

The Nature of Justice and Judgment in O. Henry's *After Twenty Years*

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ABSTRACT

This study tries to have a deep look at the nature of justice and judgment in O. Henry's *After Twenty Years*. It intends to analyze the presupposed, legalized and legitimized structures and instructions, which decide the individuals' identity, mental map of existence and merits as a citizen of a particular society. It finally shows the helplessness of man in encountering a bohemian context. The study puts a special emphasis on the inclination of two individuals on binary oppositions, where they have simply two choices, either agree or disagree, and mostly disagreement is prioritized. Ultimately, the study suggests that the only way to get away from the uncalled for events is the apt and caring scrutiny of the prevalent atmosphere and a better understanding based on mutual respect between the ruling authorities and the common mass in a friendly socio-political context.

Key Words: justice, law, judgment, bohemian, friendship.

INTRODUCTION

Justice seems to be a simple term but indeed, is entangled in a highly complicated web of interpretations. It may have its own birth and death of interpretations within any given context. The most tragic and dreadful worry of man, overall, is the unjust imprisonment and confinement of justice within the dreadful four walls of predetermined collections of doctrines, which do not necessarily tally with the fast moving pace of time. Man grows both physically and mentally, but it is only his physical growth, which moves ahead fearlessly unleashed and uncensored, indeed, his mental growth has to pass through various imposed filters. It means, we mostly carry sick and duplicate minds, which hardly belong to us. This issue may be more tangible and torturing in the third world countries, where numerous in-born problems pave the path for various filters to refine, reshape and synchronize people's minds. Indeed, through these infiltrations, the authorities control and condition the individuals based on their own tune of domination.

According to Angel (2005)

The issue of justice and equality is posed with particular clarity by one of the controversies between Rawls and his critics. Rawls argued that the liberal requirements of justice include a strong component of equality among citizens, but that this is a specifically political demand, which applies to the basic structure of a unified nation-state. It does not apply to the personal (nonpolitical) choices of individuals living in such a society, nor does it apply to the relations between one society and another, or between the members of different societies. Egalitarian justice is a requirement on the internal political, economic, and social Philosophy & Public Affairs structure of nation-states and cannot be extrapolated to different contexts, which require different standards. This issue is independent of the specific standards of egalitarian justice found in Rawls's theory. Whatever standards of equal rights or equal opportunity apply domestically, the question is whether consistency requires that they also apply globally. (114-115)

Another frustrating point, which has always been a thorn in the side of most of the world individuals, is the spurious and feigned support of egalitarianism and socio-political freedom among all the people of different strata. Indeed, this claim does not seem to be practically practiced in most of the societies. The ruling authorities create a binary opposition between the common mass and themselves; by creating such mood, they take it for granted to be immune from any offence and crime, while the common people are doomed to be susceptible and vulnerable to any possible wrong-doings. This sense creates a kind of poisonous and hostile rift between these two socio-politically divergent categories.

Boucher & Kelly (2005) aver that:

The basic structure of any social system has to recognise the claims of individuals on the grounds of justice, while at the same time afford minimum scope for undermining these claims with the tyrant's plea of public safety. It must also be recognised, however, that there are more elevated

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claims than those of simple individual justice and circumstances when the individual may forgo a claim, or even repudiate his or her separate existence for a higher good. What justice requires is the impartial development of individual capacities along with social stability secured by the prudent management of the necessary social performances of individuals (88-89)

Man chooses some pompous terms in mysteriously organized syntactic frames. He uses these filled out frames to decide the destiny of his fellow-beings about all the things they may do in the unborn future. These frames are given the name *Law*, and standing against Law makes one a criminal. The authorities are the sole eligible figures to make the right interpretations out of these frames. These interpretations are given the name *Justice*. Indeed, these are the qualified authorities, who decide what *Justice* and *Injustice* are. The common people are constantly reminded of not being mentally and socio-politically mature enough to enter the territory of giving their judgments on justice. Therefore, justice becomes the private property of the privileged strata of society. According to Plato:

The origin of the evil is that all men from the beginning, heroes, poets, instructors of youth, have always asserted "the temporal dispensation, "the honors and profits of justice. Had we been taught in early youth the power of justice and injustice inherent in the soul, and unseen by any human or divine eye, we should not have needed others to be our guardians, but everyone would have been the guardian of himself. (1968:25)

