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Short story cycles of the Americas, a transitional post-colonial form: a study of V.S. Naipaul's Miguel Street, Ernest Gaines's Bloodline, and Garbriel Garcia Marquez's Los Funerales de Mama Grande

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SHORT STORY CYCLES OF THE AMERICAS,
A TRANSITIONAL POST-COLONIAL FORM:
A STUDY OF V.S. NAIPAUL'S *MIGUEL STREET*, ERNEST GAINES'S *BLOODLINE*, AND
GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ'S *LOS FUNERALES DE MAMA GRANDE*

A Dissertation

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Comparative Literature

by

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For Valentina Dela Forkner

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of three short story cycles which are representative of the genre in the Americas: *Miguel Street* (1959) by V.S. Naipaul, *Los Funerales de Mama Grande* (1962) by Gabriel Garcia Marquez and *Bloodline* (1968) by Ernest Gaines. I analyze each of these cycles in depth concentrating on the structure, the order of the stories, and unifying elements such as characters, themes, internal symbolism, place, language and events, in order to demonstrate that these short story collections are indeed short story cycles. I examine these cycles in light of the two themes or factors out of which the modern cycle originates: desire for selfhood versus desire for community and desire for change versus desire to remain the same or even to go back. I believe that the modern short story cycle relates in some ways the dynamic duality of a desire or acceptance of individuality, selfhood, independence, versus the desire for a lost, denied, ideal (utopia) community. The cycle and more specifically the cycles from the South, Hispanic America and the Caribbean reflect the need for individuals to assert their selfhoods but also the need to challenge an imposed mass identity in order to form a new collective identity based on revived and revised inherited myths. The concept of change, evolution, transition in the community, is maybe not inherent to all short story cycles; however, I believe it is a key factor in cycles of the American South, Latin America and the Caribbean. These three regions have many common traits not only in literature, but also in their history, and especially in a reforging of their own national/regional identity. All three cycles focus on a transitional period in the history of their nation which is derived from the postcolonial experience.

1. Introduction: from Past Theories to a New Model

The short story cycle is a term of reference in critical theory that has emerged only in the last thirty years; however, this narrative method is far from being new; as a matter of fact, *A Thousand and One Nights* (approximately 11th century), Boccaccio's *Decameron* (mid 14th century) and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (late 14th century) have all been labeled as short story cycles by recent critics. Critics such as Forrest Ingram, Susan Mann and Gerald Kennedy, all at the forefront of short story cycle theory, refer to these masterpieces in order to show that the genre is based on a traditional form that reaches far back in time. It is hard, however, not to question how these canonical texts can be considered as short story cycles and, if they are, in what way they function. If Ingram's definition of the short story cycle has been challenged and contested, it nonetheless prevails in recent criticism; he defines the genre "as a book of short stories so linked to each other by their author that the reader's successive experience on various levels of the pattern of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts" (Ingram 19).

According to this definition can we consider the *Canterbury Tales* as short story cycle? When Chaucer first conceived the *Canterbury Tales*, he envisioned about a hundred and twenty tales, two tales for each character on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back. However, the *Canterbury Tales* includes only twenty-four tales and scholars are still debating the order in which these tales should be published. Even if Chaucer himself had arranged the tales and finished his work, we would have to study in depth various aspects of unity such as time, place, themes, and characters within the different stories, in order to determine whether or not the *Canterbury Tales* can be considered a genuine short story cycle.

However, the purpose of this study is not to debate whether or not the works aforementioned are legitimate cycles or to relate the modern cycle to other forms, such as the Renaissance sonnet cycle, but rather to determine that the modern short story cycle must be studied as a new and distinct genre. These early “cycles” use a frame story to link together otherwise unrelated tales. This literary device is hardly ever needed, or desired, in the modern short story cycle in which each story has a deliberate function in the overall structure. As I will argue later, the modern short story cycle demands that each story conditions our reading of the whole, and more specifically that the conclusion of the cycle compels us to look back and complete our understanding of the individual stories.

1.1. The Modern Short Story

The short story cycle has been studied as a separate form, although it has not been given much consideration in genre theory as the novel or the poem. If the short story cycle as a genre is hard to define, is it not because the short story itself is resistant to an exact definition? The problem is the diversity of its form. In his essay “The Modern Short Story: Retrospect,” H.E. Bates identifies an array of different forms: “The history of the Short Story, through its phase of myth and legend, fable and parable, anecdote and pictorial essay, sketch and even down to what the crudest provincial reporter calls ‘a good story,’ cannot be measured” (Bates 72). According to Bates, then, the art of the short story is timeless; the genre is too broad and includes too many variations. A rather comical definition of the short story by John Hadfield summarizes the pitfalls of the many attempts to define it, “a story that is not long” (qtd. in Bates 74).

Literary historians generally recognize that the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new form of short story with writers such as Irving, Poe, Hawthorne, Gogol, Turgenev, Maupassant and Daudet. These writers followed the great Romantic shift of emphasis from the

public to the private, adopting more of an inner or psychological undertone/aspect; the short story underwent a radical transformation becoming a more “written” or self-conscious narrative. As Poe suggests in his seminal review of *Twice-Told Tales* (1842), Hawthorne’s originality involved a turning inward that profoundly changed the nature and the possibility of the form. It is this recent genre of short story that critics recognize as new and important and have struggled to define. As a matter of fact, the first critical study on the short story was written in 1885 by Brander Matthews, entitled “The Philosophy of the Short-Story.” Matthews in an extension to his first critical essay on the short story identifies four elements of unity that define the short story at least until 1901, “A short-story deals with a single character, a single event, a single emotion, or series of emotions called forth by a single situation” (May 73). This was to be the first of many failed attempts to find an adequate definition of the modern short story. The type of short story that is of interest in the study of the short story cycle is not just any type of short story but the modern short story that emerged in the nineteenth century.

The emergence of the modern short story cycle coincides with the beginning of modern literature, a literary movement that “questioned the certainties that had supported traditional modes of social organization, religion and morality, and also ways of conceiving the human self” (Abrams 175). According to A. Walton Litz in *Major American Short Stories*, the modern short story developed, at least in the United States, as a response to “the lack of a rich and complex social texture” and was representative of a “local and fragmented social experience” (1). If the modern short story is hard to define, is it not because this “social experience” varies not only from region to region but more to the point because writers’ experiences and perceptions differ. The emphasis on unity seems to be an element that is essential to every modern short story, whether it is a character, a given time (some short stories do not even have the element of time),

place, event, or symbolic structure. Unity is important in the short story because contrary to a novel or even a novella, the story cannot exceed a certain length; it has to be concise and to the point. A short story does not always focus on just one character, one place, a definite time or single turning point; some short stories encompass a wide range of characters (Ernest Gaines' "Just Like a Tree") or take place over a broad period of time (Faulkner's "The Bear"). A short story, however, will never be able to fully develop all these features and is bound to focus on the elements that are essential to the narrative impact.

An example of the elasticity of the short story is easily found, as there are probably as many examples as there are short stories. "Big Two-Hearted River," one of Hemingway's finest short stories, was criticized by Scott Fitzgerald because it was "a story in which nothing happened" (Litz 332). This dismissive criticism perhaps derived from the fact that it was generally accepted that short stories revolved around "one dramatic event" (qtd. in Head, 5). However, Hemingway's story shows that a turning point or over-dramatic events are not essential to the short story; indeed, Litz says "Big Two-Hearted River" "seems somehow to illustrate the essentials of life itself, like a symbolic tale" (Litz 333). This question of unity, especially time, place, character, event, is as important to the definition of the short story as it is to the understanding of the short story cycle.

Collections of short stories are numerous and, for most of the ones compiled during the nineteenth century, have almost never been studied as unified works of fiction. Some collections though have a semblance of unity and could be seen as precursors to the cycle. Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* (1837), Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches* (1852), Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1842) or Daudet's *Letters de Mon Moulin* (1869) are all collections of stories that are regrouped around certain loose unifying elements. Nonetheless, after a careful

reading of Hawthorne, Turgenev, Poe and Daudet's short story collections, critics would be hard put to find an overall deliberate pattern or a structure of interconnected stories that would give these collections the sense of intentional unity that is found in the twentieth century short story cycle. Although it is true that the stories within these collections sometimes share the same place or at times similar characters, themes or symbolism, the stories are, it seems, randomly assembled around what Ingram calls "nebulous unifying elements" (Ingram 16).

1.2. The Emergence of the Short Story Cycle

The first short story cycle acknowledged as being more than a mere collection of short stories is *Dubliners* by James Joyce (1914). In a letter to his publisher, Grant Richards, Joyce states the reason why the order of the stories is important:

My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the center of paralysis. I have tried to present it to the indifferent public under four of its aspects: childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life. The stories are arranged in this order (Letter to Grant Richards, May 5, 1906).

Dubliners is undeniably a short story cycle; the stories are closely interrelated and, although each story retains its individuality, the collection has remarkable unity. The consistency of theme, the sequence of the stories, unity of place, narrative technique and overall symbolism display "the cohesion of a larger unit." The first short story cycle published in the United States was written by Sherwood Anderson in 1919; the stories in *Winesburg, Ohio* are arranged in a predetermined order. The recurring themes, characters, place and narration are all unifying elements that suggest an over-reaching meaning or purpose by the author. Anderson believed that he had created a new form, which he called the "Winesburg form," a form he said he invented (Sutton 434). Other American writers followed in Anderson's footsteps: Hemingway (*In Our Time*, 1925), Faulkner (*The Unvanquished* 1938 and *Go Down, Moses* 1942), Richard Wright (*Uncle*

Tom's Children, 1938), and Welty (*The Golden Apples*, 1949). The short story cycle, as Elizabeth Bowen said of the short story in England, "is a child of this century." Moreover, Ingram, Mann and Kennedy all seem to think it is a genre almost exclusively American with the exception of Joyce.

Although several scholars have tried to define the genre, they have yet to reach a satisfactory and exclusive definition. Indeed, none of the three critics cited agrees on an exclusive definition. For Ingram, "dynamic patterns of recurrent development," are necessary in order to give the cycle a "special kind of unity." He identifies three different types of cycles: "Linked stories may have been *composed* (from the outset) as a continuous whole, or *arranged* (retrospectively by an author or editor-author) into a series, or *completed* (after the periodical publication of one or more stories) to form a set" (Ingram 17). The element that seems to be the most important for Ingram is that in order to have a cycle the author must have envisioned the collection as a unified whole. Indeed, the various cycles studied by Ingram were thought of as interrelated stories by their authors; that is to say that the authors conceived the collection so that each story (within that same collection) becomes more significant when read alongside the other stories. This authorial intention is, thus, fundamental to the short story cycle.

For critics who have studied cycles by Joyce, Hemingway, Anderson or Faulkner this intention was obvious because of the proof collected from the abundant correspondence between writers and editors. Indeed, when *Go Down, Moses* was first published the original title for the cycle was followed by "and other stories." This displeased Faulkner, as he considered the work to be a intricate ensemble of stories; consequently, he wrote to his publisher Haas in 1949 "nobody but Random House seemed to labor under the impression that *Go Down, Moses* should be titled 'and other stories.' [...] I say, reprint it, call it simply *Go Down, Moses*, which is the

way I sent it to you 8 years ago.” (qtd. in Watson 133) Disagreements between authors and publishers and the ensuing correspondence help critics establish that certain collections were intended to be more than random stories grouped together for publication. In addition to the correspondence, interviews, remarks at conferences, prefaces and epilogues confirm authorial intentions. However, this first hand evidence can be misleading; Faulkner, for example, referred to *The Unvanquished* and *Go Down, Moses* as novels, for lack of a better term. For other authors access to first hand evidence is sometimes hard to come by, is unavailable or does not exist. Self-contained evidence within the cycle, therefore, becomes the primary focus of study when it comes to justify the existence of a cycle.

The cycle relies on a careful balance between individual stories and the whole structure, which exists only by noticeable interconnections between the stories. Therefore, to understand how the cycle functions it is essential, first of all, to study each story as a separate unit. As we have seen the modern short story is based on certain elements of unity such as character(s), time, place, event, and symbolic structure. These elements are important as they generally form patterns that can show a progression in the cycle, a symbolic pattern or a pattern of character development that reappear periodically throughout the cycle like in Balzac’s broader work *La Comédie Humaine*. These are several significant elements that contribute to the short story cycle, but they must be studied alongside other elements: title of the collection, narrative technique, order in which the stories are placed, general thematic and overall symbolic structure. For Ingram, these elements must be present and contribute to the “dynamic pattern of recurrence and development.” His definition of the short story cycle is valuable, but it is too narrow and his “insistence on unity has produced a restrictive and conservative theory of form which has canonized certain collections while ignoring others” (Kennedy 11). As a matter of fact, Ingram,

while completely ignoring *Go Down, Moses*, believes that *The Unvanquished* is the greatest short story cycle written in the first half of the twentieth century, because this cycle regroups all the unifying components he believes are necessary to have a well rounded cycle.

Kennedy has rightly criticized this approach; the short story cycle just as any genre in literature calls for a certain degree of flexibility. In his criticism Kennedy identifies an interesting problem: “One might argue, [...] it is the critic whose ingenuity creates the cycle by perceiving connections which imply a unified plan” (Kennedy 11). However, if Ingram’s definition of the short story cycle is too restrictive, Kennedy’s definition, then, becomes too broad, as he prefers the term “short story sequence.”

This rubric would contain all aggregates of three or more stories by a given author, without regards to the history of composition or the presumed intention of the writer. It would encompass both tightly organized sequences and more loosely bound or problematic works (such as Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses*). (Kennedy 13)¹

It is true that the reader (or critic) has a role in the formation of a cycle, but his role is not based purely on his creativity and ability to randomly interconnect stories in the cycle. A short story cycle always relies on self-contained evidence, that is to say a combination of several of the aforementioned elements. Having only one of these elements is not a proof of the existence of the cycle. The order of the stories, maybe beyond any other feature, such as character, symbolism, or theme, sustains and reveals the structure of the cycle. There is always at least one story that is placed in such a way as to tie the cycle together, a keystone supporting the structure of the whole cycle. In some cases, two, three or more stories are as many keystones binding, bridging the stories together. These stories have more weight and more significance; they are the backbone of the cycle showing an eventual progression or stagnation of certain characters or

¹ Kennedy in his introduction to *Modern American Short Story Sequences* (1995) changes “short story collection” to “story sequence” while keeping the same definition.

themes. Then again, the stories can be placed in chronological order (movement in time, increasing or decreasing age of characters or movement in space); in this case, every story supports the structure equally. However, in almost every cycle the first and last stories are two stories of particular significance; they introduce and conclude the cycle, and thus function as the foundations of the cycle.

Hemingway's *In Our Time* is one of the best examples of a balance between the different elements that combine to form a cycle. Hemingway wrote to Edmund Wilson that he thought of *In Our Time* as a unified whole: "there is nothing in the book that has not a definite place in its organization" (Baker 128). However, few critics agree on whether or not it is a cycle, and if so, how it works. I do not intend to fully examine how *In Our Times* works as a cycle, but merely to mention the elements that point towards its undeniable status as a short story cycle. In *In Our Time*, there are two components that come to support an overall structure. The Nick Adams stories are placed at the beginning, middle and end of the cycle in chronological order, which shows textual, temporal and character structure and development. The first Nick Adams stories, beyond the introduction of the main character, introduce general themes such as violence, disillusionment, a feeling of being lost in place and time. In the last story, Nick concludes the cycle as he comes back to the wilderness and attempts to practice a basic, simpler life: he walks, sets up camp, fishes. In "Big Two Hearted River," past violence is only present through the symbolically black grasshoppers, scorched by fire that burnt down the town of Seney. Hope, however, comes through Nick's ability to recompose himself one step at a time thus proving a fitting conclusion to the cycle. The vignettes² or micro-stories show a different but definite structure and arrangement of the stories by the author, as they are present throughout the cycle, always in-between two stories. Most of the middle stories do not include Nick Adams, but they

² Term used by Mann in chapter three of *The Short Story Cycle: a Genre Companion and Reference Guide*.

all feature the same type of characters who like Nick, at least at in first stories, are disillusioned with life. All these characters contribute to the formation of “a complex collective protagonist” (Dunn and Morris 67). Violence is also a recurring theme and symbolic element in the stories and vignettes, and can be moral (“Out of Season”) or physical (“Indian Camp”). The unity of this cycle is undeniable. However, some elements remain problematic; for example, the order of the middle stories does not seem to follow any recognizable pattern; the characters (apart for their likeness to Nick Adams) do not seem to have much in common; geographical places change, as stories take place in Greece, Italy or France, which might reveal looseness in the cycle. However, if it is true that almost all cycles present a certain flexibility, it is the combination of unifying elements (characters, time, place, symbols, narrative technique and the order of the stories), more specifically when they confirm the presence of an overall structural and/or symbolic pattern, that validate a collection of stories as a cycle.

1.3. The Latin American Short Story Cycle

So far, the only short stories and short story cycles mentioned have been either European or North American. Early European short story writers were not as prolific as American ones, except Maupassant, Chekhov and Turgenev, and at end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century the short story gained great momentum in the United States. Short stories were abundant both in quantity and in quality, which led Frank O’Connor to proclaim in 1963, “the Americans have handled the short story so wonderfully that one can say that it is a national art form” (O’Connor 39). Little did O’Connor know that his meaning for “American” would have to be broadened. Indeed, the short story was not only an important fictional form in the United States but also in Hispanic America. As a matter of fact, Julio Cortázar made a similar proclamation in 1970: “hablar del cuento tiene una importancia especial para nosotros, puesto

que casi todos los países americanos de lengua española le están dando una importancia excepcional, que jamás había tenido en otros países”³ (1). The short story in Hispanic America blossomed at the beginning of the twentieth century in the works of writers such as Quiroga, Borges, Asturias, Rulfo, Cortázar; these artists were soon followed by García Márquez, Fuentes and Allende. When Hispanic America finally emerged on the world literature scene in the sixties, it was mainly due to novels written by Fuentes, Cortázar, Vargas Llosa and García Márquez, and especially the “Boom” caused by *Cien Años de Soledad* (1967). The novels of the Boom suddenly illuminated Hispanic America and revealed a region of rich literary tradition. However, the precursors and founding fathers of this literary Boom, Quiroga, Borges, Rulfo, Cortázar were mainly short story writers.

Hispanic American writers have produced a copious amount of short story collections, yet, few have been considered as short story cycles and most of the stories have been studied individually. Véquez in his article on *Condenados de Contado* in *The Contemporary Latin American Short Story* states that “la visión de *Condenados de Contado* sólo se obtiene cuando se considera a todos los cuentos como un ciclo” and goes on to say that “enfocadas de esta manera, muchas de las colecciones de relatos hispanoamericanos que ya han sido estudiado unidad por unidad, podrían revelarnos nuevos matrices”⁴ (Véquez, 103-4). In the last to date critical survey of the short story cycle, *The Composite Novel: the Short Story Cycle in Transition* (1995), Dunn and Morris only include one short story collection by Cortázar in their annotated list of selected composite novels: *Un Tal Lucas* (1979). If they include this composite novel or cycle, why not include Cortázar’s earlier collections such as *Bestiario* (1951), *Final de Juego* (1956) or *Las*

³ “To speak of the short story has a special importance for us, given that almost all the Spanish speaking countries of America give it an exceptional importance that it has never had in other countries.”

⁴ “the vision of *Condenados de Contado* is achieved only when one considers all the short stories as a cycle” [...] “examined as such, many Latin American short story collections, which have been studied story by story, could reveal new patterns.”

Armas Secretas (1959), his most famous short story collections? Although they have never been considered or studied as such, Borges' *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941), *Artifices* (1944) and *The Aleph* (1949), all have unifying elements and a definite overall structure; his forewords or afterword (*The Aleph*) point out the general themes of his collections.

Hispanic America's most famous collection and acknowledged cycle is *El Llano en llamas* (1953) by Mexican author Juan Rulfo. This collection groups fifteen short stories that portray life in rural Mexico in the nineteen fifties when the failure of the Mexican revolution became evident. These stories, "despite their regional settings and sordid, naturalistic themes, [...] somewhat in the manner of Faulkner's, attain universal status by exposing the inner lives of their protagonists. [The collection] is a dynamic, but carefully measured portrait of dramatic proportions that transcends the limits of rural Mexico" (Peden 107-8). The main characters are isolated from civilization. Lawlessness, the law of the church or the law of the community are opposed to the new laws of a nation in formation. "Los federales" are present or omnipresent in every story as they are the representatives of the new government which is often portrayed as corrupt. Officials try to impose the rules and master plan of a government, based in Mexico City, whose ideals and interests conflict with those of Mexico's broader rural community. The title story "El Llano en llamas" is the centerpiece of this wide net of stories. The main character, Pichón, is a follower of Pedro Zamora (this name displays the first initials of 'Pancho' Villa and Zapata, both leaders of failed revolutionary movements). Zamora leads a possible social revolution, and has to leave aside his higher aspirations in order to get money and weapons by stealing and pillaging. This story exemplifies the misunderstanding between those who aspire to a social change in Mexican politics and those who (in theory) would benefit from it. Most peasants are caught between "los federales" and the revolutionary gangs and yearn for a return to

a more peaceful life. Although the government representatives are depicted in bleak terms, there is also the feeling that they symbolize, if not a better life at least a more stable one. Individual stories in this collection have been studied and approached in all possible ways (political, social, historical, gender, narrative and so forth). However, *El Llano en llamas* although recognized as a cycle has not obtained great critical attention as such. As a matter of fact, the only critic to discuss Hispanic American collections as cycles is Miguel Gomez, who wrote an article that shed a new light on the Hispanic American short story cycle: “Para una teoría del ciclo de cuentos Hispanoamericanos” (2000).

Although Gomez’ general theory on the short story cycle is vague and is based solely on Ingram’s theory, his critical essay shows that Hispanic America has an exceedingly rich tradition when it comes to short stories and short story cycles. Gomez defines the Hispanic American cycle as “intertextualidad refleja, o sea, las remisiones directas que se producen entre dos o más textos de un mismo autor, es el orbe donde se capta este tipo de unidad, que no implica la sujeción de una porción del volumen a otra, sino la sujeción a él de todas por igual”⁵ (Gomez 564). That is to say, each story has an equal importance within a cycle. Gomez classifies into four categories the possible harmonization of short stories within a cycle.

The first category Gomez identifies is a short story cycle that shares the same characters or place from story to story. According to Gomez, this is one of the main traits in cycles and there is an abundance of examples, such as *Cuentos Fatales* (1924) by Leopoldo Lugones. This might not be as evident to readers of Borges or Cortázar, but García Márquez, Rulfo or Altamirano use this technique to link stories together. Gomez points out that Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares wrote a cycle in which they use this technique not only for certain characters, but

⁵ “reflected intertextuality, that is to say, direct cross-references by a same author, is the space where this type of unity is captured, which does not imply the subjection of one of the volume’s portion to another, but the equal subjection of all the stories to the whole.”

also for the fictional writer H. Bustos Domecq in *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi*. The second category is more unique to Hispanic America. Gomez describes it as “cuentos enlazados anafóricamente”⁶ (Gomez 565). He makes reference to a type of cycle that uses an anaphoric method, by which the author reuses the same structure for the introduction and the conclusion of his stories. In *Cuentos de Cipotes* (1945) by Salazar Arrué, this anaphoric method is present in the titles of the short stories themselves, “El cuento de olis olis catrín y el cañonazo,” “El cuento del dichoso turís turista,” or “El cuento del gringuito regalante que da zapatos y no guante.” The style is also consistent throughout the cycle. In this cycle, the author uses colloquial speech as well as a simple, almost childlike style in order to characterize the short stories of a particular region; each short story begins with “puesiesque” (“if it is that”) and ends with “sacabuche” (“and it finishes”). The third category is one in which a unifying theme is systematically deconstructed in different units as each story focuses on a particular facet of the general theme. A pertinent example is Manuel Díaz Rodríguez’ *Cuentos de color* (1899) in which each story represents a different color, using the colors’ symbolic values to illustrate historical social codes or literary motives. Finally, the last category is determined by the use of “macrofiguras.” This concept suggests that a cycle can be unified by a “macrofigure” that does not have to be only restricted to characters, but can also be applied to a place, or an archetype. Gabriel García Márquez in *Los Funerales de Mama Grande* uses a “macrofigure” called Mama Grande to unify the short stories within this collection. Mama Grande even though she is present in only two of the eight short stories is perceived as a domineering character who controls everything in Columbia; therefore, her power can be felt in each of the short stories.

⁶ “interrelated short stories by reiteration.”

1.4. The Caribbean Short Story Cycle

If Hispanic America, like the United States, possesses a strong literary tradition in terms of the short story and the short story cycle, it seems natural also to mention a comparable tradition in the Caribbean. The emergence of a Caribbean literature began in the 1920's, when "writers like Aimé Césaire of Martinique, Luis Palés Matos of Puerto Rico, Jacques Roumain of Haiti, Nicolás Guillén of Cuba, and Léon Damas of French Guiana were the first to attempt carving out a distinctive Caribbean literary identity" (Lichtenstein 1). The history of Caribbean literature is closely linked to the history of its decolonization. Haiti was the first country to gain its independence in 1804, but most countries in the Caribbean gained independence only during the twentieth century, especially after World War II. Caribbean literature is therefore more recent than that of the United States or Latin America. Nonetheless, the short story has attracted writers such as Alejo Carpentier, V.S. Naipaul, Patrick Chamoiseau, Maryse Condé, Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid and Rosario Ferré, all of whom have written major short stories and short story collections. Although the short story cycle is not yet a fully established genre in the Caribbean, it is a genre that definitely exists, continues to inspire, and has already resulted in several major works. The authors mentioned above have all published collections of short stories; however, none has received critical attention as unified works. Yet, just as for cycles published in the United States or Latin America, most of the short story collections published regroup stories around central themes, places, characters or symbolism.

The Caribbean has known a recent surge of short story collections; since 1980 there have been more than fifty collections of short stories published. However, only a few collections have been studied as cycles, such as: *Annie John* (1985) by Kincaid and *Krik? Krak!* (1996) by Edwidge Danticat. Rocio Davis in her article "Oral narrative as short story cycle: forging

community in Edwidge Danticat's *Krik? Krak!*" applies Ingram and Kennedy's definition of the modern short story cycle, to show how this collection functions as a cycle and is representative of a broader trend in "ethnic" fiction. The mother-daughter relationship theme present throughout the stories, recurring symbols such as death, flight and butterflies, the order of the stories and authorial intention are all elements that confirm that *Krik? Krak!* is indeed a short story cycle. Although it is true that the Caribbean short story cycle has known a recent growth and expansion, it is certainly not a new form in the region.

Recent Caribbean criticism tends to focus on contemporary literature (1980's onwards) while overlooking earlier Caribbean literature. Although it has become easier to research earlier Caribbean literature, especially to find information on first edition short story collections, this information has not always been readily available. In *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Short Stories*, editors Steward Brown and John Wickham are sometimes unable to give titles and dates of collections published prior to the 1970's (only four collections are actually mentioned.) The first collection of short stories published in the Caribbean mentioned in the bibliographical notes is *Tropic Death* (1926) by Eric Walrond, a writer who was closely associated with the Harlem Renaissance. The first undeniable Caribbean cycle, *Miguel Street*, was published in 1959 by Naipaul. *Miguel Street* although it is similar in many respects to Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Joyce's *Dubliners* has yet to be studied as a short story cycle.

The Caribbean is a place of cross-cultural interaction; it is a place that has been colonized by three major colonial powers: France, England and Spain. Although the same can be said about North America or Latin America, the Caribbean colonization was very different from the colonization on the continent. Literary influences come from three different literary backgrounds and merge to create a distinctive literary identity, one that tries to detach itself from the former

colonizing power and tries to reach back to its roots, to recover its own roots. Early Caribbean literature tends to recreate its own myths, its own identity. There is a strong will to define and embrace a national (Haitian, Cuban or Trinidadian) identity or even a broader Caribbean identity. However, during the second half of the twentieth century, there seemed to be a trend to affirm individual identity, one not suffocated by the majority. The Caribbean is a “new space” colonized by Europeans and where workers come from different cultures (Africa, India, China and Malaysia). Therefore, it is no wonder that individuals or small communities feel the need to affirm their own culture and identity. The short story cycle seems to be the perfect medium to express this dual will to affirm selfhood and to belong to a community.

1.5. Towards a New Definition of the Short Story Cycle

The short story cycle generally focuses on the community, whether a broad, regional or national community (*El Llano en Llamas*) or a smaller neighborhood community (*Miguel Street*). Many cycles consist of snap-shots, portraits, sketches of various individuals in a given society. It would, however, be restrictive to say that the cycle consists only of an overall view of the given society/community. As Frank O'Connor's study, *The Lonely Voice*, emphasizes, the characters that take center stage in most modern short stories are individuals on the fringes of societies, people who have been cast out or have chosen not to belong to a community they either despise, hate or cannot accept and therefore these individuals are not and cannot be entirely representatives of the community in which they live.

The short story cycle is at the crossroads between the novel and a collection of short stories. Here, unlike what had been done before, the authors decide the precise placement of each story within the cycle. Every story fits into the cycle and guides the reader towards a broader spectrum of understanding. It seems it is an extension of both genres, the novel and the short

story, since it tries “to maintain a balance between the individuality of each of the stories and the necessities of the larger unit.” (Ingram, 15) According to Ingram, the author is the one who writes, rewrites or adds stories to the cycle. In this study of three representative short story cycles of the Americas, one of the key elements is the fact that the stories have not only been rearranged but also revised in order to conceive a meaningful whole. This confirms that the author not only works on the form of the cycle but also wants the reader to experience each individual story in the context of the cycle as a whole.

The short story cycle is therefore a new form or genre, but it is also a new experience for the reader. Stanley Fish in *Interpreting the Variorum* presents the concept of ‘Reader-Response’ theory, which focuses on the reader and his response to the text. According to Stanley Fish every reader takes part in ‘interpretive communities.’ We experience the text through the sum of what we have previously read; the reader is the one who is forming the text while reading it and interpreting it. To a certain extent when applied to short story cycles, his theory helps us understand why as readers we readjust our interpretation during the course of the cycle. Unlike a novel, which tends to be uninterrupted and develops the main characters as well as the plot that leads the reader through the novel, the short story cycle compels the reader to readjust his interpretation after each story. The cycle is inherently sequential; the stories must be read and interpreted in the order in which they are presented by the author. However, the concluding story forces a retrospective assessment of the entire work. This implies the genre’s dual nature: sequential and cyclical. Not only are we capable of understanding each story on several different levels, but also our appreciation for the whole as well as each specific story within it adjusts and readjusts as we read. Indeed, the cycles which will be the focus of the next three chapters follow a sequential and cyclical structure.

What constitutes a short story cycle? In many cases the ability to properly interpret a short story cycle comes from being able to realize the link between each story. It seems obvious that Hemingway's *In Our Time* is a short story cycle, but the connection from one story to another is not evident. Yet, G. Kennedy notes that the "enigmatic and disconnected pairing forms the symbolic crux of *In Our Time* and indeed (as readers of Hemingway recognize) prefigures the writing of *A Farewell to Arms*." (Kennedy 17) It might consequently seem arbitrary to call a collection of short stories a cycle. Therefore it is important to be able to explain the underlying architecture behind the overall structure. What makes it a cycle instead of a novel? To be able to examine the short story cycle, it is necessary to look at it from a different angle than we would a novel, a poem or a short story. A cycle is more complex than it appears to be on the surface; it combines the relative independence of a story within the short story collection and the overall meaning that can be found in novels. This combination of genres "imposes new strategies of reading in which the movement from one story to the next necessitates reorientation, just as the uneasy reciprocity between part and whole conditions the ongoing determination of meaning." (Kennedy 14) Kennedy distinguishes three "focal points of implication" that help us delimit the short story cycle. Understanding the meaning of the title is fundamental since it is an indication of the major theme behind the whole. It is also essential to understand how the author has deliberately organized the stories in such a way that they affect our reading of the collection as a unified whole. Finally, the intertextuality within a cycle not only gives the reader hints about the connections between stories, but also underlines the main themes.

The cycle as a new, modernist literary form serves purposes that cannot be achieved by the modern novel, even less by the traditional novel. The novel in comparison to the short story or the novella "permits a greater variety of characters, greater complication of plot (or plots),

ampler development of milieu, and more sustained exploration of character and motive” (Abrams 190). However, the novel, even in its modern form, only allows one or a few characters to take the center stage, whereas the short story cycle does not have such restrictions. The short story cycle allows the writer to combine two opposing forces, the need for the exploration of individuals, especially an inner or psychological exploration, versus the need to situate these individuals in a broader community. This statement however, does not fully answer why there is a need to combine these opposing forces. I believe that the cycle serves at least two purposes which although different do not necessarily contradict each other.

The first purpose corresponds to my belief that the modern short story cycle relates in some ways the dynamic duality of a desire or acceptance of individuality, selfhood, independence, versus the desire for a lost, denied, ideal (utopia) community. O’Connor, when talking of the modern short story, argues that the focus on the lonely individual began with Gogol’s short story “The Overcoat.” In this story, the main character Akakey Akakeivitch, a clerk in a “certain department,” is constantly harassed, made fun of and rejected by his peers. Akakey’s longing to be a part of society is made clear though, through the changing perception of a young man, “the figure of the humble little clerk with a bald patch on his head rose before him with his heart-rending words ‘Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?’ and in those heartrending words he heard others: ‘I am your brother’” (qtd. in O’Connor, 16). These words resonate in most modern short stories and are an underlining theme in most short story cycles. Joyce, Anderson, Rulfo, Naipaul, all use this notion in their cycles to show a fractured, broken, dissonant society, but also to show that their characters yearn to belong, be a part of that society. Although this effect can be achieved in a single story, the cycle allows the writer to develop this theme, to reinforce it, to make it more evident. A cycle diversifies the reader’s experience

through an exploration of a given community; not only does it reveal a broader view of this community, but it also expands our understanding of the individuals that compose it. While not all stories focus on a single character, short stories tend to present one or more characters that become the focal point of the narrative. In this study of the short story cycle, I will refer to these central characters as the focus character or characters. The notion of the focus character is essential given the cycle as a whole reflects a community in which the concept of the individual can be lost.

A cycle, however, is not a stagnant reflection of a community; the sequence, the unfolding of the stories gives motion to the cycle, to the community, to the individual stories. Indeed, in certain stories we can have the impression that society is stagnant; yet, society, as a matter of fact, is always changing, evolving and it is only in a cycle that change becomes visible. The second purpose, therefore, is based on this idea of change and evolution in the community, the cycle. Change is part of the daily reality in the twentieth century; modernization, urbanization, decolonization are only a few factors (although significant ones) that contribute to the evolution of society. This idea of a changing society is also present in modern novels; the cycle, though, because it focuses on different individuals, is able to present a greater range of point of views. Indeed, it is rare that every individual in a community agrees on change. Most people are resistant to change whether moral, geographical or otherwise. As we have said, individuals in modern short stories feel they do not belong, or no longer belong to their community; individual stories can focus on given characters and their reaction to the evolving society in which they live. It is true that the cycle does not always focus on one individual, but in many cycles characters reappear periodically, and in some cycles a single character (although not on the center stage of most stories) is present from beginning to end. These characters, or “a

complex collective protagonist” are usually the counterbalance of the general tendency of the community’s attitude towards change. They illustrate another dynamic duality of a general or individual will for an evolving society versus the will for society to remain the same.

