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Inner Slavery of Men: A Psychoanalytic Reading of *The Tempest* and *The Blind Owl*

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ABSTRACT

This paper, by conducting a comparative psychoanalytic study, pursues to emphasize that slavery has a deeper meaning than the meaning it has in post-colonialism by analyzing the characters of *The Tempest*, the last play written by William Shakespeare and *The Blind Owl*, the last novella written by the Iranian writer Sadegh Hedayat. It begins with an argument that how each character in the selected works, specially the protagonist, serves as a slave at different levels of life. Hence, the focus is to show how these characters are slaves to their own inner thoughts and beliefs. Revenge, as an inner force, is the driving motive in the two depicted protagonists' actions. However, they adopt different attitudes by the end of each story: Prospero, the protagonist of *The Tempest*, decides to forgive, but the narrator of *The Blind Owl* takes his revenge at last. We can see how these different attitudes of the two characters lead to the different outcomes in their real life. Inner suffering, and in turn, inner slavery, reside more in a person who persists in his belief, on the other hand, a dynamic character achieves more peace at the end of the story.

Keywords: *The Blind Owl*, *Hedayat*, *Inner Slavery*, *Freud*, *Projection*, *Shakespeare*, *The Tempest*

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1. Introduction

When a person sticks to his beliefs all through his life, life becomes harsher and harsher for him. Men are physically bound to live in the prison of this world. Furthermore, they are limited to their own bodies and capabilities. Not only they are confined to their bodies and physical features but also their way of thinking limits their way of living. The word slave denotes a person who is owned by another. This paper tries to zoom on a deeper meaning of slave. No matter how free one is, one is always a slave of his world, society, family and friends and most of all he is a slave of his inner thoughts which shape his mind and his perspective towards life.

An article entitled "Thomas Hardy and Urbanization: The Role of Determinism in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*" zooms on the major theme in Thomas Hardy's novel. It argues how the characters of Hardy's works are controlled by their destiny. Free will does not exist according to Thomas Hardy and we are destined by fate (Amjad, & Daronkolae, 2015). The question which arises here is that if free will does not exist,

in what sense is a man free. We are all bound to be the slaves of our destiny. White (2010), in his analysis of Hardy's style, says: "Hardy remained preoccupied with both fate and providence even as his belief in a personal God was fading, and although written a hundred years ago, his works remain an interesting window onto our situation" (357). According to White's claim, Hardy's view of life is attributed not only to the age he lived in but to all ages, specially the modern age. Both these ideas on Hardy's work are related to the two selected stories here, in the sense that their protagonists lack free will and that in modern age man is bound to be a slave in a deeper sense.

Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, is the story of a man named Prospero who claims to be the rightful Duke of Milan. He seeks to take revenge from his brother because he was the reason of his exile to an island. He suffers from a twofold limitation: his body is limited to live in this world, moreover, he is limited to live in isolation with his only daughter and few natives on an island. These limitations ignite the thirst of revenge in him

but by the end of the story he receives inner peace. He decides to forgive and let go of taking his revenge.

On the other hand, Sadegh Hedayat's best novella, *The Blind Owl* adopts first person point of view. The narrator claims to be suffering in life because of his wife who refuses to sleep with him due to her adulterous affairs. He suffers because he has gone mad owing to his thoughts and assumptions in life. He is confined to live in a single room. Unlike Prospero, by the end of the story, he takes his revenge and kills his wife.

While *The Tempest* was written during the renaissance period, *The Blind Owl* was written in the twentieth century and it is considered to be a modern and a surrealistic work. A large part of *The Blind Owl* takes place in the narrator's dreams. Since dreams have to do with the unconscious, a psychoanalytic study can easily be applied on this book. The book consists of two parts, in the first part the narrator dreams of killing the Ethereal woman, in the second part, in reality, he kills his own wife. Scholz explicates on the importance of dreams in the recognition of our true selves: "In dreams there is truth; despite all camouflage of nobility or degradation, we recognize our own true selves" (1887, 36). According to this statement, because the narrator has dreams of revenge, his true identity is limited to taking revenge. He is the slave of his own desires to take revenge and when his wishes are fulfilled, there is no more excuse for him to live.