A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENT AND CRIME

People under different contextual mood show different judgments. The most disappointing judgment is pulling one back to the frames of mysteriously complicated structures, as mentioned above, called *Law*. They give the least importance to the circumstantial impacts upon the individual and his deeds. They simply browse through those bombastic terms attached to one another, which seem to be ambushing hungrily to feed themselves with the crush of the helpless individuals. They just see the *Present* of the individual and hardly care about the *Becoming* of the person. They do not focus on the nature of *Becoming*, because they know that in the flow of *Becoming*, lots of influential hands are involved; it means the authorities themselves pave the path smooth for the offensive acts. So, the main criminals are those, who prepare the atmosphere for crimes to be committed. Indeed, they make the context pregnant for wrong-doings. Hence, the small ordinary criminals actually are the illegitimate offspring of the professional authorized and legitimized criminals, who take refuge in the frames of their *Law*. The worst point of this tragic issue is the submission of the people to the unswerving insistence of the ruling authorities on the legitimacy of their judgments and notions, which indeed prolongs the life of tyranny and suppression. As Sharp (2010) opines:

Unfortunately, the past is still with us. The problem of dictatorships is deep. People in many countries have experienced decades or even centuries of oppression, whether of domestic or foreign origin. Frequently, unquestioning submission to authority figures and rulers has been long inculcated. In extreme cases, the social, political, economic, and even religious institutions of the society — outside of state control — have been deliberately weakened, subordinated, or even replaced by new regimented institutions used by the state or ruling party to control the society. The population has often been atomized (turned into a mass of isolated individuals) unable to work together to achieve freedom, to confide in each other, or even to do much of anything at their own initiative. (3)

Indeed, the individuals, first need to have a thorough reconsideration of their judgments on themselves. They have got to interrogate their own conscience and commonsense over their submissive nature upon any dreadful impositions, which push them fettered into a dark dungeon of slavery and domination. This sense of submission makes them timid, and timidity is the main instrument required by the autocratic superpowers to hush their voices. The constant flow of submission becomes inevitably a habit, and the repetition of this unwelcome habit gradually loses its vitality and vigor, so consequently it makes individual's mental faculty fatigued and impotent; a fatigued and impotent brainpower cannot resist the highly modernized tricks of the political minded so-called man loving figures.

Undeniably, the individuals need to have a thoughtful journey within their own world of recognition. They should know where and how they are, and actually where they are heading to. As Bear asserts, "If you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are" (2001: 93).

O. HENRY'S AFTER TWENTY YEARS

William Sidney Porter, known as "O. Henry", was one of America's most popular short story writers. He was born on September 11, 1862 and died on June 5, 1910. He went through lots of tormenting mental and spiritual

agonies, especially when his young wife was diagnosed tuberculosis and he did his best to provide enough money for her treatment but could not afford, and finally she died young at the age 29.

O. Henry was working as a bank teller and was charged with embezzlement. He was sentenced to five years imprisonment but after serving three years was released because of good behavior. It was after his release that he chose his pen name O. Henry.

AFTER TWENTY YEARS

This is the story of two childhood friends, Jimmy and Bob, who decide to depart from each other for the search of their fortune, but meet each other after twenty years at ten pm, at an appointed place. Bob goes to the West to search for his fortune and Jimmy remains in New York.

"Twenty years ago to-night," said the man, "I dined here at 'Big Joe' Brady's with Jimmy Wells, my best chum, and the finest chap in the world. He and I were raised here in New York, just like two brothers, together. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty. The next morning I was to start for the West to make my fortune. You couldn't have dragged Jimmy out of New York; he thought it was the only place on earth. Well, we agreed that night that we would meet here again exactly twenty years from that date and time, no matter what our conditions might be or from what distance we might have to come. We figured that in twenty years each of us ought to have our destiny worked out and our fortunes made, whatever they were going to be." (Hansen, 1953: 89)

BOB AS A WANTED CRIMINAL AND JIMMY AS A RESPONSIBLE POLICE OFFICER

Bob comes back from the West as a wanted criminal. The question is that what makes a person like Bob choose the risky path of illegal activities, which are against the socio-political norms of his society? Why does he not choose a risk-free job, where he is respected and appreciated?

