

The Ironic Double of Sin and Revenge: Concept of Revenge in Edgar Allen Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne

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Abstract

In *Genesis*, God put everlasting enmity between human beings and the serpent, which was then rewritten by John Milton in *Paradise Lost*; Milton's God assigns human beings the task of revenging on the serpent, granting a sense of justice and sublime to the action of vengeance. The mutual-death picture of revenge, depicted in the Bible and sublimed by Milton, was rewritten de-constructively by Edgar Allen Poe in "The Cask of Amontillado" and also by Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*. Both writers appropriated the mutual-death structure of avenger and victim to illustrate the miserable outcome and sinister nature of revenge. Poe and Hawthorne, echoing each other, transform the sublime mutual-death picture into an ironic double of sin and vengeance, in which occurs the ironic role-shifting between sinner and victim, the identification of the avenger as a greater sinner and the deconstruction of sublime and the possibility of redemption.

Key words: Rewriting; Revenge; Sin; Redemption

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1. MANKIND AND REVENGE

In the Old Testament, Lord God cursed the serpent which deceived Eve to take the forbidden fruit from the tree of

knowledge: "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (*Genesis*, 3, pp.14-15). The dust-eating serpent then became the doomed enemy of human beings, who according to God, "for dust you are and to dust you will return" (*Genesis*, 3:19). In two sentences God depicted a picture of mutual hatred between this pair of opposing sides, a man crushing the head of a serpent while the deadly fang piercing his heel. This static picture cannot tell us who is the initiator of the mutual death, and thus questions arise: who launches the deadly attack first? Who takes the counter action as vengeance?

Umberto Eco once commented on the essence of books: "Books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told" (Eco 20). The Holy Bible is always the book alluded by other books, and the stories in it are always retold in other stories. So is the disturbing picture of mutual death; it is then rewritten in a subtle way by John Milton (1608-1674) in his sublime *Paradise Lost* (1667), interpreting one of the permanent themes of human life—revenge:

O prophet of glad tidings, finisher
Of utmost hope! now clear I understand
What oft my steadiest thoughts have searched in vain,
Why our great expectation should be called
The seed of woman: virgin mother, hail,
High in the love of heaven, yet from my loins 380

Thou shalt proceed, and from thy womb the Son
Of God most high; so God with man unites.
Needs must the serpent now his capital bruise
Expect with mortal pain: say where and when
Their fight, what stroke shall bruise the victor's heel.
To whom thus Michael. Dream not of their fight,
As of a duel, or the local wounds
Of head or heel: not therefore joins the Son
Manhood to Godhead, with more strength to foil
The enemy; nor so is overcome 390

Satan, whose fall from heaven, a deadlier bruise,
Disabled not to give thee thy death's wound:
Which he, who comes thy saviour, shall recure,
Not by destroying Satan, but his works
In thee and in thy seed: nor can this be,
But by fulfilling that which thou didst want,
Obedience to the law of God, imposed
On penalty of death, and suffering death,
The penalty to thy transgression due,
And due to theirs which out of thine will grow: 400
So only can high justice rest apaid.
(Milton, *Paradise Lost* Book XII, lines 375-401)

When Michael points out to Adam the doom of mankind, he depicts the same perplexing picture of a man striking a serpent in the head while the serpent biting him on the heel. To make sin redeemed, mankind must suffer the pain of death (and the pain of birth added particularly to women) —the only way to uphold justice or to ease God's wrath. *Paradise Lost* exhibits a complex plot of obsessional revenge, which is one of the greatest themes in literature. Satan, God the Father's previous favorite angel, betrays God by launching a rebel, only defeated by God the Son and exiled from Heaven to Hell. Satan then, in stead of projecting another fight, makes a cunning plan to revenge on God, in which he will seduce Adam and Eve, God's new favorite, to betray God and thus will force their destruction by God's own hand. His plan succeeds: Adam and Eve are exiled from Eden; but God the Son will descend as the son of Virgin Mother to redeem mankind. Whereas Satan will be punished severely by this man (again defeated by God the son), but retaliates him with a lethal wound in the heel. It is human being's doom, which is commanded by God, to take revenge on who initiates them into sin and crime; although this "righteous" action will also leave the avenger himself a fatal wound. The man's righteous vengeance on the sinister serpent at his death moment transfers a sense of justice and sublime, thus, long live the power of revenge. As Thomas Otway says in *Venice Preserv'd* (1682): "Rats die in Holes and Corners, Dogs run mad; Man knows a braver Remedy for sorrow: Revenge!"

