Game of Thrones as a Contemporary Feminist Revenge Tragedy

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For everyone whose skin
“turned to porcelain, to ivory, to steel”

(George R.R. Martin, *A Storm of Swords* 833)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The female characters of English Renaissance Revenge Tragedies are mostly either victimised, sexualised, marginalised, or objectified—if not all. The HBO series *Game of Thrones* draws on this depiction in many ways. The question of how the series' female characters echo those of English Renaissance Revenge Tragedies, pointing towards and criticising lasting injustices, has motivated this work. *Game of Thrones* not only parallels elements of the tragedies but also holds up a mirror, showing how victimisation, sexualisation, marginalisation, and objectification still prevail today. Whether in small or big ways, none of them are acceptable. And yet, they still happen. And yet, they still leave their mark on our society. On us. On me. For this reason, this work could not be any closer to my heart.

I started working on the topic in 2019 when the last season of *Game of Thrones* had just aired, and I, coincidentally, was taking a class revolving around revenge on the Jacobean stage. Having the series finale fresh in my mind, I could not help but see the endless parallels between the plays of Shakespeare, Middleton, and Marlowe and the series based on George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Foreign settings, Machiavellian schemes, opposing families, power plays and politics, incest and adultery, and gruesome, explicit acts of violence are all equally part of the plays as they are of the series. This observation both initiated and inspired this work—this journey. Because the process of writing this work truly was a journey. One that ultimately allowed me to speak up, raise my voice, and point at the objectification, marginalisation, sexualisation, and victimisation mainly (though not exclusively) women still have to endure and witness daily.

In *Radiating Feminism* (2021), Beth Berila addresses how exhausting it is to constantly work against these prevailing inequalities, outlining

> [t]hose days when we can almost touch that better world and are inspired to create bridges to it, and those days when we can barely get out of bed because of the pain of oppression—that directly affecting us and that targeting others in our community. If you are committed to social justice, chances are you have experienced—or will experience—both ends of that spectrum and everything in between. It's part of the feminist journey. (2)

This assessment certainly applies to my experiences, this work being both the epitome and result of my personal "feminist journey". Personal and individual that journey may be, but I did not embark on it alone. Thus, before we truly start having a look at Petyr "Littlefinger" Baelish's claim that "revenge is the purest of motivations" (S2E5 07:53-55), I want to take the time to briefly (and probably insufficiently) thank the people who went along on my journey:

First of all, for this is literally where it all started, I want to thank my parents for contributing to making this experience possible. I also feel the urge to express my gratitude to some people from the English Department of the University of Bonn: Gislind, Sarah, and Marthe—there is only one thing I need to say to the three of you: I burn for you. And Professor Gymnich, I cannot begin to express the esteem I hold you in; you had my back through it all, and I never felt unseen, which is worth a lot more than I think you can ever fathom: thank you so, *so* much. Even though I had to climb thousands of stairs to get there (and I do not mean this figuratively, as everyone who ever set foot in Regina-Pacis-Weg 5 knows), this entire department gave me more than I could have ever anticipated. Next, I want to thank Antoinette von Saldern: though you always praise my way with words, I am currently at a loss for them, so I will put it as simple as this: I am beyond grateful for you, truly. I also want to thank all my friends, but specifically Babsi, Merle, Lisa, Sarah, and my brother Matz: however you might have expressed it, you offered me support, which I will be eternally and profoundly thankful for. The same goes for my Loveable Ladies, Leonie and Laura: you were there for me when it got bad, you were there for me when it got better, and you're still here, having read my "Dong of Ice and Fire" way too many times—I love you the mostest. And to my roommate/sister: Hannah, you are the Sherlock to my Watson, the Scarlett to my Bridget, the Elsa to my Anna; thank you for never doubting me, for knowing when to leave me be, but also, and most importantly, for being there for me—all the time, any time.

Lastly (and this might be peculiar though entirely truthful), I want to thank the fictional characters that accompanied, if not brought me to where I am today. To name a few (because I cannot possibly list them all): Addie, Beatrice, Becky, Bridget, Elizabeth, Fleabag, Frieda, Hermione, Jane, January, Kat, Lily, Lucy, Mia, and Rose—you mean the world to me. Fictional characters have inspired me, comforted me, taught me, and thus shaped me my entire life. In the past few years, specifically Arya, Sansa, Cersei, Brienne, and Daenerys did just that. They got me thinking about and questioning the depiction of female characters and the society we live in. The following is a mirror of that.

List of Abbreviations

In this work, several abbreviations are used to refer to the three plays that are mainly discussed as well as to episodes of HBO's *Game of Thrones* and the novels by George R.R. Martin. In-text citations will be marked with those abbreviations instead of the author's name or the full title.

When quoting the novels that are part of Martin's series of novels *A Song of Ice and Fire*, all page numbers and quotes refer to the American versions of the books which were published by Bantam Books, New York. The following abbreviations will be used:

GoT *A Game of Thrones*
CoK *A Clash of Kings*
SoS *A Storm of Swords*
FoC *A Feast of Crows*
DwD *A Dance with Dragons*

To quote the series, the season (S) and episode (E) will be indicated, followed by the time frame of the quote, e.g., S1E1 28:05-42.

Referencing *House of the Dragon*, *Game of Thrones*' prequel series, the same format will be applied, though starting with *HotD* to distinguish it from the original series (e.g., *HotD* S1E3 28:06).

Quoting the plays, the following abbreviations will be used:

TA *Titus Andronicus*
TST *The Spanish Tragedy*
WBW *Women Beware Women*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"I have no doubt the revenge you want will be yours if you have the stomach for it" (S3E4 09:41-47).

