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The Need for Civil Disobedience among the People of Timkin

In Civil Disobedience, Thoreau is of the opinion that people of the state have to duty to refuse evil in all ways and form. He states that while people are not explicitly given any duty to go out and fix the evils in society, it is their duty to abstain from all forms of evil. Thoreau states that there are very few people in the society that actually adhere to this rule or perform this duty. Thus, when he states that the people are serving the state with the body alone and not with their mine, he is telling the people that a vast majority among them do not any thought or mind into serving the state. They do whatever it is the administrative unit of the state tells them to do and do not truly think whether what they are doing is inherently right or wrong.

According to Thoreau, a very large number of people living in a state actually make use of their minds while serving the state. These are the ones that truly think about what they are saying and are mindful of the workings of the government and do their level best to oppose any change that is even remotely close to the concept of evil-doing in society. They work, in their own way, to ensure that they can convert them and turn them towards the path of true men. In Thoreau’s own words, “A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men, serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part…”

Therefore, Thoreau, in this passage, is of the opinion that people do not think enough to discern between right and wrong and are most likely to just do what the government or the administrative units of the state wants them to do. Thus, in the attainment of righteous and the just way of life, if people have to engage in civil disobedience in any way or form, they should not hesitate to do so.

The story being scrutinized here, called “Repent, Harlequin!” Said the Ticktockman by Harlan Ellison is a satirical short story set that was first published in 1965. The stir has been set in a dystopian future where time is treated as a new form of currency and operates like a deciding factor in the life of every citizen that calls Timkin his home. The story won two reputable awards and has been hailed as a literary masterpiece, considering how it plays with the themes of social control and how they always, inevitably, lead towards one form or another of civil disobedience.

The story, as mentioned earlier, treats time as a unit of currency and is a deciding factor. If an individual is ever late, they are penalized by having time shaved off in the number of years and minutes they have left to live by the authorities. The various units of this society operate as if they have their life in life, which most of the time they actually do. The characters are a true representation of how the various units within the society operate and how any form of disobedience is seen as inherently wrong and critical to the various units of the society. The society has corporate control over the people which is quite similar to the time-and-motion studies carried out in the 1960s as part of the hierarchal manipulation of the masses. Here, the complacency of the population with the modern concept of slavery makes in inherently important and useful for the regulation of the consumer market (Bluedorn).

At first, the author showcases the protagonist as a version of himself. The protagonist, Everett C. Marm, is one of the few individuals of the society that things with his mind instead of serving his state with his body. He is the alter ego of Harlequin and can be seen as a disobedient menace and can be seen as the clown, a hero, an activist and an individual that is actually fighting for the freedom of the people. As Earle Bryant describes of the Harlequin as a rebel, “the weapons that he uses … are not bullets and bombs; they are pranks and high jinks [sic], outrageous stunts designed to arouse his fellow citizens from the unthinking conformity and blind adherence” (Bryant). Ultimately, the Harlequin’s account proves that one person can create a revolution, no matter how challenging the system is (Ellison).

In contrast, Michael White writes a review, in a 1977 issue of DePauw University's *Science Fiction Studies* *Journal*, of Ellison’s story as a representation of a protest that demands a “social change” (165). The analysis defines the character’s activities as irrational, as well as states that Harlequin is "unconcerned" (White 163) with the "chances of success" (White 163) his rebellion has in creating that change. The author does make an incredibly valid point in this regard. However, considering how careless Harlequin is with regard to his conduct, it was only a matter of time when he would ultimately get caught and be blamed for his actions in the manner that he was. This was, in essence, the central idea of the story that Ellison tries to get across to his audience (Ellison) and the form of civil disobedience that is condemned by Thoreau in the first place

In normal circumstances, the Master Timekeeper, who also goes as Ticktockman, is the antagonist of the story and is responsible for making sure that everything is carried out in an orderly and a timely manner in a city that he calls his own. He tends to remain calm as long as every unit in the city is run on time. However, the actions of the Harlequin are a bane in his existence and often infuriate the Ticktockman to the point that he threatens to kill him. Despite all the threats, ultimately, he decides to not turn Harlequin off at all. His form of punishment would be simple brainwashing and turning him into an example of why it is essential for an individual to be punctual in his conduct while in society, especially for the people that live in his city (Ellison).

He is the representation of a tyrannical government in Thoreau’s context and the sort that appreciate ruling over mindless members of the society that use their body alone and do not ever think with their minds. Here, it is rather important to understand and realize the idea behind the creation of Ticktockman. Throughout the text, he is the representation of corporate control on society which is carried out by keeping precise track of each person’s life, not only for the efficiency of industry, but also for complete control over university, postal, transportation, and even recreational establishments.

In this regard, one can also draw similarities presented in the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor. He presents the most compelling evidence of control over the industry which is published in The Principles of Scientific Management. These studies are more famously known as time-and-motion studies. These studies were put to use by Corporate America in an effort to raise the level of productivity of employees rather significantly by simplifying their jobs and put the process of using automation to carry out menial industry tasks into motion. In his opinion, this would help him produce the most efficient results possible (Frederick). It was such practices and processes that were put into place which can be held responsible for stifling the sense of creativity among the working class and turn them into a mindless drone that does not have any thought of their own. In other words, it is the processes put in place by the government that turns people from using their minds to operating with their bodies alone.

It is important to realize that the represents The is the efforts of, who is the scientist that published, also known as s, in 1911. used his work in the sixties to raise productivity in employees significantly by simplifying a job into automated motions to produce the most efficient results It seems that these practices stifled creativity and turned the American working class into mindless drones. In other words, as White said, the “social regimentation” (161) would become “Homo sapiens … [into] Homo automatus” (162). In fact, the idea Ellison had of social order being controlled by time is not unlike present-day, considering everyone must wake up and get to work on time, as well as the schedules for everything. As Ellison puts it, there is going to be a “day we no longer let time serve us, we serve time and we are slaves of the schedule” (44).

In this story, the citizens of the city they are in i.e. Timkin are being put on the clock and are being asked to be punctual to such an extent that it is criminal for them to waste even a moment of their life. If that is an infraction that they commit, they could have years shaved off of their life and even be killed for the most minor infractions. These citizens are conditioned to adhere to the time-and-motion management to extreme extents and operate like cogs in a machine. An example of this can be seen in the form of the slightest disruptions made by Harlequin by making use of jelly beans and bullhorn, can result in the breaking down of the machine which causes a sense of chaos in the consumer market and in turn makes the entire system shut down on a temporarily. They could be termed as an ideal representation of an oppressed society that is based on crippling rules, unique set of fears and irreversible illusions which can be held responsible for the lack of liberation among the various units of society.

In the end, despite all of his efforts, the Ticktockman manages to brainwash Harlequin and conform him to the ways of the system, asking him to publically state that what he did was wrong and that his actions were in violation of the right code of conduct i.e. to obey the rules at all times. But, more was yet to come when, in the end, the Ticktockman himself was seen as being three minutes late and was in no way, remorseful for his actions, which is a representation of how a corrupt a government that demands complete social control on their subjects can be in essence.

# Works Cited

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