

Studying Revenge in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby Dick*

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Abstract

This essay considers the theme of revenge in two novels: *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne and *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Roger Chillingworth finds out that he has been wronged by the priest Arthur Dimmesdale, who has had a relationship with Chillingworth's wife, Hester Prynne. Hester's daughter Pearl is born out of this relationship, and Hester has to spend a term in jail, stand on the scaffold for three hours, and take all the blame of the merciless Puritan community in Boston. According to Chillingworth, this is also enough to justify inflicting all sorts of pains on the priest or even killing him. Of course, Hester is not exempted from Chillingworth's wrath, but as she is exposed to public shame, Chillingworth decides that that is enough for her and that he must direct his revenge upon her partner, who decides to keep his sin a secret. In *Moby Dick*, Captain Ahab, who has lost his leg while hunting the white whale Moby Dick, does not take the loss of his leg to Moby Dick as an accident that might befall any whaler. This loss touches his deepest sense of honour, and he decides to avenge himself upon the whale. He feels insulted and the artificial leg, which replaces his real one, works as a constant reminder of his wounded pride and urges him to go on in his revenge scheme. The two men's schemes of revenge reach extreme levels. This essay will compare the concept of revenge between Hawthorne and Melville as they explore it in the presentation of the characters of Ahab and Chillingworth.

Studying Revenge in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby Dick*

Both Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) present a man who is completely consumed by a revenge scheme.¹ In *The Scarlet Letter*, the scholar Roger Chillingworth, who leaves Europe to join his wife Hester Prynne in the New World, finally meets her in the colony of Salem after a two-year period of captivity among Native Americans. Chillingworth finds out, as soon as he sets his eyes upon his wife, that he has been wronged by somebody. This is because he arrives just in time to find his wife Hester standing on a scaffold, which acts as a pedestal of shame, in the market of Salem as part of her punishment for giving birth to a child outside wedlock. Hester's punishment includes also a term in prison and, more importantly, wearing a badge of shame in the form of the letter A, which stands for adultery. Wearing this letter exposes Hester to the cruelty of the Puritan community in Salem for the duration of her life. After a careful and shrewd search, Chillingworth rightly concludes that the man who has wronged him is no other than the Puritan priest Arthur Dimmesdale, who is ironically requested to persuade Hester to reveal the name of her partner in sin and the father of the child, Pearl. According to Chillingworth, Dimmesdale's act is enough to justify inflicting all sorts of torture on the priest or even killing him. Of course, Hester is not exempted from Chillingworth's wrath, but as she is exposed to the cruelty of the Puritans, which interestingly matches Chillingworth's hunger for revenge, Chillingworth decides that that is enough for her and that he must direct his revenge upon her partner Dimmesdale, who struggles to confess his sin, but does not manage to do so until it almost too late.

In *Moby Dick* Captain Ahab loses one of his legs while hunting a white whale named Moby Dick. There is a suggestion that Captain Ahab has not only lost a leg, but his manhood, too. In other words, Captain Ahab's behaviour after the accident suggests that he has become impotent. This partly explains why Captain Ahab does not take the loss of his leg to Moby Dick as an accident that might befall any whaler. This loss touches his deepest sense of honour, and he decides to avenge himself upon the whale. He feels insulted and the artificial leg, which replaces his real one, works as a constant reminder of his wounded pride and urges him to pursue his revenge scheme. It is not as Yu and Ren suggest that Ahab's "pursuit of Moby-Dick is the process of Exploring nature." (Yu and Ren, 17) Ahab's lust for revenge, which certainly matches Chillingworth's in its powerful and consuming nature, is directed at killing the whale rather than inflicting continuous pain. It is the whale which seems to play the role of the torturer and, by doing so, adds depth to Ahab's revenge scheme, which looks initially mad. The complexity of the while allows different levels of interpreting Ahab revenge beyond madness.

¹ For more on the influence of Hawthorne on Melville's writing of *Moby-Dick* see Connie Townley "The Melville-Hawthorne Friendship and its Impact on *Moby-Dick*."

