



Journal of Social Sciences, Literature and Languages

## Journal of Social Sciences, Literature and Languages

Available online at [jssll.blue-ap.org](http://jssll.blue-ap.org)

©2020 JSSLL Journal. Vol. 1(1), pp. 10-13, 29 October, 2020

# The Correlation of Revenge with Racism: A psychoanalytic study of John Grisham's "A TIME TO KILL"

Lamiaa Ahmed Rasheed<sup>1\*</sup>, Alaa Ali Hasan<sup>2</sup> and Noora Mazin Shakir<sup>1</sup>

1. English Department-College of Education for Women-Tikrit University
2. Ministry of Education/ Saladin Directorate/ Iraq

Corresponding Author: Lamiaa Ahmed Rasheed

Received: 03 October, 2020

Accepted: 12 October, 2020

Published: 29 October, 2020

### ABSTRACT

The subject of revenge in John Grisham's *A time to kill* is correlated with the judicial racism and white oppression of the black community in America. The current study is counting upon Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation of the personality of the protagonist, Carl lee Hailey, who decides to pursue his own justice after the judicial system fails to convict the two men who raped his daughter and left her on the brink of death. When Carl lee kills the two white men in revenge for his daughter, a racist bomb explodes in the face of every black one at a time when the south considered blacks as second class citizens. The racial bigotry and white discrimination of the black American citizens also have an effect on the psychological state of Carl lee Hailey, and lead him to take his revenge for the two crimes: raping and racial persecution. This paper endeavors to prove that the revenge is a normal consequence of psychological feeling of persecution and disorders throughout analyzing the personality of Carl lee Hailey and the racial condition that he has encountered in his white society.

**Keywords:** *Revenge, Psychoanalytic theory, Racism, Carl lee Hailey, Judicial system, Racial oppression.*

©2020 JAAS Journal All rights reserved.

### INTRODUCTION

#### *The Adaption of Psychoanalytic Theory to the Interpreting of Revenge: Overview*

Generally speaking, revenge occurs when crimes are committed and laws and justice cannot punish the crimes doers so the injured take law into his hands and decides to take his revenge in spite of everything. Revenge theme touches on important day issues such as social issues of personal honor, the preservation of feudal lawlessness, and the political problem of tyranny and resistance. (Salingar 334)

According to the definition of Oxford English dictionary, revenge: is a desire and an act in which individuals replay to a wrong action by maleficence the trespasser, the person has "revenge in his heart", so this definition makes the revenge differs from any other offensives or aggressions (Schumann, and Ross 11-94). The adaption of revenge by people in order to retrieve justice is assumed to be psychologically useful. Revenge does not cancel the hurt, but it can retrieve the suffering balance between the trespasser and the victim. In addition to that, it can assist to retrieve the powerful balance between them. (Schumann and Ross 11-95). There is no doubt that many individuals like to respond to those who did wrong and expostulate him and one would certainly feel at ease if he breathes of his feelings of anger. Many interpretations are presented by some thinkers and writers to justify the action of revenge: Joel Feinberg "puts revenge in close company with blood lust" (Feinberg 103). Whereas, Robert Nozick argues that revenge is always personal in the sense consisting an enjoyment at the hardship of another and specific emotional tone. (Nozick 367)

Psychologically defined, revenge is a part of human behavior since the beginning of man's existence on the earth. There are some motives that lead to the revenge: the most prominent motive is that we look at the revenge as achieving justice and that is why we always feel desire of harming the one who outrages us. We often believe about the norm "must drink from the cup

itself". Another supreme motive is that, people psychologically believe that they are responsible for achieving the justice by their own hand not by the law so that we can find that the concept of revenge takes hold whenever the rule of law is weak.

