the reason why Shakespeare's revenge tragedies gained popularity in the first place may have been the brutal legal punishments that were common in the 16th century. The punishments were often corporal and their purpose was less to do with educating and more with intimidation and revenge. Hangings and beheadings, and even more brutal executions involving disembowelling and dismembering, were performed in public, as Greenblatt explains (1997, 34). Because of the systematic violence practised by the legal authorities, violence was inbuilt in the society and taking physical action to retaliate may not have been as unthinkable as it is for most modern people. If

revenge and violence, both legal and informal, was something with which almost everyone had personal experience, the theme was relevant also on stage. Perhaps violent revenge tragedies were a product of the conflict between, on one hand, the censure against violent crimes and the use of violence as legal punishment, and on the other hand, the Christian ideology of forgiveness clashing with the innate human desire to settle the score with the enemy. Religion was a powerful influence in Europe until it started to lose its authority in the 20th century, so the 16th century audience would likely have sympathised with Hamlet's worry over the state of his soul. It is difficult to assess the importance of Christian ideology to the values of Shakespeare's contemporaries but it appears that there was a conflict in the society between the violent reality and the Christian values everyone was expected to uphold.

Revenge is also a part of popular culture today: *Mad Max* (1979), *V for Vendetta* (2005) and the TV series *Revenge* (2011) are a few examples of modern fictional treatments of the topic. The theme of revenge also arises frequently in current works of fiction such as, for example, the novel *Purge* (2008) by Sofi Oksanen, *Downton Abbey* (2010), a TV series that follows the lives of an aristocratic family and their servants in the early 20th century Britain, and *Game of Thrones* (2011), a TV series based on the fantasy novels by George R.R. Martin. Another current TV series, *The Borgias* (2011), also deserves a mention in this connection because revenge is one of its focal themes. This list is by not exhaustive but it shows that the prominence of revenge in popular culture has not dwindled since Shakespeare's time.

2.2 Harry Potter

The *Harry Potter* novels tell the story of an orphan boy with magical abilities, following the character through seven years in a boarding school for witches and wizards. The books have

attracted millions of fans of all ages, but they have also gained ardent haters. The *Harry Potter* books are among the most frequently banned books of our time and the hostility against the series has been so intense that even a special Harry Potter hate-line was founded in Austria (Gupta, 2003, 18-20). Most of the bans and other negative responses come from fundamental Christian groups who believe that the magic portrayed in the books might lure children into witchcraft and devil worship.² Another source of criticism is the worldview the books represent, concerning issues such as gender equality, class and race.³ Although literature does not need to be politically correct, it is important to be aware of the implied worldview within a story. Stereotypical, potentially harmful representations of gender or race cannot be challenged if the readers are not aware of them. However, these concerns are not relevant to my analysis of revenge. It would be interesting to study the relationship between gender and revenge but it is not feasible within the scope of this thesis.

There are some textual problems concerning the *Harry Potter* series, which should be noted. The last book does not reveal much about the events that follow the death of the villain. Both sides suffer casualties in the war between good and evil but beyond that, we do not know much about what happened after the final battle. The seventh book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, ends with an epilogue set nineteen years after the war, but the epilogue provides little tangible information about the state of the affairs in the wizard community, or the psychological impact of the events on the surviving characters. However, after the publication of the final book, the author has given several interviews in which she has provided more information about the characters and about the events after the war. Some of these additional revelations have no consequence for this study, such as the disclosure of Dumbledore being homosexual (BBC News). It is an interesting detail but if that is how Rowling imagined the character, why not make it apparent in the books?

² See Gish (2000).

³ See Gupta (2003) and Taub & Servaty (2003).

The portrayal of the character does not clearly suggest homosexuality but the new information about him makes certain story lines appear in a different light.

The added pieces of information pose a problem for the analysis of the story because, unlike Dumbledore's sexual identity, some of the author's disclosures are relevant to the reading of revenge. In a web chat on Bloomsbury's Internet pages (transcription taken from a fan site called Leaky Cauldron), Rowling gives more details about the events taking place after the last battle. There is even a members only website called *Pottermore*, which, according to Wikipedia, provides a vast amount of additional information about the world and the characters of *Harry Potter*. These additions to the novels could have a significant impact on my reading of the story, but for the sake of simplicity, and to conform with the traditional notion of what constitutes a novel, I will limit my study of *Harry Potter* to the original printed text.

2.3 Hamlet

Hamlet poses the same difficulty to the analysis of the outcome of revenge as *Harry Potter*. The story ends shortly after the final battle and the audience has very little knowledge about the future of the characters. At the end of *Hamlet*, all the central characters are dead, so we are not left wondering what becomes of them, but we are not sure what Hamlet accomplished with his revenge. We know that prince Fortinbras of Norway will rule Denmark after Hamlet died to rid the country of the corrupt king Claudius. However, despite the fact that Hamlet trusts Fortinbras, we do not have complete reassurance that he will be a good ruler.

In addition to the uncertainty about the outcome of revenge, *Hamlet* poses a textuality problem because there are three different versions of the play: the First Quarto (Q1), published in

1603, the Second Quarto (Q2), published a year later, and the First Folio (F1), published in 1623.⁴ The first published version of *Hamlet*, the First Quarto is known as the “bad quarto” because of its shortness, and because the language is substandard when compared to the Second Quarto and the First Folio.⁵ G. R. Hibbard provides a detailed textual introduction to the different versions of the play in *The Oxford Shakespeare: Hamlet*, explaining the known facts about the printing of Q1 and its deviation in language and events from Q2 and F1. Hibbard's conclusion is that Q1 has “no direct contact with any Shakespearean manuscript, or with any transcript of such a manuscript” (2008, 69).

It is of some interest how Ling and Trundle, the printers of Q1, acquired the text they printed, if not from the author or the acting company. Theories about the origin of Q1 include the supposition that it was an earlier draft of *Hamlet*, perhaps heavily influenced by the now lost Ur-Hamlet, and later completely revised by Shakespeare. However, the extensive evidence Hibbard presents in support of the theory that Q1 was based on the memory of a rogue actor seems conclusive (2008, 67-89). The most convincing piece of evidence is that the lines of one actor are almost word for word the same as in Q2 and F1, while the rest of the Q1 is a haphazard construction, as Jenkins writes, full of “omissions, mislinings, paraphrases, verbal and morphological substitutions, misunderstandings, transpositions, anticipations and recollections: all the recognised signs of a play reconstructed from memory” (Jenkins, 1982, 19).

Considering all of the above, we can dismiss the First Quarto as a fake. It is more complicated to determine whether the Second Quarto or the First Folio is more reliable, or if they are both incomplete versions of a full text of *Hamlet* which has been lost. The title page of Q2 claims it to be

⁴ Dates of publication are according to Greenblatt in *The Norton Shakespeare* (1997, 1666).

⁵ See for example, Greenblatt, *The Norton Shakespeare* (1997, 1666) and Hibbard, *The Oxford Shakespeare: Hamlet* (2008, 67)

“Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie” (Hibbard, 2008, 90). Jenkins calls the Q2 version “the one which stands closest to the author” (1982, 74). The text is, however, full of imperfections. Some of the faults may be attributed to a careless typesetter, such as the occurrence of eye-skip, which is a term Hibbard uses for omissions of words or lines (2008, 92-93). In addition to eye-skip, frequent misspellings, such as “rehume” for “rheum” (Hibbard, 2008, 92), contribute to the poor workmanship of Q2. Some misspellings, such as “so loued Arm’d” for “so loud a Winde” (2008, 93), indicate that the handwriting of the manuscript that was used for Q2 was misleading, “and misleading in ways we have every reason for thinking were characteristic of Shakespeare’s hand” (2008, 93). Therefore, the conclusion is that out of the three surviving versions, Q2 is the closest to the original *Hamlet*, the way Shakespeare first wrote it. However, as a source text for *Hamlet*, Q2 is unreliable, mostly due to the large number of printers’ errors, and because it appears to be based on a rough manuscript rather than a finished play, as the apparently untidy handwriting of the source text, and some other clues such as incomplete stage directions⁶ at certain crucial moments, indicate.

The origin of the First Folio is a matter of some debate. There are considerable differences between Q2 and F1. The First Folio lacks approximately 230 lines that appear in Q2, and it contains 70 lines that do not appear in Q2. Some scholars think that F1 version is a playhouse deviation from the authentic Second Quarto *Hamlet*, while others believe that the First Folio is a revised version of the play, edited by Shakespeare himself. Jenkins supports the playhouse deviation theory that propositions that the F1 version of the play is the result of actors editing Shakespeare's original text. One of the weaknesses of the theory is that some of the revisions appear in Shakespeare's foul papers, but Jenkins claims that the foul papers do not prove that Shakespeare was behind the

⁶ See Hibbard (2008, 95-98) for a discussion of the inconsistencies in stage directions and the names of characters in Q2.

alterations (Jenkins, 1982, 55-56). Furthermore, Jenkins writes, “the difficulty of explaining . . . how the actors’ modifications came to be incorporated must not prevent our accepting that they did” (Jenkins, 1982, 64). In other words, we should accept the playhouse deviation theory despite its shortcomings. Jenkins is right in that the foul papers are not indisputable proof that Shakespeare made the cuts to F1 himself but it is imprudent to dismiss the idea so easily when it is just as likely that the markings were made by the author.

In the end, we cannot know the truth of the origin of the First Folio but Hibbard’s theory that Shakespeare is behind the changes is the more logical one. The most significant piece of evidence in its favour is that Shakespeare was actively involved in his company and, as Greenblatt explains,

. . . the passage from foul papers to prompt book was not necessarily a corruption of his text. Rather, it could as easily have been the occasion for deliberate authorial revision, drawing upon his own second thoughts as well as the suggestions of his trusted professional colleagues. Close study of the differences between Q2 and F suggests the strong possibility of such revision, reflecting a coherent strategy (Greenblatt, 1997, p. 1667).

Moreover, Hibbard shows that the changes were the work of a skilful poet who was able to edit the verses without ruining the metre or the meaning,⁷ which speaks against the assumption that the changes were accidental or thoughtless omissions and additions. In the end, the prompt-book version was the version of *Hamlet* that was performed in the Globe for over a decade while Shakespeare was active in the company. It is possible that Shakespeare made the revisions himself but if he did not, he must have been aware of them, and he probably would have at least collaborated in editing the play. It is not surprising, then, that the publishers of the First Folio, who were also the last surviving members of Shakespeare’s company, chose to use the theatre prompt-book rather than Q2 as a source text for the F1 version of *Hamlet*. As Hibbard says,

For them [the publishers of F1] the ‘true’ text of *Hamlet* was that contained in the prompt-book at the Globe; and, in providing the copy for F that they did, they were, to the

⁷ See Hibbard’s examples on pages 106 and 109 in *The Oxford Shakespeare: Hamlet 2008*

best of their knowledge, keeping the promise they had made ‘To the great Variety of Readers’ to publish the plays ‘absolute in their numbers, as he [Shakespeare] conceived them’ (2008, 105).

To the original actors of *Hamlet*, the version of the play printed in the First Folio was the authentic text, but it has been a common practise for editors since the eighteenth century to combine Q2 and F1 to produce a “complete” text of *Hamlet*. The custom is based on the idea that both versions are genuine but flawed, and that the true *Hamlet* was the combination of the two texts. When the Oxford editors, G.R. Hibbard and Stanley Wells, concluded that F1 is a reworked, therefore the final and the most authoritative, version of *Hamlet*, they adopted it as the authoritative source text and discarded Q2.

The benefit of the conflated *Hamlet* is that it is the version audiences have come to know. Besides, although the consensus now is that the passages left out of F1 are extraneous, some of them are relevant to the reading of the play, for example Horatio’s speech starting from 1.1.111 where he draws a parallel between Denmark and the state of Rome just before Julius Caesar was murdered. The omitted speech illustrates how “the time is out of joint” when the throne of Denmark is occupied by a usurper. The speech was presumably cut from F1 because it delays action on stage but it does explain why Hamlet says, “the time is out of joint.” The drawback of the conflated text that combines Q2 and F1 is that it is arbitrary. Such a version of *Hamlet* was probably never performed by Shakespeare’s company. Therefore, I will use the Oxford edition in my analysis.

As for the question of authorship and the originality of *Hamlet*, it should be taken into account that Shakespeare’s was not the first version of the story. The story of Amleth, written by Saxo Grammaticus, appeared in a volume called *Historiae Danicae* at the end of the twelfth century. Many of the characters and the course of events are for a large part the same as in the *Hamlet* written by Shakespeare. There are important differences as well, the most notable being that

Amleth does not hesitate to take revenge and he survives to enjoy the benefits of it, as Hibbard points out (2008, 9). Saxo Grammaticus' version of *Hamlet* is, in Hibbard's words, "a heroic tale of the heroic age in Northern Europe," (2008, 9) a story from an age before Christian values had taken root. When François de Belleforest included *Hamlet* in his *Histoires Tragiques* (1570), he was troubled by the unchristian elements in the story: the revenge and, what Hibbard calls Hamlet's "powers of divination" (2008, 10). Belleforest transformed Amleth the heroic avenger into a more complex character by adding the melancholic tendencies to his personality, to make an excuse for his unchristian pursuits. This new interpretation of the character turned the story into a revenge tragedy, a genre that was perhaps more appealing to the sixteenth century readers than a straightforward heroic tale would have been. Due to the influence of Christianity, the society's attitude towards revenge had changed from Saxo Grammaticus' time so that Belleforest felt that Amleth's cunning, ruthless and remorseless actions would not have inspired admiration in the audience. Shakespeare added further to the complexity of Hamlet's character and the plot by making the avenger question the morality of revenge.

Belleforest's story and Shakespeare's play are very similar but there are a number of differences between them. Some of the new elements are probably Shakespeare's invention, but some had perhaps appeared earlier in the so-called Ur-Hamlet, a play that is now lost but that, according to Hibbard (2008, 13), was performed in 1594. It was mentioned by Thomas Nashe as early as 1589, so most likely a play called *Hamlet* was familiar to the London theatre goers before that date, at least thirteen years before Shakespeare wrote his *Hamlet*. There has been speculation based on Nashe's esoteric essay that the author of the lost *Hamlet* might have been Thomas Kydd. Hibbard notes that the contemporary commentators thought the Ur-Hamlet was "rather ridiculous" but "one aspect of Shakespeare's genius was his ability to take an old-fashioned drama and utterly

transform it” (Hibbard, 2008, 13). Shakespeare did not create Hamlet out of nothing but he took a play that audiences ridiculed, and turned it into one of the most popular plays of all times.

3 Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is a theory of the human psyche and a method of psychological treatment that Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) developed in the late 19th and the early 20th century. Others continued his work, including Freud's daughter Anna Freud, and famous psychologists such as Carl Jung and Erich Fromm. The psychoanalytic school of thought consists of separate but interrelated theories that deal with different aspects of the human psyche. Philip Zimbardo states that the aim of psychoanalysis is to explain "the origins and course of personality development, the nature of mind, the abnormal aspects of personality and the way personality can be changed by therapy" (Zimbardo, 1995, 453). Considering the diverse nature of psychoanalysis, I will introduce only the parts that pertain to my analysis of revenge instead of trying to give an exhaustive presentation of the theory.

At the end of the Victorian era, psychoanalysis was different from other methods of treating mental problems in that it aimed at understanding the cause of the patient's psychic distress instead of merely trying to alleviate or suppress the symptoms. The idea of psychoanalysis was to allow patients to discover the source of their anxiety or neuroses through self-reflection, so the analyst would have had to remain objective and avoid imposing his views on the patient. Whether the analysts always succeeded in remaining neutral is debatable. For instance, the case of Little Hans, which Freud presents as an example of the Oedipus complex, raises doubts concerning the neutrality of the analysis. I will discuss these doubts in section 3.2, which is devoted to the most relevant arguments against psychoanalysis.

The most significant psychoanalytic theories are the structural and topographic theories that explain the operation of the human mind. I will introduce these theories along with the concepts of

defence mechanisms and drives in section 3.1. Section 3.2 is, as mentioned before, devoted to criticism against psychoanalysis and in 3.3, I will establish an understanding of revenge behaviour in light of the structural and topographic theories, the theory of the drives, and Durham's observations on the vindictive character type in psychoanalysis. Finally, I will combine van Noort's and Rosen's classifications of revenge types to create a comprehensive tool for analysing revenge in action.

