

Appealing, Appalling: Morality and Revenge in *I Spit on Your Grave* (2010)

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The notion of revenge – intentionally seeking to inflict harm in return for a perceived wrong – is encumbered by several ethical and conceptual problems. Even defining revenge is challenging because revenge has been variously distinguished from or combined with retribution and retaliation by numerous thinkers (see Stainton 2006). The present work focuses on one particular conceptual problem: in philosophical scholarship, revenge is reputed to be either morally appealing (satisfying, universally desired, natural, righteous and so forth) or appalling (immoral, universally abhorred, disquieting, and so forth). Although these positions are presented as mutually exclusive in the literature, the sustained presence of both defences and vilifications in revenge scholarship indicates that revenge presents us with a genuine dilemma: revenge is simultaneously appealing and appalling.

This dual aspect of revenge is underscored when avengers seek payback via physical violence. To illustrate this conceptual conflict, I will focus on a narrative case study (one which catalysed the present work); the remake of the notorious revenge film *I Spit on Your Grave* (2010, dir. Steven Monroe, USA). The film's plot is straightforward. While occupying a cabin in an isolated region, the film's lead protagonist (Jennifer) is gang-raped by five men: Johnny, Andy, Stanley, Matthew, and the local sheriff, Storch. Managing to escape before they murder her, Jennifer hides for a month, then returns to kill the rapists one-by-one. Jennifer exhibits no doubt over her revenge gambit. The narrative does not include any suggestion that Jennifer will face negative consequences (such as reprisal or legal penalty) for exacting revenge. In that sense, the film appears to be an unadulterated revenge fantasy in which the harm experienced by the protagonist is balanced by inflicting harm on her assailants. *Prima facie*, it is clear why viewers who are sympathetic to the idea of revenge might find the film appealing. Yet, as I will go on to detail, the filmmakers expend a great deal of effort in making revenge seem acceptable.¹

The reason such effort is required, I argue, is that *I Spit on Your Grave* (hereafter, *I Spit*) revolves around appalling acts: rape and murder. The rape is represented as a horrific, brutal and utterly reprehensible attack.² Although the rape is condemned, the viewer is simultaneously encouraged to permit Jennifer's outlandish and extremely violent revenge; Johnny is castrated and Andy's face is melted in a lye-bath, for instance. Belying *I Spit*'s clear-cut plot, the move from impetus (here, rape) to revenge (here, murder) requires careful navigation, because the narrative traverses thorny ethical terrain. Jennifer's murderous response cannot be excused in its own right simply because her assailants' actions are inexcusable. Jennifer's revenge requires justification at least insofar as she violates the fundamental deontic moral principle that killing is wrong. Jennifer does not exhibit any overt interest in preventing future wrongdoing.

My own response to the film is deeply conflicted. I share in Jennifer's righteous hostility towards her assailants. The revenge is satisfying inasmuch as the rapists "receive their

¹ As French (2001, 218) observes, the same effort is found in philosophy where authors advance theories of revenge as moral balance: 'Balancers like Sher and Davis work hard to make their accounts sound plausible.'

² To be absolutely clear, even though I express doubt over the moral legitimacy of Jennifer's revenge, this article does not seek to defend the film's rapists or rape itself in any sense.

comeuppance.” On reflection however, I am haunted by the pleasure I derive from watching Jennifer dole out terrible harm. As a matter of moral principle, I object to revenge, particularly when it entails homicide. Yet, while watching *I Spit* (and other revenge films of its ilk) I find myself enthusiastically rooting for Jennifer as she commits murder. To be blunt, I catch myself in the throes of what amounts to moral hypocrisy when engaging with the film. However, it is my contention that this conflict elucidates that revenge is simultaneously appealing and appalling. This is not to say that *I Spit* inculcates ambivalence about revenge; rather revenge is riddled with ambivalence at a conceptual level.

In order to explore these conflicts, this article will bridge between philosophy – where revenge has been most consistently conceptualized – and the sphere of popular culture in which revenge is routinely enacted and encountered. This approach follows a tradition of employing fictional narratives to test moral principles (for example, see MacAllister 2003; Solomon 1990). This article seeks to develop that approach by attending to filmic techniques and narrative construction in a way that philosophers typically do not. Given that this is a film journal, readers will be familiar with the modes of textual analysis employed here; the close reading of *I Spit* will not develop new approaches to engaging with narratives. The study adds to scholarship that combines textual analysis and philosophical concerns to evince that popular films stimulate engagement with highly complex issues such as moral dilemmas. *I Spit*, I argue, encourages the audience to side with Jennifer, but does not require consensus on revenge’s moral status. Although *I Spit* appears to be pro-revenge, it most pertinently provides a space in which audiences can interrogate common predispositions about revenge. The narrative’s support of Jennifer’s revenge goads those viewers who find revenge appalling to side with the avenger. Simultaneously, those viewers who find revenge appealing are taunted with the narrative’s unresolved moral quandaries. This article suggests that films such as *I Spit* should be taken seriously, particularly by individuals who might eschew such films because they presume they might be offended by the content. Narratives based around disquieting topics can facilitate reflection on and development of moral positions. Such deliberation is especially pertinent in the case of revenge, where even experts on the topic seem to be deadlocked.

An article of this length cannot possibly hope to chart the historical or cross-cultural development of the revenge genre in its literary, theatrical, and cinematic forms, nor does it aim to. I will not contextualize the genre in relation to classical revenge narratives here, or assess the relationship between *I Spit* and other forms of contemporary revenge cinema. Such a study would be highly valuable – not least given the bounty of Hollywood and Korean revenge films made in recent decades – but it is beyond the scope of the present work to provide that dissection. Rather, this article seeks to contextualise revenge as a concept, particularly for readers who are unfamiliar with the philosophical literature. The philosophical literature on revenge has not been sufficiently engaged with in extant film studies scholarship, and vice versa. Focusing on a single case study is necessary in order to provide a level of analytical detail that is missing in philosophers’ uses of film; this article also seeks to contribute to that analytical approach then, rather than knowledge about the revenge genre. By bridging between philosophical and film studies approaches, I hope to ignite further interdisciplinary discussion.