Faulkner in his two short story cycles insists on this problem. *The Unvanquished* and *Go Down, Moses*, both explore this dual will for an evolving/traditional community. In *The Unvanquished*, it is Bayard who represents change when in the last story “An Odor of Verbena” he refuses to kill his father’s murderer, thus breaking with the Southern code of revenge, going against the tradition of violence, the moral background and education of Southerners. In *Go Down, Moses*, however, old Issac MacCaslin illustrates just the opposite; he is resistant to change, he refuses the modern laws of ownership, the loss of moral values and traditions. He dislikes the urbanization of the South (as shown in “Delta Autumn”); in short, in this cycle, he is the overall representative figure that stands against change. Not all the characters in *Go Down, Moses* are against change, but some of the main characters refuse and fight against change or retreat from it. Uncle Buck and Buddy, although they have advanced concepts of slavery and land ownership, resist change. Although Uncle Buck is not yet ready for change, he knowingly gambles with his freedom in the story “Was,” and only gets out of marrying Miss Sophonsiba because Uncle Buddy, impervious to any change, comes to rescue him. This concept of change, evolution, transition in the community, is maybe not inherent to all short story cycles; however, I believe it is a key factor in cycles of the American South, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Why focus only on these three regions? Why not include the broader Americas (Canada, Brazil and North America) or to that matter, Ireland (a region where the short story has especially flourished) or Europe? The choice of these three particular regions does not merely

come from the fact that they are geographically close. More compelling is the fact that there is a definite literary dialogue between the American South, the Caribbean and Hispanic America.

The American South, Hispanic America and the Caribbean have many common traits not only in literature, but also in their history, and especially in a reforging of their own national/regional identity. Indeed, these three regions were subjected to differing forms of colonialist imperialism. Hispanic America and the Caribbean were under the direct rule of either Spain, France or England and achieved their independence in the early to mid nineteenth century, and throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The American South, although it was not colonized by the North, did nonetheless suffer defeat and the subsequent years of Northern control during the Reconstruction after the Civil War. All three regions underwent a radical uprooting of their traditional social structure, and in the years that followed independence or Reconstruction, they not only had to reorganize the social structure but also redefine, reaffirm their selfhood and their collective identity.

I have chosen three short story cycles which, I believe, are representative cycles of these three regions: *Miguel Street* (1959) by V.S. Naipaul, *Los Funerales de Mama Grande* (1962) by Gabriel García Márquez and *Bloodline* (1968) by Ernest Gaines. I will study in depth each of these cycles concentrating on the structure, the order of the stories, and unifying elements such as characters, themes, internal symbolism, place, language and events, in order to demonstrate that these short story collections are indeed short story cycles. I have included a table of stories at the end of each chapter to facilitate the reader's conception of the sequence. It is also essential to treat these cycles in light of the two themes or factors out of which the modern cycle originates: desire for selfhood versus desire for community and desire for change versus desire to remain the same or even to go back. The cycle and more specifically the cycles from the South, Hispanic

America and the Caribbean reflect the need for individuals to assert their selfhoods but also the need to challenge an imposed mass identity in order to form a new collective identity based on revived and revised inherited myths.

1.6. V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street*

Miguel Street (1959) was V.S. Naipaul's first complete work of fiction (1955), even though it was published after his first two novels *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) and *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1959). Born and raised in Trinidad in a family of Indian descent, Naipaul left the island for England in 1950 after having received a Trinidadian government scholarship and obtained his B.A. in English from Oxford University in 1953. Although he came back to the island briefly in 1956, he "found it stifling and in the midst of racial and political conflict" (King 10) and never came back to live on his native island. He did, however, return as a traveler, an outsider as part of a trip he made to explore the Caribbean. He transcribed his reflections of this journey in *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies – British, French and Dutch – in the West Indies and South America*, in which his bleak, pessimistic depiction of Trinidad shows his perception of the island and its inhabitants as a center of paralysis:

I knew Trinidad to be unimportant, uncreative, cynical. The only professions were those of laws and medicine, because there was no need for any other; and the most successful people were commission agents, bank managers and members of the distributive trades. Power was recognized, but dignity was allowed to no one. Every person of eminence was held to be crooked and contemptible. We lived in a society which denied itself heroes. (MP 34; 35)

In *Miguel Street*, written five years after his departure from Trinidad, even though the overall structure and some of its latter stories reveal Naipaul's negative opinion of his native island, the cycle, especially in the beginning stories paints the dynamic and vibrant life of a diverse street community in which blacks, Indians and some white characters intermingle. Naipaul's vision of Trinidad is certainly not as negative as it became in his latter works of fiction and non-fiction.

Indeed, these stories are more representative of Naipaul's own life as a boy, an innocent, curious child and echo his life in Port of Spain: "I immediately fell in love with what I could see of the life of the Woodbrook street, and its municipal order." (WP 3)

Comprised of seventeen short stories, *Miguel Street* is certainly not a mere collection of Naipaul's early stories as it does not include "The Mourners" (1950), "My Aunt Gold Teeth" (1954) and "The Enemy" (1955) which were later gathered along other stories in another short story cycle: *A Flag on the Island* (1967). The stories collected and arranged in *Miguel Street* are loosely based on Naipaul's own experience of Port of Spain as a boy, adolescent and young man. The central figure of this short story cycle, the nameless narrator, recounts comical, pathetic and dramatic events that have directly influenced and impressed him as he grows, matures and eventually starts to decipher the underlying personalities of his neighbors and friends revealing a stagnant environment. The narrator identifies the problems that afflict this small community and he comes to realize that he can only fulfill his potential by leaving Port of Spain and escaping this static environment to go study in England in the concluding story "How I Left Miguel Street."

The central themes that reappear throughout the cycle originate from a legacy of slavery, indentured servantry and colonialism. The narrator's own family does not play an important role in his development. Fatherless, an only child, he mostly looks up to men in search of a father figure, a guide who would help him attain a better life. However, his efforts are fruitless and even his closest adult friend, Hat, eventually fails in his eyes as he is sent to prison after beating a woman unconscious. Daily violence, poverty and bitterness symbolize the post-colonial disorder of this Trinidadian community. The focus characters live in dream worlds and their attempts to impersonate, emulate famous personalities, movie characters and even Jesus (in

“Man-man”) reveal a common, overreaching desire to avoid reality. The narrator, though, finally understands the limitation, failures of the people that surround him and the fact that they are trapped in a cycle of failure. Their delusions and dreams of grandeur are the only way to escape from their daily problems. The women in this cycle are an exception to this general rule and are the only characters able to face their predicament. Although the inhabitants of Miguel Street strive to realize their dreams, they are unable to do so because they live in a post-colonial society on the verge on independence, a transition they cannot follow. The only perceptible progression in the cycle comes from the narrator as he moves from innocence to bitterness to self-fulfillment. The transition from one stage to the next is the driving force that creates the dynamic of the cycle.

1.7. Ernest Gaines’s *Bloodline*

Although *Bloodline* (1968) is Ernest Gaines’ third published book, after *Catherine Carmier* (1964) and *Of Love and Dust* (1967), he had previously written and published three of the collection’s five stories. “A Long Day in November” (*Texas Quarterly* 7 (1964): 190-224) is “the first story in the sequence but also the first to be written” (Luscher 66) although it was published after “The Sky Is Gray” (*Negro Digest* 12 (August 1963): 72-96) and “Just Like a Tree” (*Sewanee Review* 71 (1963): 542-48). These stories and the third and fourth stories, “Three Men” and “Bloodline,” which first appeared in the collection, form the fivefold sequence of *Bloodline*. Gaines did not include “The Turtles” (1956), “Boy in the Double Breasted Suit” (1957), and “Mary Louise” (1960) which shows that this collection was not just an assemblage of early short stories but, rather a conscious effort to create a structured work of fiction.

Gaines never referred to *Bloodline* as a “short story cycle” in his numerous interviews. However, he has given reason to consider that *Bloodline* is more than a mere collection of early

short stories. Indeed, some of his comments on *Bloodline* show that Gaines envisioned *Bloodline* to be a unified work:

In expressing his fondness for the structure of *Bloodline*, he has compared the result of ‘getting all these [stories] together to make a novel’ with Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* (Luscher 64).

All men have hopes, and all men brutalize other things near them, at home, when they cannot fulfill those hopes. I read Joyce’s Dublin stories, and see the same sort of thing (qtd in Luscher 74).

Even though the second quote does not insist on structure but rather on a particular theme, the structure of both cycles are comparable. *Bloodline*, just like Joyce’s *Dubliners*, moves from childhood to adolescence to maturity and from the private to the public life.

The cycle focuses primarily on the black male and his search for identity, for manhood. The first four narrators are male, while the last story is a set of ten separate narratives which are told by 6 men (two boys, three adults one and an outsider from the north) and four women. Each of the first four narrators grows older as the sequence unfolds. Sonny, the focus character of the first story, “A Long Day in November,” is a six years old boy caught in an argument between his mother and father. The story focuses on Sonny and his perception of his father’s quest to regain his mother’s trust. While Sonny has both his parents and lives within the quarters, James, in the second story, “The Sky is Gray,” two years older than Sonny, no longer has his father, as he has been sent away by the military, and goes to Bayonne with his mother to go to the dentist. The environment in this story is harsher than the first one because James experiences segregation. In the third story, “Three Men,” Proctor is a young man who has lost both of his parents and goes to prison after killing a man. Forced in an even harsher environment, Proctor realizes through a three way conversation with his cellmates that he is at a crossroad. He has to make a choice between freedom and responsibility for his actions, which implies staying in prison and suffering or accepting his uncle’s plantation owner’s help, getting out of prison but remaining subservient

to the white authorities. In *Bloodline*, the title story, the narrator is a seventy year old man named Felix. However, the focus character in this story is Copper Laurent who has also lost both of his parents and is of mixed blood being the son of the plantation owner's brother and a servant girl. Unlike the previous focus characters, Copper does not belong to the community and is on the verge of madness because he is unable to find his place in society. The final story, "Just Like a Tree," is comprised of ten narratives and focuses on Aunt Fe's departure. This concluding story is a micro-cycle of its own and the multiple perspectives Gaines presents reveal the communal strength and cohesion as Aunt Fe, the symbolic soul of the community, is about to be taken away.

The main themes of this cycle, violence, racial struggles and poverty, are the underlying elements of the African American male search for manhood but also a communal search for identity. This quest can be paralleled to Gaines's own search for his identity as a writer:

While ago we were concerned with a young man who was searching for that elusive "I." Part of it he found reading American, Russian, and French literature. Now he had to sit and think: how could he relate this to the lives of his ancestors and to the people whom he had grown up around; how to articulate their, his own people's experiences; how to articulate thoughts that they had been denied to articulate for over three hundred years? There were those recent migrants to the West who told him that digging into the past would be embarrassing, too painful; forget the past. But he wanted to become "I." And to do that meant to confront the past. (ML 35)

The sequence of stories in *Bloodline* reveals and develops this search for personal and communal identity. As each story takes place a few years after the previous one, Gaines explores the period that led to the emergence of Civil Rights in this fictional southern Louisiana rural community.

1.8. Gabriel García Márquez's *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*

Los funerales de la Mamá Grande (1962) is García Márquez' first short story cycle and is comprised of eight short stories: "La siesta del martes," "Un día de estos," "En este pueblo no

hay ladrones,” “La prodigiosa madre de Baltazar,” “La viuda de Montiel,” “Un día después de sábado,” “Rosas artificiales,” “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande.” An important element that seems intriguing is the fact that the title story is the last one of this collection. García Márquez also places the title story at the end of cycle in *La Increíble y Triste Historia de la Cándida Eréndira y de su Abuela Desalmada*. Although this is not a common trait in short story collections in Hispanic America, it can be found in collections by other writers such as in Cortázar’s *Las Armas Secretas* (1964) or in Borges’ *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (1941). The last story of a cycle is usually one that not only concludes the cycle but also functions as a means to tie all the stories together, giving the reader a sense of unity.

“Los funerales de la Mamá Grande,” the last story, gives a general sense of closure to the cycle, “placed at the end of the collection that carries its name as a general title, it is both a précis of the seven stories and a precursor of future masterpieces and stylistic innovations” (Oberhelman 31). The main character Mamá Grande dies halfway through the story while she is listening to a list of her earthly possessions which takes three hours. This recitation includes: “tres encomiendas adjudicadas por Cédula Real durante la Colonia, [...]. En ese territorio ocioso, sin límites definidos, que abarcaba cinco municipios y en el cual no se sembró nunca un solo grano por cuenta de los propietarios, vivían a título de arrendatarias 252 familias.”⁷ (LFMG 140) Mamá Grande obviously stands for the political and religious institutions of Columbia, and the story seems to be highly critical of the dictatorial regime in Columbia in the 1950’s. The death of Mamá Grande is symbolic of a decaying system. Though her funeral is attended by all the major figures of Columbia, even including the Pope, her funeral is also the funeral of the country as

⁷ “three districts, awarded by Royal Decree at the founding of the colony, [...]. In that unworked territory, without definite borders, which comprised five townships and in which not one single grain had ever been sown at the expense of the proprietors, three hundred and fifty-two families lived as tenant farmers” (trans. Bernstein 204). All subsequent translations of *Los funerales de Mamá Grande* are quoted from J.S. Bernstein’s translation in Collected Stories (1984).

Macondo's streets are covered by the trash people left behind. This reveals a pessimistic view of the country's state after she dies: "mañana miércoles vendrán los barrenderos y barrerán la basura de sus funerales, por todos los siglos de los siglos."⁸ (LFMG 155)

Mamá Grande is the character who dominates the cycle. After reading this last story, the reader has the definite impression that she has overshadowed the whole cycle. Even though not physically present in all the other stories (the only other story in which she appears is "Montiel's Widow"), she can be referred to as the "macrofigure" of this cycle, an essential unifying element. Indeed, Gomez' category fits perfectly Mamá Grande's position in this cycle.

This final story ties all the stories together, but also reveals a clearly defined thematic structure, "each story focuses on an individual in a crumbling society where it is impossible to establish solidarity with other human beings and the future offers no hope" (Oberhelman 35). All the characters in this cycle evolve in a universe they do not control. Each story portrays a decaying society, but also concentrates more on the failure of the characters to understand the world that surrounds them. Every character experiences hardships and to a certain extent personal failure. If most characters have and try to retain an identity of their own, this identity or individuality is drowned, oppressed in a world where these concepts do not have a place.

Characters and place are also indications of this cycle's unity. García Márquez has often been said to be influenced by Faulkner, Hemingway, Flaubert and Balzac. Characters and places are recurrent in Balzac and in turn in Faulkner's novels and short stories. Characters are not only present in one work of fiction but in several, giving an impression of unity to the fictional world the author created. Macondo, central place in *Cien Años de Soledad*, is also the village in which several of the stories in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* (pre-*Cien Años de Soledad*) take

⁸ "tomorrow, Wednesday, the garbage men will come and will sweep up the garbage from her funeral, forever and ever" (214).

place. In the other stories, the village where the action takes place is either not mentioned or referred to as El Pueblo. Garcia Márquez also uses recurring characters in different stories. Even though characters in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* do not tend to appear in other stories, a few such as Mama Grande, Colonel Aureliano Buendía and the priest Father Anthony Isabel are present in several stories. There is therefore a definite link between the short stories in the cycle beyond the macrofigure and themes.

2. Chapter I: V. S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street*

2.1. Introduction

V. S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street* is a collection of seventeen short stories, all of which were written between 1952 and 1955; they are told from the perspective of a narrator who remains nameless throughout the cycle. Naipaul wrote his first short story "Hat" while he was working as a freelancer for the BBC Caribbean service in 1952. Although it was published in 1959, after *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) and *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1959), *Miguel Street* was V.S. Naipaul's first completed manuscript (1955). According to Naipaul it is through this book that he discovered his identity as a writer: "it was through them [the stories in *Miguel Street*] that I began to appreciate the distorting, distilling power of the writer's art" (FC 22).

It is clear this collection was inspired by Naipaul's experience as a child and as a young adult. In the first narrative of *Finding the Center* (1984), "Prologue to an Autobiography," Naipaul explains he came across the first two sentences by combining his personal experience and fiction: "The first sentence was true. The second was invention" (22). He acknowledges that *Miguel Street* is a fictional/autobiographical book that "seemed to have been written by an innocent, a man at the beginning of knowledge both about himself and about the writing career that had been his ambition from childhood" (33). This comment is reflected in the structure, the sequence of the stories. The stories and the focus characters become more complex as the boy narrator grows older.

The link between the author and the nameless narrator is significant because it explains why *Miguel Street* is so different from other, later novels, short stories collections and narratives by Naipaul. As a matter of fact, in *Miguel Street*, Indian, black and white intermingle harmoniously and belong to the same community, reflecting a two year period in Naipaul's life

during which he lived with his immediate family in Port of Spain, a period of discovery which he describes as “the richest and most serene time of my childhood” (FC 39).

Mahabir in his 2008 article “V.S. Naipaul: Childhood and Memory” mentions that the inspiration for the location is based on Naipaul’s life on Luis Street: “It is this street with all its characters (the live Topee becomes the fictional Hat) and incidents that are reproduced in Miguel Street.” (8) This fact was confirmed by Naipaul in his prologue to *A Writer’s People* (2007). Although, *Miguel Street* is partially drawn from Naipaul’s childhood memories, it would be erroneous to believe that the cycle is entirely based on this one street. The title of the cycle, *Miguel Street*, does not make reference to a specific street but is rather a “composite of streets in Port of Spain,” (Cudjoe 19) given that it is a common street name in Port of Spain. It is important to take note that Naipaul did not choose Port of Spain or Trinidad, greater geographical areas, as the setting for the cycle. Although the characters are representative of lower class Trinidadians, Naipaul made the decision to obscure the location in which they evolve in order to represent the limitations of this postcolonial environment. The characters are lured into a false sense that their dreams and efforts will lead them to better lives. However, even the characters who put forth genuine efforts or achieve limited success are never able to escape their precarious condition. The dominant themes, reflected throughout the cycle, stem from the legacy of slavery and colonialism.

Oblivious to the daily realities they have to face, the characters live in dream worlds, impersonating other characters: Bogart plays a movie character, B. Wordsworth pretends to be the black Wordsworth; or Man-man announces “he was the new Messiah” (MS 52). All act this way in order not to confront the reality of their own nature. It is when they are forced back to reality that the narrator realizes and understands their limitations, their failure and most of all the

fact that they will never achieve anything. The male characters are unable to assert themselves; they pursue futile dreams of grandeur instead of coming to terms with the necessary problems at hand.

The overall portrait in *Miguel Street* is one of a stagnant community. This first impression, however, hides the fact that, although the characters endeavor to realize their dreams, they are unable to do so because they live in a society in transition, from a colonized society to an independent one, a transition they cannot follow. It is through the narrator's changing relation to the others that we are able to see the elder characters' immobility; the only progression comes from the narrator as he moves from innocence to bitterness to self-realization. The narrator's transition through these three stages is the driving force that creates the dynamic of the cycle.

In order to appreciate the dominant themes in *Miguel Street* and understand how the narrator comes to the conclusion that he needs to leave Trinidad in order to pursue a meaningful life, it is essential to study *Miguel Street* as a short story cycle. There are three aspects that come into play when analyzing the structure of the stories. First of all, it is clear that the stories are sequential, following the narrator's development from childhood innocence to blossoming maturity as a young adult. It is possible to divide the sequence into three stages.

At the beginning, from "Hat" to "B. Wordsworth," we see the people and the events unfold through the eyes of a young boy who accepts what he sees and what he is told as the truth. He does not make judgments nor does he question events and characters. It is only in the seventh story, "The Coward," that the narrator begins to form an opinion of his own. The narrator slowly becomes aware that adults have limitations; he begins to judge and to understand fallacies that underlie projected personalities. Consequently, the narrator struggles to understand the reasons

why the residents of Miguel Street repeatedly fail to achieve their goals. It is only in “Caution” (the fourteenth story) that the narrator starts to realize that there is no outlet for the people who live on Miguel Street. The reason behind this collective failure is not merely due to the people themselves, but is due to the street, the community, the country in which they live; an environment that fosters disillusion and failure. The downfall of his hero and mentor (Hat) as well as the narrator’s initiation to the Miguel Street club opens his eyes to the unavoidable failure that awaits him.

To see only the sequential movement leaves aside a key element: the cyclical pattern of the stories. Hat, apart from the narrator, is the most important character in *Miguel Street*; he is the first character mentioned in the first story “Bogart” and is the focus of the penultimate story (“Hat”). Although a few other characters in *Miguel Street* eventually go to prison, it is noteworthy to mention that both Bogart and Hat (the first and last focus characters) are incarcerated for similar reasons furthering the notion of Miguel Street as a place of entrapment. The sixteenth story seals the cycle leaving the narrator confined and condemned to repeat the same mistakes. However, the seventeenth story enables the narrator to break the cycle and leave Miguel Street to go study abroad. He is finally able to break the cycle of failure that mires the inhabitants of Miguel Street.

The stories in *Miguel Street* focus on individuals, couples and families. Each sketch retains its individuality and could be read separately from the whole. However, the interweaving of characters throughout the narration of *Miguel Street* gives shape and dynamics to the community in which the narrator lives. The community plays a vital function in many modern short story cycles (Kennedy 195). In *Miguel Street*, the community – i.e. the group of men, women and children who live on Miguel Street – plays an essential role in the development of

the narrator. Indeed, it is through the narrator's double vision, both as a growing boy and as an adult's reflection on past events, that we are able to build a clear vision of Miguel Street's community. Most focus characters reappear throughout the cycle, in other stories, whether they are only mentioned or actually take an active part in the given story. Although a majority of the focus characters are men, Naipaul does not leave aside women and children. As a matter of fact most of the tension and violence in the street stems from relationship problems and bitter fights between lovers, married couples or attempts to break away for parental guidance. It is through the understanding of the dynamics that shape the community that we can grasp the narrator's decision to leave the street.

Recurring familial conflict characterizes the narrator's relationship with his mother. She is strict and authoritarian but, compared to other mothers and fathers on Miguel Street, essentially a good mother who looks out for her son. Naipaul mentions that he intentionally chose such a small family "for the sake of speed, to avoid complications, [...] out of my wish to simplify..." (FC 23). Because the family dynamics are simple, the fatherless narrator seems to be attracted to men who strike him as supporting, men who can provide guidance and teach him how to evolve in this male dominated society, something his mother is unable to do.

At the beginning of *Miguel Street*, the narrator is fascinated by the respected, colorful and sometimes domineering figures of his close surroundings (Bogart, Popo, Man-man). B. Wordsworth, for some time, is the only one who truly befriends and mentors the narrator. The first eight stories focus on men who project an artificial, a fabricated personality and are eventually crushed by the daily realities that confront them. However, in the following eight stories (the second half of the cycle), as the narrator grows up, he becomes interested in men and

women who do not have to project a false personality but seem to have one of their own: Titus Hoyt, Eddoes, Laura. The narrator starts to become more observant.

In the second half of the cycle, the narrator starts to examine life within households, and how people manage their daily lives. His critical eye becomes sharper. In “The Mechanical Genius,” he starts to use irony, showing a better ability to judge the people who surround him. In the last three stories, the narrator is able to deconstruct and analyze not only how the focus characters function but also how external factors (the presence of the American base) affect them. In the last story of the second half (“Hat”) the narrator finally realizes that Hat is no different from Bogart, Man-man or any other of the first eight characters. After seeing his hero go to jail, it is upon Hat’s return that the narrator comes to realize his only option is to leave the street and the island itself in order to find a meaningful goal in life. Hat never was the narrator’s childhood idol, only the last of a series of characters who hid behind a projected image, living a meaningless life.

Although the stories within *Miguel Street* give shape to the cycle, I would also like to take into account the stories Naipaul decided to omit in order to demonstrate the work’s cohesiveness as a unified whole. It is important to note that the stories Naipaul used in *Miguel Street* were not the only stories Naipaul could have included; he wrote at least four other stories which are told from the same perspective: “The Mourners” (1950), “My Aunt Gold Teeth” (1954), “The Enemy” (1955), and “The Raffle” (1957), later published in *A Flag on the Island* (1967). The absence of these stories reveals Naipaul’s conception of *Miguel Street* as a cohesive unit of short stories.

The overall sequence of stories combines to form an overview of a poor neighborhood community in Port of Spain over the span of twenty years. Although the portrait is not always a

positive one, the narrator presents a community that works as a functional unit. There is a sense that this cohesive unit strives to help individuals in their time of need. Even though there are strong animosities between a few individuals on Miguel Street, most people try to help one another, or at least to support one another. This is true of the core community that composes Miguel Street. Characters like Bogart, George and Toni who keep to themselves and remain alienated from the rest of the community, mainly because of their erratic behavior, are not truly a part of the street but rather a source of gossip. These exceptional characters, who eventually leave Miguel Street serve to emphasize the overall bond of the community. This tendency is especially true when one of them is facing hardship. When Popo's wife leaves him for another man, he is immediately taken in by the Miguel Street Club. It is the same when Elias, an adolescent with high aspirations, attempts to pass the Cambridge Senior School certificate examination. Everybody supports him in his endeavor and even after he fails repeatedly, his worth is never questioned.

The community takes pride in being a part of Miguel Street: "[...]we who lived there saw our street as a world, where everybody was quite different from everybody else" (MS 79). Throughout the cycle, the community is pleased when one of their own brings citywide or even national attention to their street. Characters such as Popo, Man-man, Big Foot and others generate this kind of attention, neither through heroic actions, nor through meaningful contributions to their community but rather because of their aloofness. For a short while they become heroes in the eyes of the Miguel Street community. This community has its own history, its own identity; those who live there have the sense they belong to a functional and unique whole, which contrasts with the lack of a larger, national, identity. The people of Miguel Street can find refuge in a community they know they are a part of, which has an identity of its own.

Miguel Street is a neighborhood unlike any other in Trinidad because of its cultural diversity. In the nineteenth century, Trinidad was a country racially divided, a place where Indians, blacks and whites lived in 'segregated' neighborhoods. While this segregation slowly disintegrated at the beginning of the twentieth century, "Colin Clarke suggests that the 'outstanding feature of the social structure of Trinidad and Tobago' is the dichotomy between Afro-Trinidadians and the Indo-Trinidadians" (Tanikella 160). This non-forced segregation was becoming a troubling problem at the time in Trinidad as Indians and blacks fought separately to gain better working conditions and political representation. Miguel Street although mainly comprised of Indians and blacks also counts a few white people and never at any point in the cycle is race a problematic issue.

Naipaul illustrates this multifaceted culture by using Calypsos, generally thought of as belonging to the Afro-Caribbean culture, throughout the cycle, something that he will never use again in his later works of fiction. The tradition of the Calypso can be seen as a bridge closing the gap between racial cultures. Indeed, Calypsos are traced back to African slaves who arrived to Trinidad and used this form of singing to mock their master. Calypsos evolved over the years due to Trinidad's mixed colonial background. Although Trinidad was first a Spanish and later a British colony, there was also a strong French presence in Trinidad that introduced the tradition of Carnival. (Warner 10) *Miguel Street* mirrors the Calypso's dual approach to events and issues that resonate in Trinidad. Keith Warner stresses the Calypso's duality in *A Study of the Calypso as Oral Literature*: "While it is true that very serious themes are treated, the prevailing mood in such calypsos is still clearly not one of attendant seriousness. [...] Humour, then, is the dominant tone in most calyposoes" (111). Naipaul successfully fashioned this short story cycle in a way

that truly resembles Calypsos, closely interweaving humor and pathos in the same way that Naipaul weaves his focus characters.

Calypsos can be found sporadically throughout the cycle. However, they are present in almost every story in the second half of the cycle. This is particularly important because it is in the second half of the cycle that the narrator starts to examine and open his critical eye to grasp how the community functions as a whole and not just as individuals. Calypsos, Caribbean satirical songs, harshly depict the daily realities and events important to the lower class population. The repeated and more frequent usages of Calypsos are not “the response in contrast to the innocence of the boy narrator,” (King 26) but rather show the narrator’s gradual awareness of Trinidad’s reality. Naipaul states in *The Middle Passage* that “it is only in the calypso that the Trinidadian touches reality” (75).

2.2. The Sequence

Miguel Street can be referred to as Naipaul’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Naipaul’s first completed manuscript, like Joyce’s first novel, is a *bildungsroman* or rather a *bildungszyklus*⁹. The cycle follows the narrator from childhood through adolescence to young adulthood, from innocence to emerging maturity: “the young narrator of the short stories demonstrates the growing awareness of one approaching maturity” (Nightingale 14). The stories are sequential and the character’s development throughout the cycle is undeniable. The cycle is comprised of seventeen stories, yet not every story yields life-changing lessons for the narrator and not all stories play an equal part in the construction of a distinct, personal identity. The linear progression of the cycle is built around three clusters of stories and three cornerstone stories that drastically change the narrator’s perspective of the Miguel Street community but more importantly of his own life. Cornerstone stories in a cycle support and reinforce the forward

⁹ Zykuls : stands for cycle in German.

progression of the cycle by explicitly revealing important steps in the narrator's maturing process. These three stories should also be seen as the narrator's cumulative learning experience of the prior cluster of stories and its implementation in his relation to and understanding of subsequent focus characters.

The cycle's first story "Bogart," serves as a general introduction to *Miguel Street*. The narrator does not actually take part in the story; he merely depicts the group of men who live on the street (this association is later known as the Miguel Street club), their habits and general attitude. Bogart, the focus character, is not described nor perceived through the eyes of the narrator but rather through those of Hat who seems to have a closer relationship to Bogart. The only interaction between the narrator and Bogart is mentioned at the beginning of the story: "He made a pretence of making a living by tailoring, and he had even paid me some money to write a sign for him" (10). From here on out, the narrator has no explicit interaction with Bogart and it is chiefly through Hat's perspective that the story progresses and ends. Hat's final comment on Bogart is an attempt to explain Bogart's return to Miguel Street as well as general a definition of the Miguel Street club: "To be a man, among we men" (16). The narrator does not at any point form an opinion on Bogart; he is the passive recipient of Hat's personal point of view.

The first cluster of stories, from "The Thing Without a Name" to "B. Wordsworth," represents the formation of basic feelings and opinions about the people who play an important role in the development of the narrator. The stories invariably begin with a simple opinion about a focus character, whom the narrator perceives he likes, fears, admires, understands or respects. However, as all these men have to face failure or what seem to be insurmountable obstacles in different aspects of their lives, they are forced to change their lifestyle radically. It is not so much the shifting relation to the narrator that disturbs him but rather the consequence of the difficulties

these men face, the forced changes the narrator perceives in men he saw as self-sufficient, independent. Each story has a double, conflicting conclusion; one represents the views of the Miguel Street club (voiced by Hat) and one expresses the narrator's opinion (the ending of "B. Wordsworth" is the only exception). The Miguel Street club approves the changes they witness, as failure brings the men closer together and more dependent on one another or is seen as deserved for those who still will not join the group. The narrator, however, is reticent to acknowledge their failure, even that of George whom he fears.

Indeed, in "The Thing Without a Name," the narrator repeatedly describes Popo as a person "I liked" (17). To like is a simple emotion, an opinion about a man to whom he looks up. Yet, the past tense expression of this opinion foreshadows the end of the story. Popo at the beginning of the story is an eccentric individual, a carpenter who is "always busy hammering and sawing and planing," (17) even though he never makes anything useful. He is always good humored, mostly due to the fact that he is not burdened by any responsibilities. However, Popo eventually has to face the bleak reality of his wife's infidelity and sudden departure due to his laziness. Popo comes to the realization he needs to change, to turn his life around in order to get her back. This life changing insight does not translate into hard work but instead, Popo steals, refurbishes and sells furniture others made in order to entice his wife to come back home. Popo, now forced to "work," forced to co-mingle with the Miguel Street club and drink to fight his loneliness, is eventually sent to jail for nine months for theft. In the eyes of the Miguel Street club Popo's stay in prison marks him as a true man, as a hero. However, now that Popo is a man, he has responsibilities, he now has to work with his own hands. He no longer has time to talk and joke with the narrator. The relationship between the narrator and Popo is altered: "for me, he had

changed. And the change made me sad” (25). Just as the story began, with a simple childlike emotion, it ends with another childlike emotion “sadness.”

“B. Wordsworth” the last story of the first cluster is a transitional story, that is to say a story of particular significance in which the narrator takes a meaningful step towards maturity. It is one of the most important stories in the account of the narrator’s development. B. Wordsworth, one of the positive mentors in the cycle, introduces the narrator to a new world, not only by sharing ideas and concepts that are novel to the narrator but also by doing “everything as though he were doing it for the first time in his life” (61) thus forming a strong bond between them. The narrator understands B. Wordsworth (61), who never tells him he cannot grasp the reasons behind a certain story or *le pourquoi et le comment* (the why and how) underlying the poet’s reactions to the way he is treated by society. It is through the narrator’s relation to B. Wordsworth that he starts to appreciate his own worth, his own ability to form a valid opinion. The narrator certainly learns more through this relationship than through any previous one. In this story, the narrator is given a unique opportunity to detach himself from the Miguel Street perspective because B. Wordsworth is the only character in the cycle who does not belong to nor interacts with the Miguel Street community. Yet, just as in the four previous stories, this one ends tragically with the death of B. Wordsworth, a loss which has a strong impact on the narrator: “I left the house and ran home crying, like a poet, for everything I saw” (65). However, this tragedy also pushes the narrator towards adulthood as we can see in the next story “The Coward.”

“The Coward,” the first cornerstone story in the overall sequence, can be seen as the result of the prior transitional story. Indeed, if in the first cluster of stories the narrator is still a young boy who finds it difficult to understand events that affect his immediate surroundings; in

“The Coward” the narrator starts to refine his commentaries. He is able to go past Big Foot’s projected personality and understand the hidden persona. Big Foot projects a dual image, in that he is both feared and respected by the Miguel Street community because of his physical appearance: “people were afraid of him because he was so silent and sulky; he *looked* dangerous” (66) but he is also perceived as a comedian by the people of Trinidad. At first, the narrator, just as everybody living on Miguel Street, is afraid of Big Foot. However, one significant incident shatters this image. As the narrator and Big Foot are both standing at the Docksite, they hear a sudden noise and a few moments later, the narrator sees Big Foot “about twenty yards away running for all he was worth” (72). Big Foot’s reaction to what turns out to be a “small white and black dog” (72) and his impending “hugging and striking the wet dog, and laughing in a crazy way” (72) leads the narrator to discover Big Foot’s true personality: a slow-witted adult who never grew up. This particular trait is revealed to the world after Big Foot’s defeat in the ring to a fake R.A.F. boxing champion: “He was like a boy, and the more he cried, the louder he cried, and the more painful it sounded” (77). The narrator relates to Big Foot; for the first time in the cycle he empathizes with the focus character in a way he had not been able to in the previous stories. This shift in the narrator’s ability to relate to the focus characters becomes obvious in the next cluster of stories as the sequence moves from individual men to a more varied group of men and women, couples and families.

