

Comparison of editha and the war prayer

Literature



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Comparison of Editha and The War Prayer In looking at the context of The War Prayer, by Mark Twain, it is easy to make a comparison to a story by William Dean Howells entitles Editha. According to history, Twain and Howells were friends who agreed on their dissent against the wars being waged against other countries in order to impose American ideals on the indigenous peoples of those lands. As they observed the country falling prey to the call-to-arms and whipping itself into a mob of patriotic war-mongering, they both wrote pieces that would bring attention to the consequences of war on those who would be called enemy. Both pieces open with similar phrases that evoke similar feelings. Ensor states that “ The situation in the two pieces I similar. Editha opens with the statement that “ the air was thick with the war feeling, like the electricity of a storm which has not yet burst.” At the beginning of The War Prayer the storm has burst:” (Ensor, p. 536) This reference to storm activity denotes an impending danger in what the people are expressing.

In both pieces, the consequences of a celebratory attitude towards the impending destruction was defined by the exalted attitudes of those lending support to the idea that it was a God driven idea that they should go to war and be victorious over their perceived enemy. In Twain’s work, the stubborn ignorance of the congregation would blind them to the possibility that they were asking something destructive from God. In Howell’s work, the lead character, Editha, would have the curse fall back on her as she loses her sweetheart in the battle. She hears his mother say:

No, you didn’t expect him to get killed. . . . You just expected him to kill someone else, some of those foreigners, that weren’t there because they had any say about it, but because they had to be there. . . . You thought it

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would be all right for my George, your George, to kill the sons of those miserable mothers and the husbands of those girls that you would never see the faces of. (Ensor, p. 536)

With this speech, Howells makes the impact of the bloody destruction that earlier, Editha had been feverishly rooting in favor of, a much more personal consequence when he makes the distinct comparison between the death of her loved one, George, and the prayer she had made for the deaths of those she would never come to know, and apparently had no sympathy. In her new empathetic situation, he drives the point home.

Meanwhile, Mark Twain shows irony in the way that the congregation ignores the man who would change their way of thinking. The information is less personal about people that the congregation does not see as people. As they send up prayers and hymns over the successes of their own soldiers, they have no reference with which to find sympathy for the deaths and destruction that the positive answer of their prayer would rain down upon their perceived enemies. While Editha is shown the error of her thinking, the congregation remains blind to its folly. Their punishment is the appearance of ignorance to the audience of the story.