

A Philosophical Examination of Will to Power and Self Overcoming in Richard Wright's *Native Son*

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ABSTRACT

Native Son, the protest fiction of Richard Wright, has been studied through aspects such as colonialism, psychology, and existentialism for years. The eminent things that these studies include are psychological issues, criminality, weakness, lack of self-confidence in the protagonist, and absurdism. Nevertheless, this article, with the help of the philosophical tenet of *Übermensch*, stated by Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, clarifies how fear, violence, and racism lead to the ethical excellence of an individual from an inferior situation. Thus, this reveals that *Native Son* not only prevents black people from being downgraded but also stands as self-overcoming and amelioration motives for the black community. Hence, by applying the theory of *Übermensch* in *Native Son*, the researcher attempts to demonstrate that the protagonist lives not in an absurd condition, and his ethical reformation changes his living which culminates in his emancipation from slavery and servitude and making him the lawgiver of his life. Additionally, through the philosophical notions of will to power and self-overcoming, the researcher proves that portraying black people in a wretchedly unhappy situation cannot improve their status in society. Conversely, each of the oppressed men should change and create his existence as an active entity.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Richard Wright, Self-Overcoming, *Übermensch*, Will to Power

INTRODUCTION

Born in September 1908, Richard Wright was a prominent African American writer whose novels brought a great change in American culture and literature. His personal life encountered with many vicissitudes which affected his literary works either. Moreover, John M. Reilly (1978) discusses that Wright's acquaintance with Jim Crow society at the early ages, together with poverty and lack of employment opportunity, made him a representative participant in black social history, and his migration in 1927 to the south side of Chicago gave him his inevitable literary topics. Further, Reilly (1978) asserts that Hugh M. Gloster, who devotes a space to Wright in *Negro Voices in American Fiction*, considered Wright as the chief proletarian spokesman of his race. Also, Wright is known for his naturalistic protest fiction and instead of depicting blacks as social victims to gain the sympathy of readers he used violence to present the reality of suppressed black lives (Howe, 1984). It can be confessed that Wright was the starting point of some variations in African American writing style which no body had the courage to write in a way that he did. Literally, for Wright who had been nurtured under the regime of Jim Crow in which lynching the black people was common, violence was an inevitable part of life, and later, it represented itself consciously or unconsciously, in his works such as *Native Son*.

Yet, it is crucial to know that Wright's works not only reflect his personal life but also prove that how much he was impressed by different writers such as Henry Louis Mencken, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche whom he had studied in his youth (Wright, 1945). In fact, Nietzsche's philosophy of *Übermensch* or as it is mostly translated "superman," his warnings about the menace of democracy, and his views about the "slave morality," influenced American intellectuals and authors such as Mencken (Rosenhagen, 2012). Likewise, the Nietzschean string of thoughts can be found in Wright's several novels especially *Native Son*, *The Outsider*, *Savage Holiday*, and "The Man Who Lived Underground" (Brignano, 1970). However, this issue has never gained the apposite attention by critics and the number of the academic studies examining this issue in a meticulous way is rare.

Consequently, this article examines the superiority of the main character, Bigger Thomas, in relation with his white masters in *Native Son*, in light of Nietzsche's philosophy of *Übermensch*. This philosophical tenet emphasized in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* represents man in its highest level of humanity and gives clues to those men of slave and oppressed the way to fulfill ethical reformation and ascendancy. Although the impact of Nietzsche and his ideas about *Übermensch* on Wright's writings are generally accepted, in the sphere of

philosophical studies, this subject has hardly been dealt with. Mikko Tuhkanen (2013) alludes to this issue and comments that “although frequently noted, Wright’s fascination with Nietzsche has rarely been given the sustained attention of close reading” and in the same line, he highlights that “in the *Philosophical Meditation on Richard Wright* there is a lacuna in the role that Nietzschean philosophy had for Wright” (p. 531). It is believed that such a gap needs to be bridged to illustrate how Nietzsche’s notions of *Übermensch* can shed light on the capability of Bigger Thomas to overcome his fears through the theory of will to power and self-overcoming.

These tenets – will to power and self-overcoming – are rarely or never investigated in aforesaid literary work, but through Nietzsche’s philosophy of *Übermensch*, these concepts can be argued and manifested in the characteristics of Bigger Thomas. This finding reveals that the oppressed African American individuals, though they might seem weak and invalid in white American’s views, can have the ability to use the harmful forces of society, such as fear, hatred, racism, and violence, to their benefits and superiority.

Therefore, the objectives of this research are to evaluate *Native Son* based on Nietzsche’s analytic philosophy of *Übermensch*. Additionally, it inspects the specific criteria of will to power and self-overcoming, which lead the protagonist toward being a superman rather than an inferior; and dissect the fact that why the author uses the element of wrath instead of compassion for portraying his protagonists regarding philosophy of *Übermensch*.