The second cluster of stories, from “The Pyrotechnician” to “Love, Love, Love, Alone,” focuses on the narrator’s progression towards adolescence. Whereas the first and last group of stories focus on men and the predicaments they are forced to face, this cluster has a more diverse core of focus characters, ranging from families, to single mothers, to quarrelling lovers and even introduces a few characters who achieve limited success. This second cluster of stories serves a

double purpose; it presents a broader view and provides a better understanding of the Miguel Street community. The narrator is able to identify the key turning points in the focus characters' lives. No longer does the narrator use simple expressions; in "The Pyrotechnicist" he starts to use more complex appraisals: "It was easy to see he was shattered" (87). The shift in the narrator's perspective is important as he becomes more curious, a crucial component of his evolving learning development. The narrator, now able to make an opinion of his own, starts to grasp the inner-workings of the community. Not only is the narrator aware of his surroundings, but he is also gradually immersing himself in the Miguel Street Club. The stories in this second cluster no longer have a double conflicting conclusion. The narrator progressively accepts and agrees with Hat's final comments.

"The Pyrotechnicist" begins the same way as the stories in the first cluster, with the introduction of a male character. The focus of this story, though, is based not merely on Morgan, but rather on the dynamics of his marriage. Unlike other characters introduced up to this point in Miguel Street, Morgan enjoys and is serious about his job: "He loved fireworks, and he was full of theories about fireworks." (80) Morgan also strives to fill the role of the street comedian. However, he never succeeds in showing off his fireworks nor is he able to make others laugh. Eventually in a desperate attempt to initiate laughter, he organizes a mock trial of his children, which ends with a public beating. This latest failure followed by Morgan's typical yet ever increasing erratic drunken behavior causes his wife to leave for the country with the children. A week later when she returns to find him with another woman, she publicly humiliates him: "the sight was so comic, the thin man held up so easily by the fat woman, that we did laugh." (90) The very next night he burns his house revealing "the astonishing splendor of Morgan's fireworks" (91).

Although he eventually achieves his goals (to cause laughter and show off his skills with fireworks), this double public humiliation forces Morgan to leave Miguel Street. Morgan is never seen as self-sufficient. His happiness depends entirely on the respect he seeks and desires from the community, an unattainable respect that eventually destroys him. Throughout “The Pyrotechnicist,” the narrator empathizes with Morgan because he is able to understand the flaws that lead him to an unavoidable tragic ending. These flaws are not personal, but rather public. The community, or rather, the Miguel Street Club cannot stand Morgan’s forced and eccentric jokes and are never inclined to recognize his unproven fireworks skills. The narrator fully adopts the Miguel Street Club point of view on the focus character. The first paragraph of “The Pyrotechnicist” clearly shows the shift in the narrator’s perception of Miguel Street: “A stranger could drive through Miguel Street and just say ‘Slum!’ because he could see no more. But we who lived there saw our street as a world, where everybody was quite different from everybody else” (79). In these two sentences, the narrator summarizes his feelings about being a part of the Miguel Street community. The narrator now recognizes the importance of the community. It is through the community he perceives and judges the focus characters and is able to appreciate Morgan’s shortcomings.

At the very end of “The Pyrotechnicist,” the narrator shares his last personal opinion: “They said all sorts of things, but the people of Miguel Street were always romancers” (92). From this point onward, the familiar double, conflicting conclusions are no longer expressed. While the stories in this second cluster retain some of the comic tone that was prevalent in the first cluster, there is, however, an established undertone of tragedy. Indeed, the narrator is able to see, empathize with and understand the flaws in the focus characters and their dependence on the community’s perception of them. This newfound ability is linked to the Miguel Street club. Even

in “Titus Hoyt, I.A.”, a story, which at first glance contains no hint of tragedy, the narrator, alongside the male community, understands the futile efforts and desires of Titus Hoyt, a would-be scholar. Despite all of Titus’ efforts, he is unable to achieve a thorough grasp of history, language, grammar nor anything he sets up to learn and teach to others. It is for this reason he is mocked by his peers and even by the children he is trying to teach. This second cluster clearly reveals the narrator’s development as a growing boy. It nevertheless also shows that his identity is slowly being washed away by the more dominant communal identity and opinion of the Miguel Street Club.

“The Mechanical Genius,” a story that offers an insight into the narrator’s family life, is the second cornerstone story of the cycle. There are several important features in this story that contribute to the logical sequence of stories and the narrator’s development. The focus character, Uncle Bhakcu, is according to the narrator “very nearly a mechanical genius” (147). It is clear the narrator is being ironic, since it turns out Bhakcu knows practically nothing about car mechanics and spends most of his time destroying the cars he owns rather than fixing them. The narrator, however, has a special relationship to Bhakcu, one he compares to his relationship with Popo: “I liked him for the same reason that I liked Popo, the carpenter. For, thinking about it now, Bhakcu was also an artist” (157). Bhakcu always welcomes the narrator to participate in his car mechanics antics. The narrator’s relationship to his uncle is important because it foreshadows the cause of the narrator’s future success.

Indeed, one of the most important aspects of this story is Uncle Bhakcu’s success. At the beginning of the story the narrator’s uncle does not appear to have a job, even though he clearly enjoys a lifestyle unmatched in this poor community. He is able to buy at least two cars, a lorry and two taxis over the span of the story. How he is able to buy them, though, is a complete

mystery given that all his business ventures are complete failures. His wife pushes him through all his business endeavors and even starts two of her own. After four fiascos, she eventually, with the help of the narrator's mother, decides that Bhakcu will become a pundit¹⁰ because "he know the *Ramayana*¹¹, and he have a car" (164). Mrs. Bhakcu is the driving force behind Bhakcu. The couple, as all couples on the street, fights constantly. Bhakcu beats his wife regularly with rods and eventually a cricket bat. It seems, however, that Mrs. Bhakcu does not mind these beatings and the narrator states that "She was beating him too, with her tongue, and I think Bhakcu was really the loser in these quarrels" (159). Bhakcu is the only character in the cycle to achieve unequivocal success and happiness. This story certainly influences the narrator, even though that influence is not felt immediately but rather in the last story "How I Left Miguel Street." Just as Bhakcu achieves success by listening to his wife, the narrator is able to detach himself from the Miguel Street cycle of failure and eventually to go study in England by listening to his mother.

The last cluster of stories, from "Caution" to "Hat," draws the cycle to a close. The narrator, once again, shifts his focus to a group of male characters. The stories at the beginning of the cycle, generally comic in tone, undermine the tragic events the focus characters have to experience. In the second cluster, the stories, while still retaining comic aspects, start to become more dramatic. In this final cluster, the bleakness of the events and outcome of the stories prevail over the comic undertone. The narrator is now becoming older: "Look boy, you in long pants now" (176). His shifting focus as a growing boy went from 'single' men to families, couples within the community to the greater Trinidad and its effects on individuals. In this last cluster, Mr. Bolo, Edward and Hat do not believe in Trinidad, they constantly assume that the people in

¹⁰ A Hindu erudite who conducts religious ceremonies and gives advice.

¹¹ An important Indian epic part of the Hindu canon.

power and outside powers¹² are lying to them and controlling their lives. Through each of these three stories, the narrator becomes aware that Trinidad and more particularly his own community is a place of entrapment. These three stories take place over a greater period of time than the previous ones and go more in depth to examine the focus characters' development. This extended time period reveals that failure in Miguel Street is not due to single dramatic events or sharp turning points in characters' lives but is inevitable. The narrator himself is powerless against it and eventually accepts a sterile life devoid of any meaning.

"Caution" more readily exemplifies this third cluster. The narrator gets to know Bolo, a retired barber, over the span of eleven years (166). Bolo is known to be addicted to the news: "he bought all three Port of Spain newspapers, the *Trinidad Guardian*, the *Port of Spain Gazette* and the *Evening News*" (168). At first he is a strong advocate of these newspapers and the news they report. However, he gradually becomes disgruntled at these papers after he learns that the games are rigged and that they promote phony schemes. His general assessment after losing money because of these newspapers is that "You mustn't believe anything you read in the papers" (171). A strange consequence to his disbelief is a delayed acceptance of foreign events; he does not believe that World War Two is over until 1947, when he personally sees the Americans closing their military base. According to Bolo, the news "is only a lot of propaganda. Just lies for black people" (165). The newspapers in this story represent not only the white control over the mass-medias, the justice system and the government but also their deep seated corruption and their ability to control the general public. Bolo's disbelief in the Trinidad way of life eventually pushes him to leave Trinidad in order to go to Venezuela. Unfortunately, Bolo, cheated by a Trinidadian smuggler, is actually dropped back off the coast of Trinidad. This second episode prompts Bolo to distrust all Trinidadians. Thereafter, his only contact with the outside world is

¹² England and the United States.

the narrator. The only purpose of this relation is to check for the winning sweepstake ticket. Bolo eventually wins a small sum of money and the narrator has then to try to convince Bolo he won. Bolo, however, never believes the narrator, entrapped in his belief that “These Trinidad people does only lie, lie. Lie is all they know” (177). Eventually the only achievement Bolo has managed to accomplish is his own alienation from the community and Trinidad. The narrator witnesses this eleven years transformation of Bolo. Bolo, then Edward and finally Hat’s transformation cause the narrator to recognize that Trinidad “was a place where stories were never stories of success but of failure” (MP 35).

After the second cluster, in which the narrator presents the concept of a functional community, and, especially after “The Mechanical Genius,” the only story of unequivocal success, this third cluster seals the notion of life in Trinidad as a cul-de-sac. Indeed, this third cluster exemplifies Naipaul’s belief that “everybody was an individual fighting for his place in the community, yet there was no community” (MP 36). The narrator eventually comes to realize this in the final story “How I Left Miguel Street.” The narrator, naturally drawn to the Miguel Street club, follows the typical pattern of the men he observed, as he was growing up. He starts to smoke, drink, objectify women and is content with a menial job where he confiscates and steals liquor. Now a man, his own life becomes as grotesque and repetitive as that of any other man on Miguel Street: “next night I went to the club again. And again” (216). However, the end of the third cluster foreshadows the start of a deep change in the narrator’s perception of the men that surround him: “I had grown up and looked critically at the people around me. I no longer wanted to be like Eddoes. [...] Titus Hoyt was stupid and boring, and not funny at all. Everything had changed” (214). Although he understands the fallacy and limitations of the men that surround him, these men, nevertheless, have greatly influenced him. Indeed, instead of

blaming himself for his own path to self-destruction, he blames Trinidad: “Is not my fault really. Is just Trinidad. What else anybody can do here except drink?” (216) He cannot break free of this pattern alone.

Portraying Trinidad as a place devoid of any possibility of personal success, fulfillment or growth is a leitmotif in Naipaul’s earlier work such as *The Suffrage Of Elvira* (1958) or *The Mystic Masseur* (1957). Keith Garebian encapsulates Naipaul’s vision of Trinidad in “V.S. Naipaul’s Negative Sense of Place” asserting that the main characters “are frustrated in their native setting and feel that success and self-development are only possible outside their homeplace” (25). However, in his urgency to demonstrate Naipaul’s problematic relation to his homeland, he wrongfully affirms: “Young Nathaniel, the persona of *Miguel Street* (1959), matures and discovers that life on the Street is a microcosm of dispiriting failure, so he leaves it all in a mood of exultant relief” (25). Not only does he mistake the nameless narrator for Laura’s lover in “The Maternal Instinct” but he fails to grasp the narrator’s feelings as he leaves his mother, his family and friends but more importantly the community in which he grew up. The narrator undeniably wants to leave Trinidad, however, his departure to an unknown land sparks his doubts and fear as he is about to part: “at this stage I began wishing I had never got the scholarship. The airport lounge frightened me” (221). Yet, resolutely, the narrator leaves knowing it is the only way to achieve a meaningful life.

Just as his uncle was able to succeed, the narrator is able to find a way out of this cycle because his mother helps him obtain a scholarship to study pharmacology. The narrator has strived throughout the sequence of stories to become a part of the Miguel Street community. However, he eventually finds out that there is no community. He finally confirms it when he returns from the airport due to a flight delay. He expects people to greet him, surprised to see

him back so soon, yet he suddenly becomes aware that “although I had been away, destined to be gone for good, everything was going on just as before” (222). The narrator, just as all the characters in the sequence, was never a part of the community.

From the very beginning of the cycle, the double narration indicates that the narrator will eventually become an educated man. Indeed, although the boy is the main character, his voice is only ‘heard’ when he speaks to other characters; the educated, grown-up narrator narrates the stories at times using vocabulary that reflects his feelings as a younger boy. This dual narration is especially significant because it guides our vision of the main character throughout the sequence of stories. The narrator has obviously been able to escape from Miguel Street. This double narrative voice presents a double perspective, vision of the focus characters. The narrator’s sense of empathy and belonging to the Miguel Street community contrasts with his older self’s veiled irony present in every story. The older narrator, now an educated man, no longer belongs to that community: “In his attitude and values, the narrator is clearly no longer part of the world he describes, and this is reflected in the sharp contrast between the Creole spoken by the characters, including the narrator’s own boyhood self and the standard English narrative” (Mair 149). It is because the double narrative voice offers such contrasting visions of the focus characters and the community that the sequence of stories is so important in *Miguel Street*. However, to see only a linear sequence of stories restrains the cycle and does not allow us to fully understand the purpose of their arrangement.

2.3. The Cycle

Miguel Street is comprised of seventeen short stories. However, the last story no longer focuses on Miguel Street but rather on the narrator and his decision to leave Trinidad. Naipaul evidently must have been aware of the number of stories he included in his short story cycle.

Sixteen is a number that carries symbolism in most cultures, and more importantly in Hinduism where it is seen as a symbol of wholeness¹³. Even though Naipaul no longer practiced his family religion by the time he arrived in England (Garebian 30), he knew the symbolism this number conveyed. Sixteen is the number of incantations in the Vedas (a collection of ancient Indian texts), but also an important number in Karmic incarnations. The number sixteen represents a crossway in terms of evolution, it can be positive, leading to karmic liberation, or negative, leading to repeated cycles of unfruitful incarnations: “[...] par lui-même, 16, nombre pair, est incapable de choisir. L’évolution positive mène vers la libération karmique; l’évolution négative mène, au contraire, vers un enchaînement de plus serré dans les cycles de la nature”¹⁴ (Allendy 363). The narrator stands at such a crossroads at the end of the sixteenth story: “Everything had changed. When Hat went to jail, part of me had died” (214). In the seventeenth and last story, he is faced with the choice of staying in Trinidad and repeating a never ending cycle of failure or breaking away, going to England to study, following the path to self-enlightenment and transcending the cycle of failure that plagues Miguel Street and more generally Trinidad: “[...] 17 représenterait l’action de l’évolution sur le Cosmos et sa tendance à la libération karmique”¹⁵ (Allendy 364). The narrator is therefore the only character in Miguel Street to be liberated from the cycle of postcolonial failure.

The other focus characters, unable to leave the street or Trinidad, are trapped in a cycle of failure. This is unambiguous, especially when considering Hat, the only other character present in all but one of the short stories (“B. Wordsworth). He is the first character introduced in the cycle: “Every morning when he got up Hat would sit on the banister of his back verandah” (9).

¹³ *The Mystery of Numbers*, Annemarie Schimmel (216)

¹⁴ “In and of itself, 16, even number, is incapable of choosing. Positive evolution leads towards karmic liberation; negative evolution, on the contrary, leads towards an ever tighter sequence in nature’s cycles.”

¹⁵ “[...] 17 would represent the action of evolution on the Cosmos and its tendency to lead to karmic liberation.”

Bogart, the main character of this story, is sent to prison. Hat, also the focus character of the penultimate story “Hat”, also ends-up being sent to prison for three years. Hat represents the core of the Miguel Street Club, a stereotype of men in Trinidad. The cycle of sixteen stories begin and end with the focus characters jailed literally and figuratively. Entrapment is one of the major leitmotifs in *Miguel Street*. Landeg White, in *V.S. Naipaul: a Critical Introduction*, mentions that of the focus characters, “two end up in jail and one in an asylum, two die and the daughter of a third drowns herself, two move elsewhere in Trinidad” (49). Although this assessment is bleak and not altogether accurate (at least two more characters are sent to jail) it gives an appropriate summary of life on Miguel Street.

Whether it is prison or failure, the repetition of these two concepts is overwhelming throughout the cycle. All sixteen focus characters, male, female, yearning for success, money, knowledge or love, having very different agendas and goals, fail to accomplish their personal ambitions. Even Uncle Bhakcu, who eventually achieves monetary success, never properly learns mechanics, his only dream and passion. This cycle of underachievement transcends generations. In “The Maternal Instinct,” Laura, a single mother of eight, pushes her children to study in order to attain a better life. A joyous character throughout the story, Laura wants a different life for her children: “It have nothing like education in the world. I don’t want my children to grow like me” (115). However, her eldest daughter, even though she finds a job and takes typing lessons, becomes pregnant at a young age, just like her mother. Upon hearing the news, Laura is devastated, a shock for the narrator: “for the first time I heard Laura crying” (115). Probably due to her mother’s reaction Lorna commits suicide, which comes as a relief for Laura: “It good. It good. It better that way” (117). Repeated failure also occurs within most stories. Titus Hoyt, in “Titus Hoyt, I.A.,” tries to learn first aid, Latin, philosophy, science,

literature and history to no avail. Yet, he is, according to everyone, the most educated man on Miguel Street. He also tries to teach what he learns to the children of Miguel Street, however, able to convey neither the material nor his passion for learning, he is ridiculed by the narrator and his friends.

Titus Hoyt's inability to teach is foreshadowed in "His Chosen Calling," a story that focuses on Elias, a young boy, a few years older than the narrator. The story conveys both the individual's cycle of failures as well as the cross-generational cycle of failure. George, Elias' father and focus character of the previous story, is the most hated man on the street. He loses two wives, a brothel, and "brutalized the boys with blows" (37). George eventually dies alone. Elias, though, is not like his father; he has high ambitions: "I think I going to be a doctor, you hear" (37). However, even though Elias is altogether a different person from his father, failure pursues him as well. Elias tries to pass the Cambridge School Certificate, ironically, under the inadequate teachings of Titus Hoyt. Elias attempts to pass the Certificate three times and although at his second attempt he passes with a third grade (the lowest passing grade,) he cannot achieve a meaningful pass (one that would allow him to study medicine.) After failing to pass the certificate for the third time, which is blamed on the English examiners, Elias attempts to pass the sanitary inspector examination and fails it three times. Elias even tries to pass the examination in British Guiana and Barbados where it is supposedly easier. However, Elias fails yet again to pass the examinations and becomes a scavenging cart driver (a successful career in the eyes of the people in Miguel Street.) Elias, although he becomes an altogether better person than his father, is ultimately unsuccessful in pursuing his primary and secondary goals. He is caught in a downward cycle of failure. At the end of the story, the narrator mentions that upon sitting the Certificate "Mr Cambridge gave me a second grade" (44), a comment that belittles

Elias' alleged brilliance and undermines the opinion of the neighborhood that saw Elias as the Street's genius. In the end, even Elias is trapped in a street/cycle that has no outlet.

The form of the cycle also allows the author to piece together a community of individuals, "the genre embodies an insistently paradoxical semblance of community in its structural dynamic of connection and disconnection" (195 Kennedy). Indeed, from the beginning till the end of the cycle, characters interweave in and out of stories. Most focus characters reappear throughout the cycle. This allows the reader to understand the dynamics of the community, to grasp its inner workings. The placement of the stories is important because it affects the reader's perception of most focus characters. It is not a coincidence "George and the Pink House" is placed before "His Chosen Calling." Naipaul clearly wanted the reader to be aware of George's brutality before focusing on Elias. Both stories can be read separately, but knowing Elias' personal family history makes his efforts and desire in "His Chosen Calling" even more poignant. As mentioned above, Titus Hoyt appears before his focus story and the reader enters his focus story with a preconceived notion of the character. Other characters reappear after their focus stories. Uncle Bhakcu, for example, reappears briefly in the last story. Knowing the character is essential to understand the narrator's reaction when he hears that "Uncle Bhakcu spent the night fixing the van which was to take [him] to the airport next morning" (220). The reader is aware that when it comes to car mechanics Bhakcu is a disaster waiting to happen, not only does the reader understand the narrator's stress but also better appreciates the comical aspect of the situation.

Perhaps no character is more anticipated than Hat in the sequence of stories. Naipaul builds this anticipation in each of the previous stories. In almost every story Hat articulates the conclusion of what transpired. He is the voice of the Miguel Street club as well as the narrator's

mentor, guiding the young narrator's vision of the events throughout the cycle. Hat can be construed as an omniscient secondary narrator. Indeed, he is never surprised by the events that transpire on Miguel Street. He acts like he always knows what to expect and how other characters will react. He is the voice of experience; he understands the characters, how they feel and perceive reality. This character, who overshadows the street and the cycle, is eventually brought back to the level of his peers in the penultimate story. He is the archetype of the Trinidadian man, although he technically sells milk as a living, he mostly resorts to impossible bets and scams of various types to avoid any hard work. His life, though, is a static yearly cycle: "I was prepared to see him do the same things for the rest of his life. Cricket, football, horse-racing; read the newspaper in the mornings and afternoon; sit on the pavement and talk; get noisily drunk on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve" (207). His downfall comes when he breaks his repetitive life cycle when he brings a woman back to Miguel Street. Afraid to be alone for the rest of his life, he becomes infatuated with a prostitute who runs away with all the jewelry he had given her. After finding her with another man Hat practically beats her to death and is sentenced to four years in jail. This incidence shatters the narrator's perception of the man who had been his mentor from the time he first arrived to Miguel Street. Hat is the only one who is present in the narrator's life from his arrival to Miguel Street until his early adolescence. The narrator's first encounter with Hat occurs when he takes him and eleven other boys to a cricket game. Only after seeing Hat as well as all the other focus characters and, as the narrator reaches young adulthood, himself trapped in a downward life cycle does he realizes the need for a drastic change. The story and the character summarize the whole cycle.

The final subject matter that gives shape to the cycle is the absence of a father figure for the young narrator. Although it would be misleading to construe *Miguel Street* solely as the

narrator's quest for a father, certain stories clearly reveal the narrator's need for a father figure. The narrator is attracted by figures like Popo, B. Wordsworth, Big Foot, Morgan, Titus Hoyt, Bhakcu and Hat because they foster a basic need for male guidance in a male dominated world. A need his mother is never able to fulfill. As the narrator goes from one character to another in search of male enlightenment it becomes clear that Miguel Street and Trinidad in general has no role model to offer. *Miguel Street* being a fictionalized autobiography it would be easy to make the parallel with Naipaul's father's long absences from his home. This, however, seems unlikely and the absence of a role model more readily points to the fact that Naipaul believed that Trinidad had no leaders, heroes, nor historical figures to look up to, to guide the country. Naipaul in *The Middle Passage* stresses this point: "We had no scientists, engineers, explorers, soldiers or poets. The cricketer was our only hero-figure" (35). If it is true male figures dominate the cycle, it is mostly their failures, inadequacies and inability to cope with reality that is highlighted. Women are the only characters able to survive the daily violence, the harsh reality of their surroundings without spiraling down the cycle of failure. As a matter of fact, women are the only characters in *Miguel Street* able to surpass traumatic events and continue to strive towards normalcy. The narrator's mother in the end is the only one who helps him escape a forlorn future.

As mentioned in the introduction, Naipaul wrote at least four other stories which are told from the same perspective: "The Mourners," (1950) "My Aunt Gold Teeth," (1954) and "The Enemy," (1955) "The Raffle" (1957), published eight years after *Miguel Street* in *A Flag on the Island*. "The Mourners" and "My Aunt Gold Teeth" take place respectively in a village in the countryside and in a wealthy neighborhood, locations that would broaden the physical location of the cycle and shatter the enclosed space of *Miguel Street*. In "The Raffle," Naipaul uses his first

name (Vidiadhar) in several instances, illustrating the closeness between himself and the nameless narrator, and is probably the reason why he did not include this story in *Miguel Street*. It also presents the narrator's school, dwells on his academic success and mentions he furthered his studies at the Queen's Royal College, one of Trinidad's best secondary schools all of which would be out of place in *Miguel Street*. "The Enemy" focuses on the narrator's relation to his father. This story offers insight into the narrator's life before he and his mother moved from the country to Miguel Street. The fact the narrator talks about his father and that the story takes place in the country are two good reasons not to include them in the cycle. However, it is also important to point out that the narrator's feelings towards his mother are drastically different from those presented in *Miguel Street* "I had always considered this woman, my mother, as the enemy" (FI 77). Naipaul in his short introduction to *A Flag on the Island* mentions he initially wrote "'The Enemy' [...]" as part of my book *Miguel Street*" (FI 7). The reasons why Naipaul chose to leave these stories out of *Miguel Street* are obvious: "They, [...], would weaken the unity and coherence of the earlier collection" (Nightingale 22). It also significantly stresses the fact that Naipaul arranged a set of specific stories to illustrate specific themes. The sequence and order of the stories, the community and its dynamics, and finally the quest for a meaningful life all demonstrate how *Miguel Street* functions as a short story cycle.

2.4. Community, Comedy, and Calypsos.

Naipaul's decision to focus on only one street in Port of Spain arises from his overall need to restrict the geographic location of the narrator. Indeed, this and the recurring images of prison accentuate the young narrator's as well as the other characters' entrapment. The purpose of focusing on such a narrow location, however, also brings forth the notion of a neighborhood and with it the concept of community. This concept is especially significant since the narrator

only has his mother as immediate family. The father has left his wife and child, which is no novel family model in *Miguel Street*. However, the fact that the narrator is an only child and that his mother never feels the need to find another companion, reveals a family nucleus unlike any other in the cycle. The narrator's family structure is almost out of place in the social setting of the cycle. Naipaul though, has justified this simplified family structure in *Finding the Center* and it is clearly not an element of overwhelming importance in the cycle. Yet, it is necessary to mention that Naipaul felt that this device allowed the narrator to be "more in tune with the life on the street" (FC 23). In other words Naipaul wanted to focus on a small neighborhood community, one in which his narrator would develop an identity of his own. This is surely a feeling Naipaul had developed while living with his extended family when he "returned [from living with his immediate family in Port of Spain] to the hubhub of the extended family and our scattered nonentity within it" (FC 39). Both the narrator's nonexistent family life (he rarely interacts with his mother) and the short story cycle form allow Naipaul to explore and develop the dynamics of a multicultural community in Port of Spain as well as to examine the narrator and other focus characters as individuals who function within it.

It is essential to start defining the Miguel Street community by describing the broader Trinidadian community for which it stands. Aaron Eastley questions the verisimilitude of *Miguel Street* mentioning that "For the Trinidadian society into which Naipaul himself was born in 1932 was already one in which thousands of East Indian had distinguished themselves professionally in all walks of life" (Eastley 53). However, the cycle does not dwell on the affluent, successful and white, Indian or black Trinidadians of the middle or upper class but rather on the poor and destitute Indian, black and, at times, White populace. In the 1940's most of the people in Trinidad were third or fourth generation residents and Trinidad was their home. For people of

African descent, only traces of their ancestry remained. On the other hand people of Indian descent still remained attached to their cultural roots: “Unlike the Negroes, the Indians had come as indentured freemen, and some attempt was made to ensure that their treatment was humane and that their traditional institutions were not destroyed as they had been with the Africans” (Ryan 4). Naipaul, though, thought their beliefs and rituals had lost all meaning. Only the white population retained their European identity because it affirmed their social dominance over the other ethnic groups. As part of the British Empire, it would, therefore, be erroneous to speak of a national Trinidadian identity *per se*. Although Naipaul in his later work stressed that there was no community or national identity to speak of in Trinidad, it is quite clear that in his first completed work of fiction there is a functioning and diverse group of individuals and families that has an identity of its own, representative of a Trinidad.

Throughout the cycle, people come and leave the street, yet there is a core of individuals and families that compose the foundation of the Miguel Street community. Landeg White in *V.S. Naipaul: A Critical Introduction* states that there is no communal sustenance, “no one actually helps anyone else, and sympathy is limited to this occasional suspension of laughter” (49). Other critics besides White feel that the community portrayed in *Miguel Street* illustrates a dysfunctional society. Peggy Nightingale, though, reveals that it is in fact a highly functional group of individuals who often strive to help one another: “It should be noted [...] that the Miguel Street community frequently rallies to support its members in times of trouble and that there is an element of chivalry in the behavior of these rough people” (21). Problems, strife, violence and failure often overshadow the cohesiveness of the community. Focus characters such as George, Man-man, Big Foot, Morgan, Toni and Edward are individuals who either are never truly part of the Miguel Street community or stray from the community culture. Some critics,

such as Aaron Eastley, label them as belonging to the core of the community. This, however, is a significant mistake given that they all eventually leave the street pushed by shame or rejected because of their ill-adjusted temperament. The narrator always mentions whether the focus character belongs to or is accepted in Miguel Street. George, the first of these pariahs, is introduced in the third story. Within the first two pages of the story the narrator points out that he “never became one of the gang in Miguel Street” (MS 27). Therefore when examining the functional community in which the narrator lives, only characters who have a fixed role and social position, unlike the aforementioned characters, should be perceived as belonging to the genuine Miguel Street community.

Several stories highlight the bond between the inhabitants of this small neighborhood. The first story to truly convey the sense of a collective concern for an individual is “His Chosen Calling.” Unable to see this story through the lens of the community, Garth St. Omer perceives it as a “particularly brutal story of a spectacular failure” (St. Omer 11). He is only able to contrast Elias’ failure to the narrator’s success and therefore cannot go past “the sarcasm [that] is reflected in the structure of the story” (12). While there certainly is a hint of sarcasm in the story, I believe it should be examined by focusing on the positive aspects brought forth by the community. Seen in this light, the story takes on an important role in the cohesiveness of the cycle.

Elias, a young boy who has high aspirations, is considered to be a genius by his peers and by the adult population of Miguel Street. Elias draws admiration but also pity from everybody because of his perseverance and thirst for success despite his father’s cruelty. This dual adoration/solace pushes the community to help Elias, to celebrate his third grade at the Cambridge Senior School Certificate, to push him when he is unable to achieve a meaningful

pass and to advise him when he repeatedly fails the sanitary inspectors' examination. In the end, although he never achieves his goal to become a doctor and has to settle as a scavenging cart driver, he still "become[s] one of the street aristocrats" (MS 45). Elias not only becomes a fixture of the neighborhood but also brings to light a cohesive communal bond that was almost absent from the first four stories.

Perhaps the story that best illustrates the communal bond of the Miguel Street neighborhood is "The Blue Cart." Ironically Eddoes is also a scavenging cart driver, one of best jobs people on the street can aspire to. Eddoes does not have high ambitions, however, he steadily endeavors to help the destitute community of Miguel Street. Throughout the story, he gathers all sorts of used objects the upper class discards and sells them to those who live on Miguel Street for a price they can afford. He gradually becomes one of the driving forces of the neighborhood not only providing people with much needed items but also by generally improving the community, the standard of life they are accustomed to. In one instance, Eddoes brings much more than a discarded object, he brings a piece of memory, a pleasant recollection to the narrator's mother. The engravings bring forth the only piece of information about the narrator's father: "This boy father was always painting sceneries" (MS 124). Eddoes' happy life of collecting and selling discarded objects comes to a brutal halt when a woman suddenly announces that she is pregnant with his child. She threatens to make him lose his garbage route, blackmails him and forces him to take the baby girl when she turns one year old. Consumed with concerns, Eddoes is counseled and taken care of by the Miguel Street club. When the baby comes, it is apparent to everybody he is not the father: "One glance at Pleasure made us know that she couldn't be Eddoes's baby" (MS 127). Although the other men could have easily made fun of him, his virility and gullibility, Hat and the other men make it a point not to mock Eddoes

but instead, they strive to reassure him that the baby is indeed his. Eddoes is so liked in the community that Pleasure “became the street baby and all the women, Mrs Morgan, Mrs Bhakcu, Laura and my mother, helped to look after her” (MS 129). The whole neighborhood, men, women and children gather to support Eddoes at a time when he desperately needs it.

The Miguel Street Club also reflects the strong communal attachment that can be felt throughout the cycle. However, in the case of the Miguel Street Club, it is a gender specific fraternization, which is as positive as it is negative. The club is perhaps not a source of chivalry as Nightingale says, given that they do not interfere in personal affairs nor do they try to stop daily violence against women or children. Rather, the group of men is mainly a source of comfort and wellbeing to other men as they bask in negative stereotypes about work, how to treat women and glorify their own place in society. The club is therefore a source of refuge for men only, and only men whom they respect (George, Morgan and Toni are never part of the club.) Beyond a few characters, the club members remain unidentified. Hat embodies the club and is its sole representative. Indeed, besides Bogart, Popo and Edward (all of whom are only temporary members,) the men who compose the Miguel Street club remain a mystery. The narrator often refers to the other men as “they”: “They played *wappee* and drank rum and smoked, and sometimes brought the odd stray woman to the room” (MS 12). The anonymity of the men who compose this club serves to represent the broader Trinidadian male population. The club is a reflection of the phallocentric society that existed in Trinidad in the mid-twentieth century.

Indeed, even if the cycle includes woman and shows that mostly woman have the drive to change and to move forward, this does not alter the fact that men dominated this society. The Miguel Street club typically supports men who do not work, drink and are in a state of constant anger against their own condition. In the eyes of the Miguel Street Club, the definition of

manhood equates a few or all of the following attributes: “fighting, drinking liquor, involvement with unlawful activities, scrapes or near misses with the law, unwillingness to do honest work for a living and multiple dealings with women” (Crichlow 291). Any attempt by men who live on Miguel Street to better their socio-economic condition is seen as a threat. As a matter of fact, genuine desire, interest or passion towards a constructive profession (even when it does not lead out of Miguel Street) is perceived as a nuisance. This would mean that if they worked hard they could eventually overcome their condition. It would obviously threaten their peace and comfort in their belief that there are no outlets for people of their condition in Trinidad. This leaves them free to blame the government, the British, the Americans and Trinidad in general.

The second story, “The Thing Without a Name,” gives us insight into the club’s values. At the beginning of the story, Popo, although not working industriously, enjoys woodwork and spends time working on ‘the thing without a name’. He does not spend a great amount of time with other men on the street. Crichlow, in “Playing Man: What Defines ‘Man’ in *Miguel Street* and the *Mystic Masseur*,” fails to see that Hat dislikes Popo not because he does not support his household and is a ‘man-woman’ but rather out of jealousy. Indeed, Popo unlike the other men of the Miguel Street Club is content; he does not need to be productive and has a passion for carpentry. However, shortly after his wife leaves him, Popo starts to drink heavily, stops working and wallows in self-pity. His new attitude “made him an accepted member of the gang” (21). The story then shifts again as Popo tries to win back his wife. This feeble attempt results in a popular Calypso of which he is the main character: “A certain carpenter feller went to Arima / Looking for a mopsy called Emelda” (22). Popo gives the impression he is ready to do anything to regain his wife. He seemingly works hard and remodels his house. Popo’s endeavor succeeds and his wife finally comes back to live with him. The Miguel Street Club loses all respect for

Popo until they realize he had never actually worked but instead had stolen furniture and paint and used them not only to refurbish his house but also for monetary gain. The main character of a popular calypso and a sentence to one year in jail elevates Popo to street hero and he regains the Miguel Street Club's respect. Ironically upon his return from prison Popo becomes a real carpenter, "he began making Morris chairs and tables and wardrobes for people" (25). By the end of the story Popo becomes a productive worker and thusly no longer fits the Club's standards. He has, however, gained the esteem of the Club and the progression of the story demonstrates the attributes sought and respected by Trinidadian men. Yet, it is important to notice Popo's wife brings forth his late emerging work ethic.

