
AN UNPOLLUTED LOYALTY: A STUDY OF PRESENT CENTURY WOMEN IN PHILIP ROTH'S *NEMESIS*

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Abstract: It is unheard that any one today feels the absolute harmony in their short span of life. Are we all marching towards a horizon of success in our life? What are the requirements to achieve it? How an individual must manage to full fill these expected requirements? Of course, there is no possible solution, since it purely rests on the individual's choices to get discontented or contended in their life. An individual is always in want of absolute freedom, higher level of responsibility for his or her free choices, the courage to overcome the then and there arising fear, and finally a positive mind towards everything that happens around him or her. These are the primary elements for any individual to get the absolute harmony that is stated in the very first line of this paper. But the world of today often denies these elements to an individual and thus life is getting complicated for that particular individual. On the basis of this unanswered issue, though one is tempted to come to an conclusion that in a person of today is only deceiving and he or she cannot be loyal to others, this paper tries to give something of pleasant elements in a person that still exists in the world in spite of the complexities of life, with reference to a female character named Marcia in the novel *Nemesis*, by the famous Pulitzer Prize winner, a contemporary American novelist Philip Roth.

Keywords: Choice, Existentialism, Freedom, Loyalty, Philip Roth.

Introduction: Philip Milton Roth, an American novelist, started his literary career from 1959 with a successful maiden novel which brought him an award, a National Book Award in 1960 for his debut novella, *Goodbye Columbus* that portrays the Jewish American life. Later Roth experimented with the themes in his writing like semi auto-biographical themes, Jewish-American life, and a satirical treatment of the patriotism and idealism. Here is an attempt to analyse the problem of today's world, which is often known for disloyalty and infidel nature of human beings, that frequently play havoc in someone's life. This paper aims to ferret out how somewhere around in the twentieth century world women are still loyal and decent in their life that brings such a comfort and solace in other's life.

Martin Green praises Roth as follows "But what makes Roth special is not only that his critical sense ... His imaginative creations. His stories are full of beautiful insights into books and authors, into the business of teachings and criticising, and into living the works of literature over time"(Green IX). The recent novels of the Roth bring out the human emotions like fear, anxiety, making a choice, freedom, alienation, and also suicidal instincts. The novelist undoubtedly captivates the mind and the heart of the readers through the nobleness and greatness of the hero, Bucky Cantor. The style of narration of Roth is undoubtedly incredible due to his choice of diction and thus George J Searles observes rightly in his *The Fiction of Philip Roth and John Updike*, "Like any good stylist, then, Roth achieves his effects consciously, through craft and his novels and stories abound with examples of his stylistic virtuosity" (119).

Nemesis starts with the threat of spreading of polio or infantile paralysis in the early of 1920's. Bucky Cantor, the hero of the novel is the most decent, moral and also dutiful minded of all heroes of Roth. As a young man of 23 years of old, he is an industrious playground director who coaches the young men, is very much disappointed when he has been denied the opportunity of participating in the war, due to his poor vision. Though he is partially blind, he excels in the art of gymnastics and has inspired the spark in all of his students and has been celebrated as a hero by his students. The opening scene of the novel mounts up the tension upon the readers through the statistical account of the fast- spreading polio and its havoc played upon the young children. " during the largest outbreak of the disease ever reported the 1916 polio epidemic in the northern United States, when there had been more than 27,000 cases, with 6,000 deaths. In New York there had been 1,360 cases and 363 deaths"(*Nemesis* 2). The above quoted passage from the text is the best illustration to show the horror of the dreadful disease polio. This horror goes to the extent of giving a historical instance in the case of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the most renowned victim of polio. Bucky Cantor's biographical sketch tells that Cantor is motherless and whose father's notorious label for stealing and gambling made him to be ashamed of his identity. Bucky is being under the care and concern of his maternal grandparents, especially his grandmother's devotion for the welfare of Bucky's life, has prepared him to be genuine, honest as well as loving. Having high moral values Cantor committed himself as a physical director and also enjoys the privilege of getting a loyal fiancé, Marcia, who worked "as a head

counsellor at the Indian Hill, a camp for Jewish boys and girls in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains" (*Nemesis* 31).

Marcia has been in love with cantor whose love surpasses beyond physical charming of Cantor. She is working as a head counsellor who is also a first grade teacher. Her father is a doctor and her mother is also a high school teacher. Enjoying the privileges of an uneducated parents she is deeply in love with morally upright Cantor. Among the three chapters, namely Equatorial Newark, Indian Hill and Reunion, the first chapter very comprehensively expresses the psychological struggle that arises with in the backdrop of the contagious disease, and who faces the temptation of leaving Newark to Pocono Mountains as a physical director, very much torn by the anxiety and the agony that he is just escaping and abandoning his students as a prey to polio. "To be or not to be"- Bucky does not know, but at the same time he is compelled to move to Pocono Mountains, a place where there is the least threat of polio, moreover the love and affection which he has towards Marcia, is the driving force behind his move from Newark to Pocono Mountains .Marcia worries always about Cantor's plight at polio threaten New York. She says "... I'm so worried about you , Bucky...I need you more than ever.I love you so much. I dread the idea of something happening to you" (*Nemesis* 84&86).