A Philosophy Best Served Cold: Defining and Dissecting ‘Revenge’

Given that revenge is one of narrative fiction’s staple themes (see Mechoulam 2006, 36; Zaibert 2006, 97; Aladjem 2008, xiv), it is surprising that revenge has received relatively little sustained attention within film studies. The most notable body of work surrounding such films is focused on the subgenre that *I Spit* belongs to: the rape-revenge film. However, even that work predominantly engages with former (rape) rather than the latter (revenge). Thus, although Lisa Coulthard (2007), Peter Lehman (2001), Sarah Projansky (2001), and Jacinda Read (2000) and have all produced salient work on rape-revenge film, these authors are principally interested in gender politics rather than the ethics of revenge. Such work is clearly pertinent; representations of rape are certainly worth scrutinizing, and it is entirely appropriate to focus on gender politics when discussing rape.³ However, there is little need to replicate those arguments since they are already well documented; for example, Laura Mee (2013) has already accounted for feminist representational politics within the original *I Spit on Your Grave* and its remake, so I will not rehearse that argument. My aim is to contribute to those discussions by focusing specifically on the moral aspects of revenge, which are under-theorized in existing work.

To illustrate, Carol Clover’s (1993, 119) influential analysis of the rape-revenge subgenre implies that sexual politics are complex, yet revenge does not require the same level of attention; Clover deems that the original *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978, dir. Meir Zarchi, USA) is ‘almost perverse’ in its simplicity. The film, in Clover’s assessment, offers ‘no concern whatever...with moral and ethical issues.’ Yet it is Clover’s failure to sufficiently engage with revenge that leads her to neglect the moral issues raised by rape-revenge films. For example, Clover accepts that revenge is an apt response to rape without considering the ethics of that exchange. Clover’s approach is illustrative of the insufficient engagement with revenge within the existing scholarship regarding revenge films. More recent work on the subgenre has remained just as focused on feminism and rape rather than revenge. Despite proclaiming that ethics is a ‘key theoretical framework’ in her ‘revisionist’ account of the subgenre, Claire Henry (2014, 10) makes no reference to moral philosophy outside of a fleeting allusion to Levinas. Henry recognizes that rape-revenge raises ‘complex ethical questions’ (2014, 41), but fails to ground or explore those questions in sufficient depth. In order to develop upon the established paradigm for handling rape-revenge texts then, I turn to moral-philosophical scholarship regarding revenge.

Indeed, the philosophical literature contains much more sustained engagement with revenge-fiction. However, such readings typically suffer from a lack of close narrative analysis. French (2001, 35) recognizes this limitation, offering the apologia, ‘I am neither a film critic nor an analyst of the nuances of film.’ Other philosophers seem less cognizant of their shortcomings with regard to textual analysis. For example, Francesca Polletta et al. (2013) make a case for the impact of plot and characterization in rape stories, but the authors erroneously use ‘narrative’ as a synonym for ‘plot.’ Thus, they misunderstand that the bridge connecting plot (the sequence of events) and character (those who undergo the events) is narrative: the manner in which the plot is relayed to the audience. Philosophical work on revenge-fiction is typically limited by this failure to engage with narrative construction and conventions.

The sustained study of revenge within philosophy more broadly is relatively recent, having only gained significant ground since the 1980s (see Rosebury 2008; Dumsday 2009). Much of that literature has sought to explain why revenge is a persistent aspect of human behavior.

³ Indeed, I have taken this approach in my previous work; see Jones, 2013b.

For instance, thinkers such as Jon Elster (1990, 881) and John Mackie (1982, 8) propose that revenge is a part of our evolutionary make-up because vengefulness once facilitated reproductive fitness. Resultantly, it is proposed that we have inherited an innate approval of like-for-like balance when group members defile established norms. Subsequent scholars have elaborated on this base. Marvin Henberg (1990, 8) asserts that our contemporary conception of revenge is ‘a product of culture elaborating on a biological tendency,’ for example, while Alan Page Fiske and Tage Shakti Rai (2015, xxii) posit that violence remains pertinent to human societies because that evolutionarily embedded strategy remains effective when it comes to regulating socio-moral relationships.

Despite these more sophisticated versions of the evolutionary explanation for revenge’s continuing relevance, the overriding understanding of revenge that has followed is that revenge is ‘instinctual,’ or, as many philosophers have it, the desire for revenge arises out of intuitions about justice (see Blustein 2010; Lippke 2003; Weiner, Graham, and Reyna, 1997). Another descendant of this theoretical lineage is the notion that revenge derives from a ‘primitive’ drive that pre-exists law and ethical contemplation (see Kleinig 1973, 11; Sherwin 2003, 1411; Small 1997, 54). One implication of this ‘instinctual’ model is that revenge is irrational, since it stems from an archaic, pre-rational mindset. This interpretation leads academics such as Sommers (2009) to propose that reflective ethical decision-making can permit humans to overcome such rudimentary drives.⁴ This stance broadly follows Immanuel Kant’s (1930, 214) logic that morality is rooted in the capacity for rationalized thought. Indeed, Arthur Shuster (2011) proposes that for Kant, ‘the rationality of retributive punishment...distinguished it from *mindless* revenge’ (emphasis added; see also Gerber and Jackson 2013; Tasioulas 2006, 296). Such philosophers frequently limn revenge as condemnable because it is reactive, even animalistic.

A further implication of this retributive strain is that there is a moral duty to bring wrongdoers to justice. Retributivists typically lean on this premise to endorse punishing criminal offenders under law. Others have employed the same notion to defend private revenge in principle, particularly in scenarios where no functional, sanctioned punishment system is available. Revenge is appealing in this regard because it ostensibly balances out the wrongdoing; as Paul Seton (2001, 95) contends, ‘revenge soothes outrage, comforts grief, and seeks balance and order’ (see also Gollwitzer and Denzler 2009, 840). Seton’s appraisal indicates that there is a connection between a) the idea that revenge is an intrinsic part of a system for maintaining order in human societies, b) the retributive notion of moral balance, and c) some kind of emotional appeal (‘soothing...comforting’). The same set of connections is evident in Michael McCullough et al.’s (2001, 602) proposal that ‘the desire to “get even”’ arises out of an urge to ‘restor[e] moral balance...Thus, vengeance might be understood, at least from the vengeful person’s point of view, as truly moral.’

Many theorists suggest that in order to justify revenge, the avenger’s response must be balanced with the harm that is being returned; that is, revenge must be proportionate to the original offence (see Corlett 2001).⁵ This ‘an eye for an eye’ balance might initially sound simple, but as a principle for attaining justice, *lex talionis* generates three core moral problems. First, an exactly proportionate response to a perceived wrong would require committing the same action that is being chastised. Therefore, given their response, the

⁴ See also Acorn (2004, 51), who suggests that such ‘instincts’ are intrinsic, and argues that without state-sanctioned justice our natural ‘impulsive’ bent might lead to ‘potentially limitless...revenge.’

