

Why sculpt fast? On R.K. Narayan's "Such perfection"

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Abstract. What is R.K. Narayan's position in relation to his story "Such perfection"? It is natural to interpret him as conveying a message similar to one Western readers are familiar with from ancient Greek myths: fear perfection; it offends the gods. But there is room for a more complicated interpretation.

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What is the position R.K. Narayan in relation to his short story "Such perfection," assuming there is one? There are different interpretations.

A sculptor has worked for five years on a masterpiece. The priest tells him:

'This perfection, this God, is not for mortal eyes. He will blind us. At the first chant of prayer before him, he will dance... and we shall be wiped out...'. The sculptor looked so unhappy that the priest added, 'Take your chisel and break a little toe or some other part of the image and it will be safe...'. The sculptor replied that he would sooner crack the skull of his visitor. (1984: 65)

The sculptor's image is displayed at the full moon. What follows is a terrible storm. Towards the end we are told:

He was back just in time to see a tree crash on the roof of his house. 'My home,' he cried, and ran in. He picked up his Nataraja from amidst splintered tiles and rafters, The image was unhurt except for a little toe which was found a couple of yards off, severed by a falling splinter. (1984: 67)

The story ends with us being told that the sculptor lived until ninety-five, but never touched his mallet and chisel again. The priest seems to think that such perfection is an offence to god, or to the gods. But why then does the sculptor, having observed the evidence, not take up his mallet and chisel again and deliberately make less perfect works? Probably he thinks that this is an offence to god.

On the basis of this story alone, Narayan's own position might be:

- (a) The priest is right that such perfection is an offence to god and the sculptor is wrong that deliberately making a less perfect image is an offence.
- (b) They are both right.

His position is probably not that the priest is wrong and the sculptor right. But how can they both be right? Well, there is an available position. A skilled sculptor should work faster and though they may achieve perfection this is less likely. But it is not a case of deliberately making something imperfect.

Reference

Narayan, R.K. 1984. Such perfection. In *Malgudi Days*. London: Penguin Books.