REVENGE

I. The Bible:

*Leviticus* 19, verse 18
18: Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

*Proverbs* 24, verse 17
17: Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth:

*Proverbs* 24, verse 29
29: Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work.

*Matthew* 5, verses 39 - 41
39: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.
40: And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.
41: And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

*Romans* 12, verse 17
17: Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

*Romans* 12, verse 19
19: Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

*1 Thessalonians* 5, verse 15
15: See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

*1 Peter* 3, verse 9
9: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

II. Francis Bacon, “On Revenge” (1625)

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 pulleth the law out of office. Certainly, in taking revenge, a man is but even with his enemy; but in passing it over, he is superior; for it is a prince's part to pardon...The most tolerable sort of revenge is for those wrongs which there is no law or remedy; but then let a man take heed the revenge be such as there is no law to punish; else a man's enemy is still beforehand, and it is two for one. Some, when they take revenge, are desirous, the party should know, whence it cometh. This is the more generous. For the delight seemeth to be, not so much in doing the hurt, as in making the party repent.

(Over)

Revenge tragedy, drama in which the dominant motive is revenge for a real or imagined injury; it was a favourite form of English tragedy in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras and found its highest expression in William Shakespeare's Hamlet.

The revenge drama derived originally from the Roman tragedies of Seneca but was established on the English stage by Thomas Kyd with *The Spanish Tragedie* (c. 1590). This work, which opens with the Ghost of Andrea and Revenge, deals with Hieronimo, a Spanish gentleman who is driven to melancholy by the murder of his son. Between spells of madness, he discovers who the murderers are and plans his ingenious revenge. He stages a play in which the murderers take part, and, while enacting his role, Hieronimo actually kills them, then kills himself. The influence of this play, so apparent in *Hamlet* (performed c. 1600-01), is also evident in other plays of the period. In John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (1602), the ghost of Antonio's slain father urges Antonio to avenge his murder, which Antonio does during a court masque. In George Chapman's *Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* (performed c. 1610), Bussy's ghost begs his introspective brother Clermont to avenge his murder. Clermont hesitates and vacillates but at last complies, then kills himself. Most revenge tragedies end with a scene of carnage that disposes of the avenger as well as his victims. Other examples are Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (performed 1593-94), Henry Chettle's *Tragedy of Hoffman* (performed 1602), and Thomas Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedie* (1607).

III. Hardin Craig:

The great chain of being would place upon him [Hamlet], as God's viceregent, the duty of vengeance—the punishment of the murderer and the dethronement of the usurper. This would constitute his responsibility. The fact that Hamlet's is a righteous vengeance is often forgotten; as also is true with reference to revenge tragedy in general. Revenge might be a sacred duty, indeed it was usually so, in part at least; or it might be a sinful indulgence.


Revenge may be frowned upon, viewed as morally destitute, papered over with platitudes about living well. But the urge to extract a pound of flesh, researchers find, is primed in the genes.

Acts of personal vengeance reflect a biologically rooted sense of justice, they say, that functions in the brain something like appetite. Alternately voracious and manageable, it can inspire socially beneficial acts of retaliation and punishment as well as damaging ones. The emerging picture helps explain why many people who think they are above taking revenge find themselves doing nasty, despicable things, and how unconscious biases pervert what is at bottom a socially functional instinct.

“The best way to understand revenge is not as some disease or morally failing or crime but as a deeply human and sometimes very functional behavior,” said Dr. Michael McCullough, a psychologist at the University of Miami. “Revenge can be a very good deterrent to bad behavior, and bring feelings of completeness and fulfillment.”

Retaliatory acts, anthropologists have long argued, help keep people in line where formal laws or enforcement do not exist. Before Clint Eastwood and Arnold Schwarzenegger, there was Alexander Hamilton whose fatal duel with Aaron Burr was commemorated this month on the banks of the Hudson River. Recent research has shown that stable communities depend on people who have “an intrinsic taste for punishing others who violate a community’s norms,” said Dr. Joseph Henrich, an anthropologist at Emory University in Atlanta.