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“An Inhumanist Poet”: Robinson Jeffers

Abstract

This paper enunciates the importance of philosophy of “Inhumanism” coined by Jeffers. It deals with human narcissism or narcissistic personality disorder and its destructive effect on the person and also the people around them. Jeffers’s poems show us how to overcome this kind of disorder by decentralising ourselves and to give emphasis to the beauty of things around us and enjoy life with the association of nature.

Keywords

Inhumanism, narcissism, unhumanize, nature, beauty.

John Robinson Jeffers is better known as an inhumanist poet because of his coinage of the term Inhumanism. Jeffers not only coined the term inhumanism but also used it effectively in his works. As a lover of nature he profoundly rejects anthropocentrism. He is looking at nature as a whole and human beings as part of it, but not the center of it. Though the philosophy of inhumanism is against humanism, it has its own values and ethics in it. Some critics have rejected the philosophy of inhumanism and they categorized Jeffers as a bitter misanthrope. In response to his critics, Jeffers, in the preface to *The Double Axe*, stated that this manner of thought and feeling is neither misanthropic nor pessimistic, though two or three people may said so and may again it involves no falsehood, and is a means of maintaining sanity in slippery times; it has objective truth and human value.

Inhumanism, the philosophy stresses that mankind is too self-centred and believes that they are centralized in this universe and not concerned about the beauty of things around them. In the preface to *The Double Axe*, Jeffers defined inhumanism as “a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not man; the rejection of transhuman magnificence ... It offers a reasonable detachment as a rule of conduct, instead of love, hate, and envy.” ()

Jeffers was born in 1887 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As a son of biblical scholar, he was well trained in the Bible and classical languages. As a student, he studied subjects like literature, medicine, and forestry. After graduating from college at the age of eighteen, he married Una Call Custer. He lived a primitive style of life in his creative stone house built by him. He was very much interested in stone masonry and the results of his interest were Tor House and Hawk Tower. He was not a member in any group or any school. Instead he developed his own style of expression and coined the term “Inhumanism,” which is usually regarded as a dark philosophy, but Jeffers justifies that it has social values. Through his poems he explored his philosophy of inhumanism effectively. He strongly protests against narcissism and avoids it. He used this medical term “narcissism” because of his medical training.

In his work “Themes in My Poems,” Jeffers states that his poems “also express a protest against human narcissism”; it is otherwise called self-love. If a person is giving much importance to his or her own beauty, it leads them to think of all other things in this world as a small part. The excessive love of oneself creates a lot of problems in one’s life; so the poet calls his readers to decentralize themselves and to look at the beauty of things around them like the sky, sea, mountain, and animals and their value in life.

In the prologue of the novel *The Alchemist* written by Paulo Coelho, we can find a mythological story about Narcissus. Narcissus was the most beautiful young man in the universe. He was fascinated by his own beauty. Every day he used to kneel down near the banks of the river in the forest. One day he drowned in the river and died. The river wept for a long time after that the goddesses of forest appeared in front of the river and asked the reason behind its sorrow. The river replied sadly that it was weeping for Narcissus. Then the goddesses asked the river whether it had seen the beauty of Narcissus, it replied that it was watching its own beauty which is reflected in the eyes of Narcissus. After the death of narcissus, a flower bloomed in the place of Narcissus death, and it was named after him.

From this story, it is clear that human beauty is not stable but the beauty of nature stands forever.

One of the best poems written by Jeffers is “Tamar.” The main source for this poem is taken from the holy book of Bible; this poem is a retelling of chapter thirteen of the second book of Samuel. Hence, he was interested in biblical literature; he retold the story with imaginary characters and he also employed narrative technique. It is easy for the readers to know the story as well as the message of it, but the theme of the poem terrifies some readers. In this poem the title character is very significant. Through this character the poet shows us the destructive power of narcissism and artistically explores his philosophy of inhumanism.

Jeffers rejects narcissism and strongly protests against narcissism. This made him write a narrative poem about Tamar, who is affected with narcissistic personality disorder and it also sketches the beauty of landscape especially Point Lobos. The story of the poem takes place in Californian coast nearby Point Lobos. The beauty of Tamar as well as Point Lobos is juxtaposed in this poem. The poet gives importance to the symbol of fire in many of his poems. Similarly in “Tamar” also there is significance for the symbol of fire, but this is not the first work where he used fire as a symbol. In “Tamar,” he used it effectively and pictures the power of fire god who is able to cleanse the sins of human beings. Actually this poem is difficult for normal readers to follow because the climax has too much confusion.

