



## A NIETZSCHEAN INQUIRY INTO JOHN CHRISTOPHER'S "EMPTY WORLD"

JOHN CHRISTOPHER'İN "EMPTY WORLD" ROMANI ÜZERİNE  
NIETZSCHECİ BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

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### Abstract

*John Christopher's Empty World (1977) is an apocalyptic novel which depicts a fatal pandemic through the eyes of adolescent children. In specific, the story is presented through the perspective of fifteen-year-old Neil Miller who loses his family and heads off to the streets of London to seek company in his quest for survival in a desolated city. Neil finally meets Lucy and Billie, two girls his age and the children then decide to move in together. This study aims to analyse Christopher's Empty World from a philosophical, in particular, Nietzschean point of view. Friedrich Nietzsche is a philosopher who had an immense impact in all areas of the social sciences and the humanities. This article thereby discusses three Nietzschean doctrines: the will to power, the eternal recurrence and amor fati. All these three notions are interrelated in Nietzsche's cosmological theory and his metaphysical hypothesis. Thus, the ultimate purpose of this article is to reveal how and to what extent Nietzschean doctrines are manifested in John Christopher's Empty World. These manifestations will be discussed with relevant references to the text in association with the setting and prevalent themes of the novel.*

### Öz

*John Christopher'ın Empty World (1977) eseri ölümcül bir salgını çocukların gözünden aktaran bir apokaliptik romandır. Özel anlamda, hikâye, ailesini kaybeden ve yalnızlığını gidermek amacıyla Londra'nın sokaklarını alt üst eden ve ıssız bir şehirde hayatta kalma mücadelesi veren on beş yaşındaki Neil Miller'in penceresinden sunulmaktadır. Sonunda kendi yaşlarında iki kız olan Lucy ve Billie ile tanışan Neil, onlarla birlikte yaşamaya karar verir. Bu çalışma Christopher'ın Empty World eserini felsefi bir açıdan, özellikle Nietzscheci bir bakış açısıyla analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Friedrich Nietzsche sosyal ve beşerî bilimlerin tüm alanlarını büyük ölçüde etkilemiş bir düşünürdür. Bu bağlamda makale Nietzsche'nin ileri sürdüğü: güç istenci, ebedi döngü ve amor fati doktrinlerini tartışmaktadır. Bu üç kavram, Nietzsche'nin kozmolojik teorisi ve metafizik hipotezinde birbirleriyle bağlantılıdır. Sonuç olarak, bu makalenin temel amacı Christopher'ın Empty World romanında Nietzsche'ye ait söz konusu doktrinlerin nasıl ve ne ölçüde tezahür ettiklerini açığa çıkarmaktır. Bu tezahürler, romanın zaman, mekân ve yaygın temalarının ışığında metne yapılan göndermelerle tartışılacaktır.*

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## Introduction

John Christopher, also known as Christopher Samuel Youd, published *Empty World* as his eleventh novel in 1977. The novel recounts the story of fifteen year old Neil Miller who first loses his parents in a tragic car accident and then finds himself in the midst of a deadly pandemic caused by the Calcutta Plague. Neil moves to his grandfather's house but shortly afterwards, loses him as well. The plague starts killing most of London's residents and Neil develops immunity to the virus. Wandering the streets of London in search of company, he meets Tommy (7) and Susie (3) and begins to live with them until one day he wakes up to see their dead bodies. After burying the children, Neil once again cycles around until he meets two girls by the names of Lucy and Billie. The three children settle down and engage in

an endless cycle of events that eventually bestows them the only meaning left in a void and meaningless world. Mathias Clasen contends that Neil “*has achieved those primary human goals: meaningful social connection, romantic attachment, and a sense of purpose*” (10). Nevertheless, the novel possesses an ending with multiple open-ended questions rather than a closed ending with clear responses.

In close relation with the setting, plot and ending of the novel, this article aims to analyse Christopher’s *Empty World* from a philosophical, in specific, a Nietzschean perspective. While this novel may be analysed through various philosophical prospects, Friedrich Nietzsche’s doctrines of “the will to power, the eternal recurrence and amor fati” have been selected for analysis due to their consistence with the novel’s apocalyptic setting and the covert implications it incorporates. To that end, the Nietzschean notions of the will to power, eternal recurrence and amor fati are discussed followed by their manifestations with particular references to the novel. In specific, the article argues that in an apocalyptic setting, the children engage in a struggle for power but become subjected to an endless cycle of repetition and as a consequence succumb to their fates, having one another as the only hope and meaning left for survival in a forsaken, empty world.