It is with these words that Lord Varys advises Tyrion Lannister on matters of vengeance, emphasising that the two chief conspirators of *Game of Thrones* are not above revenge. On the contrary, during the course of the series, both characters show that revenge is a productive tool when it comes to scheming, plotting, and manipulating others. Or, in short, when it comes to taking power. Notably, Varys' advice concerning revenge could be addressed to almost every other character of the series. The urge to seek vengeance, and thereby punish a previously done harm, spreads through *Game of Thrones*, forming a net of interconnected revenge acts that are arguably both shocking and satisfying for the audience to witness. Examples of revenge include Cersei Lannister blowing up a cathedral to revenge her previous imprisonment; Daenerys Targaryen in a similar but even more catastrophic way setting fire to an entire city to kill Cersei, thereby revenging the deaths of her dragon and her closest advisor; Brienne of Tarth stabbing Stannis Baratheon to revenge the murder of Renly, the person she once loved; Jon Snow seeking retribution for the betrayal by his fellow watchmen by hanging them all; Tyrion Lannister shooting his father with a crossbow as revenge for the persistent ill-treatment he had to suffer; Oberyn Martell avenging the murder of his sister and her children in an equally epic and brutal fight with the Mountain; Ellaria Sand giving Cersei's daughter a deathly kiss to seek vengeance for the death of Oberyn; Cersei retributing this act by giving Ellaria's daughter a similarly poisonous kiss; Sansa Stark unleashing Ramsay Bolton's hounds on him as vengeance for the sexual violence she had to endure; and Arya Stark revenging her family by first poisoning Walder Frey's followers, then forcing him to eat the remnants of his sons before slitting his throat.

These are only a few examples of characters seeking revenge, and most of them will come to engage in more than a single vengeful act. There are numerous additional revenging characters, such as Varys himself, who

describes the requirements for taking vengeance in the quote above. After a sorcerer castrated him and used his genitals for a ritual, Varys retributes this act by fighting Stannis and the Red Woman to have at least "a symbolic revenge of sorts" (S3E4 08:06) on sorcerers in general.[1] When Varys admits this to Tyrion, the latter argues: "I feel the need for actual revenge against the actual person who tried to have me killed" (S3E4 08:09-16). Yet revenge does not necessarily mean murdering the person who harmed someone. Revenge comes in all shapes and sizes, its most basic definition being that it is an act of punishing someone for a previously done harm or crime (cf. Broude 39). *How* this punishment is achieved is not specified and remains the choice of the revenger.

Revenge is a universal phenomenon, spreading across time and space, particularly when it comes to fictional narratives. Whether in Greek mythology, where, for example, Nemesis functions as the goddess who enacts vengeance against those whose behaviour before the gods is prideful and arrogant; on the Renaissance stage, where Hamlet famously seeks revenge against his uncle for the murder of his father; or nowadays on the "big screen", where James Bond avenges his lover's death, *The Avengers* avenge[2] the acts of numerous villains (because, as Tony Stark points out, "if we can't protect the Earth, you can be damn well sure we'll avenge it" (*The Avengers* 01:41:02-05), and the titular character of the newest incarnation of Batman self-assuredly proclaims: "I am vengeance" (*The Batman* 00:10:30)—independent of time and genre, revenge is universally present in fictional narratives. This is also apparent in *Game of Thrones*, where almost every character, be they hero or villain, displays vengefulness, no matter their status, age, background, or gender.

In this work, I want to particularly address the female characters of the series, who arguably use revenge as a tool to gain agency.[3] In many respects,

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[1] However, Varys not only takes "symbolic revenge". He reveals to Tyrion that he also kept the sorcerer locked in a box indefinitely (cf. S3E4 09:30), thereby taking his own, personal revenge on the person who tortured him.

[2] Keyishian makes a clear distinction between "revenger" and "avenger": the former retaliates for wrongs done to oneself, whereas the latter retaliates for "the wrongs and sufferings of others" (2). However, as this distinction is blurry—after all, harms done to persons close to someone can affect and therefore damage themselves—this work will use the terms interchangeably, albeit primarily employing "revenger".

[3] In the course of my work, I contemplate how (female) characters either lack or gain agency. Therefore, it is necessary to, at least briefly, conceptualise the term. Generally, agency "refers to human action or the capacity and ability to act" (Hinterberger 7). Within feminist theory, the term is "drawn on to understand the

the female characters are held back by specific men and the patriarchal society they live in.[4] In this regard (as well as several others), the women of *Game of Thrones* mirror the female characters of Revenge Tragedies of the English Renaissance. My aim is not only to show the intricacies of revenge, its motivations, and aftermath, but especially to outline how, on the one hand, parallels between the female characters of the series and Revenge Tragedies emphasise the ways women, whether in the fictional or the "real" world, are still objectified and marginalised. On the other hand, I also intend

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constraints under which women live their lives" (ibid. 8). Often, agency is addressed as a binary division that one can either have or not have (cf. ibid. 8). However, "the use of binary representations to describe and understand the lives of subjects living in gendered worlds" (ibid.) has been critically questioned as it simplifies matters in a non-inclusive, normative manner. Thus, "the question of women's agency in the context of patriarchy, domination, oppression and inequality […] continues to generate debate" (ibid. 7). But despite it being a "contested concept within feminist theory" (ibid. 13), it is nonetheless a significant one (cf. ibid). When the term is used in this work, it is to be understood not in its various connotations that are "linked to the political projects at the heart of feminism" (ibid.), but in its basic form, which is the ability "to resist, negotiate and transform certain forms of power" (ibid. 7). For a concise overview of the concept, see, for example, "Agency" (2013) by Amy Hinterberger.

[4] The term "patriarchal"—particularly in the context of patriarchal societies, structures, norms, and thoughts—is used repeatedly in this work and refers to the concept of patriarchy at large. The word itself derives from Latin and means "rule of (or by) the father" (Buchbinder 66). While this meaning appears to be straightforward, there are multiple ways of defining the concept of patriarchy. For instance, according to Hearn, "different theories of patriarchy have emphasized men's structural social relations to women, in terms of biology, reproduction, politics and culture, family, state, sexuality, economic systems, and various combinations thereof" (150); further, Buchbinder argues that there is a "formal patriarchy" (66), which has historical roots and refers to the patriarchs of families controlling other family members, and "symbolic or informal patriarchy" (ibid. 66), which refers to the effects of the formal patriarchy still influencing and being embedded into our culture, which he describes as "a rather nebulous set of discursive strands that constitute for people in the culture an order and way of thinking of themselves as subjects within a sexed and gendered economy" (ibid. 68). These are only examples of many possible ways of approaching the concept. In the context of this work, I will largely rely on Beetham's definition, which argues that the intricate and vague concept can be broken down into simply meaning "gender inequalities" (102)—men being inherently superior to women. For an exhaustive contemplation of the concept, see, for example, David Buchbinder's *Studying Men and Masculinities* (2013), which examines how patriarchy has been viewed in the last decades, or Pavla Miller's *Patriarchy* (2017), which mainly concentrates on the history of patriarchal societies.

to emphasise how the differences between the female characters of the series and the tragedies show that the women of the series are increasingly empowered and influenced by recent feminist developments—and how, thus, *Game of Thrones* becomes a contemporary feminist Revenge Tragedy.

