

CHAPTER III
THE STORY AS SEEN
THROUGH ITS INTRINSIC ELEMENTS

The Bridge of San Luis Rey is a novel that is rather different from its predecessor. Thornton Wilder, its author is considered on to try a new form. The most obvious thing that can be seen by the writer is the plot of the story. The plot of the story has several other stories within story. These story do not seem to be the parts of the story. They discuss about the life of different people with no relationship one to another except they are together as the victims of the catastrophe. Wilder achieves unity appropriate to the novel, not only through the question that is raised but also through the skillful interlacing of the personalities of one stories in destinies of another.

It is affirmable that this novel has several stories within story since its story wants to express about an accident. The main character's obsession to observe God's intention behind this accident needs further explanation about the way in which the five victims of that catastrophe live and their backgrounds. Hopefully, it will show the pattern for defining in what purpose they are together chosen by God to die in the same accident on that fateful day. To make the observation schematically and in detail,

Brother Juniper arranges his finding in such book that is presented by the author in *Part Two, Part Three* and *Part Four* of the novel. These parts seem do not have relationship with the previous chapter. If they are separated, may they will become some independent stories. The use of this technique is intended to emphasize that those five people are merely do not touch one to another in their conflicts. None of them becomes a part of another's life, in the sense one involves with another's conflict, as though the author wants the reader to focus her attention that it is pure an accidental occurrence.

There is no indication that shows its relationship to the main story. Those five people do not have relationship one to another, but they are put in unity in this story by the question that is raised and by the accident itself. They are together are killed in that catastrophe and they are together are the objects of Brother Juniper's observation to find the outcome for his problem.

The writer analyzes the story in a main plot and three stories between story to make this story is easy to understand. In the analysis of plot, the writer encloses once the analysis of characters and their conflicts since each character has his or her own conflict and plot. It is possible as long as the writer stands on the theory that plot is the arrangement of conflicts, and conflicts are nothing without character, there ae interrelationship for between characters and their conflicts in 'cause and effect' pattern.

The analysis of setting will be separated as it is considered rather different from other novels. It is possible since the author wants to emphasize on Brother Juniper's observation to find the similarity of the life of the victims. It is a note as a result of Brother Juniper's interview with those five victim's closest people. Moreover, perhaps, the author wants to emphasize that it is the facts, or the material to observe. This story needs to be understood and to be contemplated. The readers deserve to have their own opinion about the essence of its philosophical thought, as the author is not commenting about it in the story.

The character of Brother Juniper is also not completely depicted. There is no statement about his personality outside his feeling about his observation. It is easy to the writer to replace his role in the novel and concretize the story to observe all facts in his surrounding. In the other hand, the characters of those five victims are clearly depicted as if they mean it to be observed.

III. 1 PLOT

The story begins with the description about the event of the falling bridge and the condition of society viewing that catastrophe as describes below.

On July 20, 1714, a woven footbridge on highroad between Lima and Cuzco, Peru, collapses and five travelers are drop into the gorge below and are killed. The

catastrophe makes a great impression on the minds and hearts of the Peruvians who, although they used to disasters and believe them to be acts of God, had thought that it was unthinkable that the bridge should break.

Brother Jupiter, a Franciscan friar, sees the bridge collapse and decides to prove whether any pattern why those particular five are killed. He wants to describe that theology is an exact science by showing that God selects each of those five for definite reasons. It is not the first time he works on this method. He is the one who has a big curiosity about the Almighty. His obsession to prove that all people's pain is inserted to their life for their own good begins when he sees there is a discrepancy between his faith and the facts. His belief that God is All-knowing and All-Good can not answer his question why the the innocent people get suffered in their life. It becomes such paradox in his mind, but he is sure that God will not be like that.

Brother Juniper spends six years for his research in learning all he can get about the lives of doomed five. He is very enthusiastic in his research. Brother Juniper goes about asking question of all who have known the deceased and find that often the person closest to one of the victims, for the reasons of his own, gives the least information. He delves into every possible channel of information he can discover. Finally he writes a huge book that is containing all information he has gathered.

The book is rejected by the church who assumes that all the question about the Almighty is indecent one. The book is burned in the public square of Lima as work of

heresy but secret copy lies between two great wooden covers collecting dust through the years in the library of the university.

Brother Juniper's monumental book, however, displeases the religious power and Brother Juniper and his work are put to torch. Though he never comes to such decision about his problem, the most important that the writer can write in her mind is that Brother Juniper works on his observation for his faith that God is the source of wisdom.

Dona Maria, The Marquesa de Montemayor, is one of the richest and loneliest people in Lima. She is the daughter of a wealthy cloth merchant and suffered through childhood because of her ugliness and her stuttering. Her mother attempts to develop her social charm and smothered her with jewels, but she keeps to her self and determines to remain single.

