

Tribhuvan University

Critique of Christian Rhetoric of Confession in Jodi Picoult's *The Story Teller*

A Dissertation Submitted to the Central Department of English
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in English

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January 2020

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Letter of Recommendation

Nabin Rai has completed his research entitled “Critique of Christian Rhetoric of Confession in Jodi Picoult's *The Story Teller*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2075/03/18 to 2076/09/23 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

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Approval Letter

This research entitled “Critique of Christian Rhetoric of Confession in Jodi Picoult's *The Story Teller*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Nabin Rai has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to a number of people for their help with this project. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my guide and supervisor, Hem Lal Pandey, whose contribution in stimulating suggestions and encouragement, helped me to coordinate and complete my project. He inspired me greatly to complete this project. His willingness to motivate me contributed tremendously in this research.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Dr. Ani Rudra Thapa, Head of the Central Department of English, for the appreciation of this research work in its present shape. I would like to expand my sincere thanks to respected teachers Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota, Dr. Dhruva Karki, Badri Prasad Acharya, Shankar Subedi, Pradip Raj Giri, Keshab Sigdel, Raj Kumar Baral, Khem Raj Khanal and other teachers who inspired me to materialize my dream of Master of Arts in English Literature.

At last, I would like to remember my father and mother for their support, love and blessing to complete my M. A. in English. I owe a debt of gratitude to all my friends and others, who directly or indirectly helped me to bring this thesis in its current form. With all this said – after this long list of people who have been instrumental in my M. A. thesis – it should be noted that the mistakes, shortcomings, and oversights are all my own.

January 2020

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Abstract

The major thrust of this research is the critique of the Christian rhetoric of confession in Jodi Picoult's novel, The Story Teller. Weber is an old Nazi soldier who is extremely repentant for his engagement in the discourse of anti-Semitism during the Third Reich. Bounded by professional and racial restrictions, he is involved in genocidal violence. He is an agent and perpetrator of the harsh practice of anti-Semitism. In the prime of youth, he was unaware of the outcome of his thoughtless activities. Only in the old age, he is awake to the pros and cons of his reckless choices. Guilt, repentance, and unconscious longing for redemption drive him ceaselessly when he approaches old age. His innermost longing heightens his faith in Christian precept of salvation via repentance and confession. But the outcome turns out to be totally contrary to him. The very confession of his past crimes and inhuman activities to his so-called lady friend digs his grave. Instead of witnessing the peaceful and blissful end of his life, he has to face the fate of being arrested by that person whom he believed as the true friend. The very emphasis of Christianity on faith as the sovereign force of liberation is turned upside down. Actually, it is the void, the emptiness and weakening of humanistic values that underlie entire spectrum of human existence. This issue is tested from the vantage point of moral nihilism chiefly propounded by Friedrich Nietzsche.

Key Words: Nihilism, Christianity, Confession, Redemption

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Introduction

This study concentrates on how Christian ethics is interrogated and how nihilistic belief is reinforced in Jodi Picoult's novel, *The Story Teller*. Josef Weber is an old man who had once worked as Nazi Soldier during the Second World War. At that time, he was involved in harsh and horrendous practice of anti-Semitism. He had to involve, against his will, in all the evil practices in Nazi Holocaust concentration camp. But now he is old and lonely. He is filled with guilt. He is guilty of his past involvement in genocidal violence. Overburdened by the guilt, agony and repentant feeling, he comes to the shelter of Christian belief that confession leads to salvation. Motivated by this biblical doctrine, he befriends a lady Sage Singer. Despite the huge age gap, their friendship deepens.

The biblical rhetoric of confession fails completely. Weber expected that the confession of his engagement in anti-Semitism during the third Reich invites salvation. The biblical doctrine affirms that confession leads to salvation. Guided by this view, Weber confesses with Singer about his secret engagement in genocidal violence in holocaust. Contrary to his expectation, she enters in complicity with a police officer and collects proofs about his war crimes. Consequently, Weber is imprisoned and held in trial.

Josef Weber's attempt to get assistance from Sage Singer to die ends in despair. His trust in his friendship with Singer turns out to be fatally unexpected. The very line of his confession of his involvement in Anti-Semitism in expectation of assistance for salvation from death leads to his imprisonment. Confession leads to salvation if his confessional act becomes the root cause of bondage and imprisonment.

As their friendship reaches its height, Weber reveals the truth that he was once a murderer, a Gestapo man in company with Nazi ruler. He also confesses that he is

fed up with his life. He does not lose a moment to share with her his intense desire to die. Catching the moment, he asks for her help so that he could die safely to free from all the haunting sense of guilt and burden of life in old condition. But contrary to his expectation, she enters in support with a police officer who develops hatred and hostility with a former Nazi soldier. By plotting a conspiracy with this police officer, she collects evidences of Weber's inhuman past deeds which are unlawful and unethical. He is arrested and imprisoned. His expectation that confession leads to salvation becomes a meaningless hope in this novel.

Jodi Picoult explores new area of thinking and research as a novelist. She raises controversial issue which must be contemplated by readers to understand her novels profoundly. Her novels are filled with plenty of social issues. Her novels are concerned with issues regarding to the conflict of anti-Semitism and Nazi Concentration camp. As a novelist she has carried distinct voice to the world of rational thinking. Culture and history of anti-Semitism are the main focus of his novels. Apart from historical subject-matter and socio-cultural issues, the novelist introduces fresh issue of radical quest for meaning in life. Picoult's novels dramatize genuine concern for sufferings of mankind. There is no unanimous agreement with the claim that Picoult is a humanist. She brings into light the optimistic atmosphere generated by rational commitment to the meaning in life. She often uses the first person narrator; she has done her best to maintain objectivity of her narratives.