3.1 Essential concepts and terminology

As Freud never wrote a textbook for psychoanalysis, I rely on a modern psychology textbook, in addition to Freud's original work, in order to define the basic concepts and terminology of psychoanalysis. I have chosen Philip Zimbardo's *Psychology: A European Text* because it offers an outline of the basic principles of psychoanalysis and concise definitions of the essential concepts. As Zimbardo writes, a key tenet of psychoanalysis is that all human thoughts and actions are motivated by desires, either conscious or unconscious (1995, 10). Therefore, no human action is ever meaningless or random but even seemingly irrational behaviour always has an explanation in the inner workings of the mind.

Freud himself lists the following theories as the most important components of psychoanalysis: "the theories of resistance and of repression, of the unconscious, of the aetiological significance of sexual life and of the importance of infantile experiences (Standard Edition XX, 1959, 40). Freud's theory of the importance of infantile experiences is fascinating but difficult to apply to literary characters whose childhood events are not part of the story, which is the case with *Hamlet*. The play begins when Hamlet is a young man, and no references are made to Hamlet's childhood, which, incidentally, is a serious weakness in all theories about Hamlet's Oedipus

complex, as Nardo points out; all such theories rely on conjectures (1983, 182-183). I will not make assumptions about Hamlet's early childhood but the *Harry Potter* series offers a wealth of information about some of the central characters' childhoods, making it possible to analyse the impact of childhood events on the characters' personality development.

The topographic personality theory

One of Freud's main achievements is the topographic theory of the mind that distinguishes three levels of awareness: the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious. The conscious mind is aware of its environment and of itself, monitoring thought processes and emotions. Just below the surface of consciousness is the preconscious mind, the content of which is not actively being processed but can be recalled easily, like memories, things we have learnt, our explicit knowledge of the world and the kind of implicit knowledge that can be put into words if necessary.

The difference between preconscious and unconscious, according to Hartmann, is that the preconscious processes can be summoned to consciousness without overcoming defence mechanisms that keep them out of awareness, but "where such overcoming of resistances is necessary, as is the case with repressed material, we speak of unconscious processes" (1960, 5-6). Unacceptable memories and wishes are pushed out of consciousness in an attempt to alleviate the conflict between personal needs and social norms. According to Freudian theory, these repressed memories and desires do not vanish without a trace, as Zimbardo explains: "Freud believed that when the content of the original, unacceptable ideas or motives are repressed – pushed out of consciousness – the strong feelings associated with the thoughts still remain and show up in various forms" (1995, 93). The unconscious memories, desires and drives shape our moods, thoughts and actions, though we are unaware of their influence. It is easy for us to observe the conscious and the

preconscious in our own psyche but, due to its nature, we cannot observe the unconscious directly. Nevertheless, there are occurrences that prove its existence.⁸

Though Freud's theory of the unconscious mental processes and their effect on the conscious mind is accurate, it is unclear whether early childhood memories remain in the unconscious and can manifest in dreams even in adulthood, as Freud assumed. However, even if the early memories are gone for good, those childhood events continue to shape our personality. Even if we do not remember the events that, for example, re-enforced or countered our natural tendencies towards shyness or confidence, and even if the memories of those events are not stored even in the unconscious, we retain the shyness or the confidence trait we acquired as a result of those events. Still, our personality is not determined in early childhood. Experiences continue to shape our personalities throughout our lives.

Structural personality theory

Another essential theory in psychoanalysis is the structural theory of personality where human psyche is divided into three aspects: ego, superego and id. Ego represents the I, or “the reality principle and centralisation of functional control” (Hartmann, 1960, 9), or in Zimbardo’s words, “the reality based aspect of the self” (1995, 454). Ego, then, is the part of the personality we perceive as the centre of our being, the “me” that thinks, acts and interacts with the world. Superego is the internalisation of the social norms and expectations of the surrounding world. Zimbardo (1995, 454) clarifies the concept of superego by remarking that it is similar to what is known as

⁸ For example, the case of the woman who became depressed after a minor surgical operation. The operation was successful and the woman could not explain what caused her depression. Eventually hypnosis revealed that despite being under general anaesthesia during the operation, she had heard the surgeon exclaiming, “This may not be a cyst at all. It may be cancer!” The woman could not recall the surgeon’s exclamation or anything about the operation but her unconscious mind had registered the surgeon’s remark. The unconscious fear of cancer had caused her depression. When she became aware of the fear and was reassured she did not have cancer, she recovered from her depression (Zimbardo, 1995, 87).

conscience outside psychoanalysis. Id, the lowest layer of personality in the structural theory, is the most primitive aspect of the mind. The id is the source of our basic drives such as hunger and sexual urges. It functions on the pleasure principle, demanding immediate satisfaction. As Zimbardo (1995, 454) explains, the id is irrational and it is up to the ego to moderate between impulses of the id and demands the superego. Ego is constantly trying to find a balance between the primitive drives of the id and the social norms and ethical considerations represented by the superego. Different power relations between ego, superego and id result in different personality types, or in extreme cases, personality disorders. A person with a strong id and a weak superego can be reckless, impulsive, short tempered and morally dubious, whereas a person with a dominating superego is inhibited and mild mannered.

The id is the first layer of personality to develop. At first, a baby is governed by the id as its existence revolves around having its physical needs satisfied. It has no sense of self. Ego begins to form gradually as the baby develops a rudimentary self-image after the realisation that it is separate from its mother and the rest of the world. Superego is the last of the three layers of personality to develop, which happens when the child internalises the social norms set by the parents and the rest of the society. Hartmann (1960, 9) believes the superego to have a biological foundation in the long period that human children remain dependent of their parents. The long interaction with the parents enables the internalisation of moral codes and social norms that are often opposed to the more straightforwardly biological impulses of the id.

Everyday experience seems to support Freud's structural personality theory. Everyone has experienced having two minds about something. We want something but if we know our desire to be inappropriate, unlawful or unhealthy, we either restrain ourselves or get what we want in secret, or perhaps we find some other compromise that satisfies our craving at least partly, while still

conforming to social norms, or perhaps we give in to the impulse but feel guilty about it. Freud's structural personality theory explains the dynamics of such inner conflicts.

Drives

Drives are mental energy with a physiological foundation that motivates human actions. Hartmann explains that the difference between the instinctive drives of humans and those of animals is that human drives are "less rigid" and humans can "shift aims" and they have a variety of possible responses to outer and inner stimuli" (1960, 11). Zimbardo explains how Freud categorised drives into the ones affiliated with *self-preservation*, hunger and thirst, and ones that were connected to the survival of the species, that is, the sexual instincts or the *Eros*. (Zimbardo, 1995, 454). In addition to avoiding thirst and starvation, sometimes it is necessary to defend oneself physically. Some violent impulses can be attributed to the drives for self-preservation and the preservation of the species.

Defence mechanisms

The ego employs various defence mechanisms to protect the person's favourable opinion of him- or herself, and to cope with difficulties. For instance, to avoid talking about distressing things, we may try to direct the conversation elsewhere or to simply refuse to talk about a certain topic. This process is known as *resistance* in psychoanalytic terminology. Zetzel and Meissner clarify the relationship between *resistance* and a similar but stronger defence mechanism, *repression*, by explaining how Freud discovered in his clinical practice that sometimes patients' resistance was so strong that unacceptable thoughts, memories and feelings were "rendered inaccessible to conscious introspection" (Zetzel & Meissner, 1973, 37-38). *Resistance*, then, is the refusal to acknowledge

unpleasant thoughts, feelings or memories, and the *repression* of those thoughts, feelings or memories is the result of powerful resistance.

Another common defence mechanism is *projection*, blaming others for one's own difficulties or "attributing one's own 'forbidden' desires to others" (Zimbardo, 1995, 456). *Displacement* is a process of "discharging pent-up feelings, usually hostility, on objects less dangerous than those that initially aroused the emotion" (Zimbardo, 1995, 456). Like *repression*, *projection* and *displacement* are self-deceptive. Repressing problematic things is a refusal, whether conscious or unconscious, to acknowledge reality.

Finally, a defence mechanism known as *sublimation* should be introduced because it is crucial to understanding the persistent popularity of revenge in fiction. *Sublimation* is a process where an unacceptable activity is replaced with a more acceptable substitute. In Zimbardo's example (1995, 455), a film maker finds an outlet for frustrated sexual urges in making films with occasional erotic scenes. Defence mechanisms are a double-edged sword. They are useful, even necessary, but when used excessively, they can lead into more psychological difficulties, as Zimbardo explains.

When overused, they [defence mechanisms] create more problems than they solve. It is psychologically unhealthy to spend a great deal of time and psychic energy deflecting, disguising and rechannelling unacceptable urges in order to reduce anxiety. Doing so leaves little energy for productive living or satisfying human relationships. (Zimbardo, 1995, 455)

3.2 Criticism of psychoanalysis

In *Meaning and Theoretical Terms in Psychoanalysis*, Danto discusses the ontological question of Freudian concepts; are they "amongst the world's stock of entities" or mere "theoretical conveniences" (1960, 316). Although Danto takes the view that a theory can be correct even if its

terminology does not correspond to the entities of the real world, in other words, he suggests the internal logic or “semantic rules” of a theory are more important than the ontological question, Danto believes psychoanalysis to represent human psychology accurately (1960, 316-317). Many of the key concepts of psychoanalysis can be found to correlate with what is known and can be observed of human behaviour and its motives, as I have demonstrated above. Psychoanalytic terms have become household words, which would not have happened if they did not correlate with our understanding of psychology. However, some of Freud’s ideas are best seen as a product of his era, such as his views on women and sexuality. His view of women as lesser humans led Freud astray in his attempts to analyse women.⁹ Still, considering women's position in the society in the late 19th and the early 20th century, Freud’s ideas about women were perhaps not as astonishing to his contemporaries as they seem to the modern reader. Women had a very limited number of options available to them, which was part of the normal order of things. Freud was not alone in thinking that a psychologically healthy woman was happy with her lot in life, and that craving intellectual challenges or meaningful work outside the domestic sphere was a symptom of psychological instability in a woman.

Oedipus complex is one of Freud’s most famous theories, and one of the most controversial. The theory has its supporters even to this day, regardless of the dubious way Freud came to the idea of the Oedipus complex. Freud writes in *An Autobiographical Study* that he had made a mistake in believing the stories his patients frequently told him about being “seduced” by adults. Freud was surprised at the number of female patients who had early memories of being seduced by an adult, usually by the patient’s father. Freud describes how he, at first, believed the stories and assumed the early sexual experiences were the cause of his patients’ neuroses. Then, for some reason that he

⁹ See for example, Freud S. “Some Psychological Consequences of Anatomical Differences between the Sexes” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XIX*.

does not specify, Freud decided that the patients' stories of sexual abuse were actually fantasies, and he further concluded that the fantasies were a symptom of the Oedipus complex (Freud, 1959, 33-34). Zimbardo lists this as one of the causes of criticism against Freud, stating that psychoanalysis "minimises traumatic experiences (such as child abuse) by reinterpreting memories of them as fantasies (based on a child's desire for sexual contact with a parent). . ." (1995, 457). Freud held that trusting his patients' stories had been a mistake when the real mistake was to distrust his patients. It caused Freud to arrive at the theory of the Oedipus complex through unfounded assumptions. When Freud's main proof of the Oedipus complex is so doubtful, it renders the whole theory suspect.

The case of little Hans is thought to be an example of the Oedipus complex but in fact, it demonstrates how Victorian attitudes and practices may have caused symptoms that Freud interpreted as indications of the Oedipus complex. Hans was a little boy with severe street anxiety and a fear of horses. Freud did not treat Hans directly. Instead, he gave directions to Hans' father who acted as a mediator in the psychoanalytic treatment of the boy, and provided Freud with notes about the progress of the case, as Freud explains (1955, 5). Freud's analysis of Hans lacks objectivity. Freud and Hans' father drew their own conclusions about Hans' symptoms, and coerced Hans into accepting the adults' interpretation.¹⁰

Hans was about four years old at the time of the analysis. It is normal for a four-year-old to want to sleep in the same bed with his parents but Freud believed sleeping in the parents' bed aroused the child sexually (Freud, 1955, 17). When sleeping with parents was a taboo, and Hans was not allowed to see his mother naked despite his curiosity, and his mother told him his "widdler" would be cut off if he touched it again (1955, 7-8), it is hardly surprising that Hans developed

¹⁰ See for example, Freud, 1955, 28.

anxieties about these issues. If indeed Hans had complexes about his parents and his sexuality, it seems to me that they were the direct result of the actions of his well-meaning parents.

The objectivity of the analysis was compromised by Hans' father giving his own meaning to the boy's words, and feeding his interpretations to the boy. One example of such re-interpretation is the story Hans tells about a neighbour saying to his daughter, "Don't put your finger to the white horse or it'll bite you" and Hans' father replies, "I say, it strikes me that it isn't a horse you mean, but a widdler, that one mustn't put one's hand to" (Freud, 1955, 29). Freud reports another occasion when Hans and his father talked about Hans' fantasy about beating a horse, and the father's questions are very manipulative¹¹. Freud and Hans' father both assumed that, in Hans' mind, the horse represented his father and the fantasy about whipping a horse was a disguised fantasy about beating his father, and thus, an expression of the boy's Oedipal conflict. However, there is very little grounds for assuming horses represented his father to Hans. It is just as likely that the violent fantasy simply expressed a wish to overcome the thing he feared.

As the conversation progressed, the father kept asking Hans questions about whipping the horse, and Hans provides detailed answers until he suddenly proclaimed, "What I've told you isn't the least true" (Freud, 1955, 80). The father then tried to find out why Hans had invented such a fantasy but rather than posing neutral questions, he blatantly tried to get the boy to give answers that would support the theory of the Oedipus complex:

I: "How much of it's true?"

Hans: "None of it's true; I only told it you for fun."

[. . .]

I: "You thought it to yourself because you saw it in the street."

Hans: "Yes."

I: "Which would you really like to beat? Mummy, Hanna, or me?"

Hans: "Mummy."

I: "Why?"

Hans: "I should just like to beat her."

¹¹ See (Freud, 1955, 79).

I: "When did you ever see any one beating their Mummy?"

Hans: "I've never seen any one do it, never in all my life."

I: "And yet you'd just like to do it. How would you like to set about it?"

Hans: "With a carpet-beater." (His mother often threatens to beat him with the carpet-beater.)

(Freud, 1955, 80-81)

The question, "Which would you really like to beat? Mummy, Hanna or me?" is extremely suggestive. There is no reason to believe Hans was thinking about beating anything but the horse, and when presented with the choice of Mummy, Hanna or the father to beat, Hans picks his mother. His choice may have been a random whim but earlier it was revealed that the mother beats the children, which may explain Hans' choice. The physical discipline the children were subjected to was not discussed extensively in Freud's study of Hans' case. The beatings were only mentioned when Hans confessed to wishing his little sister was not alive because he loathed her screaming, and when Hans' father pointed out that Hans also screamed sometimes, Hans explained, "When she's whacked on her bare bottom, then she screams" (1955, 72). The father then asked if Hans had ever whacked his sister, and Hans specified, "When Mummy whacks her on her bottom, then she screams" (1955, 72). It is obvious that the mother disciplined Hans and his sister physically on more than one or two occasions, and often made threats to beat Hans with the carpet-beater (1955, 81). In view of the circumstances, it is not far-fetched to assert that when asked to choose which family member to beat, Hans chose his mother on a vengeful impulse.

Hans was so young that he could not be expected to adhere to his own thinking when his father strongly suggested to him what he should say. Hans had learned that when he said what his father wanted him to say, the interrogation would end and he would receive positive feedback. Eventually Hans grew out of his phobia and Freud assumed it was because the boy's Oedipus complex had been resolved, but the more likely explanation is that Hans got over his fears and anxieties simply because he knew his parents were genuinely trying to help him. Freud's theory

about the Oedipus complex as the cause of Hans' phobia and anxiety is doubtful. It is more likely that Hans' conflicted feelings towards his parents, which Freud saw as proof of the Oedipus complex, were the direct result of his parents' Victorian upbringing methods which, although well-meaning, were alarming by today's standards. Hans was sometimes caressed, sometimes beaten. He was threatened with physical violence, even castration. Sexuality was a taboo and Hans was told all his "nonsense," that is, his childish fears and anxieties, would go away if he stopped "touching his widdler." On top of everything else, something as natural as going into the parents' bed was a huge taboo. When Hans felt anxious or frightened, and climbed into the bed with his parents to be comforted, his father would object because he thought taking the child into the bed was harmful. Hans' mother would get annoyed and say, "It's all nonsense," and cuddle with Hans despite the father's angry protests. The scene occurred frequently, as Hans' father tells Freud (Freud, 1955, 39). If a child has to defy his father's objections just to satisfy his perfectly normal need for comfort and physical closeness with his parents, it is no wonder that the child develops some complex as a result. As much as the Oedipus complex can be said to exist, in Hans' case it is the direct result of his parents' actions. The Victorian upbringing and taboos caused most of Hans' problems but Freud's indirect treatment of the boy was successful, even if his theory of the Oedipus complex was incorrect, because Hans received a lot of attention and support from his parents, who, despite their misguided parenting methods, were well-meaning and fond of their children.

