

Depiction of Moral Values in the Gems of Literature

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Abstract

This paper gives a different perspective on the views and depiction of moral values in the gems of Literature. The last two decades, however, have witnessed a renewed interest in the relationship between literature and values and the ethical dimension of literature, culminating in what has been dubbed ‘the ethical turn’ and the re-emergence of ethical criticism. The main goals of this introduction are to gauge the relationship between literature and values, and to provide a provisional overview of some of the most important functions of literature, while also giving a brief survey of the wide range of topics and perspectives that the contributions that follow deal with and explore. This paper will also highlight various dimensions of literary works and look in to how it works for an individual’s moral awareness and his behavior.

Keywords: values, morality, literature, ethical, relationship.

Introduction – Morality in Literature

Throughout the history Literature is an important means of making our lives more sensible and of reflecting, reinforcing but also constructing the norms and values we live by. While the ‘ethical turn’ in the study of culture drew new attention to the ethical dimension of literature, the complex and reciprocal relationship between literature and values still needs to be examined in detail. “Issues of value and evaluation tend to recur whenever literature, art, and other forms of cultural activity become a focus of discussion, whether in informal or institutional context”, Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1995: 177) observes at the beginning of her fine essay on the intricate and thorny topic of “Value/Evaluation”. Debates about values and evaluation, and the ethical dimension of literature have indeed been perennial issues in literary criticism and literary theory, even “central to Western critical theory for at least the past two hundred years”. It is a truth universally acknowledged, of course, that the relationship between literature and value, and the views that have been put forward about this topic, have themselves been subject to historical change. For example Oscar Wilde, in his novel *The Picture of Dorain Gray*, he proclaimed that: “There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all.” Two more quotations from the Preface may serve to show just how important it was for Wilde to dissociate literature as well as the other arts from morality and ethical values:

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The moral life of man forms part of the subject matter of the artist, but the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium.

No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style.

All these days the fictional lives and the fantasies of literature have affected us from time unmemorable and keep on influencing our life and moral sense. Today's educators and critics have increased the wide range of creativity and dimensions of literary work from the basic level of learning. But the question is that, what type of moral value should be taught. Whether this should be religious, democratic, civic, personal, moral or universal. Modern educators are utilizing the literature in a multi dimensional approach for improving society, behavior development, problem solving skills and right attitude to handle social situations. By narrowing it can be said that literature is simply promoting moral literacy. In my point of view literature and literary works are playing very crucial role in shaping and cultivating our beliefs, cultural, aesthetic and moral senses. This approach focuses primarily on inculcating moral values from the age of adolescence in which an individual can adapt fairness, justice, equity, and human dignity along with other values constituting social, personnel, aesthetic growth. This helps the students in their development in thinking more logically and socially about moral issues. Educators attempt to stimulate students to develop more complex, moral reasoning patterns and levels through the sequential stage.

Moral Values in *Beyond Good and Evil*

To illustrate the discussion, I wish to focus on one of the most famous books, "*Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*" by Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche in 1886. Friedrich Nietzsche has long been smeared as a ghastly nihilist who repudiated all conceptions of morality. Critics point to the title of his famous work, *Beyond Good and Evil*, which appears to call for the repudiation of morality, as well as contain his vociferous condemnations of eternal moral standards. With his proclamation that "God is dead," and his assertion that there is "no such thing as moral phenomena, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena," the evidence initially appears substantial that Nietzsche was an adherent of the crassest form of relativism and a radical opponent of any notion of morality.

One fundamental distinction arising out of Nietzsche's account of the natural history of morals and forming the foundation of his immoralism is that between master morality and slave morality. Nietzsche believes that it is the Aristocratic or ruling class that formulates the principle of morality at any given period in a society.

The master morality is especially foreign and irritating to present day taste. It is disliked and distrusted for the sternness of its principle that one has duties only to one's equals and that one may act toward persons of a lower rank, toward all that is foreign, just as one pleases and that its values are beyond good and evil.

Nietzsche argues that in all higher and more mixed cultures, there appear attempts at mediation between the master morality and slave morality. The moral discrimination of values has originated either among a ruling group whose consciousness of its difference from the ruled group was accompanied by delight or among the ruled, the slaves and dependents of every degree. Here is a place for the origin of that famous opposition of 'good and evil';. Into evil one's feelings project power and dangerousness, ascertain terribleness, a certain terribleness, and strength that does not permit contempt to develop. According to slave morality, those who are evil thus inspire fear, and according to master morality, it is precisely those who are good that inspire, and wish to inspire, fear, while the bad are felt to be contemptible.

Morality is as old as humanity, and there have been many different kinds of morality across the millennia. Moral philosophers today lack this historical perspective, and in searching for a "rational foundation" for morality, all they really do is try to justify their own morality. Unable to see outside the perspective of their own morality, they are unable to see the concept of morality itself as problematic and needing to be questioned and justified.

Anything great that we have achieved or become has been the result of a strict obedience in one particular direction over a long period of time. Great art, thinking, and spirituality have occurred through constant and harsh discipline. Only through a kind of enslavement and hardship can we refine ourselves.

