

SOCIETY Vs INDIVIDUALITY IN PICOULT'S *The Tenth Circle*

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ABSTRACT

Title: "Society versus Individuality in Picoult's *The Tenth Circle*"

The Tenth Circle (2006) is a novel by Jodi Picoult about father-daughter relationships. It is written based on Dante's *Inferno*. The Article entitled "Society versus Individuality in Picoult's *The Tenth Circle*" deals with familial relationship and societal influence on an individual. In *Inferno* Dante deals with the nine circles of hell and in *The Tenth Circle* Picoult had dealt with another circle that is the tenth circle of hell. The novel deals mainly with the relationship between the parents and the daughter. The novel also tells that instead of spending the valuable time for others one should spend their time for one's parents, because they are the one who never wants to hurt their child. The study on the novel *The Tenth Circle* analyses that every character loses his or her identity for the sake of the society. The novel tells that one should heed to the words of the society but one should not take it as it is.

FULL ARTICLE:

Literature is a mirror in which we can see the reflection of life.

A.G.Xavier

Literature's ability to capture the imagination and depict the lives of others also increases readers' ability to empathize with others. A study published in the journal *Science* found that readers of literary fiction demonstrated an increased ability to infer other people's thoughts and emotions. Finally, literature helps develop critical-thinking skills. Readings and discussions of literature force readers to make reasoned judgments about character motivations, cause and effect, critical analysis of plot and more.

American literature is the body of written works produced in the English language in the United States. Like other national literature was shaped by the historical of the country and a

half, America was merely a group of colonies scattered along the eastern seaboard of the North American continent—colonies from which a few hardy souls tentatively ventured westward. American literature reflects beliefs and traditions that come from the nation's frontier days. The pioneer ideals of self-reliance and independence appear again and again in American writings.

American authors have great respect for the value and importance of the individual. They tend to reject authority and to emphasize democracy and the equality of people. They often celebrate nature and a sense of boundless space. American writers have always had a strong tendency to break with literary tradition and to strike out their own directions. Writers of other countries seem to absorb their national literary traditions. But many American authors have rejected the old in order to create something new. A lively streak of humour runs through American literature from the earliest times to the present. In many cases, a dash of salty humour saves a serious theme from becoming too sentimental. American humour tends to be exaggerated rather than subtle. It reflects the people's ability to laugh at themselves even during the most difficult times.

Contemporary American literature reflects current trends in life and culture and because these things change often, contemporary literature changes often as well. Contemporary literature most often reflects the author's perspective and can come across as cynical. It questions facts, historical perspectives and often resents two contradictory arguments side by side.

Jodi Picoult is the bestselling author of twenty-three novels including *The Tenth Circle* (2006), *The Pact* (1998), *The Story teller* (2013), *Off the Page* (2015). Her last three novels have debuted at number one on the New York Times bestseller list. Boston Globe says: "Picoult is a skilled wordsmith, and she beautifully creates situations that not only provoke the mind but touch the flawed souls in all of us" (n. pag). Picoult studied creative writing with Mary Morris at Princeton, and had two short stories published in *Seventeen* magazines while still a student.

The Tenth Circle (2006) is a novel by Jodi Picoult about date rape and father-daughter relationships. It heavily references Dante's *Inferno*. The hidden message in the book is "Nothing is easier than self-deceit, for what each man wishes that he also believes to be true". The title *The Tenth Circle* is a reference to the first canticle, *Inferno*, of *The Divine Comedy* by Dante. The book was made into a Lifetime Network movie of the week which premiered June 28, 2008.

The Tenth Circle is the Replica of Dante's *Inferno* and this article deals with a relative study between *The Tenth Circle* and Dante's *Inferno*. The novel *The Tenth Circle* falls in line with Dante's epic poem *Inferno*. In *Inferno* Dante had dealt with the nine circles of hell and in *The Tenth Circle* Picoult had dealt with another circle that was the tenth circle of hell. Every character in the novel is wound up with the circles of hell that had been discussed by Dante. Among the other characters Laura Stone maps out each and every word of *Inferno* and she also knew how to go to hell.

According to Dante the first circle of hell is resided by virtuous non-Christians and unbaptized pagans who were punished with eternity in an inferior form of heaven. Likewise as soon as the readers enter into the novel they were introduced to Zephyr, the friend of Trixie, and her family who did have little faith in God. Zephyr is half Jewish and fully practical. She always points the discrepancies to Trixie which ruined the life of both Trixie and the life of her own. In the Second circle of hell Dante found people who were overcome by lust. They were punished by being blown violently back and forth by strong winds, preventing them to find peace and rest. Strong winds symbolise the restlessness of a person who was led by desire for fleshy pleasures. The second circle is known to Laura, Trixie and Jason Underhill.

