

## Cost and Benefit of Revenge: A Sociology of Literature Study on Sidney Sheldon's *Master of the Game*

HASNA NURAIN MUKHSIN

Universitas Muhammadiyah Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia  
[hasnanurainmukhsin24@gmail.com](mailto:hasnanurainmukhsin24@gmail.com)

### Abstract

**Cost and Benefit of Revenge: A Sociology of Literature Study on Sidney Sheldon's *Master of the Game*.** Revenge as old as the existence of organism in the earth. Revenge occurs as the act of getting even or to punish the wrongdoer. This study aims to reveal the particular issue regarding revenge as it written down in the novel *Master of the Game* by Sidney Sheldon. This study utilized the theory sociology of literature by Alan Swingewood. This study used descriptive qualitative method to unravel the impact if revenge toward the characters. This study showed that each characters undergone different acts of revenge based on the three types of revenge and it also revealed that the revenge cost more that benefitted the characters.

Keywords: cost, benefit, revenge

### Introduction

The best revenge is, massive success. --Frank Sinatra

As a human being, it unavoidable to experience anger. In some cases, people tend to have an imagination on to get to back the person who wronged them. This is sparked a question, on how it feels. The feeling may vary because every human being in this world has different way on dealing with the circumstances. Some people may have felt satisfied just by imagining it but some people prefer to seek for revenge.

Throughout the passing eras, revenge has been translated as the act of getting back or seeking for the justification of a hurtful act that happened to an individual or group of people. This act of revenge has been going for centuries and the level of revenge varied from small scale to the extreme. Anger associated as the most prominent emotion that leads to revenge. This does not imply that all angry people seek revenge, but that all those who seek revenge are driven by anger. For most people, forgiveness is better than revenge.

However, what is motivated us to take revenge? As revealed in his book, Michael McCullough describe three simple rules of revenge. First, it is humanly behavior to seek revenge because that has been our characteristic. It means that the desire considered normal in the sense that McCullough (2008) assert “every human being who is neurologically intact, by any means has biological device to experience revenge”. Second, it is innate trait of human being to forgive the wrongdoer. Last, it is our nature to seek for revenge because it has been passed by generation and it is the result of million year’s biological evolution.

It is surprising that some research found out that revenge has some unexpected benefit. (Chester & DeWall, 2016) argues that there are various feeling and thought arises between provocation and aggression. The desire of revenge activates the part of brain called *Nucleus Accumbens* and this is made the person who seek for revenge found its pleasure. However, earlier study assert that revenge never has any benefits. They even categorize revenge as disease and forgiveness as the cure. The concept of revenge as disease and forgiveness as a cure clearly described in a novel by Sidney Sheldon *Master of the Game*. Sheldon known as famous writer for numerous popular fiction novels. *Master of the Game* published in 1982 and the novel were accepted greatly by the society. The novel beautifully written and captivating. The elements of revenge and forgiveness in this novel that makes the society believes that the story was written based on true story. This novel belongs to the category of popular fiction and this fact may shake its reliability to be discussed in the academic area. Yet, there are points that we missed, even popular fiction may describe the living condition of the society at that time.

Revenge and forgiveness has been a popular topic to be discussed, as it seen from several works in academic field. First is by Laura Sirola (2013) entitled *Setting the World Right: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Revenge in Hamlet and in the Harry Potter Series*. In this research, she found out that the depiction of revenge in the Hamlet and Harry Potter Series reflects the theory of psychoanalytic revenge which is mainly links with the general understanding of revenge. Second is a thesis from Zineb Tigane (2013) entitled *Between Revenge and Forgiveness: Psychoanalysis of The Main Characters in Euripides’ Medea and in Tyler Perry’s Diary of a Mad Black Woman*. From her analysis, she found out that the main perspective of revenge in the two works compared that revenge as “another form of betrayal”. This two research is quite similar because both of them looking at the comparison of two different works.