In “The Myth of Sisyphus in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*,” Friday Romanus Okpo (2021) refers to the philosophy of repetition and eternity, which is implanted in Camus’s tragic *The Myth of Sisyphus* and views Bigger Thomas, in *Native Son*, as the symbol of the “whole dynamics of racial relations in the novel” (p. 2), similar to Sisyphus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Impressed by archetypal criticism, Okpo is of the opinion that a text or a poem is not an imitation of nature but echoes another text or poem. Therefore, Okpo demonstrates how Bigger Thomas’s life is remindful of that of Sisyphus and shares the same destiny with him because both characters are sentenced to the mimesis of struggle and suffering.

Nevertheless, casting Bigger as Sisyphus leads to an absurd attitude about Bigger’s life and implies Richard Wright as an absurdist. Also, the presumption that Okpo (2021) notes as “Bigger Thomas ... an existential character ... struggles in vain to make meaning of his life” (p. 6), renders a limited and absurd sight of the novel, disregarding Bigger’s spiritual accomplishments. Accordingly, Though Okpo’s view is novel, it dismisses Bigger’s “will to power” and his spiritual ascendancy. Okpo (2021) concludes that “the attitude as always is to ‘wait and see’” (p. 8). Hence, from Okpo’s standpoint, Wright is known as an absurdist and portrays an absurd view of life that ends in nothing. Man must wait and see what life brings without questioning it. On the contrary, by refocusing the text through Nietzschean philosophy of *Übermensch*, not only, Bigger’s life becomes more meaningful than that of Sisyphus’, but also it encourages individuals, especially blacks, to question their existence and reach the agency which Nietzsche calls it “self-overcoming.” This self-overcoming both empowers Bigger against his fears and helps him to confront them thoughtfully.

Notwithstanding Okpo’s attitude, Nina K. Cobb (1979) is of the opinion that Wright’s philosophical notions regarding the individual’s existence and the essence of man’s being, particularly black people, do not stem from French existentialists such as Sartre or Camus. Thus, she accentuates that it is Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky’s books that prosper Wright’s opinion on philosophy. Cobb (1979) supports Wright’s fascination with existential ideas but condemns the influence of French existentialists on Wright and his literary works, particularly *The Outsider*. Confirming the existential quality of *Native Son*, Cobb (1979) repeats Edward Margolies and Donald Gibson’s words, claiming that “Wright’s fascination with existential ideas predated his exile” (p. 373). Also, about the source of existential ideas of Wright, Cobb (1979) precisely delineates that “Wright had been drawn to Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche in part because their struggle against authority represented one of the earliest and most persistent preoccupations of his life” (p. 373).

Drawing on Nietzschean existentialism and his tenet of *Übermensch*, Cobb (1979) is of the view that “he [Bigger] attained a level of self-awareness that permitted him to come to grips with the meaning of his existence” (p. 373). Though paramount is the point that she refers to, her brief indication of Bigger Thomas’s sociological transcendence in *Native Son* does not clarify the potentiality of Bigger in self-overcoming following his self-awareness as well as the will to power.

Nevertheless, what makes Cobb’s study in need of more examination is that her analysis leads only to the source of Wright’s philosophical understanding of freedom and alienation accompanied by existential cogitations. Although Cobb accepts the effect of Nietzschean *Übermensch*, yet in Wright’s critical thinking, she does not deal with the ethical ascendancy of the characters and their affinity with *Übermensch*.

Comparable to Cobb, Claudio Pesenti speaks on being an outsider in the essence of Wright’s different protagonists, such as Bigger Thomas, Cross Damon, and Fred Daniels; furthermore, she portrays them as aliens to their family, both black and white community, and themselves. After Cobb, Pesenti points out that Wright’s literary works are deeply influenced by existentialism rendered by Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, not French intellectuals. In this respect, she exemplifies Bigger Thomas, in *Native Son*, as a person who accepts his

existential truth and tries to rebuild a different life for him, resembling to Nietzsche's *Übermensch* (Pesenti, 2013).

Although her claims about the impact of Nietzsche and his notions on Wright are accurate, Pesenti neither elaborates on the issue nor treats the concept of *Übermensch* thoroughly. Narrowing down her study to the theory of "outsider" and presuming it as the procreative of two negative existentialist concepts – such as angst and despair – Pesenti ceases to recognize that being "an outsider" is a principal point. It helps the character – Bigger Thomas – improve himself and the positive aspects of self-overcoming in their characteristics to become godlike beings. Likewise, Pesenti's study of Wright's protagonists and assuming them as outsiders require more philosophical interpretation than general study, which Pesenti limits herself to; thus, the researcher devotes this essay to the philosophical study of Wright's protagonist – Bigger Thomas – in light of Nietzsche and his concept of *Übermensch*, in order to fill the gap and show that being an outsider is a part of the characteristic of the *Übermensch* and a stirring point for individuals to innovate their lives.

