Justifiable Retribution

Women and payback in Stephen King's "Big Driver" and "A Good Marriage"

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Abstract.

This study looks into justifiability of payback in two of Stephen King's novellas "Big Driver" and "A Good Marriage" that center around violence against women. The purpose of this research is to find out, whether the cathartic feeling that most consumers of horror literature experience holds up to scrutiny through moral and ethical standards.

This study is conducted through several close readings of the source materials and their adaptations to different moral theories, namely to *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*.

The main findings of the study are that the in relation to these texts catharsis and moral justifiability do correlate, but that neither story fulfils all of the criteria for moral justifiability on the *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* scales, and therefore need to be supplemented by moral mandate and the ethical principle of less harm.

Further research could be conducted as a reader response study to see, whether the results could be generalized to a larger reading public.

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1   Introduction

Stephen King's collection of novellas, *Full Dark, No Stars* was first published in November 2010 by Scribner. It consists of four novellas that all examine revenge from different viewpoints. I have chosen two of these novellas for this study: "Big Driver" and "A Good Marriage". I chose these two novellas, as they both have female protagonists, and both revolve around the theme of violence against women. "1922" is also centered on violence against women, but it is a supernatural story, while "Big Driver" and "A Good Marriage" are non-supernatural. "Fair Extension" on the other had has a male protagonist and is supernatural, so it also does not fit the framework I have for this study.

Why choose stories with female protagonists then? Lesel Dawson (2018, 1) writes that "revenge is frequently depicted as a man's job: women incite, and men act, performing the killings that establish their masculinity and protect their honor". She continues:

> Scholars are divided as to whether female avengers should be interpreted as honorary men, heroes in their own right, monstrous inversions of gender norms, or conduits through which male subjectivity is formed. Implicit in these debates are also questions about how revenge plots impact on wider constructions of gender, and whether such narratives reinforce conservative gender roles, interrogate the 'masculine' values that society prizes, or establish new ways of conceptualizing women and men. (Dawson 2018, 2)

These issues are at the heart of what I want to study in both "Big Driver" and "A Good Marriage". According to Lucy A. Hawke the American society "defined marriage gender roles as one where the husband worked outside the home and, two, where the mother stayed at home caring for the household duties and children" (Hawke 2007, 70). She further writes that the rise of the family-consumer ecology brought even more segregation to the marriage. The husband's role in the marriage was to go out into the world, while the wife was the care provider, who sew clothes and nursed the family (Hawke 2007, 71). She quotes William H. Lockhart, who states that "the ideal society would be full of strong traditional intact families with the fathers being full-time breadwinners, the wives maintaining order in the households, and the children happily submissive" (Lockhart in Hawke 2007, 71).

Even today, some American perpetuate these outdated gender roles. According to Isabella Snow (2022), American women are raised to be friendly and helpful, "raised to help whenever we can", and that they like strong men, who can also show their sensitive side

(Snow 2022). 'Personal development coach' James Michael Sama (2016) lists several traits that make a woman 'good', namely honesty and genuineness, empathy, consistency, putting in effort for the man, carrying herself with class and so on. While all of these sound positively archaic and stereotypical, or at least very 1950s to a liberal European woman such as myself, the websites where these claims are made are far from ancient. I am very interested in whether King's protagonists challenge these conservative gender roles and if they do, how.

I will also look at revenge, retribution, and their justifiability in the texts by putting them through a set of principles called *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. In addition to these principles, which will be presented in chapter 3, I will apply the concept of 'moral mandate' and the ethical principle of least harm. It is, however, worth noting that vigilantism is always illegal and will lead to legal repercussions (Peeler 2019). Therefore, I will not assess the legality of the characters' actions. I am solely interested in the moral justifiability their actions.

I have collected the data over several times of close reading the primary source material, Stephen King's "A Good Marriage" and "Big Driver". The edition I have used is the 2011 paperback by Pocket Books. Any Italics in direct quotes are by King, and have been included as such. Through thorough contemplation and literary evidence, I will demonstrate that in both texts the retribution enacted by the female protagonists is justifiable as well as in accordance with both moral mandates of the characters and the principle of less harm.

This study is divided into five chapters, first of which is an overview of my primary materials. I have chosen to include lengthy synopses of both texts, as I feel it is crucial for understanding my theorizing and reasoning behind the conclusion. The third chapter focuses on the theory and includes a variety of viewpoints previous research on revenge has presented. These are followed by the analysis chapter and conclusion, respectively. A full bibliography is attached to the end of this study.

As the themes of the novellas are potentially triggering, reader discretion is advised. Some descriptions of events and language may be disturbing.

2   Full Dark, No Stars

Stephen King (born 1947 in Portland, Maine) is an author, who hardly needs introduction. His first professional short story sale "The Glass Floor" took place in 1967 (T. King 2022). After that, he has been a very productive author. This study's focus, *Full Dark, No Stars* is his 1009th published work (ibid.). The collection contains four different novellas, all of which are centered around the theme of revenge. While all of the novellas have the same theme, it is approached differently in all of them, through different protagonists. Both of the two novellas I have chosen as subject of this study have sexual violence as the starting point retribution.

2.1   "Big Driver", synopsis

Big Driver is a violent, disturbing story that features eight characters, some of them corporeal and some imaginary. The corporeal characters are Tess, the protagonist; Al 'Big Driver' Strehlke, Les (Lester) 'Little Driver' Strehlke and Ramona Norville (Al & Les's mother), Betsy Neal, who works at the Stagger Inn, and Patsy McClain, Tess's neighbor. The imaginary characters are Tom the navigation device and Doreen Marquis 'the doyenne of The Knitting Society' (King 2011, 324; further page references marked with BD), the head detective of the novels Tess herself wrote for living. Tom and Doreen advice and discuss with Tess throughout the text, but their voices are all in Tess's head. The characters, who are both corporeal and imaginary are Fritzy, Tess's cat and Goober, Al's dog. They both exist, but only talk in Tess's head. Occasionally Tess can also hear her mother's voice, but she does not feature prominently in the story.

The story begins as Tess has accepted a compensated speaking engagement with Books & Brown Baggers in Chicopee. The invitation came from Ramona, who was the head librarian at the Chicopee Public Library, and the President of Books & Brown Baggers. The event is only about 60 miles away from where Tess lives, so even though it is last minute, Tess accepts. When Tess arrives in Chicopee and is greeted by Ramona, she is described as being quite masculine,

a broad-shouldered, heavy-breasted jovial woman of sixty or so with flushed cheeks, a Marine haircut, and a take-no-prisoners handshake. […] Instead of complimenting her on her earrings, she asked her a man's question: had Tess come by the 84? (BD, 200)

This very question sets the stage for the future events, which define Tess's fate.

The speaking engagement itself is uneventful. Afterwards, as Tess is invited to Ramona's office for a cup of coffee, Ramona tells her of a 'shortcut' that would save Tess "tons of time and aggravation" (BD, 204–05). After Tess had driven about twelve or so miles on Stagg Road, where Ramona had directed her, she

saw, – too late – several large, splintered pieces of wood scattered across the road. There were rusty nails jutting from many of them. […] There was a *clack-thump-thud* beneath her as chunks of wood flew up against the undercarriage, and then her trusty Expedition began pogoing up and down and pulling to the left, like a horse that has gone lame […] Tess pulled into an old, abandoned store that had an advert for something with a slogan "YOU LIKE IT IT LIKES YOU". (BD, 207; 211)

Her cellphone had no signal, and then she heard a muffled engine approaching. The old van had the words ZOMBIE BAKERS on the side. The Zombie Bakers did not notice Tess, and she went to pick the mess off the road. As she was picking the debris, she thought for the first time all the horror movies that she had seen: "But of course they all had nails, she thought. In a mystery – or a horror movie – that wouldn't constitute carelessness; that would constitute a plan. A trap, in fact" (BD, 210). She wasn't wrong: "An old Ford F-150 with a bad blue paintjob and Bondo around the headlights" finally rolls to the overgrown parking lot, and out of it climbs a man (BD, 212)

The guy wasn't big, she'd been wrong about that. The guy was a giant. He had to go six-six, but head-to-foot was only part of it. He was deep in the belly, thick in the thighs, and as wide as a doorway. (ibid.)

Tess thinks the giant of a man will help her change her busted tire, and the man at first pretends to. As he is searching for Tess's spare tire from the back of her Ford Expedition, Tess notices that his truck had not completely switched off. As she goes to switch his truck off, she sees "several pieces of wood scattered across the ribbed and rusty metal" of the truck's bed (BD, 214). At this point, Tess notices the giant man behind her. "Please don't kill me" Tess has time to say, before the man punches her unconscious (BD, 215):

> [Tess] came to in a large shadowy room that smelled of damp wood, ancient coffee, and prehistoric pickles. […] She was naked from the waist down, and he was raping her. […] He was raping her while golden dust motes twirled lazily in the slanting afternoon sun. […] He had taken her underpants; she could see them frothing from the pocket in the bib of his overalls. (BD, 216)

Tess regained consciousness once during the ordeal, but the assailant punched her again, and she passed out. When she woke up for the second time, she was carried by the rapist, who had tried to strangle her to death. "He hadn't choked her quite enough to kill her, but she was wearing the shape of his hands like a necklace, palms in front, fingers on the sides and the nape of her neck" (BD, 218). Thankfully the assailant never realizes Tess is still alive, and when he stuffs her into a culvert and leaves her there, she was afraid to move for a long time. As Tess finally plucks up the courage to try and escape the culvert, she sees what she is sharing it with.

