

## **ALTRUISM IN JODI PICOULT'S *MY SISTER'S KEEPER***

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**Abstract:** The main goal of this research is to uncover examples of altruism in the novel "My Sister's Keeper" by Jodi Picoult. This research uses qualitative methods, focusing on data in the form of words or images rather than numerical data. Data collection involves drawing information from the novel itself as a primary source, supplemented by secondary sources such as books and online materials to support the analysis. The analysis uses the objective approach, given that the required data is found in literary works, especially the novel "My Sister's Keeper." The results reveal that Anna Fitzgerald embodies altruistic qualities. Anna constantly directs her focus to the well-being of her older sister, Kate Fitzgerald, rather than prioritizing herself. She actively helped Kate recover from her illness, donating her blood, bone marrow and other bodily elements to keep her older sister alive.

**Keywords:** *Sacrifice, Altruism, Struggle, Illness*

### **introduction**

Literature acts as a mirror that reflects individual thoughts, expressed through the lens of society's background, and uses fluent language (Mogea, 2023); (Mogea, 2022); (Maru, 2009). It emerges from the author's contemplation of the world around him, and offers more than just a fictional narrative or personal desire; It involves an innovative exploration and treatment of the author's ideas.

The novel, a literary genre presented in prose form, has intrinsic and extrinsic elements that constitute its core (Rorintulus et al., 2022). Typically, novels delve into human existence, exploring the dynamic interactions between individuals and their environments (Maru, 2012); (Komenaung et al., 2021); (Onthoni et al., 2022). The novel features an extended prose format, unfolding a series of narratives that depict

the lives and relationships of the central characters, and highlight the complexities of their personalities.

*My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult is a poignant example of a novel with a compelling story. This story tells of a child who was deliberately created to save his sister, who was suffering from leukemia, and served as an organ donor. The novel skillfully depicts diverse character traits and reveals a dramatic story that resonates with the complexity of human relationships.

Character is an essential element in literary works. According to Jones (1968: 33), a character is a clear representation of someone in the story, which provides a detailed explanation of his or her existence. In contrast, Abrams (1981: 20) defines characters as entities present in a narrative or play, which are subject to the reader's interpretation. Characters in a play or story are considered individuals (Duffy & Pettit, 1953:24). Personality development includes physical description and classification of mental and spiritual traits.

In the novel "*My Sister's Keeper*," human diversity is reflected through the character of Anna Fitzgerald, a teenager characterized by altruism or selflessness. Altruism, as described by various cultures and religions around the world, involves concern for the well-being of others. There are different types of altruism, such as patronage altruism, reciprocal altruism, group altruism, and moral altruism.

Anna Fitzgerald exemplifies altruism in her unwavering focus on her sister's well-being rather than her own. Throughout the narrative, he constantly helps his older sister, Kate Fitzgerald, in her fight against the disease, providing blood, bone marrow, and other physical contributions to keep her sister alive. As emphasized by Ibrahim, Wuntu, and Luluang (2021), humans face challenges in life, and dealing with these problems is not always easy, which affects an individual's mindset.

This research limits its scope to exploring the altruism embodied in the character of Anna Fitzgerald, the main character in the novel "*My Sister's Keeper*" by Jodi Picoult. The goal is to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the altruistic qualities displayed by the main characters in the narrative.

## **METHOD**

In this research, the author uses descriptive research as defined by Jay (1992: 217). Descriptive research involves collecting data to test a hypothesis or answer

questions regarding the circumstances of the topic being investigated. This aims to identify and report the status or characteristics of existing subjects. Descriptive research is systematic scientific research that provides a comprehensive picture of events, phenomena, or facts in a specific area or population group.

The research process includes several steps, including determining the type of research, identifying research objects, identifying data and data sources, choosing data collection techniques, and determining data analysis techniques. In this case, the author collected relevant data from books related to this topic, using a qualitative research approach.

