

Robbie by Isaac Asimov (Critical analysis)

Robbie is one of the most influential works of science fiction ever written. During the 1930s, young Isaac Asimov found himself bored with the common science fiction plot that included robots destroying their creators. A precocious and prolific writer, Asimov addressed his boredom by writing his first robot story, "Robbie," in 1940, when he was just nineteen years old. He published it in *Super Science Stories* magazine. Over the next ten years, he wrote and published at least twelve more robot stories.

He tells the story of Robbie, one of the first robots constructed to interact with and serve humans. Robbie functions as a nursemaid for a little girl named Gloria; although he cannot speak, Robbie plays with Gloria and seems to enjoy the stories she tells him. Gloria is devoted to Robbie; however, her mother does not like the robot and finally succeeds in convincing her husband to get rid of the mechanical man. Asimov uses the mother to represent one of his common themes—the hostility of some people toward technology.

The parents get rid of Robbie while Gloria is out of the house, and the little girl is heartbroken when she finds her playmate gone. She sickens and loses weight. Finally her parents decide to take her to New York City for a trip to try to cheer her up. She believes that they are going to try to find Robbie. Finally, on a visit to the U.S. Robots factory, a situation emerges in which Robbie (who is working there) saves Gloria's life. The mother relents, and Robbie goes home with the family.

Asimov places humans and robots in close proximity. By doing so, he reveals the problems and concerns humans encounter regarding the role of machines in their lives. The story, "Robbie," demonstrates two basic positions humans hold regarding machines: Mr. Weston thinks that robots can provide a safe service to free up the time of humans for other pursuits. He is happy to have the robot Robbie in his household, caring for his child. He trusts that the scientists who created Robbie have placed enough safeguards in the robot to make him reliable. Mrs. Weston, on the other hand, hates the robot. She finds him dangerous, largely because she does not understand the science behind the robot. In addition, she does not understand how the Three Laws of

Robotics are designed to keep humans safe. She is also the character who talks about the people in the village being angry about the Westons having a robot. Mrs. Weston seems to imply in the chapter that their family will be in trouble with the townspeople if they do not get rid of the robot.

It becomes apparent that both views continue to coexist uneasily. Robots are still manufactured and employed to do heavy labor and tedious tasks, attesting to the fact that humans value the fruit of their labors; however, robots are not allowed to work or exist on earth; they are only to be assembled and placed in work situations in space.

Asimov demonstrates in the novel his awareness of the anxiety and discomfort many humans feel about science and machines. As a growing number of robots have led to automation of manufacturing and as computers now play a role in daily life, the theme of humans and machines explored in this novel is an enduring one.

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