There are more criticisms against psychoanalysis that should be voiced, starting from Freud's unscientific method of constructing his theories, a problem which I have already touched upon in analysing Hans' case. It is obvious that Freud's method was far from scientific. He used a limited number of case studies to extrapolate theories that he supposed to be universal. Furthermore, as Zimbardo points out, Freud extrapolated theories about normal personality based on his

observations of mentally ill patients (Zimbardo, 1995, 456). The unscientific methods led Freud into making some mistakes, but those mistakes do not diminish the value of his successes. It is prudent, however, to bear in mind the limitations of psychoanalysis.

As for the objection to using psychoanalysis to analyse literature that pre-date Freud, it would be relevant only if psychoanalysis had radically changed the way human psyche functions. Freud may have revolutionised our understanding of psychology, but he did not change the mind itself. Although Freud was the first to make the unconscious mind an object of systematic study, he did not invent the idea of unconscious mental processes. According to Zetzel and Meissner, poets and writers around the turn of the sixteenth century already explored the unconscious processes of the mind, but the unconscious was not of scientific interest until Freud began to study it (1973, 46-47). The objection to conducting a psychoanalytic analysis on a text like *Hamlet* is that psychoanalysis has changed the way we perceive and understand the human psyche, and that a certain perception of psychology makes us act according to that perception. In a word, the argument is that psychoanalysis is like a self-fulfilling prophecy. If that were the case, psychoanalysis would not be applicable to analysing literary texts created before psychoanalysis became widely known. If the objection was logical, the ban would also have to include modern texts whose authors are not aware of Freudian theory, and in fact, by logical extension, literary scholars would have to discard all theories authors were not familiar with when writing their stories. Therefore, the objection to using psychoanalysis on *Hamlet* is rather illogical, even if we allow for the fact that psychoanalysis influences our understanding of psychology.

3.3 Psychoanalytic approach to revenge

To establish a psychoanalytic interpretation of revenge, understanding how the motivating drives work is a good starting point. As explained in section 3.1, the purpose of the drives is to ensure the survival of the individual and of the species. Sexual and aggressive impulses are powerful motivating forces, along with basic needs like hunger and thirst. In Freudian theory, action is the resolution of the inner conflict between the motivating drives and social norms.

According to psychoanalysis, behaviour is driven or motivated, by powerful intrapsychic forces. In this view, human actions stem from inherited drives, and from attempts to resolve conflicts between personal needs and society's demands to act appropriately. (Zimbardo, 1995, 10)

Drives alone they do not determine human behaviour. Human beings depend on one another so we must take other people into consideration before acting on our impulses. When conflicts arise between individuals, the drive for self-preservation requires that we either defend ourselves or flee the situation, whether the attack is verbal or physical. Breuer and Freud hold that successful self-defence is psychologically more satisfying than fleeing. Furthermore, they propose a direct connection between self-preservation and revenge.

. . . the instinct of revenge which is so powerful in the natural man is nothing whatever but the excitation of a reflex that has not been released. To defend oneself against injury in a fight and, in doing so, to injure one's opponent is the adequate and pre-formed psychological reflex. If it has been carried out insufficiently or not at all, it is constantly released again and again by recollections, and the instinct of revenge comes into being as an irrational volitional impulse. (Breuer & Freud, 1895, 205)

The revenge impulse derives from impulse to defend oneself. Self-defence is an immediate reaction to physical or psychological violence, whereas revenge is a delayed and premeditated counter-action. Breuer and Freud state that the impulse for revenge results from the frustration of the natural instinct for self-defence, which correlates with our everyday experience of conflicts. The failure to defend ourselves continues to bother us, which results in vengeful thoughts and, sometimes, actions.

The thirst for revenge can be a powerful, all-consuming feeling. Milovan Djilas, quoted in Elster, describes the feeling:

Revenge is an over-powering and consuming fire. It flares up and burns away every other thought and emotion. It alone remains, over and above everything else. Vengeance. . . was the glow in our eyes, the flame in our cheeks, the pounding in our temples. . . (Elster, 1990, 870-871).

Durham observes that the mention of revenge sparks immediate interest in listeners but the word “forgiveness” gets a less enthusiastic reaction (Durham, 2000, 7). Moreover, Durham notes how traditional children’s literature is full of stories of revenge, and how some of the most famous literary classics, such as Melville’s *Moby Dick*, focus on the theme of revenge.

Our fascination with the Vindictive Character, our identification with the aggressor, is a powerful factor in the enduring quality of some of our greatest literature. (Durham, 2000, 60)

The continued popularity of revenge in fiction while it is disapproved of in reality is an incongruence that has an explanation in psychoanalytic theory. As the social norms censor revenge but we retain the innate impulse for revenge behaviour, writing or reading stories about revenge functions as a defence mechanism, providing an outlet for the frustrated urge to revenge by the sublimation of the socially condemned urge into something more palatable. Revenge itself is a kind of defence mechanism, as Rosen points out, because it directs the focus away from the “feelings of shame, loss, guilt, powerlessness, and mourning” (2007, 603), the feelings associated with being wronged. By focusing on revenge, the avenger stops being a victim and regains power but, as Rosen remarks, by focusing on revenge instead of the feelings of loss, the avenger postpones the process of mourning (2007, 603). Consequently, harbouring revenge prevents the avenger from healing and moving on. Giving reign to the revenge impulse has the benefit of restoring power to the victim but a prolonged preoccupation with revenge is as psychologically unhealthy as the excessive use of any other defence mechanism. Interestingly, the adverse psychological effects of vengefulness were

known long before psychoanalysis was invented. Sir Francis Bacon writes in his *Essays*, “This is certain that a man that studieth revenge, keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal, and do well” (Bacon, 1625).

The impulse to take revenge seems to be innate whereas forgiveness is learned behaviour. Durham’s survey of children’s associations with revenge supports the idea of revenge as an instinctive impulse. The purpose of the survey was to gather information about pre-teens’ attitudes towards revenge and forgiveness. Durham’s test participants were a group of 53 boys and 44 girls. Most of the participants were between the ages of eleven or twelve. The children were given two questions to answer anonymously: “What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word 'revenge?’” and “What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word 'forgiveness?’” (Durham, 2000, 110-111).

The results revealed that the pre-teens had an abundance of associations about revenge, but little to say about forgiveness. In fact, many of the answers indicated that the meaning of the word *forgiveness* was “not quite pertinent to their experience” (Durham, 2000, 111). The lack of associations about forgiveness is understandable because fully grasping the idea of forgiveness requires learning, the ability to understand abstract concepts and a certain level of maturity. Therefore, it is obvious that forgiveness is not an innate impulse in our psyche. Van Noort reports of a study that suggests the urge to revenge has a biological foundation. Neuroscientists at the university of Zurich have discovered that thinking about revenge activates the “reward centre” in the brain, the same area that activates when we see a beautiful face or use cocaine (van Noort, 2007, 190). This confirms that the revenge impulse is a fundamental motivating drive similar to the impulses that compel us to satisfy our hunger and to procreate.

Children are taught forgiveness from an early age, and they are often coerced into saying the words “I’m sorry,” whether or not they understand the concept of forgiveness. The concept of revenge, however, comes naturally to children. It requires conscious effort from the parents to teach a child that revenge is not desired behaviour. When we have internalised the social norms concerning revenge, we learn to control our revenge impulses, like other unacceptable impulses. The superego warns us against acting on the urge to revenge when revenge is unacceptable. The ego has to balance the drives surging from the id and the restrictions imposed by the superego.

In *The Therapist’s Encounters with Revenge and Forgiveness*, Durham surveys the impact of abusive parents on the development of two personality types: the exploited-repressive and the vindictive personality. Durham uses the term *vindictive character* to describe a person who has been “rejected, manipulated or exploited” in childhood and “whose thirst for revenge has led them to act out rather than repress their anger” (2000, 9). The *exploited-repressive* person has also been neglected or exploited as a child, but has repressed their anger rather than expressing it. I should mention that in Durham’s study, the word *abuse* does not refer to sexual abuse. In most cases, the patient’s parents had been emotionally abusive. Durham presents the following introduction of the two character types and their origins.

[. . .] in his practice the therapist will find himself encountering expressions of vengeance in essentially two forms:

1. *Vengeful thinking* concerning the perpetrator: retaliatory wishes which surface in the course of the treatment of the anxious, depressed patient who has been used by the parent in an inappropriate and self-serving manner. I have chosen to characterize this patient as the ‘Exploited-Repressive’ individual.

2. *Vindictiveness*: a pervasive character trait in the individual who has been more openly rejected, manipulated or used, and who presents with a personality disorder, most often a narcissistic or borderline personality disorder. In discussing this patient, the term ‘Vindictive Character’ is used. (Durham, 2000, 7-8)

The exploited-repressive person is accommodating, nice and sensitive to other people’s needs because, as Durham writes, “He has been a parent to his parents, accommodating their wishes

without regard for his own – in fact, he may not be cognizant of his own needs” (Durham, 2000, 16). The “vengeful thinking” Durham mentions above surfaces only after the person understands how he or she has been abused. Durham explains that typically exploited-repressive patients seek therapy for their poor self-esteem, depression and an inclination to sacrifice their own needs to serve others (2000, 17).

The vindictive character is the opposite of the exploited-repressive, although vindictive and exploited-repressive people come from similar backgrounds. Vindictive people have had an emotionally deprived childhood like the exploited-repressive, but instead of making them submissive, it has made them “hardened and cynical, and [. . .] enraged at the world at large” (Durham, 2000, 11). This is an interesting point especially for the analysis of *Harry Potter* because the hero and the villain both had a similarly miserable childhood experiences, the villain in an orphanage and the hero in an unloving foster family. The villain developed a vindictive character while the hero became exploited-repressive. Durham’s description of the causes of vindictiveness below fits both Voldemort and Harry’s childhood with an almost eerie accuracy.

Experiences leading to vindictiveness are manifold, but invariably include a pathological negativity, at some level, directed toward the individual in early years. The negativity may be manifested in the form of outright hostility, physical abuse, or neglect and indifference. (Durham, 2000, 43)

Socarides (1977), quoted in Durham (2000), describes a vindictive person as “grudging, unforgiving, remorseless, ruthless, heartless, implacable and inflexible” (2000, 45). Furthermore, “He lives for revenge with a single-mindedness of purpose. Passionately he moves towards punitive or retaliatory action. Above all other desires is the one to ‘get even’ (in effect, to get more than ‘even’)” (Durham, 2000, 55).

Neither the exploited-repressive nor the vindictive character type is psychologically wholesome. The constant self-denial of the exploited-repressive type does not lead to happiness,

though exploited-repressive people may be outwardly calm and pleasant, and as one can imagine, they are well liked for their giving, harmonious nature. Unfortunately they get easily exploited in all their relationships because they find it hard to set limits to their helpfulness. Contrary to the exploited-repressive, the vindictive types spread unhappiness to the people around them. They are quick to take offence and retaliate. Their negative worldview, the intense focus on real and perceived slights, has disastrous personal consequences because, as Durham points out, vindictiveness is so consuming that at worst it leaves no mental energy for other pursuits (2000, 55).

3.4 Types of revenge and retaliation

Revenge is such a complex phenomenon that one word is not enough to cover its every aspect. There are various types and degrees of revenge in both *Hamlet* and *Harry Potter*, as is the case of revenge in the world outside fiction. From now on, I will adapt Rosen's terminology to describe the different degrees of revenge. Rosen talks about *normal revenge* and *pathological revenge* (Rosen, 2007). By normal revenge, Rosen refers to revenge that is in proportion to the original offence, and respectively, when revenge becomes disproportionate and beyond reason, he calls it pathological. I will use the word *proportionate* instead of *normal* because it is more accurate and less ambiguous.

Rosen illustrates the difference between proportionate and pathological revenge with two examples, Euripides' *Medea* and J.M. Barrie's *What Every Woman Knows*. Medea is a pathological avenger who murders her own children to revenge her husband's infidelity, whereas Maggie Shand in J.M. Barrie's story avenges a similar offence by "a proportional, well-aimed narcissistic thrust, one that punctures pretence with minimal collateral damage" (2007, 613-615). According to Rosen (614-615), Mr Shand refuses to acknowledge Maggie's influence on his political success, and on top of the ungratefulness, he is unfaithful. Maggie, who normally writes her husband's speeches,

takes her revenge by suggesting that he should work on his next speech at a friend's cottage. Mr Shand seizes the opportunity to spend time with his mistress at a secluded cottage while writing the speech. Without Maggie's help, the speech is such a failure that it damages Mr Shand's political career. Moreover, the illegitimate lovers get tired of each other at the confines of the cottage. Maggie saves her husband's face and career by producing a speech that was supposedly a second version of the unsuccessful speech. The humbled man is forced to acknowledge that he owes his success to his wife. Maggie Shand's carefully planned revenge took an ego for an ego, without causing further pain to herself or to others. Rosen contrasts Maggie Shand's normal revenge with the story of Medea, who planned her revenge to cause the maximum amount of pain to Jason, ruthlessly murdering her own children to get back at their unfaithful father. These two stories illustrate the difference between normal, or proportionate, and pathological revenge very well, but in addition to the fictional examples of revenge, see the real life revenge story from *Me* magazine¹².

In addition to the proportionate and the pathological, there is another aspect of revenge to consider. Van Noort categorises types of revenge according to how spontaneous or premeditated the act is. She refers to spontaneous and unpremeditated revenge as *retaliation* to make a clear distinction to a planned revenge (2007, 185, 187, 191). Retaliation is a reaction to a negative stimulus, almost instinctive. Revenge is also a reaction to something negative but it is a delayed and

¹² *When I was a teenager, I had sunglasses that I really liked. Unfortunately, my five-year-old little sister found them, and broke them. I was so upset that I decided to take revenge by wrapping them up as a Christmas gift for her. My sister was shocked when she opened the parcel but the successful revenge backfired: my Christmas spirit was gone, too.*

Big sister, 44 (Outi Jaakkola, *Me* magazine, 12/09, my translation)

This story is a perfect real life example of what Rosen calls a normal revenge. The story also illustrates the tendency of revenge to bite back, and hurt the avenger. The big sister's method of revenge was inventive and cruel, but not out of proportion. The little sister ruined something that made the big sister happy, so the big sister took revenge by ruining something that made the little sister happy, in this case, opening a Christmas present. This revenge follows the "eye for an eye" logic but it is craftier than merely breaking some cherished possession of the little sister. The little sister's guilty conscience produced the shock she felt when she unwrapped the parcel that contained the ruined sunglasses. The little girl got a deserved punishment for her mischief but even so, the teenager felt bad for causing pain to her little sister. The score was settled but both were unhappy because of it. This is an essential characteristic of revenge, particularly when revenge is exacted on someone close. Normal people do not enjoy seeing their loved ones hurt. A pathological avenger would not have such qualms.

calculated reaction. Both retaliation and revenge involve similar feelings but in the case of revenge, the feelings are harboured for a longer period of time. The focus of my analysis is on premeditated revenge but it is useful to make a distinction between revenge and retaliation because there are examples of both types of revenge behaviour in *Hamlet* and in *Harry Potter*. The combination of Rosen's and van Noort's revenge categories produces a system for analysing revenge behaviour according to how normal or pathological it is, whether it is a question of immediate retaliation or actual premeditated revenge. Finally, I will consider if the avengers' motives are primarily selfish or noble. Revenge that spurs from purely ego-centred motives is less likely to gain other people's support than revenge that also serves justice and the greater good.

	Ego Centred		Justice Serving	
Proportional	Revenge	Retaliation	Revenge	Retaliation
Pathological	Revenge	Retaliation	Revenge	Retaliation

Figure 1: Revenge and retaliation: motives and types

Figure 1 illustrates all the possible combinations of revenge types and motives. Some revenge scenarios are more likely than others. For instance, ego centred proportional retaliation is fairly common but it is harder to imagine justice serving pathological retaliation.