> One of the corpses was not much more than a skeleton (stretching out bony hands as if in supplication), but there was still enough hair left on its head to make Tess all but certain it was a corpse of a woman. The other might have been a badly defaced mannequin, except for the bulging eyes and protruding tongue. This body was fresher, but the animals had been at it and even in the dark Tess could see the grin of the dead woman's teeth. […] Screaming hoarsely, Tess backed out of the culvert and bolted to her feet, her clothes soaked to her body from the waist up. (BD, 223–24)

From this moment, Tess's fight for survival begins. She starts walking, wrapped in an old piece of carpet. She has no plan but comes up with one when she arrives in the town of Colewich. She would call the limo service to take her home. When she finally arrives at the roadhouse, The Stagger Inn, she discovers there are too many people there for her to feel comfortable to go and ask for help: "He could be there. Hadn't he been capering around her at one point, singing a Rolling Stones song in his awful tuneless voice?" (BD, 235). She continues walking and "saw something beautiful: a Gas & Dash with two pay telephones on the cinderblock wall between the restrooms" (BD, 237). Despite being afraid for her life, Tess manages to call the limo company and have them drive her home. Only after she was safely indoors, she could relax a little:

> Then she was inside and Fritzy was twining anxiously around her feet, wanting to be picked up and stroked, wanting to be fed. Tess did those things, but first she locked the front door behind her, then set the burglar alarm for the first time in months. When she saw ARMED flash in the little green window above the keypad, she at last began to feel something like her true self. (BD, 244)

Throughout this whole ordeal Tess had thought about the headlines tabloids would write:

> 'Willow Grove' scribe raped after the lecture' […] They wouldn't mention […] how she was dressed in sensible – almost dowdy – business attire when she was assaulted; those details didn't fit the kind of story the tabloids liked to sell. (BD, 232)

She would get questions about whether she would write about the incident.

> The thought of telling the police made her skin burn, even out here, alone in the dark. […] The world would know a crazy, grinning giant had shot his load inside of the Willow Grove Scribe. Even the fact that he had taken her underwear as a souvenir might come out. (BD, 233–34)

Now that she was at home, she took out her gun, a Smith & Wesson .38 model called 'Lemon Squeezer'. It had been gathering dust in the closet, but now Tess loaded it, "feeling better, safer with each filled chamber" (BD, 245–46). As she assesses her injuries, the thought of publicity comes to her mind again:

> What she knew was that if she went to her doctor, her misfortune really could become public property. […] 'It's not that I have anything to be ashamed about' she whispered at the woman in the mirror. The New Woman with the crooked nose and the puffy lips. […] But public exposure sure would make her ashamed. She would be naked. A naked victim. (BD, 247; 249–50)

To her neighbor, Patsy McClain, Tess decided to pretend that she had tripped over her cat and fallen down the stairs. She starts to sleep with the Lemon Squeezer nearby, thinking about the repercussions of the attack, thinking about the other women who he had attacked and would in all likelihood attack in the future. At first Tess thinks about making an anonymous phone call to the police, to expose the giant for his crimes. However, when she gets a call that her car is at the parking lot of Stagger Inn and has to go back to pick it up, she starts talking to Betsy Neal, the barmaid. It is then that she learns about the identity of the giant – that he is Big Driver, whose real name is "'Al Something-Polish'" and that "'he and his brother own a trucking company. Hawkline, […] or maybe Eagle Line. Something with a bird in it, anyway'" (BD, 270). Tess asks that Betsy does not mention talking to her, if she sees Big Driver around.

As she drives back to the Gas & Dash and is at the payphones ready to call the police,

> she visualized a piñata and a woman poised to hit it with a stick. Soon everything would come tumbling out. Her friends and associates would know she had been raped. Patsy McClain would know the story about stumbling over Fritzy in the dark was a shame-driven lie … and that Tess hadn't trusted her enough to tell the truth. But those weren't the main things. […] "What's in it for me?" she asked. (BD, 27273)

At this point Tess starts to think about payback. She starts searching for information on Ramona Norville on the Internet, and eventually finds out she is the giant's mother. She finds their company, Red Hawk Trucking, and finds out the giant's name was Al Strehlke. Tess becomes more and more enraged the more she finds out about the Strehlkes. She learns that Al has a brother, Les, and that their father died suddenly by committing a suicide "over some trouble his older boy had been in" (BD, 286–87).

Tess starts forming a plan. In the beginning she is only thinking about visiting Ramona Norville to confront her about what happened to her. She rents movies about revenge and a couple of days after the assault, she is ready. She arms herself with a Swiss army knife, the Lemon Squeezer and a butcher's knife and goes out.

Turns out Ramona knew exactly, where she had sent Tess. Even though she tries to deny it, Tess sees her diamond earrings on in a cut-glass dish. Ramona even confesses to all this when she thinks she has the upper hand, but Tess first stabs her in the stomach and then shoots her in the head. After dealing with Ramona, she finds out the addresses for both Al 'Big Driver' Strehlke and Les 'Little Driver' Strehlke.

Tess is waiting for Al as he pulls up in his yard in his banged-up Ford F-150, and quickly gets inside through the passenger door:

> She has just seconds to register the slightly broader face and lines around the mouth and eyes that hadn't been there on Friday afternoon. But even as she was registering these things, the Lemon Squeezer barked twice in her hand. The first bullet punctured Strehlke's throat, just below the chin. The second one opened a black hole above his bushy right eyebrow and shattered the driver's side window. (BD, 319)

When Tess sees Al's pockmarked face, she realizes that she has just killed the wrong brother. At this point Tess considers shooting herself, but does not, as she feels she has an obligation "to the women in the pipe, and all other women who might join them if Les Strehlke escaped" (BD, 325). She eventually figures out that the real culprit was Les all along, using his brother's hat, ring, and truck to make himself look like the Big Driver. She then drives Big Driver's truck, wearing Big Driver's cap – the same one Les had worn when he raped her and left her to die – to Little Driver's house:

> As she entered Les Strehlke's living room and he saw her, his mouth dropped open, and then his entire face froze. The can of beer he was holding dropped from his hand and fell into his lap, spraying foam onto his only article of clothing, a pair of yellowing Jockey shorts. […] "You're dead," he whispered. "No," Tess

replied. She put the barrel of the Lemon Squeezer against the side of his head. He made one feeble effort to grab her wrist, but it was far too little and much too late. "That's you". (BD, 327–28)

After a while, Tess goes back to Big Driver's house. There she finds, through evidence, that the Big Driver had known about his brother's little hobby, just like their mother did. Her guilt about shooting him abates, and she ties the one last loose end by talking to Betsy Neal, who promises not to give her up, as she, too had suffered sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather. At the end, Tess drives back home.

2.2 "A Good Marriage", synopsis

The protagonist of "A Good Marriage" is Darcellen 'Darcy' Madsen Anderson. She is a middle-aged stay at home wife with grown, twentysomething children, who have already moved out of their childhood home. She is very much 'a good American woman', she helps her husband with his business, attends a book club and a knitting club, and is secure in her marriage. She is married to Robert 'Bob' Anderson, an accountant, a numismatist, and a Cub Scouts' leader, who has been a good father to their children, never behaving oddly or violently.

Darcy finds out about Bob's 'hobby' by accident when she goes to the garage to fetch batteries for the TV remote. She stubs her toe on something peeking from underneath the worktable. That something turns out to be a box of Darcy's old catalogues, under which she finds several hardcore bondage magazines, something she tries to pass off as "male investigation" (King 2011, 422; further page references marked with GM). As she's pushing the box of catalogues back underneath the worktable, she pushes it too far and there is a "clunking" sound (GM, 425). At first Darcy does not want to know what causes that sound, but already later that same day she decided to go back and investigate what had caused the sound. This is one of the pivotal moments of the story.

> Darcy got down on her knees, pushed the box of catalogues to one side, and shone the light under the worktable. For a moment she didn't understand what she was seeing: two lines of darkness interrupting the smooth baseboard, one slightly fatter than the other. Then a thread of disquiet formed in her midsection, stretching from the middle of her breastbone down to the pit of her stomach. It was a hiding place. (GM, 429)

Darcy finding the hiding place is the moment when her whole life starts to unravel. In there she finds a box she has gifted Bob years ago for his birthday to store cufflinks. In the box Darcy finds three cards: a Red Cross blood donor's card, a North Conway Library card, and a New Hampshire driver's license, all belonging to a Marjorie Duvall (GM, 431–32). Darcy vaguely remembers seeing Marjorie Duvall's picture somewhere, and when she goes to her computer to check google her, she finds a headline: "New Hampshire woman may have been 'Beadie's' 11th victim" (GM, 442). Her body had been found in a ravine six miles from her house. (GM, 443).

Online Darcy finds a complete timeline of Beadie's murders: "The first had occurred in 1977. There had been two in 1978, another in 1980, and then two more in 1981" (GM, 443). All of the murders had happened in different states: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont. After 1981 the murders had stopped for sixteen years. Then they had started again in August of 1997. Beadie's modus operandi was to torture the women, mostly with his teeth, to rape or sexually molest them, to kill them, and to send their identification to some branch of the police weeks or months later (GM, 445).