This paper will try to show the possible similarities and differences residing in the characters of the two books. First of all, it intends to portray how the characters suffer because they are confined to live in small places. Prospero lives on a small island and the narrator of *The Blind Owl*, although living in Ray (the old Tehran and now the Southern part of Tehran), the biggest city of the world according to himself, is limited to live in a single room. Later discussion will zoom in on this fact that how limitations make a person a slave of himself. Furthermore, it will also elaborate on how knowledge and magic bring more distress in life. In addition, this paper tries to challenge all the existing feminist criticisms which have been applied on these works, by highlighting how the women of the selected works enjoy more authority than men. Revenge is another key term in both works. The characters' lives are based on revenge. However, by the end,

their different decisions lead to different outcomes in life for them.

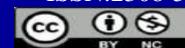
This research does not intend just to show how one character suffers more than the other, but the main intention here is to show how each and every character suffers in his own world due to different reasons. It will be highlighted that how each character is the main reason of his own suffering. To prove its main argument and claim, this study will draw on gender studies and psychoanalysis to show the inner feelings of different races and genders, and to show that, contrary to feminist readings of these texts, men are more suppressed as opposed to women.

2. Literature Review

Shakespeare has been subjected to many literary studies and criticisms. There have been many feministic and post-colonial readings of his works, especially related to *The Tempest*. Stevie Davies (1984) in his book *The Feminine Reclaimed* believed that many renaissance writers, including Shakespeare, were feminists. He claimed how men were obsessed to show women as highly valuable figures. This paper supports the idea of Davies who considers Shakespeare as a feminist since it is Prospero's daughter, Miranda, who enjoys more authority in comparison to her father.

On the other hand, Susan Iren Clegg (1990) in her article "Shakespeare and feminism: a study of four plays" focuses on the women in Shakespeare's plays, with special focus on women in King Lear and Romeo and Juliet. She argues the inequality of men and women in Shakespeare's plays and how a woman was confined to have a moral death if she did not obey her father. For example, Juliet was a subject of moral death, unlike Miranda in *The Tempest*, because the latter is so obedient and naïve that she falls in love with the first person she meets and is ready to obey her father to marry the person he has chosen for her. While the main idea in Clegg's article zooms on female characters as subordinate characters in Shakespeare's four major plays, this paper zooms on the father and daughter relationship in *The Tempest* and tries to prove, contrary to Clegg, that it is the father who is more oppressed than the daughter.

Ania Loomba (2002) in her book, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism*, describes how the differences in race, religion and position are crucial because they lead to different fates for the characters. She also focuses on Caliban, the slave in *The*



Tempest, who is characterized as less of a human and more of a monster. But this study will show how Prospero feared Caliban and his mother although he was in power.

Thus, as it can be seen, some critics believe that Shakespeare was a feminist though there are still some others who are definitely of the opinion that he was a writer living in a patriarchal society who deemed women as subordinate characters.

The Blind Owl, Sadegh Hedayat's masterpiece, has been the subject of many literary studies too. Homayun Katouzian as an international authority on Sadegh Hedayat, names Hedayat as the founder of modernism in Persian fiction. Katouzian in his (2008) book *Sadeq Hedayat, his Work and his Wondrous World* considers Hedayat as a cult figure and takes *The Blind Owl* as a cult book in modern Persian fiction. This paper, in line with Katouzian's book, which takes *The Blind Owl* as a modern work, focuses on the problems that a modern man faces in this world, moreover it will zoom on the difference between Prospero and *The Blind Owl*'s narrator in order to show that a modern man suffers more than a man who lived in the renaissance period.

Sirus Shamisa (2007) in his book *داستان یک روح [The Story of a Soul]* studies *The Blind Owl* in detail. He uses Carl Jung's collective unconscious theory to describe the reason behind the events of the story. Shamisa uses Jung's Psychoanalytic theory in order to prove many of his claims. This paper, besides using Freudian theory on projection, uses the ideas residing in Carl Jung's *Psychogenesis of Mental Disease*.

Jeffrey Wilson (2018) in his article "Savage and Deformed: Stigma as Drama in *The Tempest*" pairs Caliban's savage and deformed nature as a slave. Since his main focus is on Caliban who is the slave of the play, his article can be a good example for the way Shakespeare presents slavery in his book. The present article's main intention is also to portray characters other than Caliban who are slaves in this world.