Although the Miguel Street club does not always have a positive impact on the community, it shows that there exists a communal bond and cohesion. Throughout the cycle, several characters gain nationwide attention. Bogart is the first character to be mentioned in the newspapers for bigamy, Popo, Man-Man, Big Foot, Morgan and Hat follow in his footsteps. All of these characters draw national interest, a source of pride for the whole community. The men of Miguel Street are forging a local identity, as well as a history of the neighborhood. Defining, or redefining the concept of manliness is an important underlying theme in *Miguel Street*. Indeed, after years of slavery and indentured servantry, which stripped men of their manhood, ability to care for and protect their wife and children, there is a need, a desire to regain and reassess their position in society. John Thieme in "Calypso Allusions in Naipaul's *Miguel Street*" sees this as the bounding element to the cycle: "Naipaul's first book is a carefully orchestrated investigation of the concept of manliness as it obtains in Trinidad" (23). Although it certainly is a significant concept, it should only be viewed as one amongst other important elements that

pertain to the depiction of a search for a national identity in a nation on the verge of independence.

Mimicry is an expected outcome of the search for personal identity. This concept, introduced in the first story “Bogart,” shows how the men in Trinidad strive to regain their manhood. Unable to define it on their own, they copy the models that are available in their society. Aaron Eastley in a colonialist analysis of *Miguel Street* strictly divides the focus characters in two groups: “mimic men” and “the pathetic poor.” While his dissection of the characters is troubling and altogether incorrect, his definition of the “mimic men” reveals a complete misreading of Naipaul’s characters:

The first group is made up of people [...] who adopt roles or titles such as those that might be held by professionals of various sort in England and America, but who in various ways are revealed to be fakes or shams, unable to deliver on the implied promises of their occupational titles. (Eastley 51; 52)

Eastley lists Bogart, Popo, Elias, Man-man, B. Wordsworth, Big Foot, Morgan, Titus Hoyt and Uncle Bhakcu as “mimic men.” Beyond merely pointing out that tailor, carpenter, student, instructor, poet, boxer, firework maker and mechanic are not jobs that specifically belong to England or the United States (all of these jobs being universal), it is obvious that Eastley, because of his simplification, fails to understand the specifics of each character. Yet, he uncovers an important aspect of the cycle. Mimicry can be found in almost any postcolonial society. As new countries move towards independence, they generally tend to copy political and societal models of their colonizer. This is also true when it comes to forging a new national identity and culture. However, while the model of the former colonial power remains visible, the outlines of new, original and specifically national elements emerge and blossom. In *Miguel Street*, the mimicry is clear, yet, the seed of an identifiably Trinidad national culture is brought forth through the repeated use of Calypsos and the dynamics of a multicultural community.

When it comes to the visible community, the Miguel Street Club clearly stands out. However, the women who live on the street are often forgotten or left aside by critics mostly because they perceive Laura as the only woman who is a focus character in *Miguel Street* (“The Maternal Instinct.”) As I demonstrated earlier, a number of women appear throughout the cycle and have an important role in the life of the community. Despite the violence they face on a daily basis, they strive not only to survive but also to move their children or husbands towards a better future. Most of the women presented in Miguel Street “have an independent authority over themselves” (Pittmann 368). Clearly, Emelda¹⁶, Mrs Morgan, Laura, Mrs Bhakcu and the narrator’s mother have a strong voice and influence over their own family. Three stories in which the men achieve success, “The Thing Without a Name,” “The Mechanical Genius,” and “How I Left Miguel Street,” reveal that the women are solely responsible for the man’s ability to be productive. This trait is not specific to Trinidad: “it becomes clear that family patterns in the Caribbean often entailed women who took care of the basic needs for themselves and their own children” (Pittmann 369). Patricia Mohammed, in “Towards Indigenous Feminist Theorizing in the Caribbean,” goes even further saying that “as central figures in production, women have also provided continuity to household and family life” (Mohammed 24). In an interview with Maryse Condé, Elizabeth Nunez, originally from Trinidad, reinforces this vision of Caribbean women as strong and independent: “My characters are patterned after the women who have influenced my life: those who refused to see themselves as victims and took charge of their lives” (Nunez 46). Although the women in *Miguel Street* do not stand out as being part of the community or as having a communal bond as strong as the Miguel Street Club, they are the ones who move, shape and push the men and children.

¹⁶ Popo’s wife in “The Thing Without a Name”

Naipaul's depiction of the men who live on Miguel Street generally shows men who are unable to adjust to reality, and who see and project their persona through a looking glass. Visions of movie stars, great poets, philosophers, the American way of life are as many filters and lies they build, as a protective armor, to avoid the dire state of their daily lives. Women, though, appear unbiased, having a clear vision of reality in Trinidad. They see and understand the material reality that surrounds them, corruption, poverty, helplessness, and the near impossible task of crawling up the social ladder. The narrator's mother, able to confront and deal with the tangible life in Trinidad, sees her son's debut as a young man and the downward spiral of a predictable path towards a meaningless adulthood. She forces him to face the fact that there are no outlets for him. She knows that corruption and personal connections are the only options to better his future. When the narrator learns that the only scholarship left to study in England is to study drugs, he declares "But I don't want to be a druggist" (217). His mother, however, knows that this scholarship is his only means to escape what awaits him if he stays in Trinidad: "You mustn't mind the boy, Pundit. He will study drugs." It is true that in *Miguel Street*, most of the focus characters are men, however, it would be a mistake to believe that "Naipaul creates female characters that are outside the realm of important action within Miguel Street [...]" (Pittmann 374). Pittmann did not consider the strong contrast between the clairvoyance of women and the men's failure to confront the world that surrounds them and therefore she comes to the conclusion that Naipaul's "writing reveals a gender bias in that women's status is relationally intertwined with a man's and that these female characters are presented exclusively within the roles of wife, mother, daughter and/or promiscuous woman" (Pittmann 374). On the contrary, Naipaul presents women who are independent and do not solely depend on men to provide

guidance and financial security. Women are obviously pillars of stability in a community where men are unable to embrace reality.

Yet, there does not exist a tight-knitted group of women that could be compared to the Miguel Street Club. Generally, women tend to focus on or prioritize their immediate family. There is not much explicit interaction between the female characters presented in *Miguel Street*. As a matter of fact, the narrator's mother only speaks to Laura, Mrs Bhakcu (part of her extended family) and Mrs Hereira. "Love, Love, Love, Alone" is the only story in which the narrator's mother interacts extensively with another woman and tries to help and advise her. This story is unique in the cycle because the two focus characters are white and Mrs Hereira comes from the upper middle class. The couple does not integrate well to the Miguel Street community. The relationship between Mrs Hereira and Tony disconcerts the street due to the fact she is so pretty and refined whereas Tony is her complete opposite: "he dressed worse than any of us. He was even dirtier than George" (132). It is only when Tony starts to beat Mrs Hereira regularly and threatens to kill her that she seeks the narrator's mother companionship. The story mainly revolves around conversations between the two women. Tony, it seems, is only a secondary character, appearing sporadically to demonstrate his violent and irrational behavior. The narrator's mother attempts to convince Mrs Hereira to leave her husband repeatedly but also tells her that the bourgeois ideals of love is a chimera in this poor and destitute community, a luxury nobody can achieve in Miguel Street. Eventually, Tony becomes too violent and Mrs Hereira decides to go back to the comfort and plush neighborhood of her husband's house. If at times women help each other, it is apparent that they are primarily interested in the well being of their family. Apart for Laura, Naipaul's women in *Miguel Street* are not as colorful as the men; they have no visible interest in politics, Calypsos or Trinidad culture. While I disagree with Pyne-

Timothy when she declares that “Naipaul creates female characters that are outside the realm of important action within Miguel Street,” there is no doubt that they are “voiceless” especially when it comes to voicing a Trinidad specific identity.

The community described in *Miguel Street* reveals a functional yet diverse group of individuals and families. It is important to add that while there is violence within the households, there is very little violence in the street especially within the core community. At the turn of the twentieth century, Trinidad was racially divided geographically and by occupation. The ‘recent’ ex-indentured Indians generally lived in the countryside, working on plantations whereas a majority of the black population lived in cities: “by the turn of the century a quarter of the whole [black] population lived in the ‘Greater Port of Spain’” (Brereton 131). However, if ethnic groups tended to be segregated in the rural areas, the neighborhoods in Port of Spain were more diverse and tended to be divided by social class, even though there still existed an anchored occupational segregation. In Miguel Street the narrator practically never makes reference to the racial lineage of focus characters. Big Foot is perhaps one of the most notable exceptions as the narrator describes him as being “really big and really black” (66). In other instances the character’s names reveal their origin; Uncle Bhakcu is obviously of Hindu background. While the community is mainly comprised of Indians, blacks and Asians, Whites are not estranged from Miguel Street. Mrs. Hereira and her companion Toni are Portuguese, according to Hat. Although they are never truly a part of the Miguel Street community, this is mainly due to Toni’s anti-social behavior rather than the color of their skin. Never are there any allusions to racial tensions within the street.

2.5. Conclusion

While the cycle draws attention because of its witty characters and situations, it also depicts the harsh reality of life in Trinidad during the nineteen forties. *Miguel Street* was written a few years before the island became an independent country (1962), a time of transition for Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, the British had begun a progressive move for self-government in 1925. In 1937, blacks and Indians took matters in their own hands “following a dramatic general strike which heralded the beginning of fundamental changes in British colonial policy” (Ryan 5). This movement for self-governance gradually strengthened over the following years. Eventually, in the years after the Second World War this movement became more concrete as universal suffrage was established and a shift of power from the British executive authority to Trinidadian elected officials opened the pathway to independence. These dramatic changes in the country’s governance and history do not transpire in *Miguel Street*, yet awareness of the island’s history helps the reader to understand Naipaul’s portrayal of this small community.

Naipaul chose to write *Miguel Street* as a short story cycle, because the form allowed him to emphasize opposite movements. On the one hand, as noted earlier, Naipaul portrays a community that is able to work as a functional unit. However, *Miguel Street* also reflects a bleak picture, one of a fractured and stagnant community in which individuals are unable to move forward, to achieve anything meaningful, which, as we will see is also the case in Gabriel Gracía Márquez’s *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* and Ernest Gaines’s *Bloodline*. Naipaul is able to achieve this by using short stories that focus on individuals or families in order to portray a fragmented image of the *Miguel Street* community. Several recurrent themes throughout *Miguel Street* emphasize the idea of a fractured society. This was an important aspect of Trinidadian

society according to Naipaul: “Everyone was an individual fighting for his place in the community, yet there was no community” (MP 36).

Although the action in *Miguel Street* takes place during a transitional period in Trinidad and Tobago, Naipaul barely mentions socio-political events in the country. It is obvious that throughout the cycle, most men on Miguel Street read the newspapers on a daily basis. They are aware of what is happening outside of their locale. However, they rarely seem concerned by international or even national news because they are unable to relate to these events and feel powerless to do anything about them. This lack of concern for current events shows they do not value their country. Trinidadians at that time had no national pride (cricket being an exception.) They believed that outsiders, British and Americans (colonial forces), were better than they were. This explains why they strove to mimic outside cultures. Naipaul’s remarks in *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies* (1962) illustrate his vision of Trinidadians and their concept of national identity: “it was only our Britishness, our belonging to the British Empire, which gave us our identity” (MP 36). The men of Miguel Street trivialize their own importance as a nation and as people. This “self-denigration” stems from a legacy of slavery, indentured labor and colonial oppression. They do not know their own history nor are they interested in knowing about it. The population of Indian background only mimicked the remnants of what their ancestors had taught them about their culture; an aspect of East-Indian culture Naipaul despised and saw as a lack of a valid, true identity.

The passivity and stagnancy that is present in *Miguel Street* is the result of the decades of colonial presence. The inhabitants of Miguel Street have no control over their life, despite a general desire to move up the social ladder. Events tend to be repetitive; failure and violence are the daily norm. This failure to achieve, the domestic violence, and political passivity, which are

representative of a world where there are no opportunities, encourage artificial, projected personalities, a fabricated image of the self for the outside world, and drinking (especially within the Miguel Street club), as the men of Miguel Street attempt to escape a bleak reality. The community as a whole does not try to rebel against their condition, and the only way for an individual to escape it is to flee or to blame his own people.

The violence present in Miguel Street comes from daily frustrations, it is often the only outlet for men and women to deal with their inability to achieve their dream or the lifestyle they desire. Women and children are the most common victims of this violence. For men, it is a question of manliness; to beat your wife and children defines your manhood, and not to do so is to lose the respect of your peers. However, most women tend to fight back, sometimes returning the physical violence, or more often by using psychological means.

There is a consistent lack of creativity by the characters throughout the cycle. Even figures like Popo, B. Wordsworth or Morgan (all artists, according to the narrator) are unable to create anything exceptional. Popo claims he can build furniture; B. Wordsworth says he is writing a poem (he will supposedly finish it in twenty two years); Morgan is thought to be the best fireworks artist in Trinidad, but none of them is able to create something original. They are only able to follow the footsteps of other, more talented, people. No one is a specialist. Most characters change occupation several times over the course of their focus story, the grand majority do not take pride in their occupation. This lack of creativity also stems from the colonial oppression. After years of being told what to do, the inhabitants of Miguel Street are too lethargic to push themselves to create, to build something original they can call their own, something of which they can be proud. This focus on the legacy on an oppressive colonial past is also the focus of Márquez's *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* and Ernest Gaines's *Bloodline*. In

all three cycles, the form of the short story cycle allows the author to stress the individual dramas in a postcolonial environment.

Table 2.1: Table of Stories / *Miguel Street*

Story / character(s)	Relation with the narrator	Themes	Calypso(s)
# 1 “Bogart” FC: Bogart/Patience (card game) Occupation: In reality none, but pretends to be a tailor.	None <i>per se</i> .	Manliness Imitation of a fictional character Downfall of a respected figure	None
#2 “The Thing Without a Name” FC: Popo Occupation: Carpenter	From good it goes to bad (depending on Popo’s mood) and eventually non-existent.	Husband/wife relation Manliness Lost dream/ lost artist Limited success/ but at cost of own happiness	“A certain carpenter feller went to Arima Looking for a mopsy called Emelda.” (22)
# 3 “George and the Pink House” FC: George Occupation: has cows/ opens a brothel	The narrator fears George.	Violence Desperation/ frustration Failure	None
# 4 “His Chosen Calling” FC: Elias (George’s son) Occupation: student / scavenging cart driver	Good, the narrator looks up to Elias.	High ambition / diminished / crushed Failure	None

Table 2.1: Table of Stories / *Miguel Street* (continued)

# 5 “Man-man” FC: Man-man Occupation: None / politician / Messiah	On friendly terms then none.	Colorful character Failure/ dementia Violence Religion	None
# 6 “B. Wordsworth” FC: Black Wordsworth Occupation: Poet	Only has a relation to the narrator (very good). Does not live on Miguel Street. He is a mentor for the narrator.	Failed poet Death Learning process	None
# 7 “The Coward” FC: Big Foot Occupation: does a bit of everything, boxer	The narrator is afraid of Big Foot at first but then sees him as a coward.	Manliness Failure Lack of a dream/goal False persona	None
# 8 “The Pyrotechnicist” FC: Morgan Occupation: firework technician / street clown	No relation with Morgan. However, the narrator says that “Morgan was the 1 st artist I ever met in my life.” (80)	Failure at work Failure in public Failure in marriage	“The more they try to do me bad Is the better I live in Trinidad” (82) “It was a glorious and beautiful scenery Was the burning of the Treasury.” (91)
# 9 “Titus Hoyt, I.A.” FC: Titus Hoyt Occupation: None, teacher	Good. He forms the MS Literary and Social Youth Club of Miguel Street.	Dream of achievement Very limited success Failure to achieve his true goals	None

Table 2.1: Table of Stories / *Miguel Street* (continued)

<p># 10 “The Maternal Instinct”</p> <p>FC: Laura Occupation: Mother / prostitute</p>	<p>Good. Laura also has a good relation to the narrator’s mother. Laura is always in a good mood.</p>	<p>Violence Cycle of failure Women</p>	<p>“Every now and then just knock them down Every now and then just throw them down Black-up their eye and bruise up their knee And then they love you eternally.” (111)</p>
<p># 11 “The Blue Cart”</p> <p>FC: Eddoes Occupation: scavenging cart driver</p>	<p>Good: although it is limited. The narrator’s perspective is changing, he is growing-up.</p>	<p>Limited success Ambition Gender relations</p>	<p>“Man centipede bad. Woman centipede more than bad.” (126)</p> <p>“Chinese children calling me Daddy! I black like jet My wife like tar-baby, And still – Chinese children calling me Daddy! Oh God, somebody putting milk in my coffee.” (127)</p>
<p># 12 “Love, Love, Love, Alone”</p> <p>FC: Mrs Hereira and Toni Occupation: None</p>	<p>None: Mrs Hereira confides in the narrator’s mother.</p>	<p>Violence Women – Men relations Failure</p>	<p>“Is love, love, love, alone That cause King Edward to leave the throne.” (136)</p>
<p># 13 “The Mechanical genius”</p> <p>FC: Uncle Bhakcu Occupation: none / taxi driver Hobby: mechanics</p>	<p>Good: Bhakcu introduces the narrator to his world of mechanics.</p>	<p>Women – men relations Failure followed by success Undying dream</p>	<p>None</p>

Table 2.1: Table of Stories / *Miguel Street* (continued)

# 14 “Caution” FC: Mr Bolo Occupation: barber / odd jobs	Good: Bolo trusts the narrator with his sweepstake tickets. The boy is growing-up.	Mistrust Failure Deception	“All day and all night Miss Mary Ann Down by the river-side she taking man.” (166)
# 15 “Until the Soldiers Came” FC: Edward, Hat’s brother Occupation: paints then works for the American base	not extensive.	Imitation Dislike of Trinidad Mixed marriage Failure	“I was living with my decent and contented wife Until the soldiers came and broke-up my life.” “Father, mother, and daughter Working for the Yankee dollar! Money in the land! The Yankee dollar, oh!” (185) “Invader, I change my mind I living with my Yankee soldier.” (197)
# 16 “Hat” FC: Hat Occupation: Sells milk (owns cows)	Hat is the narrator’s mentor. The narrator always looks up to him. He is the central figure in Miguel Street	Mentor Manliness Sleaziness Failure Gender relations	“Matilda, Matilda, Matilda, you thief my money And gone Venezuela.” (210)
# 17 “How I Left Miguel Street” FC: The narrator	N/A	Dead end Criticism of Trinidad	None

3. Chapter II: Ernest Gaines's *Bloodline*

3.1. Introduction

When a fifteen-year-old Ernest Gaines arrived in California in 1948, he was introduced to a larger literary world and became an avid reader. Unable to find works which told the story of his own people in the literary world, he turned his attention to representations of the peasant in other regions by reading the works of a diverse core of modern writers such as Faulkner, Joyce, Maupassant and Turgenev, all of whom had mastered the short story. Reading, thus, pulled him back to his roots with the desire to revisit his childhood world of southern rural Louisiana. It, therefore, does not come as a surprise that Gaines's first academic recognition came through a short story, "The Turtles" (*Transfer*, 1956). In the years that followed, Gaines refined his writing skills, but struggled to make a living as a writer publishing only five short stories: "Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit" (*Transfer*, 1957), "Mary Louise" (*Stanford Short Stories*, 1960), "The Sky is Gray" (*Negro Digest* 12 (August 1963): 72-96), "Just Like a Tree" (*Sewanee Review* 71 (1963): 542-48) and "A Long Day in November" (*Texas Quarterly* 7 (1964): 190-224). Finally, in 1964, ten years after he set out to become a writer, Gaines published his first novel, *Catherine Carmier*.

Even though Gaines mostly published novels after *Catherine Carmier*, Gaines' third published book, *Bloodline* (1968), carries on the tradition of a literary genre, the short story cycle, which had a special resonance as modern literature built the foundations of new ways of voicing profound societal changes. The stories in *Bloodline* cover a period of time that spans approximately twenty years, from the 1940's to the 1960's. To concentrate on this time period in Southern rural Louisiana is to focus on at least three major aspects of change: modernization, urbanization and the Civil Rights movement. The stories in *Bloodline* are arranged in a specific

order that highlights how these profound changes affected the small black rural enclave in and around Bayonne, Gaines' fictional representation of New Roads, Louisiana.

Early critics of *Bloodline* failed to recognize it as more than a mere collection of unrelated short stories, yet, they were puzzled by the apparent balance and unity of the collection. It seems a contradiction that Jack Hicks would completely leave aside "Bloodline" from his analysis of the volume, a story he considered to be the "weakest" of the collection, while affirming: "The focus on these stories is on individual growth [...] the characters are alive, seem to evolve naturally, go through cycles and evolve almost unconsciously" (Hicks 13). Recently, though, critics such as Mary Ellen Doyle, Valerie Babb, Karen Carmean and Robert Luscher have insisted that *Bloodline* has undeniable unity: "Gaines's *Bloodline* can be more fully appreciated when analyzed as a short story sequence" (Luscher 62).

Although Gaines has never used the term "short story cycle" in reference to *Bloodline*, he does insist that the stories are interrelated. He has, in numerous interviews, given reason to believe that *Bloodline* is more than a mere collection of early short stories. Two of his remarks in different interviews show that Gaines intended *Bloodline* to be a unified work:

Once I realized that I was writing a group of stories that had some similarities, I wanted them to have a relationship with the other ones. (Ingram and Steinberg 342)

The first story is told by a six-year-old child. The second story is told by an eight-year-old child. The third story is told by a nineteen-year-old. The fourth story is told by someone in his earlier twenties. The final story is told by many characters. I definitely arranged these stories in this order [...] so there is constant growth from the first to the last story. (O'Brien 35-36)

In another interview, quoted in Luscher, Gaines does not insist on structure but rather on particular themes present throughout *Bloodline*: hope and violence. Gaines compares these themes to those in Joyce's *Dubliners*. Although Gaines does not elaborate, it is easy to see the

structural parallels between these collections. *Bloodline*, just like Joyce's *Dubliners*, moves from childhood to adolescence to maturity, and from private to public life.

Gaines has not only compared *Bloodline* to *Dubliners* but also to Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, a comparison that reveals shared thematic concerns. When Joyce wrote *Dubliners*, he focused on the city, a place he describes, in a letter to his publisher, as the center of paralysis, a place where people are unable to move, to grow or to challenge. Faulkner on the other hand, in a rural setting geographically closer to Bayonne dwells on the loss of the wilderness and the hidden horrors of slavery and its legacy. Isaac, the main protagonist, has to face the inevitable "modern" transformation of both place and people over a century, spanning Reconstruction, deep shifts in race relations, but mostly the conflict between the Old South and the New South as well as its effects on both the white and black community, also a main theme and a prominent literary reference in "Bloodline." While Carmean justifiably believes that "'Bloodline' recalls Faulkner's story 'Was,' where the slave Terrell leads his half-brothers, Buck and Buddy McCaslin, on a ritualized chase to a neighboring plantation" Gaines truly makes an allusion to the cycle *Go Down, Moses* in its entirety, paralleling Isaac's struggle to cope with his family's past with Frank's similar predicament.

Gaines was certainly inspired by his predecessors when he arranged and wrote the stories for his short story cycle. Bayonne and its surroundings convey a feeling of paralysis, a place stuck in time. The implicit and explicit rules of race relations have never truly changed and the older generation (black and white) stagnates, unwilling and unable to move forward. However, as foreshadowed in "The Sky is Gray" and "Three Men" and plainly visible in the last two stories, this older generation, from the Old South, is aware that powerful changes, brought forth by the black youth, are challenging the old order. Gaines instills the idea that change is necessary

and inevitable, that the younger generation is not only challenging the racial barrier but also asserting their rights as individuals as well as affirming and strengthening their presence within the community.

The five stories can be summarized briefly. The first four are narrated by male characters who are increasingly older, and whose vision of their immediate surroundings in the Bayonne area, gradually changes. The sequence of the stories emphasizes the quest for a reassessment of communal and individual identity, asking pertinent questions as to what it takes to become a man, a man in the eyes of others, in the eyes of the community and in the eyes of one's self. In the first story, "A Long Day in November" Sonny, a six-year-old boy, is the passive observer of a fight between his parents. Sonny's father, Eddie, is regularly driven away from his responsibilities as husband and father by an incorrigible infatuation with his car. The car is obviously the source of an old and on-going argument between the couple, which has finally reached an impasse. Eddie's latest escapade leads Sonny's mother, Amy, to leave the house and to go back to her mother's home, unwilling to stay in a non-existent relationship. Sonny shares his father's pursuit for a solution, a quest not only to bring his wife back home, but also to understand the meaning of manhood. Sonny, however, is unable to fully grasp the situation; he sees "the world in terms of basic feelings" (Forkner 1432). As Sonny is introduced to the responsibilities and problems of adulthood, Gaines introduces the major themes of the cycle. In this first story, community plays an important role in Sonny's life, and also in eventually resolving his parents' problems.

In the second story "The Sky is Gray," James, an eight-year-old boy, goes to town with his mother to go to the dentist. Although he is also a passive observer, James faces a harsher reality than Sonny's. He becomes aware of other problems, social, racial and generational issues

when he witnesses an argument in the dentist's office between a young man and a man who "looks like a preacher," (BL 94). James probably does not fully grasp the implications of the confrontation between the two men, but the young man has made a definite impression on him and for the first time he has a thought of his own, one that differs from his mother's static, stoic resistance; after the argument James thinks "When I grow up I want be just like him" (BL, 100). Two other incidences reveal the hardships that burden the black community in Bayonne. As James' mother tries to find refuge from the freezing cold in a segregated black café, she is confronted by a man who tries to assault her. This episode introduces the black on black violence that will become the main theme of the next two stories. The other event is a heartwarming attempt by an old white couple to help James and his mother. James does not fully understand his mother's hesitation to accept this much needed help. However, this passage brings to light yet another topic that will be prevalent in the following story. James's mother makes it clear that it is wrong to expect or to depend on outside help. She wants her son to rely on his own strength to face the harsh reality that surrounds him in order to be independent, self-sufficient, and free to shape his own future.

"Three Men," the third story, focuses on Proctor Lewis, a young man who turns himself into jail, after getting in a fight. Proctor certainly moves further away from the community than the two previous characters. Jeffrey Folks notes that "in the story 'Three Men' the settings shifts to the modern city, presumably Baton Rouge," (37) however, no textual evidence indicates this. Hattie, a homosexual, and Munford, a 'professional' convict, are his two cellmates and the long, often interrupted three-way conversation which forces Proctor to stop, think and face his future. Munford presents what he believes are Proctor's only two options: he can choose between continuing the path of violence and servitude, to be in debt to the plantation owner who will

come and get him out of prison, or to become responsible and assume responsibility for his own actions, which would almost certainly lead him to prison. At the end of the story, Proctor is not sure he will be able to stand by his decision, to break his own cycle of violence and servitude, but he has at least become aware of the problem. It is the first time in the cycle the main character becomes aware of the continuous cycle of oppression that stunts the growth of the black community.

“Bloodline,” the title story, is narrated by seventy-year-old Felix who works for Walter Laurent, the plantation owner. The central character, however, is Copper Laurent, illegitimate son of Walter Laurent’s brother and a black worker on the plantation. Copper has just returned to the plantation to take possession of what he considers his inheritance after a long absence, during which he has matured; he “stands as a forerunner of a generation of social activists and embodies a promise that the inertia of his own day will be overcome” (Luscher 77). Copper is no longer part of the black community. He looks down on and does not associate with the other black characters. Copper, however, stays at his aunt Malia’s house on plantation ground. Although he is an ambitious, ambiguous and flawed character, he embodies the changes to come as he forces his uncle to meet him on his own terms; the meeting between the two men “symbolizes the old order making way for the new” (Forkner 1435).

The last story “Just Like a Tree” is a micro-cycle of its own as well as the conclusion of the cycle as a whole. Each character has a section of his own; there are ten sections (separate narratives) all leading to Aunt Fe’s death. The “polyphony” of voices “point towards the multiplicity of experience and the ongoing nature of social structure” (Luscher 69). This story focuses on Aunt Fe’s public departure; she has always been present in the community as she has been its voice of reason and of peaceful dissent. Like the cycle as a whole, “Just Like a Tree”

begins with the voice of a child, Chuckkie, and ends with the mature reflections of his grandmother, Aunt Lou. The narrative includes a great range of distinct point of views on Aunt Fe's departure that results from the increasing violence of the Civil Rights fight and more specifically from a bombing against the black activists in the plantation. Although the old world order around the black Bayonne community is changing, its members stand strong. Only James, an African American from the North, and Anne-Marie Duvall, the wife of the plantation owner, do not understand the bonds of this community, a community in transition, but a community that "shall not be moved" (BL 221).

The sequence of the stories both reveals and develops several dominant themes: a shift from the old order to a new order, the emergence of Civil Rights, and the quest to affirm a black communal identity. Other themes, of course, are present throughout the cycle: an awareness of the violence, racial struggles, and poverty of this culture is essential if one is to understand the main characters, their progression and the changes they have to go through. Each of the first three stories underlines the quest for manhood, not only for self-realization, but also in order to contribute to the community and its progress. The accomplishment of these individuals only comes through the community, and by way of communication between generations: "one of Gaines's most important concerns, one emphasized in each story, [is] the connection between generations and the acceptance of the responsibility of literal or symbolic parenthood" (Duncan 94).

Thus, as the above indicates, in order to fully understand how *Bloodline* functions as a short story cycle, it is essential to first study it as a sequence of stories. Indeed, several key elements show a forward progression from the first story to the last. As mentioned above, the stories are arranged chronologically in order of age and personal experience. As the focus

characters grow older, they naturally explore and discover the inner workings of their own milieu. There is also a movement in space, from the quarters, which Gaines sees as the womb, to the outer world, devoid of protection, where white dominance stifles the black individual and community. It is also essential to point out that while the narrators grow older, the temporal setting of the stories advances too. It is obvious the first story takes place closer to the 1940's while the last two tales take place during the Civil Rights movement. Throughout the sequence, Gaines gradually develops the emergence of a black consciousness; a slow yet powerful undercurrent in the first three stories progressively surfaces to become a sweeping, unavoidable tide in the last two narratives. A parallel concern in *Bloodline* is the renegotiation of selfhood and the rise of a strong individual black male, especially in the first four stories. While this renegotiation is absent from the last story, "Just Like a Tree" shows the communal process behind the rebirth of the rural South Louisianan black male.

While *Bloodline* works as a well-orchestrated sequence of stories it is also necessary to analyze it as a cycle, to look at cyclical patterns and how these affect our vision of the stories and how they emphasize the major themes. Indeed, in almost every modern short story cycle, the last story forces a retrospective assessment of the whole. The importance of the life cycle is evident as the cycle starts with a very young boy and ends with the death of an old woman. By introducing Sonny in the first story, Gaines plants the seed of a generation that will shape the Civil Rights movement in this black rural hamlet. The death of aunt Fe represents the demise of a generation that experienced the abolition of slavery, reconstruction and the enactment of the Jim Crow Laws; she and her peers were given freedom but in reality saw little change in their daily lives. Aunt Fe is the voice of that generation; she embodies the rise of a unique cultural dignity that she transmitted to the youth. Her death symbolizes the end of a generation but also the birth

of new ways of thinking and an undeniable will to change race relations in Louisiana. It is also important to point out that the community plays a vital role in the first and last story, showing that the foundations of change, evolution in individual perception and behavior are defined and steered by the community that surrounds them. Gaines expressed this vision in an interview with John O'Brien: "to break away from the past, from one philosophy to another, is a burden that one person cannot endure alone" (O'Brien 29).

While an analysis of *Bloodline* through the lenses of both the sequence of stories and cyclical quality of this work impels me to insist on the cohesive nature of the stories, Gaines binds the stories together through the use of thematic leitmotifs. An important aspect of this cycle appears in the ever-present confrontation between the Old South and the New South. Each story presents and develops this confrontation from different perspectives, allowing the reader to fully grasp its nature and relevance for the main characters and in the unfolding of each story's narrative. Obviously, the question of modernization and urbanization are key components in the rural South during the first half of the twentieth century. While Gaines avoids advocating in favor of the Old South or New South, in *Bloodline*, he emphasizes the negative effects of a rapid modernization that, agriculturally, favored the white farmers and consequently led to a flight of black rural communities (especially men) to urban centers. Yet, Gaines keenly emphasizes the modern benefits of a greater access to higher education for African Americans as a tool to challenge the oppressive white authority.

The tension brought forth by modernization and racial tension comes in to play through the recurring themes of violence and brutality, regardless of the race inflicting it. Whether physical or psychological, each of the focus characters experiences daily cruelty meted out by the white community and legal system; it is also present within the black community and

symbolically represented by the harsh weather. The main protagonists overcome this relentless environment by preserving their sense of honor through a communal code of personal behavior. This code is passed down from the older generation to the new one not only to maintain a communal identity but also and mainly to survive and transcend their condition. Gaines sarcastically portrays religion, an institution supposed to help the community cope with their mortal dilemmas, as a hindrance to personal development. Indeed, in the first two stories, the preachers are unable to aid those who seek their help or challenge their belief system.

While these themes are important, the structure of the cycle serves to emphasize two major facets in *Bloodline*. Most criticism on *Bloodline* focuses on the quest for manhood, an important theme and leitmotiv in Gaines' literary canon. The narrators in the first four stories are male, and in "Just Like a Tree" only four of the ten narrators are women. The narrators are also the central figures in the first three stories and, even though Felix narrates the fourth story, "Bloodline," Copper is the main character. It is only in the last story that Gaines makes use of a female central figure, Aunt Fe. One might argue that although Aunt Fe is the central figure in this last story, the hope and future of the community is represented by Emmanuel, the only character in the cycle, aside from Cooper (who does not belong to nor has any interest in this community), willing to fight for equal rights. Surprisingly, the importance and the role of women in the cycle have yet to be fully explored. All the critics who have studied *Bloodline* as a short story cycle have focused on the progression of a collective male protagonist: "Each story in *Bloodline* primarily concerns the growth of a young black male whose hopes of achieving manhood are in danger of being brutalized" (Lusher 74). While these critics recognize the importance of the family and the community, none have exclusively focused on the role of women; none talk of a collective female protagonist. In order to appreciate *Bloodline* fully, it is

essential to explore the presence (or absence) of women and especially to understand how they play a pivotal role in the lives of each of the male characters in the cycle. The structure of the stories reveals not only the quest for manhood, but also the fundamental importance of women, who preserve the community's culture and roots as well as educate and shape the new generation. The men portrayed in the cycle repeatedly show their inability to be a cohesive force in their family or in the community, yet the younger male generation, Sonny, James, Proctor, and Emmanuel, clearly represents hope for a brighter future in this oppressed black rural community.

