

Comparison of the description
Rosa del Valle in Allende's 'The
House Of Spirits' and Anna
Karenin in Tolstoy's 'Anna
Karenin' .

By Solange Di Rocca

Marymount International School, London

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The style of description of author varies from one to another like fingerprints that allow us to distinguish and gain different feels from them and perceive their work in different ways. A writer's style of writing in fact influences the reader greatly when interpreting the novel or piece of writing, in prose like in poetry. These styles of writing are often used as tools by authors to create and develop a certain mood in their work.

Descriptions are important in all pieces of work as they allow us, the reader, to analyse the writers' style. By taking two writers' descriptions, one can compare the techniques used by the authors. I have decided to take two very different authors, Leo Tolstoy and Isabel Allende, and compare the first description of two characters, Rosa del Valle and Anna Karenin, both described as beautiful individuals in both novels.

In the first novel, 'the House of spirits' by Isabel Allende, Rosa del Valle's description is the focus of the very first chapter. The narrator gives this particular description whilst the mother, Nívea, looks over her oldest daughter during a church ceremony. The words used by the narrator to describe Rosa are simple and familiar. Through this description we are taken back to her birth in order to explain the character's unique beauty. The narrator in fact knows everything that the mother herself knows about her daughter in much detail, because of the nature of the narration we are quickly brought into the story. Rosa is portrayed as a creature out of this world 'this chill of hers seemed to have been made of a different material from the rest of the human race'¹ 'the tone of her skin, with its soft bluish lights, and of her hair, as well as her slow movements and silent character, all made one think of some inhabitant of the sea.'² With blue hair and golden eyes, like a mermaid, she is described as a beauty like no other on this earth and all this accentuated by the authors choice of words and comparisons, such as the mermaid and an angel, both supernatural creatures.

¹ Page: 14, lines: 25-27

² Page: 15, lines: 10-13

Tolstoy however employs a different method to Allende's. Anna Karenin is discovered, or seen, relatively late in the novel, as Vronsky meets her and his mother in a train station. His description of this particular character is through a narrator who in turn speaks the view of Vronsky, as it is often done in novels, where a narrator is able to understand each character's every thought. There is a slight air of formality in the way that he first sees this woman. His first analysis is that she must be upper class. The description explores from the outside in starting quite formally describing her as any other person but as we are told directly, but as he ' was about to enter the carriage but felt he must have another look at her -not because of her beauty, not o account of the elegance and unassuming grace of her whole figure, but because of something tender and caressing in her lovely face as she passed him'³. In this passage we immediately sense something special about this woman, she is beautiful and gentle and something makes her stand out of the crowd of people.

Both these characters are beautiful each in its individual way. We can see this through their descriptions. Both women stand out because of their beauty, which is a prominent object of their description in both passages. And yet their descriptions remain very different. Rosa's beauty is depicted as something out of this world, something so beautiful that it could not possibly belong to this earth, where as Anna Karenin's is a beauty very much real. Tolstoy use s no imagery nor makes any comparisons; he describes her, as she is a beautiful woman. Her description is also quite cold, as neither the reader nor the narrator knows anything about this woman, the mystery enveloping her is however, also part of her charismatic beauty, it is a kind of enigmatic beauty that, never the less never aspires to be anything but real.

We can perhaps say that Rosa, as a character is explored much more than Anna Karenin in this first description. Rosa's is in fact an in-depth analysis of the character where as Tolstoy decides to keep Anna Karenin like a bit of a puzzle, to be uncovered by the reader throughout the novel itself, giving this character much more depth. Tolstoy manages this by choosing the correct point

³ Page: 75, Lines: 4-8

of view through which she is firstly seen, in fact Vronsky does not even recognize who she is; this technique allows the reader to become more involved and intrigued very much like Vronsky himself.

By simply examining these passages containing the descriptions of these two characters, one can have an idea of the style of writing employed by the authors. We can see how Tolstoy uses a very realistic approach whilst Allende's description is much more free and adventurous; these methods are used by the authors for a purpose. In fact to some extent the description of these characters reflects onto them and the rest of the story.

Allende, describes Rosa in such a way as to pull the reader into a story which has obviously already begun, as we can see by the in depth analysis of Rosa which recalls her childhood, and like a vortex pulls the readers into it; whereas Anna Karenin's description leaves much to the imagination, and slowly brings the reader into the story. This is Tolstoy's preferred technique, never giving too much away intriguing the reader.

These two novels are very different and the methods used to describe the two characters also differ on many levels, the characters themselves are very different, almost opposites, but they share one thing in common and that is beauty. Beauty is very prominent in both descriptions and it is universal, many have written about it in different styles and manner but beauty remains beauty, the concept can be understood by anyone who has experienced, and all the writer needs to do is to tap into some aspect of the readers experience of beauty, by using different methods of description, in order to make these descriptions successful ones, such as these by Allende and Tolstoy; which although different, successful in its own purpose.

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