To analyze the data, the author uses a thematic approach, focusing solely on the novel "My Sister's Keeper" by Jodi Lyn Picoult. This approach, as stated by Abram (1979: 26), emphasizes the objective orientation that isolates works of art from external references. The analysis focuses on the internal relationships and elements of independence in the novel without considering external factors.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Altruism is characterized by voluntary and selfless acts aimed at benefiting society. This action involves sacrificing things or values that inherently have some form of value. These sacrifices can be physical, including financial assets such as wages, labor, and investments, as well as personal possessions such as a home, car, clothes, shoes, or time. Although these sacrifices may pose temporary challenges, they may ultimately provide benefits in the future, with individuals potentially inheriting or benefiting from their apparently altruistic actions. For example, jewelry purchased for grandparents may be worn by future generations, and contributions to the museum may be enjoyed by the entire community.

However, altruistic acts may not be entirely devoid of personal motivation. Under certain circumstances, incentives such as tax breaks may play a role. This introduces an element of ambiguity to altruism, confirming that seemingly selfless behavior may actually serve self-interest.

### ***Parents are selfless***

While struggling with the loss of their daughter Kate, Sarah and Brian Fitzgerald decide to give birth to Anna, a genetically engineered exact copy of their

sick child. Since her birth, Anna's body has been used to provide vital resources for Kate, including cord blood and various donations over the next eight years. Despite Anna's persistent efforts, Kate's health deteriorates, eventually leading to kidney failure. Sarah, desperate to save Kate, insists that Anna donate her kidney, an act that doctors greet with caution because of the low chance of success. Facing pressure and realizing that an organ transplant might not significantly extend Kate's life, Anna sought medical emancipation, sparking a complex and contentious legal dispute.

This account encourages reflection on the role of minor patients, parents or guardians, and physicians in medical decision making, especially when intervention is not medically necessary. Initially, the medical team supported Anna's contribution to Kate's life, keeping in mind their original purpose in creating her to donate blood, bone marrow, and organs. However, as Kate's prognosis became increasingly bleak, doubts arose among doctors about the advisability of risking Anna's health. Dr. Bergen, Kate's primary physician, expresses doubts about the transplant, questioning its potential benefits for Anna and the family.

In a parallel scenario involving Berkeley Conner, the doctor showed similar dedication to saving a patient's life. However, this unwavering commitment also opens the door to scrutiny. Research shows that doctors who are high in empathy may have difficulty making objective treatment decisions, which may lead to a lack of understanding of patients' needs. Although doctors' role is very important in making medical decisions for minors, it is necessary to examine their authority. Parents or guardians, although not objective, can play a role in ensuring that the best interests of their minor children are taken into account.

As Kate's condition deteriorates, Brian Fitzgerald finds himself stuck between his daughter and his wife, serving as liaison. He supported Anna's wish to make her own medical decisions and acknowledged Kate's wish to remain at home in her final moments. Brian contrasts Kate's situation with his own experience as a firefighter, stressing the importance of recognizing situations where a situation cannot continue indefinitely, such as a fire that burns itself out.

Fitzgerald stressed that Kate's condition was very poor, and that the enormous pressure placed on her by the family to keep her alive was having an impact on everyone involved. Mr. Fitzgerald tries hard to convince his wife to see Anna and Kate's situation from the same point of view. Sarah Fitzgerald faced greater

challenges accepting her son's diagnosis than in the early stages of Kate's battle with leukemia. In an internal reflection during the last month of her pregnancy, the woman said. Fitzgerald admits that he never thought of Anna as an individual. He only views "this daughter in terms of what he might be able to do for the daughter he already has" (Picault 100). From the beginning, Sarah sees Anna as only a means to save others. While this may be common in families where one child provides basic assistance to a sick sibling, Sarah's perspective challenges societal expectations of parent-child relationships. Failure to acknowledge Anna as an individual deprives her of opportunities for growth. These actions raise questions about Sarah Fitzgerald's ability to make impartial decisions about her children and the extent of her influence in making those choices. However, there are also parents in real life whose decisions are also unclear.