### **The Will to Power in *Empty World***

German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) put forward various notions and doctrines which still remain disputed among scholars and thinkers. A unique characteristic of Nietzsche’s oeuvre is his figurative use of language and his distinct literary style of writing. This was by no means a coincidence as he was a philologist by origin and a professor of philology at the University of Basel (Peters 360). One of Nietzsche’s most influential doctrines is the will to power which he valued greatly and located at the centre of his philosophy. Reprinted in 1967 with the contributions of Walter Kaufmann, *The Will to Power* was and still remains one of the most fundamental works of Nietzsche’s thought. In this work, Nietzsche put forward the will to power with these words:

What are our evaluations and moral tables really worth? What is the outcome of their rule? For whom? in relation to what?- Answer: for life. But what is life? Here we need a new, more definite formulation of the concept "life." My formula for it is: Life is will to power. (148.)

Through these lines, it can be understood that the philosopher places the will to power at the focal point of life. In other words, life and human activities are in a constantly interconnected state: *“Life in its essence is initiative, the tendency to persistence and development—the will to power”* (Cunningham 480). Nietzsche’s understanding of life and fullness of life is in essence related to the capacity of one’s abilities and therefore the more abilities one can handle the higher one’s position is on the extent of life (481). According to this reasoning, humans are of higher value than monkeys and monkeys stand in a higher position compared to protozoa. The capacity of ability, on the other hand, is measured with the concepts of organisation and correlation (481). Thus, Nietzsche’s will to power manifests itself in conflict and violence and, as a result, in individualism which is regarded as the highest level of its representation (482).

In another pivotal work, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche asserts that: *“Exploitation does not belong to a depraved, or imperfect and primitive society it belongs to the nature of the living being as a primary organic function, it is a consequence of the intrinsic Will to Power”* (259). The thinker thus emphasises that notions such as exploitation, oppression and conflict occur as a natural result of the will to power which he considers to be an innate quality. Therefore, it is in a sense natural that there exist so many incidents of struggle and conflict between individuals in the society. Hence, Nietzsche implies that life itself relies on struggle and violence (Cunningham 484). Moreover, life is envisioned to have two aspects that include struggle and conformity making up the two conflicting facets of reality (487). The philosopher continues to describe his will to power in detail:

What is the meaning of this will to power on the part of moral values which has developed so tremendously on earth? Answer: three powers are hidden behind it: (1) the instinct of the herd against the strong and independent; (2) the instinct of the suffering and underprivileged against the fortunate; (3) the instinct of the mediocre against the exceptional. (156).

The philosopher contemplates that the notion of will to power has a serious impact on moral values. Nietzsche thus makes a distinction between those possessing power and those who are deprived of it. He adds that while many people have enjoyed a great deal of advantages from it, others have suffered tremendously as victims. Hence, the will to power exerts great influence on people but also results in the victimisation of humans against others. From another perspective, the will to power: *“Suggests the idea of a continuous process as opposed to a fixed norm”*

(Joullié 34). From this prospect, the will to power appears as a cosmological theory which outlines the nature of humans and society. Joullié contends that the will to power is present in all living beings, weak or strong as it is the main precept of life (47). He goes on to affirm that for Nietzsche, the will to power is an end pursued as an objective, a romantic ideal that essentialised power the same way Plato did with truth (208).

Thus, Nietzsche's will to power is in coherence with the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. Heidegger purports: "*What is the will to power itself, and how is it? Answer: the eternal recurrence of the same*" (19). In other words: "*Being that is on will to power as eternal recurrence*" (Heidegger 20). As a major of expression of existence, the will to power is directly interrelated with the eternal recurrence. Living beings assert their existence through the will to power. This takes place within an infinite cycle that Nietzsche's metaphysical philosophy coins as the eternal recurrence of the same. Thus, the eternal recurrence is to take place by means of an elucidation of the will to power (25).

In addition, it is commonly known that Nietzsche was deeply influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer. In 1865 when Nietzsche was a young student of philology, he bought Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* which he embraced together with his friends (Dolson 241). "*Schopenhauer was to them an incarnation of the ideal philosopher, a friend with whom they came into almost personal relationship*" (241). In the upcoming years, Nietzsche was seriously affected and inspired by Schopenhauer's works (Janaway 16). However, comparing Schopenhauer's "will to life" with Nietzsche's "will to power", both philosophies centre their thought on the "will" but nonetheless, Nietzsche renounces Schopenhauer's will to life as "mystical and moralistic" and articulates his doctrine of will to power (Janaway 158). Though Schopenhauer had a profound impact on Nietzsche in person, his will to power is a strong manifestation of the rejection of Schopenhauer's theories, in specific, his will to life. Nevertheless, Nietzsche was vastly influenced by Schopenhauer and the German Materialists who provided him the basic framework of notions which paved the way for his naturalism and fatalism (Janaway 237-238).

