

## Chapter 4

# Vengeance Chronicles: An In-Depth Exploration of Park Chan-wook's Trilogy

**Kyoung-suk Sung**

*Max-Planck Institute for Human Development, Germany*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper seeks to conduct an in-depth analysis of the central theme of revenge within Park Chan-wook's renowned Vengeance Trilogy, consisting of *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002), *Old Boy* (2003), and *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* (2005). Beyond its narrative role, revenge takes on a dynamic and multifaceted persona, intricately shaping characters, settings, motivations, and cinematic language. From the stark realism of *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* to the chaotic descent in *Old Boy* and the philosophical nuances in *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*, Park guides audiences through a spectrum of emotions. Symbolic use of spaces, from confined environments to symbolic realms, enriches storytelling, emphasizing bipolar power dynamics in imprisonment and revenge. The examination of violence as a narrative tool, interwoven with black humor and alienation effects, adds complexity. This study contributes to the broader exploration of revenge in cinema, enhancing understanding of Park Chan-wook's cinematic style and positioning him as a cultural agent in auteur theory.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Revenge, an enduring and potent human emotion, has woven its narrative threads for centuries, serving as both a propellant force and a complex character. Few directors have explored the depths of revenge with the artistry and intensity seen in Park Chan-wook's acclaimed Vengeance Trilogy, comprising *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002), *Old Boy* (2003), and *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* (2005). This chapter penetrates the essence of vengeance, acknowledging it not solely as a storytelling tool but as a pivotal and authoritative force within Park's trilogy. Park, a prominent figure in the Korean film industry during the so-called renaissance from 1997-2006 (Sung, 2023, p. 142), stands out as a significant Auteur film director. Renowned for his signature style and thematic exploration of revenge, forgiveness, the

## **Vengeance Chronicles**

meaning of violence, and trauma (Chang, 2019, p. 158-159), Park's directorial contributions have left an indelible mark on Korean cinema.

Park Chan-wook's Vengeance Trilogy stands as a pinnacle in contemporary cinema, transforming revenge into a shaping force for characters, settings, and motivations. Cinematography and narrative act as primary conduits, intricately expressing the character of revenge through visual and auditory design elements. This exploration critically analyzes how Park portrays and evolves revenge within his distinctive auteur style. The chapter scrutinizes the interplay between cinematography and narrative, emphasizing revenge as a driving force depicted through cinematic elements such as figure, narrative structure, music, color, and motive. Grounded in a comprehensive theoretical framework spanning film studies, psychology, cultural studies, and emotion studies, the analysis integrates narrative theory, film aesthetics, and psychological insights. By dissecting the nuanced layers of revenge across the trilogy, this exploration embarks on a cinematic journey into the heart of vengeance, unraveling the layers of emotion, morality, and narrative brilliance defining Park Chan-wook's Vengeance Trilogy (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008).

This chapter critically examines how Park Chan-wook masterfully portrays and evolves revenge as a cinematic character within his distinct auteur style. The analysis delves into the dynamic interplay between cinematography and narrative, emphasizing revenge as a driving force across the trilogy. Cinematic elements such as figure, narrative structure, music, color, and motive will be scrutinized to unravel the profound and multifaceted emotion of revenge. The exploration utilizes a comprehensive theoretical framework, integrating film studies, psychology, cultural studies, and emotion studies, drawing from narrative theory, film aesthetics, and psychological insights. Grounded in this theoretical framework, the chapter dissects the nuanced layers of revenge across the trilogy, examining its origins and societal implications. This cinematic journey probes the intricate layers of emotion, morality, and narrative brilliance that define Park Chan-wook's Vengeance Trilogy.

## **BACKGROUND**

This chapter employs a meticulous theoretical framework, synthesizing concepts from film studies, psychology, and cultural studies, to intricately analyze the representation of revenge in Park Chan-wook's Vengeance Trilogy. At the core of this analytical approach lies narrative theory, a foundational tool for storytelling analysis that provides valuable insights into the integration of revenge within the trilogy's narrative structure, encompassing critical aspects such as plot structure, character development, and narrative arcs. Guided by this framework, the examination extends to the evolution of revenge across the three films and its profound impact on the overall narrative trajectory.

The first film of Park's trilogy *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002) follows the story of a wealthy businessman who seeks revenge for the death of his daughter who is kidnapped by a deaf-mute man who is also in the circle of revenge after the death of his sister. In the second film *Old Boy* (2003), a man is inexplicably imprisoned for 15 years and then released, prompting him to seek vengeance against those responsible for his captivity. The story takes unexpected twists and turns, exploring themes of revenge, redemption, and moral ambiguity. The final installment of the trilogy *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* (2005) follows a woman who is released from prison after serving time for a crime she did not commit. Determined to seek revenge against the true perpetrator, she meticulously plans her retaliation while grappling with the complexities of morality and justice.

18 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/vengeance-chronicles/350902](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/vengeance-chronicles/350902)

## Related Content

---

### **It Is Time to Go Public: Public Sociology and Community Policing in Nigeria**

Aminu Musa Audu (2022). *International Journal of Public Sociology and Socioterapy* (pp. 1-13).

[www.irma-international.org/article/it-is-time-to-go-public/314598](http://www.irma-international.org/article/it-is-time-to-go-public/314598)

### **Impact of Training and Development on Employee Performance: A Study of Libyan Bank**

Alsharif S. Abogsesaand Geetanjali Kaushik (2017). *International Journal of Civic Engagement and Social Change* (pp. 53-68).

[www.irma-international.org/article/impact-of-training-and-development-on-employee-performance/198956](http://www.irma-international.org/article/impact-of-training-and-development-on-employee-performance/198956)

### **The Relentless Memorial: Environmental Melancholia and Collective Social Mania**

Regan Suzanne Rosburg (2017). *International Journal of Civic Engagement and Social Change* (pp. 23-44).

[www.irma-international.org/article/the-relentless-memorial/183699](http://www.irma-international.org/article/the-relentless-memorial/183699)

### **Communication as Normative Dialogue**

Samuel Peleg (2019). *Intercultural and Interfaith Dialogues for Global Peacebuilding and Stability* (pp. 323-351).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/communication-as-normative-dialogue/228834](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/communication-as-normative-dialogue/228834)

### **Consumer Behavior Across Cultures and Markets**

André Sousa Carvalho, Tatiana Filipa Pereira Sanguinho, Marisa Alcobia Tavares, Isabel Maria Gomes Machado, Mariia Martianova, Jorge Simõesand Ana Isabel Virgolino (2026). *International Branding and Consumer Behavior Across Cultures* (pp. 103-122).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/consumer-behavior-across-cultures-and-markets/412335](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/consumer-behavior-across-cultures-and-markets/412335)