The researcher chooses the *Master of the Game* to be the object materials of this study because in academic field, popular literature seen as the inappropriate works to take as an object material of academic research. Accordingly, this study will highlight the significance of revenge and forgiveness showed in the dialog and some other text in the novel which are 485 pages. The types and impact of revenge and forgiveness will be examine through 6 (seven) characters in the novel, they are Jamie, Margaret, Banda, Kate Blackwell, Tony Blackwell, and Keith Webster. The purpose of this study is to find out what kind of revenge that undergone by each characters by using sociology of literature approach.

### **Methodology**

This research classified as literature study and this research conducted through library research and utilized qualitative method. During the research, the information carefully observed and documented. The data for this research mainly from the novel *Master of the Game*.

Since this study employs the sociology of literature as the theory taking a perspective of American studies approach, the researcher therefore examines the novel using some quotations in the forms of dialogues and some other text in the novel that show the indication of revenge and forgiveness. Some secondary data also collected from other types of writing such as journals, articles and essays that contribute in the process of the analysis of this study.

In order to complete the study, the documents are used as the data, which are interpreted according to the researcher's understanding supported by the theory in this study. As mentioned before, document analysis is conducted to collect and interpret the data needed. The researcher is working on data recording procedures using an observational protocol to record the information. The collected and interpreted data are those that give the information about how the characters deals with revenge and forgiveness and how the impact of revenge and forgiveness may differ from one to another. The data analyze through some steps as follows:

- a. The data collecting trough up close reading on relevant parts of text
- b. Highlighting the important part that showed the significance of revenge in each character
- c. Draw conclusion by matching the highlighting part with the theory of revenge.

## Findings and discussions

### The types and impact of revenge toward the characters

#### a. What revenge intended to

As it outlined by Elster (1990), revenge is an act of getting even or an act of retaliation against the wrongdoer (person or group) with the cost imposed to the person who decided revenge. Based on its intention, revenge divided into several points below.

#### 1. Revenge as balancing the scale

It is commonly found in the novel or other literature forms the expression like “an eye for eye” to indicate the desire of person that seek for revenge. It seen morally right in the perspective of wronged person as they thought that the wrongdoer deserve that (McCullough et al., 2001). This act of revenge undergone by Jamie McGregor as one the main character in *Master of the Game*.

Jamie's revenge is aimed at Salomon Van der Merwe who wronged Jamie since his first arrival at Klipdrift. Because Jamie doesn't speak Afrikaans, he is swindled by Van der Merwe, a dealer in working tools for diamond prospector at Klipdrift. Jamie almost dies in the desert but is later rescued by Banda.

*Jamie looked into the eyes of the man who had almost murdered him. He had to think. He did not trust this man – and yet he had saved his life. Banda wanted to get at Van der Merwe through him. That can work both ways, Jamie decided. More than anything in the world Jamie wanted to make van der Merwe pay for what he had done to him. (Sheldon, 1982, p. 52)*

Banda is a native boy who work on Van der Merwe shop. He is the one who bring and left Jamie's weak and dying body in the desert. Yet, he is the one who came back to help Jamie and both of them planned the revenge together. After rescued by Banda and regain his health, Jamie back to Klipdrift as Ian Travis. He undergone his revenge by destroy the most precious thing for Van der Merwe, his daughter, Margaret. The only family member he had. Jamie impregnated Margaret and tell the whole Klipdrift that he is actually Jamie McGregor and he will not marrying Margaret.

In klipdrift, Van der Merwe known as pious Christian, he never misses a day to go the church. In his perception, anyone who got pregnant before marriage is a whore. That is what happen to his own daughter. He ousted Margaret from home and locked himself in his house. He was thinking about send Margaret out of the town to her aunt house, in order no one will find out what happened to her. Too late, the whole town already know the news.