After finding the results Darcy is violently sick and wonders what to do. She thinks about calling the police, but what eventually stops her is the thought that her children, one of whom had just started a business and the other getting married, would be dragged into the mire if Bob was exposed as Beadie. She also thinks about the Cub Scouts, and about killing herself. Her dilemma was extremely difficult:

> What if she was right? Wouldn't her death free Bob to kill more, because he no longer had to lead so deep a double life? Darcy wasn't sure she believed in a conscious existence after death, but what if there was one? And what if she were confronted there not by Edenic green fields and rivers of plenty but by a ghastly receiving line of strangled women branded by her husband's teeth, all accusing her of causing their deaths by taking the easy way out herself? And by ignoring what she had found (if such a thing were even possible, which she didn't believe for a minute), wouldn't the accusation be true? Did she really think she could condemn more women to horrible deaths just so her daughter could have a nice June wedding? (GM, 449)

When Bob calls her, as he always does from his trips, he immediately hears in Darcy's voice that something is wrong. "'You sound funny', he said. 'All thick in the voice. Is everything okay, sweetie?'" (GM, 437). Darcy comes up with a quick lie, that she was thinking about her deceased sister Brandolyn, and when Bob suggests he would skip going to Burlington and

instead head home, she tries to convince him not to. She is afraid he would know she had stumbled upon his secret:

> That he had known (and at once! at *once*!) that something was wrong with her was bad. That she needed to lie about what the trouble was – ah, that was worse. She closed her eyes, saw Bad Bitch Brenda[1] screaming inside the black hood, and opened them again. (GM, 439)

She thinks she has convinced Bob to continue his trip as planned and plagued by all these thoughts about Beadie and his victims, starts to do research. She has decades worth of appointment books saved, and she begins to cross-reference Bob's business trips to the murders:

> She worked carefully and stopped often to double-check. […T]he correlations she found for the Beadie murders in 1980 and 1981 were clear and undeniable. He had been traveling at the right times and in the right areas. (GM, 452)

Darcy wakes up at quarter to three in the morning to "a cat […] stroking her cheek with a velvet paw" (GM, 456). Only it was not a cat, it was Bob. As her eyes fly open, she asks her husband what he is doing home early. Bob responds:

> I sat in my stupid old motel room for almost two hours after we talked, trying to convince myself that what I was thinking couldn't be true. Only I didn't get to where I am by dodging the truth. So I jumped in the 'Burban and hit the road. No traffic whatsoever. I don't know why I don't do more traveling late at night. Maybe I will. If I'm not in Shawshank, that is. Or New Hampshire State Prison in Concord. But that's kind of up to you. Isn't it? (GM, 458)

Now it is obvious that Bob knows that Darcy knows, even if she tries to pretend like she does not. To Darcy's horror, Bob wants to tell her everything, to come clean. Bob explains that he has "a very bad friend, who does very bad things" (GM, 462). The friend is Bob's high school friend, Brian Delahanty, or BD, who had died as a teenager after running in front of a truck. Bob "blamed BD (who had become Beadie only years later, in his notes to the police) for everything, but Darcy suspected Bob knew better than that; blaming Brian Delahanty only made it easier to keep his two lives separate" (GM, 463).

When BD was still alive, it was his idea to organize a school shooting and force girls, who had "snooted" them, to perform sexual favors in exchange for living (GM, 465). This never happened, as BD "ran into the road and got killed" (GM, 467). But Bob insisted that Brian

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[1] A model on the cover of one of Bob's S/M magazines.

infected him. […] Brian was dead, but the ideas were alive. Those ideas – getting women, doing whatever to them, whatever crazy idea came into your head – they became his ghost".[…] Bob tries to blame BD, who has become his side personality of sorts, insists that he himself is "one of the good guys". (GM, 468; 469)

He even goes as far as to say that if the police were to question him, he would confess everything. He tells Darcy that he does not "remember much about the actual … well … acts. Beadie does them, and I kind of … I don't know … go unconscious. Get amnesia. Some damn thing" (GM, 473). Darcy does not believe this, but eventually Bob asks Darcy to forgive him and to turn the page (GM, 475). Darcy considers all the things she has considered before, but mostly their children and how it would disrupt their lives having their father outed as a brutal serial killer. After weighing her options, Darcy reluctantly decides to not give Bob up to the police.

Darcy and Bob assume some semblance of a normal life, even going on date nights. On one of these date nights, when Bob has a bit too much to drink after celebrating finding a rare 1955 wheat penny, Darcy sees her opportunity. When they get home from their celebratory dinner, she goes upstairs before Bob. As Bob is ascending the stairs, holding a glass of Perrier, Darcy pushes him:

> She saw the knowledge leap into his eyes at the very last second, something old and yellow and ancient. It was more than surprise; it was shocked fury. In that moment her understanding of him was complete. He loved nothing, least of all her. Every kindness, caress, boyish grin, and thoughtful gesture – all were nothing but camouflage. He was a shell. There was nothing inside but howling emptiness. (GM, 494)

Bob, however, does not die quite so easily. As he lays at the bottom of the stairs, broken and twisted, but still alive, Darcy gets a plastic bag and a dishwiper, and

> she jammed the plastic bag between his lips and deep inside his mouth. […] She grabbed his jaw and chin. […] She jammed his mouth shut on the wad of plastic and cloth. […] Bob gave one final, titanic jerk. She saw his bottom half no longer exactly matched his upper half; he had broken his back as well as his neck, it seemed. His plastic-lined mouth yawned. His eyes met hers in a stare she knew she would never forget … but one she could live with, should she get through this. […] He fell backward. His head made an egglike cracking sound on the floor. […] There was no life left in him, no beating heart, no breathing lungs. (GM, 497–98)

Bob's death is ruled as an accident and Darcy resumes her life as well as she could. Seven weeks after Bob's death she receives a visit from a retired detective, Holt Ramsey, who had interviewed Bob in conjunction with the Beadie murders years ago. They have a talk, and he

tells Darcy gruesome details about one of the victims, a small boy, whom Bob claimed to be 'an accident' and that 'he did not suffer'. The detective tells Darcy what Bob had really done to the boy, and Darcy felt like "if Bob had appeared before her, hands out and begging for mercy, she would have killed him again" (GM, 523). The old detective knows, but cannot prove, that Bob was Beadie. He also knows that Darcy killed Bob. Before he leaves, he tells Darcy she did the right thing (GM, 525). After his visit, Darcy "felt younger, lighter. She went to the mirror in the hall. In it she saw nothing but her own reflection, and that was good" (GM, 526).

3   Revenge

Revenge is superficially an easy concept to understand, after all, almost everybody has had their feelings or bodies hurt in a way that has left them either wanting to punch a wall or to punch someone else. Research into revenge, however, is a whole different matter. Revenge is intertwined with human psychology and physiology. Emotions, motivations, and senses are all factors in revenge. Revenge also touches upon deep and complex concepts and issues, such as ethics, justice and even war. As Canadian cognitive psychologist and psycholinguist Steven Pinker (2011) has famously said: "Most wars are not fought over shortages of resources such as food and water, but rather over conquest, revenge, and ideology". In this chapter I will examine revenge from different perspectives, ranging from semantics to the just war theory.

3.1   The Semantics of Revenge

To begin to understand the in-depth concept of revenge, we must determine what 'revenge' as a concept means. Here I start with a comparison of dictionary definitions. The Merriam-Webster dictionary offers the following definition of revenge as "an act or instance of retaliating in order to get even" (Merriam-Webster, 'revenge'). The Cambridge Dictionary's definition is a little more thorough, stating that revenge is "harm done to someone as a punishment for harm that they have done to someone else" (Cambridge Dictionary, 'revenge'). The Britannica Dictionary on the other hand defines it as "the act of doing something to hurt someone because that person did something to hurt you" (Britannica Dictionary, 'revenge').

Even through this very quick dictionary review we can deduce that while revenge seems to be a straightforward word, it actually is not. Merriam-Webster's definition does not elaborate, who is retaliating against whom, even though we may quite reasonably assume some kind of previous acrimony, nor does it determine the level of action needed to achieve the "even" status. The Cambridge definition does point out the perpetrator ("someone, who has done harm to another"), but does not determine whether the revenger should be the person, who was the object of said previous harm, or whether it can be anybody. The Britannica definition marks both the revengee and the revenger as the participants of previous harm but does not define what kind of action (physical / mental / other) is required to fulfil the revenge. None of

the definitions elaborate on what degree of harm inflicted requires revenge, nor do they state whether the action taken should be somehow in proportion to the insult.

American philosopher Kit Richard Christensen has, in his 2016 book *Revenge and Social Conflict*, identified the "interested parties" involved in revenge. They are the following: 1) perceived victim of a wrongful harm, 2) perceived victimizer as a revenge target, 3) revenge agent, and 4) revenge advocate (Christensen 2016, 3). I will use these terms, as they provide a clear and understandable way to label and identify the interested parties involved in revenge.

Closely attached to 'revenge' is a similar notion, 'avenge'. Merriam-Webster defines 'avenge' as either "to take vengeance for or on behalf of" or "to exact satisfaction for (a wrong) by punishing the wrongdoer" (Merriam-Webster, 'avenge'). Cambridge Dictionary on the other hand defines 'avenge' followingly: "to do harm or to punish the person for something bad done to you or your family or friends in order to achieve a fair situation" (Cambridge Dictionary, 'avenge'). Britannica's definition for 'avenge' is "to harm or punish someone who has harmed you or someone or something you care about" (Britannica Dictionary, 'avenge').

Similarly to revenge, avenging is a complicated concept. Its dictionary definitions range from simple payback to those including a degree of moral evaluation, and even expanding the vengeance to slights experienced not by yourself, but someone in your circle of intimacy, a group that includes the people or things closest to us (Resourcing Inclusive Communities 2019).

Mark Nichols (2021) writes in his article "'Avenge' vs. 'Revenge'" that both 'avenge' and 'revenge' can be used interchangeably as verbs, although 'avenge' is more common as a verb and 'revenge' is more often used as a noun. These words share a root in Latin (vindicare), which has morphed into the Anglo-French root venger (ibid.). Nichols states that there is a semantic difference between 'to take vengeance', which means simply to seek payback, and 'to retaliate a wrong' meaning righteous retribution (ibid.). This semantic difference is blurred, however, when we consider and compare words like 'vengeance', which has an elevated connotation and therefore includes a moral evaluation, and phrases like 'with a vengeance' meaning 'excessively' or 'vehemently' (ibid.).

These examples make it clear that the dilemma of revenge vs. vengeance vs. avenging cannot be, for the purposes of this thesis, sufficiently distinguished through mere semantics alone. To avoid semantic conflict, I have chosen the interpretation suggested by Nichols, and determine

that the words 'revenge' and 'avenge' both refer to payback, without moral connotations. The justifiability of a revenge will, however, come to question in the later analysis chapters. The moral and legal aspects regarding revenge will be determined solely by the circumstances in which the revenge itself takes place. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, 'revenge', 'avenge', and 'avenger' should be regarded as empty of moral and judgement and understood to merely refer to the action of payback. 'Retribution', on the other hand, is used to refer to legal and/or justified payback that can be either enacted by an avenger or mandated by a court.

