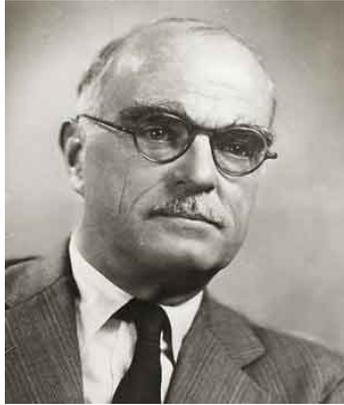


# THE BRIDGE OF SAN LUIS REY

by Thornton Wilder



## THE AUTHOR

Thornton Wilder (1897-1975) was born in Madison, Wisconsin, the son of a newspaper editor. When his father was appointed Consul General in Hong Kong, the family moved there, and Wilder spent the rest of his life moving from one place to another. He obtained his education at Oberlin College and Yale University, where he received his degree in 1920. After a year in Rome studying archaeology, he taught French at the Lawrenceville School in New Jersey, where he did his first serious writing. He turned his attention first to novels, publishing *The Cabala* (1926) and *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927), for which he won the first of his three Pulitzer Prizes. The fame and wealth these books provided allowed him to quit teaching and give his full time to writing, which he did for the rest of his life. In his heyday, he kept company with the leading writers of the era, including Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Willa Cather, along with popular Broadway actors and actresses. Criticism of his later novels caused him to turn to writing for the stage. In the process, he produced his other two Pulitzer Prize-winning efforts, *Our Town* (1938) and *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942). He spent several years in the service as a member of the Air Force Intelligence unit, was decorated by both the Americans and the British, then returned to writing after the war was over, but his later works never achieved the positive acclaim or recognition of his earlier efforts with the exception of *The Matchmaker* (1954), a play that became the basis for the hit Broadway musical *Hello, Dolly!* A later novel, *The Eighth Day* (1967), won a National Book Award. He never married, and died in Connecticut in 1975, the only man ever to win Pulitzers for both fiction and drama.

*The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the first of his works for which Wilder received a Pulitzer, was the breakthrough novel that provided sufficient funds to permit him to leave teaching and begin writing full-time. The story itself is an extended meditation on Luke 13:4, where Jesus is confronted with the problem of evil - why some people suffer death as a result of human cruelty and natural disasters, and who is responsible for such things. Wilder provides no answers, but simply affirms that love is the only thing that gives meaning to an otherwise meaningless life - an ending very similar to that found in *Our Town*. The bridge of San Luis Rey really existed and really did collapse, though the break occurred in 1890, long after the bridge had fallen into disuse.

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Brother Juniper - An Italian Franciscan missionary in Peru who witnessed the collapse of the bridge.
- Doña María - The Marquesa of Montemayor, she was an ugly and unhappy woman who died in the bridge collapse. She later became famous when her letters, which were of high literary quality, were published.
- Doña Clara - Doña María's cold and haughty daughter, she finally escapes the smothering attentions of her mother by marrying a man who takes her away to Spain.
- Pepita - An orphan taken from a convent to be a companion to Doña María, she accompanies Doña María to the shrine of Santa María de Cluxambuqua and dies at the bridge of San Luis Rey.
- Camila Perichole - A famous actress who openly mocks Doña María during one of her performances. She is the mistress of the Viceroy, but becomes an object of devotion to Esteban's brother Manuel. She is the only character in the novel who actually existed, though she did not die in a bridge collapse.
- Madre María del Pilar - The Abbess of the Convent of Santa María Rosa de las Rosas, she hated all men and was something of a proto-feminist. She arranged for Pepita to serve as companion to Doña María while grooming the girl to take her place in the future. She also raised Esteban and his brother Manuel after they were abandoned at the door of the convent as infants.
- Esteban - Abandoned as an infant along with his twin brother Manuel at the door of the Convent of Santa María Rosa de las Rosas, he is raised by Madre María del Pilar. He, too, dies in the bridge collapse shortly after attempting suicide following the death of his brother.
- Manuel - Esteban's twin brother; the two enjoy a close relationship that is severed when Manuel falls in love with Camila Perichole. She knows nothing of his feelings for her, but Esteban feels left out and in the way. Manuel eventually dies from an infected cut on his knee.
- Captain Alvarado - A sea captain who carried Doña María's letters to her daughter in Spain; he also was asked by the Abbess to contact Esteban at the University of Cuzco in order to convince him to accompany him on his next ocean voyage.
- Uncle Pio - Camila Perichole's constant companion and, if the gossips were to be believed (they were not), her father, he was an illegitimate child who had lived by his wits since the age of ten by pursuing every unsavory business imaginable. He dies in the bridge collapse, taking with him Camila's only son, Don Jaime.