Most of Picoult's novels explore the confidence of survivors. In this novel, the novelist has pointed out the alternative solution to the modern sufferings like alienation and inner injury. The crisis in consolation is described and the growing skepticism of religious metaphysics is praised. The permanent solution to the growing crisis is also pointed out. In some of his major novels, she represents how the

devastated Europe reconstructed after the Great War. Picoult's technique is to allow these characters to reveal their flaws implicitly in the narrative. The author thus creates a sense of pathos by allowing the reader to see the narrator's flaws.

Lynn Nutwell is the leading critic of Picoult. He has analyzed the diverse aspects of Picoult's novels. According to Nutwell, Picoult's novels are filled up with plenty of crucial issues which have direct relation to our present day notion of freedom, particularly individual freedom. Nutwell expresses the following views about this novel, *The Story Teller*:

The Story Teller is a story about cultivating dangerous hope against the pang of holocaust torture. When people suffered a lot from the threat of Nazism and Holocaust concentration camp, they had cultivated sinister premonition that humanity is almost on the threshold of insanity. But the constant cultivation of inner hope and belief helped holocaust inmates to cope with the tragedy of life. (10)

Lynn Nutwell is of the opinion that Picoult has advocated for the rights of holocaust inmates. He advocates for those who are haunted and made insecure by the dangerous holocaust camp. He has simply dismissed the trend to treat Jews as subhuman figures. Such a treatment would incur problems for the collective well-being of the people. Picoult's art of character portrayal is directed by his genuine care and concern for the human status of Jews. He presents himself as an activist in this direction. Such an inhuman treatment is not abolished. It can destroy the entire creative and innovative potentiality of human beings.

Sorren Helleberg extends pity to those who are lazy and passive. They came to know that they have been living for the sake of somebody else's. The holocaust camps are made to exist to secure and enrich the lives of others. He has operated into

the subconscious level of that holocaust camp inmates. Hence, it can be said that the realization of the sole motive of survival has made all those insecure victims fatalistic. They are passive and lethargic. The following citation clarifies Hellerung's view regarding to the painful plight of mankind trapped in the chaos created by the horror of anti-Semitism:

The novel, essentially, belongs to the holocaust fiction genre although this is hardly the thematically focus of the book. Life revolves around art and usual teenage concerns, creating what is apparently an almost normal upbringing for characters. The gradually unraveling truth behind the matter is that they at Hailsham are haunted by the post-apocalyptic devastation, brought up to witness the post-apocalyptic disorder. The fact that her life is predetermined is reflected in her character. (5)

Hellerung describes how last survivors of the holocaust world develop the fatalistic bent of the mind. They are ignorant about their difficult life.. They are perfectly happy and blissful. They come to know that they are made to help the lives of those human beings who suffer from incurable inner challenges. They begin to realize their tragic destiny. They decline to cultivate the radical sense of revolt against the dehumanization of helpless human beings. They simply accepted their tragic lot. In a sense, it can be argued that Hellenrung has clarified and explained a new kind of fatalism.

Cecilie Skaarup has described how Picoult has made use of memory as the device to maintain the structural design of the novel. He has made the following remarks about Picoult's *The Story Teller*:

The main goal of this book is to provide perspective and techniques for a person to use to find meaning in his or her life. It is written in an

autobiographical style by psychiatrist, Jodi Picoult. She discusses many specific examples from her imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp, along with his professional knowledge to offer a method for discovering personal fulfillment and a sense of meaning in life. (54)

Specifically, he details the conditions of the concentration camp and defines specific terms. He tells the reader that facts are presented only as they are part of man's experience, which provides the basis for understanding the psychology of individuals who face extreme suffering. Picoult tells the story of his and others' suffering in the concentration camp. Therefore, their individual ways of rewriting their past is directly reflected in the structure of each novel. They vulnerably exist for the betterment of other human beings. This dream created alienation in their lives. That is why they go to take refuge in memory. In this sense, it can be called the mode of survival.

John Harrison notices negative vision in Picoult's *The Story Teller*. He is immensely dissatisfied with the way the novelist has handled it. Harrison's approach of analysis is strictly consequential. He has not dithered about appreciating the unique thematic issue of the writer. Harrison has mentioned his view regarding to the novel in the following way:

Picoult begins with an autobiographical style to describe her first-hand experiences as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. In the beginning of this section, Picoult moves from a general description of the concentration camp circumstances to a more specific discussion of his individual experiences and feelings when first arriving as a prisoner at Auschwitz. (17)

Harrison maintains that Picoult describes the journey to this concentration camp. He states that shock is the first of three phases of psychological reactions common to all prisoners. Shock is evident given the circumstances. One of the first experiences at

this camp is the realization. If dictatorship clips the wings of individuals, how can it boost the collective aspiration of human beings for betterment and salvation? Hence, it can be concluded that the third Reich's political programs has nothing to do with the collective ambition of human beings at large.

Although all these critics have mentioned different issues in their analysis and interpretations, none of them have seen how the issue of how the Christian rhetoric of confession is critiqued in Jodi Picoult's *The Story Teller*. Weber is very much fed up with his life when he crossed ninety. It is in this stage that he is aware of the pros and cons of his past actions. His past actions are in no way morally admissible. There is no guarantee to justify that his past actions are genuine and beneficial to mankind. So it is not bad to ask for support and assistance from a lady whom he is striking close intimacy. From the side of friendship, it is imperative for her to assist him to die since he is oppressed and overburdened with the compulsion to live beyond ninety. From the vantage point of ethics, it is morally wrong to inculcate the idea of death.