Complicated stories of revenge present in literary works repeatedly, and every time it is a rewriting of sin, vengeance, and redemption. Rewriting means to renew rather than to repeat, and a series of rewritings create a collection of multiple voices on certain subject. A text always quotes or appropriates what has been said or written in pretexts, consciously or unconsciously, as Walter Benjamin put it: "story-telling is always the art of story retelling (Benjamin 90). The mutual-death picture of revenge depicted in the Bible and sublimed by Milton is so disturbing and full of potentiality of interpretation and rewriting. Approximately two hundred years later in the new Canaan where the Bible was still powerful in people's spiritual life, two important writers successively appropriated the head-and-heel picture to rewrite the perish-together revenge. Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of

Amontillado" (1846) first, and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) following, through creative rewriting produce a similar ironic double of sin and revenge, although vary a bit in the possibility of redemption and the expectation of future.

2. SIN AND REVENGE IN "THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO"

"The Cask of Amontillado" tells the revenge story of Montresor, a cunning and stone-hearted avenger. Montresor's family emblem presented in the story is almost a perfect embodiment of the vengeance theme and a resemblance of the duel between man and serpent: "A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel" (Poe 208). With the family motto "Nemo me impune lacessit" (No one hurts me can escape the punishment) in mind, Narrator Montresor explained explicitly his legitimacy and subtlety in his vengeance as he claimed at the very beginning of his narrative: "I must not only punish but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong" (208).

Walter Steep has done a thorough reading of the emblem in his essay "The Ironic Double in Poe's 'The Cask of Amontillado'". Steep provides two readings of the emblem, one is that of Montresor's and the other, he thinks, belongs to Poe. Montresor identifies himself with the giant golden foot in the emblem, having "in mind no doubt the golden legitimacy of his vengeance, a just and unquestionable retribution for the thousand lacerations he has borne in silence" (Steep 32). But Steep claims that Poe identifies Montresor not with the foot, but the serpent, because "(s)ecrecy, cunning, serpentine subtlety—these are the themes Montresor demonstrated best of all. And the huge, golden boot fits very snugly the Fortunato that Montresor presents to us—large, powerful, and very clumsy" (32). Steep points out that Montresor and Fortunato are "locked together in a death embrace", cannot escape from an "ironic bond" because Fortunato is Montresor's self-created "double", his conscience though he never admitted it.

Steep's double reading of the emblem lies in the static state of the picture; the emblem shows the present situation of the foot and serpent in a mutual hurting position. It is not possible to distinguish which one is the initiator: did the giant steps on the serpent carelessly first and triggered its revenge or the serpent attacked the giant in the heel first to get itself treaded into the ground? In front of this picture of present, the story of the past is in vague and the future in vain. This identity of sinner or avenger cannot be easily distinguished. Each one in this mutual-hurting pair can be the possible sinner, while the other one as original victim

must accordingly become an avenger---sin leads to nothing but revenge, and then to death.

Montresor as the first-person narrator told the story fifty years after his revenge had taken place. According to him, Fortunato was the initiator of the whole story; Fortunato was the sinful one at first for his arrogance and impulsiveness, and his “thousand injuries” and “insults” to Montresor. To revenge for himself, Montresor then plotted a subtle and cruel plan, which would be carried out by himself in person, to seal Fortunato alive into the vault. The self-claimed victim turned to a more vicious sinner in this delicately plotted murder because he clearly knew that he was committing a lethal crime and shew no regrets. It’s just like in *Paradise Lost* Adam is a greater sinner than Eve because he knows he is doing wrong when he decides to eat the apple.

