

The Bridge of San Luis Rey Interpretive Essay

The Bridge of San Luis Rey is based on the falling of a bridge in Peru in 1714 with five people on it at the time. The novel tells the story about the aftermath of the bridge's collapse. One person who witnessed the accident, Brother Juniper, attempts to find an explanation as to why the particular five people were the ones on the bridge. The novel states that "either we live by accident and die by accident or we live by plan and die by plan." (5) One of the characters in the novel is the Marquesa, who tries to find love and meaning in her life. While doing so, she undergoes a positive change from a selfish love to an unselfish love where she is able to find peace in her life.

The Marquesa is a very religious and superstitious woman, who engages in many superstitious practices. She is the mother of Dona Clara, whom she loves and adores, but who does not love her mother in the same way. Her daughter's attitude is a cause for a lot of stress to her because, despite all the efforts that the Marquesa makes, she cannot seem to get her daughter to show any affection towards her. The Marquesa is a colorful personality, but who lacks love from when she was a child since she was considered an ugly child. She ends up getting married to a 'ruined' Lord who does not show any love towards her. When she gives birth to a daughter, Dona Clara, she showers her with love, but unfortunately, the daughter resents her for her excessive displays of affection. Therefore, the Marquesa spends all her time chasing elusive love and fulfillment in her life, especially towards her daughter. When she writes letters to her daughter, she does not get many replies and when she gets a reply, they are full of criticism.

The Marquesa gets tired of attempting and failing to get love from her daughter, so she decides to find a companion to fill her loneliness. She chooses to get a girl from the orphanage, who is named Pepita, to keep her company. She begins to spend time with Pepita and this helps to ease her loneliness. When the Marquesa has a companion with her, change in her character can be seen. The changes in attitude are apparent when they visit the theatre and Camila ridicules her in front of everyone. When Camila is forced to approach the Marquesa and apologize, she is surprised at how kindly the Marquesa treats her.

The final change in the Marquesa comes to her after the realization that Pepita really cared about her. This comes to her after she reads the letter that Pepita was in the process of writing to the Abbess. In the letter, Pepita recounts how the Marquesa had failed to return her love. This is because the Marquesa is obsessed with getting the love and attention of 'her distant child.' The realization that Pepita loves her causes her to write to her daughter informing her of her newly found good attitude. The change in attitude causes her to stop being so bitter as she has finally found the love and care that she has spent her entire life searching for.

The realization that Pepita loves her also causes the Marquesa to take an in depth look at her life. This makes her to realize that for most of her life, her actions had been lacking in bravery.

Thus, she makes the decision to change her ways and become braver and more loving to Pepita as she has finally discovered the love to be 'free and generous'. She unfortunately does not get a chance to experience this in real life as the Marquesa and Pepita are both killed in the bridge accident. The fact that she also gets an opportunity to witness and experience true love causes her to change to a point where she resolves to allow her daughter to do what she wants, as opposed to insisting and attempting to force her daughter to accept her displays of affection. Finding love in Pepita enables the Marquesa to change to a point where she does not feel the need to insist to get love and affection in return. In her resolve to be brave, she decides to write letters to her daughter, in which she intends to be more loving and understanding. The Marquesa would like to begin 'a new life' with her daughter. The change that she experiences in her life is therefore positive, although she does not get much of a chance to put into practice her resolutions before she dies on the bridge.