- Don Andrés de Ribera - The Viceroy of Peru, he employed Uncle Pio in a variety of questionable tasks and took Camila Perichole as his mistress.
- The Archbishop - A corpulent Epicurean who enjoyed fine food and salacious literature, but otherwise lived a life of moral purity, though he did little to discipline his priests or help the poor under his care.
- Don Jaime - Camila's seven-year-old son by the Viceroy, he dies with Uncle Pio as the two are traveling to Lima so the old man can educate the lad.

### NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“The bridge seemed to be among the things that last forever; it was unthinkable that it should break.” (Part I, p.5)

“At that moment a twanging noise filled the air, as when the string of some musical instrument snaps in a disused room, and he saw the bridge divide and fling five gesticulating ants into the valley below.” (Part I, p.7)

“If there were any plan in the universe at all, if there were any pattern in a human life, surely it would be discovered mysteriously latent in those lives so suddenly cut off. Either we live by accident and die by accident, or we live by plan and die by plan. And on that instant Brother Juniper made the resolve to inquire into the secret lives of those five persons, that moment falling through the air, and to surprise the reason of their taking off.” (Part I, p.7)

“It seemed to Brother Juniper that it was high time for theology to take its place among the exact sciences and he had long intended putting it there. What he had lacked hitherto was a laboratory.” (Part I, p.7)

“People were always looking for good sound proofs; doubt springs eternal in the human breast, even in countries where the Inquisition can read your very thoughts in your eyes.” (Part I, p.8)

“Some say that we shall never know and that to the gods we are like flies that boys kill on a summer day, and some say, on the contrary, that the very sparrows do not lose a feather that has not been brushed away by the finger of God.” (Part I, p.10)

“Her religious beliefs went first, for all she could ask of a god, or of immortality, was the gift of a place where daughters love their mothers; the other attributes of Heaven you could have for a song.” (Part II, p.18)

“The women of Peru, even her nuns, went through life with two notions: one, that all the misfortunes that might befall them were merely due to the fact that they were not sufficiently attractive to bind some man to their maintenance and, two, that all the misery in the world was worth his caress.” (Part II, p.30)

“The language was the symbol of their profound identity with one another, for just as resignation was a word insufficient to describe the spiritual change that came over the Marquesa de Montemayor on that night in the inn at Cluxambuqua, so *love* is inadequate to describe the tacit almost ashamed oneness of these brothers.” (Part III, p.47)

“[Uncle Pio] possessed the six attributes of the adventurer - a memory for names and faces, with the aptitude for altering his own; the gift of tongues; inexhaustible invention; secrecy; the talent for falling into conversation with strangers; and that freedom from conscience that springs from a contempt for the dozing rich he preyed upon.” (Part IV, p.78)

“The Archbishop knew that most of the priests of Peru were scoundrels. It required all his delicate Epicurean education to prevent his doing something about it; he had to repeat over to himself his favorite notions: that the injustice and unhappiness in the world is a constant; that the theory of progress is a delusion; that the poor, never having known happiness, are insensible to misfortune.” (Part IV, p.92)

“[Uncle Pio] regarded love as a sort of cruel malady through which the elect are required to pass in their late youth and from which they emerge, pale and wrung, but ready for the business of living.” (Part IV, p.94)

“The discrepancy between faith and the facts is greater than is generally assumed.” (Part V, p.113)

“I shall spare you Brother Juniper’s generalizations. They are always with us. He thought he saw in the same accident the wicked visited by destruction and the good called early to Heaven. He thought he saw pride and wealth confounded as an object lesson to the world, and he thought he saw humility crowned and rewarded for the edification of the city. But Brother Juniper was not satisfied with his reasons. It was just possible that the Marquesa de Montemayor was not a monster of avarice, and Uncle Pio of self-indulgence.” (Part V, p.115-116)

