

The lottery by shirley jackson and war by luigi pirandello

Literature



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The Lottery by Shirley Jackson and War by Luigi Pirandello

At first reading, Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," and Luigi Pirandello's "War," appear to be completely differing narratives in the context of theme and character. "The Lottery" describes an ancient rite, culminating in the ritualistic stoning of woman in a small village, while "War" is set in a railway carriage, where the travelers attempt to come to terms with the causalities of war. However, on deeper study, several common threads are apparent in the two short stories. Both narratives deal with themes of violence and death, with the characters attempting to justify the need for this violence, and using denial as a tool to obscure the truth.

Violent death is the theme of both stories. Jackson's story revolves round a village lottery to choose an individual among the inhabitants, and the stoning of the chosen victim to death. Pirandello's tale depicts the repercussions of war on families who lose their loved ones. Both describe violence which is needlessly inflicted by men and women on others. As all the characters are equally vulnerable to the violence, we see the underlying strain of selfishness that characterizes human beings. The travelers in "War" are all "in the same plight" (Pirandello), and engage in a heated argument to portray their own suffering as the deepest. In "The Lottery," Mrs. Graves castigates Mrs. Hutchinson, the victim, for her protest by saying, "All of us took the same chance" (Jackson). In both narratives, there is no sympathy for the victims.

The characters in both the stories attempt to justify the violence. In "War," the fat man justifies war by citing the imperative to defend one's country, and the supposed fortune of dying "young and happy, without having the

ugly sides of life,” (Pirandello). In “ The Lottery,” when the Adams’ tentatively moot the abolition of the lottery, Mr. Summers, the old man, declares, “ Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon,” and justifies the barbaric ritual. He warns that, without the lottery, man will go back to being uncivilized and famine will prevail. None of the other travelers attempt to argue with the fat man. Likewise, Mr. Summers is not contradicted by the villagers. The characters in both the stories are content to accept the justification for the violence at face value.

The travelers in the train, and the villagers, deny the violence and inhumanity which rules their lives. In “ War,” the travelers conform to the expected ideal of patriotism and duty to sacrifice life for the country, giving lip service to the dictum, “ Our children do not belong to us, they belong to the country...” (Pirandello). In the case of the villagers, this denial is demonstrated in the deliberate assumption of an air of nonchalance and the display of commonplace behavior: the children talking of school, the women gossiping, the men “ speaking of planting and rain, tractors and taxes” (Jackson), the cheerful banter surrounding Mrs. Hutchinson’s late arrival. This mask of denial is torn apart by the woman in the bulky coat, whose question, “ Is your son really dead” (Pirandello) makes the fat man finally acknowledge that his son is really “ gone for ever” (Pirandello). In contrast, the villagers in “ The Lottery” continue to submit to their conditioned acceptance of the rite.

Shirley Jackson and Luigi Pirandello base their short stories on violent death. The authors expose the inherent selfishness of humanity and the common failure to empathize with the pain of others. In both narratives, acts of

violence are justified: by the argument of ‘ the universal good’ by Jackson and patriotism by Pirandello. The truth about the brutality of war, and the barbarism of the rite of stoning, is obscured by denial. While the contrived world of denial is shattered, and the cruelty of war is revealed, in the “ War,” the villagers in “ The Lottery” continue to live in conditioned denial.

Works Cited.

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