

Analyzing the house on mango street

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Sandra Cisneros' "The House on the Mango Street" weaves a thought-provoking, coming-of-age tale of a young girl. She is not only struggling to grow up to become a fine lady like usual American girls, but she is faced with shame, guilt and disappointment as her family is embarking on to acquire a new home in America. As the story comes to a full circle, the readers would inevitably commiserate with how the girl dealt with the scenarios she had faced.

She did not only have to go through the complicated journey with her family to their new home, but she has to deal with the big disappointment that their new house is not what she hoped for. These difficulties definitely fanned some fire inside her - to become more determined and strive harder in the future. In the end, readers could predict her utter frustration why things are always tough for immigrant people like them in America.

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Point of View, Setting and Characters

Sandra Cisneros' "The House on Mango Street" has the ability to pinch one's heart because the narrator's point of view belongs to a young girl. Her family has to undergo an awkward transition of looking for a permanent place to live. Readers will immediately infer that the young girl's family has Chicano roots because the girl enumerated the members of the family in beginning her story -- Papa, Mama, Carlos, Kiki and Nenny.

What's admirable about Cisneros' conversational style of story-writing is that everyone can relate to their experiences. At one point in anyone's life, we all can identify with the travails of going through a house transfer. Anyone's

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initial reaction will be to feel excited of how our new house will look like or who our new neighbors will be. Unfortunately, for the young girl, she is bound to be betrayed by her own expectations.

The setting of the story takes place in a suburb where Chicanos are living in. We can assume that this community is filled with Mexicans, Puerto Ricans or any previous residents of South American countries. These people, like all other immigrants, will always want to stay close to people who would understand them. Since this community is not the usual American neighborhood with homes that have freshly-mown lawns and white picket fences, the narrator is still hoping for the best about the house her father got them in Mango Street.

For the narrator, Mango Street is more than street sign; it is her marker that circumscribes the dream that she and her family had brought with them. Her father and mother challenged themselves to cross their country of origin to United States, just to be assured of a better future. This new house will simply be one aspect of attaining their dream --- to have a more comfortable life in this new place, in this new country. At the start, we can almost smell her overflowing relief of receiving the news about the new house.

The narrator justifies that finally they no longer have to pay the rent, “ share the yard with the people downstairs” and there won’t be anymore “ landlord banging in the ceiling with a broom”. However, when she saw the house in Mango Street, she was disappointed. She becomes aware of her own subjective perceptions as she begins to differentiate her family’s wonderful dreams and society’s ugly realities. Thus, she becomes conscious of her parents’ inability to fulfill their promises of the perfect house. She

thought that “ They always told us that one day we would move into a house, a real house” (p. 223). However, the “ real house” the narrator expected would be “ like the houses on TV”:

Our house would be white with trees around it, a great big yard and grass growing without a fence. This was the house Papa talked about when he held a lottery ticket and this was the house Mama dreamed up in the stories she told us before we went to bed.

But the house on Mango Street is not the way she told it at all (p. 224).

Anyone could just imagine the look on her face when she saw their new house. The new house is just the opposite of what she expected. This fact also corresponds to the direct opposition to the words of her parents. This contrast between expectation and reality awakens her awareness of herself as a social being and provokes her own interpretations of the significance the house holds in her life.

Theme

Apparently, when the narrator saw the house on Mango Street, it transformed from being a symbol of hope to become a symbol of poverty. The narrator associates this realization with the humiliation she has felt in the past, when her family lived in similar places. She recollected back in Lonnis when a nun from her school accosted her:

Where do you live? she asked.

There, I said, pointing up to the third floor.

You live there?

There. I had to look to where she pointed--the third, the paint peeling, wooden bars Papa had nailed on the windows so we wouldn't fall out.

You live there? The way she said it made me feel like nothing. There. I lived there. I nodded (p. 224).

We recognize that the society has been pushing the girl to feel ashamed of living in houses her family could afford to pay for. It is such a pity how people show obvious contempt to living spaces, when they should be more concerned how a young girl would feel in seeing their negative reactions. It is inevitable that the girl will be ashamed of her entire social and subjective position. Now, the narrator in the story sees the house as a symbol of the shame that threatens her own self-perception. For her, the house on Mango Street is an emblem of the oppressive socio-economic situation that circumscribes her life and is the source of her feelings of alienation. It is this alienation that becomes a catalyst for her desire to distance herself from this house she does not to be associated with.

Unfortunately, the house also becomes the narrator's first universe. She begins here because it is the beginning of her conscious narrative reflection. She describes the house from the outside; this external depiction is an unkempt and negative description of the house that would translate to her presentation of her own self: She said " I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to" (p. 234).

By pointing to this dilapidated house, she points to herself: the house and narrator become identified as one, thereby revealing an ideological perspective of poverty and shame. Consequently, she wants to point to

another house and this means she desires to point at another self. And as she longs for this other house and self, she also longs for another name. The dilemma of having this perception is that she will never have an opportunity to inhabit a special house and to fit into and find comfort. This is because her name, origins and culture will never be erased inside her.

Stories of immigrants, like this, reveal the difficulties faced by the Latino population as they move in America in search of employment or to be reunited with family. Stories of women staring out of windows or having too many babies, trapped indoors because of jealous husbands, and unable to speak English, reveal both their fear of the dominant culture and the oppression of the patriarchal system in society.

Tone and Style

The story is light to read because it is meant to be narrated by a young girl. It is deemed that she is between 9 to 11 years old. She is doing all the narration in the story and it is her point of view that is magnified. The narrative situation is a familiar one: a sensitive young girl's reflections about her struggle between what she is and what she would like to be. She has voiced out that she wanted a new house where they can have their own room. However, because of their financial difficulties, she is bound to swallow her pride and just accept the dilapidated new house. Although deep inside her, she refuses to give up on her dreams and the hope that someday her family will have those houses she sees on TV.

The frame of Cisneros's short paragraphs is simple but highly effective. We could easily understand the whole story that the family has been wandering

from place to place, always dreaming of the Promised Land, which is represented by having their own decent house. When they finally arrive at the house on Mango Street, which is at last their own house, it is not their promised dream home at all. The parents overcome their dejection by saying that this is not the end of their moving, that it is only a temporary stop before going on to the promised house.

The narrator knows better. The conflict between the promised home and the harsh reality, which she always recognized, has been replaced by a full force of rejection, violence, fear and waste. Cisneros' presented these emotions without compromise and without dramatization. This is just the way things are on Mango Street, but the narrator will not give up her dream of the promised house and she is determined to pursue it. The lesson she must learn is that the house she seeks is, in reality, her own individuality.

Conclusion

Growing up in a place where you do not belong can be a depressing experience. Especially children, they will never seriously attempt to dissect their feelings and attitudes about being different to the people they see on TV and people they see around them.

Thus, we all know now that Cisneros's story is not just about dilapidated houses and "dream homes". It could be linked to the girl's status of growing up in America. Can she still achieve her dreams when she is living in shame and disappointment? Would her family be able to rise up from poverty? As America has transformed to become a melting pot of cultures, people have to be aware of this diversity. Cisneros's story is just one slice of life that most

immigrants in the United States have experienced. Indeed, we can learn from all these disappointments, shame and challenges we face.

However, it is through understanding, knowing and respecting the diverse culture of our country that we could somehow ease the difficulties of immigrant people who have chosen to achieve their dreams here. Thus, in this story, Cisneros created a narrator, a storyteller and a mythmaker who draws upon old tales and new experiences to create the dreams of the culturally diverse neighborhoods in America.