Roth presents a decent and loyal womanhood of present century through the characterisation of Marcia. Regarding the characterisation of Roth, Derek writes as follows;"It is clear that Roth is inviting us to interrogate the reality of a self that substitutes throwing his voice on to others, for a genuine sense of responsible agency" (Derek 117). Roth presents Marcia in such a way that she is so generous in loving her near and dear ones hence she not only loves Bucky but also she loves her family. For instance she says "...Yes I worry about my father and about my mother and about everybody I love" (*Nemesis* 86). Bucky Cantor has been tear apart or in to pieces when two of his meritorious students have died in the cruel hands of polio. From that moment onwards, he has constantly been developing kind of guilty consciousness which leads to his mental disaster. The progress of this horrible disease could not be put an end by him as well as by the preventive measures taken by the government but for the Daily News allotted with specific page titled "The Daily Polio Bulletin". Throughout these trauma Cantor frequently receives an invitation from Marcia to work in Pocono Mountains, but at one juncture , on the contrary to his good nature and his will, he accepts to go over there and leaving Newark.

The second chapter Indian Hill starts with the dilemma of the protagonist as follows: "...that a

future new and unknown to him as about to unfold" (*Nemesis* 144). The forth coming passages in the novel encapsulates the stunning and arresting beauty of Indian Hills which turns the dull and sombre soul of Cantor into the new fresh and rejuvenated and regenerated soul in which he cries with the joyful spirit... "I live! I live!"(*Nemesis* 144). The new atmosphere and the fresh air pour new energy into his life and soul. It gives strength to lead a new life with the hope apart from his physical and mental deformity about the leaving of Newark. In addition, the healthy and spirited young minds add new flavours in his life. Everything around him makes a healthy and happy ambience including the presence of Marcia. Roth narrates as follows;" He needed this intelligent girl to tell him everything, really about life..." (*Nemesis* 164). Though he starts a new life and works with all commitment and responsibility, still, the psychological vacuum exists in Cantor's life. The guilt of deserting his own students often haunts him and makes him sick. Even the dutiful nature of him questions his choice of leaving his students and living with Marcia.

This dilemma between his personal choice and dutiful nature leads him to Neurosis. Adding fuel into the fire, one of his students in Pocono Mountains, Donald Kaplow has been found with the symptoms of polio. And this makes him to think that he is the sole reason to spread this horrible disease in Pocono Mountains and meanwhile all the students are afraid of this contagious disease. Cantor even goes to the extent of avoiding Marcia and very consciously discourages any form of touch between them. The struggle of Bucky Cantor is clearly brought out by the novelist as follows. "He was afraid to approach her because he was afraid to infect her, if he had not infected her already, if he hadn't infected everyone" (*Nemesis* 228). The thought to leave Marcia, gradually evolves in his mind out of his fear and dread. The anxiety, the dread and the fear lead to the world of dark and unhealthy, especially, state of being unhappy and restlessness. But in spite of Cantor's dilemma Marcia always stand as his guardian angel. She prays for his health and welfare. She says to him" I'd come out here whenever i could be alone and pray to God to keep you healthy. I never prayed so hard for anyone in my life"(169). Though she is from a rich family she remains loyal to this Bucky whose father is a notorious person which have failed to leave a mark on his personal character.

The final chapter, Reunion illustrates the pathetic light of Bucky Cantor, who at last fell as prey to devour of mankind ,which is polio; and that made him to the worst state of being crippled. Emphatically stated by Philip Roth about this psychological state of the protagonist in the below passage: "By and large he had the aura of ineradicable failure about him as he

spoke of all that he'd been silent about for years, not just crippled physically by polio but no less demoralised by persistent shame. He was the very antithesis of the country's greatest proto type of the polio victim, FDR, disease having led but he not to triumph but to defeat" (*Nemesis* 246).

Marcia is tremendously upset and could not come out of shock when Bucky decides to get separated from her because of his deformity. Marcia, however much tries to convince Bucky Cantor but drastically fails to change his decision of his withdrawal of their marriage, due to his vision towards the unhappy future of Marcia by marrying a crippled man. Cantor says at last " Look, Marcia was a sweet, naive, well-

brought up girl with kindly, responsible parents ...she didn't have any idea of how to go about getting out of her mess. So I did it for her. I did what had to be done" (*Nemesis* 255). Arnold Mesnikoff, who is the former student as well as ardent fan of Bucky Cantor stimulates or even moved successfully Cantor to recollect his past and has come to know the complete story of lonely Cantor, thus the readers come to know in the last chapter that it is he who narrates the story.

Conclusion :

To conclude, Marcia stands very elevated in the eyes of the readers. Amidst the life pressures of current century one can find and enjoy Marcia's unpolluted mind and heart.

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