Evolutionary biologists David P. Barash and Judith Eve Lipton (2011) offer more insight into determining revenge in their book *Payback: Why We Retaliate, Redirect Aggression, and Take Revenge*. They divide payback into three different categories that they call "the three R's": retaliation, revenge, and redirected aggression (Barash & Lipton 2011, 4). Retaliation is defined as a swift, proportionate, and often unconscious reaction to pain suffered (ibid.). Revenge on the other hand, according to Barash and Lipton, is a delayed response, contemplated beforehand, and typically disproportionate: "an eye for a tooth, or a life for an eye" (ibid.). As for redirected aggression, they define it as "the targeting of an innocent bystander in response to one's own pain and injury" (Barash & Lipton 2011, 4–5). In short, the swiftness of the response and the target of the revengeful action define the appropriate nomination.

Yet another concept related to payback is 'catharsis'. Originally stemming from Aristotle's *Poetics* and in modern interpretation seen as "a matter of emotional outlet and release" (Halliwell 1995, 18) it is often used in conjunction with negative experiences, such as anger, fear, and pain. Revenge would, then, provide catharsis to the perceived victim, as the pain, in Barash and Lipton's (2011, 4) words, is "passed along" or rather, returned to the perceived victimizer.

Summing it up briefly, though, I state the following: Payback is the neutral umbrella term for all things revenge. The words revenge, avenge and avenger all refer to the action or actant of payback without any moral connotations. Retaliation is an immediate reaction to a perceived harm – imagine being bit by a horse and slapping the horse as a punishment, almost reflexively. Revenge is always conscious and thought out. Therefore it cannot be immediate but requires time between the perceived harm and the act of revenge. The old saying "revenge is a dish best served cold" is the perfect analogy between retaliation and revenge – retaliation

is a hot bowl of porridge hurled across the room in anger, revenge is the cold, clotted mess that has been sitting on your kitchen counter for weeks. Redirected aggression is a delayed response to perceived harm, and the response is not directed at the perceived victimizer, but at a third party or an innocent bystander. As Barash and Lipton (2011, 4) put it: "Tom goes after Dick, who responds by going after Harry, who had nothing to do with the initial problem at all!" Retribution, on the other hand, refers to a somehow justified payback, either by an avenger or a court of law. In addition to these terms, 'perceived victim' refers to the object of first harm – that is, the object of the action of which revenge is borne. 'Perceived victimizer' is the antagonist, 'revenge agent' the person actualizing the revenge – this can be, and often is, the same person as the perceived victim – and 'revenge advocate' someone or something that supports the act of revenge. Finally, catharsis is the feeling of relief the perceived victim gets when the perceived harm is avenged.

However clear, or unclear, the definitions, it is evident that if I want to analyze the motivations and justifications of revenge, I still need to define the boundaries of appropriate action and accept that the justifiability and morality of revenge are always dependent on the act of the first slight. Thus, the following chapters present different theoretical views to revenge.

3.2   Revenge from Biological and Psychological Points of View

As can be deduced from the above perambulation, revenge is always a response. But a response to what? Barash and Lipton (2011, 4) quote the International Association for the Study of Pain when defining pain as "an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage." They differentiate between pain and suffering, defining suffering as

> deeper, more general, and perhaps more conceptual, something that can be evoked by diverse experiences – including thought alone – and not merely by the activation of certain sensory neurons. (ibid.)

Thus, according to Barash and Lipton (2011, 4), revenge is a response to pain. They explain that physical pain and emotional suffering

are intimately related, so that when people are hurting – in pain themselves – they are especially likely to respond by hurting others. […] Pain, in short, is infectious; it is passed along like a demonic bucket brigade, which, instead of putting out fire, burns its victims, who respond by causing yet more pain, which leads to yet more victims. (Barash & Lipton 2011, 6)

Christensen is on the same lines as Barash and Lipton. He writes that revenge is a "presumed natural human response to wrongful harm" (Christensen 2016, 2). He illustrates his point by using homicide as an example:

[I]n almost all societies throughout history homicide has been treated as one of the most serious norm violations, but when it appeared to be motivated by the desire for revenge, there often was more ambivalence in the social reactions to it, compared with other kinds of in-group killings. (ibid.)

Christensen (2016, 15) writes that revenge, or "vengeful actions", are always triggered by the "need of the wronged party to feel better." In other words,

the real focus in revenge is on the emotional needs of those who have suffered directly or indirectly because of what some other individual or collective agent allegedly has done. (ibid.).

According to philosopher Trudy Govier (in Christensen 2016, 15) seeking revenge is to seek "satisfaction by attempting to harm the other (or an associated person) as a retaliatory measure". Thus the avenger must be an agent in "bringing harm to others who have harmed us, and we must act with intent to cause this harm to "get even" or "restore a balance".

Revenge, according to Christensen (2016, 124), aims to alleviate the victim / avenger's fears of re-victimization, increased vulnerability, and social judgements of personal weakness. He states that there is a dual aspect in revenge: the avenger has both the intent to hurt the victimizer because they want to be preserved from further harm and enact payback for undeserved harm already suffered (ibid.).

How does the pain–revenge theory suggested by Barash and Lipton fit together with Christensen's revenge theory? Both argue that revenge is a response to pain, either physical or emotional. Christensen opines that revenge may include also societal aspects, such as taking revenge to not appear weak, or taking revenge to avoid being further victimized. Why, then, does not a perceived slight, or even physical harm, always lead to payback? To answer this, Barash and Lipton refer to the founder of cognitive therapy, Aaron Beck. According to Beck (in Barash & Lipton 2011, 59), people tend to respond vigorously and often violently to pain, but that the reactions are modulated by the victim's awareness of circumstance. Barash and

Lipton continue that "intelligent, mature people generally have no trouble recognizing when pain is intended for their own benefit" (ibid.). So, victims are usually capable of discerning fair or beneficial pain (for example, a visit to the dentist) from unfair and, if all played by society's rules, avoidable pain. Unfair and avoidable pain on the other hand calls for "passing the pain along" (Barash & Lipton 2011, 4). In other words, if the actions of the perceived victimizer are done with malice, the perceived victim is more likely to want revenge to gain catharsis and reach at least some kind of equilibrium.

3.3   Revenge, Justice, and War

Revenge is not always personal. Wars have been fought in retaliation for perceived slights for so long that already in 1485 Saint Thomas Aquinas outlined the traditional just war theory (*jus ad bellum*) in his work *Summa Theologicae* (Moseley 2022). Revenge and war are linked together by the concept of justice. As Christensen (2016, 2) states, revenge is a presumed natural human response to wrongful harm. War, on the other hand, is often "justified" by the same methods as revenge – there is a perceived victim of a wrongful harm and a perceived victimizer as the target. Only this time the act is not revenge per se, but a war waged out of either vengeful reasons or as a reaction to perceived or actual harm.

A good example of a war as a reaction to perceived wrongful harm is the Global War on Terrorism, or GWOT (George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum 2022). The GWOT was famously a response to the 9/11 attacks, which left nearly 3000 people dead (Bergen 2022). The war, and the subsequent assassination of al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden, has been described as "just deserts" (Libermann & Skitka 2008) and straight up "revenge" (Wells 2022).

In their article about war and revenge, "Just Deserts in Iraq: American Vengeance for 9/11," Peter Libermann and Linda Skitka recognize many of the same traits as Barash & Lipton, Christensen and others have recognized. Liberman and Skitka (2008, 5) draw an allegory between war and more banal notions, such as feelings, stating that "most people want criminals to be punished, because they intuitively feel that the offender deserves it." They identify the intent of the crime as much larger factor to the desired severity of the punishment, than the potential of the punishment to deter or incapacitate the perceived victimizer (ibid.).

That is to say, the perceived victim cares more about why the transgression occurred than what happens to the perceived victimizer as a result of the revenge.

In line with previously presented research, Libermann and Skitka (2008, 5) also write about emotions. They quote several cognitive studies, which "have found anger to mediate most or all of the effect of the seriousness of a crime on the severity of the punishment deemed appropriate." The studies also found "that unfair play arouses anger" which can be measured "in a brain area associated with negative emotions, and that the degree of anger predicts the severity of costly punishment" (Libermann & Skitka 2008, 5–6). It has also been found that anger probably influences decisions to punish, and that the anticipation of getting even is emotionally rewarding (Libermann & Skitka 2008, 6).

However, Libermann and Skitka also separate emotions from motivations. According to several researchers, emotions are connected to, amongst others, pain, and shape behavior "indirectly, by focusing attention on how to reach one's goals" (Barrett et al. 2007; Baumeister et al. 2007 in Libermann & Skitka 2008, 6). On the other hand, motivations like the desire for revenge, are "more conscious and concrete goals that can be pursued with varying degrees of emotion. As a result, motivations are much more durable than emotions, lasting days, months, and years" (ibid.). Libermann and Skitka refer to Brad J. Bushman et al. (2005) and Vladimir J. Konecni (1974) in illustrating that

> memories of an angering stimulus – such as a serious offence – can resurrect both social motivations – such as desires for retribution – and anger. That is why rumination […] over an original offense can sustain both feelings of outrage and desires for vengeance over a period of several months. (in Libermann & Skitka 2008, 6)

Honorary lecturer at the Institute of Psychiatry in London, Derek Summerfield (2002, 2), writes followingly in his *BMJ* article "Effects of War: Moral Knowledge, Revenge, Reconciliation, and Medicalised Concepts of 'Recovery'":

> But one man's revenge is another's social justice. The question is whether anger, hatred, and a felt need for revenge in people who have been grievously wronged are necessarily bad things. Such feelings carry a moral interrogative that points to social and individual wounds and to shared ideas about justice, accountability, and punishment that hold a social fabric together. They demand answers.