4 Revenge in a Cultural Context

Revenge is a complex phenomenon that evokes mixed feelings. In our culture, revenge is generally considered morally problematic or immature. Revengefulness is not seen as a positive character trait for various reasons, the most obvious one being the fact that revenge seldom has positive consequences. As Mahatma Gandhi so eloquently phrased it, “an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.” Then again, in some cultures and situations, it can be a matter of honour to pay back a wrong, and the failure to do so is as a sign of weakness or even moral slackness. As the philosopher Peter French said, revenge becomes a moral imperative if there is no other system for justice (Rosen, 2007, 607).

Revenge appeals to people’s sense of justice even in cultures that do not encourage it. In certain situations, an avenger can even become an admired hero. People who seek revenge for private grudges are rarely seen as heroic but when the vendetta is motivated by a social cause, the avenger becomes a glorified hero, at least in the eyes of the people who believe in the same cause. In reality, it is often impossible to determine objectively whether an act of revenge is justified or not, and it depends on the perspective and the moral principles of the person who makes the judgement.

4.1 Social motives for revenge

We seek revenge to get even, to hurt the people who have hurt us. Our sense of justice demands a settling of the score, although the motives for revenge are psychologically more complex than just getting even. Often we choose to not retaliate at all, even if our first impulse is to strike back. A premeditated revenge needs a powerful motive, something that overcomes the need to adhere to the

norms of society. In addition to the psychological motives for revenge, the survival instinct and the need to repair a damage done to one's ego, there are social reasons that can motivate the avenger.

Sometimes the removal of a threatening enemy to ensure survival is a factual incentive for revenge. When the enemy is dangerous enough, the purpose of revenge, besides settling the score, is to prevent any further threat from that enemy by a total elimination of the enemy.¹³ The problem with that approach is that even if the original enemy is successfully eliminated, someone else may take up the cause of the destroyed enemy, and issue counter-revenge. To avoid such an escalation of revenge, it is often sensible, for individuals as well as communities and nations, to forgo revenge and focus all resources on recovering from the offence. For this reason the social norms in our culture support forgiveness and seeking justice through the proper authorities. But if the victim does not trust the formal authorities to bring the culprit to justice, or if the legal punishment is not severe enough, the victim may choose personal revenge instead of formal justice.

¹³A good example of a vendetta that aims for the total elimination of the enemy is the war on terror that George W. Bush declared after the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001. In the speech he delivered at the joint session of Congress on September 20th 2001, Bush outlined the goal of the war on terror: to revenge the act of terrorism, and to destroy the enemy.

Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them. Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated. (Eidenmuller, 2001-2010, *The Rhetoric of 9-11*)

President Bush was so certain of the justification of his vendetta that he declared that anyone who did not support his agenda was siding with the terrorists. Bush said,

Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen. It may include dramatic strikes, visible on TV, and covert operations, secret even in success. We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest. And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbour or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime. (Eidenmuller, 2001-2010)

Bush does not mention the word revenge but what he says sounds more like revenge than justice, which was his claimed intent earlier in the same speech, "Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done" (Eidenmuller, 2001-2010). Bush talks about justice but that is not how justice works. We do not *bring justice* to our *enemies*. Criminals can be brought to justice but they should be considered innocent until proven guilty, and they should be given a fair trial in an unbiased court, one that does not consider the accused its *enemy*. Using the word *justice* was just rhetoric; Bush appeared to be talking about law, justice and punishment, but it is easy to see he was actually talking about revenge.

Christianity has advocated the merits of forgiveness instead of revenge for centuries in the western world but there are some cultures where old traditions of revenge have prevailed despite Christianity and official legislation. For example, Albania and Montenegro,¹⁴ and the Finnish Romani people have preserved the blood feud as part of the traditional, unwritten social norms that are not always compatible with the law. According to Elster, in societies where feuding is accepted, the feuding continues from one generation to the next. The circle of revenge is difficult to end because it is a matter of honour for an able-bodied man to avenge the death of a relative (Elster, 1990, 871). Criminal organisations like the Mafia are famous for similar feuding. Gang-related violence among young men, which is a problem especially in the USA, follows the same pattern of revenge that perpetuates itself.

4.2 Christian influences on revenge

Although *Hamlet* and *Harry Potter* are written for secular entertainment, the influence of the surrounding Christian culture is visible in both stories. As all fiction, they are the product of their cultural framework but they are not particularly Christian texts. Some Christians have even condemned the *Harry Potter* books as promoting anti-Christian ideas, specifically witchcraft. Similarly, there are certain elements in *Hamlet* that Christianity frowns upon, such as consorting with ghosts. The attitude towards revenge in these texts is not particularly Christian, either.

Nevertheless, the influence of Christianity is clearly discernible. Religion is explicitly portrayed in *Hamlet*, for example when Claudius worries about the state of his soul and tries to pray. To the contrary, religion is not visible in the *Harry Potter* books and it does not seem like a topic of interest. This is apparent in the festivities that Hogwarts, the school of witchcraft and

¹⁴ Elster, *Norms of Revenge* (1990, 870)

wizardry, celebrates. Hogwarts marks Christmas, though the celebrations have no religious content. Halloween is another big event in the Hogwarts calendar, but there are no festivities for Easter. The omission shows that Easter is no longer a notable occasion for the majority of Rowling's readers, or for Rowling herself. Religious celebrations have lost their importance as the western culture has become increasingly secular.

Even so, it is easy to notice the historical influence of Christianity, even in a non-religious text like *Harry Potter*. It is scarcely a coincidence that Voldemort begins to resemble a snake as a consequence of the destruction of his soul. Voldemort has broken his soul into pieces in the process of performing a dark magic spell that involved ritual murder. These evil deeds destroyed Voldemort's soul, literally breaking it apart, which caused him to become less human. This dehumanisation is apparent not only in his personality but also in his physical appearance, described in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, "[his face] whiter than a skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes, and a nose that was as flat as a snake's, with slits for nostrils..." (2001, 697). The idea of giving a villain the characteristics of a snake seems so natural to the reader that it almost passes without raising the question, why a snake and not, say, a frog? Snake is a traditional symbol for evil in Christianity. In the Bible, Satan assumes the form of a snake to lure Eve into committing the original sin (NIV, Gen 3:1-7). Everyone who has grown up in a Christian society knows this, even if they have never read the Bible. Furthermore, the characters in *Harry Potter* have souls, which becomes apparent when it is revealed that Voldemort has splintered his. The concept of a soul is connected to Christianity for western readers, although the idea of a soul is common to almost all religions. The references to the characters' souls and Voldemort's snakelike appearance indicate that although the *Harry Potter* books apparently have nothing to do with religion, they are influenced by

the surrounding Christianity. Therefore, it is appropriate to apply Christian understanding of ethics and morality in the reading of revenge in these books.

Christian influence is implicit in *Harry Potter*, but in *Hamlet* religion is portrayed as a natural part of everyday life. The characters talk about god, engage in religious activities such as prayer, and display anxiety for the state of their soul, as Claudius does in a bout of remorse.

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't –
A brother's murder. Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will, (3.3.36-39)

The reason for the overt religiousness portrayed by the characters is that religion was an integral part of everyday life in Shakespeare's time, so it is natural that it is depicted in the play. Similarly, the *Harry Potter* books reflect a modern attitude to religion; it is ignored or seen as a private matter.

Though religion has become less dominant in our culture during the last few decades, our ethics are still based on Christian ideology. The Bible has been the moral guideline for the western world for centuries, and its influence is deeply rooted in our cultural heritage. Even those who have not studied the Bible, have probably encountered the famous idea of “turning the other cheek,” which crystallises the Christian ideal of self sacrifice, answering evil with kindness. The idea comes from the Gospel of Matthew,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (NIV, Matthew 5:38-39).

At the beginning of this passage, Jesus refers to the old law given by Moses, which stated that the punishment had to be in proportion to the crime. For example, death was considered a just punishment for murder, and for some other serious crimes. Different corporal punishments or financial compensations were recommended for physical assaults, and the severity of the repercussions depended on the degree of the injury and on the respective social statuses of the

victim and the perpetrator (Ex 21:12-25). The law that dealt justice on the “eye for eye and tooth for tooth” principle was obviously an early attempt at controlling revenge.

In the passage from the Gospel of Matthew cited above, Jesus urges his followers to abandon that idea of justice, and to submit to aggressors rather than answer violence with violence. A peaceful acceptance like that is a beautiful notion, and if everyone adheres to it, it leads to a less violent society. Unfortunately, turning the other cheek is incompatible with the basic human instinct for self-defence. It would be very strange if someone actually submitted to a violent assault without trying to resist or at least avoid the blows. However, Jesus takes the idea even further a few verses later in the same passage,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your father in heaven (Matthew 5:43-45).

Merely turning the other cheek is not enough, but Christians should find it in them to love their enemies. It is a lot to ask but the underlying thought is that there is no merit in loving those who love you. Anyone can do that, but Christians should aspire to be like God, and love everyone in equal measure.

In the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul offers a less noble motivation for abstaining from revenge and being kind to one’s enemies,

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Ro 12:19-21).

Firstly, this passage contains a promise that God will avenge evil deeds, so his followers may rest assured that if someone has wronged against them, it will not go unpunished. Secondly, the passage advises Christians to show compassion to their enemy because that way the enemy may come to be ashamed of their actions, and repent. The hot coals on the head illustrate the burning feeling of

shame and guilt. The idea of embarrassing the wrongdoer by kindness is certainly appealing, though not as noble as Jesus' notion of aspiring to be good for unselfish reasons. Nevertheless, it has to be said that even the kind of meekness and forgiveness, as demonstrated in the verses taken from the Gospel of Matthew, is not entirely selfless if the incentive is the possible reward in the afterlife, which is what the latter half of verse 46 seems to suggest. "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?" (Matthew 5:46)

The previous extracts illustrate the principles the Bible offers regarding revenge, but there is one more verse worth citing:

“ ‘Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself’ ” (Lev 19:18).

The significant thing about this verse is that it is from the Book of Leviticus, which shows that opposing attitudes towards revenge were already in the Old Testament, so it was not an entirely new concept that Jesus brought into Christianity. The philosophy of avoiding revenge has been introduced into our culture thousands of years ago through religion, and although solving disputes non-violently has become the norm in most societies, we have retained our taste for vengeance.

4.3 Revenge, punishment and law

Revenge and punishment are not the same, although the two concepts are interrelated. The purpose of revenge is to pay back a crime or an offence, to make the wrongdoer suffer as much as, or more, than the victim of the original crime. Arguably, the main purpose of punishment is not revenge but to put the offender back in line, to make sure the offender and everyone else understands that the offending behaviour results in punishment. Punishments may have other purposes depending on the situation. Children can be punished so that they would learn proper behaviour. Criminals may be sentenced to the loss of freedom not only to teach them a lesson but also to keep other people safe

while the criminals are locked away in prison. Often legal punishments involve monetary compensation to the victim or the victim's family, the idea being that criminals must pay for the damage they have done.

The most obvious difference between revenge and legal punishment is that revenge is private, pursued by the victim or someone close to the victim, whereas legal punishments belong in the public domain. In some cases, there is an element of revenge in the legal punishment, most obviously in the case of the death penalty. An executed criminal cannot learn anything from the experience, so revenge must be a major incentive for sentencing people to death. The various legal systems existing around the world have evolved from systems of regulated revenge, but revenge is no longer the only purpose of legal punishments. Rosen briefly discusses the relationship between revenge and law, quoting a witticism of C.G. Schoenfield, "The law is to revenge what marriage is to sex" (Rosen, 2007, 607). Schoenfield, an attorney by profession, made the point that law should institutionalise the impulse for revenge (Rosen, 2007, 607) because otherwise, as Rosen goes on to explain, individuals will be tempted to take personal revenge.

It is impossible, within the scope of this thesis, to make a detailed study of the legality of various revenge scenarios in Shakespeare's time as well as our own, but a few observations are in order. Revenge as such is not illegal but acts of violence are. In *Harry Potter*, the characters are not bound by mundane law because the doings of the magical people are hidden from the normal society. However, the witches and wizards have laws and regulations of their own, and the punishment for the most serious crimes is a life sentence in a prison where the treatment of the criminals is so brutal that it surely violates human rights. As for *Hamlet*, we have already established that the original story dates back at least to the 12th century. Whatever legal system was in place in the society that produced the legend of Amleth, must have been very elementary

compared to our own. Shakespeare's version of *Hamlet* is presumably set in his own time, or at least the not very distant past. The law forbade murder and violence in the 16th century and the punishments were brutal. What makes legal issues interesting for the reading of *Hamlet* is that the monarch was also the supreme authority of law. Regicide was not only illegal but also highest possible treason, but if the king's murderer was crowned king, as Claudius was, he became the highest legal authority. Therefore, one of Hamlet's difficulties is that even proving Claudius' guilt might not be enough to get him to justice. This, to a certain extent, warrants personal revenge because there was no legal authority for Hamlet to appeal to.

Shakespeare's contemporary, Sir Francis Bacon, put forth the following view of revenge and law.

Revenge is a kind of wild justice; which the more man's nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out. For as for the first wrong, it doth but offend the law; but the revenge of that wrong, putteth the law out of office. (Sir Francis Bacon, *Essays*, 1625, Of Revenge)

Sir Francis Bacon did not approve of revenge because if people were to "put law out of office" by taking revenge to their own hands, anarchy would ensue. Furthermore, Bacon opposed revenge for moral reasons, appealing to the virtues of forgiveness, but he makes one concession: "The most tolerable sort of revenge, is for those wrongs which there is law to remedy; but then let a man take heed, the revenge be such as there is no law to punish" (Bacon, 1625). The attorney C.G. Schoenfield's views that Rosen restated are similar to those of Bacon. Both believe that law should prevent revenge because uncontrolled revenge is dangerous. Bacon, however, also emphasised that revenge is morally wrong, and praised the benefits of forgiveness in his essay on revenge. A differing point of view is that of the philosopher Peter French, paraphrased by Rosen, "absent the social structures of justice, individual revenge becomes a moral imperative" (Rosen, 2007, 607). Indeed, if there is no formal justice, then revenge is the only form of justice, which brings us back

to Sir Francis Bacon's statement, "Revenge is kind of wild justice." In other words, justice is, essentially, controlled revenge.

5 Psychology of Revenge in *Hamlet* and in *Harry Potter*

As established before, revenge is a focal theme in *Hamlet* and in the *Harry Potter* series, and the starting point of this study is the similarities in the storylines of the two tales of revenge. Hamlet's story is parallel to Harry Potter's in many respects. In both stories, the protagonist is obsessed with avenging the death of his parents. For both heroes, revenge also has a nobler purpose than merely settling the score with the killer, for Harry and Hamlet both believe that ridding the world of the villain is essential for a better future. Harry hears the truth of his parents' death when he learns he has magical powers, and that he is to start his studies at Hogwarts to become a wizard. Harry, who has been told his parents died in a car crash, is shocked to hear they were murdered by an evil wizard who calls himself Voldemort.

Revenge is not the first thing that occurs to Harry, but two years later, when he hears that Sirius Black, an escaped convict, betrayed his parents to Voldemort, Harry begins to contemplate revenge (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, 1999, 232-233). As Elster's study¹⁵ shows, the thirst for revenge is a powerful feeling that can obscure sense and reason. That aspect of the psychology of revenge is portrayed in *Harry Potter* when Harry, a boy of thirteen, attacks Sirius, a convicted murderer, to avenge the death of his parents.

'HE KILLED MY MUM AND DAD!' Harry roared [. . .] He had forgotten about magic – he had forgotten that he was short and skinny and thirteen, whereas Black was a tall, full-grown man – all Harry could think was that he wanted to hurt Black as badly as he could and that he didn't care how much he got hurt in return – (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, 1999, 366)

Another occasion when Harry experiences a powerful urge to revenge is in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, after witnessing Snape kill Dumbledore (2005, 557-563). Harry runs after Snape in mindless pursuit, and when he reaches him, Harry does his best to injure Snape seriously. He

¹⁵ Elster (1990)

even tries the deadly Sectumsempra curse that cuts deep lacerations on the victim who will then bleed to death unless the cuts are deep enough to be instantly fatal.

Harry uttered an inarticulate yell of rage: in that instant, he cared not whether he lived or died; pushing himself to his feet again, he staggered blindly towards Snape, the man he now hated as much as he hated Voldemort himself - 'Sectum-' (2005, 563).

