

Brother juniper's research: science v. faith



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1. Why and How Camila Became a Better Person Camila Perichole, the beautiful, celebrated young actress changed from a vain, prideful and self-centered person into one who opened her heart and gave charitable love to those in most need. Three tragic happenings in her life brought about the changes; these being her little boy Jaime's illness, her own suffering of smallpox, and the fall of the bridge, with the loss this inflicted upon her. She believed these not to be accidents of fate, but called them " comment from the skies;" (p. 137), suggesting her interpretation was that God was punishing her. It was the response she experienced after that final, dreadful event which taught Camila about the real meaning of loss, pain and finally, what pure love really was.

During her youth, she had been vain and proud, (of her beauty, her acting ability, and the adoration of her public). Camila was cruel and mocking too, as shown in her treatment of Dona Maria, and Manuel " the malicious actress had seen the Marquesa arrive and presently began improvising couplets alluding to her appearance, her avarice, her drunkenness..." (p. 28) and " Manuel, anyone would think you were as stupid as an ox." (p. 63) Thanks to the care, tutoring and devotion of Uncle Pio, Camila became an excellent performer, but wanted love, as she perceived it, passionate and physical. Her immorality centered around having numerous affairs with young men, until the Viceroy, Don Andres made her his mistress. Even his loving generosity and the three children she bore him seemed not to touch Camila, there was little real warmth, affection or loyalty in her character. This made her show her sick son Jaime little affection, and allowed more infidelity to take place.

After giving up acting, Camila became a snob, only seeking to look good and

be among the

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rich and powerful. Bedecked with finery, cultivating new friends, Camila denied Uncle Pio her friendship. " I will not be criticized. I don't want any advice." (p. 117) Social position and false piety meant more to her, she had become even more selfish. Her cynical view of life and love took over, but a glimpse of hidden humanity showed when, having expressed this to Uncle Pio, she asked forgiveness. " Don't think about me, Uncle Pio. Just forgive, that's all, just try to forgive." (p. 119).

Camila sincerely believed that she was only loved for her beauty, so that when smallpox destroyed this, she became bitter, lived on her pride and turned everyone away. The pride made her sell her clothes and jewels, return all gifts, and plunged her family into poverty. Uncle Pio continued to support and love her, till he was sent away for witnessing the attempts to cover the ravages of smallpox. Despair and shame, bitterness and self pity then became the norm for Camila, until Uncle Pio tricked her into speaking with him. Even then, after agreeing to Jaime's going with Pio, Camila seemed unable to express love, or that she even cared. " A great pain lay at her heart, the pain of a world that was meaningless." (p. 126). Her self-obsessed interpretation, of course.

All this changed on the way to the service for those who died on the Bridge. Camila felt real pain, " that terrible incommunicable pain swept through her..." (p. 138) This was regret, remorse and the knowledge of how she had thrown away chances to accept and give real love. Though a further year of deep despair passed, this revelation of true feeling was the turning point for her. In deciding to approach the Abbess, Camila showed desperation,

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humility and finally an understanding of love and loss. " Mother what shall I do... I have nothing in the world. I love them." She opened her heart and purged her soul, and in such confession, became a changed woman.

That Camila became an unselfish and caring person was made clear when Dona Clara visited the Abbess, who introduced her helper, " leaving me for some work across the city" (p. 142). This was the woman, " who had... been involved in the affair of the bridge and who had formerly

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been an actress." (p. 142). Though the book ended here, the proof of Camila's alteration had been shown for all to understand that no longer did she think only of herself, but understood and applied real love, as Uncle Pio taught it.

Essay 2:

Brother Juniper's Research: Science v. Faith

The view held by the author, when referring to Brother Juniper's project, may best be explained by the words, " It resembled the efforts of those presumptuous souls who wanted to walk the pavements of Heaven and built the Tower of Babel to get there." (p. 12) In other words, it is foolish and impossible to try to use human and physical means to touch, understand and measure God and the spiritual essence of faith. That was the central error of Brother Juniper's activities. He sought to understand and quantify, with scientific and logical methods, both the proofs of God's plans and the fact that individuals received their just desserts, as part of those plans. For example, his desire was " to prove it, historically, mathematically, to his converts, ... so slow to believe that their pains were inserted into their lives for their own good." (p. 12) He believed religion could be made into a

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science.

His motivation seems based on his own belief that this was true, but needed proof, some factual information which would convince others that God had plans which could be known. That is, if the right circumstances and experimental subjects could be examined and documented. He wanted to "justify the ways of God to man" (p. 13). The five who died, he perceived to be just such case studies who would give him answers as to why these five, what were God's plans Having listened to sneers about life and God (particularly from the young master at the University of San Martin), Brother Juniper was "convinced that the world's time had come for proof, tabulated proof." (p. 130). His results in that instance confused the issue; his findings showed that the people who died of plague had more points in his numerical table for saving them, than those who lived. Though this method was abandoned, the young master gave him the idea for carrying out more

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research on those five, when that young man's cynicism was shaken by reading the inscriptions of the love and regard held for a dead woman. Brother Juniper's methods involved "Six years knocking at all the doors in Lima, asking thousands of questions, filling scores of notebooks... establishing the fact that each of the lost lives was a perfect whole." (p 13). He ended up with a huge book, full of minute detail, "as he found himself stumbling about among great dim intimations." He was trying to categorize those five people into those who were, because of a Divine Plan, "the wicked visited by destruction and the good called early to Heaven." (p. 134). His hard work, resulted in a large amount of information, which was so contradictory that he doubted how true or effective it all was in providing the

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proofs he sought, or in helping him to understand any of it. " But Brother Juniper was not satisfied with his reasons." (p. 134). What he was told depended on who told it to him, so he could not place people as good or bad, or fitting into his interpretation of the Divine Plans. Their lives were perceived in many different ways, their characters depended on how they behaved in different circumstances, with different people. For him, the outcome was death and the burning of his book, and though he had been trying to promote faith in God, he also thought nobody believed him. His intentions were good, he just did not consider how true Faith works, nor the facets of human nature.