Therefore, this topic can be treated in three sections. The first section expounds on the philosophical tenets of "will to power" and "self-overcoming" to survey the influence of Nietzsche and his ideas on African American culture and portray a clear image of the importance of these concepts in African American literature. The second section studies Bigger Thomas's status in three different parts of his life, including his family life, his love life, and his social life, and inspects his fear and wrath before the turning point of the story, Merry Dalton's murder. Finally, it analyzes Bigger Thomas's actions owing to Nietzsche's concept of *Übermensch*, by drawing upon the tenets of "will to power" and "self-overcoming" to reveal Bigger's ethical reformation, which leads him toward the superior stage in comparison to his family, beloved, and white masters.

The significance of "will to power" among Nietzsche's concepts is so high that he has also written a book with the same title. This philosophical tenet has an expansive dimension and involves different aspects such as social life, personal life, individual instincts, art, knowledge, and nature. Thus, it is not easy to define it briefly. Yet, Nietzsche (2003b) renders a short explanation in illuminating the concept of "will to power" and notes that "will to power [is] the unexhausted, teeming life-will" (p. 86). Due to Nietzsche, the will to power is an instinctive part of every living thing, which impels it to change and transform, so if this power is withheld from a living thing, the flow of life will stop. Hence Nietzsche (2003b) accentuates that "Wherever I found a living thing, there I found the will to power; and even in the will of the servant I found the will to be master" (p. 87).

Moreover, Martin Heidegger and Bernd Magnus (1967) assert that this will of Nietzsche, as his impression of life, is the fundamental characteristic of all beings, and whoever desires to live possesses the "will to power" accompanied by suffering. Thus, Heidegger and Magnus (1967) introduce *Zarathustra* as the presenter of the fact that "all the being is will to power, which suffers as creative, colliding will, and thus wills itself in the eternal recurrence of the same" (p. 413). Furthermore, Nietzsche (2003b) juxtaposes the living desire with the idea of obedience and notes that "wherever I found living things, there I also heard the speech on obedience. Every living thing is obedient" (p. 87). Therefore, in Nietzsche's opinion, there are only two kinds of creatures: first, those who obey the laws stated by others, and second, those who command and set rules for all. Nietzsche (2003b) elucidates the nature of existence between the two phases of obeying and commanding as "whatever cannot obey itself will be commanded. Such is the nature of the living things" (p. 87). Indeed, Walter A. Kaufmann (1974) finds this notion of Nietzsche dialectic, describing that only children and primitive men do obey others; however, these submissive people also look for power in their obedience and think that the act of obedience can pave the way for their desire for power and success; otherwise, society retaliates and diminishes their potentiality. For Nietzsche, as Kaufmann (1974) claim, a human being, who is unique in nature, must supersede the established rules and generate his standards, and this is called the will to power, also leading to creativity.

Still, Nietzsche (2003b) alludes to "self-overcoming" as a principal source for commanding self, noting that "Yes, even when it commands itself: even then it must make amends for its commands. Judge and avenger and victim of its law it must become" (p. 87). Thus, for Nietzsche the process of commanding and obeying first must start in oneself and what is known as the "will to power" verily introduces the will to overcome oneself.

Jonathan Mitchell (2016) interprets "self-overcoming" as re-evaluative activity, and he refers to the practical identity constructed through fundamental evaluations and explained as a set of adjectives that one values oneself and finds life worth living and actions worth undertaking. Mitchell (2016) maintains that Nietzschean "self-overcoming" deals with man's fundamental evaluations, which are essential to practical identities, and exemplifies that a "Christian-turned-atheist who achieves self-overcoming in this way by abandoning her [or his] faith" succeeds in self-conception (p. 331). Mitchell's "Christian-turned-atheist" example makes the concept of morality and overcoming of morality, stated in section 32 of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, clear and represents it as the account of self-overcoming. Mitchell illustrates that those who overcome their moral beliefs and dare to renew their moral thoughts can accomplish self-overcoming. In this regard, overcoming morality originates in the world-historical reversal of values which Nietzsche attributes to a slave revolt. Nietzsche (2006) notes that

The beginning of slaves' revolt in morality occurs when *ressentiment* itself turns creative and gives birth to values ... whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying 'yes' to itself, slave morality says 'no' on principle to everything that is 'outside,' 'other,' 'non-self': and this 'no' is its creative deed. (p. 20)

In Nietzsche's view, as Mitchell further clarifies, the reversal of value is a part of *ressentiment*, which in the case of overcoming the external world needs outer stimuli, and each action is counted as a reaction. Here, it is significant to act against the noble evaluation method, and in line with this opposition, the slave morality is up to say 'yes' to itself more thankfully and exultantly. Accordingly, slave morality represents an "overturning of the self-evaluative framework of noble morality" (Mitchell, 2016: 332). Hence, this process depicts the movement from one self-evaluative framework to another without relinquishing the ethical principles. This process is subsumed as "self-overcoming," in which as Nietzsche (2003b) asserts, "he who must be a creator in good and evil: verily, he must first be a destroyer and shatter values" (p. 88). In fact, the idea of "good and evil," one of the Nietzschean doctrines, does not refer to the relation between good and evil qualities (Leiter, 1993). In this respect, Brian Leiter (1993) illustrates that this philosophical tenet comprises certain moral norms, stressing that "[these (im)moral norms are] pertaining to the value of truth or equality, or governing one's conduct toward others" (p. 262).