Nietzsche asserts that we actually register far less than we think we do. For instance, when we see a tree, we don't see the detail of every branch and leaf, but only glance at the rough shape of the whole, and from that construct all the smaller details in our head. Similarly when we read a book, we really take in only a few words and then fit those words into what we already think we know. In this sense, Nietzsche suggests, we are all inventors, artists, and liars: our so-called "knowledge" is our own make-believe.

People differ not only in what they think is worth pursuing, but also in what they take to be possession of what they pursue. One man may feel he "possesses" a woman if he can have sex with her, while another feels this possession is only worthwhile if the woman is willing to give up everything for him. This second kind of possession is made the more valuable the more deeply the woman knows the man, so the man must be able to make himself known to her as best

he can. Nietzsche also uses examples of charity and education as means of possession. For instance, in educating, the teacher makes the child see the world according to the teacher's perspective; the teacher thus comes to possess another soul.

Nietzsche bemoans the "slave revolt in morality," which considered the rich, violent, and sensual to be evil, while considering the poor holy. We have come to see everything healthy, dangerous, and passionate about ourselves as pathological. This morality of the "herd" claims in the name of "happiness" that we should avoid our darker instincts. This may be true for some, but Nietzsche despises moralizers precisely because they generalize on matters that depend greatly on the individual. There have always been more people obeying than commanding, but simply because the majority is suited to submissiveness, we should not conclude that this is a general principle that all should obey. Nowadays, those who command are almost ashamed of it, and dare only do so if they do it in the name of God, the law, or the people.

Nietzsche suggests that our moral valuations are based largely on fear. In a community that is safe from external threats, any aggressive members of that community come to be seen as a threat. Thus, our morality condemns all that is lively, preferring the safety of a tamed, mediocre mass. This morality of the "herd" then proclaims itself as the only true morality (other moralities are "immoral") and as the savior of the herd.

There is an "order of rank" that exists between people and between moralities. Some people simply have stronger and more refined spirits than others. Those of lower rank hate those who are exceptional, and this hatred is most commonly expressed in moralizing against and condemning the higher spirits. The idea of divine justice was invented so that people could falsely claim that we are all equal on a fundamental level.

No moral philosopher seems to consider that perhaps no moral laws are universally applicable. For instance, while self-effacement can be a virtue in some people, the self-effacement of a born leader who doesn't feel worthy of taking charge would be the waste of a virtue. In that sense, "it is *immoral* to say: 'what is right for one is fair for the other.'"

Pity, at bottom, is merely one way of covering up self-contempt. Because misery loves company, a self-condemning person will feel pity for others in order to suffer with them. Pleasure and pain, like pity, are mere surfaces for our deeper drives, and any philosophy that stops with those impulses--such as utilitarianism--is shallow. For instance, suffering is not something to be avoided (if that were possible), but celebrated. Nietzsche suggests that humans are unique in being both creature and creator: we necessarily make ourselves suffer in our creative efforts to make ourselves greater. Pity for suffering is essentially pity for the creature in

us that is being remade into something greater. Nietzsche feels pity only for the creator in us that is being stifled by modern society.

Nietzsche goes so far as to suggest that all of higher culture is derived from the "spiritualization of cruelty." We like to think that we've killed our animal instincts for cruelty when in fact we've rendered them divine by turning them against ourselves. The search for knowledge is one of the highest forms of cruelty; we uncover truths we would have been happier not knowing and go against our natural inclination for superficiality and shallowness. For instance, we would like to believe that we are naturally higher beings, but we learn to our dismay that we are descended from apes and are not essentially different from them.

Among the virtues of Nietzsche's ideal philosophers of the future, this will go deeper than all superficialities (call it honesty or cruelty, as you prefer) is paramount. The knowledge that scholars try to look at with disinterest is precisely what interests Nietzsche.

Even in the freest of free spirits, however, this digging for truth will hit bedrock. Fundamentally, we all have a set of unshakeable convictions that make up the core of our being, that say "this is I." These expressions of what is fundamentally settled in us show "the great stupidity we are."

Conclusion

Through literature we can live more than one life. Our imagination takes us to times, places and realities those personnel we had not faced and experienced. By going through thoughts and viewpoints of other people we can also experience the same as their experience through reading of the concerned work. Nietzsche believes that the world needs to jettison its concern for unchanging moral standards of good and evil and instead ask whether individual moral decisions are "life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating." Nietzsche proposes that the will to power should be viewed as the source of virtue. Virtue involves command, not obedience, and it is this understanding of virtue that guides Nietzsche's noble aristocracy. Epitomizing human greatness and strength of soul, they create new values and carry out their duties only to those sharing their rank. *Beyond Good and Evil* has as its moral project not the abolition of all morality. It intends to create a new morality that recognizes the diverse assortment of perspectives in the world and to better cultivate human greatness.

So it is important to consider the role of literature in moral education which is a relevant medium for our learning as it is inspired from our life actions to correct our life actions.

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