3.2. The Structure of *Bloodline*

Gaines clearly arranged the stories as a sequence in order to show a progression in age, time and space. In order to demonstrate the sequence, it is essential to analyze the individual stories in a linear approach to emphasize the progression from one story to another. The short story sequence in *Bloodline* highlights the overall deterioration and spiritual growth of the community as a whole. As the main characters grow older, the nuclear family gradually decays, each character gradually losing the parental guidance needed to foster proper psychological development. Yet, the movement in time allows for the progression and emergence of the Civil Rights movement and the gradual awareness of the community of the need for change, and a more assertive fight for rights and opportunities, the lack of which are the roots of this slowly decaying black rural community. Lusher describes the movement in space as “arranged so that it builds out from the quarters to the town of Bayonne, then returns, via a decaying plantation, to the quarters” (39). However, this physical movement is not as important as the movement away from the community. Indeed, each character progressively moves away from the community into an ever-harsher environment, eventually resulting in Aunt Fe's refusal to be uprooted from a place she knows and cherishes. “Just Like a Tree” convincingly functions as the concluding story

as it provides a final and overreaching statement to the sequence, just as the first story, “A Long Day in November,” serves to introduce the sequence and functions as the foundation and as the reference from which all subsequent stories will be derived.

3.2.1 The beginning of the sequence

The sequence starts with Sonny’s simple, childish narration. As a six-year-old, Sonny expresses simple emotions and describes the world around him, the quarters, as they are, without any trace of judgment. Although it is not altogether devoid of violence, the quarters are a place of racial unity, where the black community is momentarily sheltered from racial tensions. The story foreshadows many of the severe elements the focus characters, in the following three stories, will eventually face and have to confront. The opening paragraph summarizes and introduces the problematic that will drive the entire sequence: “Somebody is shaking me but I dont want get up now, because I’m tired and sleepy and I don’t want get up now. It’s warm under the cover here, but it’s cold up there and I don’t want get up now” (3). As Sonny is forced out of bed into the bitter cold outside by his mother, he expresses his unwillingness to be thrust out in the harsh outer world environment. Sonny, reluctant to go get his pot to “wee-wee,” is shaken, pushed and guided by his mother and is finally able to overcome his fear, reluctance and environmental conditions to make it back to his bed. In the first two sentences, Gaines sets the tone of the sequence. Sonny represents the black male, who, averse to meet the challenges ahead, prefers to stay in the quarters, a metaphorical womb. Women will have to shake, insist and guide the men, who have yet to mature, to move forward and confront their problems in order to resolve them. The importance and maturity of women in this community clearly stands out throughout the story.

The story's focal conflict arises when Sonny's mother, Amy, decides to leave the marital home after her husband, once again, comes back in the early morning after having spent the night joyriding in his car, unconcerned for the wellbeing of his wife and, more importantly, of his son. Through Sonny's narration, Eddie appears as another child, irresponsibly giving his son candy. When met by his wife's resentment and rejection he "cries a good little while" (9). Eddie clearly lacks the emotional fortitude and maturity to be a mentor and a provider to his wife and son. Amy returns to her childhood home, to her mother, a domineering matriarch who tries to dictate her daughter's life. Amy does not altogether submit to her mother's authority, but, she is forced to accept her mother's interference in her marriage during her brief return. Both women are strong willed. However, one key component sets them apart. Amy's mother does not believe in the ability of either Eddie in particular, or black men in general to change: "Every nigger from Bayonne like this now, then, and forever" (19). Amy, on the other hand, knows and trusts Eddie has the capacity to change and to become a better and more responsible man, husband and father.

Initially, however, Eddie, beyond his obsession with his car, is not able to help Sonny on the path to manhood. This is exemplified when Sonny, unprepared for the day's lesson in school, wets himself and subsequently cries, mimicking his father, a sign "the children read [...] as a mark of immaturity" (Carmean, 140). Unable to convince his wife to come back home and threatened by his mother-in-law's attempt to find Amy a new husband, Eddie sets out, with his son, to find a solution to his marital woes.

Eddie makes a five-fold journey in search of advice. He first asks the preacher for suggestions. The latter proves not only incapable of giving a satisfying answer or resolving the problem, but seems completely puzzled by Eddie's predicament. Eddie then turns to Madame Toussaint, a Hoodoo woman, the only person able to promptly resolve marital issues in Bayonne.

His first visit to the mystical woman and her seventy-five cents advice, “give it up” (49), leaves him unconvinced. He then goes on to see Frank Armstrong, who has benefited from Madame Toussaint’s expertise, to see if he can use the advice she gave him; he also tries to borrow three dollars to get Madame Toussaint’s full assistance: Frank refuses. It is only after borrowing five dollars from Johnny Green, whose advice from Madame Toussaint, again, cannot be applied to Eddie’s problem, that the latter finally receives the only solution to his conjugal enigma from Madame Toussaint: “Go set fire to your car” (59). Finally grasping Amy’s main point of contention, Eddie publicly burns his car and returns home with his wife and son.

At the end of the story, Eddie has truly assumed his role and responsibility as a man, husband and father, even his mother-in-law is forced to accept his manhood: “I must be dreaming. He’s a man after all” (71). Nevertheless, Eddie’s transformation is due entirely to Amy’s actions. Even as they return home, Amy forces her husband to assert his newly found authority, insisting he beat her in order for him not “to be the laughingstock of the plantation” (75). She forced him to wake up from a fabricated and false sense of independence, represented by his car, and, just as she did with Sonny at the beginning of the story, forcefully led him to search and find the path of true manhood. Eddie’s newly found manhood is reflected in Sonny as he becomes more assertive and confident knowing his family is whole and his father will help him in school.

3.2.2. The loss of innocence

In “The Sky is Gray,” James, a boy slightly older than Sonny, lives outside of the quarters, isolated from the community, and has been deprived of his father by the federal authorities, who need him to fight for the armed forces during World War II. As James and his mother wait for the bus to go to Bayonne and go to the dentist in order to treat his toothache, it is

evident that there exists a strong bond between the narrator and his mother: “I know what she’s thinking all the time” (83). The absence of a father and husband bestows the burden of manhood on James. Indeed, James recalls the moment when he was coerced and beaten into becoming the man of the house. Forced by his mother and sheer necessity, James has to kill two redbirds to provide food for the family, something he thinks himself incapable of doing. James then plucks and cleans the two redbirds. While the narrative style is still simple and repetitive, James’ “observations reveal a growing cognizance of life’s nuances and an understanding of his mother’s teachings” (Babb, 24). James understands that his mother’s brutality is not random but purposeful: “Suppose she had to go away? That’s why I had to do it. [...] who was go’n look after us?” (90). James, metaphorically representing black men in this community, has to learn how to be self-sufficient. His mother, just like Sonny’s mother and other black women, cannot bear full and eternal responsibility for their families in a world controlled by white males.

James, unlike Sonny, has to venture to Bayonne, a small segregated city where racial tension is evident. When James and his mother pass the courthouse, he notices the flag. This one is different from the one that hangs above his school, only bearing “but a handful of stars” (93), an obvious reference to the confederate flag and the Jim Crow laws he will have to tread carefully. Just like Sonny, however, James is accompanied and guided by his mother. In the dentist office, James is exposed to a confrontation between a young man, who appears to be a student, and a preacher. As in the previous story, the preacher ineffectively argues with the student but here has to resort to violence to silence the vibrant argument put forth by this young educated man: “As long as you listen to what your heart tells you, you will have only what the white man gives you and nothing more” (96). Beyond a mere critic of religion as yet another institution holding back the black community, this statement and episode will resonate in the

story's final sentence, "you not a bum, you a man" (117), Octavia's lesson to her son, and throughout the following stories.

Presently fatherless, James is exposed to new ideas brought forth by an educated man he looks up to and wishes to become. It is important to notice that the student wins the debate peacefully through rational arguments. However, after the preacher's departure, the student shows the limits of his reasoning as he eventually loses his train of thought going on to affirm "the wind is pink [...] Grass is black" (100) in an attempt to justify his disbelief in God confusing the only woman willing to listen to him. While this episode provides some comical relief, the student is questioning the meaning of words, more specifically the meaning of the Constitution in the South: "Name me one right that you have. One right, granted by the Constitution, that you can exercise in Bayonne" (101). The student is clearly making reference to Saussure's concept of signifier-signified. Indeed, the constitutional freedoms do not have the same meaning for Blacks and Whites in the South. The student calls for action, awareness, yet, he is unable to explain his argument to an uneducated interlocutor revealing his estrangement from this rural community of which he was once a part. John Roberts argues that the student's "feelings of isolation cause him to alienate himself from the emotional support and comfort of the members of his community, whom he, in turn, deprives of the benefits of his education" (112). Far from needing or desiring support from the community, the student clearly wants to transmit the knowledge he recently acquired but is impeded by his own limitations to communicate his ideas plainly in a manner that would resonate with his audience. James admits he cannot understand the student, just as he was, at first, unable to understand the reason he had to kill the two redbirds. The student's individualism and message parallel Octavia's, an uneducated hardworking woman who understands the intricacies and hardships of her

surroundings. While Octavia is stoic and verbally uncommunicative, she, unlike the student, is able to clearly convey the same message to her eight year old son.

As James and his mother are forced to wait outside in the cold during the dentist's lunch break, Octavia manages, by example, to show her son how to survive with dignity and on their own terms in a segregated environment, which provides little shelter to poor black outsiders. Caring for her son's wellbeing, she is able to find three warm shelters and food without compromising her integrity and without having to beg or rely on charity. Although it is not an easy task, she has to use her wits to pretend to be looking for an ax handle in order for James to warm up briefly in a hardware store. As they reencounter the bitter cold and sleet, she is forced to use a quarter (one tenth of her carefully calculated budget for the trip) in order to pay for their stay in a café located in the segregated part of Bayonne. Even confronted with an attempted assault from another customer, she fights back, without having to resort to physical violence, and earns the respect of the "lady back of the counter" (111). As they make their way back to the dentist office, Octavia is obliged to accept help from an elderly white couple. Understanding Octavia's sense of pride, the old lady tries to provide food and shelter to James and his mother by pretending she has a chore for James. Yet, when the old lady finally shows to be too generous when selling meat to Octavia, she is met with the latter's flat refusal to accept what is clearly charity. The old lady yields, recognizing this mother's determination to be self-sufficient, and finally gives Octavia a smaller, price-appropriate piece of meat. This is perhaps the most poignant episode of the entire story.

James, throughout the day, learns the hardships of being black in a segregated society. However, pushed and guided by his mother he understands the intricacies and the means that will lead him to be self-sufficient, independent and a strong, mature individual. In this story, Gaines

plants the seed that will lead to the growth of the black community in “Three Men” and “Just Like a Tree.” Valerie Babb has argued that “James now considers education as a viable means of escaping the demeaning confines of his environment” (26). This goes too far; no clear evidence points to the importance of education in subsequent stories, although it is clear James has the desire to transcend his condition. Indeed, James’ inner stream of consciousness reveals his aspiration for a better world and more importantly for action: “I’m go’n make all this up one day. You see, one day, I’m go’n make all this up” (110). The repetition reveals James’ determination to change a world in which his mother suffers, a clear reference to the student’s discourse: “Things change through actions” (102). James’ thought, although it has been generated by his mother, does not specifically mention her, and thus becomes applicable to the entire black community.

3.2.3. The emergence of maturity

Gaines’s presentation of the dominance of the white community and laws and their effect on the African American community and individuals in the sequence is gradual. Whites, entirely absent in the first story, become oppressive in “The Sky is Grey,” and are overpoweringly introduced as punitive in “Three Men.” Proctor presents himself at the white police station to confess having killed another man. Ignored at first, treated as an inferior being, he is ultimately met with disbelief and repeatedly reminded to submit to superior men, Proctor is treated as a second-rate citizen, almost as a misbehaved child. Forced into obedience by T.J., a mean, experienced policeman, Proctor is subjected to a degrading interrogation. Knowing the reason for Proctor’s surrender, T.J. takes cruel pleasure in mentally torturing his captive before stating the obvious for both men: “You figured if you turned yourself in, Roger Medlow was go’n get you out [...] I didn’t say anything – but that’s exactly what I was figuring on” (125). Proctor’s uncle

works for Roger Medlow a plantation owner who has the power and money to bail out Procter. Although still a young man, but physically having reached manhood, Procter is treated and behaves as a reprimanded child. Unlike Sonny and James, Procter has lost his mother, and his father left them both to flee up North, leaving him to be raised by an uncle described by Procter as a stereotypical Uncle Tom. To make matters worse, Procter is even more removed from his own community, which sees him as a prodigal son who has lost his way. Lacking the parental guidance that would lead him to understand the world in which he lives or a nurturing community, Procter does not possess the vision to see that he is slowly fitting into a mold predetermined by the white legal system. Procter is slowly becoming the shortsighted, violent, Negro stereotype, the opposite of his submissive uncle. He has been blindly following what is expected of him by the white community and that will lead him to a life of servitude if he does not change his attitude.

Procter is incarcerated with Munford, a career criminal who is habitually incarcerated, and Hattie, an effeminate homosexual who has been imprisoned for prostitution. "Three Men" certainly parallels the setting and problematic of Gaines's later novel, *A Lesson before Dying*. The prison, in both the short story and the novel, "stimulate[s] black men's internal probing of how they can counter and re-envision the ways they have attempted to resituate themselves as subjects" (Clark 71). Although Procter revisits the events that have transpired earlier that night, he cannot distance himself from his actions and the only way out he believes will restore his freedom: "My uncle would go to Roger Medlow – and I was hoping Roger Medlow would get me off like he had done once before" (132). Munford, the only character in the story to treat Procter as an equal, at first, gradually gains Procter's attention through simple conversation. Munford, in and out of jail for several decades, has been able to reflect on his condition and

status in society. He foreshadows Proctor's future, wisely paralleling his life story to what will likely happen to the nineteen year old narrator:

My pappy worked for a white man who got me off. At first I didn't know why he had done it – I didn't think; all I knowed was I was free, and free is how I wanted to be. Then I got in trouble again, and again they got me off. I kept on getting in trouble, and they kept on getting me off. Didn't wake up till I got to be nearly old as I'm is now. Then I realized they kept getting me off because they needed a Munford Bazille. They need me to prove they human – just like they need that thing over there [Hattie]. (137)

Munford imparts foresight and awareness of the dangers that lie ahead to Proctor, eventually giving him the guidance, advice and the necessary cognitive tools to understand and avoid the same pitfalls. If Hattie and Munford are no longer children, they are no longer human in the eyes of this Jim Crow segregated society. Throughout the story, Hattie accepts his incarceration, believing the white men's theory of black men as animal and applies it to Munford and then Proctor: "You're just an animal out the black jungle" (139). Keith Clark argues that Hattie stands for the "homophobia and sexism" of black men; Munford, however, correctly identifies this character's effeminate nature as the metaphorical castration suffered by all black males as they have to submit and relinquish their responsibility (Clark, 7). Both Munford and Hattie play predetermined parts in a cyclical pattern perpetuated to maintain the subjugation of the black male.

When Munford leaves the cell, Proctor is left to ponder and make a decision. Munford stands as a substitute father and mentor, yet Proctor becomes painfully aware of his lack of real parents. His introspection leads him to reflect on love, reaching the conclusion that the only person he ever loved was his mother, a truly reciprocal love, the one person that could have provided him with the proper guidance and authority to become a man. Now, fully aware he does not want to become an animal like Hattie and Munford, Proctor understands his only choice is to

refuse Roger Medlow's help and accept the judgment of the court: "Even if Medlow came to get me, I wasn't leaving with him.[...] I wanted to stand" (152). He will not accept charity or help from the dominating class, instead taking responsibility for his action, the hardest path, yet the only one leading to true freedom, to manhood. His decision is unequivocal; he has decided to break the cycle of servitude, of lesser responsibility, a choice made clear when he decides in turn to become a mentor to the fourteen year old boy who has taken Munford's place in the cell. Karen Carmean incorrectly interprets Hattie's femininity as a sign of motherhood. Proctor does not "emulate Hattie's actions – giving comfort," (Carmean, 147) but rather shelters the boy from a misleading and falsely comforting companion, thus passing down Munford's teachings to the boy so, in turn, he can take responsibility for himself. The seeds of manhood, planted in the first two stories, have started to grow. Still a bud, Proctor has the potential to blossom, to become a man, a father. However, Gaines in "Bloodline" demonstrates the path that lies ahead can prove unfruitful.

3.2.4. The unavoidable wind of change

Before analyzing "Bloodline" in the story sequence, it is best to pause and contrast the title of the story and that of the cycle. Gaines uses the same title but the meaning and implication differ vastly from one another. Indeed, the title of the cycle makes reference to the importance of family, communal bonds, and culture and values that are passed from one generation to the next. Bloodline is the element that binds the community and enables it to survive, to strive and, in "Just Like a Tree," to transcend and change the overall condition of the black Bayonne community while still retaining its core identity. As Robert Lusher has stated, "the title becomes an appropriate organic metaphor for the volume's unity, especially the sequential dimension that depicts the progress from the older generation to the next" (Luscher, 68). While the title of the

cycle stresses its positive elements, ironically, the title of the short story makes reference to its negative elements. Indeed, the title, here, exposes a deep and controversial aspect of racial tension in the South, the rape of black women by their white masters and the resulting mixed blood children's struggle to find a place and identity. To further illustrate the contrast between the two titles, Gaines introduces a focal character who was never recognized by his white father, and whose mother died. Copper, the son of a former plantation worker who fled after she was raped by the current plantation owner's brother who died as a result of a riding accident, is not known to have any family to call his own, has no mentor, and certainly does not belong to the community. Copper's problematic bloodline and his quasi madness as a result thereof "symbolize[s] the psychological fragmentation that derives when one's identity must be aligned between two races" (Babb, 33).

While "Bloodline" fits in the sequence and further develops the movement in time and space, it lacks several elements to serve truly as an extension of the previous three stories. In those preceding tales, the narrators are the focus of their respective stories. Here, however, Copper does not have a narrative voice and the story is recounted by Felix, an old plantation worker. While the first three narratives focused on generational communication, "Bloodline" emphasizes the generational gap between an inert and aging black community and a young but experienced black idealist. The previous focus characters come from within the community, a contrast to Copper, who, although originally born on the plantation, comes from the outside and is a stranger to the plantation and its people. Another important element that diverges from the earlier stories, which focused mainly on the present, transpires from the fact that "Bloodline" reaches back in time, stressing the history of oppression and foreshadowing the changes to come as unavoidable, a representation of the Old South resisting the emergence of the Civil Rights

movement. Still, as in the other stories, the main conflicting factor in the progression of the sequence is the quest for Manhood. Indeed, Copper is already a man but a man “on the verge of madness,” (Ingram, 339) a man led by a misguided vision of this community and its individuals, a being unconcerned with the communal identity of this place and its people.

The story opens with a conversation between Felix and Amelia, Copper’s aunt. Frank Laurent, the plantation owner, also an old man, is slowly wasting away and his inevitable death means that his niece will inherit a plantation that she does not necessarily want. Felix and Amelia know that the niece would “let them Cajuns take over,” (160) an event that would be disastrous as Amelia explains that “we was going to have to pay rent or we was going to have to leave. I doubt if half of the people on the place could do either one” (164). This bleak future is aggravated by the fact that Copper would inherit the plantation if it wasn’t for the fact that he is black and therefore cannot be recognized as a family member by Frank, who despite being racially progressive, will not deliberately break the racial codes that rule this southern Louisiana rural community. A figure reminiscent of Faulkner’s Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy, Frank is a kind owner who tries to make amends for the past horrors of slavery as well as post reconstruction brutalities inflicted by his ancestors and brother not only by letting the plantation’s black families and elderly individuals live freely on his land, but also by helping them when needed. It is in this spirit that Frank wants to meet and offer assistance to Copper. While Frank’s generosity is admirable, his attitude only serves to further the dependence of the black community, an intertextual reference to the elderly couple in “The Sky is Grey.” Not needing to be responsible for themselves, the people cannot mature and are doomed to an eternal state of childhood, which forces them to rely on white leadership and rules. Frank, but also and especially Felix and Amelia, are aware that racial relations and rights are changing outside of

Bayonne: “They doing that everywhere else, [...] everywhere else but here” (161). However, they are unwilling to change and face the hardships that they would inevitably have to confront. Their inertia is further reinforced by the fact that Felix is the only passive narrator in the cycle. All this represents the general passivity of the extended black community.

Copper’s purpose is to take possession of his inheritance and to enlighten the black population, which he views as illiterate and uneducated peasants. In Copper’s vision and attitude we see Gaines’s satirical criticism of the disconnected intellectuals who formed part of the early Civil Rights movement, “elite/middle-class and aspiring middle-class African American” who “assimilat[ed] the values of mainstream white society and [tore] away from the darker subaltern self” (Hogue, 36). Felix witnesses Frank’s numerous, varied and ultimately unsuccessful attempts to force Copper to enter his house through the back door and, therefore, to accept the Southern racial code. In the end, it is Frank who has to bend to Copper’s determination and meet him on his own terms.

In some aspects, the story breaks away from the progression seen in the preceding stories; it is therefore better viewed as a bridging story. “Bloodline” is necessary in the sequence to link the first three stories to the concluding story “Just Like a Tree.” Copper’s use of military references and his struggle with Frank is not “a re-enactment of the Civil War” (Callahan, 107) but rather represents his delusional state of mind. Copper, a self-proclaimed general with no army, no followers, is bound to fail because he is not able to relate to the local black community, to understand their culture and way of life. An exaggerated version of the student in “The Sky is Gray,” Copper lacks the communicative skills and the desire to explain his vision, to convey his ideology to others. Copper has been corrupted by an exaggerated northern black ‘intellectual’ portrait of the southern rural African Americans to such an extent that he cannot even speak or

relate to his aunt Amelia: “When he talk he don’t look right. He looking at you, but he ain’t seeing you” (161). He is clearly disconnected from the community, and according to Gaines, as an individual, he alone “will not free people” (Ingram, 339). Copper fails because in order to lead a revolution, it is essential to have the understanding and support of the local population, the key elements to initiate an overreaching desire to fight back against the oppressive white power. Change cannot come solely from the outside. Indeed, in “Just Like a Tree,” *A Lesson Before Dying* and *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, the ‘saviors’ (Emmanuel, Grant, Ned and Jimmy) have been exposed to the outside world and the emergence of the Civil Right movement; however, all have retained their connection to the local population which enables them to gain the trust and support of their community. Copper’s refusal to walk through the backdoor and his success to force Frank to go meet him is meaningless for the broader black Bayonne community, yet, it represents an imminent change, one that cannot be stopped.

With the exception of Felix and Amelia, the black men who try to obey Frank represent minstrel-like stereotypes of some of the northern African American elite’s vision, reflecting “how black southerners have often been identified with a lower form of blackness and viewed as inimical to racial progress,” thus furthering Gaines’s satire (Richardson, 77). It is obvious, after reading the first three stories, that this black rural community has the power within itself to rise and transcend its condition and ultimately achieve the maturity that will lead it to break the racial code that stifles it while still retaining its core identity and values. This title story, written specifically for the collection, leads naturally to the last story by making reference, although somewhat satirically, to the overpowering rise of the Civil Rights movement, the effects of which are plainly visible in “Just Like a Tree.”

3.2.5. The end of the sequence and the emergence of the cycle

“Just Like a Tree” is more in keeping with the first three stories as it reinforces the importance of family, community and identity. What transpires as inertia in the previous story, is shown here as a desire to stay; indeed, they share a common history of oppression, deep roots, having lived there generation after generation, and a collective sense of identity. However, in order to stay, the community needs strength of character as well as an unwavering will to address the problems of racial iniquity that are tearing the community apart, leading the younger generation to leave in search of greener pastures. A common tragedy, the impending departure of Aunt Fe, has brought the community together and is told from the perspective of ten different narrators, ranging from the children, women, men and even including a black northerner, a reference to Copper, and a white woman, an allusion to Frank. Aunt Fe is the overreaching mother figure of this community; she has guided them, shared her experience and the brutal history of their people, imparted wisdom, shaken and led her people on the road to maturity. The shared grief is palpable in all but one of the voices. Each of the narratives reinforces the sequence and makes use of intertextual references to all four of the previous stories.

The first account, narrated by Chuckkie, a child, focuses, just like “A Long Day in November,” on the importance of family. Here, the family, gradually decaying throughout the sequence, is once again whole. Chuckkie describes the journey to Aunt Fe’s house; a trip made harder by the fact that one of the two mules used to pull the wagon is lazy and doesn’t do his share of the work. The contrast between Mr. Bascom and Big Red shows that the path to communal maturation is made more difficult because, while part of the people, like James or Proctor, work hard to achieve self-sufficiency assuming responsibility, others, sheltered and ignoring their duties, cannot and are unwilling to take charge of their burden. Chuckkie’s father

Emile truly assumes his fatherly duties, helping and guiding his son to lead the wagon in Aunt Fe's yard. Although Chuckkie, self-confident, pulls half the fence, due to Mr. Bascom's lethargy, he eventually is able to park the wagon, illustrating his need for parental guidance as he grows up that will keep him on the right path. It is important to notice that Leola, Emile's wife, does not intervene in her husband's guidance and is "just sitting there in that setting chair with her arms still folded" (225). She can trust in her husband to assume responsibility to raise their son, no longer needing, like Amy and Octavia, to bear the entire responsibility of leadership.

Leola and Aunt Clo's narratives focus on Aunt Fe and her function in the community. A perceptive woman, Leola knows Aunt Fe does not want to leave her house and go up North with her daughter and son-in-law. Aunt Fe is an intrinsic part of the community; "the name's been 'mongst us just like our own family name" (227). She represents the culture, the identity of the community, even as she leaves. Aunt Fe has been a constant and will always be present, her teachings passed from generation to generations, as are family names. Aunt Clo's narration echoes Leola's sentiments when she compares Aunt Fe to a Tree that has been jerked out of its land, a reference to the introductory poem. The repetition of "Jerk, jerk, jerk" (235) reminds us of the constant pressure and sufferance of a relentlessly repressed society, the identity of which "you hear the roots crying" (235-6). The inevitable work of time, progress and change eventually brings down the tree, the absence of which will always be felt in the community, leaving a hole "you can't never fill no matter how hard you try" (236). On the other hand, Aunt Clo suggests that Aunt Fe's presence will never disappear, because "you never get the taproot" (236). Valerie Babb declares that "Fe holds her 'folk' together, preventing the erosion of familial and cultural ties" (39). However, the decay of family ties is present before Aunt Fe's up-rooting. Aunt Fe's departure and the void it leaves behind, rather, represents the slow loss of the connection

between the new generation and its roots, yet, the wisdom it has transmitted will always be present.

James, Aunt Fe's son-in-law, is one of two outsiders in the narrative scheme. While his presence certainly reminds the reader of Copper's disconnection with the community and his disdain for its people, the analogy stops there. Indeed, James is an intellectually shallow northerner whose only concern is for material possessions: "Don't mention TV, man, these cats here never heard of that" (230). He does not understand the people and their connection to one another, much less their connection to Aunt Fe whom he refers to as an "old chick." Unwilling to mix and converse with the other people, James seems unaware of the grief felt because he "depends on Bourbon to blunt his feeling" (Carmean 153). The other outsider, although she lives in a near-by plantation house, is Anne-Marie Duvall, the daughter of Aunt Fe's former master. Anne-Marie feels a strong bond to Aunt Fe, a parallel to Frank's relation to Amelia in "Bloodline." While this bond is real, her primary justification for going lies in the fact her father would have done so: "Father definitely would have gone if he were alive" (240). Again, Gaines distances Anne-Marie from Frank. Anne-Marie is disconnected from the black community; she does not understand the purpose of the bombing, the reason for Aunt Fe's departure. Her misinterpretation of the event echoes James' material concerns: "Do they know what they want? [...] Money to buy a car, is that it?" (241). Both James and Anne-Marie highlight the communal bond created by Aunt Fe's departure as well as the importance of the cultural connection among the members of the community.

The penultimate narrative, told by Etienne, focuses on the bombing and Emmanuel. Anne-Marie Duvall believes the bombing has been committed by black criminals, her understanding of which is based on the misinformation spread by the white authorities to

reinforce the notion of black violence. The bombing, however, has come as a retribution for Emmanuel's peaceful Civil Rights activism. Etienne's narrative summarizes the history of slavery and violence between men, a never ending history of envy, greed, material pursuit and blood. The history of bloodshed is not recent and will never cease; however, Etienne underlines a major difference in Emmanuel's method of fighting: "Stead of raising arms 'gainst the master, he bow his head" (245). This statement emphasizes the sharp contrast between Emmanuel and Copper's path to equality. Copper is bound to fail, as violence resulted in greater violence, an endless cycle. Emmanuel on the other hand employs nonviolent protest, and while violence is still to come, it stands as the only hope of ending the cycle. It is clear, however, that Emmanuel was steered and guided away from violence by Aunt Fe:

'You told me a story once Aunt Fe, about my great-grandpa. Remember? Remember how how he died?' [...]
'Remember how they lynched him – chopped him into pieces?' [...]
'Just the two of us were sitting here beside the fire when you told me that. I was so angry I felt like killing. But it was you who told me get killing out of my mind. It was you who told me I would only bring harm to myself and sadness to the others if I killed. Do you remember that, Aunt Fe?' (246)

Gaines highlights the importance of storytelling, of knowledge, of history but also of generational guidance and wisdom, which can prevent repeating and perpetuating the cycle of historical violence through proper control of oneself. Babb observes that "the tradition, principles and values [Aunt Fe] represents inspire [Emmanuel] to integrate the past as he forges a future for his people" (43). While Emmanuel is blamed for Aunt Fe's departure, he takes full responsibility for his actions, knowing he is working to create a better future for his people and generations to come. Emmanuel is the embodiment of manhood, of responsibility, a leader capable of taking action to improve the world for his extended family and his community.

Aunt Fe's death represents the death of a generation, and, the sequence of story ends, yet the cycle forces the reader to look back and re-examine the previous stories and their focus characters. Aunt Fe forces a retrospective assessment of the female characters in *Bloodline*, "the lineage these women continues in this place to enact changes they've made possible through the action of their lives and voices" (Callahan 109). The importance of women, their guidance, and transmission of knowledge has paved the way and allowed a new generation of men to find the way to achieve manhood. This is especially significant in a community that has been deprived of men able to lead, who were stripped of their confidence, responsibility and emasculated by their white counterparts through violent repression both physical and psychological. Emmanuel, on the other hand, shows the gradual rise of male responsibility and its difficult path in a post-reconstruction, Jim Crow segregated South.

3.3. Key Elements Supporting the Structure

Most modern short story cycles concentrate on a focal place; here, in *Bloodline*, Gaines portrays the black community that lives around Bayonne. While the unity of place is important in demonstrating an overall coherence of setting, what truly binds these five stories into a cycle is the importance Gaines gives to the black community. Gaines highlights the significance of this community in two ways. In the first and last stories, the community and the immediate and extended family have a strong presence. The community provides help, support and guidance to its members. While the main themes and problematic elements are still present in these two stories, there is a sense that the community's presence will help its members overcome adversities. On the other hand, in the three middle stories, the focus characters are all, to varying degrees, deprived of a community but also and more importantly, of their immediate family. The resulting effect is felt as James, Procter and Copper each face gradually bleaker realities. As a

matter of fact, Gaines describes Copper, who does not have any family and does not belong to any community, as being “on the verge of madness” (Ingram, 339). By contrasting the presence and absence of a well-established community in the lives of his focus characters Gaines emphasizes the significance of strong family and communal ties. However, it is also clear that there is a generational gap within the community.

Gaines, like Faulkner, recognizes the importance of the confrontation between generations, between the old order and the new order, the Old South and the New South. Faulkner developed this confrontation in most of his novels and, more to the point, in both *The Unvanquished* and *Go Down Moses*, his two short story cycles. Cycles allow a greater flexibility to contrast, oppose and present dual or multifaceted conflicts from a variety of viewpoints. In *Bloodline*, each story develops a unique facet of this confrontation. Gaines does not advocate the new order over the old order as he explains to John O’Brian: “There will always be men struggling to change, and there will always be those who are controlled by the past. In many cases, those who are controlled by the past can be just as human and sometimes more human than those who try to change things” (O’Brian, 29). In this sequence of stories, Gaines develops a narration that presents both the strengths and weaknesses of each side. Nevertheless, the sequence reveals that the new order, the Civil Right generation, is gradually leaving the old order behind as it tries to build a new future for itself. In “Just Like a Tree,” however, Gaines suggests, through a multigenerational narration, that the new order will retain the teachings, the culture and a sense of communal identity conveyed over the years by Aunt Fe, who represents the old order.

Gaines also explores the themes of modernization and urbanization in *Bloodline*. The advent of modernity, generally considered a positive factor, had a negative effect for the rural black population in Louisiana. This is symbolized by the car Eddie drives all night, night after

night in “A Long Day in November,” neglecting his wife and child to go have fun. It is only by burning his car, rejecting an object that controls him, that Eddie regains his role as a responsible husband and father. In the title story, “Bloodline,” this underlying concept affects the blacks who live on the plantation. Historically in Louisiana, the Cajun farmers were always given the best plots of land while the less fertile ones were assigned to the black farmers: “The Cajuns would have the forward land, which was the better land and the blacks would have the poor land” (Rickels 123). Having the better land enabled the Cajun farmers to raise better crops and, in turn, allowed them to buy tractors and become increasingly more productive. The black sharecroppers on the other hand could not compete against the arrival of machines and barely earned enough to survive. In “Bloodline,” those few, who stay, only do so because they cannot afford to leave. In her reading of “Just Like a Tree” Karen Carmean observes that Emile “eyes a new tractor with longing, suggesting a certain eagerness to abandon some practices” (Carmean 152). The Yankee husband of Aunt Fe’s daughter cannot comprehend the backward ways of the people who surround him; this lack of what he sees as basic comforts baffles him, yet the bond between the people is clearly stronger without these modern objects.

Tied to modernity is the concept of urbanization. From the 1940’s to the 1960’s there was a great shift in the Southern African American landscape from a rural to an urban landscape, which came alongside migration, from the South to the North and the West.

World War II encouraged more African American farmers to leave the land, and more than one million blacks departed the South during the 1940s. [...] During the 1950s, nearly 2.5 million African American farmers left the South. [...] By 1960, African American farmers had become nearly irrelevant. (Hurt 3-4)

This mass exodus obviously affects the black community around Bayonne. This theme is present in the structure of the cycle; each focus character has to go further from the quarters in their attempt to unravel their problems. If modernity and urbanization have negative connotations in

Bloodline, Gaines also makes a point to show how contemporary beliefs and greater geographical freedom give the people access to new ideas. Jeffery Folks observes that in Gaines's works, "the increased urbanization of the South threatens the black community, [...] the threat can be dealt with by means of education that often takes the form of knowledge passed down from elders" (44; 45). Indeed, throughout the cycle, Gaines strives to demonstrate that, in order to be effective, change can only take place by blending the teachings and communal bonds of the past, and, the new ideas brought forth by the fight for Civil Rights in the 1960's. These new concepts will positively affect the state of equality and social status for the black population in and around Bayonne. However, it is also implied that this sweeping change will destroy the communal bonds as the desire for modernity and more radical social and racial changes push people out to the cities, to the North and to the West. Gaines's personal history is reflected in this dramatic shift as he was forced to leave his rural home in 1948 to follow his mother and stepfather who had previously moved to California during World War II.