"It's not TV. It's HBO" (Spiegel 371)—for decades, this slogan was used by the popular US pay television channel Home Box Office (HBO), promising the portrayal of all that "normal" television had refused to broadcast for a long time. That is, until HBO made it "normal" (cf. ibid.). From sex and full-frontal nudity to extreme violence and ground-breaking CGI elements, HBO's series generally do not shy away from depicting lavish, complex, or unthinkable, maybe even tabooed and frowned upon scenes. Shows such as *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), or *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005) have proved this time and again, and all have won multiple Golden Globes and Primetime Emmy Awards. But no series showcases the exceptionality of HBO or stresses its success more than *Game of Thrones*.[5] When the series' last episode aired on May 19, 2019 after eight seasons and 73 episodes, *Game of Thrones* officially became the most-watched, most popular, and most successful programme in the network's history (cf. Fitzgerald n.p.). Executive producer and head writer D.B. Weiss explains this with the fact that the series offers a fascinating mixture of "deep characters, a beautifully crafted and compelling story, passion, violence, and intrigue" (cf. Cogman 7). These elements, combined with the topic of revenge, can be found in the Revenge Tragedies of the English Renaissance as well. The observation that, therefore, *Game of Thrones* and the tragedies share numerous elements forms the general framework of my work, and my claim that particularly the female characters of the series mirror those of the English Renaissance Revenge Tragedies makes up its core.

The series, whose pilot aired in 2011, is an adaptation of George R.R. Martin's bestselling epic fantasy series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which began in 1996 with *A Game of Thrones* and was continued by *A Clash of Kings* (1998), *A Storm of Swords* (2000), *A Feast of Crows* (2005), and *A Dance with Dragons* (2011); the last two novels, *The Winds of Winter* and *A Dream of Spring*, remain yet to be published.[6] While the novels were critically

[5] Amongst others, *Game of Thrones* received 58 Emmy Awards, including "Outstanding Drama Series" in 2015, 2016, 2018, and 2019, making it the award show's most decorated drama series ever (cf. "Awards" n.p.).

[6] Fuelled by numerous empty promises made by Martin that the next book in the series will be released soon, readers continue to anticipate and speculate about the

acclaimed (cf. "Awards and Honors"), it was the HBO show that "turned Martin's creation into a worldwide entertainment phenomenon" (Pavlac 3). The series is "perhaps the most faithful long-running television adaptation to date" (Wells-Lassagne 39). For, unlike other series that are based on novels and solely adapt the premise of their literary inspiration while leaving the details of the text behind, *Game of Thrones* seems "to follow in the footsteps of the more faithful medium of the limited-run miniseries" (ibid.), staying relatively close to its source—at least for the first couple of seasons. Of course, "as with any cinematic adaptation of a prose work, changes must be made to accommodate the new format" (cf. S. Carroll, "Medievalism" 133). This is also true for *Game of Thrones*, which initially made some immediately obvious and partly necessary alterations as well.[7] Adhering comparatively closely to Martin's novel, the series features three main plots: the families in Westeros fighting for the Iron Throne, the threat of the White Walkers in the far North, and Daenerys Targaryen's ambitious rise to power and fight for the Iron Throne from outside Westeros. Other than this, the show also has hundreds of subplots, with its main cast counting up to 30 or 40 members, depending on the season. The series was shot all over the world, from Northern Ireland to Croatia, Morocco, Spain, Iceland, Malta, and the United States (cf. "Filming Locations" n.p.), demonstrating how vast the world of *Game of Thrones* is. But "what makes it bigger still is the multiplicity of connections to our own world—not just our present, but also our historical and literary past" (Lushkowv x).

As a work of fantasy, Martin's series—and thus its adaptation—does not absolutely correspond to any one historical era (cf. Walker 71). Instead, it

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publishing dates of the sequel novels. In a comment on a post on his blog *Not a Blog*, Martin, who has been working on the sixth novel since 2011, self-deprecatingly wrote in 2017, "I think it will be out this year. (But hey, I thought the same thing last year)" ("Doom" n.p.). In a blogpost in February 2021, he then pointed out that he still had "hundreds of more pages to write to bring the novel to a satisfactory conclusion" ("Reflections" n.p.), and during an appearance on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* in October 2022, Martin explained he was "making progress" with *The Winds of Winter*, specifying he was "about three quarters of the way done" with having "finished with a couple of the characters" ("Extended Interview" 04:48-05:56). Still, at this point, there are no release dates for the novels that will bring his *A Song of Ice and Fire* series to an end.

[7] For instance, the age of the children had to be raised to prevent issues with the sexual content, and the sheer size of the cast needed to be reduced (cf. S. Carroll, "Medievalism" 133). But while other than that seasons one to five only depart only little from the novels and mostly follow the books' plots, the later seasons deviate from and go beyond the storylines of Martin's novels, as the show continued production while Martin has yet to publish further sequels.

draws "on a dizzying variety of eras, world cultures, folkloric traditions and medieval sources" (Weinczok xi). On the one hand, numerous literary allusions are used, basing the world of *Game of Thrones* "mainly on the conventions of fantasy, adventure stories, myths, historical epos, and knights' tales" (Shaham 50) and drawing "on the folklore and beliefs that were widespread in medieval Europe" (Larrington 2). As Martin claims, employing various literary allusions "along with deceptively open use of genre conventions" (Lowder xvi) helps him form—and then defy—reader expectations (cf. ibid.). On the other hand, various historical resonances can also be found: *Game of Thrones* makes use of the customs of earlier warrior cultures, especially the Celts, Anglo-Saxons, and Vikings (cf. Larrington 2.); the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros can be compared to the early medieval Anglo-Saxon heptarchy (cf. Walker 71); the Mongols, whose courage and ambition brought into existence the largest land empire the world has ever seen (cf. Larrington 2), bear some resemblance to the Dothraki (cf. Walker 71); and one can see "much of ancient Egypt in Old Ghis and ancient Rome in Old Valyria" (ibid.). Furthermore, when considering Martin's characters, "hints of Eleanor of Aquitaine emerge in Cersei Lannister, shades of Joan of Arc in Brienne of Tarth" (ibid.), and Sansa's story is "remarkably similar to that of Elizabeth of York" (Alesi 161).