Besides Montresor’s strong will to kill, his cruelty of designing a special and slow death for Fortunato and his sadistic enjoyment of carrying out this plan in person together add to his evil and sin. Fortunato was seduced by Montresor into the vault, and along their way down, for several times Montresor insisted that Fortunato should “return” while craftily urging him to go on by stimulating Fortunato’s desire to prove his “connoisseurship in wine”. This trick certainly would double Fortunato’s pain when he realized his friend’s plans because his death was in some degree “self-chosen” out of his foolishness. Sealed into the deepest and dampest place of the vault, Fortunato was tortured not only by an extremely painful and slow death, but also by his regrets, shame, and self-hatred. Montresor admitted for a few times his enjoyment of seeing the coming death of his “friend” when he was walling up the stones to seal Fortunato alive; he “might hearken to it with the more satisfaction”, and when he “placed (his) hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs”, he “felt satisfied” (Poe 213). The satisfaction on designing and executing Fortunato’s death penalty makes Montresor more dangerous and pervert than common killers; Montresor’s sadistic traits embody in his satisfaction of tormenting his victim and enjoyment of other one’s agony—which are often the features of the action of revenge.

Fortunato, the original sinner, finally became a pathetic victim of the more wicked sinner Montresor, indicating that vengeance in fact causes a role-shifting between sinner and victim. Except for their exchanged positions, Montresor and Fortunato have other features demonstrating a delicate symmetry between them. They are from similar noble family background, only that Montresor’s family has already declined, but Fortunato’s family is still prosperous. They are seemingly different from each other in personality; Montresor operates over-rationally with strategy and circumspection, while Fortunato is overly innocent and impulsive, incapable of understanding the sequel of his own words and deeds as well as the connotation of other’s. Though they seem

to stand on two polarities, they share more in essence, as if there is always a liaison between them. Montresor admits that “in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect, I did not differ from him materially” (Poe 208). It is this very “weak pointed” of Fortunato that is seized and employed by Montresor to seduce Fortunato into his death plot. Fortunato “prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine”, but his pride leads him to death. Montresor also has his pride: he is so proud of his subtle murder plan, but as Fortunato does not know the danger of his blind pride, Montresor does not perceive the fatal sequel of his revenge: the victim of his plan is never Fortunato alone.

What happens in the process of Montresor’s revenge is not merely a miserable and slow death of Fortunato, but also a frozen of time, a lost of possibility of a future for Montresor himself. Montresor carried out the murder plan in person, either to keep it a secret or to enjoy his vengeance, but he had to admit that he has vacillated and been frightened in the process. He paid extra attention to Fortunato’s shocked scream of realization, and observed that it was not “the cry of a drunken man”. He clearly realized he was burying a conscious man alive, therefore he stopped for a minute for “a long and obstinate silence”, in which both of them got an awareness of the situation. When his work was almost done, Montresor paused to check a look on Fortunato, and he was shocked by “a succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form”. The death screams forced him to “hesitate” and “tremble” with whatever he felt at that moment (213). To assure himself, Montresor “reapproached the wall ... replied to the yells of him who clamoured ... re-echoed ... aided ... surpassed them in volume and in strength” (213). This yelling and re-echoing process is a metaphor for Fortunato and Montresor’s a-sin-leading-to-a-greater-sin story. When Fortunato finally sank into quietness, Montresor, strangely enough, did not feel satisfied as he declared he was for several times in the murder, but found his “heart grew sick” (214); though he soon persuaded himself with an explanation “it was the dampness of the catacombs that made it so” (214), yet this excuse demonstrates he did not enjoy this outcome as he had assumed he should have been. At the end of his narrative, he told the reader, that “(f)or the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. In pace requiescat!” (214) Do not forget Montresor has sealed Fortunato in his own vault and he spent the last fifty years on the top of Fortunato’s grave. He probably did not forget this for a single day in this “half a century” because he was in fact guarding the grave, which is his sinful past, for all these years. His time is frozen from the day of the murder, with the possibility of his future forever lost. All he can say about his life in the last fifty years is that “no mortal has disturbed them” as if this secret becomes the sole purpose of his life. “In pace requiescat” is for not only Fortunato’s bones, but also Montresor’s soul.

Montresor's murder plan does not come out as he has plotted, to "punish with impunity". He mistakenly assumes human nature, and overestimates his ability to sin without retribution. His seeming rationality does not prevent him from doing wrong but leads to a more horrible sin. He thinks that he understands the meaning of his family emblem and motto, and thus decides to take revenge on Fortunato to carry out the motto in a righteous way, but he does not perceive the essence of "Nemo me impune lacessit" at all. No one hurts me can escape the punishment, the true meaning of the emblem ironically might be that anyone hurts others will be punished: vengeance causes mutual destruction.