In respect to the will to power, John Christopher's *Empty World* introduces the story of three adolescents and their quest for survival in the middle of a fatal apocalypse. The protagonist is fifteen-year-old Neil who loses all members of his family to the deadly Calcutta Plague. As the fatality of the plague increases, Neil is

left on his own to deal with the vital task of surviving in the empty streets of London. Unable to cope with the unbearable burden of solitude, Neil heads out to the streets of London to find company. He manages to find Billie and Lucy, two girls his age and all of them decide to live together.

The apocalyptic sphere in *Empty World* encompasses notions such as solitude, power, and fate. The major constituent of the apocalyptic sphere is solitude which dominates the novel from the beginning till the end. All the characters not only fight to stay alive but also battle a secret nemesis: solitude. In *Empty World*, solitude appears in forms of social isolation and emotional loneliness (Tilburg and Dykstra 486). The sudden and terrifying deaths of millions of people result in the social isolation of those still left alive. Neil is socially isolated after the death of his grandfather and combined with emotional loneliness, he is obliged to overcome this major problem. After settling in with Billie and Lucy, Neil gets accustomed to their company. Later, when the girls leave the house for a couple of hours, Neil once again remembers the heavy burden of solitude:

But it was not those things, nor the cold grey ashes in the hearth, which made him marvel at the thought that he had once lived here, and believed himself reasonably content. It was the silence, the crushing awareness of solitude, which did that. He felt a compulsion to break the stillness—to say something, anything. His voice sounded like that of a stranger; and the silence which settled back seemed even heavier, more pervading. (Christopher 106).

At this moment, Neil becomes aware of the fact that he has to break the silence and continue his life with the company of the two girls, no matter what happens. The negative atmosphere of solitude which exists as a result of the apocalyptic sphere forces the three adolescents to stick together and tolerate one another. Therefore, Neil becomes obliged to Lucy and Billie as much as Lucy and Billie are obliged to Neil. Thus, the feeling of obligation is reciprocal and gradually transforms into a daily routine in the repetitive lives of these characters. Though the friendship between Neil and Lucy persists, Neil has a hard time coming to terms with Billie.

Despite the solitude and the obligation to get along with one another, Neil, Lucy, and Billie often engage in a struggle for power. Nietzsche put forward that the will to power is the essence of life and that human beings engage in an endless process of asserting their power over one another. In *Empty World*, the true nature

of human beings is exposed through the apocalyptic sphere. Billie as the antagonist of the novel has a strong dislike for Neil and, deep inside, does not confirm living together with him but nevertheless conforms to Lucy due to rational motives such as solitude and survival. The struggle for power in *Empty World* occurs between various characters but mainly between Neil and Billie which initially takes place in the form of verbal harassment:

She had always had an annoying habit of whistling through her teeth: now she did it almost continuously, and always the same tune—"The Cock o' the North," off-key. In the end, when Lucy was in the kitchen, he said to her in a low but savage voice: "If you don't stop that whistling, I swear I'll kill you! I mean it." She looked at him, crestfallen. "I'm sorry, Neil." He turned away without answering. Even his own name, spoken in her voice, rasped on his nerves. (Christopher 119).

Nietzsche maintains that conflict and violence are the results of individualism which human beings manifest to one another. Individualism as the highest level of representation is an expression of the will to power (Cunningham 482). In other words, the philosopher contemplates that acts of violence and conflict are inevitable among the individuals of the society. In *Empty World*, most of the action revolves around Neil, Lucy, and Billie. As long as they live together, disputes and disagreements are unavoidable. The actual matter is how far these disputes go and how they are resolved. Despite being fifteen-year-old adolescents, their actions are no different than adults. The reason is the apocalyptic sphere which forces them to act in a more rational manner so as to facilitate the ultimate goal of survival. Hence, the author, John Christopher exposes the nature of human beings through adolescents within an apocalyptic setting. Neil, Lucy, and Billie are in a way predetermined to fight and clash with one another as this is the only form of asserting their individualism. Therefore, the clashes between these children are not only inescapable but also compulsory. Minor clashes sometimes occur between Neil and Lucy as well. Towards the end of the novel, the clashes between Neil and Billie gradually transform into conflicts that result in acts of violence:

As he did, she rushed the last few paces, the kitchen knife bright in her upraised hand. Neil tried to fling himself to one side, but she was too close. He felt the blow on his chest, seeming to punch more than stab, and staggered, almost falling. Billie came at him again. Her face was strained, as though she were concentrating hard. He pressed the



trigger, heard the hammer click futilely, and was just in time to throw up his left hand and grasp the wrist of the hand that held the knife. (Christopher 120).