To sum, it is clear that both these works, as the best works of their time, written by the best authors, have been subjected to many literary studies. However, no comparative study has been conducted on them. This paper will try to draw on this parallelism at the level of characters by showing how these characters' inner slavery, due to different reasons, leads to their suffering in life. In addition, it concludes how their different decisions lead to different paths.

3. Methodology

As mentioned in the title, this paper mostly deals with psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis has to do a lot with the unconscious. Since Freud was the founder of psychoanalysis, his theories on dream and projection will be mentioned here. Projection is a form of defense mechanism which has been largely described by Freud and his daughter, Anna. It mentions people start hating and fearing others because they recognize the features they have in themselves through others. This is a very good reason to say why Prospero hated Caliban. Prospero was constantly reminded by Caliban that he is a slave as well, because when a man is in thirst of revenge, he is nothing more than a slave himself.

However, since some of the Freudian theories are problematic and out of favor with critics, in order to give validity to the claims in this paper, some of Carl Jung's theories are also drawn upon, including his theories of self-consciousness as well as his theories of the opposition between the inner and outer self.

4. Men in Authority or Slavery

While studying the male protagonists of both the aforementioned stories, it is understood that power, position, and wealth do not bring these men authority. They are rather reasons for their own slavery. Both these protagonists have been betrayed by their close family members. Prospero has been betrayed by his brother who has ousted him as the Duke of Milan and has driven him into exile. Living on an island makes him a powerful man since he now focuses on practicing magic to take his revenge. He is now a powerful sorcerer and as the ruler of a remote island, manages to control its native inhabitants. But the question that arises here is whether he is satisfied in life or he is the subject of slavery. According to Aristotle "There are human beings who are from birth marked out by nature as slaves" (Smith, 1983, 110). He believes that some human beings are born to be slaves and their life has no meaning without their masters; however, what needs to be mentioned here is that we are all born out to be slaves. Not necessarily the slaves of others but the slaves of ourselves. If we take Aristotle's claim as true, then the nature of slavery can reside in any human being.

Meredith Anne Skura in her study of *The Tempest* argues how Shakespeare is deliberately using a post-colonial language in his play because he is influenced by both

the political system of the time and the psychological conditions of his mind:

The "colonialism" in his play is linked not only to Shakespeare's indirect participation in an ideology of political exploitation and erasure but also to his direct participation in the psychological aftereffects of having experienced the exploitation and erasure inevitable in being a child in an adult's world. (2014, 69)

Although Prospero is regarded as a colonist and the ruler of an island, he does not have a single ear to listen to his inner feelings. At the beginning of the play he tries to find a companion in his own daughter. He seeks to share his feelings of betrayal and isolation with Miranda but she is interested in her own affairs. She does not pay attention to her father's story. Caliban, as a slave to Prospero, seeks to plot against his life. Ariel who is always trying to show Prospero loyalty is just looking for a way out to achieve freedom. By mentioning all these three characters that Prospero is surrounded by, it can be inferred that the mere possession of power does not guarantee loyalty and companionship for the protagonist of Shakespeare's play. Prospero is a slave of his own loneliness and isolation, being doomed to live on a small island. He is the slave of the fear of death that is constantly reminded to him by Caliban. He is in fear because he is surrounded by characters that are different from him. For example, Caliban is like an ape, Miranda is a woman, Ariel is a spirit. So the only man residing on the island is Prospero. According to A. J. Marsden assistant professor of psychology and human services at Beacon College in Leesburg, Florida, in his book *The Psychology of Hate* (2018), "one reason we hate is because we fear things that are different from us" (4).

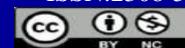
Power does not buy freedom, but it brings along responsibility, fear, and limitations. Fear itself can be the very reason for slavery. Responsibility for others can be a burden itself. Prospero while having a conversation with Miranda calls the island a cell: "Canst thou remember a time before we came unto this cell?" (Shakespeare, 2001, 1224). This intensifies the feeling he has towards the island. As the sole authority of the island and its inhabitants, he is stuck in his own cell without anyone understanding him. He suffers a double burden as he is both imprisoned on an island and doomed to live in this world, moreover, like all human beings, he owns a heart. The heart is metaphorically like a cage itself, a cage/cell

full of hatred and loneliness. He is imprisoned by his own emotions that is why he acts like the way he does towards others. He hates Caliban because he is different or it may be because he thinks he is exactly a slave like him. Hence, Prospero is tended to reject what he does not like about himself, in other words, he lives up to what is termed by Freud as projection.