Nietzsche (2002) alludes to two certain traits of slave morality and master morality and claims that the difference between good and bad has resulted in the difference between noble and despicable. The noble man determines his values and prefers what is good for him. He calls himself a creator, Nietzsche, accordingly, illustrates the noble man as an applicant of power whose sense of altruism reflects his "will to power." For Nietzsche, this man is a valuable individual because he has the power to overcome the self and knows what to do in different situations. Nietzsche portrays the noble man as a person who is wise enough to know what to evaluate and is strong enough to deride the sense of compassion and condolence. In Nietzsche's view, the noble man feels responsible for his kind, and when it comes to the men of lower rank, he acts beyond good and evil. On the contrary, Nietzsche (2002) ties up the slave morality to the pessimistic view about the virtue of the noble man when he states that "Conversely, qualities that serve to alleviate existence for suffering people are pulled out and flooded with light: pity, the obliging, helpful hand, the warm heart, patience, industriousness, humility, and friendliness receive full honors here" (p. 156).

Nietzsche reveals that what stands as a significant concept for the slave community relates to what soothes slaves' agony, and through their morality, the great contradiction appears between good and evil. As long as the concept of "evil" is regarded as something powerful and dangerous for slaves – here it refers to the noble man – the concept of "good" cogitated as the exalted states of the soul. Nietzsche (2002) notes that "According to the slave morality then, 'Evil' inspires fear; but according to the master morality, it is 'good' that inspires and wants to inspire fear" (p. 156).

Nietzsche believes that wherever the slave morality becomes a dominant morality, the terms of good and stupid juxtapose because slave morality arises a sense of worthlessness in being good. Moreover, the desire for freedom exists in slave morality, while master morality inclines to art and devotion. Thus, in line with Leiter (1993), the idea of "beyond good and evil" refers to the abandonment of the values of the slave morality, such as resentful judgments, actions that are favorable to suffering, and considering that the agents act freely.

The way Nietzsche describes the free spirit does not comprise the equality of rights and the abolition of suffering, which are the modern sense of freedom. Indeed, in proportion to Dana R. Villa, Nietzsche portrays a free man as a responsible person for himself where different motives, goals, and moral criteria cannot curb his discipline, which applies certain styles that provide the raw material for himself and determine "who he is" (Villa, 1992). Such an individual masters himself and overcomes himself, and through this "self-overcoming" he institutes genuine freedom. Rolf-Peter Horstmann (2002) alludes to "self-overcoming," noting that "The ability to achieve such states seems to function as a condition of gaining important insights and having the psychological resources needed to live with them, and it indicates a certain stance towards reality superior to 'normal' or 'common' attitudes" (p. xxvii). Similarly, Rosenhagen (2012) turns to Josiah Royce's idea that Nietzsche's "will to power" is in the service of a transcendentalist sense of self-mastery rather than mere brutal force. Thus, the outcome of this transcendent is the birth of *Übermensch*, whose aim is not to raise self over society but to achieve "self-overcoming," which is a real man's struggle for not only becoming free from conflict with society but also for using the inner conflict for self-regeneration. Moreover, by emphasizing the commonality between *Übermensch* and "ethical Titanism," which is central to Western literature and philosophy, Royce strives to induct Nietzsche's vision of self-mastery into American moral discourse (Rosenhagen, 2012). In compliance with Rosenhagen, Nietzsche's ideologies were like the breath of fresh air to African American literature. Nietzsche's writings on power and Christian morality unlocked the mind of African Americans and helped them to liberate themselves from the dubious blessing of Christianity so as to possess "Freethought," besides, his analytic philosophy of *Übermensch* was an ethical school taught African Americans to be no longer a supplicant to "vacated mythologies" about an open society or black racial inferiority (Rosenhagen, 2012).

Therefore, based on what Rosenhagen claims the trace of Nietzsche's philosophy can be detected in the African American writers such as Hubert Harrison (founder of the "New Negro" movement and the father of Harlem Radicalism), Huey P. Newton, and Robert George Seale, known as Bobby Seale (the founders of Black Panther Party in 1966). Rosenhagen (2012) suggests that in *Revolutionary Suicide*, H. P. Newton estimates Nietzsche as a source of power, black self-determination, and liberation, and his ideas are instrumental in raising the consciousness of black people about themselves and America. Furthermore, Paul C Taylor (2006) reveals that though he was one of the readers of Nietzsche, he had the idea that Nietzsche's views were indifferent and hostile to his interest in race work; however, teaching Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* made him notice and rethink what he had never thought of; thus he decided to use Nietzsche as a source in his study about Afrocentrism and race theory. Taylor values Nietzsche's racial analysis and accepts the view that human beings can cultivate into the ruling class if there is a stimulus to "self-overcoming" constrained by the Black individuals though the aim of empowering was always at the forefront of Afrocentrism.

