

Revenge

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18 April 2024

## Revenge

My cousin ate the ice cream I was saving for a week. This made me very angry she knew I was saving it to celebrate surviving another week. I wanted to cry, yell at her, and deprive her of ever tasting anything sweet for the rest of her life. Such a feeling that leaves you fuming can cause you to do something reckless and can lead to later regret. This is the feeling of seeking vengeance, something that can be responsible for the destruction of oneself and others. Revenge is an action of causing harm to someone as a form of retaliation for being harmed or treated badly. There are many different aspects of revenge. Whether it is revenge for honor, poetic justice, or simple revenge, someone will get hurt by the end of it.

This is a recurring theme in literature, and based on the author, the narrative can mold the reader's perspective. For example, in Edgar Allen Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*, the narrator, Montresor, seeks revenge on his friend, Fortunado. Montresor depicts Fortunado as a horrible person who has done wrong to him and was given the characteristics of a drunken clown, which could be in Montresor's perspective. The story ends with Montresor successfully killing Fortunado in his pursuit of revenge. Through Montresor, I believe that this story accurately depicts the motivational, behavioral, and consequential aspects of revenge and the understanding of those aspects could lead to answering why humans would want to take action in that desire.

The motivation to seek revenge could be based on the person's emotional or psychological state. After feeling as though they were angered or humiliated, they may feel the need to retaliate as a way of emotional release. The same could be said for someone who is grieving or is feeling a sort of injustice and would wish to put closure on those emotions. Ultimately, this would lead to a sense of satisfaction in being able to inflict the same pain as

someone did to them (Golden). After the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attack on America, a qualitative study was done to examine the survivors on their views of it. One-fifth of the people studied strongly advocated for the annihilation of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida (Whitney, Meagan, et al. 3). Their reasoning was for America to re-establish itself as a strong country that would not tolerate terrorism, as well as to avenge the innocent people and children who died during that tragedy. They adopted the belief that if the main perpetrator and his supporters were to be “captured and executed”, then an event like 9/11 would not happen again because there won’t be a repeated offender and the instillation of fear of America’s retaliation. These responses are most likely because of the PTSD the survivors suffered. The grief is their motivation for revenge and the suffering that they endured, and continue to endure, would be eased if they were to pass it on to the one who caused it.

I believe that one of Montresor’s motivations for seeking revenge against Fortunado is also grief. In the story, after Fortunado has his coughing fits, Montresor tells him “...You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was...”. He later mentions that the reason why his vaults were big was that family was once a “great and numerous family”. This could imply that Montresor once had what Fortunado has, was once happy, and possibly had a family. This can be supported by how Montresor only needed to dismiss the servants for his house to be empty, despite its size, as if he was the only resident there. An incident or tragedy may have happened to him and his family for him to no longer be happy. In his grief, he sees his friend still happy and his grief evolves into envy. His envy may have morphed his perspective of Fortunado into a terrible person to validate his decision to kill him and his actions in doing so.

The behavior of a person seeking revenge can be described as cautious, manipulative, and violent. In the pursuit of revenge, a person would take a calculated and meticulous approach to

execute their plans on the person they are seeking vengeance on. Their actions usually include manipulation and deceit, so that any vulnerabilities or flaws can be taken advantage of.

Montresor displays this by knowing about Fortunado's fondness of the Amontillado and his views of Luchesi to lure him into his vault. He took advantage of his friend's trust and faked concern for Fortunado's health to put him in a false sense of security. Montresor continuously gives Fortunado alcohol, knowing that he will get more drunk, which would make it easier to chain him onto the wall. Finally, as he starts to build a wall to trap Fortunado, Montresor keeps a calm expression on his face, showing no signs of hesitation or remorse. The most violence Montresor shows is when he starts yelling at Fortunado to drown his screams. He may have done that to mock Fortunado or gain even more satisfaction in knowing that his revenge was successful. Either way, Montresor behaved callously to get his revenge on Fortunado. He manipulated his trust, meticulously planned and organized the setting, and murdered Fortunado. However, did Fortunado's death make Montresor feel better?

The answer to that was not explicitly given in the story, but research has been conducted to see if revenge would solve a person's problem. A group of Swiss researchers wanted to know what happens in the brain when a person is getting revenge (Van Edwards). They would have the participant play a game, and those who were wronged were given a chance to punish the other person. During that, the participant's brain activity was recorded and it shows that there is an increase in the caudate nucleus's neuronal activity which is the area of the brain that processes rewards. However, that rewarding feeling is temporary, because retaliation may increase the pain of what was initially done rather than lessen it, and causing harm to an offender alone is not enough to rid a person's need for vengeance (Jaffe). This would cause a person to go into a cycle of revenge which only worsens their emotional pain. Despite the urge to retaliate against

wrongdoing, they ultimately harm themselves because they cannot find peace or healing (Van Edwards). In addition, a person could be so set on seeking revenge, that they would not even see the option of a solution or reconciliation. I believe, however Montresor may have felt, Fortunado didn't have to die. Montresor could have spoken to Fortunado to come to an agreement and to help with whatever dilemma Montresor was going through. Montresor didn't express regret or remorse, but it also didn't state that he felt better about it. It may have been a wound that never healed. Montresor states "My heart grew sick — on account of the dampness of the catacombs." This could have a metaphorical meaning where not only does the damp catacombs make him feel physically sick, but it strengthens the feeling of dread, which could mean that he is already starting to regret what he has done. The emotional toll of having vengeful desires can weigh heavily on one's mind, giving feelings of anger, bitterness, and despair and preventing the process of healing and forgiveness (Golden).

Revenge is part of human behavior that can be developed with intense motivations, meticulous behavior, and dire consequences. *The Cask of Amontillado* by Edgar Allen Poe follows the narrative of Montresor, who seeks vengeance on his friend Fortunado for inflicting "a thousand wounds". Based on my sources by Golden, Jaffe, Van Edwards, and Whitney, Montresor displayed the three aspects of revenge: motivation, behaviors, and consequences. As the story progresses, we see how far Montresor has planned for Fortunado's death, and callously manipulates him with his weakness, the amontillado, to lure him further into his trap in the pretense of being a concerned friend. His methodical behaviors, from manipulation to deception, can show the lengths individuals will go to achieve their revenge. He seals his friend away behind a stone wall and leaves him to die for fifty years. After the act, the reality of revenge is shown where the destructive behavior of someone can scar them and others to the point where

they would go as far as to commit murder. It can be foreshadowed that Montessor may have developed a guilty conscience, however, it was not explored in the story.

From this story, it can be learned that seeking revenge is not worth it, and will do more harm than good. Instead of feeling the need to seek revenge to harm someone, it can be focused on driving ourselves to pursue our goals or become a better version of ourselves (Van Edwards). Instead of targeting my cousin for eating my ice cream, I can that as an advantage to help me lose weight.

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