However, the most obvious parallels can be drawn to the Middle Ages, indicated by each episode's opening with a "sweeping Middle-earth map which springs to life" (MacNeil 36). The fact that Martin's "world-building draws primarily upon medieval European history" (Larrington 2) has been discussed in-depth in academia. For example, Lushkowv's *You Win or You Die: The Ancient World of Game of Thrones* (2017), Pavlac's *Game of Thrones versus History. Written in Blood* (2017), Larrington's *Winter is Coming. The Medieval World of Game of Thrones* (2019), and Shiloh Carroll's *Medievalism in A Song of Ice and Fire and Game of Thrones* (2018) all outline how the Middle Ages influenced the world of Westeros. Martin himself has identified the fifteenth-century English civil uprisings known as "the Wars of the Roses as a particular inspiration for the series" (Walker 71). After all, it is only a short step "from York to Stark and from Lancaster to Lannister" (Pavlac 20). Walker, in her article on "Historical Discourses in Shakespeare and Martin" (2015), and J. Wilson, in *Shakespeare and Game of Thrones* (2021), each outline how the dramatisations of these events in Shakespeare's history plays influenced Martin's novels. Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays as well as *Richard III* tell stories of "factions, backstabbing, and revenge: houses bound by blood and marriage fighting for the throne, multiple contenders are backed by rich, powerful lords; broken engagements ending in bloodshed" (Walker 71)—themes that all

can be found in *Game of Thrones*.[8] These parallels indicate another influence of Martin's novels and their adaptation: Shakespeare, his histories, and the Renaissance at large.

The impact of Renaissance scholars and artists on the series is undeniable (cf. S. Carroll, "Medievalism" 13), and MacNeil even goes as far as claiming that *Game of Thrones*

> is more 'Renaissance' than 'medieval' because for all the series' self-conscious referencing of 'the waning of the Middle Ages' with knights errant and damsels in distress, its politics turn not so much on a divinely anointed king as on an ambitious prince, driven by glory and ever ready, as it were, to carpe diadem; that is, to seize the crown of the Seven Kingdoms by any and all modalities, and thereby ascend the Iron Throne regardless of legitimacy, religion, right or reason. (38)

In fact, the brutal political world of Westeros, "full of assassins, warring families, and shadowy, manipulative advisors, does not seem so far removed from the intrigue-riddled realm of Renaissance Italy" (Querica 193). Considering this, a further link between *Game of Thrones* and another dramatic genre aside from history plays can be made: the series strongly echoes English Renaissance Revenge Tragedies. Revenge Tragedies proved extremely popular during the Renaissance,[9] especially during the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages, dealing with topics and featuring motifs of which many can be found in *Game of Thrones*: there are copious graphic portrayals of blood and gore, of sadistic torture and chopped off body parts, even instances of cannibalism; weddings go wrong, frequently ending in carnage;

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[8] Walker draws further parallels between Shakespeare's histories and *Game of Thrones*, especially their characters: Edward IV and Robert Baratheon are both "a rebel-turned king, heroic and handsome in youth, who become womanising drunkards in later life" (72); "a wealthy kingmaker unafraid to switch allegiances who strengthens his position through a daughter's marriage" (ibid.) is depicted in both Richard of Warwick and Tywin Lannister; Henry of Richmond and Daenerys Targaryen are both scions of the previous dynasty and threaten the new one (cf. ibid.); and generally, "characters struggle with the burden of history and the trauma of past conflicts as they strive to move forward in a world torn apart by civil war" (ibid.).

[9] As Woodbridge points out, the "sheer number of revenge plots attest to the theme's popularity" (4) during the Renaissance. Moreover, while most plays enjoyed only a single theatrical run and were printed only once (if at all), multiple revenge plays had three or more runs and saw two or more editions (cf. ibid). For instance, *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*, which both will be discussed in this work, had nine respectively three editions (cf. ibid.).

Machiavellian power-plays are implemented, leading to intrigue and manipulations; foreign settings are used; supernatural elements are embedded in the narrative; explicit sex, adultery, incest, sexual violence, and rape are portrayed; and, of course, both the urge for vengeance and the execution of it are central plot elements.

Numerous academics acknowledge the influence of the Renaissance on *Game of Thrones* (cf. S. Carroll, MacNeil, Beaton, Querica). Yet, with the exception of J. Wilson, who compares Arya to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Lushkowv, who outlines parallels between *Titus Andronicus* and Arya, a connection to the Revenge Tragedies of that time has, to my knowledge, not been drawn thus far. As a result, despite there being plenty of parallels, the link between *Game of Thrones* and Renaissance Revenge Tragedies has been neglected academically. I seek to remedy this, aiming to show how, generally, various aspects and characteristics of Renaissance Revenge Tragedies are reflected in *Game of Thrones*. More specifically, particularly the series' female characters mirror those of the revenge plays, especially in the way they are objectified, marginalised, and victimised. Works such as Frankel's *Women in Game of Thrones. Power, Conformity and Resistance* (2014), Gjelsvik and Schubart's *Women of Ice and Fire. Gender, Game of Thrones, and Multiple Media Engagements* (2016) as well as Rohr and Benz' *Queenship and the Women of Westeros. Female Agency and Advice in Game of Thrones and A Song of Ice and Fire* (2020) extensively discuss the female characters of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*, highlighting how they are empowered on the one hand, and held back by patriarchal structures on the other. But these texts do not consider the influence of the English Renaissance stage and overlook the connection between the female characters of revenge plays and those of the series.

In order to fill this void, I will concentrate on precisely this connection, arguing that *Game of Thrones* can be understood as a contemporary feminist Revenge Tragedy, seeking to address the following questions: how do the female characters of *Game of Thrones* mirror the female characters of Renaissance Revenge Tragedies? What parallels are there and what purpose do they have? Where does the depiction of the series' female characters deviate from the tragedies? Why does it deviate? How actively do the female characters engage in revenge and how does revenge influence them? In how far is revenge dependent on gender? Is revenge portrayed as harmful or therapeutic, leading either to positive or negative character development? Can revenge and the mirroring of the tragedies' women be understood as symbols of taking matters into one's own hands, of giving women agency?

How do contemporary discussions on gender, representation,[10] and especially feminism play into this depiction? What shortcomings are there in the series' portrayal of female characters and what do they show?