In the third circle of hell Dante saw the souls of gluttons who are overlooked by a worm-monster Cerberus. Sinners in this circle of hell were being punished by being forced to lie in a vile slush that is produced by never ending icy rain. The vile slush symbolizes personal degradation of one who over indulges in food, drink and other worldly pleasures, while the inability to see others lying nearby represents the gluttons' selfishness and coldness. In this novel the drug gluttons are specified. Drug addictions are more common in twenty first century. Especially teenagers fall in line easily. In the fourth circle of hell, Dante saw the souls of people who were punished for greed. They were divided into two groups. Here the fourth circle is characterized by the character of Laura and Trixie.

In the fifth circle of hell Dante saw the wrathful and sullen that were punished for their sins. This circle of hell is seen in this novel when Dante and Jason have their fights. When reaching the sixth circle of hell, Dante saw the heretics who were condemned to eternity in flaming tombs. The heretics in this novel are Daniel Stone and Jason Underhill. The seventh circle of hell was

divided into three rings. Dante saw the murderers, blasphemers and sodomites in this circle. This was specified in accordance with the characters of Daniel and Trixie. The eighth circle of hell was resided by the fraudulent. This circle of hell was divided into ten Bolgias or Stony ditches with bridges between them. Laura very well matches this circle.

The ninth circle of hell that is the last circle as told by Dante was divided into four rounds according to the seriousness of the sin though all residents are frozen in an icy lake. The ninth circle of hell can also be compared to the landscape of Alaska. When and all Daniel thought about hell the only sight he gets is the hardest landscape of Alaska. Daniel is the one who crossed all the nine circles of hell and he is in the tenth circle that is neither the hell nor the heaven. In other words it was the earth.

Even though the novel contains the hell concept of Dante the author had given a touch about the family relationships which turns even the hell as heaven. Family is always there for each other. Even when everything is bad and one feel like one is in hell, they are there too. Everything one does affects one another even if one do not know it. One's action links to one another like a chain. The novel deals mainly with the relationship between the parents and the daughter. Daniel, Laura and Trixie stand as an example for how relationship between the parents and their children is prevailing in the society. The novel also tells that instead of spending the valuable time for others one should spend the time for one's parents, because they are the one who never want to hurt their child.

The society has a major influence in the development of child. In this novel the writer also depicts the outcomes of such changes through the characters. Daniel, the father of Trixie changes his individuality for the sake of society. He is not the person as he is in his childhood. All of his life Daniel is teased by the school kids for not having a father and also for not knowing what to do in hunting as like the other Yupik boys. Cane, his childhood friend is the one among them. Because of this Cane becomes someone for Daniel and not his true friend. Daniel does not murder Cane but the situation proclaimed that he is the murderer. But after that he is not considered to be the murderer as it is proved that it is only because of Cane's hunting rifle he is killed. They also cannot find any trace of the fingerprints of Daniel in the hunting rifle of Cane.

But at that time he leaves the town. Daniel stands as the best example of the one who has fallen as the victim of the society.

Laura, being a mother always supports her daughter. She has the fear on society that what happens if she is misjudged by the people. Being the Professor and in high status in society she does not want others to talk anything ill about her. She thinks that it will spoil her career. But her thoughts vanish in the case of Trixie.

Trixie would have been a different person if she has not fear of being judged by others. The society made her to fear of exposing her character in public. But attitude totally changes after she is raped. She starts to expose her individuality in the public. She also donates her hair to “Locks of Love”, a charity that makes wigs for cancer patients.

Through the characters of Daniel, Laura and Trixie, Picoult brings out the concept of how the characters loses their individuality for the sake of society. Picoult by the character of Aurora and Laura brings out the differences that prevails between two different societies. The author shows two types of society where one enjoys the luxuries of the metropolitan city whereas the other type of society does not even have the basic needs. There are also other characters in the novel that exactly shows the society that prevails in America and the power of the status in the society. It is revealed through the characters of Jason Underhill, the detective as well as Cane and Willie.

The study on the novel *The Tenth Circle* analyses that every character loses his or her identity for the sake of the society. They do so to only safeguard their name in the society. They do not want others to talk anything ill about them. They also take up the decision which the society suggests to them. The novel tells that one should heed to the words of the society but one should not take it as it is. Because the perception differs from person to person. It can be summed up as a finding that one should not lose one's individuality and one's talent to take up a decision for the sake of the society.

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