For the people incapable of forgiving each other, Christian rhetoric of confession and its accompanying salvation is just saccharine dogma. It is not put into practice by people. It is believed that Christian norm like confession leads to redemption. Confession is cherished and valorized in the doctrine of Christianity. It is treated as the announce of liberation. In the novel, Weber believes that if he confesses how he participated unknowingly in the crimes against humanity and genocidal violence in holocaust, he would surely get assistance from his lady friend in orchestrating his self-chosen and legally support death. Contrary to his expectation, he is forced to encounter adverse and brutal end. The researcher makes use of the theory of nihilism. Nietzsche affirms that the practical choices of human beings are not guided and

governed by established Christian values like confession. There is no moral value that guides and governs human choices.

There is void in the spectrum of human choices and pragmatic life of prioritization. Only the nihilistic scenario drives the entire panorama of human existence and existential search. Thus Nietzschean notion of the active nihilism is relevant in this research. Nihilism is first of all a situation in which the world appears to be without value, the world after the death of God. There is no escape from the reality of the world, and at the same time "there is no way to reconcile oneself to it because all known means have utterly failed. This is a dilemma, an untenable situation, a state of powerlessness that we cannot possibly endure" (66). It is precisely this situation, this nihilism that is the source of philosophy as Nietzsche understands it. Philosophy responds to the pain the world causes by trying to change it.

Moral nihilism is the meta-ethical view that morality does not exist as something inherent to objective reality. Therefore no action is necessarily preferable to any other. A moral nihilist would say that killing someone, for whatever reason, is not inherently right or wrong. Nietzsche maintains that humanity is sick. The world in which we live is sick. The task of philosophy should be the liberation of humanity and the world from the grips of this sickness. There is not really any point to anything we do, that what seems to us to be "everything is really nothing. The nihilism that Nietzsche has in mind is first of all something that happens and not something that we, correctly or incorrectly, think about reality" (88). Nihilism is therefore an event, or a chain of events, a historical process.

A critique of the Christian rhetoric of confession lies at the center of the narrative. The narrator hopes to get liberation from the vicious circle of guilt by befriending Sage Singer and confessing about all of his past crimes. The narrator has a keen desire to die to liberate him or herself from endless and interminable sufferings.

Weber is very much fed up with his life when he crossed ninety. It is in this stage that he is aware of the pros and cons of his past actions. His past actions are in no way morally admissible. There is no guarantee to justify that his past actions are genuine and beneficial to mankind. So it is not bad to ask for support and assistance from a lady whom he is striking close intimacy. From the side of friendship, it is imperative for her to assist him to die since he is oppressed and overburdened with the compulsion to live beyond ninety. He seeks liberation through repentance and confession. He hopes that the person whom he strikes friendship acts and guides him benevolently. The following extract describes how Weber succeeds in exchanging his secret idea with Sage Singer:

I expect him to scoff, but instead Josef tilts his head, considering this. I suppose God tends to show up in places we would not expect. You believe in God? I say truly surprised. After our conversation about Heaven and Hell, I had assumed that he was an atheist, too. Yes, Josef replies. He judges us at the end. The Old Testament is God. You must know about this, as a Jew. I feel that pang of isolation, of difference. I never said I was Jewish. Now Josef looks surprised. But your mother— it is not me. (59)

Emotions chase over his features in a rapid way. Fed up with the senile life, he wants to end his life quickly with somebody's help. For this purpose, he chooses Sage. Finding no way to escape from circle of sorrow and guilt, he decides to select death as a mode of escape. He expects Sage to assist him to find redemption. He is peacefully ready to walk on the path of repentance, confession and deliverance. Sage acts contrary to his expectation. It is her act of betrayal that launches frontal attack on the appealing aspect of Christianity. So Sage goes to the help of a police officer to sort out the matter. She makes up her mind to get Weber arrested if she happens to collect sufficient evidences against him.

Friedrich Nietzsche's arguments against Christianity make up a large portion of Nietzsche's philosophical writings. He critiques Christian morality for numerous reasons, most importantly because it promotes a life-denying existence. In this regard he argues:

Life affirmation, or flourishing, is one of Nietzsche's primary concerns in regard to moral thought. Life affirmation is what is primarily at stake for Nietzsche in his study of morality. He believes that the optimum state of existence for human beings is when they are capable of flourishing, or living to their maximum potential. The concept of human flourishing is scattered throughout the spectrum of thinking. (87)

Nietzsche is critical of Christian morality because it inhibits life-affirming individuals from achieving their maximum potential. Living to maximum potential, or flourishing, is one of the major issues at stake in his critique of Christian morality. One primary characteristic of a life-affirming human being is a healthy and strong natural disposition.

Nietzsche describes "spirits strengthened by war and victory, for whom conquest, adventure, danger, and even pain have become needs" (24). For Nietzsche this natural physical fortitude is further enhanced by "wanting to be oneself, being able to be different, standing alone and having to live independently" (212). This focus on independence and self-assurance is an important characteristic of human flourishing in Nietzsche's work. He further describes a life-affirming individual as having a firm grounding in reality. This involves a rejection of metaphysical truths, like Christianity (24). Nietzsche involves the acceptance of his concept of eternal recurrence. Eternal recurrence can be characterized as the desire and willingness to live one's life over again, exactly as it was. It is the acceptance of all that was good and bad in one's life.