In his article "Just War Theory" Alexander Moseley goes through the long of just war theory, starting with Saint Thomas Aquinas. He presents the "*jus ad bellum* convention," which includes the following rules:

> having just cause, being a last resort, being declared by a proper authority, possessing right intention, having a reasonable chance of success, and the end being proportional to the means used. (ibid.)

The "*jus in bello*" principle, on the other hand, concerns itself with discrimination and proportionality. According to Moseley (2022): "The principle of discrimination concerns who are legitimate targets in war, whilst the principle of proportionality concerns how much force is morally appropriate."

Based on these principles of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello,* I have devised a list of criteria that would qualify a revenge as justifiable. The criteria are:

1. Is there a just cause? In other words, has there been actual physical or psychological harm?
2. Is it the last resort? Would there be another way to bring retribution to the perceived victimizer?
3. Does the avenger have proper authority? Are they themselves, or someone in their circle of intimacy, a perceived victim?
4. Will the revenge be successful? Will it have the desired outcome?
5. Is it in proportion to the perceived harm?
6. Is it directed towards the correct object, the perceived victimizer?
7. Is the force applied morally appropriate? Are there "civil casualties"? Is it an eye for an eye, or "a life for an eye"?

Using these criteria, as well as the terminology presented earlier on in this chapter, I will analyze the two source texts, Stephen King's novellas "Big Driver" and "A Good Marriage."

4 Analysis

In this chapter I look at "Big Driver" and "A Good Marriage" through the revenge theory explained above. I examine the stories from two different perspectives: whether they comply or challenge the traditional American female roles described in the introduction of this study, and whether the acts of revenge in them can be viewed as justifiable and cathartic.

4.1 Female roles in "Big Driver"

In the beginning of "Big Driver" the protagonist, Tess, is described as an ordinary woman. She is single, "a good little squirrel, living well on the money her books brought in... but putting away acorns for the winter" (BD, 195). She was a "small woman with an elfin face, a shy smile and a job writing cozy mysteries", had grown up at a farm in Nebraska and wore scrunchies (BD, 197; 202; 203). As a younger woman, ten years ago, Tess "had been in her late twenties, with long dark blond hair cascading down her back and good legs she liked to showcase in short skirts" (BD, 232). Nothing out of the ordinary about her. On the contrary, she seems like the typical all-American woman, unless you count her slightly glamorous profession.

After Tess goes through her ordeal, she starts to change. She changes emotionally, psychologically, and physically: "The sound of her changed voice was creepy. It was as if by raping her, the giant had created a new woman. She didn't want to be a new woman. She had liked the old one" (BD, 228–29). Tess also starts to think of herself as the 'New Tess': "Of course, this was her first walk as the New Tess, she of the aching, bleeding snatch and the raspy voice" (BD, 229). The New Tess's face is bruised and nose slightly off kilter after having gotten punched in the face. Even her sense of humor changes

> The band launched into a perfectly adequate cover of an old Cramps song: 'Can Your Pussy Do the Dog'. No, Tess thought, but today a dog certainly did my pussy. The Old Tess would not have approved of such a joke, but the New Tess thought it was pretty goddamn funny. She barked a hoarse laugh and got walking again. (BD, 236)

While the Old Tess used mirrors to tweezing her eyebrows and doing quick fixes on her makeup, the New Tess uses them for to examine her bloodshot eyes (BD, 247). According to Tess herself, the New Woman is also more than a little crazy (BD, 251). The New Tess does is not afraid to take matters into her own hands, unlike the Old Tess, who would have let the police handle the aftermath of the rape and attempted murder. To the New Tess, the Old Tess "seemed […] like a distant relative, the kind you send a card to at Christmas and forgot for the rest of the year" (BD, 287–88).

In the beginning Tess is a woman who follows society's rules. Even though she is not married and therefore does not fit into Hawke's description of a traditional American woman, she is helpful, kind-hearted, and empathic. She does not even charge extra for her somewhat impromptu speaking engagement at Books & Brown Baggers, as "it would be taking advantage" (BD, 199). She even has empathy for Al Strehlke, when she assumed he was innocent and unaware of the actions of his little brother and mother.

The New Tess, however, is far from what Snow (2022) and Sama (2016) would call 'a good woman'. She does not feel empathy towards any of the Norville / Strehlke family members after she finds out they all were complicit to the crime committed against her. She does, however, have empathy for the women Little Driver abused and killed before her, and a sense of moral obligation towards possible future victims.

> What she did or didn't do about her own violation was her own business, but that was not true of the women in the pipe. They had lost far more than she. And what about the next woman the giant attacked? […] Those women belonged to her now. They were her responsibility. (BD, 253–54)

Even though Tess tries, the New Tess is not going away. As she prepares to leave to confront Ramona Norville, her eyes are "haunted by rage and sanity" (BD, 293).

Of course, both Snow and Sama's definitions of a 'good woman' are very superficial and do not take moral questions into consideration. As the 'goodness' of women, according to them, is a list of characteristics and does not consider anything above the superficial. However, the goodness, or badness, of a character is a moral question. Therefore, it depends on which moral theory we adhere to. If we rely solely on Snow and Sama's lists of characteristics, we have a moral dilemma. According to Sama (2016) a good woman has empathy. This can be interpreted in two different ways. If having empathy towards men is what makes a woman 'good', then the New Tess is undoubtedly a 'bad woman'. If empathy on its own is sufficient,

or even better, if empathy for the weaker prevails over empathy for the stronger, the New Tess is even better a woman than the Old Tess. The Old Tess did not have to concern herself with such thoughts, she had merrily passed on gossip about other women and never thought twice about it (BD, 248). The New Tess, on the other hand, not only realizes the error of her previous ways, but puts her own life on the line, partially for herself, but also for the previous and potential future victims of Little Driver.

In other words, the moral mandate ('MM') is what dictates the goodness or badness of the New Tess. As Elizabeth Mullen and Janice Nadler (2008, 1239) point out, "when outcomes support people's MMs, they perceive the outcomes and procedures to be more fair". This applies to readers as well, which is why different readers will have different opinions about the character. The goodness and badness or right vs. wrong debate is in the heart of moral relativism, where "the truth or justification of moral judgements is not absolute, but relative to the standard of some person or group of persons" (Gowans 2021). That is to say, the goodness or the badness of the character depends on the reader's moral standing and on their conclusion about the justifiability of Tess's revenge.

4.2 Payback in "Big Driver"

As I have stated above, revenge is the carrying theme throughout the story. Everything is intertwined from the moment Tess decides to accept Ramona's invitation to speak at the Books & Brown Baggers event (BD, 198). Semantically speaking, Tess's payback is either a revenge or retribution, not retaliation or redirected aggression. It is a "a delayed response and contemplated beforehand" (Barash and Lipton 2011, 4). Whether the action is also proportionate (ibid.) depends on the viewpoint of the reader. In my opinion it would have been more gruesome, had Tess followed the 'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth' approach and sodomized Les, leaving him close to death in a ditch. Even though that would have been proportionate, it would have required, in my opinion, such deviant acts that they could never be justified, morally or otherwise. Taking into consideration the fact that Little Driver had also several other victims, I am inclined to conclude that Tess's actions against him were proportionate.

So, on Barash and Lipton's scale Tess fulfils two out of three requirements for revenge. She takes her time planning it and prepares, making the act both delayed and contemplated. It takes her approximately almost two days (40 hours) to enact her payback. All the 'interested parties' (Christensen 2016, 3) are present: Tess as the victim of perceived wrongful harm, Les as the revenge target, Tess herself as the revenge agent and all her 'imaginary friends' Tom the Tom-tom, Fritzy the cat and Doreen the detective as revenge advocates. There are, however, additional interested parties that theory does not manage to categorize. These are the accomplices, Ramona, who sends Tess towards Little Driver, and Big Driver himself, who participates in his brother's atrocities through fetishization, by allowing Little Driver to masquerade as himself, and by accepting items belonging to the victims as trophies.

Throughout the story the reader witnesses Tess's struggle with herself and her emotions. She battles with shame, fury, responsibility, feeling dirty and rage (BD, 249; 250; 254; 256; 283) before finally reaching equilibrium as "she was only going home. And she thought she could find the way by herself" (BD, 255). Tess feels "emotional outlet and release" (Halliwell 1995, 18), when she had killed Ramona: "There was no pity in the glance, only the sort of parting acknowledgement anyone may give to a piece of hard work that has now been finished" (BD, 307). The same goes for Les:

> She pulled the trigger. Blood came out of his ear and his head snapped briskly to the side. He looked like a man trying to free up a kink in his neck. On the TV, George Constanza said, "I was in the pool, I was in the pool." The audience laughed. […] Each time Tess thought of the little pig who had built his house out of sticks. The little piggy who had lived in this one would never have to worry about his shitty house blowing away, because he was dead in his La-Z-Boy. (BD, 328)

The only one Tess momentarily regrets killing is Al. However, when she figures out that Al was his little brother's accomplice, all guilt is washed away:

> When a person does a bad thing and another person knows but doesn't stop it, they're equally guilty. […] Say it was just Lester who did the hunting, the raping, and the killing. […] If big brother knew and said nothing, that makes him worth killing. In fact, I'd say bullets were too good for him. Impaling on a hot poker would be closer to justice. (BD, 339)

It is, therefore, an overall cathartic experience for Tess, which fulfils yet another criterion of revenge as Tess passes her pain along to the perceived victimizer. Tess's motivations are greatly emphasized by the need to avoid re-victimization, victimization of others and social

judgements (Christensen 2016, 124). One of her greatest motivations in not going to the police is the shame of publicity:

> The thought of telling the police made her skin burn, and she could feel her face literally wincing in shame, even out here, alone in the dark. Maybe she wasn't Sue Grafton or Janet Evanovich, but neither was she, strictly speaking, a private person. She would even be on CNN for a day or two. (BD, 233–34)

She is also motivated to prevent Little Driver from acquiring further victims and to get justice to the victims before her: "And what about the next woman the giant attacked? That there would be another she had no doubt. […] And the women in the pipe, she was their advocate, like it or not" (BD, 253; 289).