While revenge is associated with the psychoanalysis, racism is also connected with it. Racism can be defined as the feeling of aversion of someone toward another believing that he is less than human due to his customs, language, place of birth, and skin of color. It pushes the person to make a judgment on the others not by their deeds, but by their semblance or appearance. Practicing racism leads the person to has inclination to be supposed as a criminal and difficulty achieve his right whether in society or in law

Literature has employed revenge throughout novels, dramas, and poetry. It has been a common theme in these literary devices. Although many of the cultures do not promote revenge an instrument of relieving the soul and of settling the struggles or the conflicts. The psychoanalytic theory is well appropriate of testing or analyzing the motives that push the character, especially the protagonist to take his or her revenge from the oppressors because the revenge is the exporter of revelation or inspiration for Freud. The purpose of using psychoanalysis in analyzing the characters is to monitor not just how the task in the novel, but to what range those character are psychologically persuasive or satisfying. (Siroala 3)

The psychoanalytic personality theory of Sigmund Freud is founded in (1856-1939) who was treating the psychopathology through using the dialogue between the patient and psychoanalyst. Freud is famous for his development theories and psychoanalysis, which are the nucleus for modern psychiatric methods that depend on the talking of the patient about his problems without any obstacles. His theories or approaches and his researches contribute to the treatment of many psychiatric diseases and in the interpretation of the behaviors of societies and of various cultures. Freud develops the psychoanalytical science which is a method used by the psychoanalyst to discover the patient's unconscious conflicts depending on his dreams and imaginations through the method of free associations. He has watered the dreams (the golden path to unconscious) and devises a free association method to get the patient to go on talking about his dreams and unleash his ideas unconditionally. (Kenny1-2)

According to Freud, psychoanalysis has two meanings: It is a method which is designed by Freud in order to treat the nervous or mental disorders. Second, it is a school or a system that is developed into various theories due to the use of "Psychoanalytical Therapy".

He believes that our mind contains two parts:

- The first part consists of three layers "Conscious, Pre-Conscious, and Sub-Conscious"
- The second part involves three ingredients "Id, the Ego and the Superego".

Freud believes that the Id is the essential part of our personality; it contains the sexual desire (libido). It is the only ingredient which is presented from our birth and it is from which "the Ego and Superego are evolved. He uses the Ego for the reason that he wants this word to refer to the sense of self, but then he refines it to refer to a set of psychic functions such as reality, control, judgment, testing and tolerance. The last part is the Superego. According to Freud, this part rules whether the actions are wrong or right. It governs our sense of guilt, wrong or right. It differs from the Id in that it endeavors to appear in a socially acceptable manner while the Id only needs "instant self-gratification". (Sharma, Sangma, and Shadap 6-12)

John Grisham in *Time to kill* applies the structures of psychoanalysis theory particularly Freudian structure of human personality: the Id, the Ego and the Superego. He also shows the inner conflict between these structures of personality. It is generally known that the Ego is the responsible for transacting with reality through which human being can achieve pleasure. Carl lee deals with the reality of raping his daughter by avenging from the rapists in order to relieve his soul from the psychological troubles that have caused to him a lot of suffering after raping his daughter, and also attain his pleasure paying no attention to the unpleasant consequences. The superego is the instances that we acquire either from the parents or from the society. Carl lee is not a bad man in his personality, but the society in which he lives and in which there is distinction between black and white Americans, leads him to be a murderer. (Pardita 4-5)

### ***The Correlation of Revenge with Racism in Grisham's A Time to Kill***

In all revengeful novels or plays, a crime such as the rape in Grisham's *A Time To Kill*, is committed for various reasons including the justice and the laws leave the criminal without punishing. The revenger thus decides to restore his rights and requite against the one who injures him without giving any respect or regard to the religion or to the law. In *A Time To Kill*, the revenger, Carl lee determines to have his vengeance by taking the law into his hands. Vengeance in this novel involves two types: the first is the result of a reaction towards the rapists from Carl lee, and the second is racism towards him because he is from a different color and here racism enters as a factor affecting the revenge (Simpson 138). Since, the word revenge has a connection or a relationship with psychoanalysis, the manifestations of anger of the patient and his expressions and his desire to display them, the psychoanalysis theory is applied to investigate the theme of a thirst for revenge. To make the readers understand the themes of his novel: revenge and racism, Grisham chooses Carl lee, a black American, as the protagonist, who suffers from racism and the control of the white American over the black ones pushes him to commit a murder in order to take his revenge.

