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“He is a child and a dreamer”

Pocho, the story about Richard Rubio and his family has many themes that are still relevant today. The main character deals with many problems that deal with his identity and normal problems that a teenage boy has growing up. Richard has a pretty large family, but the novel only focuses on his parents and a few people that were influential as he grew. These other people include Mary, Joe Pete, Marla, Zelda, and Ricky. This book has strong themes of identity and these characters are the ones that help shape it. Aside from the characters, events in his life have also shaped who he is at the end of the novel, and his last decision that his mom disapproved of.

The story opens up with Juan Manuel Rubio, Richards father, as we see how he ends up in the United States. From the couple of chapters that we have on him and what his seen in the book, he is a very determined person. The first thing we see from him is him killing a Spaniard that he did not like. This was after the Mexican Revolution, so this is where he gets his strong personality. He is loyal to Pancho Villa, a key person in the Mexican Revolution. Juan Manuel mentions serval times that he is ready to go in case he is called up again. We see here that he is a very loyal person and that his determined to do his best when they need him. After the confrontation with the Spaniard he is sneaked into the United States in order to avoid political problems, he accepts that he must leave the country that he loves, but he vows to comeback one day. While he is in the United States he meets Consuelo, and has several kids, the only son that he has is Richard, so he puts a lot of the machismo mentality in him as he grows up. Being machista is also a key part of what make Juan Manuel, despite being married and having a family, he still sees other women, at the time his wife is silent about it, but that changes too. Like any other immigrant living in the United States at the time he followed whatever crop could be harvested. He moved a lot in the early days before settling in Santa Clara. Something that we see as the story progresses, is that he dislikes how much his family is assimilating with the new American culture. He is a proud Mexican and he leaves his family because of this. A central arc of his is that he believes that one day he will go to Mexico.

Going back to Mexico is a central part of Juan Manuel. No other character shares this aspect. This is something that some readers can relate to, some might have parents that came from Mexico and are always talking about moving back once they have enough money. This is something that I see in my dad. While Juan Manuel’s condition and my fathers are different, both dream about moving to Mexico and being able to live there. After Juan Manuel moves to the United States however, he does not go back ever again, my dad however has been fortunate enough to go once a year and visit his home land. Both still share the dream of moving there permanently. This is one aspect that makes Juan Manuel a relatable character that the readers can understand his point of view.

While Juan Manuel represents machismo for Richard, his mother, Consuelo, represents religion. Throughout the story, most of the dialogue between the two revolves around religion, talking about what is right and what is wrong, talking about their views on religion too. As the story progresses, Consuelo changes, she is no longer a submissive woman that follows orders from Juan Manuel, but a woman that know that she can do as she pleases because the law will protect her. Another big change is that she went from a woman that was proud of keeping a clean house to having it as a complete mess. She believes that by not tending to her past duties she has liberated herself and is now independent. Even her religious side is no more with this new her.

Like Juan Manuel and my dad, I see some similarities between my mom and Richard’s mom, mostly the religious aspect. My mom has been the only one that makes up go to church and pray the rosary every night. This is something that is important to her, much like Richard’s mom. Both our moms believe that religion is the best thing for their children and should not be questioned. But as children grow so do our thoughts and our way of thinking. The last we see from Richard’s mom, we see them talking about how Richard no longer feels the need for religion, how he can be a good person without it. The mom looks at him in disbelief and cannot prosses what her own son just said. From the text we see that she feels betrayed about what she just heard. Likewise, I too have felt that I no longer have the same connection to my religion as I once did, however I believe that my mom would react the same way, so I dare not tell her about it. This last part with Richard is also interesting, because towards the end of the novel she feels free and liberated and no longer follows her religion as she once did. The last confrontation shows that she still feels very strongly about her religion even though she does not show it any more.

The knowledge that one gets from parents is everlasting, from his father Richard got machismo, and from his mom he got a religious identity. There are other people that shape Richards identity and those are his friends. Once of the first people that we are introduced to is Mary. Mary is an interesting character because she comes from a religious household, much like Ricard at the time, but she is Protestant, her views often clash with Richards, but they are good friends and share similar interests in writing. She moves to Chicago after several years, before she departs she promises Richard that they will marry each other in the future. Marla is a character that we meet and shares Richards interest in reading, and it is something that she encourages him to follow. João Pedro Manõel Alves or Joe Pete, is someone that Richard meets while he is young. Joe Pete is an important character in Richards life because they talk about many different things. This opens Richards mind to what else can be out in the world. All these characters have one things in common, they encourage Richard to pursue knowledge, Mary with reading, Marla with writing and Joe Pete with general knowledge that enlightens Richard. These characters contrast to the ones that he will meet later on in his life.

Ricky Malatesta is an interesting character because he shares the same name as Richard, only he goes by Ricky. These two could not be any more different from each other. In the beginning we see the Ricky craves success and wishes to drop out of high school and open up businesses everywhere. He is a very materialist person that catches Richards attention and they end up becoming friends. However, as time passes they are no longer friends like they were before. Zelda is one of the few female characters that we see in the beginning she is very strong and can beat up all of the boys. She is a strong-willed character when she is young, but as soon as she becomes a teen she becomes a sexual object to all of the boys. Richard and she end up together, and the once strong-willed character becomes submissive to Richards commands. It was interesting to see how her language changed from one page to another. Her change in personality also reflects how women can become submissive when they are with a man, further pushing the machismo theme in the novel.

The first set of friends that Richard has around him push him to pursue knowledge, and the second set show him a different way of life. In the beginning Richard would talk about going school and being a writer and attending a university or how he should drop out and help his family by working. His parents encouraged him to follow school so when they moved back to Mexico he could be doctor or a lawyer. This is something that follows him all thorough out his life, should he pursue his studies, or should he join the workforce? At the end the workforce changes to enlisting in the Navy, after he is convinced by Ricky to join. Joining the Navy is something that his mom was not happy with, she really hoped that her son would continue his studies because she did not have that opportunity.

Aside from that struggle, Richard also faces another, is he Mexican or American? This question pops up more towards the end of the novel as he matures, and he is able to explore his surrounding a bit more. I connect being American with Richards decision to join the Navy because he is serving the nation that he now lives in. Assimilating to American culture is something that the dad is not fond of and leaves the family as a result. His wife and kids no longer share the same values as him and his dream of returning back to Mexico. Richard joining the Navy and serving the United States is also opposite to his father serving during the Mexican revolution, both served the country that they identified with. If Richard had chosen his studies, he might have identified as Mexican, since he would have fulfilled his parent’s dreams. Richard is an interesting character for this reason. All throughout his life he has been divided between one thing or another.

“He is a child and a dreamer,” is a line that Richard’s father says to his mother while they were talking. I found this line interesting because we see how Richard struggles to do one thing or the other. While Juan Manuel says dreamer as someone that has dreams that should be pursued, the term is now used in a different way, but still has the same overall meaning. A dreamer is now used as a term has been used to define individuals who were brought to the United States at an early age without documentation but have assimilated to U.S. culture and have been educated by United States school systems. The book Pocho was first published in 1959, while Dreamer became a term for these students after 2001. More than 40 years later, we see that a book like Pocho still has connections to struggles that students may face. Some books contain themes that might not be as relevant today, but a book like Pocho still has something that connects to people today.