Do Tess's actions count as revenge or retribution? The difference between the two is that retribution is somehow justified, either from a legal or personal point of view, while revenge does not need to be. By comparing Tess's actions to the *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* principles, we can try to gauge the justifiability of her payback. The question on *just cause* is easily answered. Les's actions caused both physical and psychological harm to Tess:

> Screaming hoarsely, Tess backed out of the culvert and bolted to her feet […] and although she did not pass out (at least she didn't think she did), for a while her consciousness was a queerly broken thing. […] She had been thumped on the head and raped and choked and was in shock. (BD, 224–25)

Whether these actions were Tess's *last resort*, or if there would have been another way to bring retribution to the perceived victimizer, is a more complicated question. In my opinion Tess had three choices. She could have done nothing and lived in fear of her assailant for the rest of her life. He had stolen her driver's license, so he knew where she lived. This was not a viable option, because he would surely have come after Tess, if he realized she was gone:

> Tess realized (again) that it [the next victim] might even be her, if he went back to check the culvert and found her gone. And her clothes gone from the store, of course. If he'd looked through her purse, and surely he had, then he did have her address. (BD, 253)

Her other option would have been to go to the police. She, however, feared the publicity which would be due to her public career and the brutality of the attack, and she was not sure she could prove that he had done this to her: "Proving actual rape forty hours and God knew how many showers after the fact might be difficult, but the signs of sexual battery were written all over her body" (BD, 289). She also felt the responsibility towards the other

victims. The lack of physical evidence could have freed Les of the charges, especially since he pretended to be his big brother while out 'hunting'.

To ensure that none of the Norville / Strehlke family members ever hurt anyone again, Tess's only option was to do what she did.

> *'No, he's the crazy one. Remember how he danced? His shadow dancing on the wall behind him? Remember how he sang? His squalling voice? You wait for him, Tessa Jean. You wait until hell freezes over. You've come too far to turn back.'*
> (BD, 318)

The other options contained too many risks, risks to her life and risks to other women's lives. Even though Tess's actions were not the only course of action, they were the course of action that guaranteed that Little Driver would never hurt anyone again.

The *proper authority* question is again relatively easy to answer. Tess was the victim of Little Driver's violence, so she, if anyone, had the proper authority to dole out retribution. It is worth noting here, that the *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* principles give authority to the wronged party itself, not a representative of them, such as a government or a local authority like the police.

The question of the payback's *success* was at times on an uneven keel. Tess was afraid on several occasions that she would fail. She was scared that the gun would get stuck in her jacket pocket (BD, 297). When she was driving to Al's house, she thought about other ways things could go wrong: what if Big Driver was not alone? What if his brother was with him? What if he was married? (BD, 310–11).

Like any with any plan, there is a possibility of failure with Tess's. The outcome, on the other hand, is what Tess desired, so this criterion is at least half fulfilled, even though the success was not guaranteed from the start.

The *proportionality* of actions taken I have already assessed in previous paragraphs and concluded that they were proportionate. The *correct object*, however, is where Tess is mistaken. In the beginning she does not know that there are not one, but two Strehlke brothers, and even though she finds this out at Ramona's residence (BD, 306), she still thinks Big Driver is her assailant. She does not realize her mistake until it is too late, and Big Driver is dead (BD, 320). She also killed Ramona, who had not physically violated her, but had been Les's accomplice. If I were to interpret the criterion very strictly, Tess would not have been justified with killing all three of them. However, as Fritzy put it: "When a person does a bad

thing and another person knows but doesn't stop it, they're equally guilty" (BD, 339). If we accept this as a moral mandate, then the killing of all three was justified.

The *moral appropriateness* of the force is yet another complex question. There were no 'civil' casualties, as both Ramona and Al were complicit. However, we again circle back to the question of using death as punishment. I, personally, do not believe in the efficacy and deterring power of the death penalty. At the same time, I cannot say what would be an appropriate penalty for such heinous acts, as what Les subjected Tess to. I want to refer to my thoughts on the proportionality and argue that due to the other victims, and the prevention of future victims, the force Tess applied was morally appropriate. It is worth noting though, that this applies only to this one specific chain of events in literature.

As we have noticed, assessing the justifiability of a payback is very difficult. In Tess's case the criteria was fulfilled more often than it was not, which would make the payback justifiable and therefore it would also earn the title of 'retribution'. Even though the actions' proportionality is dependent on the moral mandate of each reader, on this case I am inclined to side with the protagonist, especially because there had been and would be further victims. "Big Driver" is a disturbing read with many horrible events and gruesome details, which is why the ending feels cathartic. It liberates both Tess and the reader from the pain Les has caused, and the reader is left with the feeling that justice, albeit gruesome, has been served.

4.3   Female roles in "A Good Marriage"

In "A Good Marriage", Darcellen 'Darcy' Madsen Anderson is described as being born

> in the year John F. Kennedy was elected President. She was raised in Freeport, Maine […]. She went to Freeport High School and then to Addison Business School, where she learned secretarial skills. […] She was plain, but with the help of two marginally more sophisticated girlfriends, learned enough makeup skills to make herself pretty on workdays and downright eye-catching on Friday and Saturday nights. (GM, 407-408)

She is, what Snow and Sama would both call 'a good woman'. She also fits Hawke's criteria for traditional American woman. Unassuming, hardworking, putting in effort for her man, carrying herself with class, staying at home with their two children. Darcy helped her husband with his side business:

> He started up a small mail-order business in collectible American coins. […] Actually it was Darcy who found them [items that people queried], using her overstuffed Rolodex in those pre-computer days to call collectors all over the country. (GM, 410)

Darcy believed that a successful marriage was a balancing act and dependent on a high tolerance of irritation (GM, 411). All in all, she was the epitome of a 'good woman': a good mother, an attentive and helpful wife, and a in good standing within the community (GM, 484). However, as a little girl, she had had a quirky side to her:

> in early childhood she had gone around the house looking for mirrors. She would stand in front of them with her hands cupped to the sides of her face and her nose touching the glass, but holding her breath so she wouldn't fog the surface. […] How old had she been? Four? Five? […] She had been convinced that mirrors were doorways to another world, and what she saw reflected in the glass wasn't their living room or bathroom, but the living room or bathroom of another family. […] The little girl wasn't the same, either. […] Darcy supposed that if she had been able to tell her mother about […] the Darker Girl who wasn't quite her, she might have passed some time with a child psychiatrist. (GM, 454–55)

When Darcy finds out about Bob's secret life as a serial killer, she again remembers the world behind the mirrors:

> she had found her way through the mirror after all. Only there was no little girl waiting in the Darker House; instead there was a Darker Husband, one who had been living behind the mirror all the time and doing terrible things there. (GM, 455)

Because of Bob's double life, Darcy is forced to consider her options. She wants to protect her family, like a 'good woman' would, but she also feels a responsibility towards Bob's victims (GM, 449). In addition to this, Bob further confuses her by telling her that the police would think she was an accomplice and that she would not be able to survive, as he had always been the breadwinner, and that their savings would have to go towards settling the civil suits Bob's actions would bring against them (GM, 476). This is where the Darker Girl steps in: "*Why can't you* [fool him]? it asked. *After all … he fooled you.* And then what? She didn't know. She only knew that now was now and now had to be dealt with" (GM, 478).

Even though she has found out that her husband is a serial killer who has molested and killed eleven women and one boy (who was an "accident"; GM, 470), she does not go to the police. She, like Tess, fears the publicity:

> Guilty or innocent, his picture would be in the paper. On the front page. Hers, too. […] It wouldn't be just the two of them dragged into newspaper speculation and

the filthy rinse-cycle of twenty-four-hour cable news; there were two kids to think about. (GM, 447)

She thought also about killing herself, "but suicide cast a deep shadow over families, too." (GM, 449). At that time her moral mandate was to protect her family, like a 'good woman' should. She did what little damage control she could: demanded that he stop and told him that he was not allowed to taunt the police by sending them his latest victim's, Marjorie Duvall's, ID cards (GM, 478). Still, it does not seem like the right choice, even though she is doing it to protect her children – her soon to be married daughter and her son, who has only recently started his own business (GM, 448).

When Darcy wakes up the day after Bob's confession to her, she notices everything has changed.

> She shifted her gaze back to the wild-haired woman [in the mirror] with the bloodshot, frightened eyes: the Darker Wife, in all her raddled glory. Her first name was Darcy, but her last name wasn't Anderson. The Darker Wife was Mrs. Brian Delahanty. […] She wiped [the mirror] clean with a towel, and then went downstairs to face her first day as the monster's wife. (GM, 481)

Darcy, or the Darker Wife, has her chance to rectify the awful situation by happenstance two weeks before Christmas. They go out to celebrate Bob finding a rare 1955 double-date wheat penny. Bob gets slightly too drunk for his own good, and Darcy pushes him down the stairs in their home, finishing the job by suffocating him with a plastic bag and a dishwiper (GM, 488; 494; 497). But was it justified?

4.4   Payback in "A Good Marriage"

In "A Good Marriage", there is only one act of payback, as opposed to the three in "Big Driver". The single act is equally gruesome though, describing over five pages how Bob the serial killer first lays in a broken heap at the bottom of the stairs, his neck and several other body parts broken, and then suffocating slowly as his wife stuffs his mouth with a plastic bag and a dishwiper (GM, 494–98).