The two novels approach the theme of revenge in different ways. Comparing these approaches enables the reader a better understanding of the theme in both novels. The small, secretive, dark world of *The Scarlet Letter* with its four main characters contrasts sharply with the open, spacious world of *Moby Dick*. In the latter text, Ahab's revenge scheme destroys all his shipmates except for Ishmael, who survives to tell us the story. Indeed, Ahab's revenge scheme leads to the destruction of the ship, *The Pequod*, which is a mini cosmos or a miniature of America itself. Revenge in the two novels is motivated by a loss on the part of a man. These losses are interpreted in honour terms and they wound the manhood and the pride of Chillingworth and Ahab. Even though the novels deal with the dark aspect of human nature, which is revealed through these revenge schemes, there is a chance to see the nobility of human beings. This is clearly demonstrated in the whalers' courage and readiness to work together to face some of the most powerful forces in nature which might impede humanity and its progress.

The motives behind the revenge schemes of both Chillingworth and Ahab are controversial. To begin with Chillingworth, it is easy to understand his feelings as a betrayed husband. This is usually enough to justify revenge. However, considering the circumstances of Chillingworth's marriage to Hester reveals that Chillingworth is himself partially responsible for what Hester Prynne has done. His wife leaves him to America and loses contact with him for more than two years. Considering the dangers of travelling by ships at that time, Hester concludes that he has drowned on the way to America. She does not have any real hope that he will come and join her after this long period, for he could have come by this time or at least sent her a word explaining his delay. Also their relationship is not that successful considering the differences between them. Their characters are different and there is a big age difference between them. Hester is very beautiful, warm and active; Chillingworth is misshapen and cold. Their marriage in the first place is an exploitation of Hester's youth and beauty. Even Chillingworth himself considers these points and acknowledges that he himself has participated in leading his wife to doing what she has done by neglecting her. This weakens Chillingworth's motive for revenge and makes him lose the readers' sympathy.

If the reader disregards the symbolical significance of *Moby Dick* and the act of hunting it, the whale is no more than an animal that acts of mere instinct and Ahab's idea to avenge himself on the whale is utter madness. This is how the chief mate Starbuck looks at the whole idea of hunting *Moby Dick*: "Vengeance on a dumb brute!" Starbuck cries exclaiming, "that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous." (MD, 172) Melville does not want the whale and the battle with it to take simply that literal meaning. Edward H. Rosenberry explains that this is accomplished through the symbolical significance which Melville gives to the captain, and this, in turn, establishes "the superiority of Ahab's antagonist on grounds transcending the merely physical combat of a hunter and his prey." (MD, 72) Ahab himself does not think of *Moby Dick* as a whale like any other animal. He characterises the whale by a name and attributes to it all the characteristics that people attribute to their enemies. He finds the animal's behaviour rational and holds *Moby Dick* responsible for the loss of his leg.

Comparing the motives of both men for revenge, Ahab's motive at its surface meaning is much weaker than that of Chillingworth. Indeed it is madness. But hunting the whale is not a mere hunting voyage: the whale is portrayed as an evil power that is antagonistic to the progress of man. Ahab explains to Starbuck that the whale is a mask for something deeper which lies beyond the whale:

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. (MD, 172)

The whale is a godlike figure and he finds it quite pleasant to play with the fate of whalers. *Moby Dick* enjoys destroying ships and killing people. He is also exceptionally powerful and he is an expert at destroying ships. Melville's description of the whale attributes deity to him. "But in the great Sperm Whale, this high and mighty god-like dignity inherent in the brow is so immensely amplified, that gazing on it, in that full front view, you feel