Violence and brutality are part of a harsh daily routine for Gaines's focus characters. In *Bloodline*, violence is represented in all of its aspects: physical, verbal, psychological and racial. For Sonny, it is symbolized by the bitter cold he has to confront when he is forced to go outside; it is verbally present when his grandmother spews insults at his father, and it is psychologically hampering in school. For James, Procter and Copper, violence is an inescapable reality; they do not have a choice, whether they face it or try to ignore it, violence will always be their burden. Gaines explores and develops this theme from early childhood to death. Felix, in the title story, has come to accept the brutality of racial confrontations as he ironically reminds Mr. Frank of alternatives when dealing with Copper: "We ain't had a good lynching in a long time" (198). In the last story, Aunt Fe's departure is the consequence of a brutal retaliation against the family of

a Civil Right activist. However, the people are able to overcome this harsh reality by preserving their personal dignity.

The sense of pride, honor and a code of personal behavior are present in every story. All the characters Gaines portrays in *Bloodline* try to honor the values that have passed from the older generation down to the younger. Each story shows a different facet of this code of personal behavior. Still, even though collective pride is important in *Bloodline*, Gaines is also able to focus on the ambiguous nature of personal pride. Again, Gaines gives a double vision of this topic, especially through the presence or absence of the community's watchful eye.

Religion has always been present in Gaines's work. In most of his novels, he retains an equivocal stance regarding the function of religion in the black community. In *Bloodline*, however, at least in the first two stories, the religious leaders are clearly holding the black community in a stagnant pool of ignorance. The two preachers in "A Long November Day" and "The Sky is Grey" are unable to confront the problem they are asked to face. They are puppets, unable to think outside a narrow spectrum of thought; they mouth predetermined answers without truly considering the individual who voiced a specific question. In the last three stories, though, religion is barely mentioned and does not vividly affect the focus characters showing that if religion is still part of the community it is not an essential element of change.

Bloodline has often been compared to Jean Toomer's *Cane*. It seems, though, that this comparison is mainly due to the cohesiveness of both cycles rather than structural similarities. In *Cane*, Toomer interweaves short stories and poems to create a meaningful whole that transcends the sum of the individual poems and stories. *Bloodline*, on the other hand, is almost entirely comprised of short stories. However, two poems, although not written by Gaines, function importantly in the cycle. The introductory poem of "Just Like a Tree" comes from an old Negro

spiritual and symbolically applies to Aunt Fe and her daughter's attempt to uproot her from the outskirts of Bayonne, the only place she has ever known. The poem also symbolizes the community of narrators in this story and throughout the cycle. Indeed, as most people in the black community around Bayonne gradually leave, eager to find desirable opportunities, those who stay behind express the need to affirm their belonging to the land where their ancestors poured out their sweat and blood, a place where they still strive to improve. In "The Sky is Gray" James recalls "Annabel Lee" a poem he will have to recite when he goes back to school (112). This poem by Edgar Allen Poe tells the story of two lovers torn asunder by greater forces. "Annabel Lee" is particularly meaningful for James because it mirrors how the Army took his father away: "I used to like to be with Mama and Daddy. We used to be happy. But they took him in the Army. Now, nobody happy no more..." (108). It also serves as an overall symbolic motif in the cycle as it resonates with the black community's struggle to maintain their own culture while racism, modernity and urbanism contrive to disperse the inhabitants of this hamlet.

Gaines repeatedly stated in several interviews that the stories in *Bloodline* were arranged in order to bind them together into a meaningful whole. He specifically wrote both "Three Men" and "Bloodline" for the cycle, while "The Sky is Gray," "Just Like a Tree" and "A Long Day in November" had previously been written over the span of two years (1963-1964). However, one has to question the reason Gaines never thought of including his first three tales. Indeed, "The Turtles," "Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit" and "Mary Louise" were written only a few years before. All three tales take place around Bayonne, revealing a common location and are told from a first person perspective. It is essential to understand Gaines's reason not to include these stories in *Bloodline*, a collection of new and previously written material, in order to reveal the author's conscious decision to create a short story cycle. The three earlier short stories share

more than their location and narrative technique with those in *Bloodline*. Indeed, manhood, personal growth, violence, and religion are also deep and recurring themes that dominate these narratives. Yet, these shared elements are overshadowed by a differing problematic which would have compromised the coherence and progression of the cycle.

“The Turtles” and “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit,” both originally published in *Transfers*, are told respectively by a teenage boy in the process of entering manhood and a young boy caught in a quarrel between his father and his father’s mistress; both narrators are called Max, yet they are clearly not the same persona. Both boys have lost their mother and live with their father, with whom they share a strong bond. “The Turtles” recounts Max’s passage to manhood as he is pushed by his father to have sexual relations with a local prostitute after a day of fishing. Max’s relation to his father and resulting self-confidence is contrasted to his friend Benny, who unable to relate to his father and obviously cared for and dominated by his mother, still behaves like a child as a result thereof. The story focuses on the father-son relationship and the passage from boyhood to manhood which is based solely on its sexual aspect. This clearly conflicts with the overall concept and progressive development of manhood in *Bloodline* which unfolds as a ‘prise de conscience’ of the responsibilities and duties of being a dominated black man in a Southern white rural community. As a matter of fact, in “Three Men,” Munford tells Proctor that his sexual manhood does not truly make him a man: “‘Cause face don’t make a man - black or white. Face don’t make him and fucking don’t make him and fighting don’t make him – neither killing. None of this prove you a man” (138).

In “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit,” the story focuses on the importance of a whole family as Max has developed a strong bond to his father’s mistress, Mrs. Adele, and vividly yearns for a mother figure. The main conflict arises when Mrs. Adele, a devout Christian, invites

her preacher to assess and save Max's father, Oscar, who does not go to church. A recurring leitmotiv in Gaines's work, the preacher tries to persuade Oscar to change his ways but, lacking the communicative skills to do so, resorts to physical violence which eventually drives the couple apart destroying Max's hope of having a mother and shattering his hopes of maintaining the close relation he has started to establish with Mrs. Adele. The themes of ineffective religious leaders and the importance of a whole family are also present in *Bloodline*. However, religion is only a minor aspect of the cycle, not a major binding element, whereas the concept of a nuclear family which fosters growth is heavily stressed, especially in the first and concluding story. Furthermore, "Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit" does not offer any hint that Max is maturing or has learned anything about manhood. Indeed, in "The Sky is Gray" and "A Long Day in November" both Sonny and James learn valuable lessons that will guide them towards self-determination, responsibility and ultimately a better understanding of the concept of manhood. While Mrs. Adele educates Max to behave and dress appropriately for church, she fails to guide him on the path of independence, whereas Sonny and James's mothers strive to push their respective sons to become more self-reliant. Both stories lack the strong female characters present in *Bloodline* who are the source of the male maturation process that gradually unfolds throughout the cycle.

Unlike the other two stories, it is a young woman, who bears the same name as the title, who narrates "Mary Louise." The main character has waited ten years for the return of Jackson, her first and only love. Jackson finally comes back and as she recalls her childhood and a particular "sinning" incident with Jackson, Mary Louise hopes he has returned to marry her. However, her hopes are dashed when Jackson declares he does not love her and she realizes her life has been full of deception: "All my life I had been nothing but a fool for people" (*Mozart*

and Leadbelly 113). This female character lacks the moral fortitude and the keen perception of her surroundings that define the women in *Bloodline*. Mary Louise has lived in a dream world completely dependent on Jackson, which has helped her shut out harassment from white men, a taxing job and the repeated mockery and criticism of her friends and father. She is the antithesis of the women portrayed in Gaines's short story cycle, neither a mother nor a self-respecting individual; Mary Louise has deluded herself and eluded her daily reality, hoping Jackson, her personal savior, will come and liberate her from the daily grind she endures. The focal women in *Bloodline*, aware of the harsh reality they have to face, seek to improve the overall condition of their community by educating and guiding their sons and men in general to transcend their social position as second class citizens.

"The Turtles," "Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit" and "Mary Louise" were later republished together with other essays and stories as a loose collection in *Mozart and Leadbelly* (2005). Gaines's decision to leave these three tales out of *Bloodline* reveals a definite authorial purpose and accentuates the cycle's cohesion and progress from one story to the next. A close analysis of the cycle reveals its structure and movement, yet, in order to prove the definite intention to organize independent stories into a meaningful whole, understanding the reasons the author left out other stories bolsters the argument for the cycle's cohesiveness. Progression, patterns, leitmotifs, a collective protagonist and place demonstrate the interconnectedness of independent stories into an organized ensemble; however, the cycle, in all its aspects, serves to bring to light an overall message. Gaines's *Bloodline* highlights the strength of the community by showing how women and men work together to lead the transition from oppression to freedom by gradually initiating the fight for their Civil Rights.

3.4. The Women and Men of *Bloodline*

In *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, Gaines reaches back to slavery and reconstruction to reveal Miss Jane's strength of character. Far from the stereotypes of Jezebel and Mammy, Miss Jane, strong-minded, independent and nearing the end of her life, embodies the heart of her community. Aunt Fe and Miss Jane share the same qualities. Gaines had originally envisioned his third novel to follow the same narrative pattern as "Just Like a Tree" eventually deciding against it: "The first version of *Miss Jane Pittman* was entitled 'A Short Biography of Miss Jane Pittman.' I had a group of people from a multiple point of view telling the story. And then I said, 'Oh goddamn, this is too much like 'Just Like a Tree;' I've got the same characters telling the same thing" (Ingram 343). Ingram in his interview with Gaines points out that "Miss Jane Pittman, in a sense, is the story of Aunt Fe's life" (Ingram 343), a statement confirmed by Gaines. Although Miss Jane clearly stands for Gaines's vision of the back rural woman, in *Bloodline* he is able to present various facets of black women in a small southern rural community. The black women in and around Bayonne are portrayed as figures of authority. On the other hand, the grown men Gaines describes struggle to achieve maturity or abandon wives and children to flee the South, selfishly looking for a better life. The general feeling in the cycle is one of a matriarchal society, not by choice but rather by necessity.

However, to speak solely of women misrepresents their function in *Bloodline*, as well as in *A Lesson Before Dying* or *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. Indeed, most of Gaines' women are first and foremost mothers, whether blood mothers or figurative mothers. These women/mothers, beyond being strong figures of authority, also preserve the knowledge of their community's past. They preserve and impart the history of their people, the identity of the community. This concept is vitally important especially in the context of post slavery

segregation, a period during which the white population mostly saw African Americans as portraits of popular stereotypes, feral, uneducated, violent and rootless. Any hint of an affirmation of a distinct identity, especially one that would challenge the established order, was brutally repressed. The communal knowledge, in *Bloodline*, is passed from mother to child, to guide, educate and provide a better understanding of the social order. Knowledge is the key to survive in a place that has complex rules of race relations. Yet, the knowledge bestowed on the younger generation also serves as a means to encourage personal growth, to reach maturity, to take charge of their own lives. Gaines's women do not push their sons to find a way to break the disparities that stifle personal and social progress but rather finally give them the means to break the cycle of dependence from the wealthy, white power that has carefully crafted legal and psychological devices to keep them in servitude long after emancipation. While Gaines vibrantly highlights the importance of women in the Bayonne community, it is disconcerting to notice that none of the focus characters are young women. Indeed, all the children and young adults who play a central role in the narratives are exclusively male.

The assessment of Gaines' concept and definition of manhood in this cycle as well as in the study of its individual studies has been the driving force behind most critical approaches. Indeed, Gaines explores the notion of male responsibility and irresponsibility in all of his novels and short stories. Even in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, a novel that centers on the life of a female character, Gaines, in an interview with John Lowe, declares: "the book is structured around four men" (Lowe 303). It is essential, before further examination, to detach Gaines' notion of manhood from "the sacrosanct and ingrained conception of masculinity that accentuates violence, power, and sexual dominance" (Clark 68). Gaines, rather, explores "the totality of the black male self from emotional, psychological and spiritual perspectives" (Clark

68). Gaines presents his own definition and personal understanding of this concept, in an extended interview with Marcia Gaudet and Carl Wooton, in which he divides men into several categories:

We ought to think about these guys who say: [...] ‘Hell, why should I go along with anything society says, when I’ve never been given a chance to participate in society?’ And others are always going to say that tomorrow is going to be a better day, tomorrow has to be a better day. You have those who say tomorrow will be a better day, so I’m going to be strong today, so I can be stronger tomorrow. You have those who say the hell with it all, I’ll never have a chance. And then you have the others who say I’m a defeatist. (51-52)

It is no surprise strength of character emerges as an essential notion. Clearly, Gaines envisions a Man as a person able to understand current hardships in order to confront adversities to come. Indeed the leading male figures in *Miss Jane Pittman* (Ned and Jimmy), *A Lesson Before Dying* (Grant) and *Bloodline* (Emmanuel), epitomize men who are educated, have knowledge of the outside world and possess a deep understanding of their community’s past and present. Yet, in order to highlight these messiahs or ideal portraits of black manhood, Gaines also presents a broader examination of men in and around the black Bayonne community. As a cycle, *Bloodline* allows a greater range of representation of the male figure. In *Bloodline* this contrast and depiction of the defeatist, the passive or the violent African American male is broader than any one of his novels.

The focus on male narratives is undeniable in *Bloodline*, however, the quest for manhood, as a binding thread throughout the cycle, while legitimate, is also questionable. Indeed, Gaines, in several interviews, repeatedly describes Copper as either mad or on the verge of madness. If the stories in *Bloodline* progressively move forward the quest for manhood, the title story noticeably fails to do so. This ‘flaw’ undermines the flow and cohesion to which short story cycles aspire. Copper, an entity utterly detached from the community, is not a man in the eyes of

‘his’ people, but rather a wild animal unaware of the communal rules that govern the quarters he seeks to liberate. The story’s cohesiveness within the cycle lies in the development of the conflict between the Old South and the New South; defining the problems the younger black generation will face in its own community and foreshadowing the sweeping social changes that will be the focus of “Just Like a Tree.” In this last story, Emmanuel, the hidden focus of this polyphonic narrative, shows personal growth and a strong sense of communal responsibility. He personifies the ideal achievement of manhood. However, so little information transpires about Emmanuel and so little is known about his actions that “Just Like a Tree” cannot convincingly serve as a conclusion to this quest for manhood. However, even though this quest does not necessarily bind the stories within the cycle, it is an essential component of the first three stories and important achievement in the last story.

In “Just Like a Tree,” while little is known about Emmanuel, Aunt Fe is undoubtedly his mentor. As previously argued, *Bloodline* strongly establishes the importance of African American mothers in the development of their sons as well as other men close to them. However, the father-son relationship, or absence thereof, obviously plays an essential role in the exploration of manhood. Only one story truly focuses on the meaning of fatherhood, “A Long Day in November.” In the three subsequent stories, however, the absence of a father who can provide guidance, experience and help is an essential problem that results in a misconception of what being a man implies. Indeed, if James, in “The Sky is Gray,” is still too young to have been exposed to and to apply the stereotyped portrayal of black men as violent and sexually dominant ‘animals’, this adversely affects the development of both Proctor and Copper, in “Three Men” and “Bloodline.” Both Proctor and Copper are fatherless and have therefore never benefited from the guidance a father would provide to his son. Proctor and Copper’s experiences of

fatherlessness vastly differ, and while Proctor eventually finds a male mentor, nevertheless, the effects on both of their psychological development is obvious. The inability of these men to mature, to reach adulthood, strongly affects the fabric and positive evolution of Bayonne's black community. The arrangement of the stories in *Bloodline* reveals possible paths and impasses to achieving manhood despite the dearth of father figures.

3.5. Conclusion

The cycle opens and concludes with the presence of nuclear families. Even though the story opens with Eddie, Sonny's father in "A Long Day in November," repeatedly deserting his wife and son, representing and foreshadowing the flight of black father figures in the rural South, the story ends revealing the reunited family in their home with the prospect of both mother and father working together to raise their son. Sonny will clearly benefit from having both parents to assist him, giving him a better chance to become educated and to understand the responsibilities and duties of being a man. In "Just Like a Tree," Chuckkie, guided by both his mother and father, appears as a well-rounded boy who, while still needing his parents' supervision, demonstrates the qualities that will lead him to become an autonomous person. Emmanuel's presence and the hope he brings to the community undeniably reflects the positive aspects brought forth by having strong family bonds. Sonny and Chuckkie, both of whom benefit from the presence of a mother and father, can aspire to a better future, being able to achieve a balanced parental view and understanding of their environment. James, on the other hand, only presented with his mother's vision of his surroundings, is more likely to be led astray. This is demonstrated by his fascination with the student in the dental office. Even though the student is a positive figure, he also foreshadows Copper's inability to communicate effectively and to relate to the community. As a matter of fact, James does not truly comprehend the student's message; he is

infatuated with the student's appearance and speech revealing an already flawed perception: "I want clothes like that and I want keep a book with me, too" (100).

Proctor and Copper in the subsequent stories showcase the dramatic consequences of the deteriorated family structure or absence thereof as they fail to assess their surroundings and are guided by misconceptions and a stereotyped understanding of the notion of manhood in the rural South. Unable to benefit from the guidance and experience parents provide their children, they readily identify with projected clichés of manhood, Proctor on his way to becoming the feral negro white southerners have fabricated and Copper projecting the flawed perception of the South northern black intellectuals have promoted. Proctor, because he encounters a mentor who forces him to reconsider his actions, is able to break away from the mold imposed on him by white propaganda symbolized by T. J. in "Three Men." By enclosing the cycle with stories focusing on the importance of the nuclear family, Gaines affirms the path towards meaningful change; freedom and independence from the omnipresence of the stifling white subjugation this black rural community has to endure, can only come to fruition through a closely knit family and, by extension, community retaining its identity. The communication, transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next establishes the significance and power of an interwoven, continuous bloodline.

Knowledge of the past and understanding of the present do not by themselves lead an individual or a community towards a new future. Indeed, as previously argued it is also the exposure to emerging, novel ideas and means to resist and counter century old white subjugation that will break the cycle of violence and servitude. Emmanuel, in "Just Like a Tree," epitomizes the mesh of these three concepts. The stories naturally guide the reader towards the concluding communal polyphony which in turn forces a retrospective interpretation as well as projects a new

generation that has the means to transcend this cycle that has entrapped their ancestors. Emmanuel's character suggests the community has the potential and power to do so. Yet, Gaines counterbalances this nascent hope with two major hindering factors. Indeed, throughout the cycle, repeated evidence indicates the breaking up of the African American community in this south Louisiana locale. The flight of men, husbands and fathers, as well as women, although not as significant, imposes itself as a challenge to the fabric and future of black people living around Bayonne. Gaines also exposes the problematic of a deeply rooted inertia present in every story. Given that "the rural south in 1920s was much as it had been in the 1870s," (Kirby, xiv) the lack of desire for change and the acceptance of life as second class citizens are evidently issues which will impede the dissemination and belief in the new ideas brought forth by the Civil Rights movement.

The short story cycle allows Gaines to present and explore the converging effects of the rise of the Civil Rights movement and the exodus from the rural communities in the South. By giving the reader a multifaceted vision of both the positive and negative effects of this dual problematic, Gaines effectively sketches a community on the verge of an unavoidable, dramatic transition from the rural agrarian Old South to the urbanized industrialized New South. The conflict presented in *Bloodline* represents Gaines's own understanding of the black rural South in Louisiana during this period. Gaines clearly feels uncertain about the prospects of this community:

I think that at the moment, right now, the black man is on the verge. [...] I just don't know where things are going. [...] I don't know whether I'll ever see that actually happen. I don't know whether I'll live that long. I'm neither pessimistic nor optimistic about that sort of thing. I mean you hope for the best, but... (Ingram 339; 340)

This cycle mirrors the dilemmas the African American community in South Louisiana had to face during a twenty year period which yielded unprecedented changes. As the community was dispersing, progressively ending a way of life that had remained the same for decades, new ideas came forth, giving this stagnant and fractured community the means to redefine itself.

The struggle to reassess and affirm one's identity during transitional periods is certainly a key component of the post-colonial movement, indeed, "every new instance of independence [...] required that the nation be reconstructed in the collective imagination; or that identity be symbolized anew" (Boehmer 177). In many aspects, life for Africans Americans in the South was akin to life in colonies where the dominant class imposed its ideology. Much as Naipaul's *Miguel Street* and Gabriel Gracia Márquez's *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*, *Bloodline* focuses on key aspects of post-colonial issues and the search for a redefined communal identity. Both cycles highlight the importance of identity in relation to the people's culture and past. They also emphasize the predicament which these focal communities confront to as they strive to retain their own identity while also trying to accept new concepts and move forward in the face of drastic transition; indeed, "living culture is an ongoing questioning of traditional beliefs – testing and adapting them to the inevitable transformation all societies undergo" (Memmi 41). *Miguel Street*, *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* and *Bloodline*, well-orchestrated sequences of stories leading to a reassessment of the whole, reflect the process of redefining a communal identity.

Table 3.1: Table of stories / *Bloodline*

Story Title	Focus character/ Narrator	Location	Main themes	Family
“A Long Day in November”	Sonny (six years old)	Quarters	Manhood Responsibility Father-son relations	Whole
“The Sky is Gray”	James (eight years old)	Outside the quarters	Segregation Oppression Responsibility Interracial violence	Only has his mother
“Three Men”	Proctor (nineteen year old)	Prison	Oppression Interracial violence Change Responsibility	Lost mother and father. Lives with his uncle.
“Bloodline”	Copper (early twenties) Felix (seventy years old)	Plantation	Old South versus New South Change Mix-blood Interracial violence	Lost father and mother. Mixed-blood

Table 3.1: Table of stories / *Bloodline* (continued)

Story Title	Focus character/ Narrator	Location	Main themes	Family
“Just Like a Tree”	Aunt Fe and Emmanuel	Aunt Fe’s house Outside the quarters		Community
	Chuckkie (child)		Responsibility	
	Emile (male adult)		Father-son relations	
	Leola (female adult)		Fragmentation of community	
	James (male adult)		Northern perspective	
	Ben O (child)		Interracial violence	
	Aunt Clo (female adult)		Fragmentation of the community	
	Chris		Fragmentation of the community	
	Anne-Marie Duvall (white female adult)		White perspective	
	Etienne (male adult)		History of oppression and violence	
	Aunt Lou (old female)		Aging/fragmentation of the community	

4. Chapter III: Gabriel Gracia Márquez's *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*

4.1. Introduction

Gabriel García Márquez is synonymous with the Latin American literary “Boom” of the nineteen sixties. He quickly gained international renown after publishing his fourth novel *Cien años de soledad* (1967). Although García Márquez is primarily known as a novelist, he began his career as a short story writer soon after obtaining his baccalaureate and enrolling in the faculty of law at the Universidad Nacional of Bogotá. In 1947, just having finished Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, Gracia Márquez “felt an irresistible longing to live in that alien paradise” (LTT 248) which led him to write his first work of fiction, “La tercera resignación,” a short story that was published in “*Fin de Semana*, the literary supplement of *El Espectador*” (LTT 245). In the fifteen years that followed, he mostly endeavored to write short stories and novellas while studying and, after he had abandoned his studies, working as a journalist. During most of his childhood and adolescence, the Liberal party had been in power in Colombia. However, in 1946, Mariano Ospina Pérez, a Conservative president, took power after divided elections in which the Liberal party split its votes between two candidates, Alfonso López and Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. This election marked the beginning of La Violencia, a period from 1946 to 1958 during which the country endured a dramatic shift from democracy to dictatorship and suffered a wave of violence “in which eventually between 100,000 and 200,000 Colombians died, often in quite unpleasant ways” (MMC 205).

During these two decades, García Márquez became a recognized journalist, traveled throughout Europe for three years (1955-1957), worked as undocumented journalist in Venezuela (1958-1959) and personally witnessed the downfall of three dictatorial regimes (Pérez Jiménez in Venezuela, Fulgencio Batista in Cuba and Rojas Pinilla in Colombia).

Unsurprisingly, these experiences, which deeply marked Gracía Márquez, and his childhood memories of rural Colombia form the background for the short stories he wrote during that period. Gracía Márquez acknowledges in an interview with Peter Stone that it was after the Bogotazo of 1948, massive riots in Bogota following the assassination of Eliécer Gaitán which lead to the death of several thousand people, “when I was [...] forced to go back to Barranquilla on the Caribbean, where I had spent my childhood, I realized that that was the type of life I had lived, known, and wanted to write about” (Stone 321). Indeed, the eight short stories included in the volume *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* (1962) focus on violence, repression, disillusion, socioeconomic status and a fractured community. The stories combine some of Gracía Márquez’s childhood recollections with the political issues with which Colombia grappled during La Violencia, issues that stemmed from a long history of strife between the Liberal and Conservative parties. Gracía Márquez affirms that the stories in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* are “inspired in Colombia’s reality and their rationalist structure is determined by the nature of the theme” (Williams 41).

Although little information is readily available on these early stories, it is possible, through interviews and biographic sources to find out the general timeline when they were written. Even though Harley Oberhelman in *Gabriel García Márquez: A Study of the Short Fiction*, asserts that “these stories were written during the five year period between 1955 and 1960, but none was published until 1962,” (20) at least three stories had previously been published before Gracía Márquez was able to sell the collection to the Universidad de Veracruz, in Xalapa, Mexico, for a thousand pesos in 1961 (Martin 313). The first story in the collection to be completed, “Un día después del sábado,” the sixth story in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*, was started in 1953. (LTT 421) In 1955, Gracía Márquez won a “competition sponsored by the

Association of Artists and Writers of Bogotá for his story ‘Un día después de sábado’” (Nelly Gonzalez xx) and finally published it a year later. (Stavans 79) At least three stories were completed in 1958, “La siesta del martes,” “Un día de estos” and “La prodigiosa madre de Baltazar,” of which the first two were published in 1960. (Méndez 85) Finally, Gracía Márquez wrote the title story, “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande,” in May-June of 1959. (Hart 137) Gerald Martin, in *Gabriel García Márquez: Una Vida*, states that Gracía Márquez started to write the first seven stories during his stay in Europe (1955-1957) and completed them while living in Venezuela. Knowing when these stories were written and that some of them they were published before they were collected proves that Gracía Márquez did not randomly assemble a collection of previously unpublished material but, rather, made a conscious decision to compile some stories while leaving out others. He organized them sequentially to create a unified ensemble. Gracía Márquez wrote at least two other short stories in that same period, yet did not include them in the collection: “La Noche de los Alcaravanes” (1953) and “Monólogo de Isabel Viendo Llover en Macondo” (1955)

Based on an interview with Gracía Márquez, Luis Harss, in “Gabriel García Márquez, or *the Lost Chord*,” mentions that “at the editorial desk of *Momentos* and *Elite*, he finished another chapter of his secret book, *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*” (315-16). This mysterious comment, which does not include the title of the story, points towards an authorial conception of the work as a unified whole. Although Gracía Márquez never explicitly spoke of this aggregate of stories as a cycle yet, he was certainly aware of the genre. Indeed, Gracía Márquez was an avid reader of Faulkner, Kafka, Joyce and Hemingway, all of whom wrote short story cycles. Many critics have commented on Gracía Márquez’s use of Faulknerian literary techniques, which are present in this collection and illustrate “the emergence of reappearing characters,

family clans, and recurring episodes that show a continuing presence of Faulkner's method" (Oberhelman 71). *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* definitely epitomizes the use of recurring themes, characters and place which are present in *Go Down, Moses*, *The Unvanquished*, *A Hunger Artist*, *Dubliners* and *In Our Time*. The collection undoubtedly mirrors the profound societal problems presented in the aforementioned cycles, as Gracía Márquez portrays a stagnant, fragmented society on the verge of transition.

The arrangement of the stories focuses on and emphasizes the history of political violence and corruption in a deeply divided rural Colombia. Although *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* has never been studied as a short story cycle, several critics have observed its thematic unity. Indeed, Harley Oberhelman notices that "these short stories represent a sophisticated form of expression of the social and political realities of Colombian life" (19-20) while José Luis Méndez remarks that "todos los cuentos en la colección giran alrededor de algunos de estos cuatro temas básicos: la violencia, la criminalidad, la clarividencia y la sátira política y sociológica."¹⁷ (85) Judith Goetzinger in "The Emergence of Folk Myth in 'Los funerales de la Mamá Grande,'" questions the unity of the collection and the purpose of a title story: "If, then, we are being presented with a folk tale, why has the author considered it important enough to supply the title for the entire series of short stories? Just what is its relationship to the rest of the stories – assuming that there is a kind of general unity, a unity which does appear to prevail among the other parts of the collection?" (238) Other scholars have studied individual stories or a personal selection of stories within the cycle identifying parallel elements, leitmotifs, common characters and place, yet, only Mario Vargas Llosa, José Luis Méndez, and Harley Oberhelman have studied them in the order in which they are arranged.

¹⁷ All the short stories of the collection revolve around one of these four basic themes: violence, criminality, clairvoyance and political and sociological satire.

The main problem that has hindered the analysis of *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* as a short story cycle stems from the drastic shift in narrative style between the first seven stories and the title story. All the stories in the cycle are narrated in the third person by an omniscient narrator, yet, according to Raymond Williams in *Gabriel García Márquez*, while the narrator remains neutral from “La siesta del martes” to “Rosas artificiales,” the narrator in “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande” addresses the reader directly. This altered form of narration exemplifies an exaggerated representation of the folk story teller, a parody of Colombia’s numerous forms of “pregones, entre los cuales se destacan los gritos del presentador de circo, del artista callejero, del predicador de plaza, del culebrero o vendedor de drogas milagrosas.”¹⁸ (Castaño, 258) Mario Vargas Llosa, in *García Márquez: Historia de un deicidio*, considers this work, and more specifically the title story, to represent a transition in literary style from García Márquez’s earlier work leading to the blend of “lo real objetivo y lo imaginario” which so aptly defines *Cien años de soledad*. (345) This assessment has overshadowed the unity and structure of the cycle as most critics tend to agree with Vargas Llosa and only focus on a few stories in which hints of the oft ill-defined, yet popular concept of magical realism appear. However, a rupture in the narrative technique does not necessarily interrupt the sequential flow of the cycle. In Gaines’s *Bloodline*, the last story shifts to multiple narrators and points of view in order to force a retrospective assessment of the cycle as a whole. I suggest that “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande” plays the same function in this sequence; Mamá Grande serves as a macrofigure, whose presence can be felt throughout the cycle, and the narrative technique parallels essential societal issues which are the foundation of the previous tales.

¹⁸ Proclamations, among which stand out the shouts of the circus presenter, the street artist, the preacher of the square, the serpent vendor and the seller of miraculous drugs.

Another problematic aspect of claiming overall unity for the collection stems from the lack of common locale. Indeed, according to Vargas Llosa, five stories take place in El Pueblo¹⁹, while the three other stories are based in Macondo²⁰. Yet, characters who live in Macondo appear in stories situated in El Pueblo: “‘el pueblo’ de ‘La viuda de Montiel’ y de ‘La Mala Hora’ es la misma cosa con Macondo, escenario explícito de ‘Los funerales de la Mamá Grande,’ es decir el lugar la casa donde muere la matriarca y donde vivirá luego la viuda de Montiel”²¹ (Vargas Llosa 412). Most of the stories, however, do not specifically mention the location where the narrative takes place. Vargas Llosa is only able to name the location of the tales by cross-referencing characters that appear in the collection and in other novels by Gracía Márquez such as *La Mala Hora*, *La Hojarasca* and *Cien Años de Soledad*. El Pueblo and Macondo are clearly two different places. Macondo, a fictional town inspired by Gracía Márquez’s childhood memories of Aracataca, is situated near a train track and has a small train station; whereas El Pueblo, based on Gracía Márquez’s adolescent recollections of Sucre, is adjacent to a river. In the overall spectrum of his fictional works, Gracía Márquez’s use of El Pueblo or Macondo has a specific purpose, as the stories in “Macondo-Aracataca beben de los recuerdos, muchos de ellos nostálgicos, que el autor conserva de su niñez ‘prodigiosa,’ en tanto que los cuentos localizados en ‘el pueblo’ (Sucre) sirven para exorcizar los recuerdos de su dolorosa adolescencia”²² (Martin 281). In William Kennedy’s “The Yellow Trolley Car in Barcelona: An Interview,” however, Marquez emphatically states that “*Leaf Storm* and *Cien*

¹⁹ “Un día de estos,” “En este pueblo no hay ladrones,” “La prodigiosa tarde de Baltazar,” “La viuda de Montiel” and “Rosas artificiales.”

²⁰ “La siesta del martes,” “Un día después de sábado” and “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande.”

²¹ ‘the town’ of “La viuda de Montiel” and of “La Mala Hora” is the same thing with Macondo, explicit stage of “Los Funerales de la Mamá Grande,” that is to say, the place the house where the matriarch dies and where the widow of Montiel will live.

²² Macondo-Aracataca drink from the memories, many of them nostalgic, that the author retains from his ‘prodigious’ childhood, whereas the short stories situated in ‘the town’ (Sucre) serve to exorcize the painful memories of his adolescence.

Años are in Macondo, nothing else. The other three [*Coronel*, *Mala Hora*, *Mamá Grande*] are in El Pueblo” (69). The author, though, ignores textual evidence that clearly indicates that the locale in “Un día después de sábado” is Macondo: “ahí penetró, sin ver la tablilla: Hotel Macondo; un letrero que él no había de leer en su vida”²³ (104). Whether the narration takes place in Macondo or El Pueblo, it is more accurate to say that, in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*, both towns are meshed to represent a broader Colombian rural reality.

The last concern that has shrouded the cycle’s unity is the sequence of time from one story to the next, especially vis-à-vis Colombian history. The preconceived notion and assumption that all the stories in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* focus on La Violencia, Eliécer Gaitán’s assassination and the downfall of Colombia’s president, Rojas Pinilla, in 1957 overlook Gracía Márquez’s allegorical use of time in his short stories. Vargas Llosa tries to situate the tales in time according to the parallel between characters in the cycle and the same characters in other works, yet, he struggles to do so and at times, his insistence on accurate dates and historical events lead him astray from other elements, factual or allegorical that would indicate otherwise. As a matter of fact, Gracía Márquez, in his short fiction, tends to represent “time as truncated or dislocated [from] reality rather than an historical continuum, namely, a time in which, for example the sequence of past, present and future may be reversed” (Hart 129). Therefore, while it is important to locate the time period of the stories, the approach to time has to be based on a loose, general time period rather than specific dates. While the cycle is indeed primarily based on events during the period of La Violencia, Marquez also makes reference to Colombia’s cyclical postcolonial history. Since Colombia obtained its independence from Spain in 1819, the country has endured almost constant changes of regimes between the Liberal and

²³ “And he went in without seeing the sign “HOTEL MACONDO,” a sign which he was never to read in his life.” (177)

Conservative parties which, in turn, repeatedly led to violence, civil wars, military coups and rebellions. As will be demonstrated, the sequence of stories in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* clearly symbolizes the author's vision of Colombia's history as a fruitless cycle of failure and violence. The stories in the cycle cover over forty years of Colombia history, ranging from the beginning of the twentieth century to the mid-1950s²⁴. Gracia Márquez parallels two eras during which Colombia was dominated by brutal and violent dictatorships (1885-1930 and 1946-1957).