“Now learn . . . at last that anywhere you may expect grace.” (Abbess, Part V, p.121)

“Even now almost no one remembers Esteban and Pepita, but myself. Camila alone remembers her Uncle Pio and her son; this woman, her mother. But soon we shall die and all memory of those five will have left the earth, and we ourselves shall be loved for a while and forgotten. 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 a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning.” (Abbess, Part V, p.123)

## **PLOT SUMMARY**

### **PART ONE - PERHAPS AN ACCIDENT**

The novel begins with a rope bridge in Peru breaking and plunging five people to their deaths in the chasm below on Friday, July 20, 1714. The bridge had been woven by the Incas

more than a century earlier, and was named for Saint Louis (King Louis IX of France), who was believed to protect the bridge and those who crossed it. Its collapse was viewed as a national tragedy; a service was held in the Cathedral in Lima and everywhere people repented of their sins and thanked God they had not been on the bridge at the time of the disaster.

The accident was witnessed by Brother Juniper, an Italian Franciscan who was serving as a missionary in Peru at the time. He was walking in the mountains and paused to enjoy the view, filled with joy at the beauty of God's creation and pleased with the response of the Indians to his ministry. He just happened to glance down into the gorge when the ropes snapped and five people fell to their deaths. He immediately began to wonder why those five in particular had died, and he determined to look into their lives in order to seek the answer. His main interest was in discovering God's intentions in such calamities; this, after all, was the perfect opportunity, since the event was an Act of God in the purest sense. He approached the matter, not as a skeptic ready to challenge God's goodness or even His very existence, but as a believer seeking evidence for what he already knew to be true in order to communicate it to his flock.

For the next six years, Brother Juniper pursued his research, knocking on doors and asking questions about the five who had died. His goal was to demonstrate that each had died at precisely the right time because his or her life was complete in every respect. The result was an enormous book that was publicly burned by the Inquisition, though a secret copy survived to gather dust in the library in the University of San Marco. The narrator doubts, however, that Brother Juniper ever got to the hearts of his subjects, and wonders whether such a thing is even possible.

## PART TWO - THE MARQUESA DE MONTEMAYOR

Doña María, the Marquesa of Montemayor, was the most prominent of the casualties from the bridge. She gained fame after her death through the publication of her letters, which stand as great achievements of Spanish literature. Contrary to the beauty of her prose, however, the woman herself was ugly from childhood and the object of constant ridicule by her mother. Determined to reject social expectations by remaining single, she finally gave in to family pressure and married a ruined nobleman at the age of twenty-six. She soon bore a daughter on whom she doted, but who turned out to be cold and mean-spirited, and who finally managed to escape the smothering affection of her mother by marrying a Spaniard and moving to a different continent. Doña María then was left with little to do other than talking to herself constantly and roaming the streets, often in a drunken condition. Had she not had friends in high places she probably would have been brought before the Inquisition or committed to an asylum. The daughter, meanwhile, became a rising star in the Spanish court, bestowing her bounty on artists and scientists, living lavishly, but still ignoring her mother. One visit four years after the daughter's departure was a disaster, and thenceforth the two restricted their contact to periodic letters - the masterpieces that later made Doña María's reputation, though they were barely read by her daughter and only preserved because of the care of her son-in-law. The rejection of her by her daughter led Doña María to abandon her faith and become cynical about human nature in general, concluding that no one but herself was truly capable of love.

One day Doña María went to the theater to see the great actress Camila Perichole and took with her a young orphan named Pepita. Between acts, the star improvised a song in which she mocked Doña María in front of the entire audience. Pepita suggested that they leave the theater, at which point the entire crowd erupted in laughter and applause and Perichole danced with glee,

knowing that her performance would lead to a raise in salary, though Doña María was oblivious to all that was happening around her. The Viceroy was enraged that one of his noblewomen was so mistreated and ordered Perichole to visit her and apologize, but when she arrived Doña María was hung over after a week of inebriation. The old lady was completely confused about the reason for the apology and brushed off Perichole's words, instead congratulating her on her great performance. The actress, thinking Doña María was pretending ignorance out of magnanimity, knelt and kissed her hand.

