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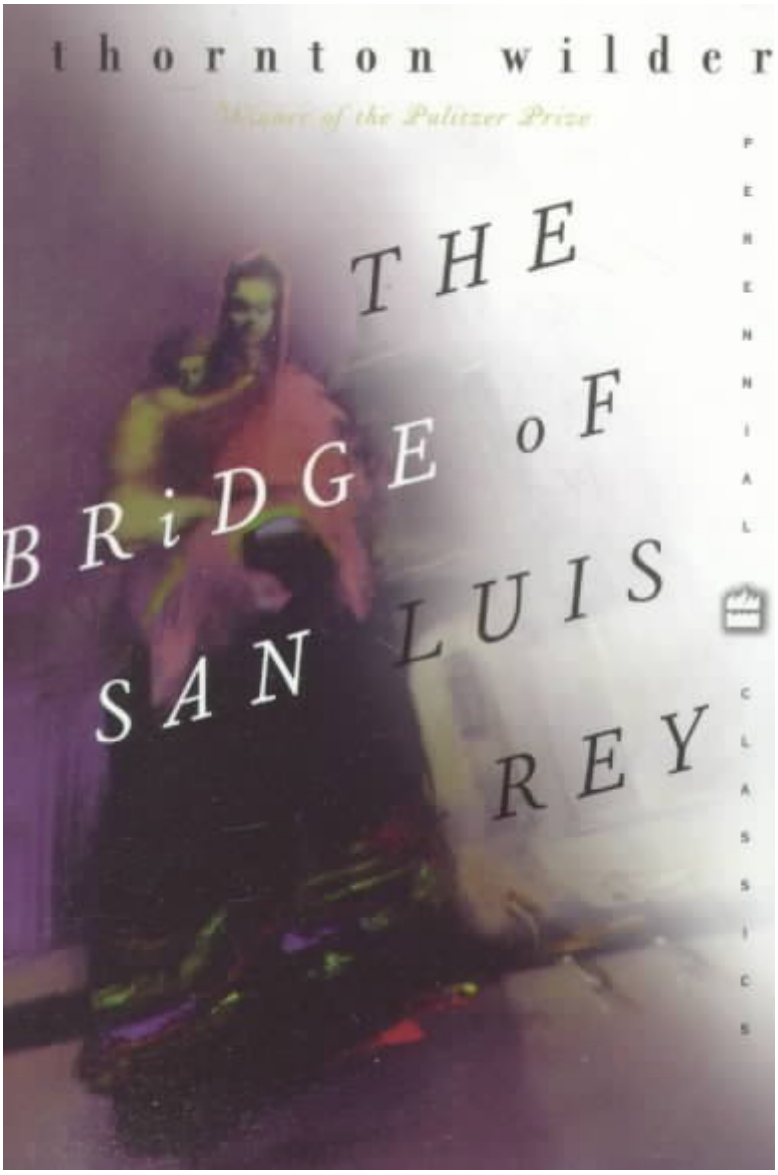
"The Bridge of San Luis Rey" reviewed by Sarah on June 14, 2010



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Name:
Sarah
Grade:
11
Title:
The Bridge of San Luis Rey
Author:
Wilder, Thornton
Genre:

historical

Write a review of the book, including plot points, if you wish:

#In Thornton Wilderï¿½s novel, The Bridge of San Luis Rey, the Abbess Madre Maria del Pilar, caretaker of the Convent of Santa Maria Rosa de las Rosas, has a great desire to protect women and aid the poor in the town of Lima, Peru. The Abbess, in seeking an heiress to her convent and work, chooses a twelve year old orphan girl named Pepita whom she trains in various responsibilities beyond her years. However, after Pepita dies in a bridge collapse, the Abbess realizes she does not have an heiress to continue her work and that she has been so attached to Pepita that she is then forced to tear an idol from her heart. Thus, the Abbessï¿½ attachment to Pepita with a selfish and passionate love has only led to her sufferings and loss of Pepita. However, losing Pepita causes the Abbess to realize that true love towards a person is given for the personï¿½s own sake and not for gaining anything in return, thus allowing the Abbess to live the rest of her life as a compassionate, fulfilled and happy woman. Deeply attached to Pepita and training her in worldly experiences so that she can continue her work at the convent, the Abbess does not love Pepita with a compassionate love but with a selfish love that only concerns the Convent and the Abbessï¿½ work. The Abbess possesses the dream of being someone who can alter the present treatment of women and the poor, even though many others do not care about her mission. She is ï¿½...one of those persons who have allowed their lives to be gnawed away because they have fallen in love with an idea several centuries before its appointed appearance in the history of civilization.ï¿½ This love the Abbess has for her work causes her selfish and idolatrous love of Pepita. The Abbess views Pepita as an idol because she sees her as the only means to fulfill her dream. In her seeking a capable heiress to continue the work of the convent, ï¿½...the search ended with Pepitaï¿½. (36) The Abbess sees Pepita as capable of continuing her work but does not realize what she is asking of the twelve-year-old orphan and thus does not really love Pepita as she should love her. Pepita ï¿½...was assigned to the most disliked tasks in the House, but she came to understand all the aspects of its administration...the Directress...talked to her at great length, not only on religious experience, but on how to manage women and how to plan contagious wards and how to beg for money.ï¿½ (36) However, the Abbessï¿½ only focus is on training an heiress for her convent and assuring the continuation of her work with women and the poor and she does not love Pepita as she should. When the Abbess loses Pepita on the bridge, she realizes that her selfish and idolatrous love of Pepita has led to her sufferings in life. The Abbess, through her loss of Pepita, understands how greatly she has relied on Pepita to continue the work of the convent and that she has obsessed over teaching Pepita heavy tasks too strenuous for Pepita to undertake. She realizes there will ï¿½...be no Pepita to enlarge her work; it would relapse into the indolence and the indifference of her colleagues.ï¿½ (141) Through the Abbessï¿½ comprehension of this, she begins to develop an understanding of Godï¿½s Love and His will for her. The Abbess causes herself to endure spiritual sufferings, due to her lack of loving Pepita compassionately and in imitation of Godï¿½s Love. She became ï¿½...the nurse who tends the sick who never recover...the priest who perpetually renews the office before an altar to which no worshippers come.ï¿½ (141) Therefore, through her selfgiving, the Abbess begins her transformation into a compassionate woman. Advantageously, the Abbess realizes that her selfishness and idolatrous love of Pepita is what brought about her frenzy and sufferings. Realizing she should have loved Pepita with a selfless love, the Abbess utters regretfully ï¿½...my affection should have had more of that colour, Pepita. My whole life should have had more of that quality. I have been too busy.ï¿½ (141) Thus, the Abbess, due to her realization of her previously possessing a selfish and idolatrous love of Pepita, begins her observation and searching out Godï¿½s Will for her life and work with a selfless, compassionate love. Realizing that true love towards a person or thing is given for its own sake, not for gaining something in return, the Abbess resolves to love as God loves, resulting in her ultimate

happiness. The Abbess understands that she has to search out and rely on Godï¿½s will rather than her own in order to love others with a true and compassionate love if she is to receive contentment. She has torn ï¿½...an idol from her heart and the experience had left her pale but firm.ï¿½ (141) The Abbess has now learned an important lesson through the death of Pepita and she has come out stronger than she has been before. The Abbess resolves to love as God loves by focusing on the present and not worrying about what the future may hold. She ï¿½...accepted the fact that it was of no importance whether her work went on or not; it was enough to work.ï¿½ (141) The Abbess now understands that God desires her to focus on the present, rather than look to the future which is full of uncertainties. Through her resolution to love others for their sake and not for gaining something in return, the Abbess gains peace and relief, which results in her ultimate happiness. She states, ï¿½...love will have been enough; all those impulses of love return to the love that made them.ï¿½ (148) Thus, the Abbess, indeed, changes her view of love from a passionate and idolatrous love to a compassionate and self-giving love, which will benefit her for the rest of her life. To conclude, due to the loss of Pepita, the Abbess Madre Maria del Pilar realizes that true love towards a person is truly given for the personï¿½s own sake and not for gaining anything in return, thereby allowing her to live the remainder of her life as a compassionate, fulfilled and content woman. Because of the dream she has, the Abbess causes herself to undertake spiritual sufferings which lead to the obsessive and idolatrous love of Pepita. Through this love, the Abbess trains Pepita in difficult and strenuous tasks too complicated for the twelve-year-old girl to undertake. Regretfully, Pepita dies in a bridge collapse in which the Abbess undergoes the removal of an idol from her heart and the loss of her heiress. However, she learns important life values and the value of true love through her struggles and sufferings.

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