

The Analysis of Revenge in *The Count of Monte Cristo* Using Bourdieu's Concept of Habitus

Sylvia Ohene Manteaw, REN Xiao-fei

School of Foreign Languages, Jiangsu University, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu 212013, China

This paper analyzed revenge in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Bourdieu's concept of habitus was used in the analysis with the help of field and capital. Dantes, an innocent and kind gentleman is unwillfully exposed to the outside world which automatically determines his actions and inactions as Bourdieu explains in his concept of habitus as one's contact with his environment for a long period of time being a catalyst in determining one's thoughts and actions. At the end of the study it was observed that Bourdieu's concepts being used in analysis gives a deeper understanding of the text itself and the message Bourdieu conveys in respect to his concept of habitus and finally making the study pleasant to readers' understanding.

Keywords: revenge, habitus, field, capital, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Bourdieu, Dantes

Introduction

It is generally known that revenge occurs when one is wrongfully treated and demands justice or intends to make the offender suffer for his or her actions. In understanding revenge, one needs to know and understand the events and actions that led to the quest for revenge. Revenge can be interpreted in different contexts. In an instance where a game like basketball is being played, revenge can be interpreted as a "win back". However "revenge" in this current study can be explained as a "vengeance". The occurrences of vengeance are a big threat to societies. As a result, the writers express their anxiety about these occurrences by reflecting them in novels, songs, drama and poetry. An example is Dumas' *Count of Monte Cristo*. According to Rizal (Rizal, 2014), vengeance is necessary for the Count to restore self-esteem and to punish his enemies to make them aware of their mistakes. Dumas writes *The Count of Monte Cristo* as a mirror of society which describes that there are many individuals exacting vengeance in society and also as an advice to society to prevent vengeance as a means of curing the pain.

This current study employs Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to investigate revenge in Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The central concepts or ideas in Bourdieu's theory include: habitus, field, practice and various forms of capital which includes cultural, social, economic and symbolic. Bourdieu's concept of habitus forms an important part of his theory and obviously the most well-known and commonly researched area. This concept invented by Bourdieu serves as a mediator between structure and agency. Regardless of how famous the concept of habitus is, it becomes more relevant when used together with *field* and *capital*. Habitus accounts for change in individuals and this is seen as a result of an individual's change of social environment which Bourdieu terms as

“field”. The range of possibilities inscribed in a habitus can be foreseen as a field. Habitus can be duplicated by coming into contact with a field that reproduces its dispositions. It can be transformed at one end of the field through a process that either raises or lowers an individual's expectations. In most cases habitus is dependent on one's field or capital. This study reveals how Edmond Dantes “field” and “capital” influenced his passion for revenge.

There have been quite a number of reviews of related studies on *The Count of Monte Cristo*. In a study carried out by Latifah (Latifah, 2005), Personality of the Main Character “Edmond Dantes” explains Dantes' change of behavior as a result of the environment surrounding him. The outcome of her research depicts Edmond Dantes' transformation as a result of his environment. Tjahjaputri (Tjahjaputri, 2002) conducted a Study of Edmond Dantes' Character Change before the Denunciation, after the Denunciation and after the Revenge. In her study, she concluded that vengeance is not a guarantee of satisfaction, but in turn makes one's character worse. Antonious Christopher in his study entitled Edmond Dantes' changing concept of justice in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, draws a conclusion on the fact that retributive justice is not the best approach to justice because it makes matters worse. However, justice can be resolved by using a restorative approach to solve a problem.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the concept of revenge with the help of habitus. We begin this study by introducing the Bourdieu's concept to explain the concept of revenge. We shall also study how Dantes' character is influenced through habitus and then further explore revenge through Bourdieu's habitus by discussing the inspiration for revenge and the impact of revenge.

Theoretical Framework

Before Bourdieu put his theory forward, the theories of Karl Marx heavily influenced Bourdieu's thinking and this is greatly realized Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. Bourdieu's influential concept of habitus is quite broad and ambiguous than it appears to be. The workings of habitus are linked to capital and field. It is important to note that habitus is mostly realized based on the individual's contact with the field and in most cases, capital. Habitus can be extended to our preference for taste or other cultural objects and this is where Bourdieu relates French natives' tastes in art to their social class positions, opining that artistic sensibilities are determined and designed by the culturally ingrained habitus.

The Concept of Habitus

Bourdieu's concept of Habitus is an essential part of his theory and central to his theoretical framework. Bourdieu's habitus explains the regularities of behavior that are related to social structures which includes; gender, class and ethnicity without making social structures deterministic of behavior, or losing sight of the individual's own agency. The concept of habitus is quite complicated as Bourdieu himself approves that fact. However, Bourdieu believes that this idea is essential and has virtues. Its importance is exhibited through an individual's connection to the social environment through education and history. Habitus is a set of dispositions, internal to the individual that both reflects external social structures and shapes how the individual perceives the world and acts in it. Despite the fact that these social bodies do not define the behavior, the individual is predisposed to act in accordance with social structures that have shaped him and in turn move with these social structures. The conditions associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring agents, that is,

as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu again defines habitus, but in this case this definition is widely accepted and most comprehensive and practical. He defines habitus as “the external definitions which are connected to a particular class of conditions of existence produce hexis (habitus), systems of conditions and transferable predispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, in other words, as generative and organizing principles of the practices and reconstructions, which can be adapted objectively to their purpose without aiming consciously at it, and to control explicitly the actions necessary for its achievement” (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 88).