At the age of 26 she finds herself being forced into marriage with a ruined nobleman; she bore him an exquisite daughter, upon whom she centers an idolatrous love. The girl, Dona Clara, grows up to regard her mother with astonishment and repulsion. She fights against her mother's possessive affection. Dona Clara deliberately chooses to marry a nobleman who lives in Spain, in order to get away from her mother. Four years later Dona Maria visits her daughter but reunion is so unsuccessful

that Dona Maria returns to Peru without having the courage to bid Dona Clara a personal farewell. Now the old woman expresses her maternal love in letters to her daughter. Her letters are so beautifully written and so full of critical observation. Long after Dona Maria's death they will be considered as literary gems and be a lasting memorial to her. Dona Clara hardly reads these letters; only her husband appreciates them preserves them for posterity.

Dona Maria writes to win her daughter's love. She loves her daughter with a selfish passion from which she is powerless to free herself. This situation makes her really desperate.

The knowledge that she will never be loved in return acts upon her ideas as a tide acts upon a cliff. Her religious went first, for all she could ask of God, or of immortality, was the gift of a place where daughters love their mothers; .. next she lost her belief in the sincerity of those about her. She secretly refused to believe that anyone (herself excepted) loved anyone.¹

Dona Maria is extremely lonely and takes to drink as a consolation. To comfort herself in her loneliness she goes to the convent of Santa Maria Rosa de las Rosas and begs the Abbess, Madre Maria del Pilar, to allow her to take one of the orphans into her home. The Abbess has been training Pepita, a 14-year-old girl who is bright, energetic, and loyal, to be her successor in the great work of bettering the lot

¹ Ibid p.36

of woman. She sees the Marquesa's request as a chance for Pepita to learn more about life. She allows the girl to live with Dona Maria and be her companion.

One night Dona Maria is at the theater to see the great actress Camila Perichole performs. Perichole, as she is called, sings some mocking verses are directed at Dona Maria between the acts, but Dona Maria is lost in her thoughts and is unaware of the insult, her mind is in her daughter whom she has been longing for a long time.

' But the Marquesa, deeply moved by the first two acts of the comedy, scarcely saw the singer and sat staring before her, thinking about Spain.¹

She acts as if her daughter were there, and longs for the good speech of her daughter,

..... (who know) that might bring a smile to her daughter face and might make her murmur: "really my mother is charming."²

The Viceroy is angry that a member of the aristocracy has been insulted and he orders the Perichole, who is his mistress, to go to Dona Maria and apologizes. Dona Maria, arises from a drunken sleep, receives the impudent actress with dignity, brushes off her apology, and calls her a great woman. The Perichole is ashamed and deeply affected by the old woman.

¹ Ibid p.46

² Ibid p.47

Dona Clara writes that she becomes a mother and Dona Maria is so concerned about her daughter's safety. She does not only invoke Christian blessing but also resort to superstitious and pagan charms. She takes Pepita on a trip across the bridge to visit a famous shrine in the mountains. They stay at an inn, and while Dona Maria is at the shrine Pepita writes a letter to the Abbess in which she expresses her loneliness and her despair at indifference shown by the Marquesa.

When Dona Maria returns to the inn she finds the letter. She is moved by what she reads and tells Pepita the letter is very beautiful. Pepita says it was not brave to write such a letter and tears it up.

Reading Pepita's letter, Dona Maria understands for the first time how selfless her love is and with this lesson in courage she writes her daughter a warm and moving letter. She resolves to begin life anew and to love the little Pepita. They start back to Lima two days later and are crossing the bridge when it collapses.

Twin boys are left at the door of the convent, years before, and the Abbess has supervised their upbringing. They are named Manuel and Esteban and no one has ever been able to tell them apart. The Abbess has been their one true friend and guide and when they are too old to remain in convent she arranges for them to work for the priests in the city. The two boys live apart from the life of the city and seldom speak except when they are alone together, when they communicate in a secret language of

their own thought. As they grow older they act as scribes and do much copying of manuscripts for the theater.

One evening Manuel is asked to write some love letters for Perichole, who swears him to secrecy. He is desperately and silently in love with the great actress. Esteban knows his brother is brooding over the Perichole. One night she comes to their room and whispers some dictation to Manuel. The twins have an almost telephatic sensitivity to each other's emotions and when she leaves, Esteban silently communicates to Manuel that Manuel should go after her and be happy. Realizing that Esteban is miserable, Manuel purges himself of his love and reassures Esteban. Manuel cuts his knee and it becomes infected. A barber-surgeon prescribes medicine and tells Esteban to put cold cloths on the knee every hour. Manuel becomes delirious from the pain, speaks out at Esteban for hurting him, and curses him for coming between the Perichole and himself. From this Esteban learns that,

.....even in the most perfect love one person loves less profoundly than the other.¹

Manuel dies and Esteban slinks away as a hurt beast and does not attend the funeral.

¹ Ibid p.100

The Abbess is concerned for him; she knows Esteban makes his living by doing odd jobs and that he disappears for months at a time. The Abbess finally sends Captain Alvarado, a shipmaster who has known the twins, to seek out Esteban in Cuzco.