Other critics hold that he is a cruel colonist by taking advantage of others. He orders Ariel and Caliban to satisfy his needs. He even exploits his own daughter Miranda: "Prospero unconsciously found his daughter a suitable choice to solve his despair" through the defense mechanism of displacement (Sehat & Jahantigh, 2018, 3). For example, at the beginning of the story he asks Miranda to pluck his cloak. This shows how dominating he is. But the question which arises here is whether it is right to judge Prospero because of the way he acts or does he act the way he does because he is suffering inner slavery himself.

Equally important, the narrator of *The Blind Owl* is just like Prospero in the sense that like Prospero who owns an island, the narrator owns a house in Ray. He is likewise confined to live in loneliness. In the first part of the book he dreams of his house being located outside the city proper. Freud claims in his article "The Interpretation of Dreams" that people dream about things they are deprived from in reality. Accordingly, the narrator wanted to live far away from people because he believed no one understood him, which is exactly how a modern man feels. "Man, for these writers [modernist writers], is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings" (Richter, 2007, p. 1219).

Moreover, in *Psychogenesis of Mental Disease* Carl Jung asserts that when a person reaches self-consciousness he is necessarily alone. The more he recognizes the self, the less he wants to be surrounded by people (1960, 178). The narrator of *The Blind Owl* had reached self-recognition. All he longed for was revenge, the sole reason of his existence. In other words, he was the slave of an inner desire. In reality he lives with his nurse, wife, brother-in-law, and father-in-law. According to Shamisa in the aforementioned book, all these characters in the story could be deemed to be the very narrator himself, but this paper will treat the characters as if they all exist in the narrator's life and not in his mind. The narrator's relation with his wife can be compared to Prospero's relation with his daughter. Like



Prospero who needs a sympathetic ear in Miranda, the narrator wants his wife to lend a sympathetic ear to him. His wife gives him the cold shoulder and does not care how the narrator feels because she can gain nothing out of the relation with him. According to Al-e Ahmad “Why did Hedayat search for love in heavens and in the subtle and intangible being of that ethereal girl? It is very simple, because he has been deprived of copulating on earth” (Hillmann, 1978, 38-39). Since the narrator cannot have sexual intercourse himself, he abhors others.

Moreover, Jung discusses when the inner (soul) and outer (body) self are in opposition and the outer cannot fulfil the desires of the inner, a person suffers self-opposition. Jung compares his discussion to what Freud had to say about sexual imaginations which are taboo in the society and a person who has these kinds of imagination turns out to be a rebel, a mad man, or a psychopath in the society (1960, 185). This shows how the narrator of *The Blind Owl* is the slave of his own body and inabilities. His inner desires cannot be fulfilled because of his physical inabilities. His imaginations and desires lead him to madness. He is doomed to live the way he does because his very body serves as a boundary for him in his life. Like Prospero, he has a heart full of hatred toward others and, likewise, seeks companionship, but is left to suffer in isolation in the very room he lives in. Prospero’s and the narrator’s inner hatred grows because they are limited to live in the confinement of small places.

Like Prospero who fears death because of the presence of Caliban, the narrator also fears death all through the story. In one part of the story there is a conversation between the narrator and his brother-in-law. He tells the narrator how glad the members of his household would be if he died because then the house would belong to them. Just like Caliban who wants Prospero dead to achieve the island, the narrator’s household, especially his wife, want him dead to get the house. This very fact shows that these men are not in power but are in slavery. They are slaves to live in fear, because of their positions. They are slaves of isolation in this world; moreover, in their case the isolation is limited to a smaller place than the whole world, to the confinement of a house or an island. They both bear fear and hatred in their hearts because of the people they are surrounded by.