⁵ Other theorists have expressed skepticism over the notion of moral balance per se. For instance, Henberg (1990, 20) voices his concern that the ‘moral balance’ metaphor is so abstract that it leads to inconsistent interpretations regarding what can be balanced, how, and by whom.

avenger's assessment regarding the act's wrongness seems to be inconsistent or even hypocritical. Comparable problems arise in many revenge-based films, since avengers frequently seek to use torture and murder to balance violence done to them. Even in less extreme situations, the same principle applies; as Thomas Tripp, Karl Aquino and Robert Bies (2007) observe, revenge routinely involves behaving in what would otherwise be considered immoral ways.

Second, recall my opening definition of revenge as intentionally seeking to inflict harm in return for a *perceived* wrong. Even if we accept that an avenger is certain of their offender's identity and that the avenger's desire to inflict harm is acceptable (on the grounds that it supposedly achieves moral balance), it is not guaranteed that avengers are equipped to assess proportionality. Where revenge is enacted by an aggrieved party or someone who has an intimate connection with a wronged individual, the avenger's outlook is likely to be severely biased or clouded by their emotional investment in the circumstances. That is, the avenger may not seek just to take 'an eye for an eye' because they might also seek compensation for their outrage, anger or distress, for instance. Moreover, the avenger's perception of what ought to be paid back to compensate for their emotional distress might seem unreasonable to an impartial observer (see Forster 2005, 246-7; Kim, Smith, and Brigham 1998, 354; Barton 1999, 108).

Combining the first two concerns, Adil Ahmad Haque (2013) argues that because it is motivated by 'caus[ing] like-suffering,' revenge seems to be antithetical to justice (see also Hershenov 1999, 80). Haque's critique points towards a third problem. Revenge does not simply balance wrongdoing: inflicting like-suffering also satisfies the avenger and potentially offers vicarious gratification to third parties who empathize with the avenger (see Clark 2004; Golash 1994). Thus, revenge seems to encourage individuals to derive pleasure from another's suffering (to whatever degree), and that in itself suggests that revenge is immoral.

Revenge's moral status is uncertain then since it hinges on a number of indeterminate premises. For example, it is unclear whether: a) one has a moral duty to balance wrongdoing; b) it is acceptable that one pursues revenge; c) directly replicating an immoral act is permissible so long as the avenger seeks moral balance; d) moral balance is itself a feasible goal; e) avengers are primarily motivated by the desire to achieve moral balance or to gratify their outrage, and so forth. Consequently, thinkers in the field are divided on revenge's moral status.

The field is also divided on revenge's reputation more broadly. Many philosophers declare that revenge is taboo (see Rosenbaum 2013, 5; McCullough 2008, 4-5; Oldenquist 1986, 76), being 'condemned as abnormal, illegitimate, dangerous, and morally improper...despite its historical prevalence' (Yoshimura and Boon 2014, 222). Elsewhere, scholars presume that the populace find revenge appealing, placing emphasis on the presumed universality of revenge fantasy (see Smith 2008, 144). Recent empirical research underlines that revenge is commonly imagined to be pleasurable or satisfying, even though it entails committing immoral action and is likely to result in negative outcomes. For instance, Threadgill and Gable (2020) suggest that revenge provides a context in which punishment generates pleasure, and anger amplifies that pleasure. Gert (2020) claims that revenge offers a justification for committing what the avenger understands to be immoral action, while Eder, Krishna and Mitschke (2021) propose that the pleasures of revenge-taking help individuals to overcome their discomfort about doling out punishment. Griswold describes this notion of pleasurable revenge as being among the most common 'fantasies and...fallacies' associated with the concept (2006, 28). Lister concurs, averring that there is a commonplace 'fallacious belief' that revenge offers cathartic relief, which obscures the reality that revenge is typically

‘destructive for the individual and society’, and is thus ‘not only...immoral but [also] counterproductive’ (2014, 373). Perhaps these conflicts and shortcomings help to explain why revenge ideation has been correlated with depression (see Barcaccia et al, 2020), and even suicide (see Acosta et al, 2020) in the empirical literature.

Given that the field is divided on this fundamental matter of revenge being either appealing or appalling, it is unsurprising that some scholars’ conclusions about revenge are inconsistent. To illustrate, Brian Rosebury (2008, 1) observes that ‘certain acts of revenge may be just...and yet...generally agreed to be morally wrong.’ Suzanne Uniacke (2000, 63) too notes that revenge is morally wrong and yet seems to be acceptable in particular circumstances. Unlike many of their peers, Rosebury and Uniacke arrive at an impasse because they are unwilling to explain away these contradictions by adopting an outright pro- or anti-revenge stance. Indeed, this stalemate – which is evinced by the conflicting assessments that characterize revenge scholarship – cannot properly be resolved by denying the seemingly intrinsic appeal of revenge-desire or the potential moral hypocrisy that might follow from fantasizing about or committing revenge.

Despite the fact that ‘revenge is capable of producing both negative (“bitter”) and favourable (“sweet”) reactions’ (Eadeh, Peak and Lambert, 2017: 27), the prevailing understandings of revenge – both in the scholarship, and in the predispositions revealed by empirical research – are polarised, failing to distinguish between revenge ideation and enacted revenge, or the moral quandaries posed by revenge feeling “good” despite being “bad”. Yet, it is insufficient to presume that the populace generally either outright condemns or champions revenge since the topic generates conflicted responses. It is better to recognize that revenge is simultaneously appealing *and* appalling.

‘Not good enough’:⁶ Narrativizing Revenge in *I Spit on Your Grave*

As aforementioned, numerous philosophers draw on fictional examples when theorizing about revenge, using those scenarios as thought-experiments to engage with underlying conceptual issues (for instance, see Bennett 2013). Yet, such scholarship is commonly hindered by their authors’ unfamiliarity with methods of narrative analysis.⁷ Since this article seeks to counter that deficiency via close textual analysis of a single case study, it is worth pausing to illustrate the kind of inadequacy I refer to. On watching the revenge-themed western *Silverado* (1985, dir. Lawrence Kasdan, USA), and being part of the audience who found revenge ‘morally satisfying,’ Jeffrie Murphy (1990, 210-11) concludes that despite principled opposition to revenge, ‘most typical, decent, mentally healthy people’ approve of ‘righteous’ revenge in a ‘common sense’ way. Murphy thus reasons that revenge is widely accepted as being normal. However, like most philosophers who draw on fictional examples, Murphy does not account for the narrative devices that characterize revenge within *Silverado*.