*This was payment for what Salomon Van der Merwe had done to Jamie and to – how many others? But this was only part payment for all the things Salomon Van der Merwe had done, just the beginning. Jamie’s vengeance would not be complete until Van der Merwe had been totally destroyed. As for Margaret, he had no sympathy for her. She was on it. (Sheldon, 1982, p. 105)*

Jamie’s revenge does not stop there. With the diamond he smuggled from Namib Desert with Banda, Jamie bought a bank across Van der Merwe’s shop. The news of Margaret’s pregnancy blown up the town and it made Van der Merwe lost all his costumers. He go bankrupt and Jamie uses this chance to make Van der Merwe fall into deepest hole as possible. He made Van der Merwe borrow money from Jamie’s bank and once Van der Merwe could not pay up, Jamie took all the properties. Van der Merwe being sent to the street, penniless. One hour later, Van der Merwe killed himself by shooting a bullet into his head.

This revenge had done by Jamie and Banda, while it sparks the question why Banda wants to avenge Van der Merwe is because it revealed that Banda’s younger sister got raped by Van der Merwe couple years back. Banda has been waiting for the chance to avenge Van der Merwe and it happened Jamie has the same intention. Their team works is undeniably perfect, to the extent no one ever realized that Ian Travis is Jamie. While it is can be explained that all the struggles he had face make Jamie look like 20 years older than his actual age.

The revenge that undergone by Jamie and Banda can be understand as the act of getting even or getting to balance the scale. Jamie wants Van der Merwe experience the dying feeling he had experience. Jamie never intent to kill Van der Merwe. He just want to make Van der Merwe suffer and fell into the deepest hole.

In the concept of revenge as balancing the scale as explained in previous page, Jamie saw that the revenge he had committed against Van der Merwe is morally understandable which in fact we could see how vicious Jamie's actions were. When Jamie had to be confronted with a legal law, he could not be prosecuted for his actions because Jamie had not put his hand directly in his revenge. Jamie did it with a subtle technique but undeniably destroying slowly but sure. In fact, seen from any angles Jamie's revenge toward Van der Merwe seems cruel but if we remember what Van der Merwe have done to Jamie beforehand, the actions can be justify as balancing the scale. However, we could not possibly accept the action because if everyone goes by the "eye for eye" then Alexander Pope said, the world will remains blind.

## **2. Revenge as Moral Instruction**

Heider as cited in (McCullough et al., 2001) explain that the urge "to teach a lesson to the wrongdoer" also one of the reason of person to do revenge. In this case, revenge is seen as figurative behavior that is forced to convince the perpetrator that certain types of behavior will not be tolerated or go unpunished. The act of revenge itself is considered less evil but still yield specific and invisible damage. Margaret van Der Merwe has mixed feelings about Jamie, a man who got her pregnant in order to avenge her father. Margaret never really hated Jamie, she just wanted to teach Jamie a lesson.

*Margaret looked at him scornfully. "Adopt my baby? Oh, no. you will not have my son. I feel sorry for you. The great Jamie McGregor. With all your money and power, you have nothing. You're a thing of pity. (Sheldon, 1982, p. 130)*

The way Margaret want to avenge Jamie is by not letting him to have his own baby. Margaret clearly understand her act of revenge is just to make Jamie learned his lesson. Even though at first Jamie tries to deny the existence of his son, Jamie Jr. but Margaret trick to make Jamie McGregor want his son should be given standing applaud. Jamie find the sparks to live after he felt the reason to live is gone after Van der Merwe die. He had his son. Margaret uses this chance to teach Jamie a lesson. She did not allow Jamie to adopt her

son, she wants him to marry her. As it should be done at the first place, as it supposed to be.

Margaret did not want to give her son to Jamie for free, and she is not asked to be given money too. All she needs is Jamie McGregor. She wants a marriage. By any means, we could understand easily that the point of Margaret act of revenge is to give a moral shock to Jamie. It is not because of Jamie did revenge to her father and she come for doing the same. It is merely for Jamie to learn a lesson that he could own his world but he needs an heir for his business and wealth.

