

Repent, harlequin

Literature



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here 4 August Two Essays on “ Repent, Harlequin!” Said the Ticktockman All Give and No Take According to Henry David Thoreau, everyone serves the state with their bodies, minds, or consciences. In Harlan Ellison’s “‘Repent, Harlequin!’ Said the Ticktockman,” the protagonist, known as the Harlequin, serves a unique and non-integral part of society. Even though he would be pigeonholed by Thoreau as serving society with his conscience, the Harlequin acts as a monkey wrench in the oppressive, finely tuned System – instead of being grease or a gear that keeps the machinery of the state running. The meticulously run and precision-timed System poses a moral dilemma for the Harlequin, who believes that people have become inhuman robots so preoccupied with keeping on schedule that they cannot experience the things in life that they were created to enjoy. This is seen when the Harlequin yells down at people mechanically going about their business at Efficiency Shopping Center, “ Why let them order you about? Why let them tell you to hurry and scurry like maggots? Take your time! Saunter a while! Enjoy the sunshine, enjoy the breeze, let life carry you at your own pace! Don’t be slaves of time...” (Ellison 884). He believes that his fellow citizens have the right to be late, spontaneous, and have fun – and that the oppressive System keeping them from these proclivities is immoral and evil. To save citizens from their mindless monotony, the Harlequin dumps billions of jelly beans from his air-boat – \$150, 000 worth – onto his robotic peers as they shuffled down the moving slidewalk. This zany deluge of squishy fruit flavors delayed the shift seven minutes, grinding the slidewalk to a stop and resurrecting behavior that was all but extinct as “ shift workers howled and laughed... and broke ranks,” (Ellison 880). But this refreshing douse of new life proved fatal to our hero, who ended up not only serving fellow man with <https://assignbuster.com/repent-harlequin/>

his conscience, but with his life, as the chief antagonist, the Ticktockman, brought him to “justice” for his crime of disorderliness, telling the soon-to-be martyr, “I’m going to turn you off,” (Ellison 885).

The Irony of It All!

Living – or being programmed – for the one function of keeping people on time and punishing them for being late, the Ticktockman certainly had his priorities straight and fine-tuned. Under no circumstances was he to tolerate tardiness, lollygagging, or any kind of delays. Such offenses were crimes, punishable by hard time, an even death. If the Ticktockman had a motto, it would be “Stay on Time” or “Zero Tolerance,” as the enforcer of time knew that anything or anyone threatening the routine orderliness of perfect timing was an enemy of the System and a lethal threat to the state. That is why he took his job so seriously, yelling “Don’t come back till you have him!”

(Ellison 885) to those on the hunt for the first-class offender of time – using every resource available to catch and bring down the Harlequin. When the culprit was finally brought into custody, the Ticktockman read him his offense, reminding the Harlequin the exact amount of time that he had been late... down to the last microsecond. But a funny thing happened after the enforcer of time made the nonconformist Harlequin repent before destroying him. He, too, committed the unpardonable. At the end of the story, the Ticktockman was met with this greeting as he showed up for his shift, “Uh, excuse me, sir, I, uh, don’t know how to uh, to uh, tell you this, but you were three minutes late,” (Ellison 886). Yes, the enemy of the late was, in fact, late himself, throwing his entire world off schedule. In denial, the Ticktockman exclaimed, “That’s ridiculous!... Check your watch,” still in utter disbelief. Had he become his own worst enemy? This ironic ending begs <https://assignbuster.com/repent-harlequin/>

the reader to ask the question of whether the Ticktockman will enforce his own standard of zero tolerance against himself... for breaching the very System that he dedicated his entire life to uphold and protect.

Works Cited

Ellison, Harlan. *The Essential Ellison*. Las Vegas: Morpheus International, 2005. Print.