To answer these questions in the most productive way, certain qualifications must be made with respect to both the series and the Revenge Tragedies. I will exclusively regard the tragedies of the English Renaissance. Revenge Tragedies come in various shapes. They may all revolve around the topic of revenge in one way or another, but they employ different means and techniques to do so. As such, Revenge Tragedies are dependent on the time and context of their publishing and performances. For example, the revenge dramas of the Italian Renaissance differ from those of the English Renaissance, and a contemporary performance of an English Renaissance Revenge Tragedy looks decidedly different from a performance of the time the play was created in, inherently being presented in a distinctly different context than it was during the Renaissance. Considering this, when I address Revenge Tragedies—if not stated differently—I will always exclusively speak of those of the English Renaissance and the manner of performance of that time, which will be addressed in more detail in the course of this work.

Exemplary for the Revenge Tragedies of the English Renaissance, I will mainly focus on three plays. Each written by an influential author and during three different decades, these plays serve as representatives of English Renaissance Revenge Tragedies at large. These three tragedies are:

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[10] The term "representation" will be used frequently in this work in its literal understanding of displaying or showing something, for example, the way female characters are being represented as vengeful. However, the term also refers to a concept which I will use in the discussions of the characters and the chapters on feminism (chapter 7) and the series' shortcomings (chapter 8). Generally, the concept of representation "describes the act of symbolically producing presence from absence" (Wearing 192). More specifically, "representations maintain a relation to the social world but the process of representation is also, and at the same time, one of accruing and acquiring meanings and therefore that is not one of 'mere' record—rather, the process itself produces a new range of possible understandings of the subject represented" (ibid. 192-193). Considering this, representation can be understood as having "an *effect* in the world, acknowledging its power to shape the meanings attached to gender, and as a *responsibility*, owing to its root in the creation of a presence out of an absence" (ibid. 198, emphasis added). As a consequence, the representations of, for instance, gender in audio-visual media can influence and shape the understanding of it. But questions of representation are not only essential to "the analysis and understanding of gender but also of class, 'race' and ethnicity, age, ability and sexuality" (ibid. 194), and, thus, representation has become a key concept in cultural and media studies (cf. ibid.).

The Spanish Tragedy by Thomas Kyd, which was written in the late 1580s or early 1590s,[11] and, revolving around Hieronimo's plan to revenge his murdered son, helped to establish the genre and "popularized revenge as a tragic motive on the Elizabethan popular stage" (Bowers 65);[12] *Titus Andronicus*, which was written in the 1590s and, dealing with the titular character's desire to avenge his daughter's rape and mutilation, is Shakespeare's earliest and bloodiest tragedy (cf. Bate 1); and *Women Beware Women* by Thomas Middleton, which, written between 1613 and 1621 (cf. Gill xiv), presents numerous revenge plots by female characters and has been central to Middleton's reputation as a significant playwright due to his inclusion of three demanding female roles and the depiction of moral depravity and ambivalence (cf. Taylor and Lavagnino 1488).

Further, I will primarily concentrate on the series *Game of Thrones* and not on Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, as the former has already been completed. Though I will refer to Martin's series as well, the final two novels remain to be finished, therefore making an analysis of a complete character arch difficult. When it comes to the female characters of the series, I will consider specifically five characters: Cersei Lannister, the cruel, frustrated, and ever-scheming manipulator; Sansa Stark, the romanticising teenage girl who develops into the fierce Queen of the North; her sister Arya Stark, the vengeful and skilled "tomboy" and eventual assassin; Brienne of Tarth, the loyal, chivalric knight; and Daenerys Targaryen, the initially passive girl who becomes an independent, dragon-riding (mad) queen. *Game of Thrones* is marked by its portrayal of numerous strong, captivating, and essential female leads. Next to the aforementioned characters, many other striking female characters would be worth considering, too, such as the witch Melisandre, the ambitious Margaery, the unyielding Yara,[13] or Ygritte, who so famously informed Jon Snow that he "know[s] nothing" (S3E5 10:31). Yet, Cersei, Sansa, Arya, Brienne, and Daenerys are arguably the most prominent female characters of the series. They are depicted very elaborately, having more screen-time than the show's other female characters,

[11] It is not clear in what precise year *The Spanish Tragedy* was written. Calvo and Tronch state in their introduction to the Arden edition of the play that "it was certainly written before 1592" (1), whereas Bowers insists that it came into being between 1587 and 1589 (cf. 65).

[12] For further information on the play's lasting influence and contribution to popularising revenge plays on the Elizabethan stage, see Gurr's *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (1996).

[13] While Theon's sister is called Asha Greyjoy in Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, she goes by the name Yara Greyjoy in the series. As I primarily concentrate on the HBO show, I will refer to her as Yara, not Asha.

and the audience can witness their development throughout eight (in Brienne's case, seven) seasons. Moreover, these women present five characters that stand out in their own, unique ways. As such, they function as representatives of the series' depiction of female characters at large.

Considering the questions that were raised above and form the framework of this book, not only my reasonings concerning the plays and the series need to be addressed, but an explanation of how I use the concept of gender in this work needs to be offered as well. After all, I particularly focus on *female* characters and how they use and perform revenge, especially in comparison to *male* characters—which implies an inherent gender binary, i.e., "ideas of distinct and opposite feminine and masculine identities and embodiments" (Posocco 107) which "oversimplif[y] the complexity of the natural world" (Bosson et al. 8). However, the concept of gender, as Judith Butler stresses, "is constructed" (11). As such, gender is "neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived" (ibid. 193). Gender is fluid and a spectrum. As Milestone and Meyer argue, "the fact that certain attributes and behaviours are linked to men or women is not 'natural' but a matter of convention" (12) and, thus, concepts such as masculinity and femininity may exist, but only as "the outcome of social processes" (ibid. 13). The results of these social processes are that persons being read as men. are traditionally associated—and fit into the frame of hegemonic masculinity[14]—with qualities such as strength, power, ambition, (sexual) aggression, assertiveness, competitiveness,