### **3. Revenge as Saving Face**

The intention to save face may be the one of the reason of person to seek revenge (Heider, 1958). This notion describe the act of revenge because the wrongdoer somewhat attribute the wronged person is not worthy a better treatment. In simplified sentences, the definition of revenge expressed by Heider refers to the act of revenge by an offended person that has been harmed earlier by an unpleasant act by someone who considers that the offended person is not entitled to be treated properly. The offended person try to show the offender that he/she have self-value-worth that need to be respect. This kind of revenge can be seen from Tony Blackwell toward Kate Blackwell, his own mother. The second character that undergo this type of revenge is Keith Webster.

*"Tony! What on earth—"He carefully aimed the gun at her and began squeezing the trigger. (Sheldon, 1982, p. 300)*

Tony, the only son of Kate Blackwell tries to avenge his own mother after he found out that Kate let his wife Marianne to bear down risky pregnancy and it leads to Marianne's death. It is already warned by the doctor that the pregnancy is in risk, but Kate's greedy self could not let the fact ruin her dream to have an heir. Tony did not have an idea about it because he is not with Marianne when the doctor told her that she needs to abort the baby if she wants to live. Wrong of Marianne is that she did not tell Tony about, instead she went to Kate and everything go south from that moment on.

*Dr. Harley turned to Tony. "What are you doing, Tony?" A savage slash. "I'm helping Mother. I'm destroying the company. It killed Marianne, you know." He continued slashing at the dresses in Kate's closet. (Sheldon, 1982, p. 302)*

It is shown in the passage above that Tony tries to kill his own mother. Tony thought that Kate being possessed by their company, Kruger-Brent. This is not the first time Kate tries to bury down everyone in the name of saving the company. Kruger-Brent is a cursed company because Jamie, Margaret, David (Kate's husband) and Marianne died in the process of Kate tries to save the company. Tony never want to inherit the company, and in order to save the company, Kate cruelly let Marianne bear down the risky pregnancy. Even in her almost die state, Kate still holding on the fact she needs to save the company. She never let herself lost to anyone and this is what Tony hates so much about his mother.

The second character that undergo this type of revenge is Keith Webster. In order to save his face, he avenge Eve. One of Tony's twin daughter. Keith Webster is not a main character in this novel but his roles in this novel turn the tables. He is a plastic surgeon and he is involved in the case between Eve and her brutal boyfriend, George Mellis. How he revenge Eve?. As a plastic surgeon, he is capable to make someone become prettier or uglier. Eve is a pretty woman and beaten to death by her boyfriend. Luckily, she escaped from death but left with scars in her face. Webster is an ordinary man, not really handsome but not ugly too and because of this he is rejected by Eve.

George Mellis is a handsome but homosexual guy. He tortured Eve with the unbelievable actions. Eve kill George out of her frustration and tried to frame her twin, Alexandra as the killer. Yet, the alibi proves that Alexandra is innocent and the accusation change direction to Eve. Keith who suspicious of Eve tried to threaten her and if she want to be save, she should marry him. He will be her alibi. Eve agrees on Keith proposal and they married immediately. George murder case left unsolved.

After the marriage, Eve involved in an affair with a young man named Rory. Keith get to know about this and the passage above is his revenge toward Eve. One day Eve asked Keith to remove eye bag from her eyes and Keith use the opportunity to do his revenge toward Eve. After the surgery, Eve does not want to see mirror and



being depending too much to Keith. She scare that Keith will leave her for another prettier woman. Keith promised Eve that he will make Eve pretty again but he actually do not want to do that because he knows that he will lose Eve for another man.

The revenge of Tony towards Kate does not seem directly associated with the underlying motives to revenge as saving face. This is well fitted with (McCullough, 2010) statement, the innate desire of every human being. From this perspective, it should be said that Tony tries to vent all his frustration of Kate's treatment to him. He wants Kate to treat him as a human being, not a robot to fulfill her obsession of power.

Here in after, Keith vengeance toward Eve seems the well fitted description of revenge as saving face. He put a stop to Eve's wish to leave him for another man. He also wants to say to Eve "I can do what I want and you better listen to me or you will face the worst". This act of revenge has done by Keith done in the name of his love toward Eve. He make Eve became ugly by surgery, the thing he is so good, to make Eve stay with him forever. Keith's act of revenge seems understandable and acceptable if we take a look back to Eve's past actions toward Keith and everyone.