Hamlet experiences a powerful thirst for revenge when he learns about the circumstances of his father's death, (1.5.29-31) but instead of charging at Claudius then and there, he resolves to wait, but when he witnesses his mother's death, he feels the same rage that propelled Harry into attacking Sirius and Snape, though he could not stand a chance against either of them.

5.1 Revenge and retaliation

The excerpts above are examples of spontaneous, spur of the moment revenge that van Noort terms retaliation to distinguish spontaneous revenge from premeditated. The main storylines in *Hamlet* and *Harry Potter* revolve around premeditated, drawn out revenge. The reason behind Hamlet's delayed revenge has been a topic for speculation for generations of literary scholars, and the interpretations have varied from one generation to the next. After Freud analysed Hamlet and diagnosed the character as suffering from the Oedipus complex, a popular theory has been that Hamlet's real reason for delaying is that Claudius has done what Hamlet secretly wanted to do himself; kill his father and marry his mother. The theory is irrational because if Hamlet did have an Oedipus complex, he would have been even more enraged when Claudius usurped, not only the throne but also Hamlet's repressed Oedipal aspirations. Such an act would not inspire admiration or respect in the thwarted prince, at least not enough to make him so hesitant to carry out his revenge. It is also normal to feel uncomfortable, even resentful, if a parent remarries quickly after the death

of one's other parent. Such feelings are not an indication of some psychological problem. On the contrary, Hamlet's feelings are a normal reaction to the disturbing events in his life.

There are more probable and more practical reasons for Hamlet's delaying than the supposed Oedipus complex. One of them is the often ignored fact that the character of Hamlet could be younger than the actors who usually play his part have led us to imagine.¹⁶ Hamlet attends the University of Wittenberg, and university students in the 16th century were much younger than they are now. Boys went to university around the age of twelve, so if Hamlet went to university at the usual age, and if he has a year or two of studies in Wittenberg behind him, he would be thirteen or fourteen, or fifteen at most. On the other hand, if the gravedigger remembers the year of Yorick's death correctly, Hamlet would have to be at least in his mid-twenties to remember a jester who died "three and twenty years" ago (5.1.164-165). Either the gravedigger's memory fails and Yorick has not been dead for that long, or the gravedigger remembers the time of Yorick's death correctly and Hamlet went to university at a later age than usual, or he has studied for a longer time than was customary. The third alternative is that Hamlet's memories of Yorick are just his imagination running wild, but that does not seem viable because after the sea voyage Hamlet seems to be more serious than before. Moreover, he is in the company of Horatio and the gravedigger who does not recognise Hamlet, so he has no need to play the madman and talk nonsense, if not for the benefit of the audience.

If Hamlet is in his late teens rather than a grown man, his young age is one reason why he cannot simply walk up to Claudius and challenge him. On the other hand, Hamlet can fight Laertes, and the young prince is apparently skilled enough in swordsmanship. However, Hamlet and Laertes are of roughly the same age while Claudius presumably belongs to the same generation with

¹⁶ David Robertson, private conversation

Hamlet's parents, so he might be more experienced in sword fighting than the much younger Hamlet. Still, there is no evidence of Claudius being a fighter. According to Hamlet, Claudius is "bloat" (3.4.171) and compares to the old king Hamlet like "a mildewed ear" compares to Roman gods (3.4. 54-65), so unless Hamlet is very biased, we may assume that Claudius is not in a good shape, at least compared to the late king. Moreover, Claudius is partial to feasting, as we learn at the beginning of the play, which supports Hamlet's assessment of his physical condition. That Claudius resorted to poison may suggest that he was unsure of defeating King Hamlet in a fair fight, though his main motive for using poison was likely that he wanted the death to appear natural. The only way Claudius could succeed to the throne before Hamlet was by marrying Gertrude, which gave him the appearance of having a legitimate claim to the throne, and we may argue that Gertrude would not have married Claudius had she known he had murdered her first husband. Therefore, Claudius' secretive method of killing the king does not necessarily imply he cannot wield a sword. As a nobleman, he would have carried a sword at all times and he would have practised sword fighting since early childhood, so even if Claudius is not Denmark's best warrior, he could still be more experienced a fighter than the young Hamlet. Hamlet might be able beat Claudius in a fight but it is by no means certain.

While the topic of age is commonly ignored when discussing *Hamlet*, it is the main reason why Harry Potter has to delay his revenge. The character is a year-old baby when his parents are murdered, and he remains ignorant about his real past until he begins his studies at Hogwarts at the age of eleven. The murderer of Harry's parents, the evil wizard Lord Voldemort, is assumed dead but later on in the story, Voldemort comes back to life through black magic, and Harry begins to entertain thoughts of avenging his parents. At first it is just a childish fantasy but as the story progresses, it gradually becomes evident that Harry is destined to be the instrument of justice. As

Harry grows up, the dream of revenge turns into grim determination to stop Lord Voldemort from gaining power, and in doing so, also to avenge his parents.

Another reason for Hamlet's delaying after the Ghost appears to him, one that is explicitly voiced in the play, is that Hamlet wants to make sure that Claudius really is the murderer. Hamlet does not trust the otherworldly messenger without reservations, so instead of rushing into action, he resolves to find proof of Claudius' guilt. Hamlet's reservations add a touch of realism into the otherwise supernatural turn of events. It also makes Hamlet a more intelligent character than one who would draw his sword as soon as the Ghost tells him to revenge. Nevertheless, wanting to make sure he is justified in seeking revenge explains only a part of the delay. Hamlet hesitates even after he receives the confirmation he sought. He would have a perfect opportunity to slay Claudius while he is focused on prayer and does not notice Hamlet's presence, but Hamlet does not seize the opportunity. According to Rosen,

The target must be worthy of his fate, largely to allay any introspective guilt on the part of the revenge-seeker. The target must be dehumanized, demonized, emptied of any mitigating merit, while at the same time the avenger and his motives must be kept superego-bribingly immaculate. (Rosen, 2007, 604)

Hamlet has a very negative opinion of Claudius but perhaps his attempt at praying was such a mitigating merit that it made Hamlet hesitate. Nothing in the text supports such an interpretation, however. It is not mercy or self-doubt that stays Hamlet's sword at that moment. Hamlet has drawn his sword to kill Claudius when it occurs to him that if he kills Claudius in mid-prayer, his soul goes to heaven (3.3.73-74). Hamlet pauses to think and he surmises that sending the murderer to heaven would be a reward rather than revenge, so he decides to take his revenge when Claudius is engrossed in his sins, depriving him of the chance to repent, as Claudius had done to Hamlet's father (3.3.75-95). At this point, Hamlet delays because he wants his revenge to be as vicious as possible. To an atheist viewer it may seem like Hamlet is just making up excuses to delay the

revenge. However, if Hamlet is a character that really believes in life after death, as we can assume he must do, after seeing the ghost of his father with his own eyes, it is a genuine concern for him whether he sends Claudius to heaven or to hell. Consequently, there is no reason to believe Hamlet has some ulterior motive, such as the Oedipus complex, for sparing Claudius at this point.

Hamlet agonises over his own delaying and he envies Laertes for his quick action. The difference between Hamlet's intended revenge and Laertes's attempted revenge is the difference between revenge and retaliation. When Laertes hears Hamlet has killed Polonius, he sets out to revenge his father's death at once. Laertes acts on impulse, in the heat of anger, without planning. This kind of revenge behaviour fits van Noort's description of retaliation rather than premeditated revenge. Hamlet envies Laertes' resolution and swiftness in seeking revenge, but he does not realise the differences in their circumstances.

In the end, Laertes does not get to retaliate but Claudius convinces him to seek revenge in a more circuitous manner. Claudius wants Hamlet dead without implicating himself, so he arranges a supposedly friendly duel between Hamlet and Laertes, where Laertes is meant to wound Hamlet with a poisoned sword. Claudius has devised a back-up plan to kill Hamlet with poisoned wine in case Laertes fails. Claudius makes a show of wanting to celebrate Hamlet's first hit. He drops a pearl into a cup of wine and offers it to Hamlet, but Hamlet declines, saying, "I'll play this bout first. Set it by awhile" (5.2. 236). Whether he is suspicious of the cup marked with a pearl, or whether he simply wants to keep a clear head while fencing, is hard to determine. After the sea voyage Hamlet must know that Claudius is trying to get him killed, so it would be prudent of Hamlet to decline any drinks Claudius offers him. It is also prudent for him to behave as if he trusted Claudius.

After Hamlet's refusal to drink, Hamlet and Laertes resume the duel and Hamlet scores another hit immediately. Claudius seems pleased but Gertrude delays the fight, probably to give Hamlet a chance to catch his breath (5.2. 239-240). Gertrude then proceeds to take the cup that was meant for Hamlet (5.2.241) but Claudius says, "Gertrude, do not drink." Gertrude defies Claudius and drinks anyway, and offers the cup to Hamlet next. Apparently Gertrude does not realise she is drinking poison, or she would not have offered the wine to Hamlet. Again, Hamlet declines, "I dare not drink yet, madam – by and by" (5.2.246). This would seem to support the assumption that Hamlet wants to stay sober while fencing. If he suspected the wine was poisoned, surely he would try to stop Gertrude from drinking it? Perhaps Hamlet is so focused on the duel that he does not notice Gertrude taking the cup with the pearl in it. Two possible interpretations are that Hamlet did not suspect the wine was poisoned after all, or he suspected it, but was too focused on the sword fight to pay attention to what his mother was doing. The third alternative is that Hamlet had ceased to care what happens to Gertrude, but Hamlet's strong reaction to her death a few moments later makes that reading less plausible than the other two.

After drinking from the cup, the Queen wants to wipe Hamlet's face. Meanwhile, Laertes and Claudius have a discreet exchange where Laertes tells the King he will wound Hamlet now, but Claudius thinks it unlikely. Laertes then contemplates, as an aside, "And yet 'tis almost 'gainst my conscience" (5.2.248). Maybe Hamlet's apology at the start of the duel swayed Laertes' resolution to avenge Polonius' death, or maybe Laertes is having second thoughts about the dishonest scheme to which he has allowed himself to be persuaded, but when Hamlet calls Laertes to resume the swordplay, Laertes complies. The pair fight more evenly matched than before, neither of them scoring points for a while (5.2.253). Then Laertes exclaims, "Have at you now!" (5.2.254) and wounds Hamlet. Laertes' exclamation before the fatal thrust may be an indication of his second

thoughts concerning the scheme to poison Hamlet. It is as if he wanted to give Hamlet a warning. The footnote supports this reading. “. . . their [the words *have at you now*] normal purpose in Shakespeare is to serve as a warning to an opponent that he is about to be attacked” (Hibbard, 2008, 349). Hamlet must realise that Laertes is fighting with an unprotected sword, so the civilised fencing turns into a scuffle, during which Hamlet snatches Laertes’s sword and wounds him with it. Claudius calls, “Part them. They are incensed” (5.2.255) but his concern must be feigned. If Claudius really wanted to save Laertes, he would have attempted to stop the fight as soon as Hamlet got hold of the poisoned sword. But of course, it is more convenient for Claudius if Laertes dies without a chance to reveal their murderous schemes, so Claudius intervenes only when it is too late to save either of them. All the same, Claudius’ observation is correct; Hamlet is incensed and he challenges Laertes to attack again, but at that point, Gertrude falls (5.2.256).

Osric exclaims, “Look to the queen there! Ho!” (5.2.257) but no one pays attention because Horatio exclaims, “They bleed on both sides,” and he asks Hamlet, “How is’t, my lord?” Osric echoes the question, “How is’t, Laertes?” Horatio and Osric want to know if the wounds are serious, and they are probably also wondering how it is possible that Hamlet and Laertes are bleeding. It was supposed to be a friendly duel, fought with blunted swords. Laertes explains, “Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric. I am justly killed with mine own treachery,” meaning that he has fallen in his own trap (5.2. 258-261). At this point, Hamlet does not concern himself with the question of how Laertes is “justly killed,” having incurred only a minor wound. Instead, he asks about the Queen, and Claudius replies, trying to avoid detection, “She swoons to see them bleed.” Unfortunately for Claudius, Gertrude can still talk, and she manages to make it known she has been poisoned, and that the poison was in the drink (5.2. 262-264).

Hamlet demands that the doors be locked until the culprits are found. Laertes confesses everything, and when Hamlet hears the sword is poisoned, he says, “Then, venom do thy work” (5.2.275). Without further ado, Hamlet stabs Claudius. He does it in a fit of rage. Hamlet’s next act attests to the power of his anger because even though he has already stabbed Claudius with the poisoned sword, Hamlet’s rage is not consumed, so he seizes the wounded king and forces him to drink the poisoned wine, saying, “Here, thou incestuous, murd’rous, damnèd Dane, drink off this potion” (5.2. 278). Finally, Hamlet accomplishes the revenge he has been planning, but it is not a planned revenge. It is more retaliation than revenge. If not for the fit of anger caused by the death of his mother, we may wonder if Hamlet would ever have found a suitable moment to carry out his revenge. In all its violence, the long overdue revenge is satisfying for the audience, although there is a vague sense of disappointment at it being over so quickly, before Claudius admitted his guilt. Claudius dies without being publicly condemned, and Hamlet gets no support for his actions. The courtiers yell “Treason! Treason!” (5.2.276) when Hamlet stabs the king. But it is the fit of rage that finally propels Hamlet into action that allows him to remain a sympathetic character. Even now, a state of blind rage is sometimes presented as an attenuating circumstance in courts. Violent deeds are more repulsive, less human, if the aggressor remains calm. If Hamlet had murdered Claudius in a cool, calculated manner, we would have seen Hamlet's personality in a very different light.

The final battle in *Harry Potter* is very different from that in *Hamlet*. There is an open war between the good people and the evil Voldemort’s supporters, known as Death Eaters. The battle takes place in the Hogwarts castle and grounds. The defenders consist of the school staff, many of whom belong to the Order of the Phoenix, a secret society that opposes Voldemort. The evil wizard had gained foothold in the society over the years before the conflict escalated. The general magical

population was kept in the dark and misled, so that even though Voldemort's supporters were in the minority, their coup was successful.

In the final book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry, Ron and Hermione are on the run. Harry's secret mission is to destroy all the horcruxes.¹⁷ Eventually the only remaining horcruxes are Voldemort's pet snake Nagini, and an old diadem hidden in Hogwarts. Harry and his friends manage to sneak into the school but Voldemort has placed two Death Eaters to make sure the teaching conforms to Voldemort's ideology, and to report of any suspicious activities. Severus Snape, the former potions master and Dumbledore's double agent who murdered Dumbledore, is now the headmaster. Before Harry makes any progress in his search for the diadem, one of the Death Eaters finds him. During the confrontation, Harry uses a torture curse on one of the Death Eaters, which is surprising because the *Crucio* curse is one of the three unforgivable curses. Now, Harry is not in imminent danger. The Death Eater is arguing with Minerva McGonagall, the head teacher of the house of Gryffindor, and Harry attacks him when he spits the old teacher in the face.

Harry pulled the Cloak [of invisibility] off himself, raised his wand and said, 'You shouldn't have done that.'

As Amycus spun round, Harry shouted, '*Crucio!*'

The Death Eater was lifted off his feet. He writhed through the air like a drowning man, thrashing and howling in pain, and then, with a crunch and a shattering of glass, he smashed into the front of a bookcase and crumpled, insensible, to the floor.

'I see what Bellatrix meant,' said Harry, the blood thundering through his brain, 'you need to really mean it.' (*Deathly Hallows*, 2007, 477)

This is a completely disproportionate retaliation for a relatively harmless offence, but the purpose is justice serving or at least chivalrous, rather than ego serving. Nevertheless, this response reflects a change in Harry's character. In *Order of the Phoenix*, Harry tried to use the *Crucio* curse on

¹⁷Horcruxes are magical objects that are created in an obscure ritual involving human sacrifice. They protect their creator from death by preserving a part of his soul, which can be brought back to life. Voldemort created six horcruxes, killing six people just to secure his own immortality. The price of creating a horcrux is splitting one's soul, and since Voldemort's soul was shredded into seven pieces, he has very little humanity left in him.

Bellatrix, but he failed, and she taunted him, “You need to *mean* them, Potter! You need to really want to cause pain – to enjoy it” (*Order of the Phoenix*, 2003, 715). The fifteen-year-old Harry did not have enough malice in him to torture the murderer of his beloved godfather, but two years later he uses the *Crucio* curse to retaliate a spit in the face. Before judging Harry, we should note that he is acting in defence of his old teacher rather than himself. Harry’s impulsive attack on the Death Eater is chivalrous but it is also startling. It shows that the past two years have hardened him and caused him to relax his personal moral code. Such loosening of morals could result from living in the midst of Voldemort’s uprising.