With these ideas of Nietzsche, the contradictions in the expectation of Sage and Josef become noticeable. Twenty-five-year-old Sage Singer lives in a small town known as Westbrook, New Hampshire. A couple of years before the story began; Sage and her mother are in a car accident while Sage was driving. Sage's mother is killed in the crash. Sage is left with a large scar across her cheek. It serves her as a constant reminder that she is responsible for her mother's death. Sage is very self-conscious about this scar. Sage Singer makes an effort to hide from the world. She is self-conscious about the facial scar left from a car accident that killed her mother. She works the graveyard shift at a bakery. She delicious breads during the hours the shop is closed. She is involved with a married man. Her unlikely friendship with ninety-five year-old Josef Weber turns her life upside down. Weber implants a question in her mind about how ethical it is to assist a senile man to die. It turns out that Josef has a good reputation in their small New Hampshire town. He is an officer at a Nazi concentration camp. His request that Sage help him die brings up old secrets. Such a request causes Sage to consider the true meaning of forgiveness.

Every human being has a personalized life. He or she generates meaning which is subjective. It depends on cultural facts, beliefs, faith and biographical experiences. End of life could mean a long period of a human life. But end of life decisions are near death decisions. Death is the loss of biological life and it can be verified. Nevertheless it can be seen as a mystery and is open to different points of views. What is unquestionable is that our human life is finite and therefore it will always come to an end. Josef takes a deep breath. When he expire, the words he speaks hang between us. He wishes "I would like you to help me die. What? I say, truly shocked. Why? He is having a senile moment, I think. But Josef's eyes are bright and focused. I know this is a surprising request. Surprising? How about

insane—I have my reasons, Josef says, stubborn" (59). To persuade Sage, he takes a polite and earnest tone and repeats "I ask you to trust me. I take a step backward. Maybe you should just go. Please, Josef begs. It is like you said about chess. I am thinking five steps ahead" (59). The profound death wish on the part of Weber is a clear indication of how bioethical issue gains an upper hand in the entire spectrum of our life.

For Nietzsche, Christian morality does not allow for individuals to flourish. Instead it offers a weakened and tamed way of existence, life-denial. Nietzsche devotes a major portion of his philosophical work to the question of the benefits of morality and is particularly critical of Christian morality because he views it as promoting life-denying characteristics. Nietzsche explains life-denying characteristics as those concepts with a moral system that encourage followers to live at a diminished form of existence. The major example that Nietzsche uses for explaining life-denying characteristics in Christianity is the ascetic ideal. By encouraging self-denial and sacrifice, Nietzsche believes that Christianity promote an un-healthy form of existence. The following extract is suggestive of how life-denying Christian morality is:

Christianity is a life-denying religion. Moral goodness or badness is no longer dependent on the conditions under which you exist in this world; it has been moved to an otherworldly place. "Good" and "evil" for the slave class are staked on one's belatedness by God. In this way the ascetic ideals practiced by the priestly class and the moral value of weakness as "good" become conflated. By practicing ideals of self-discipline, self-sacrifice, and self-denial one increases their weakness, and becomes more blessed, or good. (64)

Christian morality is life-denying in the sense that it promotes a hatred of life.

Nietzsche describes two of the most important characteristics of slave morality as pessimistic suspicion towards the masters who thrive naturally, and an elevation of qualities like, pity, the complaisant and obliging hand, the warm heart, patience, industry, humility and friendliness. These qualities are honored by the slave class because they are useful in alleviating one's suffering. An extraordinary focus on the alleviation of earthly suffering is central to slave moralities, like Christianity. One way that slave morality retreats from earthly suffering is through the rejection of all that is natural and instinctual in human beings.

The suppression of human instincts and passions is a major component of Nietzsche's critique of Christian morality as a life-denying religion. Sage chooses to wear her hair across her face in order to hide her scar. She works nights alone as a baker. She believes that she deserves a loner life. The following extract is illustrative of how Sage's father died of a heart attack and how her mother lost her life in a car accident:

My dad died of a heart attack when I was nineteen, and the only way I can even make sense of losing my mother three years later is by telling me now she's with him again. In the bathroom, I pull my hair back from my face. The scar is silver now, rucked, rippling my cheek and my brow like the neck of a silk purse. Except for the fact that my eyelid droops, skin pulled too tight, you might not realize at first glance that there's something wrong with me – at least that's what my friend Mary says. But people notice. (9-10)

Sage is torn between the question of life and death. At the time of taking action, she appears to be assertive and forceful. Sometimes, she realizes that her careless driving is responsible for the untimely death of her mother's life. The guilt and temptation to

life are two powerful forces which attract and repel her. She is painfully aware of how ashamed and embarrassed she feels when the vigilant public casts scornful glance on her. Those in her surrounding are just too polite to say something. Sage is painfully aware of how they are under the age of four and still brutally honest. They point and ask their moms what is wrong with that lady's face. Her sisters, Pepper and Saffron, blame her for their mother's death.

Sage expects from her unwavering faith in the liberating grace of Christian faith is to commit a terrible mistake. The narrator, Sage, is critical. She is taught a few bitter lessons in her life. Life turns out to be increasingly callous to her. No matter how deftly she wants to handle her life, she still has to face several unexpected hurdles and horrors. Her acquaintance with Josef brings drastic change in her life. In the initial phase of her intimacy with Josef, she has the high opinion. She is impressed by the eventful life of Josef. But the moment she hears his death wish, she is jolted into attention. Josef says that he wants to die through certain means or with the help of somebody.