Via the huge foot and serpent emblem, Poe rewrites the story of revenge and remind readers of the sinister and disastrous nature of revenge, during which sinner and victim shift their status, "righteous" revenge turns out to be self-destruction, and sin always generates greater sin. Sin and revenge form a cyclic double, and when that happens, the boundary between sinner, victim and avenger blur. People lost in this double will find themselves always face the mutual-destruction emblem, with the possibility of future utterly deprived.

3. SIN AND REVENGE IN *THE SCARLET LETTER*

Nathaniel Hawthorne rewrote the double of sin and revenge in his celebrated *The Scarlet Letter* published four years after "The Cask of Amontillado". Critics do not have firm assertion on whether this repetition is a mere coincidence or an innovative inheritance, since there remains a wide field for further investigation. Among scholars studying Hawthorne, Richard Kopley claims that Chillingworth's intrusion upon the sleeping Dimmesdale and his discovery of Dimmesdale's secret may find its model in Poe's short story "The Tell-Tale Heart" in his essay "A Tale by Poe". Kopley cites Hawthorne's letters to Poe to demonstrate that Hawthorne "highly respected the fiction of Poe" and quotes George Ripley's early review of *The Scarlet Letter* to "stimulate inquiry into the possibility of a Hawthorne debt to Poe" in general (Kopley 174). Kopley also lists other scholars suggesting this relationship between Hawthorne and Poe, such as Arlin Turner, Maurice Beebe, Millicent Bell and others. To prove his point, Kopley provides a bunch of evidence to show "Hawthorne's use of Poe in that novel" and "a clear pattern of parallels between 'The Tell-Tale Heart' and *The Scarlet Letter*" (181). If Hawthorne did borrow from Poe in *The Scarlet Letter*, then this debt is not solely from "The Tell-Tale Heart", but also from "The Cask of Amontillado".

The symmetry between Arthur Dimmesdale and Roger Chillingworth is almost identical with that between Fortunato and Montresor, only with the interference of the heroine Hester Prynne. According to Henry James's

statement in 1879, the novel is not the story of Hester, but more of the pair of Dimmesdale and Chillingworth. "The story, indeed, is in a secondary degree that of Hester Prynne; she becomes, really, after the first scene, an accessory figure...The story goes on, for the most part, between the lover and the husband...between this more wretched and pitiable culprit (Dimmesdale), to whom dishonour would come as a comfort and the pillory as a relief, and the older, keener, wiser man, who, to obtain satisfaction for the wrong he has suffered, devises the infernally ingenious plan of conjoining himself with his wronger, living with him, living upon him" (James 186). Henry James wisely points out the interesting liaison between Dimmesdale and Chillingworth, which is set and strengthened not in the sin of adultery, but in Chillingworth's revenge on Dimmesdale.

Dimmesdale and Chillingworth form a perfect symmetric double, like two foot points of the letter A, with Hester Prynne as the point at the top. Both, Chillingworth the husband and Dimmesdale the lover, are inferior to Hester Prynne, as Harold Bloom has argued "her greatness of spirit, like her heroic sexuality, is ill-served by the terrible alternatives of the Satanic Chillingworth (Iago's understudy) and the timid Dimmesdale, an absurdly inadequate adulterous lover for the sublime Hester" (Bloom 91). From the aspect of Pearl, the two form another symmetric double: Dimmesdale is her biological father, but Chillingworth saves her life in the prison. Dimmesdale admits Pearl as his daughter before his death, granting her an identity; while Chillingworth leaves her with his property, offering her a new position and opportunity to get a new life. Almost at every important scene of the novel, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth appear as a double but standing at polarities. Despite obvious differences in age, appearance, and personality, the two share a lot of traits in common: they both are well educated and learned men, one in science and the other in theology; both are scholars and representatives of reason and rationality; both are in love with Hester and show an emotion (perplexity and affection) for Pearl. Besides these similarities, their symmetry embodies more in the ironic structure of sinner and victim.