Pepita was invited to live with Doña María as her companion when she reached the age of fourteen; she saw the old woman at her worst but remained unflaggingly loyal. Unbeknownst to both the girl and the old woman, Pepita was being groomed by the Abbess of the convent to take her place when she died. Shortly after Pepita's arrival to stay at the palace, the Marquesa got a letter from her daughter in Spain announcing that she was expecting a child. Doña María became frantic at the thought and began adopting all sorts of rituals, Christian, pagan, and pure peasant superstition, in order to protect her anticipated grandchild, driving her servants crazy in the process. Finally she took a pilgrimage to the shrine of Santa María de Cluxambuqua. As she approached the town where the shrine was located, she was carried in her chair across the bridge of San Luis Rey, the most revered in all of Peru. At the shrine she received an insulting letter from her daughter, but quickly forgave her; Pepita, meanwhile, made all the arrangements for their stay in the village. After completing her duties, she wrote a letter to the Abbess, but when Doña María found it, she became jealous that another woman was able to command Pepita's affections so completely. When Pepita discovered that her letter had been read, she refused to send it and tore it up instead. Doña María was terribly ashamed of her behavior to the girl and determined to turn over a new leaf and start life anew. Two days later, on the way back to Lima, Doña María and Pepita fell to their deaths from the bridge of San Luis Rey.

### PART THREE - ESTEBAN

One day twin boys were abandoned in a basket at the door of the Convent of Santa María Rosa de las Rosas. The Abbess took them in, named them Esteban and Manuel (though no one could ever tell the two apart), and raised them among the nuns. When they grew too old to live in the convent, they assisted at churches all over Lima, doing whatever they could to help. They eventually became skilled scribes and gained reputations for transcribing documents, scripts for plays, and especially musical scores. They suffered much teasing because they could not be distinguished from one another, and developed a secret language of their own that bonded them together and gave them a place of refuge from the cruel outside world. They were so closely bound to one another that each knew instinctively where the other was and what he was doing despite their conscious efforts to avoid appearing together in public.

After a while they grew tired of working as scribes and took a series of jobs on the docks, as teamsters, and working on farms. They eventually returned to Lima and resumed their work as copyists. One night the theater manager gave them free tickets. Neither man enjoyed the play, since they much preferred silence, but Manuel was smitten by Camila Perichole. His crush on her drove a wedge between the brothers, especially when the actress asked Manuel to write some letters for her to the Viceroy and to a bullfighter with whom she was enamored that he had to keep secret, even from Esteban. One night she visited their room while Esteban was in bed to get Manuel to write a letter for her. Esteban was hurt by the signs he saw of a relationship involving

his brother that he could not share, and Manuel, sensing his hurt and valuing his brother more than the actress, determined never to see the Perichole again. When Manuel shared his decision with Esteban, the latter insisted he should not abandon his love for his sake. The two quarreled and Esteban prepared to go out for a walk in the middle of the night, but Manuel convinced him to go back to bed. Manuel, true to his word, refused the next commission offered him by the Perichole.

One day Manuel cut his knee on a piece of metal. The wound became infected and Esteban located a surgeon barber who treated Manuel with various nostrums, but the pain only worsened until Manuel became delirious. In his delirium, the inner thoughts of his heart came out his mouth and he cursed Esteban for separating him from the love of his life. When Manuel awoke in his right mind the next morning, Esteban told him what he had said in his delirium and Manuel insisted that he should think nothing of it; he even refused when Esteban offered to bring the Perichole to him for a visit. That night, however, the cursing began all over again. The noise became so bad that the neighbors reported them to the landlord, who threatened to throw them out into the street if the racket continued. One the third night, however, Esteban called for a priest and Manuel died.

When the Abbess came to the apartment to make arrangements about the body, Esteban told her that he was Manuel. So shaken that he was unable to attend his brother's funeral, Esteban wandered the countryside for weeks, unable to hold a job and unwilling to speak to anyone. Finally he took a job as a copyist at the university in Cuzco. The Abbess heard of this and asked Captain Alvarado, a world traveler who had carried Doña María's letters to her daughter, to bring him along on his next voyage. When he found Esteban in Cuzco, the young man agreed, but said he had to return to Lima first. He wanted to use his wages for the voyage to buy a present for the Abbess from him and Manuel. Captain Alvarado suggested the two go to Lima together. Esteban woke the following morning and announced that he had changed his mind, and as soon as the Captain left he tried to hang himself. The Captain found him in time and the to set off for Lima, but Esteban died on the way when the bridge of San Luis Rey collapsed.

