

Conforming and rebelling to a society essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Ralph Ellison's "Repent Harlequin! Said Ticktockman" is a tale about rebellion and conformity. As individuals belonging to a society, whether it is your family or a community, there are rules that should be followed and when you break them, there are punishments that await you. These "rules" are things that make a society orderly and without these "rules", chaos will eventually happen. But, what if these "rules" are just too much that these become a burden to the people who follow it? Being a non-conformist and habitual latecomer, the Everett Marm, also known as the Harlequin, is considered a rebel in a futuristic society in the story "Repent Harlequin". In this future world set in 2389, conformity and punctuality are strictly being enforced.

The "order" of society did not fascinate the carefree Harlequin. People in the society where the Harlequin lived disliked him because he spent an alarming "sixty-three years, five months, three weeks, two days, twelve hours, forty-one minutes, fifty-nine seconds, point oh three six one microseconds" of his life arriving late, and causing tardiness among others (Ellison, p. 02). The Harlequin always takes his sweet time in doing things and thus he becomes an inevitable distraction to an otherwise well-ordered, suppressed society. As their leader, the Ticktockman can't allow Harlequin to continue his "wrongdoings" and he decides that the Harlequin must be destroyed.

It is against this "terrible world" that Marm rebels. But amusingly, the weapons that he uses in his rebellion are not bullets and bombs; they are pranks and high jinks, outrageous stunts designed to arouse his fellow citizens from the unthinking conformity and blind adherence to "sanity and metronomic order" in which they are enmeshed (p. 06). Accordingly, when

the Harlequin swoops down in his airboat on the workers entering the roller-bearing plant and showers them with jellybeans, he is attempting to show them that life can and should be a joyous affair and not the government-mandated robotic existence they are leading.

We could deem that throughout the story, Ellison wants us to see Marm as a comic rebel-hero. Apart from that,, another image that Ellison wants to project in this scene is that of a doubloon-dispensing float rider in one of New Orleans' annual Carnival parades. One indication that this is Ellison's intention is the jellybeans that Marm unleashes on the factory workers. Although Ellison explicitly states that there are "[m]illions and billions" (p. 405) of jellybeans and that they are of various colors, he is careful to specify only three of the colors: purple, yellow, and green (p. 405), the traditional colors of New Orleans' Mardi Gras. Marm's dispensing of the jellybeans creates an unabashedly festive atmosphere among the factory workers—indeed as Ellison describes it, " a holiday" (p. 06).

Funny and yet cynical in some sense, readers of " Repent Harlequin" will be exposed to that facet in society and government. A certain society will be like a machine, the people will be just like robots whose actions are measured through the rules that are enforced to them. Ellison used symbolic descriptions to display the Harlequin's rebellion, as well as the reaction of the society to his thoughts and actions. We could almost feel the robot-like lives of his society, as described in the story, the Harlequin " could hear the metronomic, left-right-left of the 2: 47 shift, entering the Timkin roller-

bearing plant in their sneakers... he heard the right-left-right of the 5: 00 AM formation, going home," (Ellison, p. 396).

This sentence show the stringencies of an overly organized society, when every move and action corresponds to every tick of the clock. Overly organized societies remind me of Nazi rule in Germany, where Hitler ruled as a dictator. In the end, people will demand to oust their leader because freedom is a basic human right. Thus, rules should be rightful, just and suitable to the needs of the people. Conforming and Rebelling to your Family
In every family, there are unwritten rules that need to be taken into consideration.

Disobeying these rules would certainly amount to being “ grounded” and catching the ire of your parents. Also with conformity and rebellion imbibed in its theme, Amy Tan’s “ Two Kinds” show us the clash of American and Chinese culture between an immigrant Chinese mother and her daughter who has imbibed American values. This short story tells us about the rebellion and conformity within the family, as it is a basic unit of society. Jing-mei is the Chinese girl who has a misunderstanding with her Chinese mother. Her mother just wants anything that’s best for her daughter, so she decides to enroll her to piano lessons. Jing-mei feels that she’s just an instrument of her mother’s dreams, and she bears silent grudge towards her mother who wants her to become a child prodigy.