the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature.” (MD, 370) Rationality is attributed to the behaviour of the whale as he is given a history and a mythical past. This emphasizes the symbolical significance of the whale. Moreover, the whale is given the complexity that is given to his rival Ahab, and this makes it difficult to take a clear stand towards the whale. Robert K. Martin points out that “the whale represents the natural world; hence the inability of critics to resolve their argument over its essentially good or evil quality”. (Martin, 86) With its complexity the whale stands for the mysterious powers of nature, which antagonise people. In order for nature to serve the needs of people it must be harnessed and this will take the form of battles between people and these mysterious, natural powers. Indeed, hunting the whale takes the form of a real naval battle. Ahab prepares his crew members for this battle and asks them to pledge their honour and swear death to Moby Dick. Joyce Sparer Adler reads the hunting of the whale as a real war: “The final battle with Moby Dick, the climax towards which Melville, like Ahab, has been driving from the beginning, is not only like war, it *is* war, and nothing else but war.” (Adler, 59)

Fighting the whale as a representative of the powers that are antagonistic to humanity provides Ahab with a good motive. Ahab becomes a Faust-like figure in that he is using knowledge to gain power. His knowledge of geography and mapping seeks to encompass the wild oceans within his maps and domesticate them by eliminating the main opponent Moby Dick. Maps are significant in that they define people’s territories and fields of power. Ahab wants to have control over everything within the realm of his maps and he is not ready to compromise even with the most powerful whale Moby Dick. Like the whale, Captain Ahab has godlike qualities. Robert K. Martin elaborates on this by drawing parallels between Ahab and Prometheus: the portrayal of Ahab as robbing the seas of their power which is embodied in Moby Dick brings to mind Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods to the welfare of Man. Ahab is made like Prometheus by the fire imagery which both share. (Martin, 84) Like Prometheus Ahab is excessively proud, and he is removed from the sympathies that bring him close to humanity:

Ahab’s links to Prometheus are appropriate, for Prometheus is the culture hero of a society that is strong, aggressive and proud, that values technology (the power of fire to transform matter) over human relationships. Melville may grant Ahab his “humanities,” but he sees that these are deeply scarred by the fires of desire. (Martin, 85)

Looking at Ahab’s motive from this perspective leads the reader to regard Ahab as a hero like Prometheus. Indeed, the whale has been such a threat to people in the sea, for he has killed many people and will continue doing so unless people kill him. But the welfare of mankind is not Ahab’s pure motive. Ahab acts against the welfare of mankind on many occasions in the course of the voyage. One can not deny the strong personal element behind Ahab’s crusade: avenging his wounded pride. He always talks about the whole affair as his own private revenge. Starbuck looks at fighting the whale from this point of view and regards it as blasphemous. This personal motive explains why Ahab himself should kill the whale rather than cooperate with other people. Actually he should cooperate with others if he regards hunting the whale as a human endeavour against the powers of nature. Also the personal motive behind Ahab’s revenge on the whale is strengthened by the great value that Ahab gives to the leg that he has lost for the whale. Elizabeth Hardwick explains that “the White Whale has taken the leg as a trophy and also in a faraway extension of power taken the old Captain’s manhood!” (Hardwick, 84) The hints at the sexual frustration and the possible impotency that the whale has inflicted upon Ahab by means of the artificial leg which replaces the real one are strong in the text: “. . .by some unknown, and seemingly inexplicable, unimaginable casualty, his ivory limb having been so violently displaced, that it had stake-wise smitten, and all but pierced his groin; nor was it without extreme difficulty that the agonizing wound was entirely cured.” (MD, 495) This is why Ahab is keen to forget about his young wife, and he even regards her as a widow during his life. Ahab’s motive should, therefore, be taken with its complexity as there are evidences in the text supporting different levels of interpretations.