The situation of his daughter's raping causes Carl lee's psychological collapse and the only way of thinking that controls on his mind is how to avenge for and restore his honest no matter how the consequences will be:

*I don't know what I'd do. I don't know what I'd do." Let me ask you this. If it was your little girl, and if it was two niggers, and you could get your hands on them, what would you Do? "Kill them." Carl Lee smiled, then laughed "I'm sure you would. (Grisham 67-68)*

Here, the conversation is between the lawyer, Jake Brigance and Carl lee Hailey, the father of the girl, reflects the idea of revenge that becomes the main anchor for Carl lee. Generally speaking, revenge is the most complex human impulses because the notion of revenge hits the mind and breaks the individual to cause his psychological illness. His seeking for revenge is the result of thinking that revenge will help him to achieve justice and that is why the desire to harm someone exposed the hidden oppression of his psyche.

One of the main reasons that make the individual think about revenge is that it is considered to be as an effective method of deterrence and that is what happens with Carl lee. When his daughter is raped he cannot psychologically stand this and takes the revenge as an effective method of deterrence and that is why when the lawyer asked him, he ironically smiled and laughed intending that he will take his revenge at all.

*Are you ready to defend another member of my family ? Don't do it, Carl Lee. It's not worth it. What if you're found guilty and they give you the electric chair? What about your children? Who'll look after them?" I have no choice, Jake. I'll never sleep till those two are dead. I owe it to my little girl, I owe it to myself, and I owe it to my people. It'll be done." (Grisham 68)*

The importance of this speech mirrors the embodiment of revenge by which Carl lee had already took his decision to take his revenge. According to Freud, one of the psychological symptoms for showing if the person is suffering psychologically is the lack of sleep. Carl lee says that he cannot sleep peacefully until he sees the death of these two men who raped his daughter. People think that revenge will help them to overcome the abuse and the sense of oppression. Carl lee thinks that revenge can psychologically transcend the sense of oppression and the abuse that caused to him by the raping of his daughter.

"Willard asked Cobb if he thought she was dead. Cobb opened another beer and explained that she was not dead because niggers generally could not be killed by kicking and beating and raping. It took much more, something like a knife or a gun or a rope to dispose of nigger" (Grisham 4). This conversation between the two white rapists, Willard and Cobb, indicates that the writer of the novel wants to draw the attention of his readers to white racism and their persecution of the black community. Accordingly, both revenge and racism are connected with each other, revenge comes as a result of the kidnapping (rape) and of the racism, something related to the psyche. As known that there is a great distinction between White and black Americans at that time to the point that the two white Americans rapes the black girl, Tonya, paying no attention to her honor even they put in their mind that the niggers cannot be killed whether by raping, beating or by kicking. These racial distinctions psychologically and deeply affect the black people pushing them to use violence means such as revenge in order to regain their consideration.

*I'm white, and this is a white county. With a little luck I could get and all-white, which will naturally sympathetic. This is not New York or California. A man's supposed to protect his family. A jury would eat it up. (Grisham 69)*

In his book, "The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People", Boyer mentions that "miscarriage of justice is a part of the reality of American life blacks" (Boyer 908). Throughout reading *A Time to Kill*, it is apparent and evident that justice for niggers is impossible. The lawyer Jake thinks that it is not easy for the black man, Carl lee, to get his liberty for the reason that he is black not white American.

This speech reflects the idea of racism when the lawyer informs him that if he is white American, the case will be different. Jake says to Carl lee that the Ku Klux Klan's existence influences the decision of jury. If they free Carl lee, the Klan will hurt them and their family. The Klan does not harm Carl lee directly or threat him, but by intimidating the juror, they wish that they can achieve their aims. Grisham wants to display the fact that the whites cannot psychologically be comfortable if they see that the blacks enjoy the absolute freedom.

After the raping accident, Carl lee tells the lawyer about his policy in taking his revenge from the two rapists and when Carl lee takes his revenge by his own hand, Jake claims that he will defends him in the trail. From the moment that he declares that he will be his lawyer; he faces and receives many blusters or threats. The first one was from his secretary; he declares that he will hurt his family in addition to harming himself:

They weren't really obscene. They were threatening. They threatened me because I work for you. Said I'd be sorry because I worked for a nigger lover. The ones here threaten to harm you and your family. I'm just scared. (Grisham 146)

This shows that racism is directed towards anyone who stands with and defends the black people or even be his friend because the white Americans will scorn him and if he does not give up his situation they will harm him or at least harm his family and that is what really occurs with Jake when he decides to defend Carl lee in the court. This threat reflects that there are some reasons that cause this racism or we can call it the catalysts of racial self that affected psychologically on the people: greed and exploitation, lack of awareness of the concept of racism, and the culture and religion. In this novel, the white characters exploit the niggers ignoring their sense and the consequences psychological effects.