In analyzing Bourdieu's definition of habitus, he makes mention of “a system of continuous and transferable dispositions”. In Bourdieu's reference to dispositions, he explains it as individuals' positions and tendencies in terms of the way they think, act, feel, and understand, which they have embodied and internalized, in an unconscious way, but through informative processes and socializations at the base of the objective social conditions of their existence, but also their social orbit. These dispositions function as what an individual unconsciously does which becomes practical. Bourdieu opines that the dispositions which are attained during infancy or childhood are long lasting and more decisive. These dispositions can however be long lasting but not always decisive. These dispositions are acquired through one's contacts with the social environment, but there are individual personalities which are more ingrained than these dispositions and these personalities are sometimes stronger than these dispositions. Notwithstanding, despite one's primary habitus being stronger, persistent influence of one's secondary habitus can overtake one's primary habitus. The natures that entail habitus are structured, unavoidably projecting the social conditions in which they are formed. In an instance where an individual is raised from an upper class, the habitus of this individual will be quite similar to the habitus of those in the geographical region related to that class, but will however be different to those of the working class and in turn even if that individual moves to settle in a working class environment, his or her primary habitus will be maintained until the persistent influence of one's new environment changes the individual.

The Analysis of Revenge

Revenge is seen as an act committed in response to a prior harmful act by another (Stuckless & Goranson, 1992). Other scholars term revenge as a response that is motivated by an injustice and can serve many different purposes, including: validation of moral standards, protecting one's belief in a just world and reinstating moral order in society (McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001; Sanders & Hamilton, 2001). In explanation of revenge, it is important to outline some key factors that contribute to the whole idea of revenge in the text. Revenge does not occur unless there is the necessity for it.

Bourdieu's Habitus in Analysis

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is essential in the characterization of Edmond Dantes. In analyzing revenge through the lens of Bourdieu, Edmond's transition depicts how habitus is constructed. Every individual holds beliefs about their possible future paths and achievements in life. However, these beliefs are informed directly or indirectly by evidence in the environment and this can be seen in relation to Dantes. His environment could not help him achieve his dreams as he was being surrounded by people who were ready to destroy his aim and

ambitions. The migration of Edmond Dantes to a new environment serves as a catalyst for his change of attitude and mindset. The text is infused with a sense of being deprived of being in one's comfort zone and sent to a place of misery and pain. Dantes' transition from Marseilles to his new field (Chateau d'If), influences the potential for change and adaptation. His utterances and actions reveal how distressed and miserable he was.

Finally, his pride collapsed and he has begun to pray, not yet to God, but to men... He roared blasphemes which made his jailer recoil in horror and dashed himself furiously against the wall of his prison... (Dumas, 1997, p. 34)

However, his transition has not only transformed him into a bitter person which triggered his revenge, but also his new environment helped him gain more knowledge of the outside world, helped him to acquire new languages and also made him more wise and technical in carrying out his revenge plans. The endurance or interruption of Dantes' habitus can be seen in his way of expressing his feelings and thoughts. His initial stay in prison was quite difficult for him to fit in as he never had a sense of comfort until he met Abbe Faria, his prison friend. Habitus being used to explain Dantes' revenge is based on what he perceives in his social world which eventually influences his desire for revenge. Based on the hostile environment he finds himself in, he makes decisions on what he feels which is quite realistic. Dantes' experience in prison raises questions concerning the potential for change and adaptability. Habitus does not always serve as a tool for embracing change, but in other cases serves as a tool for continuity when habitus and field comes together harmoniously. However, in this analysis, it is seen that there is no sense of harmony between the habitus and field.

In further analysis of revenge, the concept of capital is an essential factor in exploring Dantes' revenge. Bourdieu explains "capital" in four forms which are: economic, cultural, symbolic and social. Bourdieu's concept of capital is vital when relating it to Dantes' revenge. As mentioned earlier, habitus becomes more relevant when functions together with field and capital. Capital often influences one's power and authority in society. In our secular world today, it is those who have power and authority in society that rule. Capital is a determining factor of "habitus". Edmond Dantes, after assuming the position of *The Count of Monte Cristo* possesses power and authority. Dantes' acquisition of "capital" can be linked to all four forms of capital explained by Bourdieu. Assuming the title of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Edmond deploys his advanced intellectual and financial assets in investigating his enemies, gathering vital information and conquering them by destroying what each one of them treasured most in life.

