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ENG 200: On Erica Sanchez's Crying in the Bathroom

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ENG 200

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Poetry Explication

Relationships can be complicated. They usually do not go in a straight upward slope; they go up and down. Not one relationship is perfect. Unfortunately, in some relationships, people may settle or stay in a so-called toxic relationship. This leads to many problems for each person, which leads to a constant spinning of the head deciding whether to stay or leave. Erika Sánchez describes her relationship with her ex-husband in her book “Crying in The Bathroom.” She then uses these emotions in her poem “To You on My Birthday.” which illustrates this inward battle. Erika Sánchez uses imagery and symbolism, macro-to-micro comparisons, and flashbacks to convey the complexity of relationships.

Erika Sánchez uses symbolism to convey the message of how complicated a relationship can be. Throughout the poem, Sánchez uses imagery to show the ins and outs of her relationship with her ex-husband. For example, she writes “The waves taking my breath like that nocturnal cactus flower.” (Sánchez, 6). This plant seems to be a half-dead vine until it blooms on a June night once a year. By morning the blooms are gone. This cactus is used to show the complexity of her relationship. The blooming of the flowers shows the good part of the relationship that rarely happens, but it can be so pretty when it does. Most of the time the relationship seems to be dead just like how the cactus looks for the majority of its life before it blooms once a year (*Night-blooming cereus*). Another example would be the broken flowerpot on the dresser

(Sánchez, 12). This shows how a beautiful relationship can turn into a broken one. When a pot breaks, it is usually by accident and it happens quickly, which in this relationship also rings true. They never wanted to end this relationship, but it was broken, and they both had to realize that no one was necessarily at fault, but it was still broken. In Erika Sánchez's book "Crying in The Bathroom" she says, "I didn't blame my husband" (Sánchez, 106). This relates to the broken flowerpot because she isn't blaming anyone for breaking it. Finally, the last symbol is the "faded flowered sheets" (Sánchez, 21). This is yet again about something that may have started beautiful, but it has faded. Just like in this relationship, she knows how good it once was, but it has faded. These examples show the complexity of relationships because they show how a once beautiful thing can turn into something not so beautiful. But always having hope that it will once return to a place of beauty.

The next literary device Sánchez uses is a macro-to-micro comparison to convey the complexity of relationships. She uses the ocean to explain her relationship. In the poem, she references the ocean many times. She writes "But we are here again, the ocean" (Sánchez, 4). She uses the ocean to explain the place where they began and keep going back. The same reference to the ocean is used again towards the end of the poem. It says "Mexico, the ocean— where we began/ when we were young and where we end" (Sánchez, 50-51). She uses the ocean as a place where they are always ending up. They start at the ocean. Then they have some ups and downs in between. They go back and forth between good and bad but hold on to the good memories. Then in the end they end up back in the same spot "at the ocean". The ocean is constantly in a state of movement, whether this is the tide going in and out of the waves crashing on the beach. This can be compared to Sánchez's relationship because her relationship is always moving and going back and forth in her head. She seems to have this internal struggle on

whether to stay or not. In this poem, she uses the ocean as the macro and her relationship as the micro to explain something that can be hard to explain. She also uses the whole poem as the macro because she starts with talking about the ocean, while also ending it at the ocean. This is just like their relationship and how they started and ended in the same place. Sánchez uses this comparison throughout the poem to help the reader understand the complexity of relationships.

Finally, in stanza 5 Sánchez uses flashbacks to show the complexity of relationships. Before this stanza, she shows how broken the relationship feels by using imagery and symbolism. Now she uses flashbacks to show the beauty of their relationship. She starts the stanza by writing “This is ridiculous, I think, /Then suddenly I remember us.” (Sánchez, 29-30). This shows how she thinks about how bad and how stuck she feels in this relationship, but right when she is ready for it to be over, she thinks about the good. She remembers them in the Chinese pizza place in the Dominican Republic. She describes the place in detail, showing fond memories there. The stanza ends with “I laugh, and you don’t ask me why” (Sánchez, 35). This shows how they were just having fun, not taking things too seriously. It was beautiful. After this stanza, it goes back to describing the bad. In her book, Sánchez writes about him no longer laughing at her jokes, which shows the importance of the flashback of when he did (Sánchez, 53). The next line in the poem states “Later, I drop the four bottles of Coronas; they shatter” (Sánchez, 36). This quote describes the relationship breaking. This line comes right after the flashback, which conveys the constant ups and downs of their relationship. This shows the complexity of her mind and how hopeful Sánchez felt. She wanted to go back to a place where the relationship was good, where she felt safe. These small slivers of light keep her from ending this relationship. In her book she even states “Leaving him was the hardest thing I had to do.”

(Sánchez, 53). The use of flashbacks shows how a bad relationship can have good in it, which can lead to this complex relationship.

Overall, the literary devices of symbolism, flashbacks, and macro-to-micro comparisons are used by Erika L. Sánchez to convey the complexity of relationships. She uses symbolism to show how beautiful things can turn into broken ones. She uses flashbacks to show how a bad relationship can have good parts in it. Finally, she uses macro-to-micro comparisons between the ocean and her relationship to show how they are always ending up in the same place. In today's world so many people can feel stuck like Sánchez, she is able to use her poems to show people that they are not alone. When reading the rest of the story in her book "Crying In The Bathroom" she shows that she was able to get out of this relationship and doesn't try to sugarcoat it either. She uses her experiences to give others strength to get out of similar situations.

Works Cited

Night-blooming cereus. meadgarden.org. Retrieved Feb 26, 2023,

<https://www.meadgarden.org/visit/ecology/flora/night-blooming-cereus/>