As the following dissection of *I Spit* will illustrate, attending to narrative construction helps to explain the apparent contradiction between principled opposition to and approval of revenge that Murphy outlines but is unable to explain. Murphy is correct that revenge narratives can be pleasurable. Yet, *pace* Murphy, those pleasures do not simply stem from or

⁶ When Matthew claims that he is sorry for raping her, Jennifer exclaims that his apology is ‘just not good enough.’

⁷ I am not claiming that the narrative techniques outlined here are exclusive to revenge film; rather my point is that philosophers who have engaged with revenge films have not adequately accounted for analytical approaches that are commonplace within film studies.

substantiate revenge's universal appeal: it is also necessary to overcome the widespread disposition that violent revenge is appalling, and this can be achieved via narrative construction. Although *I Spit* seemingly presents violent revenge as an acceptable response to perceived wrongdoing and audiences are encouraged to side with or take pleasure in Jennifer's vengeance, the narrative must negotiate the inherently appalling aspects of revenge.

I Spit's protagonist (Jennifer) has an unambiguous impetus for revenge: she is gang-raped by five men. Although her motive is understandable, her response – murder – is not necessarily permissible. As William Wilson (2007) argues, homicidal revenge is 'never a "normal" or even "partially normal" response' to harm, even if 'we cannot expect...ordinary human beings always to measure up [to absolutist moral ideals] in times of extreme stress.' Before dissecting the film's narrative techniques then, it is worth outlining some moral objections to Jennifer's revenge-gambit. From a deontic stance, all other rights follow from one's right to life, and so killing is unjust in principle. The rapists' right to life is not mutable or context-dependent in this view. One possible exception to this rule is in the case of self-defence, where homicide might be excused as a necessary evil. In her rigorous monograph on self-defence, Fiona Leverick concludes that killing is justified only 'where an aggressor poses an unjust immediate threat, and *there is no other way in which the threat can be avoided by the victim*' (2006, 65-66; see also Fine 1993, 300). Thus, the 'morally preferable option' is to retreat where possible, as this 'promotes maximum respect for the right to life' (Leverick 2006, 76). Jennifer's premeditated revenge is to be distinguished from self-defence since she escapes from threat, and then returns a month later to exact her revenge. That intended harm is an end in itself rather than a by-product of Jennifer's attempt to preserve her own life or safety.⁸ That is, the revenge is premeditated rather than defensive.

However, the narrative positions Jennifer's revenge to generate an impression that it is equivalent to self-defence by severely limiting her ability to escape from her attackers in the film's first half. Jennifer is initially attacked by Matthew, Stanley, Andy and Johnny who invade her residence and threaten her. Jennifer manages to flee into the woods, where she encounters Sheriff Storch. Although he appears to be her saviour, he then takes Jennifer back to her cabin where he and the other men gang-rape her. Jennifer's inability to escape is also reified via camera movement. Her journeys into the rural locale where her victimization occurs are characterized by her movement from screen-right to screen-left. Her attempts to escape reverse that motion. Given that she is an author – she took residence in a woodland cabin to work on her writing – that direction is significant. For the English-language writer, movement from page left-to-right signals active progress. Jennifer's journeys to the rural cabin from right-to-left of frame thus signify deletion: negative change. Accordingly, Jennifer's several attempts to escape her attackers are positively coded by mimicking the left-to-right movement of words across a page. When Jennifer first runs into the ostensibly benign Sheriff Storch, she enters from screen-left, and is only halted by colliding with him. When Storch takes her back to the cabin where she is then raped, the shots return to the screen-right to screen-left movement, portending imminent defeat and destruction. Storch's attempts to expunge Jennifer after the rape – burning her possessions, destroying Stanley's videorecording of the rape – affirm those thematic connotations: he seeks to erase her. After two thwarted attempts, Jennifer stops trying to escape and instead remains in the woods to 'delete' the rapists. Framing again conveys the thematic implications of her position-shift. Whenever Jennifer walks away from the rapists after revenge sequences, she moves towards

⁸ On justifying revenge as a by-product of preserving one's own life or safety, see Hindriks, 2011. On this distinction between revenge and self-defence, see also Kaufman (2013, 139).

a static camera. After setting the final revenge-murders in motion, she strides away from the cabin towards screen-right, thus suggesting that she is finally able to leave. However, before she vacates the shot, she slumps down. Jennifer's slumped posture signals that she has physically and emotionally relinquished her ability to escape.⁹

Here, I disagree with Mantziari's interpretation that Jennifer is depicted 'smiling contentedly' in both versions of *I Spit on Your Grave* (2018: 397). The original *I Spit* closes with a shot of Jennifer absconding from the crime scene in a motorboat. Her pursed, wry, fleeting smile is accompanied by a steely gaze as she looks out in her direction of travel (that is, towards "her future"). The connotation that she has regained control is underlined by the final shot: a close-up of the boat's tiller as she steers. In the remake, Jennifer's expression is far more ambivalent: her "thousand-yard stare" is vacant, and her slumped posture suggests resignation rather than victory. The remake certainly seems to eschew what Robson refers to as the archetypal 'final scene' of a rape-revenge film, 'which seems to valorise the revenge actions of the vigilante' (2021: 75). Here, the film ends abruptly. Individual viewers might perceive the ending as cathartic.¹⁰ However, it is worth considering the extent to which that satisfaction is born of predisposition – a desire to see rapists punished for their crimes and the wronged individual being redeemed – and the ways the film's narrative manipulations generate "satisfaction".

Jennifer's seeming inability to escape implies that she is limited to a path of revenge: her choice to enact revenge feels intuitively appealing insofar as the narrative suggests that she has no other options. For example, Jennifer initially seeks help from Sheriff Storch, but he is then revealed to be the lead rapist. Storch's abuse of authority acts as a narrative shorthand, explaining why Jennifer does not seek further legal help following her escape. However, the absence of local legal authority does not itself justify her subsequent choice to enact revenge.¹¹ The implication that she has no option other than to seek revenge is symptomatic of the narrative design that obfuscates Jennifer's ability to leave after the attack. Indeed, although we might understand the appeal of revenge for someone in her position, she only *needs* to exact revenge insofar as it completes the narrative arc.