A substantial portion of Nietzsche's critique of Christian morality is dedicated to the concern that this morality suppresses human instincts. However, Nietzsche is not calling for anarchy in which humans let their passions run wild. He realizes that much of "humans' instincts and passions lead to stupid and harmful behavior" (21). In fact, he credits Christianity with stifling instincts in an attempt to make a more livable world. For instance, not coveting thy neighbor's wife is useful for both personal and social reasons. Nietzsche's problem with Christianity is the extent to which it has suppressed all human instincts and passions. Christian morality works against the passions by attempting to demonize them, or destroy them completely.

Nietzsche sees this sort of annihilation of passions and instincts as "motivated by the moral persons, inability to react to stimulus" (22). By this he means that morality is created by and for the most weak-minded people, those who cannot

control their instincts. They become Christian moralist because total abstinence is the only way that they can control themselves. Nietzsche believes that this is "a radical and harmful approach towards the control of stupid behavior as a result of instinctual needs. In contrast, he insists that people can and should be trained in the art of controlling their instincts, and using them for their beneficial qualities" (32). In these lines, Nietzsche characterizes this as an educational pursuit in which people are taught to have a strong will in reaction towards harmful instincts, but they are also taught to enjoy and use their beneficial passions and instincts.

In order to elucidate how Christianity promotes life-denial through the suppression of human instincts he explains that, "in saying 'God looks at the heart' it says no to the lowest and highest of life's desires, and takes God to be the enemy of life... The saint, in whom God is well pleased, is the ideal castrato... Life ends where the kingdom of God begins . . ." (Nietzsche 23). For Nietzsche, Christianity's aversion to all that is instinctual and passionate in human behavior places this morality squarely against the affirmation of human life. The anti-nature ideology of Christianity further stifles human life through inhibiting one's ability to achieve maximum potential, or flourish.

Outwardly, Sage acts as if she is impressed by the naïve faith of Josef in the crime-contrition-confession- and redemption model of Christian doctrine. Sage is awake to this horrific wish of Josef. Instead of hearing him, she makes up her mind to give up her friendship with him. Sage is in an ethical trap. It is by no means right to assist anybody to die. But after hearing ups and downs of Josef's life, she is so moved that it would not be wrong to assist a man to die because he wants to free himself from a vicious cycle of grief, guilt and remorsefulness. The following extract is illustrative of how Sage acts hypocritically:

Two weeks later, Josef and I carpool to our next grief group meeting. We sit beside each other, and it is as if we have a subtle telepathy between us as the other group members speak. Sometimes he catches my gaze and hides a smile, sometimes I roll my eyes at him. We are suddenly partners in crime. Today we are talking about what happens to us after we die. 'Do we stick around?' Marge asks. 'Watch over our loved ones?' 'I think so. I can still feel Sheila sometimes,' Stuart says. 'It's like the air gets more humid.' 'Well, I think it's pretty self-serving to think that souls hang around with the rest of us,' Shayla says immediately. (54)

It is unchristian of Sage to assist Josef to end his life. But his misery and inner agony justify that death would be the most liberating phenomenon in Josef's life. However, the narrator is torn between the Christian sense of integrity and a sense of loyalty as a friend. Sage actively avoids contact with her sisters. Her best friend is Mary D'Angelis. She is an ex-nun who owns Our Daily Bread, the bakery. Sage works at this bakery. Sage is in a sexual relationship with a funeral director called Adam. He happens to be married. Yet Sage appears to be initially fine with their arrangement. She is still able to lead her loner life.

Josef used to participate in the heinous practice of anti-Semitism. He had taken the lives of many Jews who were confined in Nazi Holocaust concentration camp. While working as Nazi soldiers he had committed crimes aplenty. His hatred knew no bound during the Nazi occupation of areas populated heavily by Jews. Now in his later period of his life, Josef feels extremely guilty, remorseful. The desire for death well up in the center of his heart. The following extract is indicative of this fact:

He is having a senile moment, I think. But Josef's eyes are bright and focused. I know this is a surprising request. Surprising? How about insane I have my

reasons, Josef says, stubborn. I ask you to trust me. I take a step backward. Maybe you should just go. Please, Josef begs. It is like you said about chess. I am thinking five steps ahead. His words make me pause. Are you sick? My doctor says I have the constitution of a much younger man. This is God's joke on me. (60)

Having seen the death wish of Josef, the narrator comes to the conclusion that the most important thing in life is to resist death. She does not accept death passively. Tortured and haunted by the past crimes he committed, Josef wants to die. He seeks the narrator's help. The question of Christian ethics comes prominently.

The process of the suppression of instincts, for Nietzsche, leads to the creation of bad conscience. Nietzsche explains bad conscience as the result of Christian morality's battle against human instincts and passions. He is of the opinion that suppression, in the case of Christianity, does not lead to the reduction in these instincts. He briefly remarks:

Instead, it just bottles up the natural inclinations. Being a predominate instinct in humans; the inclination towards causing pain in others begins to act out against the host. The introduction of moral ideals by Christianity turns natural human instincts and passions parasitic and they lash out against their previously healthy host. Humans see their ability to act and release themselves as crucial in human health and flourishing. (27)

Nietzsche's critique of the concept of agency is based on his unique understanding of human will. He sees human actions as a result of a complicated web of deterministic factors, and also as a result of competing unconscious drives. As a result, he rejects the Christian moral concept of human agency completely. Further, he critiques Christian morality for implementing the concept of free will as a tool for inflicting

responsibility and guilt onto human beings. The function of free will in Christian morality is to further tame and weaken human beings.