[14] Literally, the term "masculinity" derives from Latin "masculinus" and simply translates to "male", "of masculine gender", or "male person" (cf. Hearn 149). However, looking at the term as a concept, masculinity is closely linked "with concepts of manhood and manliness" (ibid.) and "characteristics thought to be suitable for men; traits of behaving in ways considered typical for or characteristic of men; or properties characteristic of the male sex" (ibid.). As Connell proposes in her work *Masculinities* (1993), four types of masculinities can be differentiated: subordinated, complicit, marginalised, and hegemonic masculinity (cf. 76-81). In this work, particularly hegemonic masculinity is relevant. Closely related to patriarchy, Connell describes hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (77). Thus, it generally "describes the practice that legitimises and justifies men's dominant position in society and, consequently, the subordination of women or 'ordinary' men" (Hearn 151). Despite being seen as "contested and subject to struggle and change" (ibid. 152), the concept of hegemonic masculinity is nevertheless stable and persistent. For further information on hegemonic masculinity and other forms of masculinities, see Connell's *Masculinities* (1993) or Jeff Hearn's "Men, Masculinity and Masculinities" (2013).

forcefulness, dominance, and independence (cf. ibid. 26). In contrast to this, persons being read as women are stereotypically linked to emotion, beauty, sensuality, gentleness, motherliness, modesty, empathy, compliance, and submission (cf. ibid. 27). However, all these qualities, whether traditionally connected to masculinity or femininity,[15] can be performed not only by either gender, but by any individual. Butler argues at the beginning of *Gender Trouble*:

> [t]he masculine/feminine binary constitutes not only the exclusive framework in which that specificity can be recognized, but in every other way the 'specificity' of the feminine is once again fully decontextualized and separated off analytically and politically from the constitution of class, race, ethnicity, and other axes of power relations that both constitute 'identity' and make the singular notion of identity a misnomer. (6)

Considering this, a persistent gender binary only constricts individuals as it enforces unnatural characteristics and prevents nonconformity: "[t]he binary regulation of sexuality suppresses the subversive multiplicity of a sexuality that disrupts heterosexual, reproductive, and medicojuridical hegemonies" (ibid. 26).

In this book, I will employ a current concept of gender that is based on the assumption that binaries are socially constructed and that promotes the fluidity of gender. However, in the fictional as well as the secondary texts

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[15] Both masculinity and femininity are concepts that are vast and complex. Considering them exhaustively would go beyond the scope and purpose of this work. Despite this, I briefly want to acknowledge and stress that both concepts are only, as Scharff points out, "a culturally constructed ensemble of attributes, behaviours and subject positions generally associated" (59) with men and women respectively. Neither masculinity nor femininity is "*natural* but […] *done*, i.e. is socially constructed and continuously produced" (ibid., original emphasis). Notably, it is now common to refer to the concepts in the plural, i.e., masculinities and femininities. According to Scharff, "the plural expresses at least three features of contemporary thinking" (ibid.): the socially constructed nature of masculinities and femininities; the way they intersect with and are in part constituted by class, sexuality, and race; and the concepts' historical and cultural variability (cf. ibid.). When I use the terms in their singular form, I do so while referring to the stereotypical, conventional ideas of the concepts mentioned above. For a comprehensive consideration of the two concepts, see, for instance, *Masculinities* (1993), in which R.W. Connell (as one of the first) both scrutinises and criticises prevailing ideas of (hegemonic) masculinities and patriarchy; Evans and Williams' *Gender. The Key Concepts* (2013), which provides an extensive overview of the main ideas of the concepts; or Buchbinder's *Studying Men and Masculinities* (2013), which, as the title suggests, contemplates current ideas of masculinities.

used in this work, I constantly find myself confronted with binary gender ideas. Gender may be a mere social construct, but literary texts have traditionally contributed to creating binary gender concepts. In the Revenge Tragedies I discuss here, this concept is partially questioned as women are also linked to stereotypically masculine characteristics, for example, through the use of violence. However, as long as it is emphasised that women use, for instance, other methods for their revenge, the binary concept itself persists and, thus, needs to be addressed. In the course of this book, I will show that the female characters of *Game of Thrones* often entirely subvert gender binaries. But as these female characters are always also considered in comparison to the women of the revenge plays, I still need to discuss these binaries and consider conventionally or stereotypically masculine and feminine qualities. Yet, by doing so, I will be further enabled to show how, on the one hand, the female characters of the show are, similarly to those of the revenge play, objectified and marginalised as they are forced into these binaries by society. On the other hand, by including a discussion on gender binaries in this work, I will also be able to emphasise that, when the female characters of the show disrupt and subvert binary gender ideas, they move beyond the female characters of the tragedies, mirroring the current zeitgeist of Western culture which promotes gender fluidity,[16] while also showing that there are no inherently feminine or masculine attributes—just societal expectations.

Next to gender fluidity, gender equality is another highly discussed topic. Throughout this book, I will regularly refer to the way recent feminist voices demand such equality. Taking this into account, I use the concept of feminism in its most basic meaning: the demand to establish equality of *all* humans in *every* aspect, i.e., political, personal, economic, and social equality. The history of feminism is conventionally divided into "waves", a metaphor that aims at "capturing the complex history of women's rights and feminism" (Hewitt 1).[17] The image implies that these waves are neither

[16] Gender fluidity can refer to a person's gender expression or gender identity—or both. The concept highlights how gender is not divided by a clear dichotomy but, instead, is non-binary, fluid, and a spectrum. Particularly the publication of both *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler and *Epistemology of the Closet* by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in 1990 stressed this idea by introducing and giving prominence to Queer Theory in general.

[17] Despite being used globally, the term "waves" is not unproblematic: it ignores the advances and efforts made outside these waves (cf. Nicholson n.p.), "fails to acknowledge the diversity of feminists with differing perspectives who contributed to each apparent wave" (Bosson et al. 21), and, thus, does not "represent the unitary

exact nor completely closed, but they merge and grow anew. As Hewitt points out, "feminists in each wave viewed themselves as both building on and improving the wave(s) that preceded them" (2).[18] The history of feminism is usually split into four waves: in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the first feminist wave primarily manifested itself in the women's suffrage movements; the second was initiated in the 1960s, when demands for legal and social equality for women were increasingly voiced; and the third began in the early 1990s and concentrated on issues of diversity and intersectionality. What we are currently experiencing, and what I will particularly concentrate on, is the fourth wave of feminism. Still persisting, fourth-wave feminism started in the early 2010s and in particular makes use of social media to fight sexual harassment and gender-based violence and, similar to the third wave, stresses the importance of an intersectional approach, i.e., the inclusion of *everyone*, not only certain groups.[19]

Furthermore, I regularly refer to the female characters of both plays and series as being objectified, sexualised, marginalised, and victimised. Considering this and the fact that the first section on each discussed character will start by examining their objectification through others—particularly, but not exclusively, by men—a brief contemplation of these terms is fundamental. Nussbaum, who scrutinises the concept of objectification in a feminist context, points out that the word "has by now passed into many people's daily lives" (249) and constitutes "a familiar concept" (ibid.). Still, "it is not only a slippery, but also a multiple, concept" (ibid. 250).[20] Generally, however, Nussbaum argues that the term can be

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voice of all feminists and […] much gender activism takes place outside of the 'waves'" (ibid.). See Nicholson's "Feminism in 'Waves': Useful Metaphor or Not?" (2010) for further information on the criticism of the 'wave' metaphor.