#### PART FOUR - UNCLE PIO

Uncle Pio, an old man whom Doña María considered excellent company despite his dissipation, was Camila Perichole's constant companion, tending to her needs, running her errands, and helping her learn her lines (Camila was illiterate), among other things; he was also, according to the gossips, erroneously thought to be her father. He was an illegitimate child from Castile who ran away from home at the age of ten and thereafter lived by his wits in Madrid, spreading gossip, selling secrets, fomenting minor rebellions at the behest of the government so they could crush them mercilessly, spying for anyone who would hire him, including the Inquisition, and even pimping when called upon by some wealthy nobleman to cater to his pleasures. He never was able to settle down to anything for long, however. The three things he cherished most were his independence, beautiful women, and literature and the theater.

One time he became involved in some unpleasantness in a brothel and decided to seek his fortune in Peru, where he quickly resumed his old ways. He soon gained the confidence of the Viceroy. His life was changed forever when he went to a café and heard a twelve-year-old singer by the name of Micaela Villegas. He bought her and took her to his house to live, training her voice and teaching her to act; thus was born Camila Perichole. The two developed a deep love and unshakeable loyalty to one another. As they traveled from Mexico to the islands of the Pacific, he drove her toward excellence, and even when she became famous in Lima, he drove her

ever onward toward perfection. She soon became bored because of the poverty of parts available to women in the Spanish theater and only gave her very best when a new actress joined the company and the star felt she needed to prove herself anew. Her life took on a new dimension when the Viceroy of Peru, Don Andrés de Ribera, began inviting her to late-night dinners at the palace. She was drawn to him for what he was able to teach her of the world, and in response her acting reached new heights. Uncle Pio worried about the affair at first, but became content when he saw the impact it had on her performances.

One day the Viceroy invited the Archbishop of Peru to one of his late-night dinners; both the fat old man and the young actress were eager to meet one another. Soon Uncle Pio and Captain Alvarado were also included. Conversation would often go on until dawn, while Camila would fall asleep against the Viceroy's shoulder. Eventually she bore the nobleman three children, but she never actually fell in love with him, tiring of him and returning to casual affairs with actors and matadors. Much to Uncle Pio's horror, she also became bored with the stage; her new passion was to become a fine lady. She left the theater at the age of thirty and began to put on airs and move in high society, somehow within five years convincing people to forget her humble origins, her many affairs, and her illegitimate children. When Don Andrés built a small palace in the hills near Cluxambuqua, she built herself a villa nearby. Her new position in society required that she distance herself from Uncle Pio, which she cruelly did, much to his sorrow.

One day he visited her in her villa to try to convince her to return to the theater, perhaps in Madrid, or even to go away to an isolated island where she could be herself and be loved for herself rather than constantly pretending to be what she thinks others will approve. She refused his request and sent him away, first begging his forgiveness. She admitted that she was upset because her only son was ill. Soon she contracted smallpox. As a result she lost her beauty, much to the delight of her envious former fans, and became a recluse. The Viceroy and the Archbishop sought to draw her back into society, but she refused and plunged into deep depression. Uncle Pio refused to give up, however, traveling frequently to the villa in order to help with the children and manage the farm. She heaped abuse upon him, but he never deserted her, understanding better than she did the stages of grief through which she was passing. One day, however, he accidentally entered the door to her room while she was putting on a heavy paste to try to conceal her scars. Furious, she threw him out of the house and told him never to return. About a week later he sneaked back to the villa and tricked her into talking to him, asking her to send her son with him to Lima for a year so he could educate the boy. She refused at first, but finally agreed to let the boy go if he wished it. The next morning Uncle Pio and young Don Jaime left for Lima, and perished when the bridge of San Luis Rey collapsed.

## PART FIVE - PERHAPS AN INTENTION

A new bridge was built to replace the old rope structure and the collapse of the bridge of San Luis Rey passed into Peruvian folklore. Brother Juniper's book about the tragedy was not his first effort to quantify the work of God. When plague struck an isolated village, he listed the qualities of the dead and the survivors, assigning each a value on each quality on a scale of one to ten and discovered that the dead were five times more worth saving than those who survived; he promptly tore up his results and threw them into the ocean. The massive tome he compiled about the fatalities on the bridge was unsatisfying, even to him. The Inquisition liked it even less, declaring it heretical and ordering it burned in the city square along with its author.