I Spit further naturalizes Jennifer's decision to kill by portraying the particulars of revenge as 'poetic justice,' an abstract balance that (as the qualifying term 'poetic' indicates) derives from the film's dramatic construction. For instance, Stanley is a voyeur who secretly films Jennifer prior to and during the rape. Jennifer's revenge entails binding Stanley to a tree, prying his eyes open with fishhooks, and leaving his camcorder to film as crows peck out his eyes. Each of the deaths follow suit, back-referencing the rape in the revenge sections. Johnny grips Jennifer's teeth while humiliating her, so she later pulls out his teeth with pliers. Matthew strangles Jennifer during the rape to subdue her, so she subsequently chokes him into unconsciousness with a noose. Andy dunks her head in a puddle several times during the rape, so she returns the gesture by drowning him in a lye-bath. Storch threatens Jennifer by pushing his rifle against her crotch before anally raping her; she avenges herself by thrusting

⁹ In retrospect, her promise to Matthew (long before the attack) that she is 'not going anywhere' – intended to mean she would remain at home so he could fix her plumbing – is bitterly ironic.

¹⁰ However, it is worth acknowledging Bloom's assertion that 'of all dead psychological theories, catharsis is the deadest' (2021, 84).

¹¹ The implication that Jennifer is forced into avenging the rape connotes that the premeditated homicide she commits should not be equated with first-degree murder (on this distinction, see Jacoby 1983, 192).

the rifle into his rectum.¹² The story abruptly ceases once her revenge has been exacted on all five men. Those arcs connote that the revenge offers closure for Jennifer's trauma.

'Poetic justice' is not limited to Jennifer literally mimicking attributes of the original attack, however. Numerous additional dramatic motifs foster that feeling of complementarity. The majority of these elements are beyond the characters' comprehension. During the initial attack, Jennifer sprays mace into Stanley's eyes, pre-echoing the revenge later exacted on him. Before the rape, Stanley films Andy beating a dead fish in the woods with a baseball bat. That incident is evoked again when Stanley and Andy compare Jennifer to a 'dead fish' after the rape, and also in the revenge sequence: Jennifer smears fish innards on Stanley's face to attract the crows. The crow-attack is also foreshadowed. When Storch threatens Stanley for not disposing of his camcorder recording of the rape, Stanley's denial – 'I didn't do anything' – is immediately followed by the sound of a crow cawing in the distance. The soundscape presages the revenge. The birdcall highlights Stanley's negation of wrongdoing, signalling that revenge cannot be escaped. Sound is employed throughout *I Spit* to portend revenge. Pizzicato strings and bass drones accompany Jennifer's pre-attack trips to an abandoned cabin that becomes her post-rape home, and to a shed where she discovers the tools and lye she later uses in exacting revenge. Jennifer's unsettled expression in these moments connotes that they are significant discoveries. Although Jennifer cannot be aware of why they are important, her countenance confirms the ominous tone set by the extra-diegetic music.

These mechanisms patently draw on notions of balance and resolution in order to naturalize revenge for the audience (rather than for Jennifer), making it seem as if Jennifer's trajectory towards revenge is somehow fated. The problem that follows from such balancing is illustrated by Uniacke's (2001, 68) linked statements, 'revenge qua revenge is wrong. Some acts of revenge are tolerable because they...have a redeeming feature such as being memorably witty.' Uniacke presents the latter as a defence for revenge, yet the suggestion that murder is excusable if 'witty' is alarming; complementary patterns are insufficient as justifications for homicide. Nevertheless, Uniacke's proclamation conveys how impactful narrative devices can be. As *I Spit* demonstrates, heinous violence can appear to be morally acceptable if narrativized as poetic justice.

Although the narrative is balanced in these ways, the acts of violence themselves – rape and revenge-homicide – remain imbalanced in order to (ostensibly) justify the latter while unambiguously admonishing the former. Viewers are prompted to perceive Jennifer's revenge as being entirely different to her assailants' violence. The avenger's pain is linked to her innocence during the initial sequences of violence. In contrast, the offenders' suffering is connected to their guilt in the revenge sequences, since the revenge is coded as an effect of their previous actions (on the connotations of 'revenge' in this respect, see Benditt 2007, 357). The structure urges viewers to evaluate two forms of violence and their perpetrators in relation to each other, rather than assessing each in their own right. The subgenre label 'rape-revenge' also primes viewers to morally typecast its antagonists as guilty and deserving of punishment before they commit their crime. The minor key musical refrain that plays as

¹² Since Storch is the lead antagonist and this incident is the film's climactic act of revenge, it is implied that object-rape is a form of balance that offers closure. *I Spit* is not the only film of the period to depict object-rape as a form of sexual horror (on this, see Jones [2013, 143]), but here the incident raises the aforementioned problem with *lex talionis* or balancing "harm with harm". Numerous thinkers have cautioned that 'rape for a rape' is a literal proportionate form of punishment, but rape is clearly incompatible with justice; the inherent wrongness of rape means it cannot be utilized to attain moral balance (see Roberts-Cady 2010, 186-7). On the problem of assessing 'what sort of punishment is suitable or apt' in cases of rape, see French (2001, 225). *I Spit* eschews this question by creating motif-based parallels between the rape sequences and the revenge sequences, as outlined above.

Jennifer first encounters the men – despite the absence of threat – elucidates their position as antagonists in the narrative schema (the rapists in this ‘rape-revenge’ tale). In contrast, Jennifer is always-already innocent. Inarguably she does nothing to provoke the rape, but her role as innocent victim carries over to the revenge too.

The narrative’s power dynamic is skewed in a manner that supports Jennifer’s campaign. Jennifer is victimized by five men, while the revenge is exacted by her alone. The odds are stacked against her in both halves of the story, meaning her revenge is presented as a courageous feat. Tripp, Aquino and Bies (2007, 12-13) aver that revenge is most likely to occur when victims have more power than their offenders, since the victim thereby has greater means to respond. *I Spit* works in the opposite way, and in so doing makes the revenge seem permissible. Jennifer’s relative lack of power is accentuated by her isolation. Her arrival at the cabin is presented in long-shots that underline her remoteness. Visually, she is dwarfed by her desolate surroundings. In contrast, the rapists have collective power. Prior to the rape, the men are predominantly depicted together as a group. Sheriff Storch’s legal status literalizes the quintet’s power, as well as amplifying the crime’s law-flouting unjustness. Characterized as a triumph over power-biases, Jennifer’s revenge appears to balance inequity.