Indeed, it does not always necessarily mean that a person willingly chooses to be a police inspector or a criminal. Sometimes, you do not have the choice. It may be the force or the demand of the moments, which make you determine the available choices. Is there a guarantee that had Jimmy gone to the West, he would not have turned out to be a criminal? Or, if Bob had remained in New York, he would not have chosen to be a police inspector? Even it is possible that if Jimmy had had the very first available choice of an illegal lucrative activity, he would have gone for it. Or, if Bob had had the very first choice to be a police inspector, he might have gone for that as well. Therefore, there are lots of elements responsible for an event to happen. But the sad point is that all these interfering elements are neglected, and only the involved individual and his current status is the focal point. The commanders of the army of *Judgments* with the heart and mind poring missile of *Justice*, unjustly and mercilessly attack those individuals, who are trapped in the web of delinquency and crime. It goes without saying that delinquency and crime are two in-born negative and depreciated terms, but these terms may embody their virgin connotations just when a person out of different available choices chooses to be a criminal, or when he does not need to choose this negative field of activity, but he does so simply out of greed and dreamy expectations. But, we do not see such tangible elements in Bob, who is rejected by his police childhood pal. Indeed, he is anxiously and expectantly waiting to see his friend, Jimmy:

The policeman twirled his club and took a step or two.

"I'll be on my way. Hope your friend comes around all right. Going to call time on him sharp?"

"I should say not!" said the other. "I'll give him half an hour at least. If Jimmy is alive on earth he'll be here by that time. So long, officer." (90)

THE FADED FRIENDSHIP

Bob and Jimmy seem to be the childhood bosom friends; such friends who cannot forget to meet each other after twenty years at ten pm. The strange point of friendship is that Jimmy does not forget all these twenty passing years that he has got a friend, but he forgets to come and meet him as a friend; he comes as a police inspector. He remembers to be a good police inspector but seems to have totally forgotten the rules and doctrines of friendship. He does justice with his job, but unfortunately does injustice with his friendship. He wants to show to be still a good friend by not directly arresting Bob, but indeed, this is not his humility but his humiliation, which stops him facing Bob. So, Jimmy sends a plain-clothes police to arrest Bob, though first he thinks it is Jimmy, but later on with full frustration realizes that he is not Jimmy:

"You're not Jimmy Wells," he snapped. "Twenty years is a long time, but not long enough to change a man's nose from a Roman to a pug."

"It sometimes changes a good man into a bad one," said the tall man. "You've been under arrest for ten minutes, 'Silky' Bob. Chicago thinks you may have dropped over our way and wires us she wants to have a chat with you. Going quietly, are you? That's sensible. Now, before we go on to the station here's a note I was asked to hand you. You may read it here at the window. It's from Patrolman Wells.

"The man from the West unfolded the little piece of paper handed him. His hand was steady when he began to read, but it trembled a little by the time he had finished. The note was rather short.

"Bob: I was at the appointed place on time. When you struck the match to light your cigar I saw it was the face of the man wanted in Chicago. Somehow I couldn't do it myself, so I went around and got a plain clothes man to do the job. JIMMY." (91)

CONCLUSION

This study tried to bring to picture the wrong role of justice and the impertinent exposure of judgments. It displayed the cliché type of submission to some inked words, which change the destiny of man in no time. Indeed, it was an effort to expose the inapt application of justice and law without giving a scrutinized investigation on the prevalent atmosphere, which pushes the individual into the helpless quagmire of delinquency and crime. It gave a focal throw to the ever changing interpretations of the context-based terms, which control our mental territory. As Browning et al. (2000) aver:

Moreover, there is now no straightforward way in which debates can be characterized as being concerned with, say, relations of production, social classes or the State. Things appear to have changed so much, and seem to continue to change at such a disconcerting rate, what with the explosive growth of media, leisure, consumption, changing employment conditions, travel and so forth, that it seems impossible to fix analysis and explanation in any stable set of terms. At every level, from the intimacy of the body and sexual relationships, to issues such as stratification, substantive developments lead to the redundancy of once accepted concepts and new terms are required to give insight into fast-changing trends. Even on the grand scale established ways of thought have come to be assaulted. (5)

The study finally unraveled the loose and shaky principles of friendship in hard time, where a friend may play a crucially vital role to change his friend's trend of life, and may save him from the further impending threats and evils.

Man will remain the victim of the untoward circumstances, until and unless the rift between the authorities and the common man is narrowed down, and of course there is a drastic need of the apt and fair application of justice and judgments, taking into consideration all the elements responsible for an individual's wrong-doings.

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