The final battle begins when Voldemort and his Death Eaters arrive to claim Harry. Teachers and students, except the Slytherins, defend the castle to protect Harry from Voldemort (*Deathly Hallows*, 2007, 490-491). While the Death Eaters bombard the castle with devastating spells, Harry, together with Ron and Hermione, locates the diadem, but just as Harry is about to take it, Draco Malfoy, Harry’s old enemy, appears with his two henchmen. Malfoy plans to seize Harry and take him to Voldemort, hoping it will improve his family’s precarious position in Voldemort’s eyes. The situation escalates as Crabbe and Goyle start firing torturing and killing curses at Harry and Hermione. The heroes return fire with defensive spells, disarming Goyle and Malfoy, but Crabbe sets the whole place on fire. The magical fire that cannot be extinguished spreads abnormally fast, so the hall is soon a blazing inferno. They all flee the flames, Malfoy dragging the stunned Goyle. As the flames close in, Harry grabs two broomsticks. He gives one to Ron and Hermione, and takes the other himself. The three kick off from the ground but the flames grow ever higher. Instead of trying to find a way out, Harry risks his life trying to find his old enemies who just tried to kill him.

Harry could not see a trace of Malfoy, Crabbe or Goyle anywhere: he swooped as low as he dared over the marauding monsters of flame to try to find them, but there was nothing but fire: what a terrible way to die... he had never wanted this...

‘Harry, let’s get out, let’s get out!’ bellowed Ron, though it was impossible to see where the door was through the black smoke.

And then Harry heard a thin, piteous human scream from amidst the terrible commotion, the thunder of devouring flame.

‘It’s – too – dangerous – !’ Ron yelled, but Harry wheeled in the air. [. . .]

And he saw them: Malfoy with his arms around the unconscious Goyle, the pair of them perched on a fragile tower of charred desks, and Harry dived. Malfoy saw him coming, and raised one arm, but even as Harry grasped it he knew at once that it was no good: Goyle was too heavy and Malfoy’s hand, covered in sweat, slid instantly out of Harry’s –

‘IF WE DIE FOR THEM, I’LL KILL YOU, HARRY!’ roared Ron’s voice, and as a great, flaming Chimaera bore down upon them he and Hermione dragged Goyle on to their broom and rose, rolling and pitching, into the air once more as Malfoy clambered up behind Harry. (*Deathly Hallows*, 2007, 508-509)

The impressive rescue shows what a good person Harry still is, despite the earlier incident with the Death Eater. Ron and Hermione follow Harry’s example, and together they save Malfoy and Goyle. Harry’s selfless bravery that borders on madness does not come as a surprise to the readers, nor does Ron’s decision to help Harry, but Malfoy shows a new aspect of his character by dragging the unconscious Goyle with him as they flee the fire. This is the first time Malfoy risks his life to help someone else. After the escape from the cursed flames, Malfoy’s first concern is his other friend.

‘C – Crabbe,’ choked Malfoy, as soon as he could speak. ‘C – Crabbe...’

‘He’s dead,’ said Ron harshly. (*Deathly Hallows*, 2007, 510)

This is a side of Malfoy we have not seen before. Caring for his friends does not make up for his many faults, but it does make the character more sympathetic. Ron’s harshness, conversely, adds realism to the heroes’ personalities. They all have their flaws, as some of the bad guys have their redeeming qualities.

The heroes saved Malfoy and Goyle from the fire, but that is as far as their goodwill extends. They leave the two to fend for themselves, though having lost their wands, they are defenceless. Harry, Ron and Hermione have other things on their minds. The diadem Harry managed to retrieve, as they escaped the inferno, was destroyed by the cursed fire. With the second to last horcrux obliterated, there is only the snake Nagini to stand between Voldemort and final death (*Deathly*

Hallows, 2007, 510-511). Before Harry, Ron and Hermione decide what to do, Death Eaters penetrate the castle. After a brief but disastrous battle, Harry uses his mysterious telepathic connection with Voldemort to discover him and his snake, and the three set out to find him (511-518). They make their way through the battle under the invisibility cloak. On the way out of the castle, they see the defenceless Malfoy being threatened by Death Eaters. Malfoy is pleading for his life, telling them he is on their side. The Death Eaters apparently do not recognise him, so Harry intervenes.

Harry Stunned the Death Eater as they passed: Malfoy looked around, beaming, for his saviour, and Ron punched him from under the Cloak. Malfoy fell backwards on top of the Death Eater, his mouth bleeding, utterly bemused.

‘And that’s the second time we’ve saved your life tonight, you two-faced bastard!’ Ron yelled. (*Deathly Hallows*, 518).

Harry saves one of his most hated enemies for the second time that night, but Ron’s uncalled-for punch guarantees that any gratitude Malfoy feels is mingled with humiliation and resentment. While Ron is an invaluable asset to Harry, he is also a liability in his thoughtlessness, a sort of personified fatal flaw that is, in some ways, the undoing of the good Harry accomplishes.

Killing the snake proves impossible because it is protected by a powerful spell (524-528). Back at the castle, the Great Hall is full of the dead, the wounded and the mourners. The sight is too much for Harry who feels responsible for the deaths because Voldemort promised to spare everyone else in exchange for Harry. Rather than join the mourners, Harry flees into Dumbledore’s office. There he discovers the crucial information that there are seven horcruxes, not six, and that Harry’s task is not to kill Voldemort, but be killed by Voldemort because Harry is the seventh horcrux. When Voldemort tried to kill Harry, the curse bounced off Harry and hit Voldemort instead, and as he died, a splinter of his soul detached and jumped into Harry.

Part of Lord Voldemort lives inside Harry, and it is that which gives him the power of speech with snakes, and a connection with Lord Voldemort’s mind that he has never

understood. And while that fragment of soul, unmissed by Voldemort, remains attached to, and protected by Harry, Lord Voldemort cannot die. (*Deathly Hallows*, 2007, 551)

Instead of risking his life in a duel with Voldemort, Harry must lay down his life without a fight so that someone else might kill the evil wizard. Harry is devastated, but he does not even consider running away (554). Harry sacrifices himself so that others might live, but he has no death wish. He is terrified but he goes to his death because he knows there is no other way. This is an unorthodox way of taking revenge; revenge by self-sacrifice. In fact, as Harry sacrifices himself, he does not even remember his vendetta. He only cares about saving others. It can be construed that this is why Harry avoids the fate of tragic avengers. He ceases to be an avenger and becomes a messiah; he gives up all his personal goals and ambitions to fulfil one greater goal, which is to save everyone else. It is a dramatic turn of events but perhaps less satisfying than Hamlet's brutal retaliation on Claudius.

However, to the readers' relief, Voldemort's attempt to kill Harry fails once again. The killing curse hits Harry but instead of dying, he finds himself lying face down, naked, in an empty space. During the cryptic episode, Harry talks to the deceased Dumbledore who explains why Harry is not dead: when Voldemort tried to kill Harry, the curse affected, not Harry, but the piece of Voldemort's soul that lived inside Harry (*Deathly Hallows*, 2007, 576). As Harry gave up the pursuit of revenge, and with it, everything but his will to save others, Voldemort's curse purified Harry's soul of its resident evil. Voldemort destroyed the horcrux while leaving the container, Harry, intact. The unexpected outcome leaves Harry free to resume his pursuit of revenge, or rather, his quest to rid the world of evil. After a brief hesitation, Harry decides to go back and fight (578-579).

Harry has to endure the pain of allowing his friends to think he is dead, but after a moment's despair, the defenders of Hogwarts rally. Neville decapitates Voldemort's snake, thus destroying the final horcrux and leaving Voldemort mortal (587). Harry fights from under the invisibility cloak,

looking for Voldemort. The near death experience did not turn Harry into a saint. He does not hesitate to hurt his enemies:

Harry was shooting jinxes and curses at any Death Eater he could see, and they crumpled, not knowing what or who had hit them, and their bodies were trampled by the retreating crowd. (*Deathly Hallows*, 588)

Eventually, Harry confronts Voldemort to protect Ron's mother. (590). As he and Voldemort begin to circle each other, Harry announces he does not want anyone to help but that "it's got to be like this. It's got to be me" (590). To explain the necessity of fighting Voldemort alone, Harry quotes the prophecy, "Neither can live while the other survives" (591). This cannot be construed as thirst for vengeance. Harry acts under the fatalistic idea that only he can finish Voldemort because their fates are magically entwined. For a while, Harry and Voldemort circle each other while everyone watches, and Harry attempts to explain to Voldemort why he cannot win. Harry's self-sacrifice extended a magical protection over the people for whom he sacrificed himself (591). If there is revenge in this scene, it is in the way Harry strips the aura of mystery and danger from Voldemort by using his real name instead of the name he devised for himself.

'You can't touch them. You don't learn from your mistakes, Riddle, do you?'
'*You dare –*'
'Yes, I dare,' said Harry, 'I know things you don't know, Tom Riddle.' (591)

Harry then proceeds to expose to everyone how Voldemort's schemes have failed, and how his double agent, Snape, was loyal to Dumbledore while pretending to take orders from Voldemort (592-595).

In the end, Voldemort loses his temper and shouts the killing curse, while at the same time Harry casts a disarming spell. The spells collide in the middle, and once again, Voldemort's curse rebounds, and this time it kills him. Thus, Voldemort dies by his own wand. There is no stabbing, no forcing poison down the villain's throat, no torture curses. Even so, Harry achieves his long-

standing goal of killing Voldemort, even if it is by accident. Arguably, Harry and his allies killed Voldemort bit by bit as they destroyed the pieces of his soul contained in the horcruxes, so perhaps Harry's thirst for revenge had already been satisfied by the time he faced Voldemort. In the final duel against his nemesis, Harry merely seeks to disarm the evil wizard in order to protect himself and everyone else. The action he takes is not revenge, or even retaliation. It is quite simply self-defence. It is in keeping with Harry's typical response in encounters with Lord Voldemort. Besides, Voldemort is such a powerful adversary that he is like a force of nature rather than someone the other characters could overcome. Harry could not hope to match Voldemort in magical ability so he had to rely on luck and his psychological upper hand.

5.2 Proportional and pathological avengers

It is not easy to determine whether Hamlet is a pathological avenger, or whether his revenge behaviour is in proportion with the original offences. Technically his revenge on Claudius is proportional, although the scale is devastating: Hamlet takes a life for a life. When Laertes wounds Hamlet in the duel, Hamlet retaliates by wounding Laertes with the same sword, which is a proportional reaction, although the consequences are dramatic because the sword happens to be poisoned. If stabbing Polonius is interpreted as retaliation for spying, regardless of who the spy is, Hamlet's retaliation might be deemed disproportionate if it not for the fact that being overheard in that situation could be fatal to Hamlet. If Hamlet stabs the spy behind the tapestry thinking it is Claudius, as Hamlet's line, "Is it the king" (3.4.27) indicates, the stabbing is both an instant retaliation for spying and an attempt at getting his revenge. The act seems rash but considering the threat on Hamlet's own life, killing the spy does not seem a pathological act of revenge. On the other hand, the revenge consumes Hamlet's entire life in an unhealthy way but that is due to the

circumstances rather than Hamlet's pathological vengefulness. Hamlet cannot turn back from the pursuit of revenge after Claudius has deemed Hamlet is a danger to himself.

Laertes seeks revenge for the death of his father, which makes his revenge behaviour proportional on the same grounds as Hamlet's revenge is proportional, but there is one character whose actions are clearly pathological rather than proportional: the villain. There is nothing to support a reading of Claudius' regicide as a revenge on his brother, so we must assume Claudius is simply motivated by his lust for power. Murdering one's own brother to gain power is not an act of a reasonable, well-adjusted person, so in this sense, Claudius' behaviour is pathological. His subsequent actions, such as sending Hamlet to England to be murdered, are an effort to keep his crime a secret and himself safe. Perhaps there is an element of revenge in the order to have Hamlet executed but mostly Claudius is motivated by his will to survive. Sending Hamlet into exile would not have been safe for Claudius. Hamlet might have returned from his exile with an army. Executing Hamlet in Denmark was likewise not a good option for Claudius because of Hamlet's popularity among the people, and because Gertrude would not have accepted it. By executing Hamlet, Claudius would have lost the favour of the court and the people, and the result might have been an open rebellion. Simply imprisoning Hamlet on account of being insane might have been a proportional response to the situation, but it would have been a poor long-term solution. So Claudius' attempt to have Hamlet killed was motivated by necessity, but that does not rule out an element of revenge. It would be strange if Claudius did not bear Hamlet a grudge for setting up the play, killing Polonius and turning Gertrude against him, although it is not clear if Claudius has noticed a change in Gertrude's attitude toward him. Claudius' attitude makes his actions pathological. He experiences a bout of remorse over killing his brother, but sending Hamlet to be

executed in England, and plotting to have Laertes murder Hamlet after his return from England does not seem to perturb Claudius' conscience.

Another possible avenger in *Hamlet* is the Ghost. He returns from the dead to make sure someone avenges his death. The Ghost is justly angry for having been murdered but instead of demanding retribution at any cost, he urges Hamlet to avoid tainting his own mind and causing pain to Gertrude. This confirms Hamlet's notion of his father as a conscionable man. On the other hand, the Ghost's demand for vengeance and his caution to Hamlet to not to taint his mind, and to protect his mother from harm, are mutually exclusive. Therefore it seems that the Ghost's rational thinking is impaired by his desire for revenge, and his request for his son to guard his soul against taint and his mother against pain is just a feeble gesture, possibly meant to appease the Ghost's conscience.

Premeditated revenge requires a lot of thought and resolution. Hamlet spends almost the entire duration of the play gathering that resolution, and similarly, Harry devotes much of his time preparing himself to destroy Voldemort. In the final book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry drops out of school to go into hiding, partially to evade the attempts on his life, but also to have a chance to get his revenge. Seeking ways to destroy Voldemort consumes Harry's life entirely. Hamlet is equally preoccupied with murdering Claudius. Harry and Hamlet are both entangled in revenge but their fixation with it is not what Rosen would call pathological, nor are they vindictive characters as defined by Durham. Successful revenge is the only way for Harry to survive, so he has no choice but to pursue revenge until he completes it, and Hamlet's situation is much the same.

Out of all avengers in *Hamlet* and *Harry Potter*, Voldemort is unquestionably the most pathological. The arch villain develops a personality disorder early on in his childhood as a result of parental abandonment. Tom Riddle, as he was called before he assumed the name Voldemort, grew

up in an orphanage because his mother had died in childbirth and his father never showed up to take him home (*Half-Blood Prince*, 2005, 249-250). He was a cruel and manipulative child who had no empathy, no conception of right and wrong (250-256). Tom's deprived childhood influenced the development of his personality but the psychopathic traits were at least partly congenital. Tom's mother was not a bad person but her family were antisocial wizards who practised the Dark Arts and prided themselves on being Salazar Slytherin's¹⁸ descendants (*Half-Blood Prince*, 2005, 190-196). Tom's father was a muggle and although he was not evil, he had to be somewhat cold hearted to abandon his unborn child without ever taking an interest in the child's well-being (203). It seems Tom inherited the worst traits from both parents: he got his mother's family's inclination for evil, and his father's ruthlessness.

Tom managed to hide his true character from almost everyone because he could be very charming, as psychopaths often are when it suits their purposes. Dumbledore admitted the intelligent and magically gifted child to Hogwarts, hoping that a different environment would change the path of the boy's development. Unfortunately, Tom was already incorrigible at that point, and when he got to Hogwarts, he skilfully disguised his true nature and charmed everyone. While Tom was still a student at Hogwarts, he sought out his biological father and killed him and his family to avenge the early abandonment (*Half-Blood Prince*, 2005, 340-344). This act of revenge was obviously pathological and purely ego serving. But even that brutal revenge was not enough for Tom, so he continued to take revenge on the whole world, especially muggles. To Tom, muggles perhaps represented his father, but they were also sub-human according to his ideology of magical people as a superior race.

¹⁸Slytherin was one of the founders of Hogwarts, a legendary wizard who practised the Dark Arts.