## **b. Benefit and cost of revenge**

### **1. Benefits of revenge**

As it explained before, some researcher argues that revenge offers personal and social benefits. McCullough (2008) stated that the origin of revenge evolve parallel with human evolution. There are two points highlighted according to this theory. First, revenge used as an aid to help mortals in solve the problem happened along the time being. Each problems coming with the different solution and this must be done to prevent the incoming problems. Second, revenge is transmitted genetically and it also may be because of cultural influences. To put it simply, the desire to do revenge transmitted from generation to generations in a genetic transmission but it could not be denied that social structure and culture of society takes a role in the process of transmitting.

McCullough (2008) describe that revenge has its own adaptive function which is divided into three parts. First, it is used to prevent

potential harming actions that might happen in the future by saying that the person being wronged could not be taken lightly or seen as weak contender. This act of revenge may be understood clearly from Keith Webster's point of view. His revenge is done to deter Eve from doing another harm to him by punishing her with cruel yet appropriate plastic surgery. Keith's intention is to emphasize that he is not a weak person that Eve can play with. He wants Eve to realize that Keith is able to do the unimaginable things. This resulted in the right direction as he intended, Eve tamed and depending on him for the rest of their life.

Second, revenge used as the prevention of incoming acts of anyone who is intended to hurt us. If the first notion directs toward someone who ever hurt us at first then revenge deters the second harm from the same person, the second notion directs toward anybody who has an intention to hurt us and revenge prevents the action before it takes place. This second notion may refer to the act of revenge by Kate. She did not let anyone touch her by any means. Her act of revenge seems the lightest yet the cruelest. She did not care of hurting even her own son and her own husband. As long as she thought that person may tackle her obsession of power, she will not hesitate even a second to destroy that person. Her act of revenge prevents anyone to mess up with her. Third adaptive function of revenge is to prevent a free rider from the wrongdoer or transgressor. This notion will not be explained further because there is no character in this novel who has undergone the revenge because of this reason.

Fridja (1994) concluded that the most aggravating fact of being wronged is that the wrongdoer walks on a flowery path while the wronged person may live in the deepest grief or hatred. In fact, revenge does not deprive the wrongdoing, but it can help the victim to balance the scale of suffering they felt and the offender must experience that feeling. By generating harm, the offender signifies that their victims are not worthy to be respected. From doing revenge, victims may restore their dignity and show that they are worthy of better treatment. This is shown by Jamie, Margaret and Keith. Through their revenge, they want to tell the offender that they should be respected as a human being at least.

Broadly speaking, the benefits of revenge attained by each characters lead to one point of the three points proposed by McCullough. Each of the characters who undergone revenge comes down to their goal of try to let people know, the one hurt them that they are should not treated that way and they are worthy to be respected. From 6 (six) picked characters, it is found that only five characters (Kate, Jamie, Banda, Margaret and Keith) attain the benefits of revenge. The remaining two get the cost instead. Even though revenge offer such benefits and evolutionary theorist support it, does not justify revenge as a way to punish the wrongdoer.

## **2. Cost of Revenge**

Horney as cited in (McCullough, 2008), a famous psychologist linked the desire to revenge with mental illness and some psychiatric called it “personality disorder”. In recent studies, it shows that people who have a thought on seeking revenge toward the offender, tends to experience increasing of high blood pressure level and heart rate. Those findings argue that holding a grudge toward someone or some people for years could harm that person’s cardiovascular system, and as a form of psychological mechanism against conflicting thoughts and feelings, it may lead a person to die prematurely.