Josef makes the narrator so strong that she cannot die even when she wants to. She says "I have had cancer, twice. I survived a car crash and a broken hip. I have even, God forgive me, swallowed a bottle of pills. But I was found by a Jehovah's Witness who happened to be passing out leaflets and saw me through the window, lying on the floor" (60). In a conversation with Josef, she says "Why would you try to kill yourself? I should be dead, Sage. It's what I deserve. And you can help me. You showed me your scars. I only ask you to let me show you mine. It strikes me that I know nothing about this man for what he has chosen to share with me" (60). At her home, she ponders on the same issue intensifying the sentiments of friendship versus ethics over the idea of controlling and conquering life. When her worries worsen she exclaims "You do need help, but not for the reason you think. I do not go around committing murder" (60). It is his Jewishness that brings problem in his desire for death. When facts regarding his hostile stand on Jews during the Second World War get exposed, he is espied and targeted scornfully. Planning to confine him in custody only after collective sufficient evidences Although Sage's family is deeply Jewish, she refers to herself as an atheist. She does not want to be associated as a Jew.

At first many of the friends of Sage had expressed their doubts about the increasing nearness of Weber to Sage. Sage is a girl of moderate age. She is overburdened with guilt. She had detached herself from her relatives and focused on work. In the same way, Weber is also on the same lot. He also wants people to understand him. He is in need of sympathy. He needs attention and assistance so that he can finish his life swiftly. When life becomes an unavoidable burden, thoughts on the idea of abandoning life arises in the mind of the victims. The following extract is

an index to how indecisive and pathetic Josef is due to the onslaught of Sage on the integrity of his faith in the power of friendship:

He nods in sympathy. ‘I am sorry for your loss,’ he says stiffly. ‘And you?’ I ask. He shakes his head. ‘Too many to count.’ I don’t even know how to respond to that. My grandma is always talking about how at her age, her friends are dropping like flies. I imagine for Mr. Weber, the same is true. ‘You have been a baker long?’ ‘A few years,’ I answer. ‘It is an odd profession for a young woman. Not very social. Has he seen what I look like?’ ‘It suits me.’ ‘You are very good at what you do.’ ‘Anyone can bake bread,’ I say. ‘But not everyone can do it well. (34)

Weber believes in the grace of Christian faith. He naively believes that Christian faith liberates him. Confession is the pathway to the golden gate of deliverance. When his faith falls apart, he turns out to be a pathetic seeker of sympathy. At that time, he is denied even an iota of sympathy. Even his friend hatches a conspiracy against him. Instead of assisting him, she hatches a conspiracy against Weber with the help of Leo. Leo harbors hatred against the descendants of Germans who had brutalized and exterminated Millions of Jews.

In *The Second Treatise of On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche states, “I take bad conscience to be the deep sickness into which man had to fall under the pressure of that most fundamental of changes he ever experienced—the change of finding himself enclosed once and for all within the sway of society and peace” (56). Nietzsche sees the civilization of man from animal into his current state as being the primary destructive force in his well-being. For Nietzsche, natural instincts like, “hostility cruelty, pleasure in persecution, in assault, in change, in destruction,” was suppressed by society within the individual and turned against man himself (7).

Nietzsche does not believe that this turning inward of consciousness happened by chance. He spends a considerable amount of time in his work mapping out the development of this sentiment.

Christianity's hindrance of human instincts and flourishing is primary in promoting a hatred of life in human beings. Nietzsche sites such a hindrance as primary in the decline of a species, or the path towards decadence. For Nietzsche, "decadence is the decline of society caused by the belief in moral truths, like those of Christianity. This decline is characterized by a loss of strength and spirit in the human condition, and an overall weakness that festers in the human character" (27). The root cause of this move towards decadence is the suppression of human instincts and passions. Christianity can be seen as part of a whole of society which suppresses humans' instincts.

Nietzsche chooses Christianity to look at specifically because it is a case that is relative to his own experience and a vivid example in which naturally occurring passion are suppressed. Social institutions that teach concepts of self-denial and sacrifice as an ideal are the major culprit in leading humans down the path towards decadence. Nietzsche views Christianity, and its co-conspirators, as promoting a way of thinking in which human beings settle for living at marginal utility, in a materialistic, physical, and intellectual sense. He briefly illustrates his theoretical point in this citation:

Egotistical actions are not only beneficial for human beings, they are our natural disposition. He does not deny humans' capability for egotistical or altruistic actions, but instead believes that in order to be healthy they must come from an ideal that first embraces human instincts and passions. Slave

morality created the ideals of bad conscience and the overall movement of humanity towards decadence. (77)

By exposing Christianity as life denying and promoting a hatred of life, Nietzsche hopes to lay the groundwork for future healthier incarnations of morality. His critique of Christian morality as being life denying is a major aspect of his overall critique, and is referenced constantly in his work.

Leo wants to punish anyone who represents a lingering trace of anti-Semitism. After Josef and Sage become close, he tells her a secret about his past. He was a Nazi commander in the Holocaust at Auschwitz concentration camp. He asks her if she will help him die. Josef tells Sage that he committed horrific crimes and killed many people. He asks her to help him commit suicide because of how guilty he feels about what he has done. Sage is conflicted by the request and leaves Josef. After much deliberation of what to do, she calls the local police department. She tells them she has discovered a Nazi and is referred to the Department of Justice. She gets directed to Leo Stein. Stein is in control of all things Holocaust related in the U.S. Leo is immediately attracted to Sage's voice. He tells her how difficult it will be to be able to verify that Josef is in fact telling the truth. According to him, it will be even more difficult to convict him of his crimes.

