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Tatum Weiss

Not Your Average Fairy tale

Most little girls grow up either watching or reading the story of Rapunzel. This classic tale describes a beautiful young girl locked away in a tower with only a window to look out of. Through this unobstructed opening, Rapunzel can see the wonderous world beyond her tower, but she has no way of actually experiencing it for herself. So she suffers, for the window is perched hundreds of feet high and her evil mother who keeps her captive guards the tower exit.

Although the women mentioned in *The House On Mango Street* live a life quite distant from any fairy tale, this Rapunzel-like fable of a trapped woman with only a window to peer out of appears to share a common and recurring motif throughout the vignettes. In this book, the window represents two concepts that are recounted throughout the stories. First, it represents that the women have hope for a better life than the one that they are trapped in currently. Because every time any of the characters look out the window, they can see that there are others who are not trapped and they could possibly enjoy freedom like that one day. Secondly, the window viewed as a literal and tangible object is very hard to escape from without overcoming extreme obstacles that few are able to accomplish. Most people, including the majority of the women characters living on Mango Street simply succumb to staring out the window passively, wishing that one day their prince will come to save them just as he did for Rapunzel.

The first mention of a window occurs in the vignette *Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Tuesdays*. Rafaela is locked indoors by her husband who “is afraid Rafaela will run away since she is too beautiful to look at” (79). Because her husband has complete control over her, all she can do is lean out the window and dream of a better life where she has “sweeter

drinks”(80) and someone to share it with, someone who is better than her husband who keeps her captive. Yet, actually achieving that life would be far too difficult, for she has children to take care of and a husband who is guarding her own personal tower. Therefore, all she can do is dream just as Rapunzel did for years alone in her tower as she looked out on the world.

Next, there is Minerva, whose abusive husband leaves her constantly. When he wants to return, he “sends a big rock through the window” (85) and is let back in. This is obviously toxic and could be resolved by Minerva closing the window and letting the rock bounce back onto the ground. But she feels that she needs him to survive and closing the window, while her only figure of hope, would just be too difficult for Minerva to do. She opens it and continues to look out of her window perpetually trapped in her toxic relationship with no other option but to hope things will get better. The window is also seen through the story of Sally whose husband “doesn’t let her look out the window”(102) leaving her without even a means to escape. Because of this predicament, she stays with her husband and continues in the awful cycle set for her on Mango Street.

This symbolic image of a window continues to appear many times throughout the vignettes, eventually leading up to Esperanza’s ending, where she overcomes all of the traps set before her and escapes through her personal window.

In the vignette, *A House Of My Own*, Esperanza names things she would like to have in her “dream” house. She lists “my porch, my pillows, and my pretty purple petunias”(108). Yet she does not ever mention desiring a window. Thus, when she “escapes” Mango Street, she- out of all of the other characters- will have been able to flee her window and overcome the obstacles required to do so. Esperanza will not have to stare out her window hoping life will get better like

Rafaela, Sally, Minerva, or the many others just like them do in an endless and torturous cycle. Instead, she will be the one person who the people of Mango Street can only dream and aspire to be one day. Esperanza escaped her tower, as did Rapunzel- except she did it without a prince. She got down the tower all on her own.

The reason that Sandra Cisneros includes this motif of the window is to show that escaping Mango Street is very difficult, much like it would be to climb through a window many stories high. Few can complete this task and most would end up just like so many of the story characters becoming another statistic trapped in this vicious cycle of poverty and remaining a prisoner of their own life. Also by continuing the motif of a window in almost every vignette that includes a female character, it creates an even larger paradox between Esperanza and all the other women on Mango Street when she does not have one throughout the book. Escaping Mango Street, or any other place like it, is not the norm, because it is much easier to just wish and hope for a better life when faced with that situation rather than actually finding a way out as Esperanza did.

Pictured on the front cover of the book is a girl looking out a window with her eyes closed. This image foreshadows the story's overarching theme that most people want to escape their window but just close their eyes to the possibility because it is too scary or difficult to actually do anything heroic.

Rapunzel may have been able to just wish her way out of trouble, but Mango Street is not a Disney fairytale. These women do not have golden locks of hair stretching hundreds of feet long or a prince who will swoop in and rescue them from their decrepit life. Wishing for a better

life for them is not an option. These women, and all women in general facing disparity, have to take matters into their own hands if they ever want to escape their window just as Esperenza did.

Works Cited

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. Jane Schaffer Publications, 1997.