Tom invented the alias Voldemort to hide that he was actually a “mudblood,” a wizard with mixed ancestry (*Chamber of Secrets*, 2000, 337). Incidentally, Voldemort’s mixed ancestry is an interesting parallel to Hitler, whose features were Jewish rather than the tall and fair Aryan ideal he admired. It is curious that Voldemort did not see the paradox in persecuting something he himself represents, and if his inner circle of Death Eaters knew about Voldemort’s family background, they never mentioned it. As an adult, Voldemort's behaviour is consistently vindictive. He punishes his followers severely for the slightest reasons. As mentioned before, it is reasonable to conclude that Voldemort’s hatred of muggles derives partly from his hatred of his father, so it occurs that Voldemort is simply avenging his father’s desertion on all muggles. In Voldemort’s case, however, it is not purely a question of the defence mechanism displacement, using muggles as substitute targets for his revenge. Voldemort took revenge on the actual target of his hostility: his father. Voldemort’s genealogy and his early experiences have shaped him into a pathological avenger who finds new hate objects as soon as he has discharged his anger on someone. He is also a megalomaniac who wants nothing less than world dominion. Voldemort is the archetype of a psychopathic villain who feels no empathy but is intelligent enough to manipulate people into doing his bidding.

5.3 Vindictive and exploited-repressive characters

Voldemort is an extreme example of the vindictive character type. A pathologically vindictive person is not satisfied even when the revenge has been accomplished, so the anger that originates from the damaging childhood experiences requires new outlets. This characterisation of the vindictive personality fits Voldemort and Snape. Both characters were neglected as children and their childhood traumas shaped their personalities, and neither seem able to forget an insult to their ego.

Experiences leading to vindictiveness are manifold, but invariably include a pathological negativity, at some level, directed toward the individual in early years. The negativity may be manifested in the form of outright hostility, physical abuse, or neglect and indifference. (Durham, 2000, 43)

Durham's description of the causes of vindictiveness fits not only Voldemort's but also Harry's childhood. While Voldemort was abandoned by both his parents and left into a dismal orphanage, Harry was systematically abused by his foster parents. At the end of *Deathly Hallows*, we learn that Snape had also been neglected as a child. All three neglected boys were admitted into Hogwarts at the age of eleven, which constituted a chance to repair the emotional damage of the early childhood years. Voldemort had already developed a vindictive character with strong psychopathic tendencies but Harry embraced the chance to form meaningful relationships with teachers and classmates. Voldemort already despised other people, and only pretended to connect with them when it served his interests. Snape falls between the two extremes. He does not have Harry's social skills nor does he have Voldemort's skill to charm people. He has a strong friendship with his classmate Lily, Harry's mother, but his interest in the Dark Arts drives them apart. The death of Harry's parents was largely Snape's fault because he was the one who gave Voldemort the information that convinced him of the need to kill James and Lily's son, the baby Harry (*Half-Blood Prince*, 2005, 509-513). Snape thought Voldemort would spare Lily (*Deathly Hallows*, 2007, 543-544) but only Harry survived Voldemort's death curse, and James and Lily both died trying to defend him.¹⁹ Harry's survival set into motion the events that eventually led to the fulfilment of the prophesy. Voldemort created his own scourge and minister by attempting to murder him in his crib.

Snape never recovers from the loss of Lily and the guilt over causing her death. He makes amends by helping Voldemort's opponents and he does his best to protect Harry from harm, for

¹⁹ This story evokes the Bible tale of Herod slaughtering the male infants after hearing from the Magi that they were seeking the future king of the Jews. Like Harry, "the future king of the Jews" survived due to his parents' efforts and lived to become the messiah.

Lily's sake, but he cannot bring himself to treat Harry normally. When dealing with other adults, Snape is an intelligent, mature and even responsible character, but when he is in Harry's company, or the company of Lily and James' close friends, he behaves like a bullied teenager, displacing his anger on those who are weaker than him and cannot retaliate, usually his students. Snape uses his students as scapegoats instead of getting into open confrontations with the people he resents, the ones who bullied him at school. Snape is also a blatantly biased teacher, favouring the students of his own house, Slytherin. All this suggests that Snape has not been able to resolve the issues that originate from his youth, so he keeps taking revenge on Harry, who acts as a surrogate for James. Despite his guilt, Snape has not been able to overcome his hatred towards James. Snape saves Harry's life on more than one occasion but Snape cannot get the better of his vindictiveness, so he abuses his position as a teacher to torment Harry. Harry's physical appearance is like a symbol of Snape's internal conflict. The boy has inherited his father's appearance except for his eyes that are like Lily's, so for Snape, Harry serves as a constant reminder of the traumas of his youth.

As for the younger generation, there is an interesting juxtaposition between the heroes and the villains. Draco Malfoy, Harry's main enemy among his peers, is a vindictive character type, though his childhood is anything but deprived. His family is rich, they live in a mansion, and his mother panders to his every whim. Harry, on the other hand, spent his early childhood in an abusive home where he was deprived of affection and even basic care. He was denied sufficient nourishment, forced to sleep in a closet and he had to perform household chores that were too demanding for his age. Despite the extremely disadvantageous environment, Harry does not develop a vindictive personality. He has some traits of the exploited-repressive personality. For example, he is modest, undemanding and polite, and he has a well-developed sense of empathy. He has, however, avoided

the depression and the anxiety that exploited-repressive people are prone to, perhaps because he was taken to Hogwarts in time.

Despite this apparent incongruence, Harry and Malfoy are not psychologically implausible characters. Some children are well-adjusted despite growing up in dysfunctional families, and, on the other hand, growing up in a wealthy and loving home does not guarantee a pleasant personality. In *Harry Potter*, nature and nurture both affect character development, which is in accordance with both psychoanalytic and layman understanding of psychology. Choice is one of the major themes in *Harry Potter*. It is often emphasised that Harry chose Gryffindor; friendship, braveness and loyalty, whereas Voldemort chose Slytherin, the house that cultivates ruthlessness and personal gain. The important message in *Harry Potter* is that we cannot choose who we are but we can choose our actions. However, that is only true up to a point. Harry did not choose to inherit his father's courage and his mother's sense of justice any more than Voldemort chose to inherit his parents' psychopathic traits. The psychoanalytic notion of the importance of early experiences for the development of personality is clearly visible in *Harry Potter* on two levels, the mundane and the magical. Voldemort's psychopathic traits begin to dominate his personality because he never experienced parental love. Snape was neglected as a child and grew up to be a vindictive adult. Harry's experiences with the abusive Dursleys leave their mark on him, making him exhibit some traits of the exploited-repressive personality and some vindictiveness towards the Dursleys. Unlike Voldemort, Harry has the benefit of having been loved as an infant, which becomes a magical element in the story. Dumbledore explains the power of love to Harry at the end of *Philosopher's Stone*.

'Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realise that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection for ever. (1997, 216)

Dumbledore often refers to this protection of Harry's as "old magic," magic that makes Harry impenetrable to Voldemort's spells when other people would be vulnerable. In addition to being a magical element in the story, Harry's mother's protective charm is a metaphor for a secure growing environment that gives a good start to personality development. Having been loved and cared for by his parents gave Harry's personality a foundation that enabled his growth into a person who is able to resist evil.

In *Hamlet*, none of the characters are vindictive, strictly in the sense Durham uses the word; as a defining character trait that emerges as a result of consistent and open neglect and exploitation in childhood. There is no information about the characters' early years in *Hamlet*, and none of the characters behave like a vindictive person, spreading misery around them. Hamlet can be said to have more a vindictive than an exploited-repressive personality because of his sarcastic jibes and the flashes of anger and contempt directed at Ophelia and Gertrude. Hamlet's character is also marked by his strong resentment of Claudius, but resentment of one's father's killer is not a sign of pathological vindictiveness.

6 Social Aspects of Revenge in *Hamlet* and in *Harry Potter*

Hamlet's obsession with revenge starts after he finds out that his uncle Claudius was behind the death of his father. Hamlet wants to be sure of Claudius' guilt before he takes action. However, as the lawful ruler, Claudius is above the law so he can no longer be charged with treason even if his complicity in the death of the previous king was revealed. Therefore, if Hamlet takes revenge on Claudius, no matter how justified it is, he also commits treason. The society in *Hamlet* may understand the urge to revenge when it comes to disputes between common men, but taking revenge on the king is, socially and legally, out of the question. In addition to that, Hamlet is concerned with the state of his own soul, and he wrestles with the dilemma that in order to avenge a murder, he also has to become a murderer.

The situation is socially and morally less complicated for Harry because there is no doubt that Lord Voldemort killed his parents and that the evil wizard is a serious threat to the whole society. However, immediate revenge is impossible because of Harry's young age. Besides, until the fourth book, Voldemort exists only in spirit form so revenge is not possible even in theory. Furthermore, as I have stated before, Voldemort is so powerful that he is like a force of nature. When Harry encounters Voldemort's spirit in *Philosopher's Stone* (1997, 211-214) and in *Chamber of Secrets* (2000, 330-346), and finally when Harry witnesses Voldemort gaining a physical form in the fourth book, *Goblet of Fire* (2001, 689-697), staying alive is Harry's primary goal rather than getting even.

As he grows up, Harry has to witness his lethal enemy gaining more power while he remains powerless to interfere. Harry harbours the desire to avenge the death of his parents and to rid the world of evil, but he is still stunned when he hears about the prophesy that says he is destined to kill Voldemort or be killed by him (*Order of the Phoenix*, 2003, 744). The knowledge weighs so heavily

on Harry that he cannot share it even with his closest friends (*Order*, 2003, 748-749). Thus, the burden of his destiny sets him apart from other people, which places Harry in the same position as Hamlet when he makes the speech, “The time is out of joint: O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right!” (1.5.196-197). Both heroes have their faithful friends but both feel, whether it is warranted or not, that they alone are responsible for setting the world right. Like Hamlet, Harry is troubled with the problem of becoming a murderer himself if he is to avenge a murder, or indeed, survive (*Order of the Phoenix*, 2003, 754).

While desiring justice through revenge, both Harry and Hamlet are also forced to become avengers because of the circumstances. As the stories progress, it becomes more and more evident that both heroes are in mortal peril whether they are willing to commit to the revenge or not. Carrying out a successful revenge is a matter of life and death to the protagonists but neither of them is motivated solely by the desire to stay alive. In fact, Hamlet does not seem very attached to his existence. He defends himself when his life is threatened but, as Hamlet himself says when Horatio tries to prevent him from following the Ghost, “Why, what should be the fear? I do not set my life at a pin’s fee” (1.4. 43-44). It is as if Hamlet strives to stay alive until he accomplishes his revenge but does not care beyond that. Harry, on the other hand, is a happy young man, or he would be, if not for the shadow that Lord Voldemort casts over his life. Hamlet's negligence about his own life might suggest the argument that Harry sets out to rid the world from evil at a greater personal cost than Hamlet, except that it is probable that Hamlet only lost his ability to enjoy life as a consequence of Claudius' actions. Nevertheless, staying alive is not the only priority for either hero. Not only does Harry have to eliminate Voldemort to ensure his own survival, but he wants to do it for the common good. There is no question that Harry’s world would be a better place without the influence of the evil wizard. Although Claudius is not as unquestionably evil as Voldemort,

Claudius' corrupting influence on Denmark could be extremely harmful if his reign was allowed to continue.

6.1 Instinct, the greater good and social norms

The *Harry Potter* stories demonstrate how revenge behaviour is so common, especially in children, that it must be a natural instinct in human beings. Rather than turning the other cheek, the children in *Harry Potter* are quick to retaliate, and some of them, like Harry and Malfoy, are practically feuding with each other. The animosity between Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy started before the first school year has even begun, in Diagon Alley, while being fitted for school robes. Malfoy behaved like a spoilt brat and his mother encouraged his pettiness, which provoked Harry's, as well as the readers', dislike. Their next meeting on the Hogwarts train sealed the enmity between the two boys. Malfoy had heard that the famous Harry Potter was on the train and wanted to make friends with him. Malfoy said, "You'll soon find out some wizarding families are much better than others, Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there." Harry replied, "I think I can tell who the wrong sort are for myself, thanks" (*Philosopher's Stone*, 1997, 81). Malfoy took revenge on Harry by trying to get him into trouble at school, first by goading Harry into misbehaving during a flying lesson (*Philosopher's Stone*, 1997, 109-112) and when that ploy failed, Malfoy challenged Harry to a midnight duel in order to set Harry up for being caught out of bed in the middle of the night (114-118).

The children's vengefulness corresponds with the notion that the revenge impulse is innate, and resisting that impulse is learned behaviour. In Hogwarts, as in real schools, children learn to control their vengeful reactions to avoid punishment: when a teacher approaches, children refrain from responding to insults, though some of them bear grudges and take revenge later. Forgiveness

as a virtue is not emphasised in *Harry Potter*, but the children know that fighting will get them into trouble, so it is better to back out of a conflict rather than get back at the offender, at least when there is a risk of getting caught.

Harry, despite being a well-behaved boy, has a hot temper when provoked. He stands up for himself and his friends, but he never picks fights. The only time we see Harry being mean on purpose is at the beginning of the fifth book. Harry is forced to stay with the Dursleys for the summer and he is frustrated at the lack of news from the magical community after Voldemort's return. Harry vents his frustration on his cousin Dudley, making fun of him cruelly (*Order of the Phoenix*, 2003, 15-18). This display of malignancy is surprising but it does not diminish the character's appeal because Harry's choice of a target for his aggression is not random. It is revenge for years of bullying. "Harry could feel fourteen years' hatred of Dudley pounding in his veins –" (*Order*, 2003, 19). It is satisfying for the readers to see Harry finally giving his tormentor his due. The reason a scene like this is so satisfying is that it appeals to the reader's instincts. We may feel uncomfortable about enjoying a portrayal of a good revenge because we know revenge is wrong, but we still cannot help enjoying it. The amount of discomfort we experience as a consequence of this reprehensible pleasure depends on the strength of our superego.

In addition to applying to the reader's baser instincts, the revenge scene actually makes Harry a more sympathetic character. If Harry was flawlessly fair all the time, he would be annoying rather than appealing. Also, Harry goes through the worst part of puberty in the fifth book so he is moody and he has a volatile temper. A year later in the sixth book, the sixteen-year-old Harry is noticeably more mature. He has learned to grit his teeth and control his impulses, but his desire to take revenge on Voldemort does not diminish until towards the end of the series, when Harry has apparently achieved catharsis through learning about Voldemort's troubled past and destroying the horcruxes.

Revenge is seen as a natural instinct in *Hamlet*. The Ghost urges Hamlet to avenge, and as Warhaft says, in doing so, “he [the Ghost] appeals not to heaven or law, or the common weal but to nature: ‘If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not’” (Warhaft, 1963, 200 & *Hamlet*, 1.5.81). The Ghost’s appeal to nature indicates a worldview where revenge is a natural element in human beings, and lacking the impulse to revenge would be unnatural. Again, this correlates with the psychoanalytic understanding of revenge as a natural instinct, and the psychoanalytic view receives support from the neurological findings²⁰ that contemplating revenge is a source of physical pleasure. The Ghost is then correct in believing that the impulse to revenge is natural, and the pleasure the reader experiences when Harry taunts Dudley as a payback for old grievances would be measurable to neuroscientists.

However, even if thinking about revenge gives us pleasure, thinking is not the same as doing. The human brain may be genetically predisposed to enjoy the idea of revenge, but there are psychological, social and practical impediments to putting those thoughts into action, as Hamlet and Harry’s cases demonstrate. Even if Hamlet’s wish to get revenge is proportional and justified, the laws and norms of the society are against him. No matter how entitled Hamlet is in his revenge, killing a king is treason. When Hamlet eventually stabs Claudius, all the courtiers shout “Treason! Treason!” (5.2.276) despite the fact that Claudius is implicated in Gertrude’s death, and Laertes has revealed the king’s plot to kill Hamlet.

Harry’s situation is different because Voldemort is an enemy of the public. All right-minded witches and wizards oppose the evil Voldemort, so wanting to get rid of him does not oppose the norms of the society. The problem is that the ministry hides Voldemort’s return from the public and labels Harry insane, so Harry’s attempts to warn people about Voldemort are not taken seriously. By

²⁰ See van Noort (2007, 190).

the time the threat is recognised officially, Voldemort has gained so much power that he controls the ministry and therefore the law enforcement, so that he cannot be disposed of by a legal route, even if the magical law enforcement were strong enough to detain Voldemort, which they are not. So, even if the law is on Harry's side, it does not help him because the legal authorities are powerless against Voldemort.

Over the years, Voldemort's growing influence in the society increases Harry's concern for the state of the world. In the final book, *Deathly Hallows*, the magical community has all but succumbed to Voldemort's reign of terror. Even muggles are feeling the effects of the Death Eaters' racial ideology as an inexplicable increase in murders, riots, accidents and natural disasters that claim lives (*Half-Blood Prince*, 2005, 10-16). These larger concerns overshadow Harry's personal thirst for revenge. In the final book, Harry states the greater good as his incentive to risk his life to kill Voldemort (*Deathly Hallows*, 458), but the shift from being motivated by a personal grudge to being motivated by the greater good has been gradual.