The poem “Tamar” consists of three sections in it. It begins with a horse and its rider badly wounded at Point Lobos cliffs into the surf. The rider Lee Cauldwell lies down half-dead, but the horse died. Lee was rescued by his sister Tamar and she nursed her brother well. After recovering from his illness, Lee renewed himself and thought that it is a kind of rebirth for him. He told Tamar that, he wasted all the valuable time by wild living, so now he wants to turn his head towards the beauty of things and nature:

O Tamar

I’ve thrown away years like rubbish. Listen

Tamar,

It would be better for me to be a cripple

Sit on the steps and watch the forest grow up

On the hill. (78- 82)

Lee's father advised him to attend a local dance, but he refused it. So his father warned his son in a humoristic manner, that too much time on ranch is not healthy and good. Lee is no more interested in local dances. He wants to make his time worthwhile. Instead of spending his time on dance, he decided to spend time with his sister Tamar, and wants to show her beauty of flowers, meadows, mountains, and the forest:

A hundred times he wanted Tamar, to show her
Some new beauty
of canyon wildflowers, water
dashing its frens, or oaktrees thrusting elbows
at the wind()

Lee wants to share the beauty of things in nature, but instead his sister Tamar wants to share her own beauty with her brother. When they reached Mal Paso creek, she saw her own beauty in the dark mountain. After undressing she was tempted to do evil things and wanted to attain sexual pleasure with her brother. She thought that if he asked her brother for help when there was a snake in the water, he would surely come and kill it bravely, but if she asked him to satisfy her by accompanying for her desire, he would be frightened and never involve in this kind of activities so Tamar decided to tempt her brother in some other way. Due to her excessive self- love, she forced her brother in many ways to step down into water and seduced her brother.

In the second section the poet vividly portrays the beauty of the landscape as well as Tamar, by the act of Tamar. By the act of Tamar, the poet means to say that if we want to improve our self- respect as well as self- worth, it is really good and worthy to live a better life. But self- love is not like that and here the excessive self- love of Tamar leads to destruction of humanity, because the poet believes in the cycle of nature and renewal of all life on earth.

In section three Tamar felt guilty about her deeds and she wanted to clean her sin with fire. Only fire can cleanse the sins of Tamar as well as her family. She lighted the candle and tried to burn her entire home but she failed because only her room was burnt and she died

as the poet believe in the cycle of nature. He ends the poem with Tamar's idiotic aunt burning the entire home with the candle accidentally. So the sin of Tamar as well as her family has been cleansed.

According to Big Bang theory, fire is the first thing created in this world and even sea and earth are created out of fire. The title character Tamar also prays to the fire god to cleanse the sin of her whole family. The symbol of fire is used in this poem to cleanse the sins of humans. This poem shows us the beauty of things like the rocks, mountain, and water which are stable and will flourish forever as well as the mortal beauty of humans which is destructive. It is evident through the poem "The Beauty of Things."

In the poem "The Beauty of Things" the poet enunciates the beauty of nonhuman world around us. We speak not only about the astonishing beauty of things like the earth, stone, and water, but also sun, moon, stars, man, woman and beasts. All the beauty of human beings is mortal; it will be destroyed and recreated by god. But the "unhuman nature" is in the peak of reality. Human beings can say that we are dreaming and question about the dream of nature. The unhuman world is always real; it cannot exist in the world of dreams. So only it is constant and never changing. The sky, the rock and water always express their beauty greatly as well as are expressed and understood greatly.

To show this kind of beauty is the sole purpose of poetry, but human beings is much conscious about them, and unfortunately neglected the beauty of things because of various sentiments and ideas. It may be good or evil we are giving importance to love, lust, and longings and we compromise ourselves by giving reasons like this, but these are all not the reasons. It is only in our hands to decentralize ourselves and give importance to the beauty of things around us such as the rock, mountain, sea, and landscape. However, we are not ready to unhumanize ourselves from this conventional attitude. We become too selfish and not even ready to accept the truth about our future which will be darkened by the rapid growth and development of science and technology.

Jeffers gives the answer for the questions of audience as well as himself. The title of the poem is "The Answer." In this poem the poet starts with a question "then what is the answer?" (1). The answer is no one should be misled by their dreams. With few suggestions and examples the poet gives his answer. They are listed as follows: The tyrants wants to know the breakdown of the great civilization because of violence; they came before it many

times. When there is an open violence, the wise people always avoid it or sometimes they may face the ugly conflict because these evil things are essential for their success.

If we want to keep up the ethical and moral codes, we must be merciful and keep away from corruption and avoid evil doings as well duplications. There are always dreaming about universal justice and happiness, but they will not be fulfilled easily. The whole remains beautiful forever, but its parts are ugly. The hand which is separated from the body is ugly. By the same token, the humanity which is separated from earth is atrociously ugly.

The moral or ethical codes are called wholeness and the greatest beauty is organic wholeness, the life on the planet and the unshakable beauty of the universe. The poet asks his readers to love the beauty of things around them but not man. If people gives importance only to human society they will share only confusions and they drown themselves into helplessness in their worst days of life. So let us come out from the misconceptions about human centeredness and live life to the fullest potential by enjoying the enormous beauty of the world.

Thus, from all these three poems we come to know that the poet calls to his readers to break down the wall between nature and humanity and enjoy the beauty of things around them. Instead of enjoying the mortal beauty of our bodies and also the opposite sex because all things regarding life become nothing one or the other day. In this perspective narcissism is synonymous with nihilism because everything in human life ends with nothingness. So we should learn how to live our life by giving importance to nature around us from the point of view of an inhumanist poet.

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