The Inspiration for Dantes' Revenge

Quite a number of philosophical findings affirm that revenge offers benefits in various forms to individuals and society as a whole. Revenge is not only a means of restoring justice, but also psychologically useful. People get inspired to revenge when the culprit goes away without being punished. Frijda (Frijda, 1994) observed that one of the most infuriating aspects of revenge is that "he walks in pleasure and I in suffering". Dantes' motivation to revenge on his enemies is a result of the years he spent in Chateau d'if with the world being shut on him for no crime he committed. He initially had no hope of escaping from prison even though he had planned in his heart to avenge his enemies. He is full of anguish for being denied the privilege to be marrying his fiancé and also care for his sick dad. Dantes in that state was psychologically unstable and was emotionally shattered. His contact with

Abbe Faria was quite hopeful of his escape to revenge his enemies. The motivation for his influence even heightened after he became wealthy and powerful.

The Impact of Dantes' Revenge

Despite the fact that revenge is useful in several ways, revenge can also be harmful not only to the receiver but also to the retaliator. Rather than induce cooperation, revenge might often motivate counter-revenge and prolonged feuds (Kim & Smith, 1993). Revenge can destroy good relations between people and even sometimes cost the lives of innocent people. In analyzing the cost of Dantes' revenge in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, it is important to consider the impact "revenge" had on Dantes, his enemies and other innocent people. Most often "revenge" causes greater destruction as compared to the act that caused the revenge. Research reveals that revenge can cause serious psychological problems to the avenger and also to the one who is being punished. These greater outcomes include high negative impact and depression and also reduced life satisfaction (McCullough et al., 2001). Dantes' punishment to his enemies is flawless, deep and excruciating. He causes each of his enemy to suffer just the way he did. The consequences of his punishment caused some of his enemies to lose their pride and lives and the lives of the people they cherished most. One significant aspect of revenge is the effect it had on Dantes himself. Habitus plays an intermediary role between the past and the present. According to Bourdieu, habitus refers to something historical and it is linked to individual history (Bourdieu, 1990). It is important to note that one's past habitus is responsible for determining his or present actions and thoughts. This is clearly seen in Dantes' future actions towards his enemies. His present actions are based on his past experience. His actions go beyond revenging on his enemies by destroying the lives of innocent ones. He suffers emotionally and regrets for allowing his revenge to go beyond the limit. Nevertheless, he felt content that justice had prevailed.

Monte Cristo pale at the horrible sight. He realized that he had gone beyond the limits of rightful vengeance and that could no longer say "God is for me and with me". (Dumas, 1997, p. 403)

Conclusion

This current study investigated "revenge" in Dumas' *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* through the use of Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Bourdieu's concept revealed how habitus is responsible for shaping the individuals' mind and thoughts as a result of their contact with their field for a certain period of time. We studied the issue of revenge by envisaging Bourdieu's concept of habitus with the assistance of field and capital. The analysis revealed that Dantes' contact with an unfriendly environment transformed him into someone who was ready to make his enemies suffer having no passion or forgiveness in him. Additionally, this study revealed that one's past habitus is responsible for controlling one's present actions and attitudes. In this study it is revealed that before Dantes' transformation he was a kind-hearted and a peaceful man, but his transformation changed his mind-set and actions even after so many years. We close by discussing the cost of revenge, which can sometimes bring great loss and misery than the harm that triggered the revenge and this is revealed after Dantes' revenge did not have a negative impact on only his enemies but also on innocent people as well. Dantes at last regrets for his actions for causing greater harm than he imagined.

References

- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *In other words: Essays towards a reflexive sociology*. Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2006). The sense of practice. *Alexandria, Athens*.
- Frijda, N. H. (1994). The lex talionis: On vengeance. *Emotions: Essays on emotion theory*, 263-289.
- Kim, S. H., & Smith, R. H. (1993). Revenge and conflict escalation. *Negot. J.*, 9, 37.
- Latifah. (2005). Personality of the main character "Edmond Dantes" as reflected in Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Yogyakarta: English Education Department, Ahmad Dahlan University.
- McCullough, M. E., Bellah, C. G., Kilpatrick, S. D., & Johnson, J. L. (2001). Vengefulness: Relationships with forgiveness, rumination, well-being, and the Big Five. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 27(5), 601-610.
- Rizal, M. (2014). The necessity of vengeance reflected in Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*. *A Psychoanalytic Criticism*.
- Sanders, J., & Hamilton, V. L. (2001). *Handbook of justice research in law*. Springer.
- Stuckless, N., & Goranson, R. (1992). The vengeance scale: Development of a measure of attitudes toward revenge. *Journal of social behavior and personality*, 7(1), 25.
- Tjahjaputri, G. (2002). *A study of Edmon Dantes's character change before the denunciation, after the denunciation, and after the revenge in Alexandre Dumas's the count of Monte Cristo*. Petra Christian University,