If we look again at the *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* principles, we find that Darcy's case is a lot more complicated than Tess's was. As the principles do not state that the actual physical or psychological harm has to be done to the avenger themselves, Darcy can be viewed as

justified in this aspect. Even though the physical harm has been dealt to characters other than Darcy, she herself has been psychologically victimized, having to listen to Bob's sick tales about his escapades and then holding onto this awful secret for nearly two months (GM, 460–78; 487).

The *last resort* question is, again, more complicated. Payback is not a last resort in Darcy's case, and she would have to choose between three options. She could do nothing and risk Bob going on a killing spree again – he had stopped for 16 years, but started again (GM, 476). Bob had never hurt her or their children though, so she was not in any physical danger. Bob even said to her:

> You know that old punchline? The one that goes 'I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you?' That doesn't apply here. I could never kill you. Everything I do […] I've done and built for you. For the kids too, of course, but mostly for you. (GM, 473)

Her second choice would have been to call the police. She might have been made into an accomplice, and all their lives, including the children's, would have been tainted by Bob's crimes. On the other hand there is ample evidence against him, and the families of the victims would have closure, knowing the monster who did those things to their loved ones was Bob Anderson, an accountant from Yarmouth, Maine (GM, 485).

In the end she chooses the third alternative, which is, in a way, the easy way out. She chooses to kill Bob. This which prevents him from ever killing another person again and saves their children, and Darcy herself, from the shame. It does not, however, give closure to the victims' families. She talks about this with retired detective Holt Ramsey at the end:

> "And the families of the victims? The ones who deserve closure?" She paused, not wanting to say the rest. But she had to. This man had fought considerable pain – maybe even excruciating pain – to come here, and now he was giving her a pass. At least, she thought he was. "Robert Shaverstone's father?"
>   "The Shaverstone boy is dead, and his father's as good as. […] Would knowing that his son's killer – his son's mutilator – was dead change that? I don't think so." (GM, 524)

If we agree with Holt Ramsey's statement that closure is not necessary, because it would not change anything, Darcy is justified in her actions, as she chose the to protect her children, which is in accordance with the ethical principle of least harm. The judgement here depends on how much weight we put on closure.

According to *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* principles, Darcy does not have the *proper authority* to exert payback onto Bob, as she, nor anyone in her circle of intimacy are the victims. The victims are strangers, and therefore the onus is not on Darcy to act in revenge. It is, of course, impossible for others to avenge the victims, as Bob has never got caught, but in my opinion, this speaks even more strongly on behalf of going to the authorities instead of acting in vengeance. This is one box that Darcy does not tick.

To answer the question of *desired outcome*, we need to first determine, what was the desired outcome. Darcy wanted to stop him from ever killing again. Right before she pushed Bob down the stairs, she thought of the victims.

> The image of Helen and Robert Shaverstone filled her mind, hellishly clear: the son and his molested, mutilated mother floating together in a Massachusetts creek that had begun to grow lacings of ice at its sides. (GM, 494)

As to *success*, there was little chance of Darcy failing, either, as Bob was drunk, carrying a glass up the stairs. The 'worst case scenario' was that he would have been only mildly injured, and that was not likely. As Darcy's act was successful and did have desired outcome – Bob would never kill anyone again – Darcy was, according to this principle, justified in her actions.

The revenge being *in proportion* to perceived harm is also an easy question to answer, if we set aside the Christian morality of 'thou shalt not kill' and again adopt the principle of least harm. Bob had killed multiple victims, so his death pales in comparison to the deaths of eleven other people. Darcy was sure that he would 'relapse' again, had she not done something:

> It's what drug addicts say. "I'll never take any of that stuff again. I've quit before and this time I'll quit for good. I mean it." But they don't mean it, even when they think they do they don't, and neither does he. (GM, 477)

Considering that Bob had already killed eleven people and could be expected to kill again, Darcy was justified in stopping him in any way possible.

The *direction* of the revenge is also correct. Darcy has strong evidence of Bob's guilt – his "special box" with the latest victims ID cards in it, as well as Bob's own, lengthy confession (GM, 430). There is no way that she is mistaken and that someone else had committed the atrocities, even though Bob tried to blame his dead friend, Brian Delahanty aka BD:

> Do you want to call it guild avoidance? That's what a shrink would call it, I suppose, and it's fine if you do. But Darcy, listen! […] Listen and get it through your head. It was Brian. He infected me with … well, certain ideas, let's say that. Some ideas, once you get them in your head, you can't unthink them. You can't. (GM, 468)

Despite Bob's insistence, the mere fact that Brian Delahanty had been dead for almost forty years, made it impossible for Darcy to be mistaken on Beadie's identity (ibid.).

The force Darcy used against Bob is *morally appropriate*, even if it were only based on the principle of least harm. Bob had multiple victims, whereas Darcy only had one. There were no 'civil casualties' and Darcy actually protected her children from the terrible publicity by getting rid of Bob.

In conclusion, Darcy was also justified in her payback, which should therefore be called retribution instead of revenge. Even though she was not, nor any of her circle of intimacy, at the receiving end of Bob's violence, she avenged the deaths of eleven victims and prevented him from acquiring more. Although Bob's death was gruesome and Darcy did not have the proper authority to avenge the victims, she still qualifies in almost all of the *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* categories, making her actions justifiable, particularly if the principle of less harm is also applied.

5   Conclusion

It has been said to me that one should never research texts that they love, as the meticulous combing back and forth destroys all the joy one gets from reading them. Even though Stephen King is in the top three of my favorite authors, and even though I love horror literature and think both "Big Driver" and "A Good Marriage" are excellently written stories, they are difficult reads. Their themes, sexual and physical violence, retribution and suffering, are enough to turn even a less sensitive reader's stomach, not to mention the graphic descriptions of vertebrae poking through skin and brain matter oozing onto shoulders.

Despite the challenging themes, it was interesting to analyze the stories' morality and to look deeper, past the surface. The stories share many similarities. Both of them have female protagonists and male antagonists, both center around violence against women, both protagonists change: Tess into the New Tess and Darcy into the Darker Wife, both Darcy and Tess are deterred from legal methods of delivering justice by the threat of publicity and public shame, both deal with the questions of justice and retribution, both have supportive accomplices for the avenging protagonists – Tess has Betsy Neal and Darcy has Holt Ramsey, both of whom assure the women they did the right thing and that they would keep their secrets. However, there are also differences.

Tess's story is less focused on the moral questions and has less description of Tess's life before the assault, whereas Darcy's story focuses very tightly on the moral aspect of revenge – there is page after page of description, how Darcy battles between choices and tries to choose the less of all evils.

The application of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*, in addition to other moral and ethical principles, such as the moral mandates and principle of less harm, made the analysis particularly interesting. I have always read with a feeling, and the first time I read "Big Driver", I was glad that justice got served. With "A Good Marriage" I was somewhat repulsed by Bob's death. He did not go quickly, and he did suffer, but nevertheless it felt justified because of the horrible things he had done. Putting the texts through the *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* principles showed that the feelings of catharsis and vindication were also philosophically justifiable – even though neither fully conformed to the principles, they met enough criteria to be viewed as justifiable.

Mainly these differences – weight on morality or weight on vengeance – show in the analysis chapters, where the analysis of Tess's story is more weighted on the payback chapter, and Darcy's on the moral chapter. The questions I have asked are of course all relative to the readers' morals, and a different reader might have different results. Even though my results might not be easily generalized to cover all readers of these stories and their moral judgments, I hope that they resonate with many, who do choose to read these stories.

Further research could be conducted on the applicability of these theories to revenge by conducting a reader response research. The data from the readers, combined with the analysis through the *jus in bello* and *jus ad bellum* principles, could further strengthen or disprove the justifiable retribution theory in horror literature.

From another perspective it would be interesting to compare a text with a female antagonist, such as King's *Misery* (1987) and find out, whether these same principles could be successfully applied there.

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Summary in Finnish

Suomenkielinen tiivistelmä

Tutkielmassani käsittelen oikeutetun koston käsitettä Stephen Kingin pienoisromaanien "Big Driver" ja "A Good Marriage" kautta. Teokset on julkaistu ensimmäisen kerran vuonna 2010 kokoelmateoksessa *Full Dark, No Stars*, joskin käyttämäni versio on vuoden 2011 pokkarijulkaisu. Vaikka kaikki *Full Dark, No Stars* -kokoelman pienoisromaanit käsittelevät kostoa, valitsin "Big Driver:in" ja "A Good Marriage":n, sillä molemmissa niissä käsitellään kostoa nimenomaan naisnäkökulmasta ja molempien aiheena on väkivalta naisia kohtaan.

Aiempien tutkimusten mukaan (Dawson 2018, 1) kosto nähdään usein "miehen työnä". Naiset yllyttävät kostoon ja miehet toimivat, vahvistaen maskuliinisuuttaan ja suojellen kunniaansa tappamalla. Koston tematiikkaan liittyy kiinteästi myös naisen asema yhteiskunnassa sekä moraaliset ja eettiset kysymykset.

Tutkija Lucy A. Hawken (2007, 70–71) mukaan amerikkalainen yhteiskunta on määritellyt avioliiton sukupuoliroolit siten, että mies kävi työssä kodin ulkopuolella ja nainen pysyi kotona hoitamassa lapsia. Hän siteeraa Lockhartia (Lockhart in Hawke 2007, 71) kirjoittaessaan, että ideaali yhteiskunta olisi täynnä ydinperheitä, joissa isät olisivat täysiaikaisesti töissä, äidit hoitaisivat kotia ja lapset olisivat alistuvia, mutta onnellisia. Näitä varsin 1950-lukulaisia sukupuolirooleja vasten peilaan myös Kingin pienoisromaanien päähenkilöitä, "Big Driverin" Tessiä ja "A Good Marriagen" Darcyä.