Leo is also skeptical of her story. He does not believe that a Nazi would simply confess his crimes 70 years later. Leo investigates Josef Weber. He finds that no such Nazi guard by that name existed. Under much coaxing from Sage, Josef confesses his real name is Reiner Hartmann, who is indeed an officer at Auschwitz. However, Sage needs more information. Over time she gathers bits and pieces including photographs, dates, people, places, documents. She gives it to Leo who had arrived at her house to investigate her claims to look through. They are able to confirm that his dates are accurate. But it is not enough to prove that Josef is who he

says he is. However, in order to actually prove that Josef is Reiner, Sage must uncover information from Josef that only Reiner would know. The man is in a rush to die. He sees salvation in death. Openly and legally he is unable to come out. So he befriends Sage. He expects her to abide by bioethical pressure. But she tends to move ahead with her one track mind on the same monolithic pressures of traditional ethic.

Leo is a man torn between racial pride and vindictive sense. He is driven by the one track mind. He is of the opinion that a man who used to commit horrible crimes can be so loving and confessional. So he easily manipulates Sage. Sage works as Eve, Leo as a Lucifer and Josef as Adam. Certain degree of indifference is clearly visible in her mind. Instead of sharpening her talent to penetrate the frozen individual longing of Weber, she too begins to act on the dictation of conformist mind. She is totally weak to come out of the narrow cell of communal hatred and racial pride. The following extract betrays how Sage is ineffectual to realize how selfish, vindictive, treacherous the world is:

I tell him how my father would read the Seder every year in a Donald Duck voice, not out of irreverence, but because it made his little girls laugh. I tell him how, on our birthdays, my mother let us eat our favorite dessert for breakfast and how she could touch your forehead if you were feverish and guess your temperature, within two-tenths of a degree. I tell him how, when I was little and convinced a monster lived in my closet, my father slept for a month sitting upright against the slatted pocket doors so that the beast couldn't break out in the middle of the night. I tell him how my mother taught me to make hospital corners on a bed; how my father taught me to spit a watermelon seed through my teeth. (41)

The ground reality regarding Weber's love for redemption from the vicious cycle of guilt and haunting agony is not noticed by Sage and Leo. They are both locked in the narrow circle of jingoistic sentiments. However they are eager to hold Weber responsible for the torturous end of Sage's mind. Sage's grandmother, Minka, is a survivor of the Holocaust. She is a prisoner at Auschwitz. After much persuading, Leo manages to convince Minka to open up about her past. She tells them of her time in Poland as a teenager. She moves into a Ghetto and follows to Auschwitz.

Nietzsche regards the Christian viewpoint as a misunderstanding and manipulation of human beings. Morality, in general, is dependent upon an understanding of how human intention and action function. According to Nietzsche, a person who believes in the doctrine of Christian morality finds himself able to say, "I know what I want, what I have done, I am free and responsible for it, I hold others responsible, I can call by its name every moral possibility and every innermost will which precedes action" (116). This type of thinking allows for morality to hold a person completely responsible for actions that might have been caused by other determining factors. Also, it allows for one to be judged, punished, and has guilt inflicted upon them. This according to Nietzsche is evidence that, "the primeval delusion still lives on that one knows, and knows quite precisely in every case, how human action is brought about" (116).

Josef expected redemption by professing Christian tenet. But he is pushed to the brink of suicide. After much trial and tribulation, Sage survived the Holocaust. She also explains a story that she began writing in childhood with her best friend Darija. She carried on writing throughout Auschwitz. This story is found soothing by other inmates. Nazi guard known as Franz Hartmann expresses interest in the story. He believes it explains his complex relationship with his brother. To him, it offers her

small comforts such as warmth and food scraps in exchange for ten pages of the story per day. The following extract gives an explanation to Singer's vigilance on the unearthed history of Weber's involvement in criminal politics:

One day upon arriving to work for Franz, she catches his cruel older brother Reiner. He is seen stealing money out of the safe that was originally taken from dead inmates. To prevent Minka from turning him in, he shoots Darija in the face, killing her instantly. To save himself, he blames Minka for the theft. This blame leads her being sent from Auschwitz in a death march in 1944. Leo and Sage return the following day with photographs of Nazi generals. Minka is able to positively identify one of the guards as Reiner Hartmann. She states that she would never forget the man that murdered my best friend. (57)

Leo and Singer work hard to collect evidence about Josef's explicit or implicit involvement in criminal politics and genocidal violence against Jews. In order to have Josef arrested and extradited, an eyewitness account is needed. Only Reiner would know. Sage is sent by Leo to talk to Josef. She takes a wire to record his confessions. She asks what the worst thing he ever did is. He also explains "about how the bullet is meant for Minka. It hits Darija instead as he has an unstable hand that was injured in the front lines. This confession upsets Sage greatly. With having the material she needs, she leaves his house and returns to Leo" (56). Sage receives a call saying that Josef is in the hospital from an attempted suicide attempt.