Chillingworth is, at the beginning of the novel, the cuckolded husband, hurt by Hester Prynne's adultery. Vowing revenge, he chooses to live under a pseudo name and to find the adulterer whose name is kept a secret by his wife. Identifying Dimmesdale to be the one, Chillingworth maintains this secret for many years and uses it to torment Dimmesdale and to ruin his soul in a malicious way. Chillingworth deliberately commits a greater sin than that of Dimmesdale who has sinned out of impulsive lust and passion. Robert C. Evans has detailed his study of the figure of Chillingworth in very close reading and shows how "Hawthorne carefully charts Chillingworth's own self-chosen spiritual degeneration" in his essay "The Complexities of 'Old Roger' Chillingworth: Sin

and Redemption in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*". In Evans' conclusion, the man "who seemed in some ways admirable and sympathetic at the beginning of the chapter has turned himself into a potentially satanic figure by the end ... Roger Prynne (the innocent victim) has turned himself into "old Roger" Chillingworth (the malignant sinner)" (Evans 258). Evans focuses on analyzing how Chillingworth's spiritual degeneration is "self-chosen" and thus more sinister and eviler, causing him to be a greater sinner than Dimmesdale. In fact, Chillingworth's sinfulness is not only revealed in his firm and "self-chosen" sinister will, but also in his sadistic enjoyment of his cruel and evil method to revenge, just like Montresor in his vengeance on Fortunado.

Chillingworth uses almost the same strategy as what Montresor employs to tempt Dimmesdale into his own "grave". Without knowing (the same as the innocent Fortunado) Chillingworth's identity as the wronged husband, Dimmesdale, almost forced by elder ministers and the deacons of his church who care so much about his health, promises to accept Chillingworth's help as a physician. During the treatment, "(t)here was a fascination for the minister in the company of the man of science, in whom he recognized an intellectual cultivation of no moderate depth or scope; together with a range and freedom of ideas, that he would have vainly looked for among the members of his own profession" (Hawthorne 70-71). As a man of science and rationality, Chillingworth offers Dimmesdale a break from his own "obstructed" and "musty" world: "with a tremulous enjoyment, did he feel the occasional relief of looking at the universe through the medium of another kind of intellect than those with which he habitually held converse" (71). Tempted by the sense of freedom from his theological study in church provided by another kind of knowledge (Hester's love gave him the same sense before), Dimmesdale accepts Chillingworth at first as an intimate friend, and then as his roommate, giving the latter great opportunity to perceive his secret and thus to torture him in years. Dimmesdale, like Fortunado, follows unknowingly all the way his enemy who has planned a torturing slow death for him, never perceiving the true intension of the one in disguise of a good friend. During those years Dimmesdale does sometimes feel the old man's hostility and "become vaguely aware that something inimical to his peace had thrust itself into relation with him", yet he, the same as Fortunado, cannot recognize his enemy's trick because of his own fault: "trusting no man as his friend, he could not recognize his enemy when the latter actually appeared" (100). While Old Roger Chillingworth, just like Montresor, knows too well how to cover his evil intention: he "had perceptions that were almost intuitive; and when the minister threw his startled eyes towards him, there the physician sat; his kind, watchful, sympathizing, but never intrusive friend" (100). The torture and suffering go on between them until the final moment comes: for

Fortunado it's when Montresor makes him fastened to the wall; and for Dimmesdale, it's when Hester tells him the identity of the old man. The too-late realization of his foolishness only makes Dimmesdale or Fortunado more painful sufferer of their former victims' revenge.

During years of intimacy, Chillingworth has every opportunity to kill Dimmesdale fast and directly; a mysterious poison, not difficult to be obtained by a physician as Chillingworth, may well serve the purpose. However, Chillingworth, as Montresor does, chooses a much more painful and slow death for Dimmesdale. "This diabolical agent had the Divine permission, for a season, to burrow into the clergyman's intimacy, and plot against his soul" (Hawthorne 75). His malice "led him to imagine a more intimate revenge than any mortal had ever wreaked upon an enemy. To make himself the one trusted friend...All that guilty sorrow, hidden from the world, whose great heart would have pitied and forgiven, to be revealed to him, the Pitiless—to him, the Unforgiving!" (86) Chillingworth, just like Montresor, enjoys himself masochistically in his power to manipulate his victim: "(h)e became... not a spectator only, but a chief actor in the poor minister's interior world. He could play upon him as he chose" (87).