The narrator then returns to the funeral for the victims of the bridge collapse. Among the many mourners were the Viceroy, guiltily going through the motions; Captain Alvarado, who couldn't stand the hypocrisy of it all and walked out of the Cathedral; the Abbess, who mourned not only her dear Pepita, but also the loss of her dream that her work in Peru might continue after her death; and Camila, who started for Lima to attend the funeral but stopped halfway there, consumed with guilt and convinced that smallpox, the illness of her son, and finally the death of Jaime and Uncle Pio were God's judgment upon her. A year later, after hearing that the Abbess too had lost two people she loved in the accident, she determined to seek comfort from the old woman. The Abbess received her gladly and she was finally able to pour out the sorrows of a lifetime into a sympathetic ear.

The narrator next turns to the question of what happened as a result of the bridge collapse. How was the world different? Camila became a volunteer helper in the convent hospital, and Clara was reconciled at last to her mother, albeit after the latter's death.

## ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* may be read as an extended meditation on Luke 13:4, which reads, "Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?" How does Wilder answer the question? Is his answer the same as that of Brother Juniper? Is it the same as that given by Jesus?
2. The titles of the first and last sections of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* suggest that the book deals with the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility or between chance and determinism. What answers does Wilder provide for these age-old paradoxes? Are his answers biblical? Support your response with specifics from the novel and from Scripture.
3. Thornton Wilder often addressed questions at the heart of the meaning of human existence in his literary works. This is true of two of his Pulitzer Prize-winning works, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* and *Our Town*. Using these works, analyze Wilder's view of what brings meaning to human existence. Consider particularly the role of love in his thinking, being sure to support your conclusions with specifics from both works.
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5. The interconnectedness of all humanity is a leading theme in the works of Thornton Wilder. Discuss how this theme is played out in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* and *Our Town*. Cite specific quotations in each work that bring out this theme and analyze how it is amplified through the corresponding plots. Did Wilder's thinking about this issue change or develop in the decade between the two works?
6. In Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, Brother Juniper writes a book about the people who are killed when the bridge of San Luis Rey collapses. His purpose is to ascertain the cause of the event and apportion responsibility between God and the victims. Why is he burned at the stake by the Inquisition? Is the charge of heresy lodged against him justifiable? Why or why not?
7. In Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, Brother Juniper, who witnessed the collapse of the bridge, sought to demonstrate that the victims' lives were complete, thus justifying the act of God in removing them from the earth. Does the novel picture the lives of the three to whom chapters are devoted as complete? Why or why not? Support your conclusions with details from the text.
8. In Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the author is clearly trying to communicate certain broad truths about human existence. In telling the story, however, he connects the victims through other characters like Camila Perichole, the Abbess, and Captain Alvarado. Does the fact that, in the huge capital city of Peru, the victims all seem to know the same people undermine the universality of his message, or are these relationships a necessary part of what he is trying to say? Support your conclusions with specifics from the novel.
9. In Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the author presents the collapse of the bridge as a blessing to many people. Cite three examples and discuss how this fact relates to the major themes of the book concerning the providence of God and the problem of evil.
10. In William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Gloucester says, "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport." This line is quoted in Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* as one possible explanation for the collapse of the bridge. Compare and contrast the explanations for human calamity given in Shakespeare's play and Wilder's novel. What do they have in common, and in what ways are they different? Does either author in the end agree with Gloucester's gloomy assessment?
11. The narrator of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* alludes in Part One to Matthew 10:29-31, where Jesus assures His followers of God's care for them by comparing it to His providential care for sparrows, none of which falls to the ground without His knowledge. Does the story itself affirm this confidence in God's providence? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with quotations from the novel.