Sage begins to think her relationship with Adam. She breaks up with him. She realizes she is no longer happy being the other woman. She does not love him anymore. He is now the one chasing her. Adam comes to Sage's house and proposes. He is filing for divorce so he can marry her. But she tells him to leave. While Josef is in the hospital, Sage learns that her "grandmother Minka has died in her sleep. Sage

blames herself. She thinks that making her remember all the details about her time in the Holocaust is what killed her. At the funeral wake at Sage's house, Sage is overwhelmed by the amount of people present" (47). To soothe her, Leo makes a passionate gesture to her. His passionate gesture is reflected in the following extract:

Leo takes her away to a hotel, where the two have sex. Leo confesses he loves her, leading to them entering into a relationship. Upon Josef's release from hospital, Sage decides to help him achieve his death wish. After an in depth chat with Mary about forgiveness, Sage decides she cannot forgive Josef for the crimes he committed against humanity. Josef further confesses to Sage that the worst crime he ever committed was not Darija's murder, but watching his brother choke to death in front of him and choosing not to save him. (44)

To come out of this tough scenario, she allows herself to engage in various tricks of trade. Sage poisons him with a pastry. Sage discovers that the hospital wristband Josef is wearing "states his blood type as B+, where Reiner's is widely known as AB. After going through his possessions, Sage also finds the story that her grandmother wrote in Auschwitz on the back of photos of dead Jews" (43). It keeps her alive through the Holocaust. It has been taken by Reiner's brother Franz. Sage suddenly realizes that Josef Weber is not in fact Reiner Hartmann. His younger brother Franz is the real culprit. She kills a man who was not who she thought he is. She realizes that Franz's conscience is not clear either.

The entire panorama of camp led by Josef seems to be a drama. It sometimes reaches the level of tragedy and descends to the bottom of melodrama. The prisoners had to move through different phases of psychological reactions. In the first phase, Jews feel detached from their normal world. They became familiar with the trial within concentration camp. They moved into the second phase of psychological

reaction. They had unilateral and mundane response. They acted and reacted as though they are just like a machine. In short it can be said that they were dazed and stunned by the repetitive ritual of killing, incarceration, brutalization and dehumanization.

Nietzsche considers human beings unaware of the majority of factors that constitute their actions. This places him acutely opposed to the Christian moral concept of free will, and solidifies his position as an immoralist. Nietzsche rejects modern understanding of the human condition in stating, “however far a man may go in self-knowledge, nothing however can be more incomplete than his image of the totality of drives which constitute his being. He can scarcely name the cruder ones: their number and strength, their ebb and flood, their play and counter play among one another and above all the laws of their nutriment remain wholly unknown to him” (119). Nietzsche demonstrates how human beings and morality come to be mistaken about free will, through his interpretation of language and reality. He cites language as being the major culprit in giving human beings a false sense of understanding reality and the forces that drive human action. He points out that humans tend to believe that reality ends where language loses words for it, but according to Nietzsche there is a complex web of interconnected emotions and drives that lack words.

Nietzsche examines what he calls the debtor creditor relationship, which has transformed into Christian moral responsibility and guilt. His evaluation begins by a introducing the idea that human beings enjoy inflicting suffering on others, and through the debtor creditor relation the infliction of pain onto another became just payment for a wrong done. Here humanity found an outlet for the instinct and desire

to cause pain. But as society developed it suppressed this instinct, morality replaced the infliction of pain on another with the infliction of guilt upon them.

However, Christian morality needs individuals to be free agents in order for the moral system to function. Nietzsche explains, "people were thought of as 'free' so that they could be judged, punished—so that they could become guilty: consequently every action had to be thought of as willed, the origin of every action had to be located in the consciousness" (7). Bad conscience emerges, for Nietzsche, when the avenue for inflicting pain upon others is blocked. Instead, the inclination manifests itself in the feeling of guilt, having turned itself against the individual.

Nietzsche says that, "this man of bad conscience has taken over the religious presupposition in order to drive his self-torture to its most gruesome severity and sharpness." It is in "guilt before God: this thought becomes the instrument of torture for him" (22). Christian morality uses God as the ultimate ideal in which man must hold himself up against and be in debt to. His animal instincts are totally denied, yet not extinguished. This guilt is completely reliant upon the creation of the false concept of free will. Morality manipulates the ideal of free agency and will in order to inflict bad conscience.

Nietzsche is critical of Christian morality's dependency and use of the concept of free will. He views free will as developing out of a misinterpretation of reality through language. He supports a more deterministic view of reality in which human beings are not entirely capable. He views the area of human desires as a complicated network of conflicting passions. Further, he blames Christianity for manipulating the concept of free will, in order to inflict guilt and bad conscience as a means of controlling people. Through its concept of free will, Nietzsche demonstrates

Christianity's continuing promotion of life denying values that weaken the human race.

In an extremely cold climate, some of the prisoners were sent to work outside in snow without shoes on their feet. These scenes and events made them far more traumatic than they themselves had surmised. The following lines give a true account of prisoners' second phase of psychic response to the Nazi play of brutality and dehumanization in the camp:

But the prisoner who had passed into the second stage of his psychological reactions did not avert his eyes any more. By then his feelings were blunted, and he watched unmoved. Another example: he found himself waiting at sick bay, hoping to be granted two days of light work inside the camp because of injuries or perhaps edema or fever. He stood unmoved while a twelve a twelve year old boy was carried in who had been forced to stand at attention for hours in the snow or to work outside with bare feet because there were no shoes for him in the camp. (34)

Those who are in the authority to dehumanize and brutalize the Jews in the camp are careful to use proper strategies. The Nazi workers who take charge of the prisoners in the camp have created such kind of atmosphere that kills the emotions of captives. Once the emotions of prisoners are killed, they allow themselves to be used in whichever way the Nazi soldiers like. The task of wholesale massacre would be possible only after the emotions and feelings are sealed permanently.

To cut the whole matter short, Christian ethics is simply an expansion of a moral order that is generally revealed to everyone. But its core emphasis on the redemptive role of confession is correct in the text, *The Story Teller*. Only the

vividness and information of moral order gain the upper hand in the entire narrative.

The universality of the ethical sense is questionable.

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