Both Chillingworth and Captain Ahab find their motives strong enough to act upon them, and except for a few moments of reflections, which serve to assure the reader that these characters still have some humanity, they hardly question their motives. They proceed to avenge themselves upon their enemies at whatever cost. It does not take them a long time to decide, and once they have decided they do not hesitate to put their ideas into action. Chillingworth pursues his purpose with the coldness of a machine. However, we are given on the occasion of his meeting with Hester in prison a different view of Chillingworth when he admits that he is partly to blame for what Hester has done. He points out to Hester:

It was my folly, and thy weakness. I,—a man of thought,—the book-worm of great libraries,—
a man already in decay, having given my best years to feed the hungry dream of knowledge,—

what had I to do with youth and beauty like thine own! Misshapen from my birth-hour, how could I delude myself with the idea that intellectual gifts might veil physical deformity in a young girl's fantasy! Men call me wise. If sages were ever wise in their own behoof I might have foreseen all this. I might have known that, as I came out of the vast and dismal forest, and entered this settlement of Christian men, the very first object to meet my eyes would be thyself, Hester Prynne, standing up, a statue of ignominy before the people. Nay, from the moment when we came down the old church-steps together, a married pair, I might have beheld the bale-fire of that scarlet letter blazing at the end of our path! (SL, 290)

A part from this scene, Chillingworth does not show any signs of hesitation, and he actually never loosens his grip on Dimmesdale.

Likewise, Ahab is constantly determined and except for one scene, in the chapter entitled "The Symphony", where his humanity is revealed for a fleeting moment, he is relentless in his attempt. Looking into Starbuck's human eyes brings Ahab for once back to his human weakness and he longs for life on land.

Away, whole oceans away, from that young girl-wife I wedded past fifty, and sailed for Cape Horn the next day, leaving but one dent in my marriage pillow—wife? wife?—rather a widow with her husband alive! Aye, I widowed that poor girl when I married her, Starbuck; and then, the madness, the frenzy, the boiling blood and the smoking brow, with which, for a thousand lowerings old Ahab has furiously, foamingly chased his prey—more a demon than a man! (MD, 572)

Anyway he soon dismisses all these feelings and resumes his project. Determined as he is, Ahab tries to understand the power that leads him to revenge but he finds it difficult to understand. Hardwick suggests that Ahab cannot explain this power when he says "The inscrutable thing commands 'that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time'" (Hardwick, 83) Bruce L. Grenberg goes on to suggest that Ahab is aware that he is ignoring his humanity. "It is not that Ahab lacks humanity; on the contrary, he consciously sacrifices it in order to face the inhuman and heartless immensity of the sea." (Grenberg, 153)

Unlike Chillingworth, Ahab, whose intention is known to his companions, is faced by obstacles that give the reader an idea about the degree of his determination. He always proves quite determined to overcome all obstacles. First, there is the possibility of his crew members rebelling against his plan. His strong leadership makes this unlikely to happen. His mates are not prepared to take such an initiative. Rosenberry rightly explains that "the three mates yield standing commentary on events from three critical points of view: that of the scrupulous man (Starbuck), that of the careless man (Stubb) that of the 'mechanical' man (Flask), who has no attitudes but performs his role in life because it is there." (Rosenberry, 82) Second, there is the stronger obstacle which is the temptation of a good life which Ahab can enjoy on land with his wife. He glimpses the appeal of this beautiful life there and indeed it makes him hesitate for a moment and look at his life in the sea as inferior to that on land. Afraid that this might put an end to his project, Ahab dismisses the idea very quickly. Martin comments that the chapter which is entitled *The Symphony* "is a wonderful vision of a harmonious universe in which the masculine and the feminine are reconciled; this divine androgyny is Ahab's last temptation, and he resists it to pursue the whale to the end." (Martin, 93) The image of his wife waiting for him scars his old wound and reminds him of the impotency the whale has caused him. Third, there are several incidents that also stand in his way such as the several prophecies that predict that he will be killed by the whale. *The Pequod* meets a number of ships and she is supposed to "gam" with them. Ahab, however, does not observe the behaviour of whalers on such occasions. He uses them as tools to hear something about Moby Dick, and once that is done, he puts an end to the whole meeting. (Rosenberry, 83) The most touching of these incidents is the meeting with *The Rachael* whose captain has lost his son. Ahab is not ready to give any consideration to an important human consideration, like that of a desperate father looking for his son, for fear that he might lose Moby Dick.