In carrying out his evil plan, Chillingworth finally surpasses Dimmesdale as sinner in his firm will to revenge, in his cruelty to torture the latter to death by continuously spiritual strikes to ruin his soul, as well as in his enjoyment of his victim's pain. The role of sinner and victim shift when the former victim takes revenge through a more malicious sin. This is exactly what happens in "The Cask of Amontillado", and the sequel of the revenge is also similar. Dimmesdale is tormented, and Chillingworth, who designs and performs the scheme, also suffers from his own plan, just as Montresor suffers from his revenge and sin. Along with his revenge, Chillingworth's expression transforms from "calm, meditative, scholar-like" to "something ugly and evil", indicating his decay in morality. At the beginning of the novel when he cures Pearl in the prison, he still has "a will" to control his anger and to collect himself, but his vengeance he destroys first his own reason before he can do any harm to others. He insists on ruining Dimmesdale's soul in person, but what he has done for revenge ruins his own soul first. "Had a man seen old Roger Chillingworth, at that moment of his ecstasy, he would have had no need to ask how Satan comports himself when a precious human soul is lost to heaven, and won into his kingdom" (85). In "deriving his enjoyment" from torturing Dimmesdale, Chillingworth, "this unhappy person had effected such a transformation by devoting himself for seven years to the constant analysis of a heart full of torture" and "there came a glare of red light out of his eyes, as if the old man's soul were on fire and kept on smouldering duskily within his breast" (113-114). To take a personal revenge on Dimmesdale, Chillingworth slays his own conscious

and loses rationality. He grants himself every right to find the adulterer and punish him, but he does not realize that this vengeance will be self-destructive; even if he does realize the price he will pay for it, he would rather destroy Dimmesdale's soul at the price of his own, like he confesses to Hester:

"I have no such power as thou tellest me of. *My old faith*, long forgotten, comes back to me, and explains all that we do, and all we suffer. By thy first step awry thou didst plant the germ of evil; but since that moment, it has all been a *dark necessity*. Ye that have wronged me are not sinful, save in a kind of typical illusion; neither am I fiend-like, who have snatched a fiend's office from his hands. It is our fate. Let the black flower blossom as it may" (116, My emphasis).

His old faith is the faith in his power and righteousness to take revenge—this is Chillingworth's justice, the old justice granted by God in the Bible and in Milton. Chillingworth shows more philosophical thoughts about his revenge, which he explains as the "old faith" of mankind, the original sin inherited from Adam and Eve, which he claims that he cannot control. Nevertheless, his explanation cannot ennoble his deeds or reduce the disastrous effects of his revenge; Hawthorne clearly depicts him as sinful and erases his future: from the day of Dimmesdale's death, Chillingworth's time stopped—his life deserves no value and purpose at all, and he dies soon.

The story of Chillingworth and Dimmesdale can be explained by the giant-and-serpent emblem in Poe's story perfectly; and this time, Chillingworth identifies himself with the giant golden foot, full of power and righteousness to punish the guilty serpent, Dimmesdale; while Hawthorne's explanation maybe just on the contrary: Dimmesdale is the clumsy giant makes a careless mistake out of impulsiveness, and the serpent—the canny and evil satanic Chillingworth takes his revenge in his lethal bite, even if the dead giant will tread him into hell together.

CONCLUSION

Similar rewritings of this ironic double of sin and vengeance by Poe and Hawthorne, coincidence or not, suggest their focus on the everlasting theme of revenge and its consequence. Their only difference lies in the outcome of the original sinner and later victim, specifically, Fortunado in Poe and Dimmesdale in Hawthorne. Fortunado, a desperate prey of the cunning Montresor, dies in half-realization and total desperation. But Dimmesdale, though deprived of an opportunity of a new life, is once given a slim chance of redemption (whether Dimmesdale is redeemed is arguable). His

last confession on the scaffold at least makes him get rid of Chillingworth's revenge in his death moment and frustrates Chillingworth in his evil plan. More importantly, his suffering offers Dimmesdale a new perspective to understand all the sinners, or human beings in general. His sin and sufferings render him not only agony and death but also self-knowledge and revelation. In this way, Hawthorne seems to have some hope for the sinner to die in understanding, but the death is doomed and there is no future: Hawthorne refuses to give Dimmesdale or Hester a new life.

Poe and Hawthorne together, in the rewriting of stories about revenge, suspect the possibility of redemption. Is reason capable of surpassing sin and evil? They answered: No. Can sinners escape the sinful past and move on to have a future? Again: No. Can individual know themselves and understand human nature? Poe: Definitely no. Hawthorne: Maybe possible.

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