12. In speaking of his novel, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, Thornton Wilder said, “*The Bridge* asked the question whether the intention that lies behind love was sufficient to justify the desperation of living.” He also argued that the task of a writer was not to answer questions, but to pose them clearly. Answers, however, are always implicit in the ways that questions are presented. What answer does Wilder imply to the question he said is at the heart of the novel? Support your conclusion with details from the story.
13. Thornton Wilder once criticized playwrights and novelists who wrote with the desire to say, “This moral truth can be learned from beholding this action.” He argued instead that literature should portray life as it is and allow the reader or viewer to draw his own conclusions. To what extent has he succeeded in fulfilling this goal in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*? Is it even possible for a writer to avoid imposing his own moral sensibilities on what he writes? Support your analysis with specific quotations from the novel.
14. In Thornton Wilder’s *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, Brother Juniper sets out to write a theodicy – “to justify the ways of God to man.” Is his work an act of faith or an exercise in futility? Why do you think so? What does the narrator think about his attempt? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
15. In Thornton Wilder’s *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the author employs an anonymous narrator to describe the histories of the victims of the bridge collapse. Why does he choose to do this rather than using Brother Juniper as a narrator, since he had done much of the research on which those histories were based? How does this choice affect the reader’s perception of characters and events? Support your analysis with quotations and details from the plot of the novel.
16. In Thornton Wilder’s *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the three central characters to whom chapters are devoted are all victims of rejected love. Compare and contrast these three central characters. Which can be most readily seen as victim of injustice? Which is most responsible for his or her own sorrows? What might the author be saying through their central similarities?
17. Thornton Wilder once said that the central question of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* is, “Is there a direction and meaning in the lives of people beyond the individual’s own will?” How does the novel answer the question, or does it answer it at all? Support your analysis with specifics from the book.
18. Critic Russell Banks described Thornton Wilder’s *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* as “as close to perfect a moral fable as we are ever likely to get in American literature.” Do you agree? Typically, a fable concludes with some intimation that “the moral of the story is . . .” If the novel is a moral fable, what is its moral? If not, why not? Be sure to support your analysis with specifics from the novel.

19. At the beginning of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, Brother Juniper witnesses the collapse of the bridge. The reader is told that "he saw the bridge divide and fling five gesticulating ants into the valley below." What is the significance of the description of the victims as "gesticulating ants"? Is this the perspective of Brother Juniper, the narrator, or the author? On what basis would you make your determination, and what is the significance of the phrase for the overall message of the novel?
20. In Part One of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the narrator says, "It seemed to Brother Juniper that it was high time for theology to take its place among the exact sciences and he had long intended putting it there. What he had lacked hitherto was a laboratory." Is such a scientific approach to theology possible? Why or why not? To what extent does the novel answer that question? Be sure to support your answer, not only from the novel, but from Scripture as well.
21. In Part One of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the narrator says, "People were always looking for good sound proofs; doubt springs eternal in the human breast, even in countries where the Inquisition can read your very thoughts in your eyes." The statement is a play on words derived from a couplet in Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*: "Hope springs eternal in the human breast / Man is, but always to be blest." Pope's poem is a theodicy of the sort attempted by Brother Juniper (though from a Deist perspective). What is the author trying to say by the twist he puts on the famous quotation? Does this shed light on the difference between the two theodicies? Use quotations from both works to support your argument.
22. In Part II of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the narrator describes the Marquesa in the following terms: "Her religious beliefs went first, for all she could ask of a god, or of immortality, was the gift of a place where daughters love their mothers; the other attributes of Heaven you could have for a song." If you were to evaluate the faith described in this sentence, what is wrong with it? How does it contrast with true saving faith? Be sure to use the characterization of the Marquesa in the novel as well as passages of Scripture in your assessment.
23. In Part Four of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the narrator says the following: "The Archbishop knew that most of the priests of Peru were scoundrels. It required all his delicate Epicurean education to prevent his doing something about it; he had to repeat over to himself his favorite notions: that the injustice and unhappiness in the world is a constant; that the theory of progress is a delusion; that the poor, never having known happiness, are insensible to misfortune." Compare this description with the Bible's teaching about the qualities of the true man of God. What are the consequences of the Archbishop's unfaithfulness, both in his own life and in the lives of others?
24. In Part Five of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the narrator says, "The discrepancy between faith and the facts is greater than is generally assumed." Do you agree? Why or why not? How does this attitude differ from the biblical assertion that faith is "the assurance of things not seen"?