The sequence of stories presents a broad representation of the different social classes found in rural Colombia. Gracia Márquez gradually introduces the pyramid of Colombia's social classes starting at the bottom with the underprivileged, and then progressively alternating a slightly higher class to come back to lower one, ending the cycle with the overreaching oligarchy represented by Mamá Grande. While doing so, Marquez concurrently and increasingly delves deeper in his characters' development, concentrating on a character's relation with other social classes. The only story that does not follow this development is "Rosas artificiales," which is the overture to "Los funerales de la Mamá Grande." The main characters in this cycle can be broadly divided in four categories: the poor, the middle class or artisans, the clergy, and the higher class or oligarchy which includes both economic and political dominance. The stories in this cycle can be divided in three clusters, and each cluster embraces all four social classes. The first introductory cluster is comprised of the first two stories: "La siesta del martes" and "Un día de estos." The first story presents the lower class and the clergy, whereas the second story focuses on the middle class and the oligarchy. In the next cluster of sketches, from "En este pueblo no hay ladrones" to "Un día después de sábado," each social class has its own focus story. The final cluster, "Rosas artificiales" and "Los funerales de la Mamá Grande" functions differently from

²⁴ These dates stem from some of Vargas llosa's notes in *García Márquez: Historia de un deicidio* but also from textual references to Colombia's history in *Los Funerales de la Mamá Grande*.

the previous two. Indeed, the penultimate story does not focus on social class or any of the recurrent themes present throughout the cycle, as will be demonstrated. The title story on the other hand includes all the social classes, and establishes the underlying reasoning behind the hierarchical nature of Colombia's social structure.

Both the sequential and the cyclical flow is revealed as each distinct cluster of stories leads to the next, gradually developing key issues in rural Colombia. The first two stories introduce the cycle, using a simple objective narration; both stories are concise and to the point. These stories consist mostly of the description of the town and its surroundings as well as its focus characters. Poverty, violence, fear, corruption and political strife are plainly depicted. Keeping a narrow focus, the narrator does not give any outside information, nor does he reveal the character's thoughts or emotions which would allow a better understanding of the context. "La siesta del martes" and "Un día de estos" take place during the mid-1910s or early 1920s. The characters who appear in these two stories are, to varying degrees, representative of the protagonists of the next set of narrations.

In the following cluster of stories, the narrative style shifts in order to delve into the main protagonists' perception of their environment. In these four narratives, the focus characters not only reveal their feelings and the motives for their actions but also show how they interact with others, a key component of this cycle. Dámaso, Baltazar, Montiel's widow and father Antony all have a flawed conception of the community and its inner workings. Indeed, all four live in a created world in which their dreams become personal realities, regardless of factual evidence. In the nuanced "En este pueblo no hay ladrones," Gracia Márquez plants the seed of delusion. Dámaso demonstrates himself to be incapable of living in reality; his lowly dreams/schemes to earn money without working and his aptitude to deny reality display the problem at the root of

Colombia's inability to forge a national identity and to move forward politically. In each of the subsequent stories, individual dreams and delusions are reinforced and elaborated, finishing with father Antony who has completely fallen into dementia or insanity. Each of these individuals has problems relating to other characters, regardless of social class. Indeed, the poor, the middle class artisan, the oligarchy and the clergy showcased in this core cluster are representative of the deep division between these social classes, each playing an important role in Colombian politics, and their disconnection symbolizes the divided and fragmented nature of Colombia's rural communities and is also representative of the lack of national identity. Here, the first three stories take place during La Violencia and during the gradual intensification of violence associated with the rise to power of the Conservative party and Rojas Pinilla's coup in 1953. The characters and events are allegories of the national scene that transpire in the capital, Bogota. Nevertheless, Gracia Márquez uses El Pueblo, an archetypal Colombian rural town because "the political violence between Liberals and Conservatives [...] was primarily rural, not urban" (Bushnell 205). The fourth story, sixth in the overall sequence, however, reverts back to the late 1920s, this time focusing on the Conservative government that took over the country after the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902).

The last two stories in the sequence, although independent from one another, function together. "Rosas artificiales" introduces the critical perspective needed to understand the underlying criticism of Colombia's oligarchy and sociopolitical world in "Los funerales de la Mamá Grande." Indeed, in the penultimate story, the clairvoyant grandmother, able to decipher her granddaughter's love drama despite being blind, introduces the reader to the importance of critical analysis. The grandmother is able to 'read' and interpret her granddaughter's state of mind by using her knowledge of her granddaughter's daily routine and the tangible events that

take place that day. This story provides the reader with the necessary cognitive tools to perceive the double *narrataire* that appears in the title story. The folk narrator in “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande,” the concluding mythological tale, addresses the rural population, the primary *narrataire*, people who are unable to see past the fantasy. The second *narrataire*, the reader himself, though, will understand the exaggerated, hyperbolic tale is a metaphor. While the penultimate story is outside of the time frame, the last one takes place a few years after “Un día después de sábado.” The sequence gradually builds a comprehensive examination, assessment and critique of Colombia’s rural and national community.

In order to understand fully the structure of *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* and the themes it reveals it is essential to analyze the sequential arrangement of the stories as well as their cyclical nature. The title story is at the same time the concluding story and the story that leads to a reassessment of the whole. This twofold movement reveals a double perspective of politics, in Colombia and in Latin America. The vision presented in this cycle stems from Gracía Márquez’s own past and recent experiences both at home and abroad before publishing *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*. In 1962, the government in place in Colombia had yet to change dramatically, mainly because the transition from a Conservative regime to a Liberal one was not brought forth by a revolution or a coup but instead once again by a bipartisan arrangement. The exodus of Rojas Pinilla in May 1957 did not change the nature of Colombian politics and, as a matter of fact, “there was not much change in the overall pattern of inequality” (Bushnell 223). However, the downfall of the dictatorial governments in Cuba and Venezuela were violent and drastic, and the repercussion of these forceful transitions was felt throughout Latin America. Living in Venezuela at the time of general Marcos Pérez Jiménez’s flight and having been invited to Cuba three days after Fidel Castro had taken control of the country, Gracía Márquez

personally witnessed the aftermath of the change of regime, which led him to believe that “por primera vez desde 1492, todo el planeta quedaría afectado directamente por los acontecimientos políticos de América Latina. Tal vez los tiempos de soledad y fracaso del continente tocaban a su fin.”²⁵ (Martin 285) However, upon his return to Colombia, Gracia Márquez was confronted by the fact that politics in his own country were unaffected by the Latin American political renewal; indeed, “Colombia demostraba ser la excepción a la regla del continente”²⁶ (Martin 290). It is this double perspective, hope and discouragement, that is present in the sequence and cycle of stories.

The cycle’s closing story naturally leads back to “Siesta del Martes.” Indeed, the critical tools require to accurately understand title story allow an understanding of the concealed sociopolitical factors that play a significant role in the two introductory tales as well as the ones that follow. However, the cyclical aspect of *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* is more readily confirmed by analyzing its historical timeframe. The first five stories are arranged in chronological order, although there is a sizable gap between the first and second cluster, ranging from the beginning of the 1920s up to the beginning of the 1950s. Then, in “Un día después de sábado,” the sequence is suddenly interrupted and reverts to the late 1920s. The linear timeline, then, continues as “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande” clearly follows “Un día después de sábado,” Father Antonio being a few years older. The timeline would then indicate that the title story occurs between that of the first and second clusters. The analysis of both *Miguel Street* and *Bloodline* show that in these cycles sequence is chronological; however, this is not the case in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*. Gracia Márquez’s decision not to follow a chronological sequence, though, is deliberate because this non-linear historical time allows him to stress

²⁵ For the first time since 1492, the entire planet would be directly affected by the political events taking place in Latin America. Perhaps the times of solitude and failure of the continent had come to an end.

²⁶ Colombia demonstrated to be the exception to the rule in the continent.

Colombia's cyclical history and political stagnancy. As the sequence of stories ends, the title story naturally guides the reader back to both the introductory tales and core cluster. This fractured timeline unmistakably indicates that Gracía Márquez intended *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* to be read as unified whole, not merely as a random assortment of unrelated sketches.

Beyond the sequential and cyclical aspects of *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*, several thematic leitmotifs also support the structure of this aggregate. Three concepts come readily to mind. In most of the stories, the scorching heat suffocates the focus characters and is a cause of generalized stagnancy and decay. This heat evidently embodies the general atmosphere under the dominion of oppressive dictatorships. Money is a recurring element, symbolizing the economic social divide. It is especially important as it shows the extreme gap between the general population, even the middle class, and the ruling oligarchy, representative of the few, and the division between Liberals and Conservatives. Money affords access through corruption to the reins of political power. Finally, the presence or absence of the word "realidad" comes into play in understanding the satirical versus the authentic. Gracía Márquez cleverly omits it from the first two sketches, as well as "Rosas artificiales," while including it in the core cluster as well as the title story. In and of itself, it does not seem to have any relevance. However, the inclusion of an ambiguous concept such as "realidad," in the cluster that develops the notion of delusion and in the mythical tale of Mamá Grande clearly indicates the use of irony. Indeed, the real is merely a perception depending on the individual. This brings to light the comical characteristic of these focus protagonists, albeit a derisive one. These three leitmotifs will be developed in the sequential analysis of the individual stories.

4.2. Introductory Cluster

4.2.1. “La siesta del martes”

The first story is based on one of Gracía Márquez’s childhood memories when he was living in Aracataca. The slaying of a poor man at the hands of an old widow was Gracía Márquez’s first contact with death: “He was the first dead person I had seen” (LTT 22). The event, retold in *Vivir para Contarla* bears trait for trait similarities with this opening fictional sketch: “This happened on a Monday. The Tuesday of the following week, during siesta [...] we saw in the deserted street a woman dressed in strict mourning and a girl about twelve years old who was carrying a bouquet of flowers wrapped in newspaper [...] [who] were quite oblivious to the effrontery of the people who watched them pass by” (LTT 23). This traumatic incident, which haunted him until he transposed it to fiction, gave him an understanding of the general attitude towards the helpless.

In “La siesta del martes,” the narration is plain, mostly descriptive, never revealing the characters’ emotions. The interaction between the characters is kept to the bare minimum. The narrator remains neutral throughout the story, never revealing any sense of empathy towards the main characters. The focus character in this story is a poor woman accompanied by her twelve year old daughter. Their state of poverty is unequivocal as the woman projects “la serenidad escrupulosa de la gente acostumbrada a la pobreza”²⁷ (8). The pair are traveling by train and are the only passengers in the third class section. As the train emerges from a tunnel to reveal the outskirts of Macondo, the dominion of La Compania, the two nameless female characters prepare to arrive in a hostile environment. They step out of the train during nap time, under the oppressive heat of a deserted town. The motive of their trip becomes evident when they go

²⁷ “...the conscientious serenity of someone accustomed to poverty.” (106)

directly to the parish house, where the priest resides. The woman's son (Carlos Centeno) was killed in the village the preceding week by a wealthy widow (Rebecca) who believed he was trying to break into her house. After a brief confrontation with the priest, who is not keen to help them, the mother is able to obtain the keys to the cemetery. Her arrival, though, has not gone unnoticed, and she leaves the parish house with her daughter under the menacing glare of the anonymous townspeople. The faith of these two forsaken protagonists remains a mystery, as the story ominously never reaches an expected climax. This first story depicts a harsh, stifling environment in a small town hostile to foreigners which is contrasted with the poor woman's dignity in the face of adversity. The story also introduces the wide social gap between the poor and the wealthy in Colombia as we will later learn in "Un día después de sábado" that Rebecca was "una viuda amargada que vivía en una inmensa casa de dos corredores y nueve alcobas"²⁸ (87).

Although the town is never named, it bares all the characteristics of Macondo. The rail road and La Compania both indicate the story's local. However, in an effort to efface the importance of this mythical place, the narrator indicates that it was "un pueblo igual a los anteriores"²⁹ (9). This purposeful blurring of a specific town as well as the association with all the others the mother and daughter have passed confirms that this town is meant to be representative of the rural milieu, not a reference to the Macondo used in Gracía Márquez's previously written stories and novellas. The sketch also fails to provide any indication of historical time, yet it is possible to situate the story in time by using textual elements. Rebecca offers the only specific temporal marker as she has been a widow for twenty eight years, whereas in "Un día después de sábado" the narrator states her husband died forty years ago. The sixth

²⁸ "...an embittered widow who lived in an immense house with two galleries and nine bedrooms." (165)

²⁹ "...a town just like the ones before." (106)

story takes place in the late 1920s which would imply the events in “Siesta del Martes” take place beforehand. Indeed, the mention of La Compania, which is the fictional United Fruit Company, the train and the company’s electrical fans, which were all present in Colombia in the 1920s, corroborates the general time period. However, the gradual and confining geographical movement in the story symbolizes the progressive deprivation of personal freedom. Indeed, the story begins in an open space, endless fields and plantations, where at least the young girl still possesses some personal freedoms: “La niña se quitó los zapatos”³⁰ (8). The narration then moves to a small town, in which she has to be on her best behavior, eventually ending in the confined office of the parish house submitting to the whims of the town priest. This gradual deprivation of personal liberty corresponds to Rafael Nuñez’s rise to power and subsequent authoritarian regime, the effects of which were drastic: “The new constitution further strengthened the national presidency by extending the term to six years and by authorizing immediate reelection. The suffrage was limited once again [...] by the imposition of a literacy requirement for national elections [...] the death penalty was finally restored [and] the provision that public education must henceforth be conducted in accordance with the teachings of the Roman Catholic religion” (Bushnell 143-144). Given the time period, the priest, unsurprisingly, enjoys the position of moral arbiter.

“La siesta del martes” revolves around two main figures, the mother, representing the destitute, and the priest, representing the clergy. The mother is presented as a strict woman, concerned with appearances. In the train she warns her daughter: “Después, aunque te estés muriendo de sed no tomes agua en ninguna parte. Sobre todo, no vayas a llorar”³¹ (9). This seems to be a reference to *Le Conte de Monte Cristo*: there, Edmond Dantes refuses to share his

³⁰ “The girl took off her shoes.” (106)

³¹ “Later, don’t take a drink anywhere even if you’re dying of thirst. Above all, no crying.” (107)

enemy's food. Similarly, the mother does not want pity or even water, a dire necessity under the scorching heat, from anyone in this town which she considers as a single entity, as the enemy. Vargas Llosa notes the contrast between her visually projected and her hidden interior feelings, highlighted by the narrative tone: "Al enclaustrarse en el nivel exterior de lo real y describir sólo la conducta visible de la mujer, el narrador nos obliga a adivinar o a inventar lo primordial: el sufrimiento del personaje, la violencia que debe hacerse para disimularlo a los demás"³² (352). However, the focus of the narration is not on the inner self but rather on the visual representation of the outsider; the function of the critical reader is not to imagine but rather to understand through textual evidence. The mother evidently has a clear conscience; indeed, her views on common morality are different because of her socioeconomic conditions, her behavior "obedece a una ley superior, a una ley que trasciende la moral simplista de una sociedad en que rigen la injusticia, la desigualdad y la arbitrariedad"³³ (Carlos 227). The plight of this family's destitute condition has altered their belief in morality, and the general notions of right and wrong, which is illustrated by what the mother has told her son: "le decía que nunca robara nada que le hiciera falta a alguien para comer, y él me hacía caso"³⁴ (15).

The mother's personal moral values matches the rigidity of the Catholic code of behavior which is symbolized by a military meticulousness imposed on herself and her daughter and exemplified by her posture in the train: "Viajaba con la columna vertebral firmemente apoyada contra el espaldar del asiento"³⁵ (8). The priest, on the other hand, incarnates the town's moral authority. In an attempt to encounter the teachings of the church, of which he is the guardian, he

³² By remaining at the exterior level of the real and by describing only the visible conduct of the woman, the narrator obliges us to guess or to invent the primordial: the suffering of the character, the violence that has to be endured in order to conceal it before the others.

³³ Responds to a superior law, a law that transcends the simplistic morality of a society in which injustice, inequality and arbitrariness govern.

³⁴ "I told him never to steal anything that anyone needed to eat, and he minded me." (111)

³⁵ "She was riding with her spinal column braced firmly against the back of the seat." (106)

tries to provoke the mother's admission of shame. According to his teachings, this mother should feel humiliation or remorse because of her son's actions. Yet, as he peers into her eyes, her 'visible' soul, he is unable to find the emotions he expected her to display. Instead, he understands that the mother has taught her son values, but that these values stem from her state of poverty, not his Catholic rhetoric. The priest then experiences personal shame when he is confronted by the mother's dignity "el padre se ruborizó"³⁶ (13). This guardian of the communal morality is mortified to see the moral he instills in others is relative, as it does not take in consideration individual conditions, such as this family's complete and utter state of poverty.

Rebecca, even though she is only part of the background, embodies the opulence and predisposition of the higher class. The mother's serenity sharply contrasts with Rebecca's troubled condition, a widow who has lived with "un terror desarrollado por 28 años de soledad"³⁷ (14). Rebecca lives in terror because of her social position. Living alone, she fears losing the only markers of her superiority over others. She is willing to kill the poor and powerless to defend her position, a position that was never threatened in the first place because Carlos Centeno, according to the mother, "era un hombre muy bueno"³⁸ (15). The priest's and Rebecca's power and control over the faceless masses are reflected in a crowd unable to perceive the mother and her innocent child as anything but outsiders, and an external threat to their moral values. Indeed, the mother and her daughter are subjected to the townspeople's judging glare. The priest offers an insight in the general sentiment regarding the mother's son when he asks her: "¿Nunca trató de hacerlo entrar por el buen camino?"³⁹ (15) Awaiting outside the parish house, the crowd perceive Carlos Centeno to be a common criminal, a threat to the entire town.

³⁶ "...the Father blushed." (110)

³⁷ "...a terror developed in her by twenty-eight years of loneliness." (110)

³⁸ "He was a very good man." (111)

³⁹ "Didn't you ever try to get him on the right track?" (111)

The mother obviously knows her son. Before leaving his home, he struggled as an amateur boxer on the receiving end of brutal beatings, but who nevertheless fought on in order to feed his family. Carlos Centro was shot in an attempted robbery for personal gain in order to obtain material possession but rather, “lo han matado en [su] lucha contra el hambre, en la lucha contra la miseria”⁴⁰ (Carlos 232). The priest and the entire town have passed judgment on this unknown yet noticeably poor intruder and justified his killing at the hand of a rich elderly widow as righteous. Gracia Márquez’s social commentary in this tale depicts a small town mindset in which the mass mentality, devoid of compassion, supersedes the search for understanding which highlights “la actitud hipócrita de los que pretenden condenar la actuación del abatido escalador, pero son indiferentes a sus condiciones de vida miserable”⁴¹ (Méndez 87). This incident also introduces the concept and consequence of a collective blind belief in official rhetoric. This notion gradually unfolds further in the subsequent stories.

The lack of open communication between the mother and the priest is representative of a broken population. The priest and the townspeople’s lack of empathy towards a destitute outsider but, also, the mother’s closed attitude and succinct answers, although more understandable, establishes that both parties are incapable of relating to one another. The seemingly unbridgeable gap between the two outsiders and the town exemplifies the state of a country lacking a national identity. Colombia in the 1920s was still recovering from the federalization of the nation which had started in 1853. Unlike other Latin American countries, it had only just adopted a national anthem; “the sense of national identity in Colombia as a whole continued to be weak” (Bushnell 154). The fractured nature of a country in search of a national identity is developed in the subsequent stories through the isolated predicament of individuals incapable of genuine dialogue.

⁴⁰ They have killed him in [his] battle against hunger, in the battle against misery.

⁴¹ The hypocritical attitude of those who try to condemn the actions of the climber, but are indifferent to the miserable conditions of his life.

However, the parallel progressive approach of communal vision indicates a gradual unification of the masses.

4.2.2. “Un día de estos”

“Un día de estos,” also serves as an introductory story. However, here, the focus changes to a lower middle class dentist “sin título” (19) who is confronted by the town’s mayor, a violent and corrupt governor-appointed official. The story is succinct and, again, the narration is simple and objective. The mayor comes to see the dentist after having endured five nights of pain and desperation. Even though the dentist does not want to receive the mayor, he is threatened to be shot if he does not: “dice que si no le sacas la muela te pega un tiro”⁴² (20). The dentist and the mayor are obviously on opposite sides of the political divide, and the animosity between the two characters is evident as both men have a gun close-at-hand. As the dentist prepares to remove the tooth without anesthesia, he reveals the violent nature of the mayor’s oppressive rule: “Aquí nos pagas veinte muertos, teniente”⁴³ (22). The corrupt mayor leaves, acknowledging that sending the bill to his house or the city “es la misma vaina”⁴⁴ (23). Judith Goetzinger points out the obvious and plainly stated when she notes that the mayor’s tooth decay represents his moral corruption. While Marquez focused on social class in the first story, here, he shows the deep political split that exists in Colombia. Even though the narrator never explicitly makes reference to the parties’ names, it is clear the dentist belongs to the Liberal party whereas the mayor represents the Conservative party that brutally governed Colombia in the mid-1890s and again in the mid-1950’s. Indeed, the conflict between Liberals and Conservatives stems from the independence to the 1970s. This story presents yet another facet of the fragmented social reality in Colombia.

⁴² “He says if you don’t take out his tooth, he’ll shoot you.” (115)

⁴³ “Now you’ll pay for our twenty dead men.” (116)

⁴⁴ “It’s the same damn thing.” (117)

Vargas Llosa situates the story as unfolding in El Pueblo, based on the same reiterated episode in both *La Mala Hora* and *El Coronel no Tiene Quien le Escriba*: “El Alcalde de ambas novelas es el del ‘pueblo’ y eso nos permite situar ‘Un día de éstos’, ya que en el cuento no hay mención explícita del lugar donde sucede”⁴⁵ (355). However, the omission of locale is purposeful. The story is independent of these two novellas and using the additional information obtained from the different versions of this incident detracts from its function in the cycle. Whereas in “La siesta del martes” there was a gradual deprivation of freedom, here, the inherited oppressiveness and violence of Núñez’s regime is overbearing. In the 1920s, after Núñez’s death (1894) and after the Liberal party’s attempt to regain power was brutally overcome in the War of a Thousand Days, Colombia was still under the Conservative rule more than twenty years after Núñez had instated a quasi-unilateral party governance⁴⁶. Liberals and artisans had seen their political freedoms denied and still faced brutal violence, especially in the rural areas of the country. Indeed, the dentist never leaves his cabinet, which implies a complete deprivation of personal freedoms. The dentist’s position in this sketch parallels the “years of continual repression [...] from the standpoint of the Liberals, who found themselves totally denied executive office at all levels” (Bushnell 149). It is also interesting to note that there were no elections for local offices as “governors were named by the national president, and the governors in turn named all the mayors” (Bushnell 143).

Even though the dentist works methodically, opening his office at six in the morning and working with great care and professionalism, his office is in a decrepit state: “vio el cielorrasso

⁴⁵ The Mayor of both novels is the one from the “town” and that allows us to situate “Un día de éstos”, because in the short story there is no explicit indication of the place where it occurs.

⁴⁶ Although there were free elections after Rafael Reyes stepped down in 1909, the successive Conservatives presidents, up until 1930, never implemented extensive changes in Colombia’s political policies. (Bushnell)

desfondado y una telaraña polvorienta con huevos de araña e insectos muertos”⁴⁷ (22). Harley Oberhelman sees the state of the office and of the town, visible through the widows as representative of the “social erosion and economic stagnation, with no resolution in sight” (23). However, the presence of the buzzards, birds of prey, and the dead insects caught in the spider web also symbolize the political violence mentioned in the conversation between the mayor and the dentist. The town appears as deserted and the cast of characters is reduced to a bare minimum effectively stressing the impression of stagnancy. Furthermore, the communal vision and perception that was present in the previous sketch and is a significant element in all but one of the subsequent stories, is blatantly absent. This omission, again, draws a historical comparison as the “opposition newspapers were silenced” (Bushnell 148). The Conservative government kept strict control of the media outlets and did not accept dissident opinions. In this story, the communal voice is missing because it is non-existent, which is also represented by the narrator who remains neutral despite the evident corruption and decay.

The narrative tone in “Un día de estos” is banal. The dentist merely follows his daily routine and the mayor is received casually. Even the threat of gunshots seems trivial as the dentist’s eleven year old son merely repeats the mayor’s threat to his father, the *destinataire* of the intimidation. Violence has become part of the daily realities, even for this innocent child. However, in this sketch, the routine and ordinary come chiefly from the dentist and his son, whereas the mayor’s arrival and abscess certainly are abnormal and show a reversal of associated roles, the “dentista como representando la estabilidad y el orden mientras que el alcalde, por lo menos metafóricamente, encarna el caos”⁴⁸ (Carlos 221). This astute observation draws to mind another role reversal as for a brief period of time, where the victim victimizes the oppressor.

⁴⁷ “...he saw the crumbling ceiling and a dusty spider web with spider’s eggs and dead insects.” (117)

⁴⁸ The dentist as representing stability and order while the mayor, at least metaphorically, embodies chaos.

Vargas Llosa questions the dentist's diagnosis of the mayor's abscess, implying that "su cambio de actitud responde a la súbita determinación de hacer sufrir todavía más al Alcalde"⁴⁹ (359). Again, there is no textual evidence to determine whether the dentist's diagnosis is true or not, and does not affect the pain the mayor has endured for the past five days. The intense pain felt by the mayor symbolizes poetic justice which is foreshadowed in the title. Although it is only temporal in this episode, the title implies a more permanent role reversal and foreshadows the downfall of the oligarchy in "La viuda de Montiel" and "Los funerales de la Mamá Grande."

This introductory cluster of stories introduces the main thematic elements that will appear in the next cluster of stories and presents the social divisions that will be the focus of the following cluster. Each of the following stories focuses on a single representative character of a specific social class: the poor, Dámaso; the middle class artisan; Baltazar, the upper class and political power, Montiel; and the clergy, father Antonio. Although the first two stories take place during the 1920's they are representative of Conservative hegemony that lasted over forty years, from the late 1880s to 1930. The historical time line switches from the 1920s to La Violencia, a twenty five year gap. However, the sixth story and last one of the second cluster reverts to the end of the 1920s. While the time line is interrupted, the characters and situation remain similar, revealing Gracía Márquez's vision of a stagnant Colombia as he explains that in the late 1940s, "from many points of view, life in Colombia was still in the nineteenth century" (LTT 257). However, in the subsequent cluster, Gracía Márquez introduces and develops the concept of personal and communal delusion.

⁴⁹ His change of attitude responds to the sudden determination of making the mayor suffer even more.

4.3. The Core Cluster: Delusion

4.3.1. “En este pueblo no hay ladrones”

The longest story in the cycle, “En este pueblo no hay ladrones,” pulls the focus back to the lower social class. The narration explores in detail Dámaso’s personality and although the omniscient narrator is seemingly objective, Dámaso’s portrait is not a positive one. An interest in the focus character’s consciousness, absent in the previous tales, is introduced here and will be developed in the three subsequent stories. The focus character, who has just stolen three billiard balls from the local pool hall, is a lowlife gallant living off his lover, Ana⁵⁰. The story mainly focuses on Dámaso and his internal moral struggle as he realizes his theft will not yield a monetary profit and, that in the process, he has deprived the town of its only entertainment. Dámaso’s remorse for a minor theft sharply differs from the corrupt mayor’s attitude in “Un día de estos” who, without a trace of shame, acknowledges benefiting from public funds. However, Gracia Márquez also presents the gender divide, as Ana, Dámaso’s mistress, also grapples with the theft but from a different perspective. Dámaso is never suspected of the crime, as the title of the story so plainly states that “There are no Thieves in This Town.” The only *forastero*⁵¹ in town, a black migrant worker, is immediately incarcerated and is coerced, beaten and starved, into admitting the theft. Eventually, both Dámaso and Ana want to return the billiard balls: Ana because she altruistically wants the innocent man to be freed and Dámaso because he selfishly wants life to return to normal. In a drunken stupor, Dámaso decides to return the balls the same way he stole them but is caught by don Roque, owner of the pool hall. The story concludes as Roque declares he also wants the two hundred pesos back, a false declaration based on his earlier fabricated statement to the police. The events clearly take place in El Pueblo, and the time frame

⁵⁰ In his translation for this story, Gregory Rabassa and J.S. Bernstein incorrectly translate “mujer,” instead using “wife” giving the false impression Dámaso and Ana are married, a civil status which never appears in this story.

⁵¹ Outsider

is easier to deduce given the avid pool hall customers' attention to the baseball championships which only started in 1948 in Colombia⁵².

Here, the representation of poverty-stricken individuals is developed but unlike the first story, we are confronted by an ambivalent portrayal. Indeed, in the first story poverty ran parallel with dignity, whereas here, the focus character is depicted as a violent, intellectually shallow individual living in his own reality. Whereas Carlos Centeno in "Siesta del Martes" unsuccessfully attempted to break into Rebecca's mansion in order to find sustenance, Dámaso effectively steals three billiard balls for monetary gain. However, Dámaso also feels empathy towards his fellow townsmen, and in the end is unjustly accused of a crime he did not commit by a rapacious pool hall owner who admits that "ahora te los van a sacar del pellejo, no tanto por ratero como por bruto"⁵³ (63). Ana, on the other hand, represents a nurturing mother figure who while protecting and caring for Dámaso strives for justice. Police brutality, corruption, and social injustice and hopelessness are the underlying themes in this story. Another important aspect of this tale is the contrast between Dámaso who lives in a dream world full of implausible prospects, and Ana, who has a better understanding of their socioeconomic condition, of basic reality.

Gracia Márquez, in "En este pueblo no hay ladrones," elaborates on the social dichotomy introduced in the first cluster. However, he also reveals a gendered approach to the portrayal of this lower social class. Indeed, Dámaso and Ana appear as two disparate characters. He is repeatedly depicted or referred to as an animal and describes others using bestial attributes which characterizes "esa animalidad que (inconscientemente) las otras clases le atribuyen [a] la clase

⁵² <http://www.federacioncolombianadebeisbol.com/historia.php>

⁵³ "And now they're going to take them out of your hide, not so much for being a thief as for being a fool." (147)

popular”⁵⁴ which, in turn is assumed and mimicked by the lower classes. (Vargas Llosa 366)

Dámaso’s brutality is exposed several times, none more palpable than when he ferociously hits Ana, who is six month pregnant, at the end of the story: “La golpeó en la oreja con el revés del puño, y sintió el quejido profundo y el denso impacto del cuerpo contra la pared, pero no miró”⁵⁵ (59). Dámaso is completely indifferent to violence, a trait best exemplified as he watches the innocent black accused of the crime he has committed get beaten. Instead of feeling remorseful, he is concerned by Ana’s comments, believing it might expose his involvement: “Hablas mucho. [...] Lo único que falta es que te pongas a gritar”⁵⁶ (48). Dámaso’s apathetic attitude contrasts greatly with Ana who abhors violence; she pities the innocent black man unjustly suffering at the hands of the police, as she repeatedly utters “Pobre hombre”⁵⁷ (37; 48). Ana’s sentiment reflects the feminine perception of violence, as Gloria, a prostitute with whom Dámaso has intercourse, and an anonymous woman in the crowd share the same feeling.

Dámaso’s selfish behavior and individualism represents the fragmented state of this and more generally Colombia’s rural community. He is lazy, refuses to work and lives in a delusional interior world, idyllically dreaming of improbable means of income: “Se me ha ocurrido el mejor negocio del mundo. [...] Me voy de pueblo en pueblo. [...] Me robo las bolas de billar en uno y las vendo en el otro. En todos los pueblos hay un salón de billar”⁵⁸ (40). Although he fantasizes about the future, he only lives for his present satisfaction. Whereas Ana works hard and altruistically to provide for the both of them, pragmatically envisioning the immediate future, Dámaso goes to drink, to the movie theatre and even cheats on her with a prostitute, using her

⁵⁴ That bestiality that (unconsciously) the other classes ascribe to the working class.

⁵⁵ “He hit her on the ear with the back of his fist, and felt the deep cry and heavy impact of her body against the wall, but he didn’t look at her.” (144)

⁵⁶ “You talk too much. [...] Now all you have to do is to shout.” (136)

⁵⁷ “Poor man.” (136)

⁵⁸ “A terrific job just occurred to me,” [...] I’ll go from town to town,” [...] I’ll steal the billiard balls in one and I’ll sell them in the other. Every town has a pool hall.” (129-130)

money or obtaining them for free by helping Don Roque or by his good looks. Vargas Llosa, though, mistakenly characterizes Ana stating that “su egoísmo individualista y calculador se volatiliza ante Dámaso”⁵⁹ (366). Ana, as a matter of fact, generously gives her lover money, accepts him after he comes back after he has spent the night with Gloria and even endures a beating from him to prevent him from returning the billiard balls. Her hard work and efforts to pay the rent cannot be construed as selfish but rather as selfless.

Dámaso’s only positive trait is the empathy he experiences towards the townspeople and Don Roque; this feeling, though, is only triggered by his own boredom. Dámaso’s desire to return the billiard balls does not stem from his generosity or as José Luis Méndez suggests “el remordimiento [que lo] lleva a arriesgar su libertad para lograr la liberación de un inocente”⁶⁰ (90) but instead, only comes from his personal desire for the return to normalcy of his preferred establishment. As a matter of fact, his sympathy for Don Roque reveals Dámaso’s shortsightedness. Indeed, the pool hall owner is a corrupt individual closely associated with the police and the political establishment. We learn that Gloria had spent the night of the theft with the *forestero* and that the mayor, afraid of her account, bought her testimony “por veinte pesos”⁶¹ (46). Dámaso ignores the violent realities of his environment and repeatedly fails to understand the future consequences of his actions. Foreshadowing the grandmother’s clairvoyance in “Rosas artificiales,” Ana, recognizes the dangers of Dámaso’s actions and, in her internal struggle to deal with this brutal reality, dreams about Dámaso’s future demise: “Me dormí sentada – dijo -, de pronto abrieron la puerta y te empujaron dentro del cuarto, bañado de sangre”⁶² (25). Ana’s dream comes true, as Dámaso is eventually caught by Don Roque. Ana represents reality and

⁵⁹ Her individualistic and calculating selfishness volatilizes before Dámaso.

⁶⁰ The remorse that makes him risk his freedom to attain the liberation of an innocent.

⁶¹ For twenty pesos.

⁶² “I fell asleep sitting up,” she said. “Suddenly the door opened and you were pushed into the room, drenched with blood.” (118)

parallels the poor woman in “La siesta del martes” as she is described in a similar manner: “sus movimientos tenían esa suave eficacia de la gente acostumbrada a la realidad”⁶³ (29). Dámaso, though, just as Baltazar in the following story, is unconcerned by reality, only living in an individual imaginary world.