The researcher of this article argues that Richard Wright portrays the philosophical issue of *Übermensch* in his works and particularly alludes to the idea of "will to power" and "self-overcoming" in *Native Son*. Similarly, *Native Son* brightens the true essence of black people's lives through which Wright paves a path that would lead African Americans out of poverty, oppression, and violence toward a new sense of self.

In this respect, Ana María Fraile-Marcos (2007a) regards the thematic and stylistic concerns of Wright compound of a powerful mixture of contradictory elements such as Modernism, Freudianism, universalism, and existentialism in the frame of large genres, trends, and political and philosophical ideas. Hence, Fraile (2007b) cements her literary bona fide opinion by expressing "Wright's novel *Native Son* stands at the ... triple intersection where the African American experience works its way from the margins to the center of both American idealism and the Western understanding of modern man" (p. 120).

Since, in *Native Son*, limited living facilities and educational provisions circumscribed Bigger, the protagonist, he has no credible and practical roles in his society. Likewise, the idea and policy of the racist white people enslave Bigger and do not allow him to learn fundamental skills as he is a Negro and not qualified for a serious job like aviation. Thus, the black community, particularly Bigger, lives as an outsider in the white society. Thereupon, Bigger has a desire for identity and grapples with this problem in the society just as so in the family.

Each and everything Wright portrays from Bigger's family is nothing more than violence, agitation, poverty, and disjointedness of the mother-son relationship. The thing that exists between mother and Bigger looks like the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed, in which mother is oppressing Bigger. Consequently, against the kinship, there is no affinity in this connection. Accordingly, Bigger is continually reminded by his mother to be a responsible person for the family issues, and the family can be released from hardships if Bigger acts more competently. Yet, what Bigger desires and wishes for is not such topics or discussions his mother constantly made in the family.

Bigger's family has been cultivated by a mother whose dogmatic religiosity tries to foster a religious spirit in the souls of her children. Bigger's mother always cries for mercy, whispering the name of the Lord, more and more. She also directly expresses her religiosity in her songs. Therefore, the mother figure is least attentive to worldly issues as well as Bigger and his maternal needs, since she only wants to be a Christian. Moreover, all her advice is in line with her religious desires; besides, no single line in the novel shows a logical or an intimate conversation between Bigger and his mother.

Bigger's mother belittles Bigger's humanity and authority with her abusive words, such as – the biggest fool, crazy, plain dumb, black crazy – which fires up Bigger toward constructing a new self. Consequently, the mother, despite her perceptions of herself as an oppressed person, becomes a new oppressor trying to control Bigger and his life by imposing her religious beliefs and harsh manners on him because he was a delinquent son. Likewise, Jane Davis (1986) alludes to the indicated idea, divulging that "Clearly, Bigger's mother's pressure on him to act as provider causes hostility ... Thus, in *Native Son*, the mother causes her son to be estranged from her" (p. 69).

As a result, Bigger is obsessed with rebelliousness, and his escape from his mother, social constraints, and stereotypes, which make him feel like a worthless creature, can be proof of the issue that, as a modern man, he is searching for authority. In fact, anything Bigger demonstrates is an adaptation of his mother's manner, by hiding his agitation in the shroud of wrath. Bigger hates his surroundings along with what he is. Wright alludes to Bigger's hate from his family, since it reminds him of his powerlessness.

Furthermore, Bigger experienced the feeling of fear when he met Dalton's family, specifically his daughter, Mary, and her white boyfriend, Jan. So far as Wright portrays, Bigger feels miserable in joining Mary and Jan. Wright (1940) elaborates that "they made him feel his black skin by just standing there looking at him ... at that moment he felt toward Mary and Jan a dumb, cold, and inarticulate hate" (p. 48). However, Mary and Jan have an opposite view and opine that they can make Bigger feel comfortable. On the contrary, they make the situation difficult for Bigger, reminding him his pains, as better expressed by Wright (1940) in the following way "he felt that this white man, having helped to put him down, having helped to deform him, held him up now to look at him and be amused" (p. 48). On account of this, Davis (1986) accentuates Bigger's agony in contact with

Mary and is of the view that "Mary Dalton's relationship with Bigger intensifies his sense of impotence by inadvertently making him intensely aware of his feelings of inferiority in relation to whites" (p. 69).