Ahab and Chillingworth dedicate all their lives for a single purpose and they find that their lives are worthless if they do not manage to achieve revenge and defeat their enemies. Revenge becomes an obsession to Ahab and it occupies every single minute of his life. Rosenberry explains the destructive effect of the this obsession on Ahab:

His life, his soul, is overwhelmed by an obsession to search the seas in vengeance for his terrible wounding. In this way, Ahab can be seen to have fallen into idolatry, an unwholesome worship of the claims of private destiny, a blasphemous disregard of nature, the seas, and the creatures within it; an agnostic disowning of his fellow beings, the crew who will perish with

him.(69)

With both men, the overwhelming psychological impact of revenge has physical manifestations. It affects the way Ahab sleeps and his body always contracts. Grenberg elaborates on these physical manifestation:

He pores over his charts, plotting the course of Fate, prefiguring in his dreams his final confrontation with Moby Dick. Sleeping “with clenched hands” and waking “with his own bloody nails in his palms”, Ahab is, indeed, self-crucifying— sacrificing his common humanity to his soul-devouring purpose. (107)

Ahab describes the effect of the obsession with this single purpose as making both his soul and his body bleed into each other. With “his ‘torn body and gashed soul’ bleeding into each other, Ahab is made mad. Ahab’s ‘monomania’ is characterised not by an idea but by a commitment to action.” (Grenberg, 106)

Richard Harter Fogle explains the physical manifestations of Chillingworth’s obsession with revenge as the deterioration of his body and the loss of light in his countenance. His aspect changes and becomes dark. Hester, who encounters Chillingworth after a long time, observes this change in Chillingworth’s countenance despite Chillingworth’s attempt to hide his blackness behind a smile. (Fogle, 35) Charles Feidelson adds that revenge has also its effects on Chillingworth’s mind as well: “Chillingworth, who discovers the psychosomatic malady of Dimmesdale, is himself afflicted in the same way: his aspect changes, just as his mind is transformed, from the scholar to the devil.”(Feidelson, 11) Chillingworth becomes a sadist deriving pleasure from torturing his victims. With the coldness of a machine he tortures Dimmesdale. He does not want to kill his enemy; his pleasure depends upon exposing his victim to a slow psychological pain. In this way Chillingworth is like the Puritan community who are not satisfied with ordering Hester to stand on the scaffold for three hours and locking her up in jail for a specific term. They want Hester’s shame to be permanent by asking her to wear a badge of shame. This is exactly what Chillingworth would do if he punished Hester, and that is why he leaves Hester to the scarlet letter. As Dimmesdale is not discovered by the community, Chillingworth takes it upon himself to torture him. Henry James suggests that Chillingworth is made to look like a devil as he, not only inflicts pain upon Dimmesdale’s mind and tries to probe into the secrets of his heart, rather “revels in his unsuspected knowledge of these things and stimulates them by malignant arts.” (James, 110)

Though both Chillingworth and Ahab are similar in that revenge overwhelms them completely, their courses towards revenge are different and this reveals a great deal about their characters. The process of revenge takes a long time in which both men use their intelligence and their professional knowledge: geography and the art of whaling in the case of Ahab, and medicine in the case of Chillingworth. J. Donald Crowley points out that in the course of their revenge both men look Faust-like figures looking for knowledge and power. (Crowley, 94) Ahab’s aim remains a secret till *the Pequod* has sailed for several days and thus he makes sure that none of the crew members will be able to reject taking part in the mission which he intends for the ship. After this Ahab declares an open war on the White Whale. He plays on the concept of courage to enlist all his crew members in the battle against Moby Dick. Even Starbuck, who is opposed to the whole idea, is made to take part in the oath, and when he attempts to question the aim of the mission later on, Ahab crushes down this attempt and even threatens that he will kill Starbuck if he opposes him. Though Ahab involves all his crew members in the task, he is not willing to share the hunting of the whale with other ships: it must be he who will have the honour of killing the whale. Furthermore, he is not ready to be delayed by whatever reason from hunting the whale. Like Chillingworth who claims Dimmesdale his own, Ahab claims the white whale his own, and he always makes inquiries to ensure that nobody has hunted the whale before he finds it.