The captain finds Esteban and gets through to him in his bluff friendly way and Esteban agrees to ship out with him. The next morning the captain finds Esteban about to hang himself but he manages to renew the boy's courage and will to live. They start for Lima and when they reach the bridge the captain descends to the river below to supervise the passage of some goods. Esteban is on the bridge when it collapses.

Uncle Pio is the tutor, confidant, manager, severest critic, hairdresser and devotee of the Perichole. As an illegitimate son of a Castilian, he runs away from home at 10 and ever since has lived by his wits. For five years he performs small odd jobs. Later he becomes an animal trainer, an informant, and a spy. He loves the company of beautiful women although he asks nothing but their good will. Above all he develops an exquisite taste for Spanish literature and the theater.

He emigrates to Peru, where he finds a young girl of 12 singing ballads in a cafe and, being struck by her talent, he purchases her. He renames her Camila Perichole and devotes himself to training her for the stage. She has grown to be a beautiful and fine actress and Uncle Pio is well aware of her real capabilities and potential greatness. He drives her cynically and doles out few words of praise. She meets the Viceroy,

becomes his mistress, and bears him a son, Don Jaime. The Perichole has been tired of the Viceroy and has been indulged in a series furtive love affairs.

Finally she gives up the stage, to the despair of Uncle Pio pleads with her in vain to return to the stage and to make a triumphal trip to Spain.

Soon after, the Perichole is taken with smallpox and her beauty is permanently scarred. In her conviction that life is over for her she sends back all the expensive gifts the Viceroy and the other men have given her and she decides to live close to poverty with her children.

Eventually Uncle Pio contrives to see her and begs her to allow him to take Don Jaime for being educated like his mother. She reluctantly agrees. Uncle Pio and the boy start off to Lima. They are on the bridge at the fatal moment.

In the other part, the author also gives such opinion about the implication of the death of those five towards their closest people. This opinion is presented by the ones whom the victims give their love to. It is probably different with what Brother Juniper feels about it and seems jump from the main problem (Brother Juniper's conflict). It looks like doesn't have relationship with the previous topic, but it also becomes the worth speech to think about by the reader. The writer sums the plot up as below.

The Perichole realizes that she has loved Uncle Pio and little Don Jaime and reproaches herself for not having shown her love. She hears that the Abbess has lost two persons dear to her in the same accident and she goes to the Abbess, who consoles her and gives her healing work to do. Not long after Dona Clara arrives from Spain, goes to the convent, and tells the Abbess she has failed her mother. The Abbess shows the aged, the young and the sick who are being cared for in the convent. The aristocratic woman is humbled by the sight of the Abbess surrounded by those who hold her in great affection.

The Abbess muses that almost no one but the Perichole, Dona Clara and she herself remembers the only important thing about the tragedy is the continuance of love;

But the love will have been enough; all those impulses of love return to the love that made them. Even memory is not necessary for love. There is a land of the living and there is a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning.¹

III.2 SETTING

The story takes a place in Peru, when the Bridge of San Luis Rey on the highroad between Lima and Cuzco is colapsed. It is on Friday noon, July the twentieth, 1714. The bridge had been built by the Incas from more than a century

¹ Ibid p.235

before. It is made from a mere ladder of thin slats that is swung out over the gorge below, with handrails of dried vine. Hundred of persons pass over it every day. St. Louis of France protects the bridge by his name and by the little mud church on the farther side. It shows that the society is very religious.

The people in Lima are very impressed knowing the catastrophe. It is potrayed by the author as:

The moment a Peruvian heard of the accident he signed himself and made mental calculation as to how recently he had crossed by it and how soon he had intended crossing by it again. People wandered about in a trance-like state, muttering; they had hallucination of seeing themselves falling into a gulf.... Servant girls returned bracelets which they had stolen from their mistresses, and usurers harangued their wives angrily, in defense of usury.

This situation is rather strange if the Limeans being impressed of that event, for in that country disasters are more than usually frequent and people are called as the "acts of God." It is unthinkable for the people that the bridge shall break. This description gives the sense of mystery in this novel.

The description about religious society is also indicated by the reaction of the church towards Brother Juniper's book. When the church board knows about what

¹ Ibid p.18

Brother Juniper has done, the church put both the author and his invention to torch. The church assumes that the book is a work of heresy. At that time all the question about God's power is presumed as an indecent one. All religious teaching has to be accepted as a dogma. No wonder if what Brother Juniper wants to do; to put theology among the exact sciences, deserve to put to torch in the Square, both the book and its author.

The author chooses the church and mass as mostly setting to get a religious sense. It is supported by the characters who are the members of the church board also indicates that, i.e., Brother Juniper and Madre Maria del Pilar. In the other hand, Brother Juniper's question that remains a question in his heart again gives a sense of mystery in the reader's opinion.

The mood of the characters in the story can be seen from the dialogue of the characters. Most of them indicate their love feelings and their lonely life.

CHAPTER IV

THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN FAITH AND FACT