



“Nobody in the Renaissance  
conceived of a revenge  
quite so delicious”:  
John Dickson Carr’s  
Bencolin Stories and  
Jacobean Revenge Plays

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**Abstract.** This article argues that John Dickson Carr’s first four novels about Inspector Henri Bencolin each draw from a different early modern revenge tragedy: *It Walks by Night* alludes to John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*; *Castle Skull* borrows names and atmosphere from Henry Chettle’s *Hoffman*; *The Lost Gallows* nods to Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*; and *The Corpse in the Waxworks* evokes Thomas Middleton’s and William Rowley’s *The Changeling*.

It has often been observed that many of John Dickson Carr’s detective stories have a distinctly gothic flavor. Stefano Serafini remarks that “Carr does not work within the fictional paradigm of mimetic realism but rather relies on gothic and supernatural imagery, plunging the reader into a nightmarish atmosphere” (23) and notes his debt to Edgar Allan Poe (26). His principal detective Gideon Fell was based partly on G.K. Chesterton, whose Father Brown stories frequently include uncanny elements, as noted by Joanna Kokot (63). In *The Crooked Hinge* the doctor says of the automaton “Shades of *Udolpho*!” (149), and Molly Farnleigh leads a witch cult. In *He Who Whispers* the suggestion that Fay Seton may be a vampire leads us into “[t]he realm of monsters and nightmares” (220). In *Hag’s Nook* Fell discusses

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