Chillingworth, on the other hand, is very secretive, and his secrecy lasts to the moment of his defeat. The first thing he does when he discovers that the woman who is standing on the scaffold is his wife is putting his finger on his lips to silence Hester and keep everything secret. He immediately claims her partner his own. “There is a sympathy that will make me conscious of him. I shall see him tremble. I shall feel myself shudder, suddenly and unawares. Sooner or later, he must needs be mine!” (SL, 64) It is more practical for Chillingworth to keep his revenge secret because he is an outsider and nobody would help him; not even his wife. As Chillingworth keeps his scheme as a secret, he does not meet any external obstacles except from his wife who knows about his revenge. She confronts him and asks him to leave the minister alone but Chillingworth is not ready to do so. Ahab uses maps to identify the whereabouts of Moby Dick, Chillingworth dwells in Boston and studies the behaviour of the men in the presence of Hester and her daughter in order to identify Hester’s partner. His method excludes nobody and it does not take him a long time to find out that Pearl is Dimmesdale’s daughter.

As the minister falls ill, Chillingworth finds a golden opportunity to live with Dimmesdale and break into the secrets of his heart, which the priest wants to withhold from all humans. Indeed Chillingworth is not in a hurry like Ahab, and he has a good command over his emotions. He uses his mind alone to perform his revenge. When he suspects that Dimmesdale is his rival because the latter vehemently defends Hester's right to keep Pearl, he does not rush. He needs to be absolutely sure, and so he keeps track of every step Dimmesdale takes by spying on him. Once his suspicions are confirmed, he tries even to break into Dimmesdale's heart. Dimmesdale considers this act a sin worse than his and Hester's. He confirms to Hester when they meet in the forest: "We are not, Hester, the worst sinners in the world. There is one worse than even the polluted priest! That old man's revenge has been blacker than my sin. He has violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart. Thou and I, Hester, never did so!" (SL, 166) In the long course of his revenge, Chillingworth undergoes a profound change, which is consistent with his description as a devil. He becomes darker and darker as he engages further in his evil project. Chillingworth's revenge knows no limits. He knows that he is slowly killing Dimmesdale and he is happy to do that. There are even some indications that he is trying to kill Dimmesdale by giving him some poisonous herbs in the form of medicine.

The enemies of Chillingworth and Ahab are equally interesting as topics of study. Dimmesdale's physical weakness is contrasted with the grandness of the whale. The whale lives harmoniously with its natural habitat. Dimmesdale is miserable in his parish for he has violated the law which he preaches on daily basis. Considering the way Dimmesdale and Chillingworth are presented in *The Scarlet Letter*, one might conclude that the text enlists more sympathy for Dimmesdale. Chillingworth is portrayed as an evil, and the reader is not really persuaded to sympathise with him, though his case as a husband who is coming to join his wife after a long separation, and as a husband who gets shocked by the fact that he has been betrayed by his wife allows for a great deal of sympathy. Indeed, the reader is led to sympathise with Dimmesdale because he is presented as a pitiable person. The emphasis is on Dimmesdale's physical weakness and his guilt-stricken conscience, despite the fact that he embraces the tough Puritan ideology that forces Hester to wear the scarlet letter. Louise Desalvo explains that "instead of a persecuting angel, inspired by the wrath of the righteous, we are given the portrait of a humbler lover, a portrait of a man who beats himself with 'a bloody scourge', who punishes himself for hiding his sin, rather than a man who persecutes others." (Desalvo, 64) Hypocrisy is the major factor behind Dimmesdale's spiritual weakness, which becomes a physical weakness, too. This is aggravated by the fact that Dimmesdale is regarded as a moral hero in his parish. As the battle with Dimmesdale is a moral one, Chillingworth has the upper hand over Dimmesdale for seven years. It is only when Dimmesdale acts morally and confesses his sin that he can defeat Chillingworth.

