

Dona perfecta essay



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Throughout Benito Perez Galdos' novel, *Dona Perfecta*, Galdos uses his ability to draw his characters, in such detail, that he allows the audience to relate with his main characters, Don Jose "Pepe" Rey, Rosario, and Dona Perfecta. By the order of his father, Pepe Rey has left his home to visit the small town of Orbajosa where his aunt, Dona Perfecta, lives. Pepe Rey has recently graduated as an engineer. He is a man of the new generation, inspired by Darwin, German philosophy, and the miracles technology promises.

He has little time and less inclination for the stoic, small-minded Catholic zealotry of his aunt and of Orbajosa in general. While in Orbajosa, Pepe Rey causes conflict within the town and his family because of his modern thinking. This thinking has terrible consequences, especially later when Orbajosa becomes embroiled within a terrible uprising against the Spanish government. Ultimately, due to his beliefs and modern thinking, Pepe Rey is killed by the order of his aunt, Donna Perfecta.

As the novel begins, the opening chapters spend some time describing the major characters in impressive detail. This narrative device could spell the doom of the novel almost immediately. The usual technique of writing a novel is to create fluency in order to allow the reader to remain interested in the plot. Therefore, nothing disrupts flow more than excessive description, particularly at the beginning of a novel. Yet Galdos masterfully provides the reader with a sense of tangential exposition. Consider the stunning paragraph describing Rosario as an example of Galdo's skillful writing.

Galdos tells, “ Rosario was a girl of delicate and fragile appearance, that revealed a tendency to pensive melancholy. In her delicate and pure countenance there was something of the soft, pearly pallor which most novelists attribute to their heroines, and without which sentimental varnish it appears that no Enriqueta or Julia can be interesting. But what chiefly distinguished Rosario was that her face expressed so much sweetness and modesty that the absence of the perfections it lacked was not observed.

This is not to say that she was plain; but, on the other hand, it is true that it would be an exaggeration to call her beautiful in the strictest meaning of the word. The real beauty of Dona Perfecta’s daughter consisted in a species of transparency, different from that of pearl, alabaster, marble, or any of the other substances used in descriptions of the human countenance; a species of transparency through which the inmost depths of her soul were clearly visible; depths not cavernous and gloomy, like those of the sea, but like those of a clear and placid river.

But the material was wanting there for a complete personality. The channel was wanting, the banks were wanting. The vast wealth of her spirit overflowed, threatening to wash away the narrow borders” (24). This quote, while long, illustrates Galdos’ illuminating ability with words. There is nothing more commonly described in novels than a beautiful female. Despite this common occurrence, Galdos is able to make what could be trite into something sublime. The author does not just tell the appearance of the character but shows a glimpse of the heart and soul of each character.

Likewise, the other characters benefit from equally rich, evocative description. By providing these descriptions, the reader is able to create a connection with and relate to these characters. As the novel progresses, at first, the town of Orbajosa welcomes Pepe Rey. He is shown around, and introduced to the various inhabitants of the town. Dona Perfecta, having the reputation as being “ perfect,” as her name suggests, loves the societal impact that her nephew is able to supply to her. However, this joy that Dona Perfecta experiences is short-lived due to brewing trouble.

Due to his education, Pepe Rey clashes with one of Dona Perfecta’s first guests, Don Inocencio, the town canon. Both men are quite intelligent. However, Pepe Rey is rational and calculating, thus, he dislikes the sheep-like belief of Orbajosa’s Catholic population. When Don Inocencio says, “... the brain, a place for breeding maggots” (35), he is echoing the beliefs of his flock, of himself, of the town. The town of Orbajosa believes in the idea of religion triumphing over science. To the townspeople, science is blasphemous. Pepe Rey’s disagrees with this belief.

Pepe Rey says, “ But it is not our fault if science overturns day after day the vain idols of the past: its superstitions, its sophisms, its innumerable fables—beautiful, some of them, ridiculous others—for in the vineyard of the Lord grow both good fruit and bad” (36). Pepe Rey believes in the fundamentals of knowledge. He considers those who live by mere faith alone are ignorant because science has disproved many ideas regarding religion. As can be seen, Inocencio and Pepe Rey are at loggerheads, there is no real middle ground where they can meet.

Their ideals will always clash and therefore create trouble. Throughout the majority of the first half of the novel, Pepe Rey and Inocencio argue. Soon, Dona Perfecta, as well as other members of the town, becomes involved in the argument. Pepe Rey is resolutely against the beliefs of Orbajosa. To the contrary, from the point of view of the townspeople, Pepe Rey is a young upstart without proper respect for the customs and heart of the town. During this time, Pepe Rey falls in love with Rosario. Unfortunately, for Pepe Rey, Dona Perfecta, her mother, comes to detest adamantly him.