Tutkimukseni varsinainen teoriatausta nojaa vahvasti yhteiskunnallis-uskonnolliseen viitekehykseen ja eritoten 'oikeutetun sodan' periaatteeseen. Tämän periaatteen saattoi alulle Tuomas Akvinolainen jo vuonna 1485 teoksessaan "Teologian summa". Sitä on sittemmin kehitetty eteenpäin ja oman kriteeristöni koston oikeutuksen arvioimiseksi olen muokannut Alexander Moseleyn (2022) "Just War Theory" artikkelin pohjalta.

Moseleyn artikkelin pohjalta muodostin seuraavat kysymykset, joihin vastaamalla voin erottaa, onko henkilöhahmon tekstissä oikeutettu vai ei.

1. Onko teolle oikeutus? Toisin sanoen, onko tapahtunut joko psyykkistä tai fyysistä vahinkoa?

2. Onko kosto viimeinen keino? Olisiko väärintekijälle mahdollista tuottaa seuraamuksia muin keinoin?

3. Onko kostajalla oikeus kostoon? Onko hän itse, tai joku hänen lähipiirissään, uhri?

4. Onnistuuko kosto? Onko sillä haluttu lopputulema?

5. Onko koston laajuus suhteutettu aiheutettuun vahinkoon?

6. Onko kosto suunnattu oikeaa kohdetta, väärintekijää, vastaan?

7. Onko käytetty voima moraalisesti oikeutettua? Onko kostosta vaaraa sivullisille? Onko kyseessä silmä silmästä vai "elämä silmästä"?

Näiden kriteerien lisäksi tärkeitä käsitteitä tutkimuksessani ovat moraalinen mandaatti ja vähimmän haitan periaate. Moraalinen mandaatti tarkoittaa sitä, että moraaliset tuomiot eivät ole absoluuttisia, vaan suhteessa yksilön tai ryhmittymän standardeihin (Gowans 2021). Kun lopputulema tukee ihmisen moraalista mandaattia, hän kokee toimenpiteet ja lopputulemat oikeudenmukaisempina (Mullen ja Nadler 2018, 1239).

Viimeisenä teoreettisena viitekehyksenä tutkimuksessani on itse koston käsite. Kosto on suomen kielellä yksinkertainen sana, joka sisältää monia merkityksiä. Englannin kielessä näitä sanoja hivenen eri merkityksillä on useita. Tutkielmassani erittelen ne toisistaan ja keskityn nimenomaan oikeutetun koston ('retribution') käsitteeseen.

Olen sisällyttänyt tutkielmaani myös lyhennelmät sekä "Big Driveristä" että "A Good Marriagesta". Nämä auttavat lukijaa muodostamaan oman mielipiteensä tutkimukseni löydöksistä, sekä helpottavat analyysin seurantaa.

Kingin pienoisromaanien päähenkilöt ovat monikerroksisia ja heidän kamppailunsa koston kanssa on teksteissä tarkoin kuvattu. "Big Driverin" Tess on yksineläjä, jota kuvataan alussa tavallisena naisena – ainoa erikoisuus on hänen ammattinsa, kirjailija. Tess joutuu kuitenkin väkivallan uhriksi. Muutamaa päivää myöhemmin hän selvittää, ettei kyseessä ollut vahinko. Ramona Norville, jonka kirjallisuusseuralle hän oli mennyt pitämään puhetta, oli tahallaan ohjannut hänet kiertotielle, jotta hän joutuisi Norvillen pojan uhriksi. Tämän selvitettyään Tess aikoo punoa suunnitelmaa kostaakseen niin Norvillelle kuin hänen pojalleenkin.

Tess päätyy tappamaan niin Ramona Norvillen kuin hänen molemmat poikansakin. Vaikka Tess kuvitteleekin hetkellisesti surmanneensa väärän miehen, käy kuitenkin ilmi, että koko Norville / Strehlken perhe oli tavalla tai toisella mukana suunnitelmassa. Suurimman osan tästä päättelytyöstä Tess tekee 'mielikuvitusavustajiensa' kautta. Tällaisia henkilöhahmoja, jotka eivät ole todellisuudessa olemassa, ovat auton navigointilaite Tom sekä Tessin oman kirjasarjan pääetsivä Doreen Marquis. Nämä hahmot käyvät dialogia Tessin kanssa hänen päänsä sisällä ja auttavat ratkaisemaan ongelmia ja hiomaan suunnitelmaa. Lisäksi Tess saa apua kissaltaan Fritzyltä, joka on todellisuudessa olemassa, mutta luonnollisesti käy keskusteluja hänen kanssaan vain Tessin pään sisällä. Viimeinen tärkeä sivuhahmo on baaritarjoilija Betsy Neal, joka näkee Tessin heti hänen selvittyään väkivallanteosta ja joka lupaa olla antamatta Tessiä ilmi poliisille, kun hänelle selviää, mitä Tess teki hyökkääjälleen ja tämän perheelle.

Darcy Madsen Andersonin tarina "A Good Marriagessa" on saman suuntainen, mutta erilainen. Toisin kuin Tess, Darcey on perheenäiti ja ollut naimisissa miehensä kanssa vuosikymmeniä. Hän kuvittelee heillä olevan hyvän avioliiton, kunnes törmää miehensä Bobin salaiseen kätköön etsiessään autotallista paristoja. Bob paljastuu sarjamurhaajaksi ja Darcey jää puun ja kuoren väliin pohtiessaan, voiko hän ilmiantaa Bobin vai ei. Hän pohtii kaikkia mahdollisia seuraamuksia – heidän tyttärensä on juuri menossa naimisiin, ja poikansa on aloittanut oman yrityksen. Isän paljastuminen sarjamurhaajaksi veisi koko perheen lokaan. Toisaalta hän ei voi antaa Bobin jatkaa 'harrastustaan' ja tappaa lisää viattomia naisia. Lopulta Darcy päätyy ratkaisuun, jossa hän pyytää Bobia lopettamaan ja yrittää jatkaa elämäänsä tämän kanssa kuten ennenkin. Kaikki on kuitenkin muuttunut ja eräänä iltana Darcy saa tilaisuutensa, ja työntää Bobin alas portaita. Bob kuolee ilmeisen kivuliaan ja hitaan kuoleman, mutta hänen salaisuutensa menee hautaan hänen kanssaan ja perheen maine, sekä tulevien uhrien henget, pelastuvat.

Myös Darcyä auttaa teoksessa sivuhahmo, etsivä Holt. Tämä tulee paikalle Bobin kuoltua ja haluaa keskustella Darcyn kanssa sarjamurhaaja 'Beadiesta', jonka Holt epäili olleen Bob. Syntyy tilanne, jossa Holt tietää Darcyn tappaneen Bobin ja Darcy tietää sen, mutta kumpikaan ei varsinaisesti ota asiaa esille. Lopussa Darcy saa 'synninpäästön' Holtilta, eikä Holt ilmianna häntä poliisille murhasta.

Vietyäni molemmat tarinat kehittämäni kriteeristön läpi, kävi ilmi, että molempia kostotoimia voitiin pitää oikeutettuina. Vaikka Darcyn ja Tessin tilanteet erosivat toisistaan hieman, molemmat vastasivat kuitenkin kriteeristöä siten, että enemmistö kriteereistä täyttyi.

Vaikka molemmat kostotoimet olivatkin oikeutettuja sekä kehittämäni kriteeristön että pienimmän haitan periaatteen mukaan, keskittyivät tekstit eri näkökulmiin. ”Big Driverissä” keskityttiin paljon tarkemmin itse kostoon ja sen suunnittelemiseen, kun taas ”A Good Marriagessa” painotus oli selkeästi koston moraalisuuden ja sen erilaisten seurausten pohtimisessa. Molemmissa tarinoissa oli naishenkilöt tai -henkilöitä, jotka joutuivat väkivallan kohteeksi, ja mieshenkilöt, jotka olivat väkivallan toimeenpanijoina. Tessin tapauksessa väkivallantekijän apuhenkilönä oli nainen, kun taas Darcyn tapauksessa väkivallantekijän apuhenkilönä oli mies. Olisikin mielenkiintoista lukea teksti, jossa kohteena ja kostajana on mies – olisiko painotus silloin suoralla toiminnalla, vai olisiko tekstissä samankaltaista moraalista pohdintaa kostosta ja sen oikeutuksesta?

Tutkimukseni heikkona puolena on ehdottomasti se, että moraalin subjektiivisuuden vuoksi tutkimusta on erittäin vaikea toisintaa. Mikäli moraalikäsitykset olisivat ehdottoman universaaleja, olisi tutkimuksen toisintaminen mahdollista, mutta ikävä kyllä näin ei ole.

Olisi kuitenkin mielenkiintoista tutkia asiaa laajemmassa mittakaavassa. Tämän voisi toteuttaa esimerkiksi lukijatutkimuksena, jossa koehenkilöt lukisivat molemmat teokset ja arvioisivat koston oikeutusta kehittämäni kriteeristön avulla. Haittapuolena tällaisen tutkimuksen järjestämisessä on kuitenkin tekstien pituus – molemmat ovat yli 100 sivua pitkiä – joten toinen, joskaan ei niin luotettava, vaihtoehto olisi kerätä lukijoiden arvioita esimerkiksi Goodreads-sivustolta ja tulkita niiden kautta lukijoiden käsitystä koston oikeutuksesta.

Myös tekstejä, joissa pahantekijä onkin nainen (kuten esimerkiksi Stephen Kingin *Misery*) olisi mielenkiintoista tutkia koston ja sen oikeutuksen näkökulmasta.

Näistä sudenkuopista huolimatta tutkielmani onnistui tavoitteessaan, sillä onnistuin luomaan toimivan kriteeristön, jonka kautta pystyin arvioimaan tekstejä ja peilaamaan niitä soveltuviin moraalikäsityksiin. Tutkielmani sisältää myös laajahkon semanttisen osuuden, jonka sisältöä

on vaikea ilmaista suomeksi sanastojen eroavaisuuksien vuoksi, joten toivon, että lukijat pystyvät tutustumaan myös alkuperäiseen, englanninkieliseen tekstiin.