It is possible that researchers and theorists have focused on beneficial aspects of revenge. This is because they try to explain why seemingly negative and unbelievable behavior is so common. However, as the various attitude towards revenge shows, revenge has a negative impact, not only for recipients of revenge, but also for the one who seeks revenge. In addition, recent research reveals that revenge disposition is related to various adverse of psychological outcomes. Those unwanted results include preponderant negative effects and depression, and decreased life satisfaction (Schumann & Ross, 2010). Jamie showed this symptoms,

*Jamie’s vengeance was complete. Why is it, Jamie wondered, that I feel no sense of triumph? He was empty inside. (Sheldon,1982, p. 118)*

The emptiness Jamie felt after the revenge takes place may seen as the reduction in a life satisfaction. It understandable that Jamie had that feeling because he wants to punish Van der Merwe for his evil act towards Jamie, but in fact that Jamie already has nothing to lose. He is

seeking for revenge just to fulfil his desire to getting even. A strong desire for revenge then a greater desire to act on revenge have also been linked to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and psychiatric morbidity (Cardozo, Kaiser, Gotway, & Agani, 2003)

*Tony was in a private asylum, where he could get the best care possible. Kate had psychiatrists flown in from Paris, Vienna and Berlin, but when all the examinations and tests had been completed, the diagnosis was the same: Her son was a homicidal schizophrenic and paranoiac. (Sheldon, 1982, p.307)*

Tony being sent to the company private asylum. He is in a post-traumatic symptom disorder after all the things happened in his life. The betrayal of Kate, the death of his wife, and the fact that his wife died because of his mother angered him even more. In addition, (Schumann & Ross, 2010) find interesting result from longitudinal investigation toward respondents that reducing revenge motivation on given day linked to more positive moods, greater life satisfaction, , and lesser psychosomatic symptoms in the following day.

Furthermore, (Schumann & Ross, 2010) from set of experimental studies conduct, it reveals that there are some psychological disadvantages of revenge. Desire to revenge predicted result on negative health outcomes. It shows that revenge contributes to high level of blood pressure and increasing of cardiovascular reactivity while forgiveness work as the opposite, lower the heart rate and blood pressure. Thus, the desire to do revenge and trait to forgive closely related to mental health as well as physical health which is emphasizes that high in forgiveness and low in revenge were associated with reducing stress level and, accordingly, fewer illness symptoms. Vengeful person have a chance to die early and the forgiving person could live longer.

From the data analysis and the close reading to the novel, it is shows that the characters experience cost more than get the benefit of revenge. Jamie, who lived with his desire to do revenge toward Salomon, die early because of severe stroke. For a year before his death, Jamie remained paralyzed and Margaret took care of him. She could have Jamie completely. This is too, happened to Tony. Even he could live a bit longer, but he is completely out of his world. He lived without

emotions after the doctors who take care of him in Kruger-Brent private asylum undergo Lobotomy to help Tony. He attacks everyone before the surgery takes place and Kate who decided to let the doctor to do the surgery.

In other cases, Kate did lived longer than anyone even after series of revenge she had done towards many people. This is may be against all odds that in the passage above that Schumann & Ross (2010) mentioned that person with desire to do revenge tend to die prematurely. This notion applied to some of the characters but not to Kate because her acts of revenge merely because she wants to teach the offender a lesson, not to harm them just like McCullough (2008) explained about the intentions of a person to do revenge. Kate intention of revenge based on what she claimed as her love toward the person who got her revenge.

## **Conclusion**

The result of analysis above showed us the three types of revenge which is every characters undergone different acts of revenge. As it already explained in the previous pages, the three types of revenge divided by as it intended to. First, revenge as balancing the scale. This revenge undergone by Jamie and Banda toward Van der Merwe. Second, revenge as a moral instruction. This type of revenge had done by Kate toward Tony, Eve, David and some people in her reaching hand. This revenge also had done by Margaret toward Jamie. The third type is revenge as saving face. Keith and Tony are the characters that undergone this revenge.

The impact of revenge towards the characters varied depending on the intention of their act of revenge. Even though revenge may offers benefit to the person who seek revenge, in fact, it cost a lot more. Each characters dealing with the impact of their act differently. Some of them lost all the things they had and other lost their life. As it already said in a famous quote by Douglas Horton. “While seeking for revenge, dig two graves—one for yourself”

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