Billie's violent attack on Neil is an expression of the disguised anger which accumulates deep inside her and finally explodes in a seriously violent manner. Billie is sick and tired of Neil having a say over their lives and urges Neil to step out of their lives. This violent conflict results in Neil getting wounded and seeking comfort alongside Lucy. Lucy is the character that represents balance, stability, and maternity, which is of utmost significance for both Neil and Billie. Though Lucy is unable to prevent conflicts between Neil and Billie, she does succeed in maintaining a balance between these two powers. In conclusion, Neil survives Billie's violent attack and distances himself from her for some time, aware of the fact that he is stuck with her as long as they keep together and remain alive and well.

### **Eternal Recurrence within Apocalyptic Mayhem**

Besides his notion of the will to power, Nietzsche put forward several other ideas and doctrines such as "amor fati" and "nihilism" during his lifetime. One notion which possesses a significant place in his philosophy is the "eternal recurrence". However, noteworthy aspects of this notion have left unseen by many critics mainly due to the poetic and literary nature of Nietzsche's doctrine, expressed in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Loeb 645). This is connected to the problematic relationship between poetry and philosophy (645). Nietzsche also conveyed his ideas using "a highly figurative, literary language" (Pippin xv). Where philosophy attempts to expose concealed information, literary works, on the other hand, depend upon endeavour to obtain meaning from these texts (xv).

The philosopher conveyed that this book which has the eternal recurrence at its focus is his most significant work (Loeb 646). In, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche conveys that human beings are able to live with suffering but not with meaningless suffering (68). According to Nietzschean Nihilism, the universe is empty and void of meaning. Therefore, the philosopher believed in the horror of existence which is largely ignored by most scholars (Kain 50). This horror was mainly due to the vision of universe which he expressed as follows: "We cannot reduce suffering, and to keep hoping that we can will simply weaken us. Instead, we must conceal an alien and terrifying cosmos if we hope to live in it. And we must develop the strength to do so" (51). To that end, Nietzsche states that humans cannot alter the universe but what they ought to do is to: "Construct a meaning for

suffering. Suffering we can handle. Meaningless suffering, suffering for no reason at all, we cannot handle. So we give suffering a meaning” (51). In connection with suffering, Nietzsche purports:

Now I die and disappear, you would say, and in an instant I will be a nothing. Souls are as mortal as bodies. But the knot of causes in which I am entangled recurs – it will create me again! I myself belong to the causes of the eternal recurrence. I will return, with this sun, with this earth, with this eagle, with this snake – not to a new life or a better life or a similar life: – I will return to this same and selfsame life, in what is greatest as well as in what is smallest, to once again teach the eternal recurrence of all things. (qtd. in Pippin 178-184).

Through these words, Nietzsche asserts eternal recurrence as the basic law of the universe, that of infinite repetition which includes all living beings from the biggest to the smallest. Thus, Nietzsche maintains the existence of a limitless cycle that dominates the universe. The philosopher emphasises the terrifying nature of existence within the cycle of eternal recurrence. The actual horror lies in enduring an endless repetition and being subject to the same experience for countless amounts of times (Kain 56). Hence, the eternal recurrence is generally regarded as “a cosmological hypothesis” which is based on the repetition of the same cycle for an infinite number of times (Nehamas 332). Nietzsche claims that: “*The universe as a whole continues as it is, indefinitely*” (335). Nietzsche asseverates his cosmological theory with the following words:

And this slow spider, which crawls in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway, whispering together, whispering of eternal things-must not all of us have been there before? And return and walk in that other lane, out there, before us, in this dreadful lane-must we not eternally return? (qtd. in Pippin 126).

Thus, Nietzsche describes his theory of the eternal recurrence by relating it to specific examples of daily life. Instead of attempting to prove a scientific cosmological theory, Nietzsche seems to assert a philosophical assumption which is connected to metaphysics rather than physics (Nehamas 342). This is mainly due to the fact that the eternal recurrence, as put forward by Nietzsche, represents a culmination of philosophical assumptions as no concrete or scientific evidence is provided by the philosopher to maintain its accurateness.