So she does not take her piano lessons seriously and tells her mother that she can’t do it. After a bad performance at a recital, Jing-mei’s built up frustration and grudge towards her mother is finally blurted out that ended

her mother's forced piano lessons, "...I wish I wasn't your daughter. I wish you weren't my mother... I wish I was dead like them" (Tan 457). Jing-mei refers to her mother's twin daughters, who she left in China during the war. Of course, her mother was terribly hurt by what her daughter said and this revealed how much Jing mei disliked her mother's decision to make her play piano. In her mother's thinking, she just wants Jing mei to do her best because she believed that her daughter can do it.

It turns out, her daughter felt bad about her dreams for her. In our society, we may have encountered these kinds of issues about conforming to rules and breaking them. For example, if a student becomes too rowdy inside the class, his teacher could punish him for disturbing the whole class. Rules are needed, but sometimes these become too much.

Examples of strict implementation that have gone bad are those present in authoritarian governments ruled by dictators. There's no more freedom of speech and people are prohibited to do things they want to do. People respond to society and some follow rules without question and others do what they feel is just right, despite the consequences. In Amy Tan's "Two Kinds", the reader would be able to realize in the end that sometimes rebellion could lead you to something that's not right. Like what Jing mei did, she terribly hurt her mother when her mother only dreams what's best for her.

If she didn't like to take the piano lessons, she should just have told her mother that she did not like doing it. Children who often rebel are just products of misunderstandings with their parents. In communicating their

thoughts to their parents, misunderstandings and rebellions would be avoided. Also, parents should hear what their children have to say.

They could just not enforce what they want for their children. In the final analysis, we could draw out in both stories that there should be a balance in conforming. People should not just conform to rules that are making them do what they do not want and preventing them to do what they want. That goes for rebellion, too. Sometimes, we just feel that something we want to do is the right thing and we do not hear what other people have to say.

Most often, these types of rebellion leads to harm on your self and on others. In the societies we live in, respect and conformity to the rules are important to have order. However, critical thinking among the populace should also be encouraged so that they will be aware of what rules will be best for them.

That is basically the essence of democracy, where people could live safe and freely doing what they want: a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Conforming, and Not Rebelling, to a Good Reading A good literature for me goes beyond the characters, the theme and the story itself.

It is actually how one could connect to the intertwining of these elements to weave something that you could visualize on your head. Quality literature summons a person's sublime experience while reading that piece of work. In reading a story, like say " Repent Harlequin! Said Ticktockman", I have been drawn by the unique approach of Ralph Ellison to tell the story of Everett Marm. Using science fiction as a springboard, he goes on to tell us about a society in the future. We all know that the things Ellison made us ponder in his story are surreal and ridiculous, but it is amazing that he convinces his

readers to think that, “ What if that could happen? ” Definitely, we could feel our connection to the Harlequin, where he wanted to rebel in that society he belonged.

Much to our knowledge, the people in that society could be compared to some office workers who are already working like robots. It is a commentary to the fact that nowadays; people should take time out to smell the flowers, to laugh once in a while, and to feel human, as they have been too pre-occupied in obeying rules that hamper them from living their lives to the fullest. On the other hand, with Amy Tan’s “ Two Kinds”, I could relate with Jing-mei being a daughter myself. I connected with her longings and her guilt towards what she did to her mother. Sometimes, mothers could be so annoying for comfort, with all their rules and their “ don’t do this, don’t do that”, but if we just study their intentions carefully, mothers just want the best things for their children. Occasions of rebellion in our homes could occur once in a while, but it always end up that mothers are always right.

Upon realization, I would certainly recommend these stories to other students next semester because I know they could connect with Ellison’s and Tan’s stories. They may have a different experience reading these stories, but I assure them that they could definitely feel what the stories want to convey. They will only not learn something about conformity and rebellion, but also they could work on their thoughts about families and societies as well.