Ozzie trapped his left palm with the stick and grinned at Cobb. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say will be used against you in court. You have the right to a lawyer. If you can't afford one, the state 'll furnish one. Any questions?" Yeah, what time is it?"

"Time to go to jail, big man" "Go to hell, nigger. (Grisham 24-25)

Ozzie Walls, who was the only black sheriff in Mississippi and was loved by the blacks because he was one of their own, represents another example of racism as he was always subjected to ridicule, insult and cursing by whites. When he arrested Cobb he cursed him and reminded him of his origins and mocks the niggers considering them inferior to the whites. The racism is based on the thought or belief that the human groups should be treated according to their appearances and that is what happened between Ozzie and Cobb. If Ozzie is a white American not a black one, Cobb will treat him differently. Racism causes serious psychological conflicts to the people making them follow the wrong way as Carl lee does when he thinks about revenge.

Crespino presents a similar reading about racism with a white racial hero which helps the public to conceptualize race problems in an individual, moralistic sense. If racism only exists on an individual basis, then racial reform can only take place through individual moral reforms, not through social or structural changes that could challenge the legal, the economic or political statue (9-29). This proves that racism is everywhere and draws attention to the necessity of uniting and caring about the real issue of racism and the people involved in racial bigotry and being harmed due to their color or race. Racism was so extreme that at the end of the story a lot of people were killed because they favored a certain party and there was a huge war between the blacks and the whites.

### Conclusion

This paper concludes that revenge is one of those intense feelings that come up from every single human being oppressed and persecuted in a society that offers him no justice or equality. Revenge can negatively affect the individual's mind and psychology and is linked to the circumstances surrounding him. Jake and Carl Lee fight bravely to get their rights in a racial society where laws and rules are applied against their community. *A Time to Kill* illustrates apparently the psychological consequences of persecution due to color or race on the individuals who can retrieve inner comfort and peace through taking revenge from the oppressors. Carl lee is an example of a revenger who wishes to attain justice through murdering the white rappers who wronged him and his daughter just because they are niggers. John Grisham succeeds in *A Time To Kill* to deliver a message that the racial intolerance is one of the reasons that led to revenge.

### REFERENCES

- Boyer, Paul, S. *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*. Toronto: D. C., Health and Company, 1990.
- Crespino, Joseph. *The Strange Career of Atticus Finch Southern Cultures*, 2000.
- Durham, M.S. *The Therapist's Encounters with Revenge and Forgiveness*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publisher, 2000.
- Feinberg, Joel. *Doing and Deserving*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.
- Grisham, John. *A Time To Kill*. London: British Library, 1989.
- Kenny, Theadora, Dianna. *Freud Sigmund*. Australia: The University of Sydney, Sidney NSW, 2019.
- Miles, Robert. *A Dictionary of Cultural & Critical Theory*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publisher, 1996.
- Ningrum, Septi, Reksiana. *The Reflection of the Practice of Racism in America in John Grisham's A Time To Kill*. Yogyakarta: Yogyakarta press, 2011.
- Nozick, Robert. *Philosophical Explanations*. United State: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- Pardita, Febriani, Gitti. "Revenge Reflected in John Grisham" *The Racketeer* (2012). Surakarta: Muhammadiyah University, 2016.
- Salingar, G.L. *Touneur and Tragedy of Revenge*. Harmond Worth: Penguin Books, 1955.
- Schumann, Karina and Ross, Michael. *The Benefits, Costs, and Paradox of Revenge*. University of Waterloo, 2010.
- Simpson, Percy. *Studies in Elizabethan Drama*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955.
- Sirola, Laura. *A Psychoanalytic Reading of Revenge in Hamlet and in the Harry Potter Series*. University of Tampere, 2013.
- <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/vert-fut-39583620>
- <https://www.gradesaver.com/a-time-to-kill/study-guide/analysis>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/24/movies/film-review-a-father-s-revenge-for-his-child-s-rape.html>