In addition, the eternal recurrence cannot be thought of without the will to power because the eternal recurrence represents infinity which is related to the will to power as the essence of all beings (Kılıç 25). The recurrence and the will, as expressed by Nietzsche, are both eternal and interrelated. In other words, “*The eternal recurrence is the recurrence of willing and the will to power*” (25). It is described as an eternal cycle of life, suffering and of death (233). Nietzsche associates the eternal recurrence with the tragedy:

Everything goes, everything comes back, the wheel of being rolls eternally. Everything dies, everything blossoms again, the year of being runs eternally. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; the same house of being builds itself eternally. In every instant being begins; around every here rolls the ball there. The middle is everywhere. Cooked is the path of eternity. (qtd. in Pippin 175).

The tragedy of the eternal recurrence lies in acknowledging and accepting every single facet of life including negative ones such as suffering, pain, toil and death. Thus, the eternal recurrence comprises positive events as well as utterly negative ones. From that perspective, “*The eternal recurrence is connected to amor fati which is the energy of life and difference*” (Kılıç 36). Thus, Nietzsche’s theory of the eternal recurrence represents a cosmological and metaphysical hypothesis which attempts to unveil the true nature of the universe in connection with the doctrine of amor fati.

To that end, John Christopher’s *Empty World* not only provides a manifestation of the will to power but also exhibits a strong tendency towards the eternal recurrence which is closely connected with the previously mentioned doctrine. As the eternal recurrence is an endless repetition of the will to power, Nietzsche claimed that all of life, its beginning, suffering, and end occur in an infinite manner. In *Empty World*, the setting consists of an apocalyptic world with very few people left alive. Those that remain alive like Neil, Lucy, and Billie are preoccupied with two basic requirements; surviving and avoiding solitude. After they decide to stick together, the children become caught up in a monotonous cycle of repetitive events. No matter what they do, they do not manage to break this cycle. In that sense, *Empty World*’s apocalyptic sphere exposes the eternal recurrence and carries it to the utmost visible level. It not only brings forward the boredom of repetition but also implies the meaninglessness of life in this universe. The only meaning the children experience is staying alive and sticking together in an empty world.

Before Neil meets the girls, he lives together with his grandfather and after his death, Neil decides to leave home to find food. Then he meets a six year old, Tommy with two year old Susie and begins to take care of them. After a while, both children die all of a sudden and Neil gives them a silent burial. As Neil is on his own once again, the cycle commences:

For a week after that he lived like an automaton: eating, drinking, sleeping, trying not to think and for the most part succeeding. He did not bother to look at himself, and since he had put away the mirrors did not happen on his reflection accidentally. He had a dim feeling that it was taking too long, but all his thoughts were slack and dull and he did not pursue it. (Christopher 47).

The apocalyptic condition prioritises basic human needs and eliminates all artificial necessities imposed by the society and its governing system. The plague, therefore unveils the actual nature of human beings as all constructed needs are eradicated, leaving only the fundamental needs behind. All deemed valuable by the society such as money, fame, respect, and career are now simply void of meaning. Humans are reduced to the primary instinct of survival and solidarity through companionship. The apocalyptic setting which comes to being as a result of the fatal plague causes humans to regress to a primitive lifestyle. Ironically, this primitive lifestyle forces children and adolescents to behave and act in a more mature manner. This maturity occurs as a natural consequence of the survival instinct. They are obliged to face reality and make the best of it despite the exhausting repetitive state:

His life developed into a routine again. He rose about seven, washed and dressed and made breakfast. In the morning he walked in the Park when the weather was fine, and found himself automatically following the same route every day [...] In the afternoon he visited the shops, or prepared fuel for his fire. (Christopher 72).

Neil's cycle continues until he meets Lucy and Billie. After meeting the girls and settling down, another similar cycle begins to take place. The events and actions remain the same while the actors change. Lucy assumes the role of the mature mediator in conflicts between Neil and Billie. Neil, Lucy, and Billie's cycle mainly consists of living together, cycling out to obtain food and other needs and then coming back home. This cycle only breaks when Billie runs out because "*It was a fine morning and she felt like a ride*" (Christopher 114). For the rest of the time, the cycle is doomed to repeat itself. From a broader perspective, assuming one

or more children died and Neil or one of the others is left alone once again, the cycle would reinitiate from the very beginning. The surviving child would go out, seek company and once found settle down together. Either way, as long as they remain alive, the cycle is of perpetual nature.

All in all, while there are many versions and interpretations of the eternal recurrence, in *Empty World*, the notion becomes apparent through the voidness and meaningless established by the apocalyptic setting. The apocalyptic setting displays life in its earlier/primitive stages where humans are occupied with taking care of their basic needs. To that end, it represents a foreshadowing of Nietzsche's cosmological doctrine. Using a global pandemic, Christopher depicts that all action taken by living beings is bound to endless repetition.