The narrator seems to suggest that the priest lost sight of the qualities of the human soul, and the individual's relationship with others and with God, the essence of true faith. There might even be an implied criticism; Brother Juniper was too proud and all-knowing, he almost believed himself to be capable of bringing God and Divine intervention down to an earthly, factual level. He was trying to put God and the human soul into a box, which could then be opened to prove and demonstrate the unknowable. He was foolish and over-zealous in trying to make people believe, rather than let them find their own way to faith and understanding of the love of God.

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Essay 3: Topic 2

Uncle Pio Defines the Essence of Love

The book shows a journey made by the souls and hearts of the characters, explaining that within each of them, there is the potential for real, charitable love. This is a truth which can be extracted from the story and applied universally. The message is that we need to stop hankering after our selfish

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vision of what we think love is, and look at what we already possess.

Acceptance of this will allow for peace and our lives will have love that "takes its place among the loyalties." Such love is not dependent on wealth, power, looks or possessions, it accepts a person just as they are.

Dona Maria's journey takes her through pride, self-pity, a passion for control, and the recriminations and reproaches of "an idolatrous" and "fatiguing love" (p. 18) for her daughter Clara, a love not returned in the way she wanted. She lost her religion, then "she secretly refused to believe that anyone (herself excepted) loved anyone." (p. 23). "She loved her daughter not for her daughter's sake, but for her own... She wanted her for herself." (p. 23). This shows explicit self interest and pride. Her drinking and eccentricities frightened Pepita, who would have welcomed and returned love and affection. Instead, Dona Maria writes, "letters to Clara had to take the place of affection" (p. 21). Sending money and gifts are examples of the "false generosity" alluded to in the statement.

The hysterical behavior she indulged in, on learning of Clara's pregnancy, frightened Pepita even more, and caused others to turn away from the demanding, demented old woman. But the visit to the shrine of Santa Maria de Cluxambuqua was the beginning of Dona Maria's change of heart. Her enlightenment brought her to the conclusion that she should leave matters in the hands of God, "What will be, will be." (p. 47). She moved further towards a deeper awareness when she read Pepita's letter to the Abbess. Dona Maria "longed to be back in this simplicity of love, to throw off the burden of pride and vanity that hers had always carried." (p. 48). With this self-

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realization, her love is moving to "take its place among the loyalties" when she looks at the sleeping child and says "Let me live now, let me begin again." (p. 51).

The Abbess, Madre Maria del Pilar, became so wrapped up in her good works, and the desire for their continuation, that she stopped being aware of individuals, people became 'causes' for her. The desire to give women dignity, to save them from the world, was ahead of its time, though well meant. In schooling Pepita, she burdened a child unfairly. As good works depended on money, finding financial support took over, at the expense of real charity. She lost her kindness and "almost her idealism." Though she "wanted to give Pepita the worldly experience of living in the palace,.... She also wanted to bend the old woman to her own interests." (p. 36). This was self-interest and false generosity in action. Though not believing that Dona Maria had a heart, she was willing to sacrifice a young girl to get the money she needed, knowing of Pepita's obedience and loyalty to her. For Pepita, the Abbess was the "only real thing in her life." (p. 136), but was still living with a drunken mistress and thieving servants, mostly terrified, to suit the Abbess's needs.

It did not dawn on her how self-serving she had been, until the night before the service for those lost on the bridge. She realized how she should have been, to Pepita, Manuel and others. "My affection should have more of that color, Pepita." (p. 137), was her thought on hearing the beautiful soprano voice soaring upwards to Heaven. She understood that it did not matter whether her work continued after she died, "it was enough to work..... I have been too busy." (p. 137). From then on, the Abbess acknowledged the truth of real love, explaining to Clara, "All of us have failed.... but in love our

very mistakes don't seem to be able to last long." (p. 140-141). Her perception brings about a deeper commitment to those she helps and the desire to do more for more people.

Camila owed her long and successful acting career to the mentoring and care of Uncle Pio, and while his motivation was at first, not entirely without self interest, it came to be based on a real

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love for her. Her decision to abandon her career for what she perceives to be real love, with the Viceroy; " She adored her elderly admirer, she thought she was going to be happy forever." (p. 105),

also changes her towards Pio, her snobbery makes her ashamed of him. Her biggest mistake, regarding the quality of love, was the belief that it depended upon physical perfection, which may account for her infidelity later, and the apparent lack of feeling toward the sick little son, Jaime, a less than perfect person. After suffering smallpox, her attitude to love is expressed most clearly in these words, " she need look for no more devotion now that her beauty had passed.... she had never realized any love save love as passion." The " long servitude" of Camila is about her considering outward appearances and the trappings of wealth and perceived perfection, as the things which make a person worth loving. Her despair is all self-centered, but it is her pain which makes her finally understand what real love is about - the loss of those who loved her unquestioningly, no matter what or who she was.

" I love them, what shall I do" (p. 139), is a cry from the heart of one who has finally understood the reality of that purest of loves, and for whom the realization has come too late. But as the narrator states at the end of the

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book, using the Abbess to express the idea, and this is true for all of the characters, and anyone who sees that concept as truth; " Now learn,... learn at last that anywhere, you may expect grace." (p. 143) Camila and the Abbess took this to heart and had the chance to put this belief into practice, to alter their lives. The Marquesa died before she could do so, but Uncle Pio's message is clear, do not leave it too late to value what is already there, understanding that love seeks nothing in return.