Against external and self-perception conflicts, Bigger feels relief next to his girlfriend, Bessie, who also had an impressive role in Bigger's reformation since he feels puissant and self-imposing next to Bessie. Wright (1940) describes Bessie as a person who conveys to Bigger a sense of strength "he wanted to see her badly; he felt that he would be stronger to go through tomorrow if he saw her" (p. 77). Nevertheless, what makes Bessie on the lines of Bigger's mother, friends, and even the white community is the controlling power that Bessie tries to enforce on Bigger through her emotional actions. In fact, Bessie's "Will to Power" contrasts with Bigger's "Will to Power." Also, Davis further introduces Bigger's mother and Bessie, as threatening to his self-dependence. Thus, Davis (1986) notes that "being in control of Bessie gives Bigger the same sort of thrill he had after accepting responsibility for Mary's death" (p. 71).

Narrowing down her study on female characters, Davis's article dismisses the suppression of male figure in his social relationship and ignores the ethical reformation putting Bigger in higher status in comparison to both the female characters and other male ones who try to exercise their authority over him. Moreover, Davis fails to specify how the protagonists succeed in the "will to power" and "self-overcoming" process. Thus, she concludes that the male character is trying to escape from women's power through "callousness, abandonment, or violence" (Davis, 1986: 82).

Consequently, what Bigger reflects before Mary's death is the picture of a turbulent and weak black individual who lives in the shadow and is considered an outsider. Additionally, the existential conflicts question Bigger's entity in the world and disable him from expressing his notions. Furthermore, those who surround Bigger, such as his mother, Bessie, Mary, and Jan, attempt to persuade their ideology to Bigger and expect him to be of the same mind, which desolates Bigger because of his different "Will to Power." Yet, what Wright brings to view about Bigger after Mary's death, is reminiscent of what Nietzsche discusses in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* as an *Übermensch*, in order to steer the modern man to find the lost status of humanity in the world in which God is assuming to be dead and help humanity to rescue himself from oppression and aggrandize his existence.

The analytic philosophy of Nietzsche, which scrutinizes the existence of an individual in a godless world, and his concept of *Übermensch*, render a deep understanding of Bigger's existence and prepare a precise deconstruction of the writer's thoughts. In this regard, Pesenti (2013) admits that "Bigger acts like Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, he accepts the true nature of his existence and the chaos which governs the world, killing and creating a new life for himself" (p. 21). Thus, what Bigger feels and thinks at the moment of suffocating Mary Dalton and after that includes worthwhile existential reformation in Bigger that leads him toward what Nietzsche calls "self-overcoming."

In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche calls for war and revolt against family as well as enemy, since none of them are dignified enough to be strange with hatred and envy. Being courageous and aspirant for victory is what Nietzsche praises. Nietzsche (2003e) notifies that "They call you heartless: but your heart is true, and I love the modesty of your cordiality" (p. 35). Nietzsche (2003e) presents man as a creature that should have been overcome and learned to obey as well as disobey and notes that Rebellion — that is the distinction of a slave. May your distinction be obedience! May your commanding itself be an obeying! 'Thou shalt' sounds sweeter to a good soldier than 'I will.' And all that is dear to you shall be that which has first been commanded to you ... man is something that shall be overcome. So, live your life of obedience and war! (pp. 35-36)

Accordingly, Nietzsche's summons for war, and prowess is a step toward self-overcoming. This war is against not only the enemy and family who convey the feeling of hatred and weakness but also against self and internal fear. Hence, bravery and prowess are at odds with the enemy, family, and even self, which is what Nietzsche yearns for, and substitutes obedience with the aim of mastery for the resisted slavery. Indeed, it is not a long life admired by a brave individual but a life with serious conflicts.

What Wright delineates in Bigger after Mary's death is not, as the researcher of this thesis claims, at variance with what Nietzsche declares about bravery and prowess. White-skinned Mary's death was a moment of anagnorisis for Bigger, which arguably acquainted him with his actual existence, which should not be regarded as weak, timid, and less impressive. So, in contact with Mrs. Dalton, Mary's white blind mother, Bigger tries to save himself by violently pressing the pillow on Mary's face; however, by doing so, in fact, as the researcher claims, Bigger metaphorically chokes all his fears. This incident turns a new page in Bigger's life, which leads him to a superior status. Sheldon Brivic (1974) has the idea that "[these] feelings of superiority suggest the Nietzschean superman" (p. 239). As a result, following Mary's death, Bigger's attitude toward the world deviated from what his mother had always urged to, and all the more, he felt unlimited authority in contact with white masters who he had misled.

Moreover, Bigger's alienation from other blacks can be traced when Wright (1940) notes that "He [Bigger] felt that someday there would be a black man who would whip the black people into a tight band and together they would act ... He never thought of this in precise mental images; he felt it..." (p. 70). In effect, Brivic (1974) describes this sense of Bigger's inclination to Fascism as a reaction to his nationalistic pride. Nevertheless,

according to the researcher, Bigger's challenge is more ethical rather than a political movement. Hence, Brivic's study suffers from the fact that it dismisses the ethical reformation of the protagonist, and overlooks Bigger's complaints about racial discrimination, his family relation, his status in society, and his hatred of himself, which are the drives that impel Bigger toward significant changes in his life. Likewise, Bigger's violence is a reflection of the amount of tension that he has endured throughout his lifetime; and the lack of social security together with social respect spontaneously lead him toward "will to power," which is regrettably not discussed by Brivic. Also, Brivic does not address "self-overcoming," through which Bigger starts a new life, rebuilds himself, and overcomes his weaknesses, on the contrary he castigates Bigger mentally sick.