### **Amor Fati: Love of Fate Taken for Granted**

Closely related to the eternal recurrence is the notion of "Amor Fati" which Nietzsche deemed significant in many of his works. Through this doctrine, Nietzsche touched upon the issue of fate in human life. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes:

My formula for greatness in a human being is amor fati: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely to bear what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary—but love it. (12).

The thinker coins the notion of amor fati as the love of one's fate or the plain acceptance of all that life has to offer to human beings. Nietzsche urges humans to acknowledge and come to terms with all the good and bad experiences in life. However, amor fati embodies a dilemma in the sense that love includes ascribing a certain value to something whereas fate incorporates negative feelings such as pain and sorrow (Han-Pile 4-5). According to Nietzsche, this paradoxical state can only be overcome by the unconditional acceptance of every negative event that humans are subjected to in their lives (Han-Pile 5). As a consequence, fate might become a loveable object on the condition that it reaches a balance (9). Hence, a natural result of Nietzsche's doctrine refers to the necessity of suffering and negative experiences in human life. In another work, *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche states the following: "I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. Amor fati: let that be my love henceforth! Some day I wish to be only a yes-sayer" (223).

As the first text in which amor fati was mentioned, Nietzsche expressed that he aimed at seeing the beauty in all things. In the subtext, it could be interpreted that Nietzsche aspired to make things beautiful, even those that were not so. Therefore, he ascribes love to fate which is at certain times negative. His wish to become a yes-sayer is a longing for the acceptance of fate despite all the sorrow and suffering it has to offer. The actual challenge, however is to surpass the difficulties posed by these negative experiences (Mollison 18). In Nietzschean terms, suffering might be necessary to enable one's life valuable in holistic terms (18). According to Nietzsche: "*If suffering is compensated for or makes a necessary contribution to what makes life valuable, fate can be loved*" (Mollison 19). Thus, Nietzsche justifies the act of loving one's fate due to its contributions to human life.

In addition, Robert Solomon argues that Nietzsche actually relates his notion of amor fati to fatalism: "*He urges us to appreciate the necessity and significance of outcomes without reference to any mysterious agency*" (70). Hence, Nietzsche avoids the influence of any supernatural power or any kind of doctrine that might be assigned to have a direct effect on fate. This type of fatalism urges humans to acknowledge and accept things as they come. Nietzsche believes human life to be indivisible from all that exists in the world (Brodsky 40). It is maintained that one of Nietzsche's main objectives is to: "*Overcome dualisms and oppositions between humans and the rest of the natural world, and convince us that loving life and fates requires that we love all else because our lives and fates are internally connected with all else that exists*" (Brodsky 40). According to Nietzsche, any possible attempt to resist and alter fate is meaningless.

As a consequence, if humans ought to love themselves and their lives, they are expected to love everything about themselves and their lives (Brodsky 44). This doctrine is not an attempt to the perfection of human life but it: "*Spells out the goal of giving meaning and vitality to human life in view of the character of life and of the complex ways people depend on their pasts and the environments in which they live*" (Brodsky 54). Thus, amor fati requires the unconditional acceptance of one's fate and its meaninglessness.

Accordingly, in *Empty World*, there are many instances concerning the manifestation of amor fati. Neil, Lucy, Billie, and Clive and all the other characters in Christopher's novel except his grandfather are adolescent children. At an early age, these young people are faced with the heavy burden of surviving in a setting where dead corpses and abandoned buildings prevail. Therefore, the children

express signs of early maturity considering their young age. After the loss of his grandfather and later Tommy and Susie, Neil understands and acknowledges that no matter what he does, there is no stopping this catastrophe. To this end, Neil starts taking things for granted: "*The wind was violent at times, and once he heard a pane of glass break somewhere at the back of the house, but did not bother to go and look. It did not matter. Nothing mattered*" (Christopher 47).

During the time when Neil was left on his own after his grandfather's death, he starts to realise that he cannot fight his own fate. Therefore, he succumbs to his fate and takes everything for granted as it comes. Neil sees no point in resisting his fate. All that is happening is a reality that needs to be acknowledged. Survival forms the basic priority in this setting. When survival and solitude are taken care of, Neil simply surrenders himself to life's dull routine:

He tried to take refuge in blankness, in not responding to her in any way, but it didn't work. The fact was that every moment of her being there was a moment in which he could not be alone with Lucy. And this was something which would continue indefinitely. In the old world there would have been some hope of escape: there was none here. The sight of her coming into the room, her footsteps on the stairs, set his teeth on edge. (Christopher 117).