Furthermore, the narrative’s perspective on the two sets of harms (rape and revenge) is imbalanced, being biased in Jennifer’s favour. Jennifer’s response remains appealing because of her narrative position as our lead protagonist. *I Spit* centralises Jennifer’s viewpoint at key moments. The film’s opening shots encourage engagement with Jennifer, introducing her via three positions in quick succession: first, from her point-of-view as she drives; second, a front-on slow zoom-in on her face (a reverse shot that contextualizes the first); and third, a shot of Jennifer in profile, positioned from the car’s passenger seat. Thus, the sequence opens ‘in’ her position, and ends travelling along ‘with’ her. As the film’s point-of-entry, these quick establishing shots do a great deal of contextualizing work that carries over into the rape and revenge.¹³ Although the rape is presented in a stylized manner – employing shaky hand-held camera and blurred point-of-view shots from Jennifer’s perspective that signal her tear-filled field of vision – these aesthetic attributes corroborate the text’s initial establishing of Jennifer as the narrative anchor.

Some have argued that *I Spit* cultivates a degree of complicity with the rapists’ viewpoint as they attack Jennifer. For example, Mantziari proposes that during the rape sequence, there is an ‘intermittent adoption’ of the rapists’ point-of-view via Stanley’s camcorder: the camcorder footage ‘puts the spectator in the position of the rapist/voyeur’, fostering ‘complicity in [their] sadistic scopophilia’ (2018, 405). Mantziari proposes that even though ‘the film... condemns yet also condones sadistic scopophilia’, the film also ‘implicates the spectator in the action by creating an affinity with the voyeur/rapist’ (2018, 400). I disagree that the film’s deployment of camcorder footage generates affinities with the rapists, even intermittently. First, the camcorder footage is introduced before the attack, when Stanley surreptitiously films Jennifer. In that scene, the identity of the camera-wielder is withheld from *I Spit*’s viewer. As Mantziari notes, ‘the adoption of this point of view is fleeting and explicitly marked as sinister’ here (2018, 403-4), and this connotation carries over into the later rape scenes where the same point-of-view recurs. That is, when Stanley is been revealed as the camera’s operator, the association of the camcorder footage with Stanley (who threatens our lead protagonist) generates further discomfort rather than complicity. Second,

¹³ As Cerulo notes (1998, 40-3), a narrative’s point-of-entry is significant because it shapes one’s apprehension of subsequent hostile action, most notably in terms of justification and moral assessment.

the camcorder footage is formally distinguished from *I Spit*'s usual "omniscient" third-person footage. The camcorder footage is handheld, grainy, the colours are desaturated, and the low-resolution image is marred by scanlines. Rather than offering a point of identification within the scene, the footage feels distanced from the scene; compared to the "invisible" immediacy of the omniscient camera's perspective, the camcorder footage is detached from the moment, as if we are watching it after-the-fact. Moreover, compared with the overtly emotionalised adoption of Jennifer's first-person perspective during the rape, the camcorder footage comes across as cold and distant. The camcorder footage might underline that capturing Jennifer's humiliation is important to *Stanley*, but that does not mean it is important to or is a source of voyeuristic pleasure for *I Spit*'s viewer. This distinction is underscored by the use of point-of-view to introduce Jennifer as our narrative point-of-entry, while Stanley's camcorder footage is initially disconnected even from his identity. The formal mechanisms utilized to foster allegiance with Jennifer in *I Spit* are not utilized when depicting the rapists, even during the revenge sequences. Formally, the men are not presented as 'victims': they are merely perpetrators. The viewer is encouraged to perceive only the rape as harm. The narrative structure couches the revenge-homicide as a symptomatic effect rather than a deliberate infliction of harm.

Contra to 'the common view...that the wrongness of' harms such as killing 'does not vary with such factors as...whether the victim is well liked or generally despised' (McMahan 2003, 235), *I Spit* demonstrates that the perpetrator's character does impact on one's assessment of harmful acts. The narrative does not provide much detail from the rapists' perspectives, but where it does so, it supports rather than problematizes the established assumptions about each man's moral character. *I Spit* supplies some evidence that 'people are not only murderers, rapists, or torturers' (Govier 2002, 112), and this could (theoretically) underline the rapists' humanity, rather than simply reducing the men to the harm they inflict. For example, Storch is presented in his home-context, as father to a young daughter and husband to his heavily pregnant wife. However, maintaining the position that the rapists are inherently and only 'bad,' such inclusions amplify rather than reduce their villainy. During the rape, Storch breaks away to talk sweetly to his daughter on the telephone about his weekly routine of making breakfast before church. This sickening contrast underscores how horrific Storch's treatment of Jennifer is. Even when he returns home after the rape – greeting his daughter as 'angel' and his wife as 'sweetheart' – the bass drone that accompanies his comment that he will 'shower up' before dinner reminds the audience of Storch's crime: his need to cleanse himself (both literally and figuratively) in order to hide his wrongdoing.

The rapists are denied the possibility of change. Both Johnny's and Storch's final statements present them as unremorseful, and therefore beyond salvation. They refuse to accept responsibility for their actions, continuing to refer to Jennifer as a 'bitch.' Their moral wrongness thereby remains consistent, and that helps to justify Jennifer's revenge: since they are presented as unsalvageable, it seems fitting that the rapists should be eradicated. For instance, Trudy Govier (2002, 112) argues that taking another's life in return for a perceived harm is inherently wrong because it robs them of the 'human capacity for remorse, choice, and moral transformation.' *I Spit*'s narrative mechanisms encourage precisely the opposite reading. The rapists are reduced only to their wrongdoing, despite being both rapists *and* revenge-victims. Jennifer's role, in contrast, is dynamic: she transforms from 'writer' to 'victim' to 'avenger.' Jennifer's aggression in the narrative's latter stages contrasts with her earlier non-aggressiveness. Since she does not display any general leaning towards violence prior to the rape, her transformation into an avenger seems to be caused by the rape itself. Thus, Jennifer is divested of responsibility for her metamorphosis into an avenger. The

narrative structure implies that the circumstances are responsible for the ensuing revenge, and so Jennifer remains seemingly innocent.

The narrative construction might suggest that revenge is permissible, thus compensating for the appalling aspects of revenge, but these very strategies also undermine the revenge. Overall, Jennifer has little control in the narrative. She is presented as morally innocent because the rape transforms her into an avenger. Yet, this means that the rapists' agency takes priority even in the revenge sequences; they bring their suffering on themselves. Indeed, following Jennifer's escape, the narrative detaches from her insofar as we do not see her recuperating and plotting her revenge: she simply re-appears to exact her revenge. In this light, Jennifer is a conduit for the restoration of moral balance rather than a self-determining agent.