Nuno Nabais (2006) describes the philosophical tenet of "will to power" as the element that regulate the sense of who we are. Nabais (2006) clarifies that "it is a will that does not struggle merely for existence but aims at stronger and fuller existence, at 'growth and conquest and supremacy'" (pp. 284-285). Also, Nabais (2006) insists that Nietzsche's free-spirit man "affirms struggle as a creative force and aims at the intensification of power" (p. 286). Thus, as the researcher asserts, Wright (1940) writes about the power which Bigger was thirsty about, stating

The whole thing came to him in the form of a powerful and simple feeling ... Now, who on earth would think that he, a black timid Negro boy, would murder and burn a rich white girl and would sit and wait for his breakfast like this? Elation filled him. (p. 66)

In fact, Wright portrays what society has forced on the protagonist through Bigger's deeds. But, with the help of ethical reformation, which appeared after Mary's murder, Bigger acts against his habit of submitting to white people by setting new rules in which there is no submission to white authority anymore. Thus, in Nietzsche's view, a different form of "will to power," namely "freedom," is created when an individual wants authority in order to oppose the power which the state and society apply to him, so Nietzsche (1967) states that "the most fearful and fundamental desire in man, his drive for power – this drive is called 'freedom'" (p. 384).

The sense of power is something that domineered Bigger's life after Mary's death and enabled him to overcome his fears and weaknesses so that he could earn his freedom. Therefore, the sense of fearlessness demonstrates itself in Bigger's life after Mary's death. Wright (1940) elaborates it by alluding to Bigger's first meeting with his friends after the involuntary murder that he had committed, describing that "It was a kind of eagerness he felt, a confidence, a fullness, a freedom; his whole life was caught up in supreme and meaningful act" (pp. 69-70).

Killing Mary, even unintentionally, was the most critical thing Bigger had done in his life and made him overcome his groundless and paralyzing fears and weaknesses. Also, by portraying Bigger as an individual who yearns for power, the author upholds the view elaborating that "Power it is, this new virtue; a commanding thought it is, and around it, a wise soul: a golden sun, and around it, the serpent of knowledge" (Nietzsche, 2003c: 58). Nietzsche is of the opinion that even though avoiding violence can be a good way of living among people, this issue can turn out to be the principle of collapse and corrosion in society, whether this notion generalizes the fundamental proposition in society. Therefore, Nietzsche (2003a) again affirms that "which is higher than all reconciliation must the will which is the will to power will" (p. 109).

Consequently, the tenet of "will to power" increases the desire of deifying in an individual, and an individual must overcome everything that triggers dread and anxiety, such as senses and desires (Nietzsche, 1967). Therefore, the principle of "self-overcoming" can be detected when Wright describes Bigger's thoughts the day following Mary's murder, and for the first time Bigger presents that he is able to dominate and control himself. Thus, Wright (1940) clarifies that "His crime was an anchor weighing him safely in time; it added to him a certain confidence which his gun and knife did not ... He felt he could control himself now" (pp. 65-66).

Exerting "self-overcoming," Bigger turns out to be a strong character who successfully reforms and creates a new being out of himself. The chickenhearted, timid, and naive Bigger replaced with a more lionhearted, mature, and crafty one, who has the ability to sedate his feelings and direct his actions, which he was powerless to control a while ago. Again, Wright (1940) highlights the transformation of Bigger and his thoughts by describing Bigger's notions and emphasizing that "no matter how they [white community] laughed at him for his being black and clown like, he could look in the eye and not feel angry" (p. 88). In fact, Bigger overcomes the absurd situation he had been in his whole life, and now he feels like a man who can do noteworthy deeds, whether right or wrong. This sense of "self-overcoming" also gives him the "will to power," which not only does he control his perceptions in contact with whites as well as his family and friends but also puts him in a godlike (master) status, who controls others' lives and sets rules.

Therefore, with regard to Nietzsche when oppression and weakness drags a slave's life to the abyss of destruction, as Pearson (2006) assert, the one with free will, who is also called *ressentiment*, develops a sentiment against the oppressive master and takes revenge in the form of "the invention of a new concept and an associated new form of valuation" (p. xxi). So, it was Bigger's turn to manifest his agency and superiority, as the researcher claims, equal to a godlike character in comparison to his white masters, stand and laugh at their failure in seeing and perceiving the truth. Moreover, Bigger sentenced Bessie to death since she could be a

source of shame, fear, and weakness for him, and would be a serious hinderance to his "Will to Power," and by not taking the money from Bessie's pocket he confirmed his ability to self-overcoming.