[5. Woman: Suppressed or Enjoy the Freedom of Authority and Liberty](#)

The primary idea that comes to a reader’s mind while reading these stories is that the female characters have been suppressed by the male characters, since in *The Blind Owl* the female character was murdered by the male one and in *The Tempest* Miranda was a subject which Prospero used in order to take his revenge. However, this article exemplifies different reasons which mention how throughout the stories the female characters enjoyed more authority than the male ones. As mentioned before, there have been many feminist readings of *The Tempest*. Many critics have argued that Shakespeare is deliberately using just one female character in his play whose value only resides in her virginity. On the other hand, Mary Beth Rose (1991) argues that there were reasons behind pervasive patriarchy, theater etiquette, or a shortage of young male actors to play female roles. While many assume that women were completely disempowered in early modern England, Rose claims that women were “buying, selling, and bequeathing property and actively negotiating the marriages of their children, as well as planning for their education” (1991, 293). She believes that Shakespeare does not use female characters not because he was a misogynist but for other reasons. These other reasons can be mostly related to economic reasons. As it can be seen, there have been different views and perspectives toward Shakespeare’s use of female characters on stage. In turn, here the argument is that the way Shakespeare portrays Miranda and the other absent female characters next to the male ones in this play is to highlight the way female characters enjoy more authority than men do. Miranda is going to be wedded to a man she has fallen in love with. In addition, she is going to be the future queen and enjoy the benefits of authority. She can serve as a foil for Prospero to highlight the miseries in Prospero’s life. Nowhere in the story we can see the presence of Prospero’s wife, as readers we can assume she is dead. In this sense, Prospero is doomed to lead a lonely life, while Miranda is going to enjoy the feeling of being loved in her life. Prospero’s dukedom has been taken away from him but Miranda is going to enjoy even more than the dukedom that once belonged to her father.

Not only Miranda but also the other women mentioned in the passing in the play are portrayed as powerful women. For example, Claribel, Ferdinand’s sister, who is now the queen of Tunis is a woman in power

who is enjoying her authority. Compared to Ferdinand who is trapped on an island, she enjoys more freedom as she is subjected to live in the world but her brother is confined to an island the same as he is trapped in this world.

Sycorax, the other female character, has also once enjoyed the privilege of ruling an island. In a time that women were considered subordinate creatures, this woman, though not white, once used to rule an island. Even the language Prospero uses when describing Sycorax shows the fear he has toward her, because deep down he believes she was a powerful woman. Though Sycorax is not there anymore, Prospero has her constantly present in his memory. As Brittney Blystone (2012) argues “Prospero claims that Sycorax could never defeat his magic, and, to his convenience, she is not there to prove him wrong. Since Sycorax is absent, she becomes the platform for Prospero’s ideas of gender, and she highlights both his desire for power and his fear of losing that power.”

It can be perceived that all the women in *The Tempest* are portrayed as powerful creatures, no matter absent or present. Compared to Prospero, they are freer. Even the very fact that Sycorax is not there in the island anymore shows that she has more liberty than Prospero does, since she is not confined to live in this world.

Similarly, when the woman in *The Blind Owl* is compared to the man, it can be perceived that she enjoys more liberty in the house than he does. The same claim is made by Hashemipour in his article “Surrealistic Duality and Inner-Voice in *The Blind Owl* by Sadegh Hedayat.” It mentions: “The narrator fences away his thoughts and feelings from his life and isolates himself in the walls of his room” (2018, 2). His wife is not the one who has gone mad so she is not limited to live only in a single room. She is not the one with incapability in her body. It is true that she is limited to her body in this world but the way her physical features are described shows she is perfect, while the man is not perfect at all. It has been said that the owner of the house is the man but the woman is both in charge and is at the same time enjoying the privileges of the house. She is the one who can freely have affairs with anyone she likes even though she is a married woman. On the contrary, the narrator, because of his sexual impotency, is doomed to live in a world devoid of passion. All these things added up together lead to the narrator’s sense of anger and to the

feeling that the world in which he has been caught is not constructed for a person like him. The capability of the woman is juxtaposed to the incapability of the man.

By comparing the female characters to the male protagonists in these two books it can be seen how women are more in charge than men and how men are more of slaves in this world than the women.