Hamlet's motivation to kill Claudius is a mixture of personal revenge and removing Claudius for the greater good, but the nobility of Hamlet's actions is more questionable than Harry's. The threat Claudius poses to Denmark is not as concrete and imminent as Voldemort's rule of terror. The indications of rottenness of the rule are much more subtle. Claudius is not an obviously evil tyrant but he has murdered his brother and married his brother's widow. The regicide and the incestuous marriage of the king have caused a cosmic disturbance in Denmark, but since Horatio's speech about the mysterious ill omens is omitted from the Folio version of *Hamlet*, Claudius' bad influence is harder to decipher. Nevertheless, Hamlet feels that "time is out of joint," and that killing Claudius will restore the proper rule, and therefore, the cosmic balance to the kingdom.

Christianity has a visible role in *Hamlet*. The characters express their religion and engage in religious activities, but the influence of Christianity does not seem to reach their views on revenge, except when Hamlet expresses his anxiety for being destined to set things right. All the characters who voice an opinion on revenge seem to find it a natural course of action and only the outcome of the escalated revenge is lamented in the end. In *Harry Potter*, religion is not discussed and the characters are not portrayed practising religion, but there are a number of parallels to Christian mythology. Voldemort is the snake that lures people with power and plants seeds of evil in their hearts, literally, in Harry's case, and Harry is the boy who survives attempted infanticide, resists evil and grows up into a saviour who delivers the world from evil. Although Harry has “a furious desire for revenge” (*Half-Blood Prince*, 477) and many of the characters act on vengeful impulses, they also condemn revenge (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, 159-160), which reflects the real attitudes to revenge in Western cultures.

6.2 Outcome of revenge

As Elster's study on blood feuds shows, revenge has a tendency to repeat itself. In its extreme forms, the feuding continues from one generation to the next. The time span of *Hamlet* does not allow us to observe whether that is the case within the play, although there is enmity between Denmark and Norway over land and political power. The affairs of international politics are merely in the background while the focus of the play is on the death of the monarch and avenging his death. In *Harry Potter*, the enmity between Voldemort's supporters and those who oppose him had started with earlier generations, and the magical community was divided by the ideological differences of the opposing sides even while Voldemort was gone. When the evil wizard returned, the situation soon spiralled to open hostility between the different factions.

Revenge has different outcomes for the avenger in *Hamlet* and *Harry Potter*. Hamlet dies in the pursuit of revenge whereas Harry survives. The way the two avengers finally accomplish their revenge is as different as the outcome. Hamlet kills Claudius in a fit of rage induced by the poisoned sword and Gertrude's death, but Harry does not even attack Voldemort when he finally has the chance. First Harry sacrifices himself to make Voldemort mortal, and when he confronts Voldemort for the second time, he seems to be trying to talk Voldemort into giving up without a fight. In his final duel with Voldemort, Harry merely defends himself, and Voldemort dies of his own curse. During the final battle, Harry adheres to a strict moral code unlike Hamlet, who becomes reckless and ceases to care about the state of his soul. Harry, too, exhibited some loosening of morals during the events that led to the final battle, but when Harry faces the ultimate challenge, he adheres to his principles. The plotting of revenge, preparing to murder someone, and all the hardships Hamlet has suffered have deadened his conscience, which is exactly the outcome of which the Ghost warned him. Hamlet's paradox is that in order to kill someone, conscience must be deadened, despite the Ghost's warnings. However, when Hamlet enters the duel, he is not in a reckless mood. As Kaula (1984, 253) points out, Hamlet intends to fight the duel in the same spirit as Harry fights Voldemort; determined to act honourably and to do the right thing.

In the end, Hamlet's revenge on Claudius is not premeditated murder, but while he mentally prepares himself to kill Claudius, he rashly stabs the spy behind the tapestry without even bothering to find out who the spy was before killing him. On finding out that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are carrying orders to have him executed, Hamlet forges an execution order for them instead. The two sycophantic courtiers did not necessarily know that Claudius' letter to the king of England contained a warrant for Hamlet's execution, so sending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths is a rather disproportionate revenge. Furthermore, Hamlet wanted his revenge to be as brutal

as possible, so instead of merely killing Claudius, he wanted to send his uncle to hell, which, we can assume Hamlet accomplished because he killed Claudius while he was at the height of his sins. Harry, on the other hand, tried to explain the concept of love to his psychopathic arch nemesis, although it is not clear if Harry actually intended to give Voldemort a chance to repent, or if he was just talking to distract Voldemort, or if his aim was to get his revenge by humiliating the Dark Lord by listing all his failures for everyone to hear. The fact remains that Hamlet and Harry approached revenge very differently but their circumstances were different, too. Hamlet had to murder a human being, albeit a very corrupt one, to achieve revenge, whereas Harry was dealing with an evil wizard who had very little humanity left in him and who had been a dangerous psychopath even when he still was fully human. In addition to that, the murderous rage that finally prompted Hamlet to get his revenge was induced by the poisoning of his mother. If Harry had been in the same situation, he would have attacked Voldemort with the intention to kill, as we can surmise from his reactions to the murders of his godfather (*Order of Phoenix*, 2003, 710-715) and his mentor (*Half-Blood Prince*, 2005, 557-563).

Despite the many differences, there is an important similarity in Hamlet and Harry's fates. Both avengers become Christ-like figures due to their self-sacrifice. Findlay remarks on the obvious parallel between Hamlet and Christ: both are summoned by their father to scour the nation (1978, 984), and Harry is marked to the task by a prophesy. Harry literally and knowingly sacrifices himself, and it is the self-sacrifice that causes Voldemort's downfall. Hamlet's death is a consequence of his reckless actions while pursuing revenge. If Hamlet had not rashly killed Polonius, Ophelia would not have gone insane and Laertes would not have had a reason to fight Hamlet with a poisoned sword. Although Hamlet's death was not prerequisite for successful revenge, he was aware that avenging his father's death might cost him his life. He did not plan his

future beyond the revenge and he severed his ties with Ophelia, whether because he lost the ability to love her in his disturbed state of mind, or because association with Hamlet might implicate Ophelia in treason. Hamlet gave up happiness with Ophelia when he devoted his life to revenge, and ultimately he gained the revenge but lost everything else. In any case, Hamlet could not have led a happy life as long as Denmark was ruled by an incestuous murderer. It is impossible to say whether Hamlet would have recovered psychologically from the traumatic events if he had survived. Hamlet had lost both his parents, and Ophelia had lost her mind and probably drowned herself as a result of Hamlet's actions. No matter how guilty Claudius was, Hamlet was also guilty of several murders and treason, and there would have been consequences had he survived. Even if Hamlet had survived the final battle, the pursuit of revenge had already destroyed his life.

The difference between Hamlet and Harry Potter is that Harry manages to get a kind of revenge without losing much of his moral integrity in the process. It can be debated whether that is as psychologically convincing or as dramatically satisfying as Hamlet's fate, but at least Harry's improbable success in not tainting his mind with revenge did not come easily. In fact, it does seem like Harry is succumbing to evil before he defeats it by the Christ-like gesture of sacrificing himself so that others might live. For the large part of his mid-teens he suffers from similar feelings of isolation as Hamlet. Harry has faithful friends and supporters, he feels cut off from them and actively tries to push them away because he believes he is tainted with evil, or because wants to protect them from harm. In the end, it turns out that Harry was tainted because a part of Voldemort's soul was living inside him the whole time since Voldemort tried to kill him and the spell backfired. The revelation of Harry as the final horcrux and his eventual success in redeeming everyone, despite the seed of evil living inside him, is the culmination of the theme of choice developed throughout the whole *Harry Potter* series.

Through his self-sacrifice, Harry is purged from his personal share of evil. Harry also succeeds in ridding the world of Voldemort's evil influence, but instead of an unequivocally happy ending, there is a lingering doubt. The final words of the epilogue are "All is well," but that is true only on the surface. The epilogue shows a glimpse of Harry's world nineteen years after Voldemort's death. Harry has married Ginny, Ron has married Hermione, and the heroes are escorting their children to the train that will take the younger generation to Hogwarts. The scene depicts a reassuring continuation of the quaint, happy existence of the magical folk, but the seeds of evil and discord are visible beneath the surface of the idyll. Harry, Ginny and Hermione try to reassure their children that it does not matter which house of Hogwarts they end up in, but the fact remains that Hogwarts is still sorting students into the greedy and cunning Slytherins, brave and noble Gryffindors, intelligent Ravenclaws and hard-working Hufflepuffs. Such sorting can only cause division in the magical community. Despite the parents' reassurances that the sorting does not matter, the children seem to be taking it rather seriously. Ron's thoughtless joking does not help. The children are getting very mixed signals about the sorting, and once again, Ron's good-natured thoughtlessness undermines Harry and Hermione's attempts to bring harmony into the magical community. The scars of the war have obviously not healed. The stiff nod between Malfoy and Harry shows that their relationship is strained. Harry has named his second son Albus Severus, to honour both Dumbledore and Snape, but Malfoy's son, Scorpius, has a name that would suit the next Dark Lord.

Like Harry, Hamlet is successful in purging Denmark from the harmful influence of the bad usurper king, but following the Ghost's advice on not letting his mind become tainted proves impossible for Hamlet. Although Hamlet does not survive, he finds peace in the end. Hamlet's death atones for the deaths he has caused both intentionally and by accident. The audience may be

shocked by Hamlet's violence in the revenge scene but the character retains the audience's sympathy because his revenge was not a premeditated murder, but an aggravated retaliation. Claudius, on the other hand, has proven himself to be capable of coolly calculated murder, and even Gertrude's death does not disturb him; he is only worried about the exposure of his crimes. It is clear that Denmark's outlook is better without such a monarch. Hamlet bequeaths the throne of Denmark to Fortinbras, the prince of Norway, in an attempt to bring peace and stability into the country. The audience may have their doubts about how politically stable Denmark will be under the rule of a Norwegian prince, but we do not know if Hamlet's final orders result in peace or in further violence. Fortinbras has the bodies carried outside for the public to see, and the story of the tragedy will be told, which, hopefully, will result in less corruption in the future.

7 Conclusions

In this thesis, I have analysed revenge in two literary works from different eras. My initial hypothesis was that *Harry Potter* is a modern version of the revenge story in *Hamlet*. A close reading revealed that there are similarities but also significant differences between the stories. Although Harry and Hamlet are different in many ways, revenge itself is the same because the urge to revenge is inherent in human beings.

I applied psychoanalytic theories to analyse different revenge types and the different motives for revenge. Especially the *Harry Potter* books contain numerous depictions of the way the urge to revenge manifests itself. There are so many examples of revenge in the novels that it was not possible to analyse them all. The series follows the characters' development from childhood to adulthood, and in addition to the main storyline of Harry's revenge on Voldemort, the characters engage in smaller scale vendettas and retaliations throughout the school years.

The examination of the cultural framework of Christianity revealed an interesting juxtaposition between *Hamlet* and *Harry Potter*. In *Hamlet*, where religion is portrayed explicitly, the idea of resisting revenge does not triumph over the pursuit of revenge, though it would seem that a play created in a predominantly Christian society would be more likely to conform with Christian morality. The practice of religion is not portrayed in *Harry Potter* but there are a number of parallels to Christian mythology, and eventually the pursuit of personal revenge takes second place to serving justice and the common good. Conversely, while Hamlet enters his final scene with the serene resolution to trust in providence and to act honourably, the events take a turn that drives him to exacting vengeance for personal reasons, although his ego serving action also serves justice and the common good.

Magic plays an important role in the *Harry Potter* books. In addition to being an element of fantasy in the story, some of the magical events can be seen as metaphors for psychological processes. Harry carries a piece of Voldemort inside himself and he can only get rid of the evil through self-sacrifice. In other words, Harry becomes a better person through self-sacrifice, by placing others ahead of himself. No such purification awaits Hamlet who, despite all justifications, commits almost the same crime he is supposed to avenge. If Claudius and Laertes deserve to die for their crimes, then so does Hamlet, although it has to be said that Hamlet's motives for his crimes are nobler than those of Claudius or Laertes. Claudius murdered to gain power and he attempted to have Hamlet killed to hide his earlier crimes. Laertes schemed with Claudius to kill Hamlet in pursuit of personal revenge. Hamlet sought revenge not only for himself, but because it was the only way to restore justice in the kingdom, but he brought about his own death by killing Polonius. If it had not been for that rash deed, Laertes would not have turned against Hamlet. Harry avoids the fate of the tragic avenger because, when the moment comes, he remains resolute in his resistance to evil. In the end, he gives up his pursuit of personal revenge and focuses on saving others.

Like Harry, Hamlet acts for the common good, but instead of eradicating the evil within himself through self-sacrifice, Hamlet has to become more evil to achieve the common good. Hamlet's eventual revenge, a rash act of retaliation done in a fit of rage, has a strong personal motive. Contrastively, Harry remains calm during the final confrontation with Voldemort, and instead of pursuing his revenge, he concentrates on protecting others from the villain. Since Voldemort dies of his own curse, Harry succeeds in the task of balancing the demands of the id and those of the superego: he gets his revenge by a lucky chance, without doing wrong. The approach may not be satisfying for the reader who has been waiting for Harry to get his revenge, but it is in line with Harry's previous encounters with Voldemort. Every time Harry faced his arch enemy, he

survived because he only sought to defend himself and his others, without succumbing to evil. He remained composed which allowed him to cast his defensive spells at just the right moment. He also had friends to help him, and a considerable amount of luck. Hamlet is less fortunate. By the end of the play, he has committed murder, he has been cruel to Ophelia, and insulted his mother while pursuing revenge. Harry finds redemption instead of the ruin that awaits Hamlet by remaining remains a thoroughly good person, but he owes much of his success to the different circumstances. Hamlet's moral predicament is worse than Harry's because, while Claudius is a corrupt man, he is also Hamlet's uncle, a relative he has known all his life. Voldemort, on the other hand, is a snake-faced, absolute, inhuman evil that has to be vanquished or the whole world will suffer.

Harry and Hamlet both retain the audiences' sympathy despite their violent and vengeful actions. The characters remain sympathetic because their motives are at least partly justice serving. Also, they are both in mortal peril that leaves them no choice but to pursue revenge. This justifies revenge enough to appease the audiences' conscience so that they can enjoy the portrayal of vengeance. The specific type of the revenge also has consequence on the avenger's appeal to the audience. Spontaneous retaliation, even if it is violent, is more acceptable than a premeditated revenge carried out in cold blood. This stands to reason because a well-adjusted person loses interest in revenge after the initial anger has cooled. If the person continues to pursue revenge even after the hurt feelings have calmed down, there are psychological implications: either the person is using the preoccupation with revenge as a defence mechanism to delay having to deal with the hurt feelings and the damage to self-esteem caused by the initial insult, or the more unpleasant implication, the person in question is a vengeful psychopath who will not let an insult go unavenged. In the end, Hamlet and Harry escape this interpretation of their character because the nature of their vengeful acts turned out to be intuitive retaliation rather than calculated revenge.

The analysis revealed that revenge is considered justified when the original crime is appalling enough, and there is no other way to bring justice to the victims. In *Hamlet* in particular, craving vengeance is thought to be a natural reaction to the murder of a member of one's family, which correlates with Freud's idea of revenge as a natural psychological tendency. The *Harry Potter* series shows that the younger the children are, the more prone to revenge they are, but as they mature, they learn to control their impulses. This is in accordance with Durham's observation that children have to learn forgiveness while they seem to understand revenge instinctively. This aspect of revenge behaviour adheres to Freud's topographic theory of personality.

In conclusion, the portrayal of revenge in both *Hamlet* and the *Harry Potter* series reflects the psychoanalytic revenge theory, which in turn correlates with our everyday understanding of revenge. The psychological accuracy explains the lasting appeal of these stories. Even if most readers have no personal experience of murder, we may have experience of less serious instances of revenge and retaliation. The basic psychological mechanism that triggers the urge to revenge is the same in smaller insults as it is in the devastating crimes depicted in these stories. Although the intensity of the emotions is not the same, we can relate to Hamlet and Harry's feelings. It has been shown that contemplating revenge is a source of physical pleasure, so if the fictional revenge scenario seems psychologically plausible, we derive pleasure from it.

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