[18] For further information, see, amongst others, Hewitt's anthology, *No Permanent Waves* (2010), which scrutinises this categorisation and lays out the history of feminism and its various movements. For a more current overview of the history of feminism (after all, the fourth wave of feminism only emerged within the last decade), see, for example, Lucy Delap's *Feminism: A Global History* (2020).

[19] I will revisit and explore the concepts of feminism—particularly fourth-wave feminism—and intersectionality in more detail in chapters 9, 10 and 11.

[20] Nussbaum argues that there are seven distinct ways of treating a person as an object. She differentiates between: instrumentality ("The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes" (Nussbaum 257)); denial of autonomy ("The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination" (ibid.)); inertness ("The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity" (ibid.)); fungibility ("The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type, and/or (b) with objects of other types" (ibid.);

defined as "a question of treating one thing as another: One is treating *as an object* what is really not an object, what is, in fact, a human being" (ibid. 256-7, original emphasis). Similarly, across the term's "different applications in film and media studies, gender studies, sociology, law, and beyond, objectification means treating and dehumanizing a person as a thing, instrument or object" (Paasonen et al. 4). As Paasonen et al. point out, "even though debates on objectification do almost exclusively cluster on issues having to do with the representation of women" (5), objectification is "not automatically about gender" (ibid.). People of all genders can be objectified (cf. ibid.). However, in the context of this work, which considers female characters being objectified, the focus lies on the way women are represented across media and concerns about gender oppression. After all, as Kappeler points out, "the objectification of women means the simultaneous subjectification of men" (49), which, consequently, makes "the objectification of women a pressing concern for the reproduction of male hegemony" (Paasonen et al. 29). Objectification "bundles together issues about appearance, beauty, bodies, sex and social power" (ibid. 2), all of which are similarly palpable in the depiction of the female characters in both Renaissance tragedies and the twenty-first century TV series. Albeit not exclusively, "the concept is most recurrently used in the context of sexual representation, and as synonymous with the sexual objectification" (ibid. 3) and also sexualisation of women. In this book, both objectification and sexualisation are mostly used interchangeably, though the latter term emphasises the sexual nature of the ill-treatment the discussed characters suffer more distinctly and explicitly, showing how they are not only reduced to being objects but *sexual* objects. Next to objectification and sexualisation, I conceptualise the term "marginalisation" as simultaneously constituting both a source and a result of women being objectified and sexualised. The discussed female characters of the plays and series alike are continuously viewed and treated as lesser and secondary to men. The ways they are

violability ("The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into" (ibid.); ownership ("The objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc." (ibid.)); and denial of subjectivity ("The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account" (ibid.)). Nussbaum recognises these forms of objectification as morally objectionable as they both violate and blur the boundaries of objects and human subjects (cf. ibid. 291). For distinct (literary) examples of these forms of objectification, see her article "Objectification" (1995), or, for a comprehensive overview, see Paasonen et al.'s *Objectification. On the Difference between Sex and Sexism* (2021).

mostly reduced to their bodies—either for men's pleasure or mere reproductive purposes—arguably both promote and result in women's continued objectification and sexualisation through their constant devaluation. In many respects, victimisation can then be conceptualised as the result of people—again, here, particularly women—being objectified, sexualised, and marginalised, as they thereby become the victims of unfair treatment, harmful behaviour, and discrimination.

These conceptualisations and the outlined choices regarding Revenge Tragedies and *Game of Thrones* in this work must be addressed to facilitate the process of finding answers to the previously raised questions. Through these answers, I intend to show that women of Renaissance Revenge Tragedies are mirrored in the female characters of the series, that the desire to seek revenge influences them all, and that, through this, *Game of Thrones* becomes a contemporary feminist Revenge Tragedy. I further suggest that, on the one hand, this mirroring stresses the struggles women have to endure in the series, how they suffer and how they are treated, being objectified and assaulted, remaining under male control—highlighting issues that have not ceased to exist today. On the other hand, I also intend to outline that this reflection also demonstrates how the characters of the show change and develop. The female characters of *Game of Thrones* I selected for this book transcend—especially in light of current discussions of feminism, of giving women the voices and platforms they deserve and need in order to be heard—the female characters of the tragedies. Where the latter are held back by the times and circumstances they were created in, particularly Cersei, Sansa, Arya, Brienne, and Daenerys succeed in maturing, in gaining agency, in becoming increasingly empowered—in short, they stop being pawns and, instead, become active players in the game of thrones, emphasising a feminist agenda, traces of which already run through the tragedies, but, as I will outline, are further elevated in the series.

In order to present these claims and answer the questions raised above, I will begin by considering revenge in general in chapter 2. I will define and contextualise the term and lay out the primary factors that trigger revenge and the supposed benefits of indulging in it, as well as the ways in which the reasons for women to seek revenge also typically differ from those of men. In the chapter's final part, a discussion of revenge psychology and Francis Bacon's view on revenge, or what he calls "wild justice" (347), will outline the negative, depraving effects of revenge. In chapter 3, I will focus on the different media used in this work and explore how dramas and television series accomplish portraying thoughts, emotions, motivations, and developments of a revenger, deliberating if one medium is more suitable to depict the act of vengeance than the other. Following this, I will move to

the representation of vengeance in Revenge Tragedies in chapter 4. I will examine the appeal and popularity of revenge plots in general and contemplate both Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge plays, defining them and looking at dominant motifs, themes, and topics. The differing depiction of male and female characters in these tragedies will be addressed as well. All these aspects will make up the theoretical framework of this book.