Consequently, the purpose of her revenge-quest is called into question. Indeed, it is notable that Jennifer does not clearly state what she hopes to achieve via revenge. There is little evidence that Jennifer herself seeks moral balance for the antagonists' wrongdoing. Rather, Jennifer's intermittent outbursts hint that she seeks emotional resolution for the violations she experienced. During the revenge sequences Jennifer occasionally makes direct, fervent references to her suffering. For example, in her exchange with Andy, she responds to his exclamation, '[f]uck you!', with '[y]ou already did that. I didn't like it very much. Now it's my turn.' She equally returns his imploring with "'[p]lease" is what I said to you.' Jennifer's 'I' statements connote that she is primarily concerned with wrong done to her. Jennifer refers to herself in these moments to communicate to the rapists that her personhood is worthy of recognition; the rapists should take responsibility for harming her (as opposed to admitting that rape is wrong more broadly). Notably, Jennifer's assertions double as a protest against the narrative's elision of her agency, drawing attention to that omission.

Jennifer's outbursts are so striking because they are uncharacteristic. For the most part, Jennifer's demeanour is clinical. She exhibits little anger, spending much of the film's latter half staring blankly into the distance. Jennifer does not appear to be consumed by rage, and there is little evidence that revenge assuages her resentment. Revenge's satisfactions are typically thought to derive 'from another person's suffering, not for any instrumental value of the suffering, but just for the sake of the suffering' (Uniacke 2000, 64), yet Jennifer does not overtly attain such satisfaction. For instance, she does not react when Stanley steps into a bear-trap, implying that she is disinterested in his suffering. If revenge provides emotional satisfaction then, it does so for the audience, not for Jennifer. In addition, since the film ends when the revenge-gambit is complete, there is no confirmation that revenge results in Jennifer's recovery, for example. Jennifer's revenge does not rectify the original wrongdoing, even if it offers narratological balances. The revenge offers only shallow resolutions then, holding little gratification or purpose for the avenger herself. Thus, although the narrative strives to create an impression that revenge is acceptable or appealing, its hollow conclusion is likely to leave many viewers feeling pity or horror as well as satisfaction.¹⁴

¹⁴ That inconclusiveness is underlined by the production of a sequel – *I Spit on Your Grave 3: Vengeance is Mine* (2015, dir. R. D. Braunstein, USA) – which continues Jennifer's story by focusing on her inability to move beyond her trauma. Similar implications follow from a more recent sequel to the 1978 original – *I Spit on Your Grave: Déjà vu* (2019, dir. Meir Zarchi, USA) – which depicts the original's Jennifer and her daughter being abducted by the original rapists' family members. In both cases, the sequels indicate that the initial film's revenge fails to offer resolution. Indeed, the revenge is followed by further appalling violence in these sequels.

Taking Revenge-Fiction Seriously

While *I Spit* does not overtly probe revenge's underlying moral complexities – seemingly subsuming those difficulties into a familiar organizational pattern instead – its reliance on narrative structure to justify revenge itself exposes how problematic revenge is. *I Spit* implies that the balance between impetus (perceived wrongdoing) and response (revenge) is only formal; that is, the narrative is balanced, but revenge offers no moral equilibrium or satisfaction for Jennifer. Indeed, as numerous philosophers have warned, revenge usually fails to offer avengers resolution (see Sommers 2009, 37). Notably, *I Spit* draws upon the appealing aspects of revenge, but also fails to substantiate that appeal. Since Jennifer's revenge is so violent, that lack of substance creates dissonance, leaving open questions about the aims and moral status of revenge. For instance, if revenge does not cancel out or rectify harm experienced by the avenger, it is unclear why revenge should be thought of as being causally linked to or (even nominally) balanced with the preceding harm. These quandaries are not explicitly unpicked in *I Spit* itself, but they are intrinsic to the narrative and inherent to revenge. *I Spit* encourages the viewer to side with Jennifer and to take pleasure in revenge then, but only in a minimal sense; that is, in the context depicted and for the duration of one's engagement with the narrative.

I Spit is likely to be seen primarily by viewers with a tolerance for contentious subject matter, but audiences do not respond to stimuli in a uniform manner. Indeed, contentiousness invites multiple responses. Some viewers might be entirely horrified by the revenge. Although the filmmakers foster allegiance with Jennifer (at least initially), that strategy does not guarantee that audiences will find revenge permissible. Some might be convinced by the notion that, in these particular circumstances, revenge is an acceptable informal substitute for judicial punishment. Others may empathize with the revenge as enacted rage, feeling justified anger towards the rapists, even if Jennifer's vengeful actions are immoral. Others still may feel that Jennifer is morally obligated to punish her assailants in return for the harm they inflicted. Some viewers, like myself, might find their own responses to revenge disquieting. These possibilities are not mutually exclusive.

Drama is powerful since it allows viewers to work through moral dilemmas, permitting audiences to gauge 'what, in any given situation, is the appropriate thing to do' (Elster 1990, 862-3). That does not mean that audiences necessarily agree with the protagonists' or antagonists' responses to stimuli. Rather, by illustrating various (often questionable) versions of 'the appropriate thing to do,' revenge-themed drama naturally guides its viewers towards a) contemplating contradictions that underpin our responses to certain behaviours, and b) probing the moral principles one presumes to hold true prior to engaging with revenge-fiction. In fact, it is possible that the subject matter might appeal most to those who are conflicted about revenge's status. Even if one's responses to events depicted in revenge-fiction are coloured by one's predispositions regarding revenge, revenge-fiction's audience may be primarily drawn to the subject matter because they enjoy having their predispositions challenged.

This assessment of revenge-fiction's audience might sound surprising to those who – in an echo of the evolutionary model of revenge's development – presume that such filmmaking appeals to unsophisticated viewers' animalistic bloodlust. For example, Susan Boon and Stephen Yoshimura (2014, 270) propose that 'tales of revenge...may have powerful effects on perceptions of revenge, leading people to believe that revenge is more acceptable and common in relational contexts than it really is.' This appraisal imagines that audiences are passive recipients of information who lack the ability to distinguish between the fictional context and the viewer's own socio-political reality. In fact, that distinction allows viewers to

remain critical of real-world revenge while holding the seemingly contradictory stance that revenge seems to be acceptable or appealing within a narrative context (revenge acts are normative in revenge fiction). Tomas Böhm and Suzanne Kaplan (2011, 7) similarly underestimate audiences by presenting engagements with such films as homogeneously all-consuming; '[a]ll of us are affected by strong scenes of violence and revenge.' Although the authors add the caveat that 'after a short time most of us hopefully regain our sense of balance between reality and fantasy,' the implication is that some viewers might not 'regain' such a balance. These evaluations imply that revenge is 'primitive' and that revenge narratives themselves are simplistic, leading towards the insinuation that the audiences who take pleasure in revenge-fiction are unsophisticated.