The meaninglessness of life occurs back to him multiple times. He neither thinks that life has a meaning, nor does he attempt to ascribe any meaning to it. Lucy comes forward as the only person Neil truly bonds with. She is the only one who can understand him, which is of utmost value for Neil. Despite his awareness of the meaninglessness of life, Lucy's company is the only factor that keeps him alive in a spiritual way. With the physical and spiritual needs fulfilled, the three children continue their existence in this world without any meaning, aware of the fact that there is no other way but to endure the heavy burden of survival. Neil, Lucy, and Billie unconditionally accept all that their new lives have to offer, including the negative aspects. After Billie attacks Neil with a kitchen knife, Neil distances himself from Billie but eventually finds himself in the same position. His friendship with Lucy inevitably pushes him to communicate with Billie, despite the horrible attack that she has bestowed upon him. Thus, the apocalyptic setting and the solitude it maintains, force Neil towards reconciliation. At the end of the novel, Neil, Billie, and Lucy join together with the realisation that this is their ultimate fate. There is simply no way out of this cycle:

It did not matter what the chances were, nor how much was at stake. All that counted was the emptiness of the world, and that she was human and alone. He looked at Lucy. "It's no good." She asked no question; just nodded. One of the many good things that were there, and would continue. Neil pressed her arm, and went downstairs to let Billie in. (Christopher 125).

Despite Billie's terrifying attack, Neil has come to the realisation that no matter what happens, these children desperately need one another. They do not possess the luxury to abandon each other and must put up with all unwanted behaviour. As these lines constitute the final words of the novel, Nietzsche's doctrines of the eternal recurrence and amor fati become apparent once again. All their experiences are bound in an endless cycle and being aware of that results in embracing their fate. Neil eventually lets Billie in to reconcile with her and to regenerate normalisation in the group.

### **Conclusion**

John Christopher's *Empty World* is a realistic portrayal of an apocalyptic story involving a global pandemic, reflected through an adolescent perspective. The novel not only provides a detailed account of a deserted world, but also displays a clear manifestation of Nietzsche's will to power, the doctrine of the eternal recurrence, and amor fati. Eternal recurrence manifests itself within the scope of the apocalyptic setting. Due to the pandemic, the society is regressed to minimal stages and survivors are imposed to fulfil fundamental physical and spiritual needs. In this respect, the apocalypse facilitates the visibility of the eternal recurrence. The endless cycle of repetition rises to surface more than ever. As Nietzsche affirms, eternal recurrence exposes that all that life has to offer is doomed to infinite repetition. Therefore, the only problem humans need to cope with is the unconditional acceptance of all experience; good and bad. *Empty World* demonstrates the relevance of the eternal recurrence and amor fati through the limited experiences of adolescent children in an apocalyptic setting. Despite being involved in an endless struggle of power, the children embrace their fate within a cycle of repetition. The conflicts they engage in do not hold them back from reuniting and maintaining their friendship. At the end, the children reunite and continue the cycle of experience back from where they left off.



In addition, *Empty World* also deals with solitude which is omnipresent throughout the novel. Solitude comes forward as the major spiritual challenge faced by individuals during the apocalypse. In fact, solitude reaches such a level that it becomes unbearable. It is solitude that brings Neil, Lucy, and Billie together every single time. Knowing they cannot resist living alone, they succumb to their fate and tolerate one another despite all hardships. To that end, solitude is in direct connection with Nietzsche's amor fati as it constitutes the basic spiritual element that eventually leads to the acceptance of fate.

Moreover, the novel also centres on the duality of hope vs. despair as the characters linger between hope and despair. Evrim Ersöz Koç argues that: "*The duality of hope and despair is one of the most significant elements of the traditional apocalypse*" (86). Koç adds that: "*The apocalyptic vision reveals a sense of not only despair but also hope since the humanity succeeds to re-create the world after apocalypses*" (92). In accordance with the traditional apocalypse, Christopher establishes a balanced duality of hope and despair. In spite of all despair, the children never lose their hope of a better life. Hope is associated with optimism, what is desired and anticipated to come true (Milona 100). Thus, the balance of the duality of hope and despair is once again subject to Nietzsche's eternal recurrence as it also occurs in an endless cycle. Within this cycle, it is not possible to clearly distinguish whether hope or despair prevails. It would be thus more accurate to assert that the author creates a balance between hope and despair and leaves his readers with question marks rather than clear answers.

In connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, John Christopher's fictional Calcutta Plague is much worse and deadlier, yet still provides a realistic vision of what might happen in case such a fatal, global disaster occurs. To that end, *Empty World* demonstrates "*How speculative works can be guiding and cautionary texts in understanding the possible future scenarios*" (Atasoy 672). Therefore, despite its bleakness, *Empty World* provides a noteworthy vision of a global pandemic at its worst degree. The very fact that it presents the plague through children's eyes makes the novel's predictions even more authentic and striking.

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## Summary

John Christopher is a contemporary British author who is mostly known for his works of science fiction. The author published many works in this genre, one of which is *Empty World* (1977) which conveys an apocalyptic narrative through the eyes of adolescent children. In particular, Christopher recounts the story of fifteen-year-old Neil Miller who, after losing his parents and family to the deadly Calcutta plague, wanders off to the streets of London in search for company. This article's main purpose is to analyse Christopher's apocalyptic narrative from a philosophical, in specific, Nietzschean point of view. As one of the ground-breaking

philosophers of continental philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche asserted various doctrines and notions which still remain discussed today. This study analyses Christopher's *Empty World* according to Nietzsche's doctrine of "will to power", "the eternal recurrence" and "amor fati" and interprets the text in relation to the novel's apocalyptic setting. In a more specific context, the article argues that the children are involved in a quest for power but eventually become bound to an infinite cycle of repetition and as a result give in to their destiny, having each other left as the only hope and meaning left for survival in a deserted, empty world.

In the will to power, Nietzsche maintains a cosmological theory which asseverates that the struggle for power lies at the centre of the universe. While it is a natural process, it creates advantages for some people whereas it causes serious problems for others. Nietzsche also highlights that the will to power ensures the dynamic state of the universe by disrupting its static condition. In other words, life and human activities are in a constant interrelated state. In short, the philosopher contends that struggle, violence and mayhem possess a focal place in the universe. In accordance to Nietzsche's doctrine, there are many instances of the will to power in *Empty World*. Neil, Billie and Lucy move in together and engage in a series of conflicts, verbal and physical, which result in tensions throughout the novel. These conflicts are clear manifestations of the will to power as each one of these characters exerts power over the other and aims to achieve domination. Hence, the struggle for power is manifested between all three characters but mainly between Neil and Billie. However, no character achieves supremacy as the will to power is directly connected to the eternal recurrence.

Secondly, Nietzsche purports the eternal recurrence as the basic law of universe which all living beings are bound to. According to this doctrine, everything in the universe is subject to endless repetition which is void of any type of meaning. Furthermore, the eternal recurrence is directly connected to the will to power as "it is described as an eternal cycle of life, suffering and of death" (Nietzsche 233). Thus, everything recurs for an infinite number of times and this includes the will to power as another fundamental doctrine of the universe. In *Empty World*, the eternal recurrence exhibits itself within an apocalyptic context and in specific, in two forms: survival and keeping company. The children are preoccupied with the burden of surviving and avoiding solitude. All their activities are based on these two objectives and therefore, all three children demonstrate the eternal recurrence which becomes more visible due to the apocalyptic setting. The cycle continues in a

repetitive fashion and it is signalled that it will go on in an infinite way as long as the children remain alive.

Lastly, the article looks into Nietzsche's notion of "Amor Fati". The philosopher describes this concept as an unconditional acceptance of one's fate, including every single positive and negative aspect. Thus, Nietzsche encourages humans to embrace all the good and bad that life has to offer for them. According to Nietzsche, resisting fate is futile and for this reason, fate must be acknowledged. The thinker describes this with a symbolic name he coins, the love of fate. Moreover, Nietzsche adds that suffering is a necessary aspect of enduring one's fate. In Christopher's *Empty World*, there are many instances of amor fati throughout the novel. As the children become caught up in the apocalyptic sphere, they are subjected to the eternal recurrence which they eventually take for granted. Having realised they cannot resist their fates, they display signs of maturity and openly accept all the positive but also the negative facets of their newly established lives. Neil, Lucy and Billie give in to their fates and ultimately reconcile with one another despite the violent conflicts they go through.

In conclusion, John Christopher's *Empty World* is an obvious manifestation of Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power, the eternal recurrence and amor fati. The characters experience a struggle for power within an apocalyptic setting which is bound to eternal repetition (including the open ending) and ultimately surrender to their fates by accepting this reality. Besides the Nietzschean doctrines, *Empty World* also deals with several underlying themes such as loneliness and the binary opposition of hope vs. despair. In spite of all despair, the children manage to preserve their hope. All in all, Christopher's narrative portrays a conspicuous account of apocalyptic fiction through the eyes of adolescent children.