Therefore, she will not allow the marriage to take place. Dona Perfecta tells Pepe Rey, “ Be silent, blasphemer! and don’t take the name of God upon your lips!... In the name of God, whom I can invoke, for I believe in him, I tell you that my daughter will never be your wife. My daughter will be saved, Pepe Rey; my daughter shall not be condemned to a living hell, for a union with you would be a hell! ” (139). In a grand irony, Dona Perfecta opposes the very marriage she so forcibly arranged. Due to the controversy Pepe Rey caused, she will not allow Rosario and Pepe Rey to be married.

She believes that allowing that marriage will be sentencing her daughter to pain and suffering. Likewise, she thinks that in allowing the marriage to occur it would not only destroy her daughter’s reputation but also her own reputation. Because Pepe Rey cannot marry the woman he loves, the reader is inclined to sympathize with him. More than halfway through the novel, Orbajosa, as a whole, considers Pepe Rey evil for his blatant disregard for and opposition to the town’s belief. With this perception of Pepe Rey, the novel changes tack and becomes a study of rebellion and uprising.

Pepe Rey disappears for most of the remainder of the novel after a violent outbreak. Angry that still he is unable to marry Rosario, Pepe Rey says to Dona Perfecta, “ We have both become equally barbarous, and we struggle with and wound each other without compassion. God has permitted that it should be so; my blood will be upon your conscience, yours will be upon mine. Enough now, senora. I do not wish to trouble you with useless words.... Good-by, senora. I will now leave this house. I think we shall meet again” (140-141).

Galdos displays such anger in Pepe Rey in order to have the reader understand him, and empathize with him. Pepe Rey is heartbroken over the fact that he cannot be with his love,. Therefore, Pepe Rey attempts to make Donna Perfecta feel guilty for not allowing the union to take place. While he is gone, the reader is left to deal with the very people whose sympathies he cannot share. Because Dona Perfecta somewhat appears ridiculous due to her adherence to her outdated views, it is difficult to care about her outcome, as she and the other townspeople struggle against the government and begin to rebel.

As the novel ends, due to all the confusion, irrelevance in the second half of the novel, the melancholy of the characters, Galdo’s invokes a sense of sadness in his audience. As Rosario speaks with Donna Perfecta in the last scene, she is crying. She explains that her love for Pepe Rey. She tells Donna Perfecta, “ Mamma, mamma, I hate all that is not he! ... Hear my confession, for I wish to confess it to every one, and to you first of all... We have agreed to be married”(213). Rosario tells her mother that she wants to marry Pepe

Rey. Likewise, she explains the he and her have an arranged meeting tonight in the garden.

Donna Perfecta's response to this new knowledge is that of anger. She rushes downstairs to her garden, where Pepe Rey is, and orders a man to shot Pepe Rey. Donna Perfecta says to the man, " Cristobal, Cristobal-kill him"(216). Due to Galdos' superb ability to draw his characters in such detail, the readers genuinely are saddened at the overwhelmingly depressing finale. Regardless of whether someone is Catholic or is technologist, or is sympathetic, or is distasteful, no one leaves happy and satisfied with the ending of the novel. Pepe Rey is killed, and the reader cannot help but to be sad.

Donna Perfecta has her wish granted of never having Rosario marry him. Galdo's closing comment is immensely fitting for outcome of the novel. Galdos writes, " This is all we have to say for the present concerning persons who seem, but are not good" (223). Galdos uses this quote to explain the hypocrisy of people. In the viewpoint of the townspeople, Donna Perfecta was saintly while Pepe Rey was seen as evil. However, the reality was just the opposite for it was Pepe Rey's blood that was spilled by the hands of Donna Perfecta and not vise-versa.

Throughout Benito Perez Galdos' novel, Dona Perfecta, Galdos uses skills at writing to make his characters relatable to the reader. Galdos writes achingly well. Of the many talents that he possesses, the most immediately arresting is his capacity for description. Repeatedly, while reading, his display of the sheer beauty and truth in his descriptions of people and places, and his

analysis of thought and emotion were remarkable. The reader becomes so emotionally connected to the characters that fact that they are not real almost is forgotten.

The readers became so involved in the story that they cannot help but feel remorse for the main character, Pepe Rey, who was not able to be with his love. Likewise, they are inclined to have hatred for Donna Perfecta for she killed the beloved protagonist of the novel. Galdo's ability to have the reader become so connected with the characters of a fictitious book is an accolade of its own. Overall, Galdo's ability to draw his characters, in such detail, that he allows the audience to relate with his main characters, Don Jose "Pepe" Rey, Rosario, and Dona Perfecta allows him to create a novel that is considered by many as consummate