Based on the quote above, it appears that Jess has begun to engage in risky behavior. He dared to drink alcoholic beverages, and dared to smoke, as the quote below shows: "First, I took off my shirt and dipped it in a roadside puddle; Then he wrapped it around my head and face. Smoke was rising, and the black clouds were angry. And in the hollow of my ear came the sound of a siren (Picault 224)." Likewise, Anna felt neglected, as evidenced by the following quote: "She dared to drink alcoholic beverages, let alone smoke, as shown in the quote below: 'At first I took off my clothes "And I dipped it into the container. A puddle of water came out and it came out; then, at that moment, I folded it over my head and my face. The smoke was already rising, a dark, angry cloud. And the alarm sounded in the hollow of my ears" (Picault 224).

### ***Devoted Sister Anna***

Anna Fitzgerald always prioritizes her older sister over herself, and constantly helps Kate in her recovery from her illness. Anna goes beyond merely imagining such an act and selflessly donates blood, spinal cord, and other body parts to keep Kate alive—a manifestation of altruism, a behavior centered around the well-being of others rather than one's own. The existence of altruism is closely linked to causal factors, which are mainly driven by feelings of empathy toward others.

Anna's life was marked by many sacrifices for Kate. Despite her passion for playing hockey and her talent as a goalkeeper, Anna faces the challenge of joining a local

team. Despite her accomplishments and aspirations to become a permanent member, Kate's unstable condition makes it difficult for Anna to commit to the team, a decision met with resistance from her mother, Sarah. According to Murphy (1972), speech can reveal a person's character, and Anna's statement emphasizes the challenges she faces: "The older you get, the less the team will tolerate you if you miss a game. I'd hate to leave it all behind" (133). The uncertainty of Kate and Anna's recurring need for a donor interferes with their ability to fully engage in hockey. Realizing the potential negative impact on the team due to her situation, Anna selflessly refrains from pursuing her passion, demonstrating an altruistic personality .

Anna's social circle is limited because family circumstances make it difficult for her to spend time with her friends. Kate's illness, as described in the novel, hampers Anna's ability to socialize, as the perception of an incurable, contagious disease hinders potential friendships. Despite facing these difficulties, Anna refrains from complaining about the situation, which shows her selflessness.

In the narrative, Giulia Romano plays an important role as Anna's Guardian Ad Litem (GIA), who is appointed by Judge Di Salvo to monitor Anna's well-being in the emancipation case. Julia notes Anna's selfless character, expressing her view in the following paragraph: "I took a deep breath and noticed Anna. What I see here is a young woman who has spent her life with an enormous sense of responsibility to her sister's well." "-existence. In fact, she knew that she had come into this world to bear this responsibility" (438). This quote emphasizes the important role Anna played and her great responsibility at the age of thirteen, serving as her sister's caregiver. Despite the challenges, Anna does her bit to support Kate without asking for anything in return, highlighting her selfless character.

With the usual selfish reasons one would expect from a thirteen year old girl. His choice was not due to a desire to imitate other children his age, nor was he bored with medical procedures or afraid of pain (481).

Furthermore, when Anna takes legal action against her parents, it represents an unexpected change from her usual obedient attitude . Although he consistently followed his parents' instructions, he insisted on stopping being Kate's donor. After careful observation and Anna's surprising testimony, Julia realizes that Anna's behavior is not rooted in selfishness; Rather, it reflects his denial . Anna prioritizes Kate's desire to die peacefully over undergoing a kidney transplant.

In the Fitzgerald family, everyone has a different role. Anna is the obedient child, Jessie is the naughty one, and Kate is the weak daughter. Anna's role is described as peacekeeping, as Jesse states in the novel: "Don't play with the system, Anna," he comments bitterly. "We've all finished the script. Kate plays the martyr. I'm the lost one. And you, you're the peacekeeper" (15). As the family grapples with Kate's health problems and Jesse's unruly behavior, Anna's decision not to donate to Kate no longer disrupts the family dynamic, and conflicts with her usual role. Jesse warns Anna not to reconsider her decision, anticipating potential chaos in the family.

Anna's deep love for her sister is shown not only in her willingness to give him everything she has, but also in her willingness to sacrifice her own dreams. This shows that Anna is more concerned with Kate's happiness in Minnesota than with her own accomplishments, as seen in the following quote: "I kneaded her. 'Nothing, believe me. I'd rather make you do less.'" But if you don't, Anna, someday, You'll wish you could.