Nevertheless, the most crucial "self-overcoming" in Bigger happens when he confronts Christianity and casts aside the religious tenets that his mother nourished him. Bigger, akin to an *Übermensch*, breaks up with taking Christianity as a pattern, endeavoring to save his principles and doctrines. Besides, as a black-skinned individual, he succeeds in creating an elevated version of his existence. Wright (1940) expands the case when Bigger comes across a priest in prison, noting that

He felt that his making the priest stand away from him and wonder about his motives for refusing to accept the consolations of religion was a sort of recognition of his personality on a plane other than that which the priest was ordinarily willing to make. (p. 212)

Likewise, Nietzsche (2003d) presents priests as his, or Zarathustra's, enemy and advises to "pass by them quietly and with sleeping swords" (p. 68). Over and above, Nietzsche (2002) comes down on Christianity, condemning it for being cruel and exhorting the supporters to "sacrifice of all freedom, of all pride, of all self-confidence of the spirit" also highlighting that "it is simultaneously enslavement and self-derision, self-mutilation" (p. 44). Accordingly, Anthony C. Ojimba and Bruno Yammelluan Ikuli (2019) underline that in Nietzsche's view, Christianity calls "evil" whatever induces an individual to have a dominant life and announces "good" whatever disputes the instinct of a strong life. Hence, Ojimba and Ikuli (2019) come up with the idea that a superman never acquiesces the conventional practices; instead, he creates his new values, and by breaking the traditional and religious absolutism he wakes up humanity and existential authenticity. Besides, they highlight that "for Nietzsche, superman represents the liberation of man from the tyranny of the Christian religion" (Ojimba and Ikuli, 2019: 20).

Consequently, the concept of *Übermensch*, maximizes in *Native Son* when Wright illustrates how Bigger stands with resistance right before the execution, and expresses his thoughts about Mary's murder. At the moment that everyone expects Bigger to mourn and lament, he firmly expresses his tenets with comfort and confidence. He declaims that "What I killed for must've been good! ... I didn't know I was really alive in this world until I felt things hard enough to kill for 'em ... I feel all right when I look at it that way ..." (Wright, 1940: 217). So, the reformation in Bigger becomes clearly visible as his "will to power," in the form of his rejection of religious attitudes, his ability to self-control, and the power of creating his principles turn him into a superior creature in comparison to his people and prove that to live in war is more worthwhile than to live as an outsider. Life does not mean being in peace but indicates accepting hard challenges to improve yourself and create a superior version of humanity. Thus, by the existential challenges and the philosophical attitudes, Wright has the objective of acquainting his people with their existence, and power of reformation necessary for evolution in their life and status as a human in the society.

CONCLUSION

The present study was designed to determine the effect of applying Nietzsche's philosophical concept of *Übermensch* on *Native Son* and argued that in what way the Nietzschean tenets of "will to power" and "self-overcoming" account for Bigger Thomas's life from being an inferior person to a superior one in comparison to his white masters, his family, and friends. Accordingly, the researcher divided the examination into two parts, before and after Mary Dalton's unintentional murder. The researcher presented that at the beginning of the novel, the protagonist, Bigger displayed a timid and naive young boy whose life was limited to the black segregation of Chicago with some suppressed wishes. Also, Bigger's relationship with his friends, mother, and girlfriend, Bessie, analyzed and depicted that Bigger was an oppressed individual in his personal as well as social communications and implicitly suffered from lack of authority imposed on him by his friends and family. The study focused on the idea of "will to power" as long as Bigger had confronted with the senses of dread, weakness, poverty, and racial discrimination. Hence, these notions led to a specific hatred and wrath in Bigger toward his family, friends, and even himself. Eventually, this sense of "will to power" led to Bigger's inclination to "self-overcoming," which controlled his life and revalued his values. So, he decided to renovate and ameliorate his life by accepting the job in Mr. Dalton's house.

Although Mary Dalton's unintentional murder tarnished the protagonist's image, the researcher demonstrated this incident as a resurrection of Bigger and emphasized his ethical reformation and agency in contact with white masters. Also, this incident metaphorically indicated Bigger's overcoming of his dreads and anxieties as well as gaining authority and spiritual accomplishment. Thus, as the researcher concluded, Bigger recreated a courageous individual out of himself, whom neither lamented in time of his death nor regretted Mary's murder because it was the first time he sensed himself alive and doing some serious deeds. As a result, by taking Nietzsche's tenets of "will to power" and "self-overcoming" into account, Bigger succeeded in renewing his existential values and rendering an elevated entity, which equated him with Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. Besides, Bigger reinvigorated the status of black people in his society and proved that black people are active entities of society that must be taken seriously. Additionally, for further study the researcher recommends the gap in feminine study on Richard Wright's works. Also, there is not enough studies in examining Nietzschean feminism in the

feminist survey which can not only involve female works but also apply on Wright's *Native Son* to examine the female role in view of post-feminism on account of Nietzschean interpretation.

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