Continuing from this, I will then move to the main part of this book, which revolves around the question how the female characters of *Game of Thrones* mirror female characters of the previously discussed revenge plays. In order to answer this question, I will start by considering the two (conventionally) more feminine characters discussed in my work, Cersei Lannister and Sansa Stark: in chapter 5, while studying the character of Cersei, I will concentrate on the objectification and sexualisation she suffered in the past, her enduring incestuous relationship with her brother, her role as mother, Machiavellian power plays she employs, and, eventually, revenge itself. In chapter 6, I will then focus on Sansa, discussing her objectification and marginalisation, her loss of innocence, the sexual violence she is forced to endure, and finally, the acts of revenge she executes Following this, I will examine the female characters of the series that show more stereotypically masculine characteristics: in chapter 7, I will regard Arya, particularly her initial objectification and the way she then grows increasingly independent, constantly developing and pursuing her primary goal: revenge. In chapter 8, while considering Brienne, I will outline how she also experiences objectification, especially due to her gender-bending appearance and performance. Her chivalry and her approach to vengeance will be part of the discussion of her character as well.

Following the exploration of these four characters, in chapter 9, I will acknowledge recent shifts and renewed interest in feminist debates that go a long way towards explaining differences between the depiction of the female characters of the series and the discussed Revenge Tragedies. I will outline the rise of the fourth wave of feminism and reflect on its influence on *Game of Thrones*. The following two chapters will examine persisting shortcomings of the series' depiction of female characters. In chapter 10, I will specifically concentrate on Daenerys Targaryen, her objectification, her climb to autonomy, her role as "breaker of chains", and her take on revenge. The latter will show how she becomes obsessed with power, dependent on male control, and grows increasingly mentally unstable, forming a considerable shortcoming in the show's portrayal of female characters. In chapter 11, I will then scrutinise other issues and shortcomings, both with regard to the depiction of female characters and the series' mis- and underrepresentation of diverse races and sexualities.

Finally, in chapter 12, I will consider aspects that still need to be addressed or that might be of interest for further research opportunities, specifically focussing on *House of the Dragon*, the prequel series to *Game of Thrones*, which is set 200 years before the events of the original and aired its first season in the Fall of 2022. In this concluding part, I will also look back and contemplate whether chief-manipulator Littlefinger was right in his assumption that revenge truly is "the purest of motivations" (S2E5 07:53-55).

CHAPTER TWO

REVENGE

Defining Revenge

> YARA. We'll get justice for you.
> THEON. If I got justice, my burnt body would hang over the gates of Winterfell.
> YARA. Fuck justice, then. We'll get revenge. (S6E7 34:56-35:02)

This dialogue between Yara and Theon Greyjoy in season seven of *Game of Thrones* already suggests that there is a difference between the concepts of revenge and justice. In this scene, justice is seen as more official, public, and something that others determine—which is out of the question for Theon, as if he demanded that, he would be sentenced to death. Yara, however, suggests revenge, which in this case means taking matters into their own hands and seeking private retaliation. The difference between private and public revenge, which is alluded to in the quotation, will be examined more closely in the following. Moreover, alternative terms for or associated with revenge, such as vengeance, punishment, and retribution, will be considered in order to draw distinctions between these concepts. Different forms of revenge, such as the blood feud, will be addressed as well. Ultimately, all this will contribute to defining revenge and its different facets, thereby establishing the conceptual basis of this work.

Revenge appears to be a ubiquitous concept of human societies, reappearing across time, place, and history, existing in a multitude of different cultures and epochs—as Throop points out, revenge "seems to be universal, in that some sort of relative concept appears throughout history and across cultures" (2). Similarly, Gollwitzer and Denzler argue that "the desire to retaliate is a universal phenomenon among human and non-human primates across all ages and cultures" (364). But even though, or rather because, the idea of revenge is seemingly universal, it is difficult to find a generally valid definition of the term: "[f]rom Greek to Indian mythology, from visual to written art forms, from groups to individuals, from folk lore to sophisticated formal studies, from law to culture, revenge continues to be

a thorny area of enquiry" (Chauhan and Halpert-Zamir 1). Moreover, "the complexity of the concept of revenge makes it difficult to describe or define it comprehensively" (ibid.). Generally, however, academics agree on considering revenge as "an explanatory idea—a concept used to explain events" (Throop 1) and "a response to an earlier humiliation that upsets personal and/or social order and is thus also seen as a retributive attempt to set right the lost mental, emotional, social and ethical balance" (Chauhan and Halpert-Zamir 1). Thus, on a fundamental level, revenge can be defined as the act of punishing someone for a previously done harm or crime (cf. Broude 39).

The universality and longevity of revenge and its inherent complexity are not the only aspects that complicate defining the concept. What makes defining revenge even more of an intricate matter is the variety of different terms that are used to refer to revenge, a fact that Throop firmly emphasises:

> [a]s anthropologists and social scientists continue to demonstrate, the different words used for vengeance, and the variety of different ways in which a desire for vengeance may be expressed or sanctioned within different cultures, is truly boggling. (1)

As Throop already shows here, one of the terms used to express the urge to seek revenge is "vengeance". The two terms, "revenge" and "vengeance", "are often used as synonyms, being applied to both the response to a specific event and a disposition or personality trait" (Gäbler and Maercker 47). After all, as Broude stresses, "revenge and vengeance [are] appropriate to denote the response of the outraged party, whether individual, state, or god" (41). Despite that, some authors still differentiate between "vengeance" and "revenge": some argue "that the terms should be distinguished according to their accompanying emotions: feelings of either resentment (desire for revenge) or moral indignation and anger (vengeance)" (Gäbler and Maercker 47). Others insist upon the notion of vengeance further implying a "wrathful, vindictive, furious revenge" (Broude 39). In light of these somewhat blurry and contradictory distinctions, I will refrain from differentiating between "vengeance" and "revenge" and use these terms synonymously.

Another term that tends to be equated with revenge is "punishment", stressing the force that revenge often requires. Broude suggests that the synonymous usage of "punishment", "revenge", and even "vengeance" as synonyms has its origin in Latin: the Latin nouns "ultio" and "vindicta" are the equivalents for "vengeance", but their verb forms "ulcisci" and "vindicare" are used as equivalents of "to punish" as well (cf. 40). Further, Pollard even defines revenge as "to punish the original wrongdoing" (59),