25. In Part Five of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the Abbess says, "Now learn . . . at last that anywhere you may expect grace." What does the author intend us to understand by this? Is the statement biblical? Why or why not? Does the Bible mean the same thing as Wilder in his assessment of the place of grace in the world?
26. In Part Five of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the narrator tells us, "I shall spare you Brother Juniper's generalizations. They are always with us. He thought he saw in the same accident the wicked visited by destruction and the good called early to Heaven. He thought he saw pride and wealth confounded as an object lesson to the world, and he thought he saw humility crowned and rewarded for the edification of the city. But Brother Juniper was not satisfied with his reasons." Is this rather cynical conclusion an accurate reflection of how many Christians deal with the problem of evil? Why or why not? Critique his assessment from the standpoint of Scripture. What might he have said that would be a more accurate reflection of the Bible's teaching on the subject?
27. Some critics have suggested that Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* could take as its concluding lesson the words of James 4:13-17. Do you agree? Cite specific quotations from the novel that indicate the value the author places on these words written by James in your analysis.
28. One of the repeated themes emerging from Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* is the unequal nature of all loving relationships and the pain caused by that inequality. How does the novel illustrate these themes? What conclusion is the reader intended to draw from this aspect of human relationships? Be sure to employ Scripture as well as specifics from the novel in your analysis.
29. In Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, Uncle Pio is described as a Pygmalion to Camila Perichole's Galatea. Is this an accurate description? How well does their relationship fit the Greek myth? How does that relationship help to communicate the central themes of the novel?
30. In Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, Uncle Pio is described as a Pygmalion to Camila Perichole's Galatea. Compare and contrast their relationship with that of Henry Higgins to Eliza Doolittle in George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*. Be sure to consider as well the ideas the two authors are trying to communicate through the relationships in question.
31. In Part One of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the reader is told that "the whole purport of literature is the language of the heart." In what sense is the novel a commentary on this statement? Consider not only the forms of literature that appear within the story, such as the Marquesa's letters, Camila's performances, and the twins' secret language among others, but also take into account the novel itself.

32. If, according to the narrator of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, love is "the only survival, the only meaning," can the reader expect to find in the novel a character who is a genuine exemplar of love? Does any model of love stand out above the others as portraying what the author seeks to advocate, or are all the characters in the novel intended to illustrate genuine love by their failure to achieve it? Support your conclusion with specifics from the book.
33. In Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, what does the bridge symbolize? Discuss the rich significance of the metaphor by suggesting three possible meanings and developing each through the use of incidents, characters, and quotations from the novel.
34. Critic Jonathan Yardley, speaking of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, says that the book "deals in universals and just happens to be set in Peru." Is this an accurate assessment of the role of setting in the novel? Could the story have been set in another location with equal success? Why or why not? Support your arguments with specifics from the book.
35. At a memorial service in London for those who died on September 11, 2001, British Prime Minister Tony Blair concluded his eulogy with the closing words of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*: "There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning." Was this an appropriate way to give meaning to a seemingly meaningless tragedy? How did the fall of the Twin Towers differ from the collapse of the bridge in the novel? Be sure to use both the book and the Bible in evaluating the suitability of Blair's eulogy.
36. Some have suggested that the central theme of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* is the search for meaning. To what extent is this true? Choose three characters in the book who seek meaning and discuss the extent to which they find it. You may alternatively include the narrator and even the author should you choose to do so.
37. Love as described by Paul in I Corinthians 13 and by others elsewhere in the Bible is selfless, independent of the response of the object of that love. Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* has much to say about the theme of love and its importance in human relationships. Does any character in the story display the kind of selfless, *agape* love advocated in Scripture and personified in the work of Christ? Choose three examples from the novel and evaluate them on the basis of the biblical standard. Be sure to include the Marquesa, whose final letter is (erroneously) described as "her Second Corinthians."
38. The collapse of the bridge in Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* has a lasting impact on some of the characters who survive. Discuss the changes that occur in the lives of Camila Perichole, the Abbess, and Doña Clara. Do these changes in any way justify the tragedy? Why or why not? How do these changes contribute to the major themes of the novel?

39. Many of the characters in Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* face internal conflicts. Choose three who deal with struggles within themselves and discuss how these struggles are resolved (if indeed they are) and what the resolutions (or lack thereof) contribute to the major themes of the novel.
  
40. Several characters in Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* die shortly after undergoing major changes in their lives and outlooks, but before they are able to implement them. Does this fact indicate an underlying optimism or pessimism on the part of the author with regard to human nature and the meaning of human life? Support your analysis with specifics from the characters to whom this question applies.