Some viewers may find revenge appealing on the levels that these authors suggest, since revenge has an intrinsic attraction. However, their presumptions underline several insufficiencies in the authors' perspectives on revenge. These scholars promulgate an unnecessarily limited vision of revenge's potential appeal. *Prima facie*, *I Spit's* narrative approaches suggest that the film is pro-revenge. Yet, the satisfaction offered via its narrative structures is scant because it is essentially illusory. The text establishes a core moral conflict that it then fails to resolve (even though it superficially appears to offer "balance"). The film's conclusion leaves its unresolved tensions hanging in the air, and the uncomfortable hollowness of its ostensible "balance" provides a space in which attentive audiences can interrogate common predispositions about revenge.

I Spit's depictions of rape and revenge are situated by a genre context that primes its audience to respond in this way. The presence of rape in a film does not automatically suggest that the film belongs to the horror genre (even though rape is a horrific crime). Indeed, Projansky (2001, 63) indicates that rape features in numerous genres because it is a near-ubiquitous facet of cinematic fiction. Read also observes that although the origins of the rape-revenge structure lie in the horror genre, there are 'problems inherent in defining rape-revenge as a sub-genre of horror' (2000, 23). However, as a remake of an infamous 1978 horror film, *I Spit* is contextualised within that genre. Viewer expectations are highly likely to be shaped both by that genre context, and associations forged by the original film. Revenge-fiction's pleasures might seem difficult to explain because they involve finding appeal in the appalling, but that conflict is the lifeblood of the horror genre.¹⁵ Within horror, it is unsurprising to find revenge being presented as appalling, and it is expected that viewers will find some pleasure in the violent spectacle of revenge. Within this genre context, rape-revenge presents rape (and the rapist's pleasure) as another source of horror. The latter establishes a narrative justification for revenge and invites viewers to take pleasure in seeing punishment dispensed. In *I Spit*, the initial attack on Jennifer is horrific, and that horror goads viewers into accepting her response (which amounts to an individual vigilante administering the death penalty). Many viewers (myself included) might find this position uncomfortable, especially since the invitation to abandon one's ethical principles in favour of outrage is so seductive. Still, that conflicted discomfort is arguably what makes horror stimulating for many viewers.

I Spit is further contextualised by what was happening in horror at the time of its release; in particular, the film has been aligned with the torture porn cycle. Viewers attracted to *I Spit* due to this alignment were arguably primed to notice its moral conflicts. Since torture porn focuses on torture, and since torture is inherently a moral issue, torture porn films frequently

¹⁵ The literature on this subject is bountiful, but notable examples include Carroll 1990; Gaut 1993; Hills 2005; Martin 2019; Smuts 2008.

explore ethical quandaries in explicit, literal ways (see Jones 2013, 58-61). Many torture porn films follow revenge plots, and so its torture-based revenge campaigns are overtly explored in these terms. Films such as *7 Days* (2010, dir. Daniel Grou, Canada), *John Doe: Vigilante* (2014, dir. Kelly Dolen, Australia), *Vendetta* (2013, dir. Stephen Reynolds, UK) and *The Tortured* (2010, dir. Robert Liberman, USA/Canada) each feature characters who explicitly ruminate on the dissatisfactions and problems of enacting revenge (that is, revenge's appalling nature). Such dialogue indicates that many torture-horror filmmakers and revenge-genre devotees are intrigued by questions regarding the circumstances that could lead an individual to engage in revenge. Revenge-fiction not only reflects responsive attitudes towards revenge acts, but also has the capacity to convey concerns about revenge-*qua*-concept.

More broadly, the sustained popularity of revenge within fiction could be characterized as being indicative of a widespread leaning towards violence that stems from a pre-moral stage of our psychological evolution, which itself ought to be eradicated rather than kindled. However, such stigmatization underestimates both viewers' sophistication and revenge's conceptual complexity. Most non-academics will primarily engage with the concept of revenge via fiction rather than via philosophical scholarship. Subsequently, many viewers of revenge-fiction may not be equipped to articulate their responses using specialist, academic language. The average person is unlikely to use terms such as 'eudemonistic consequentialism' or 'threshold deontology,' for instance, when discussing revenge. The lexis viewers use to convey ideas about the relationships between revenge, power, justice, anger, and morality may differ from scholarly discourse, but that is not to say that philosophical scholarship is the only arena in which complex ideas about revenge are explored. Unfamiliarity with the iterative conventions of scholarship does not equate to a failure to meaningfully engage with the same kinds of moral quandaries found within philosophical literature. If revenge is instinctual and universal (as many philosophers propose), it is surely the case that rumination on revenge is also commonplace. Revenge-fiction's sustained prevalence certainly gestures towards persistent public interest in revenge. Far from being characteristic of widespread immorality or an innate leaning towards violence that should be quelled rather than stimulated, revenge's prevalence within fiction is indicative of a populace that is sensitive to the importance of moral thinking.

Texts that deal with morally contentious subject matters have great potential to stimulate discussion on those issues, particularly when exhibited within public settings such as the multiplex. As many thinkers propose, revenge is publicly-oriented (Griswold 2006, 29) and communicative (see Robert Nozick 1981, 368; Funk, McGeer, and Gollwitzer 2014, 986; McCullough, Kurzban, and Tabak 2013, 13). Thus, it is insufficient to theorize about revenge without accounting for the ways in which ideas about revenge are communicated in the public-sphere, and what those popular discourses reveal about revenge itself. In conclusion then, it is my hope that the present work will stimulate further academic inquiry into the concept of revenge; such work should take popular fiction and audience's responses seriously as objects of philosophical enquiry. The starting point for such discussion, I contend, should be an interdisciplinary marriage. Philosophy provides tools that allow film scholars to articulate and engage with the conceptual complexities that are intrinsic to revenge. Simultaneously, film studies supplies the apparatus needed to analyse and sufficiently comprehend popular cinematic representations of revenge.

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