Defiantly, Anna entered Kate's room, climbed onto a chair, and touched her sister's cheek. "Can he hear me?" Asked. "Of course," I answered, more to myself than to him. "I'm not going to Minnesota," Anna whispered. "I'm never going anywhere." "Wake up, Kate," he added as he approached (Picault 240).

According to the previously mentioned passage, Anna, despite her youth, showed the ability to make wise decisions. He chose to keep Kate in the hospital rather than travel to Minnesota and celebrate his victory. Anna works as Kate's assistant, demonstrating her constant willingness to give everything she has. This can be seen in the quote: "I am able to give him what he needs. I have been watching my mother as long as she is away from me; I am always able to give him what he needs" (Figure 312).

This highlights Anna's blunt nature, as she acts without expecting anything in return. His actions stem from his love for Kate and his desire to see his sister flourish. The quote "I used up all you put me through, and we both tried to pretend we didn't understand the truth: apart from peace, I always wanted Kate to live" (Picault 314) further emphasizes Anna's commitment to supporting Kate.

Contrary to Jesse's misconceptions, Anna's presence isn't just to make him feel better. Anna is constantly at Kate's side, offering support whether Kate needs it or just wants to have fun and laugh together. This shows Anna's ability to make Kate

feel safe, as reflected in their conversation when discussing hairstyles for the prom. The conversation between Anna and Kate, removing the scarf from Kate's bald head and sharing a moment of laughter, shows the deep bond between the sisters, and highlights Anna's unwavering dedication to Kate's well-being (Picault 318).

### ***Kate is selfless***

Jodi Picoult introduces us to a middle-class family grappling with three different children: a disaffected teenage son who is filled with rage and resentment that his parents have neglected him for the past thirteen years and thus paid more attention to his pregnant younger sister, Kate. . At the heart of this family crisis is Anna, a donated child and the youngest of the siblings. Anna was created expressly for the purpose of being a donor and to fulfill this role throughout her life, and is now considering ending this role. However, withdrawing his consent to donate blood, bone marrow and other tissues proved to be a difficult decision. It is not clear whether or not giving consent was within Anna's authority.

The story unfolds as Anna seeks help from a local lawyer dealing with her physical and mental struggles. Although the novel is descriptive, somewhat predictable, and somewhat commonplace, it serves as an interesting thought experiment. Picoult carefully educates the reader about Anna's life. Anna's parents are reluctant to let her participate in summer camp, fearing that she may not be available for the emergency blood transfusion that Kate may need. Anna is often absent from school, as is her sick sister because she is also sick. Anna mainly works as Kate's pharmacist.

Picoult convincingly describes how Anna's social life and ability to form friendships and relationships outside her family suffered greatly. In addition, Picoult hinted at what the relationship between the donor child and his parents would be like. The mother is portrayed as oblivious, driven only by the mission of saving Kate at the expense of meaningful relationships with her other children. His ambition is to keep Kate alive at all costs. If having a child through in vitro fertilization and intentionally selecting embryos through preimplantation genetic analysis for the purpose of obtaining body parts is morally complex, then subsequent procedures are morally less complex. Anna functions as a literal and metaphorical device A symbol and distraction from Kate's inevitable death.



Parents can prevent Kate's death and avoid the grief of losing a child by taking resources from Anna. It may have been easier for Anna to endure so much hardship than to face the death of the child they loved and knew before Anna was born. Without Anna's body parts, Kate would not be able to survive. The complexity of this story, both moral and legal, lies not in Picoult creating a unique narrative. On the contrary, the strength of this case study lies more in things that are not revealed by the author, but are familiar to us all. Parents' relationships and unspoken responsibilities to their children, along with the concept of unconditional love, permeate the dynamics of forced donation. Implicitly, we assume that parents should not prioritize one child over another or expose one child to significant risk for the benefit of another child. However, this is exactly the dynamic at play in forced donation scenarios.

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