6. Knowledge and Magic as other Chains

The main issue which resides here is that the more a man possesses knowledge the more he is subjected to slavery. Prospero and the narrator are both knowledgeable men. Prospero, due to his owning of many books and his extensive reading has gained a lot of knowledge. But his books and stuff are like a chain in his life. To release himself by the end of the play he breaks his stuff and drowns his books. This action can prove what a burden it is to have a lot of knowledge and magic. Hedayat’s narrator also observes people. He knows everyone’s issue. He can even hear the sound of the plant growing. He compares his knowledge of people to that of God. He, unlike Prospero, does not let go of the knowledge he has which is exactly the reason he suffers more. By comparing these two characters it can be perceived that people who do not let go of their belongings are more subjected to inner suffering and slavery in this life. We are the slaves of the objects and the knowledge we hold in life to the level of fetishism.

7. Revenge: a Bigger Burden in Life

Previously, it had been mentioned how the male protagonist of these stories were slaves of their own revenge. The only motive of their life was taking revenge. It is evident that on the one hand a dynamic character by persisting to take revenge, achieves peace by the end of the story while on the other hand, a character who takes his revenge turns into a full subject of slavery. In *The Holy Quran* God has regarded himself four times as “ذو انتقام” which means He is “the owner of vengeance.” *The Holy Quran* interprets revenge in two ways. It says God can take revenge because his judgement is not based on emotions and that he is a fair judge; however, human beings must resist revenge and leave it up to God. In different parts of *The Holy Quran* it has been mentioned that human beings must forgive others, a case in point is the following verse: “Those who spend (in Allah’s Cause) in prosperity and in adversity, who repress anger, and who pardon men; verily, Allah loves Al-



Muhsinun (the good-doers)” (Quran 3: 134, Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore USA edition).

The two selected texts serve as a cry of vengeance. Throughout both works it has been depicted how the protagonists are trapped in their inner feelings of hatred and revenge towards their close family members. In Prospero’s case his hatred and vengeance are directed firstly toward his own brother who has wronged him. But in Hedayat’s story the revenge is directed toward a woman. The narrator is so thirsty for revenge that even in his dreams he sees murdering the woman. As the novella proceeds it becomes evident that the thirst for revenge makes the narrator crazy. In different parts of the story he blames his wife for his current plight but as readers we can perceive that his inner intention makes him crazy. At the end when he has finally gotten rid of his wife he looks at himself in the mirror finding himself being turned into a crazy person. All through his life he was the slave of his feeling, the slave of revenge. He wanted to serve his inner desire but it is obvious that his inner desire has now confined him to live in misery and guilt. He assumes that by killing his wife he is going to achieve inner peace but in turn it ends in insanity for him.

Resistance to change is another concept introduced by Freud which fits the discussion of this paper. Although the narrator knows that changing might save him from a life full of miseries, he resists it. On the contrary, Prospero by the end of the play lets go of his inner desire and by being a dynamic character he achieves inner peace. But this does not change the fact that he was for years the slave and victim of the revenge inside him. His whole life, his attitude towards the islanders, the reason of the terrified men on the ship, all these were due to his inner feelings. For years he was the reason of the misery in his own and other people’s lives. At the end, by forgiving others, he is not doing anyone a favor but himself to evade a bigger catastrophe in life. Based on *The Holy Quran*, people who forgive achieve more grace and pardon from God:

It was by that Mercy of Allah that you dealt so leniently with them. Had you been harsh and hardhearted, they would have surely deserted you. Therefore, pardon them and ask forgiveness for them. Take counsel with them in the matter and when you are resolved, put your trust in Allah. Allah loves

those who trust. (Quran 3: 159, Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore USA edition)

8. Conclusion

This paper compared *The Blind Owl* by Hedayat and *The Tempest* by Shakespeare to shed light on the parallel motif of the inner slavery and suffering of the characters. It showed how the protagonists of the two stories were subjected to different kinds of slavery. They were the slaves of the places they were confined to live in because they were short of human communication and sexual relations. They were the slaves of their fears and their desires for revenge. Even, compared to their immediate female characters, they had a more miserable status.

Despite all the similarities between these protagonists, their different decisions led to their different fates. While Prospero by forgiving was released from one of the chains in his life, the narrator of *The Blind Owl* by taking revenge, was confined to be imprisoned in a bigger chain, i.e. the feeling of guilt. While forgiving others leads to inner peace, taking revenge leads to a bigger burden in life.

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