The whale is not weak since it acts in accordance with the law of its nature. Dimmesdale has sinned, and he is to blame for leaving Hester to take all the blame alone. Can we blame the whale for transgressing the laws of nature? On the one hand the whale is an animal and we can not blame it for defending itself against hunters. On the other hand, the whale might be regarded as immoral because it kills people not to eat but for sport. This puts it in conflict with humanity and justifies Ahab's attempt, not only to hunt it but to *kill* it. Indeed the whale is represented as an evil, experienced fighter who has destroyed many ships.

By the end both Ahab and Chillingworth are defeated but not in the same way. The battles which Ahab and Chillingworth fight against their enemies take place within their enemies' territories and on their enemies' terms. As the whale inhabits the sea, the battle is fought in naval terms. On the surface level, the battle with the whale is against an antagonistic power and Ahab and his crew have to use all their skills to defeat the whale. On this level, Ahab loses the battle for he fails to avenge himself upon the whale and he himself is killed instead. This, however, should not exclude the moral dimension of the battle. The associations between Ahab and the mythical hero Prometheus are quite strong. On this level the battle is moral and the result does not matter as much as the noble aim behind it. Ahab wins morally for he has acted bravely and lost his life in order to eliminate the whale who threatens the welfare of mankind.

Chillingworth knows how to manipulate the religion of his victim, and he comes very close to achieving victory: the death of Arthur Dimmesdale without confessing his sin. Even when Dimmesdale tries to confess his sin before he dies, Chillingworth desperately tries to stop him. Chillingworth is not completely defeated for he has enjoyed seeing Dimmesdale writhe under the pain he has been inflicting upon him for years. Like Chillingworth, the whale plays psychologically with Ahab as it does not kill him on the first day, rather it keeps Ahab hoping that he can realise his purpose for three days. Chillingworth wins as he knows how to torment Dimmesdale by playing on his beliefs. Dimmesdale actually dies and on the material level Chillingworth has won for he has, in a way, killed the priest. But that is not what Chillingworth wants: he wants the priest to die with his sin not

unconfessed. Does Chillingworth believe in the Puritan concept of sin, then? Or does sin matter to him as far as it tortures his rival? Apparently Chillingworth believes in sin as Dimmesdale does, or at least he believes in it because it serves his purpose. As Chillingworth studies with a physician's eye the strong physical and spiritual effects of sin on the minister, it becomes real to him and it works upon him at the end for if he does not believe in sin, why is he then defeated? He is defeated because Dimmesdale has freed himself from his grip and died with a hope for salvation. This is what Chillingworth has been trying to prevent all the time.

In conclusion, *Moby Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter* present two interesting studies of the theme of revenge. Comparing the two novels from this perspective allows a better understanding of the novels. Though the two cases are different, there are many similarities. The differences are equally interesting. Both Ahab and Chillingworth begin their revenge schemes with what we might consider controversial motives. They, however, do not dwell long enough to examine their motives. What overwhelms them is the single idea of obtaining revenge upon their rivals at whatever price. The approaches they follow begin in secrecy, but later on Ahab declares an open war on Moby Dick; Chillingworth maintains his secrecy till the very end. Chillingworth's approach proves more successful as he comes very close to realising his aim. By the end both men fail to achieve their aims and in the meanwhile we are introduced to their rivals: Dimmesdale who is portrayed as weak, guilt-stricken minister, and Moby Dick which has grandeur, mystery and god-like attributes. Though *The Scarlet Letter* is full of symbolism and allows different ways of looking at its characters, the way Chillingworth is portrayed allows very little sympathy for him as he is made to appear like a devil. *Moby Dick*, complex as it is, allows several ways to look at both Ahab and Moby Dick. At the surface level, Ahab is enraged by an animal, but considering the dangers the whale presents, Ahab becomes a Prometheus as he takes it upon himself to face that danger. Attempting this great feat and losing his life in the attempt, Ahab is made a real hero.

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