Dámaso’s delusion is comparable with the communal perspective in “En este pueblo no hay ladrones.” The townspeople’s opinion factors greatly in the general assumption that the break-in was committed by an outsider. However, the facts about the theft and later about the thief’s arrest take a life of their own through popular gossip: “se metieron en el salón de billar y cargaron con todo [...] desmantelaron el establecimiento, pieza por pieza, hasta llevarse la mesa del billar. Hablaba con tanta convicción que Dámaso no pudo creer que no fuera cierto”⁶⁴ (29). Subsequently, when Ana recounts the distorted version of the outsider’s arrest at the movie theater she heard in the streets, Dámaso fails to correct her, again demonstrating his willingness to believe the fabricated tale. Both the theft and the arrest are exaggerated by word-of-mouth and eventually changed to such a point they hardly even correspond to the actual, factual events. However, Dámaso who committed the theft and later personally witnessed the *forastero*’s arrest in the movie theater, is intrinsically drawn to believe the popular version of the events rather than what he knows to be true. The community’s innate desire to believe in an imagined version of reality denotes a basic need for escapism, a way to avoid the harsh environment that constitutes the bleakness and oppression of the daily life in this rural town. This fabricated communal fantasy of authenticated events, or “la transformación de un hecho ‘histórico’ en ‘legendario’ o

⁶³ “...her movements had the gentle efficiency of people who are used to reality.” (121)

⁶⁴ “Someone got into the pool hall and walked off with everything [...] she explained how they had taken the place apart, piece by piece, and had even carried off the billiard table. She spoke with such conviction that Damaso could not believe it wasn’t true.” (121-2)

‘mítico’, el paso de elementos de lo real objetivo a lo real imaginario”⁶⁵ foreshadows the innocent, non-skeptical *narrataire* in “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande” (Vargas Llosa, 371).

The minor theft of the billiard balls, the black outsider’s arrest and the ensuing deformation of these events stem from Gracía Márquez’s personal experience in El Bogotazo in 1948. On the ninth of April 1948, Gracía Márquez was in Bogota eating lunch when he heard the news of Eliécer Gaitán’s assassination. Soon after, he was at the scene, and witnessed the death of Gaitán’s assassin at the hands of a furious mob. Gracía Márquez, however, was never convinced of Juan Roa Sierra’s guilt. More importantly, he saw the rapid transformation of Gaitán’s murder by the crowd: “I remained at the scene of the crime for ten more minutes, surprised by the speed with which the accounts of witnesses were changing in form and substance until they lost all resemblance to reality” (LTT 282). Theories concerning the reasons for Gaitán’s slaying range from “the notion of Communist responsibility” to “the notion that the Conservative administration was behind the assassination” (Bushnell 203) demonstrating an overreaching, beyond the political and social divide, need to fabricate rather than believing the facts. The parallel between the story and this personal experience shows Gracía Márquez’s interest in the transition from fact to fantasy and shows the rapid and easy manipulation of crowds. Indeed, the mayor exploits the popular belief by buying the only testimony that would disculpate the outsider in order to manage the population and restore normalcy.

“En este pueblo no hay ladrones,” introduces and develops key concepts that will be the cornerstones of the subsequent three stories. The dichotomy real/imagined, the concept of dream, personal fantasy play a significant role in this core cluster, and will be furthered and expanded to the other social classes. However, the characteristics of this delusion change depending on the

⁶⁵ The transformation of a “historical” fact in “legendary” or “mythical”, the change of elements from the real objective into the real imaginary.

social milieu, as the poor, unconcerned by politics or religion, and the middle class/artisan, involved in politics, only perceive life as “un presente que se sobrelleva y un futuro que se imagina o se desea”⁶⁶ (Vargas Llosa 364). Whereas the rich and the clergy “instalados en el presente, miraban sobre todo hacia atrás”⁶⁷ (Vargas Llosa 364). The omnipresent violence presented in the first cluster influences the lives of the focus characters in all the stories, although, at times, such as in “La prodigiosa tarde de Baltazar,” this violence is veiled or symbolically present, as in “Un día después de sábado.” The transition from “En este pueblo no hay ladrones” to “La prodigiosa tarde de Baltazar” is manifested by an upward progression of the social ladder and the use of the same setting, El Pueblo, and time frame.

4.3.2. “La prodigiosa tarde de Baltazar”

In the fourth story, “La prodigiosa tarde de Baltazar,” the focus character, a middle class artisan, becomes the center of attention of the town when he finally completes a magnificent bird cage, “la jaula más bella del mundo”⁶⁸ (65). Gracia Márquez introduces a more complex social structure here, presenting an artisan, and a doctor belonging to the upper bourgeoisie and the upper class. When Dr. Octavio Giraldo hears of the cage, he comes by the shop intending to buy it for his invalid wife. However, Baltazar refuses Giraldo’s generous offer (fifty pesos), claiming the cage was built for Pepe Montiel, the son of the richest man in town. Baltazar then goes to Chepe Montiel in order to sell him the cage. However, Montiel refuses to buy the cage ‘ordered’ by his son declaring “sólo a ti se te ocurre contratar con un menor”⁶⁹ (72). Pepe fakes a tantrum and Baltazar, to show the limits of Montiel’s power and enrage him, gives Pepe the cage without seeking a payment. Unable to boast about his moral victory over the upper class, Baltazar

⁶⁶ A present that is hard to endure and a future that is imagined or desired.

⁶⁷ Rooted in the present, mainly they looked back.

⁶⁸ “...the most beautiful cage in the world.” (148)

⁶⁹ “Only to you would it occur to contract with a minor.” (154)

pretends he has sold the cage for sixty pesos and celebrates with the townspeople in the pool hall. After having spent more than the sum he claimed to have obtained from Montiel, Baltazar finishes the evening drunk and shoeless lying on the street. Baltazar's actions represent the seed of resistance, of political action against the power in place. By showing the limits of the oligarchy, the story foreshadows its downfall in the next story as well as in "Los funerales de la Mamá Grande." While furthering the sociopolitical agenda, Gracia Márquez also shows Baltazar's limitations. Baltazar, like Dámaso in the previous story, lives in a dream world and if he is able to claim a personal moral victory over Montiel, it does not change his social position or economic status in town. The appearance of the oligarchy, in "La prodigiosa madre de Baltazar," reveals the political focus of this core cluster. However, the dichotomies present in the preceding stories are also noticeable.

Ana's pragmatism as opposed to Dámaso's lack of concern for reality in the previous story is apparent, although not as prevalent. Ursula, Baltazar's wife, understands the concept of money and reality and is "una mujer sólidamente anclada en lo real objetivo, en tanto que su marido, Baltazar, vive en lo imaginario"⁷⁰ (Vargas Llosa 373). Unlike Baltazar, she correlates the time her husband has spent working on the cage and its monetary value: "Pide cincuenta – dijo Úrsula -. Te has trasnochado mucho en estos quince días"⁷¹ (66). Ursula's concern with money stems from her preoccupation for the future of the household. Baltazar, on the other hand, focuses entirely on his work, neglecting his wife to pursue his passion regardless of the household budgetary needs. Baltazar's egocentrism can also be seen when he goes to the pool hall to celebrate his 'sale' with the townspeople, leaving Ursula alone and under the impression he has sold the cage when, in fact, he spends more money than he has and leaves his watch in the

⁷⁰ A woman firmly anchored in the real objective, whereas her husband, lives in the imaginary.

⁷¹ "Ask for fifty," said Ursula. "You've lost a lot of sleep in these two weeks." (149)

pool hall as pledge to repay his debt later. Just like Dámaso in the previous story, Baltazar only seeks to gratify his personal desires, a trait Judith Goetzinger fails to recognize and interprets Dámaso's decision to return the billiard balls and Baltazar's gift to Pepe as "act[s] of generosity towards his fellow man" (244). As a matter of fact, Dámaso, Baltazar and Montiel are all intrinsically defined by their personal interests, completely disregarding their partner's concerns. While the gender contrast is an important aspect of Baltazar's characterization, the focal contrast reveals the social fragmentation in this rural town.

The story primarily concerns the conflict between Baltazar and Montiel, but, also presents Dr. Giraldo, who like Ana and Ursula, is an unselfish balanced character. Dr. Giraldo, representing the upper middle class, is the only character in the cycle who is "contento de la vida"⁷² (67). Happy, self-sufficient, he passively accepts the disappointing news when Baltazar declares that the cage is not for sale, even though he really wanted to buy it for his wife. Baltazar and Montiel, however, are both self-centered and take action when they are challenged, although their interests differ vastly. Indeed, it would be wrong to assume that "what the aristocrat (Montiel) and the marginal (Baltazar) have in common is their refusal to place monetary value on an object" (Williams 50). As a matter of fact, although Montiel and Baltazar both have interests in money, their refusal to place monetary value diverges from each other. Baltazar is not concerned with the true value of his cage, as he is unable to see its beauty, and eventually prices it at thirty pesos, because in his mind, the cage "no tenía nada de particular"⁷³ (74). Montiel, though, refuses to place monetary value on the cage because he does want to part with his money, only perceiving monetary value as belongings with which he is unwilling to part: "Era un hombre tan prevenido, que dormía sin ventilador eléctrico para vigilar durante el sueño los

⁷² "...happy with life." (149)

⁷³ "...it was not particularly important." (156)

rumores de la casa”⁷⁴ (71). Even though the cage’s cost will not affect Montiel’s overall wealth and would please his son, Montiel’s will to be in charge and in control of his domain does not allow him to buy the cage.

Montiel’s desire for power overshadows the happiness of his own family and symbolizes the sentiments underlying Colombia’s dictatorship in the 1950s and the manner in which the nation suffered. Indeed, the conflict between the artisan and the oligarch represents the period of La Violencia during which the desire to overthrow the political Conservative establishment never ceased to exist. Baltazar challenges Montiel’s power by giving the bird cage to Pepe in order to frustrate his antagonist who has just admitted that “el médico me ha prohibido coger rabia”⁷⁵ (73). Beth Miller, in “Alegoría e ideología en ‘La prodigiosa tarde de Baltazar’: el artista del tercer mundo y su producto,” interprets Baltazar’s gesture as selfless in a mistaken analogy to the biblical Daniel in the Book of Daniel: “Baltazar se aproxima a Daniel el bíblico [...] porque sirve a los ricos (al hijo de Montiel/los reyes de Babilonia) sin querer recompensa”⁷⁶ (60). The evidence of Baltazar’s disgust over Pepe’s demeanor, though, is clear as the child’s tantrum is portrayed in pejorative, animalistic terms: “Entonces emitió un sonido gutural, como el ronquido de un perro, y se lanzó al suelo dando gritos. [...] Baltazar observó al niño como hubiera observado la agonía de un animal contagioso”⁷⁷ (73). Baltazar does not refer to the biblical Daniel, as Miller asserts, because he never demonstrates “capaz de actos de resistencia física y moral”⁷⁸ (Miller 59). At no point in the story does Baltazar suffer a physical aggression and construing Montiel’s refusal to buy the cage as an attack on Baltazar’s character is questionable.

⁷⁴ “He was such a cautious man that he slept without an electric fan so he could watch over the noises of the house while he slept.” (153)

⁷⁵ “The doctor has forbidden me to get angry.” (154)

⁷⁶ Balthazar is similar to the biblical Daniel [...] because he serves the rich (Montiel’s son/the kings of Babylonia) and does not want a reward.

⁷⁷ “Then he emitted a guttural sound, like a dog’s growl, and threw himself on the floor screaming. [...] Balthazar observed the child as he would have observed the death throes of a rabid animal.” (154-155)

⁷⁸ Capable of performing acts of physical and moral resistance.

Baltazar, rather, alludes to Balthazar Claës, the delusional central character of Balzac's *La Recherche de l'Absolu*.

The parallel, though, is not novel, as Gracia Márquez's *Cien Años de Soledad* has drawn several comparisons with Balzac's masterpiece, especially when Miguel Ángel Asturias was asked "su opinión acerca de las alegaciones de que el autor de *Cien años de soledad* había plagiado una novela de Balzac, *La búsqueda de lo absoluto*"⁷⁹ (Martin 397). The similarities between these two Baltazars are striking. Both characters spend weeks locked in their workshop, neglecting their spouses to dedicate themselves to their passion. Balthazar Claës spends countless amounts of money in the pursuit of the transformation of minerals into gold and diamonds. This chimeric chase is mimicked in Baltazar's alcohol induced dream as he "hablaba de un fabuloso proyecto de mil jaulas de a sesenta pesos, y después de un millón de jaulas hasta completar sesenta millones de pesos"⁸⁰ (75) an impossible venture which would take more than thirty thousand years to accomplish⁸¹. Just as Ursula takes charge of the household, in Balzac's novel Balthazar Claës's wife "devenait la protectrice du mari" (68).

When Baltazar leaves Montiel's house and goes to celebrate his victorious 'sale' it is striking that nobody seems to be aware of the events that have actually transpired, even though at least the end of Baltazar's argument with Montiel was public: "Cuando Baltazar se abrió paso a través de los curiosos que bloqueaban la puerta, José Montiel daba gritos en el centro de la sala"⁸² (74). In "En este pueblo no hay ladrones" we see acceptance of the fabricated by an individual who has witnessed the actual events, whereas in "La prodigiosa madre de Baltazar,"

⁷⁹ His opinion about the statements that the author of *Cien años de soledad* had plagiarized one of Balzac's novel, *The Quest of the Absolute*.

⁸⁰ "...he was talking about a fabulous project of a thousand cages, at sixty pesos each, and then of a million cages, till he had sixty million pesos." (156)

⁸¹ At the rate of one cage every two weeks, it would take Baltazar 38.461,5 years to complete one million cages.

⁸² "As Balthazar made his way through the spectators who were blocking the door, José Montiel was shouting in the middle of the living room." (155)

Gracia Márquez shows the individual, Baltazar's alteration of an incident which leads to an imagined tale accepted by the masses. Baltazar's audience in the pool hall is indeed more inclined to believe in the fabricated version rather than the actual event, given that Montiel is the richest man in town. Indeed, Baltazar's version opens a potential path to riches while the actual one destroys it, by confirming Montiel's rapacity and stinginess. The townspeople's willingness to accept Baltazar's story also emanates from his social class, as his mentality is representative of the milieu in which he evolves.

Unwilling to abandon his dream, Baltazar's celebration though causes him to end the night lying in the streets. The following morning, "las mujeres que pasaron para la misa de cinco no se atrevieron a mirarlo, creyendo que estaba muerto"⁸³ (76). Although the violence is understated, the conclusion implies the consequences of opposing the oligarchy. While furthering the concepts of personal delusion, communal transformation of fact into fantasy and the gender and social dichotomy, "La prodigiosa tadre de Baltazar" also presents the ruling, domineering class that will be the focus of the next story.

4.3.3. "La viuda de Montiel"

"La viuda de Montiel" occurs a few years after the previous story. Don José (Chepe) Montiel has just passed away from natural causes, a fact that disconcerts the community given that Chepe was a rich, powerful and violent figure deeply linked to the ruling political authorities. This non-violent death is so unexpected that the people resist fully accepting his demise: "Fue preciso que atornillaran la tapa del ataúd y que lo emparedaran en el aparatoso mausoleo familiar, para que el pueblo entero se convenciera de que no se estaba haciendo

⁸³ "The women who passed on their way to five-o'clock Mass didn't dare look at him, thinking he was dead." (157)

muerto”⁸⁴ (77). While the focus character is Montiel’s widow, the story delves deeply in Chepe’s rise to riches and power as well as the inner workings of the corrupt dictatorial regime and its links to the higher class. The mild delusions of Dámaso and Baltazar are furthered in this story as well. The narrator indicates that the widow “no había estado nunca en contacto con la realidad”⁸⁵ (79). The widow, disappointed by the lack of flowers sent to the funeral, firmly believes her husband was a good man who worked hard and helped others. It transpires, though, that when the new mayor was appointed to the town, Montiel served as his informant, denouncing those who were affiliated with the opposite political party and benefiting from their evictions: “Después de que el alcalde les perforaba las puertas a tiros y les ponía el plazo para abandonar el pueblo, José Montiel les compraba sus tierras y ganado por un precio que él mismo se encargaba de fijar”⁸⁶ (83). The extent of Montiel’s wealth and power foreshadows the exaggerated extent of earthly possessions enumerated in “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande,” and is represented when the widow falls in despair “con sus tierras sin límites, y con los infinitos compromisos que heredó de su esposo y que nunca lograría comprender”⁸⁷ (81). Abandoned by her son and daughters, who prefer to remain in Europe, the widow, alone and unable to manage her wealth, loses everything her husband had accumulated through corruption, violence and extortion. The ghost of Mamá Grande appears before the widow, only awaiting death, to predict she will die “cuando te empiece el cansancio del brazo”⁸⁸ (86).

“La viuda de Montiel” is the clearest political reference in the cycle, because it is so explicit. This story develops the historical cycle of power and political violence introduced in

⁸⁴ “It took screwing the lid on the coffin and walling him up in the showy family mausoleum for the whole town to become convinced that he wasn’t playing dead.” (158)

⁸⁵ “...she had never been in direct contact with reality.” (159)

⁸⁶ “After the Mayor riddle their doors with gunfire and gave them their twenty-four hours to get out of town, José Montiel bought their lands and cattle from them for a price which he himself set.” (162)

⁸⁷ “...with her limitless lands, and with the infinite number of obligations which she inherited from her husband and which she would never manage to understand.” (161)

⁸⁸ “When the tiredness begins in your arm.” (164)

“Un día de estos.” Harley Oberhelman suggests that “the decline and collapse of Montiel’s materialistic world are envisioned here by García Márquez as an augury of a future world governed by socialism” (28). His comment, though, pushes beyond the actual text, and reflects the critic’s own opinion of García Márquez and his political affiliations rather than an analysis derived from the story itself. Indeed, it would be wrong to assume the death of Chepe Montiel represents a definite end of the violent dictatorial regime, given that the mayor stays in power but, rather, indicates that the cycle of violence will continue. It is important to note that this story is the last one in the sequence of time. If “En este pueblo no hay ladrones” opens the threefold sequence of stories focusing on La Violencia, “La viuda de Montiel” concludes it.

Vargas Llosa situates Montiel’s death as occurring in 1951 (based on transplanted versions of the characters who also appear in *Cien Años de Soledad*), yet no textual element in the story allows such a specific date⁸⁹. (380) The means by which Montiel built his fortune, however, were “a common practice during the worst years of ‘la Violencia’” (Cida Chase 75). The political analogy to La Violencia implies that Montiel’s death takes place during that actual time period and symbolically foreshadows the demise and flight of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla a few years later in 1957. Indeed, Chepe Montiel dies as “consecuencia de la rabieta que el medico le había prohibido”⁹⁰ (78), an event anticipated in the previous story. The cause of his death, however, can be paralleled to the main reason Rojas Pinilla fled from Colombia, although a full-fledged revolution had not developed. The Conservative leader’s downfall at the hands of a Liberal and Conservative coalition stems from his failed negotiations with “a large number of armed *guerrilleros*” which “seems to have puzzled [...] and angered him to the extent that he

⁸⁹ In their translation of this story, Gregory Rabassa and J.S. Bernstein, include a specific date “José Montiel died in his hammock, the second of August, 1951.” (158) However, in the original version there is no specific mention of this date: “José Montiel murió en su hamaca, un miércoles a las dos de la tarde.” (78)

⁹⁰ “...as a result of a fit of anger which the doctor had forbidden.” (159)

unleashed a campaign of all-out military repression” (Bushnell 222). The inner workings of the Conservative government clearly emerges as the narrator reveals that “sólo asistieron sus copartidarios y las congregaciones religiosas, y no se recibieron más coronas que las de la administración”⁹¹ (78). During the late 1940s and 1950s, and throughout the past periods of Conservative hegemony in Colombia, the elite, the political administration and the church represented the economical, legal and moral trichotomy that formed the dictatorial governing body. Chepe Montiel’s death, in and of itself, does not affect the overall power structure as he can be replaced by the other two bodies. Montiel’s widow does not assume her husband’s position as the leader of the vast estate he accumulated. The responsibilities of the estate, instead, befall señor Carmicheal “antiguo y diligente servidor de la familia”⁹² (79) who cannot maintain it because, unlike his former master, he is not supported by the other two governing branches.

The widow is presented as yet another focus character who blindly refuses to accept reality and lives in a fabricated fallacy of her own. Dominated by her husband in the previous story, the narrator states that “la había hecho feliz”⁹³ (78). Used to being controlled, she falls in a deep depression, her internal agony symbolized by the desolate state of the town, “la placita desolada, las casas silenciosas,”⁹⁴ (80) and the endless “lluvias pantanosas”⁹⁵ (79). Her distress, though, stems from her complete disconnection from reality. She is never able to grasp the true nature of her husband’s activities. After Montiel’s death, she cannot understand the lack of support from the townspeople, whom she believed her husband helped: “Te arruinarás

⁹¹ “...only the members of his own party and of his religious brotherhood attended, and the only wreaths they received were those from the municipal government.” (159)

⁹² “...and old and diligent friend of the family.” (160)

⁹³ “...had made her happy.” (159)

⁹⁴ “...the desolate little plaza, the silent houses.” (161)

⁹⁵ “...swampy rains.” (160)

ayudándolos para que no se mueran de hambre en otra parte, y ellos no te lo agradecerán”⁹⁶ (83). Her humanity, innocence and blindness are best exemplified when she asks her husband to use his influence on the government “para que se lleven a esa bestia [the mayor] que no va a dejar un ser humano en el pueblo”⁹⁷ (83). Here, Gracia Márquez paints a disquieting portrait of a wealthy widow showing that at least a portion of the elite is unaware of the consequences of their support for the conservative oligarchy. Raymond Williams comments that “she can be read as an ideologeme for that sector of society that supports its institutions, and even institutional violence without realizing the true nature of either” (54). This astute analysis, though, does not take in consideration the widow’s opposition to violence; indeed, she is aware of it even though she ignores her husband’s involvement. The almost exclusive focus on the widow’s imagined world does not altogether leave the population’s perception that was prevalent in the previous two stories.

This popular reconstruction of witnessed, genuine events is also present at the beginning of “La viuda de Montiel.” However, here it comes through the general population’s disbelief of Montiel’s death, which was expected to be violent. Even though the population strongly desires his death, it does not correlate with the suddenness of his passing and the conflicting versions of their imagined projection of his downfall: “Muchos seguían poniendo en duda después de ver el cadaver en cámara ardiente, embutido con almohadas y sábanas de lino dentro de una caja amarilla y abombada con un melón”⁹⁸ (77). Once Montiel is finally buried, the population disappears entirely from the story. The widow is shunned and ostracized as a result of her blindness and delusion. Even her son and daughters refuse to come back to take care of her. They

⁹⁶ “You’ll ruin yourself helping them so that they won’t die of hunger someplace else, and they will never thank you.” (162)

⁹⁷ “...to get them to take that beast away; he’s not going to leave a single human being in town alive.” (162)

⁹⁸ “Many continued to doubt it after seeing the corpse in the sweltering room, crammed along with pillows and linen sheets into a yellow coffin, with sides as rounded as a melon.” (158)

are perfectly conscious they would be confronted to the population's retaliation, as the son grudgingly admits that "no se atrevía a regresar por temor que le dieran un tiro"⁹⁹ (84). The widow's isolation and her flawed perception of reality develop and corroborate the fractured state of Colombia's rural communities. Although Montiel's death should have provided a change, the town does not experience any transformation and its desolate state, beyond symbolizing the widow's state of mind, also reveals a stagnant environment where nothing has changed. The fragmented nature of this society stems from the social and political divide which is reinforced by the elite and the church.

Some of the religious elements that will be the focus of the next story are introduced when Montiel is described lying in his coffin: "Era el mismo don Chepe Montiel de los domingos, oyendo misa de ocho, sólo que en lugar de la fusta tenía un crucifijo entre las manos."¹⁰⁰ Montiel appears to be the same person as he always has been, but, the whip he usually holds has been replaced by a crucifix. The crucifix indicates that he is actually dead, a fact confirmed in the very next sentence. The mention of church indicates a close relation between the ruling class and the clergy and the whip Montiel carries with him in church symbolizes the church's acceptance of the violent enforcement of the government's rules, which are based on the Catholic notion of morality. However, the widow in her depression and reflections on the wave of violence dominating this rural town leads her to question God: "si Dios no hubiera descansado el domingo habría tenido tiempo de terminar el mundo."¹⁰¹ (81) The only comical episode of this story represents the widow's sole coherent observation, being

⁹⁹ "...he didn't dare return for fear he would be shot." (163)

¹⁰⁰ "It was the same Mr. Chepe Montiel as was present every Sunday at eight-o'clock Mass, except that instead of his riding quirt he had a crucifix in his hands." (158)

¹⁰¹ "...if God had not rested on Sunday He would have had time to finish the world properly." (161)

introduced as “nunca fue más lucida que entonces”¹⁰² (81). The parallel between the whip and the crucifix and the widow’s comment on God foreshadow the critic of the Catholic Church’s rhetorical power in the next story.

4.3.4. “Un día después de sábado”

With “Un día después de sábado,” the cycle reverts to the late 1920s¹⁰³ and introduces father Antonio, a character who will later appear in the title story. The sixth story in the cycle offers a more complex narrative than the previous ones. The story shifts the focus of the narration between three characters: Rebeca, who killed Carlos Centeno in “La siesta del martes,” Antonio Isabel del Santísimo Sacramento del Altar Castañeda y Montero, the ninety-four year old delusional town priest, and, a poor young man, an outsider who misses the train and is forced to stay overnight in town. The background of this tridimensional narrative, a plague of dead birds falling on the town causing a putrid rotting odor, bears little relevance to the story’s plot. Like Dámaso, Baltazar and Montiel’s widow, both Father Antonio and Rebeca appear to be utterly detached from the daily realities of the town. Although the story seamlessly alternates from one character to another, the greater part of the narrative focuses on Father Antonio. Throughout the story, the priest is lost in his own stream of consciousness: “perdido en sus oscuras nebulosas interiores”¹⁰⁴ (100). Governed by irrational impulses, his thoughts randomly go back and forth between the present, the past and the immediate future, his Sunday sermon. No longer drawing the townspeople to church, the demented priest, who trice has seen the devil, knows the townspeople have stopped going to church because they think he is crazy. Although the sudden appearance of a nameless outsider in the middle of the narrative offers an external perspective on

¹⁰² “...she was never more lucid than then.” (161)

¹⁰³ Vargas Llosa believes that “el cuento ocurriría en 1907, más o menos” (387) based on references to characters and situations that appear in *Hojasca*. However, the textual evidence paralleled with historical events indicates the story takes place in the late 1920s.

¹⁰⁴ “...lost in his dark interior fog.” (175)

the town, he too is disconnected from reality. He has a dim understanding of Colombia and only perceives the government as an entity that gives money for no reason, which is exemplified by his understanding of retirement: “[tenía] una idea enteramente rudimentaria de la palabra ‘jubilación,’ que él interpretaba en bruto como una determinada cantidad de dinero que debía entregarle el gobierno para poner una cría de cerdos”¹⁰⁵ (109). At the end of the story, the priest in a delirious sermon declares he has seen the Wandering Jew. The apocalyptic sermon once again draws the townspeople to church and the priest is finally able to collect money which he gives to the outsider to buy a new hat.

The mysterious conclusion, far from clarifying the chain of events that have transpired in the short story, “fails to clarify the exact meaning of the disparate events in it” (Oberhelman 28). The reader is unable to relate the falling dead birds with the priest’s sermon about the Wandering Jew, his inexplicable generosity towards the outsider and Rebeca’s function in the story. The story is purposefully unclear and represents the general population, the clergy and the upper-class, all of whom have difficulties grasping the concept of nation and history, or how past events influence the present and future course of the country. The priest completes the social portrayal of Colombia’s rural communities in this core cluster and symbolizes the greater religious community in Colombia and its failure to connect religion and reality. While this story breaks the time sequence by going back to a period between the second and third stories, it advances the thematic concerns of the sequence and introduces a new element, the decline of the governmental trichotomy, which leads to the final and concluding cluster.

The narration mainly focuses on Rebeca and Father Antonio, neither of whom interact with the rest of the population. It is evident they both live in their own imagined reality and no

¹⁰⁵ “...[had] an entirely rudimentary idea of the word “retirement,” which he interpreted crudely as a certain sum of money which the government ought to give him so he could set himself up in pig breeding.” (182)

longer accurately perceive the present. Their thoughts instead focus on the glorious past. Indeed, Rebeca recalls her distinguished role in the form of “su bisabuelo paterno, un criollo que en la Guerra de Independencia peleó al lado de los realistas”¹⁰⁶ (87) just as Father Antonio in his interior monologue relives the days of his youth. The crest of Conservative rule is now in decay, a notion reinforced by the young outsider’s description of the town: “Advirtió que era un pueblo muerto, con calles interminables y polvorientas y sombrías casas de madera con techos de cinc, que parecían deshabitadas”¹⁰⁷ (114). Harley Oberhelman relates the plague of dead birds with the decrepit state of this community, mentioning that “the sudden appearance of an unusual phenomenon [...] breaks down the sense of order in society” (28). The deteriorated state of this community, however, is not caused by the dead birds given that the town and its institutions are presented in a state of decay. This affliction, rather, symbolizes the weight of a violent and oppressive regime on a population that no longer looks up to the elite, the clergy or the mayor.

The trichotomy of Conservative authority depicted in this story is presented from a different perspective than the previous ones. Here, links and influence from one to another has collapsed. The story stresses the fragmented state of this town and its governing bodies, highlighting the disconnection between the mayor, Rebeca and the priest. The visible erosion of the bonds that support the governing power structure emerges when Rebeca goes to see the mayor to complain about her torn screens. She evidently wants to make use of her social position to force him to take action; however, the mayor is utterly unconcerned by her claim. The widow on the other hand clearly shows her contempt for the mayor, the narrator mentioning that “ni siquiera le escandalizó la evidencia de la autoridad degradada a lo alto de una escalera, reparando

¹⁰⁶ “...her paternal great-grandfather, a Creole who in the War of Independence had fought on the side of the Royalists” (165)

¹⁰⁷ “He noticed that it was a dead town, with interminable, dusty streets and dark wooden houses with zinc roofs, which seemed uninhabited.” (185)

las redes metálicas de la ventana con un rollo de alambre y un destornillador”¹⁰⁸ (88). The elite no longer influences an administrative body that has lost its prestige. Likewise, the relation between Rebeca and Father Antonio is quasi non-existent. Their deteriorated relation is demonstrated when the priest knocks on Rebeca’s door to save a dying bird and both characters, forced into an awkward situation, feel the need to distance themselves from one another: “No permaneció allí más de cinco minutos. La señora Rebeca creía que era ella quien había abreviado el incidente. Pero en realidad había sido el padre”¹⁰⁹ (97). Throughout the story, the mayor and Father Antonio never meet, even though the falling dead birds seems to be a supernatural phenomenon, which is indicative of an obvious lack of communication between the two institutions. The narrative reveals that the bonds between the three institutions, that maintained the Conservative hegemony, have dissolved, just as their influence over the town.

Rebeca and Father Antonio are oblivious to the fact that birds have been dying, only noticing the epidemic several days after the entire town and only when it affects them personally. This belated awareness denotes their disconnection from the rest of the population. When Rebeca hears the news of the Wandering Jew, she immediately believes the apparition to be true: “Es verdad – dijo, con una voz que se le subió de las entrañas-. Ahora me explico por qué se están muriendo los pájaros”¹¹⁰ (117). Her sudden change of attitude towards the priest does not stem from a rational train of thought but instead from the desperate need to find the cause of a strange adversity. This passage is an evident criticism of the powers the clergy once held. Indeed, even though Rebeca has lost faith in the priest’s influence over the town, she, nevertheless, tries to

¹⁰⁸ “Nor was she scandalized by the evidence of authority degraded, at the top of a stairway, repairing the metal threads of the window with a roll of screening and a screwdriver.” (166)

¹⁰⁹ “He didn’t stay there for more than five minutes. Rebecca thought that it was she who had cut short the meeting. But in reality it had been the priest.” (172)

¹¹⁰ “It’s true,” Rebecca said in a voice which rose from the depths of her being. “Now I understand why the birds are dying off.” (187)

bring a new young priest to town by appealing to the bishop, her “ilustrísimo primo,”¹¹¹ (116) which would allow her to go to church and restore her social standing. Rebeca longs for the close relation between the upper class and the clergy presented in “La viuda de Montiel” because “the general tenor of church teachings continued to encourage automatic acceptance of the existing order that God in His wisdom had provided” (Bushnell 168). However, instead of gaining a renewed influence over the town, Father Antonio and Rebeca reveal their disconnection from the social realities. The priest’s failure to reconnect with the masses parallels the archbishop of Bogotá whose indecision in 1930 led to the Conservative party’s collapse: “the archbishop had trouble making up his mind, backing first one candidate and then the other – with the result that the Liberals returned to power after almost fifty years in opposition” (Bushnell 181). The priest’s prophecies, wavering between the devil and the Wandering Jew, no longer influence the townspeople.

In “Un día después de sábado,” the church’s dwindling influence is revealed when the priest declares he has seen the Wandering Jew: “Os juro que lo vi. Os juro que se atravesó en mi camino esta madrugada, cuando regresaba de administrar los santos óleos a la mujer de Jonás, el carpintero. Os juro que tenía el rostro embetunado con la maldición del Señor y que dejaba a su paso una huella de ceniza ardiente”¹¹² (117). However, the townspeople clearly think Father Antonio’s repeated vision of the devil means he is senile and demented and the peculiar appearance of the Wandering Jew does not draw the masses because of their belief in his sudden clairvoyance, but instead, they have come to witness yet another example of his delusion. This altered perception is reflected in Argénida’s comment to Rebeca, her employer: “dicen que el

¹¹¹ “My Eminent Cousin” (186)

¹¹² “I swear to you that I saw him. I swear to you that he crossed my path this morning when I was coming back from administering the holy unction to the wife of Jonas he carpenter. I swear to you that his face blackened with the malediction of the Lord, and that he left a track of burning embers in his wake.” (187-8)

padre se volvió loco en el púlpito”¹¹³ (116). Indeed, the population now recognizes the irrational rhetoric. Gracia Márquez’s critique of the clergy is not merely a satirical approach to the Catholic Church and its influence over the elite; it is also a transitional portrayal of Colombian rural communities who have begun to see past the irrational rhetoric of the clergy; people are no longer merely content to accept a spoon-feed fabricated truth. The religious approach here contrasts sharply with the popular perception of morality in the first story. The downturn of the economy, the clergy’s loss of influence and the inept management of the country by the Conservative party that has stayed in power for over forty years foreshadows the end of an era and naturally leads to the concluding cluster.

4.4. The Concluding Cluster

4.4.1. “Rosas artificiales”

The concluding cluster opens with “Rosas artificiales,” a story that focuses on the relationship between a young woman, Mina, and her grandmother. The story takes place entirely within the family home and, besides the brief appearances of Mina’s mother and her friend and coworker Trinidad, nobody else comes to disturb the two focus characters. Vargas Llosa is able to situate the tale’s location as occurring in El Pueblo and its timeframe¹¹⁴; however, place and historical time do not play any relevant function and do not affect the placement of this story within the sequence. Whereas the previous cluster of stories focused on delusion and sociopolitical concerns, here most of those elements are absent. José Luis Méndez believes the religious connection between the previous story and this one reflects a shared thematic, “el vínculo entre la religión y la locura [...] forma también parte del cuadro general”¹¹⁵ (95). Although this link definitely shows the progression of the sequence, the story mainly focuses on

¹¹³ “...people are saying that the Father has gone crazy in the pulpit!” (187)

¹¹⁴ “Este relato ocurre en ‘el pueblo,’ en época cercana a la de *La mala hora*.” (394) (mid-1950’s)

¹¹⁵ The connection between religion and madness [...] it is also part of the general frame.

the clairvoyant nature of the grandmother and Mina's attempts to deceive both her mother and her friend. "Rosas artificiales," though, mainly operates as an overture to the final story. The grandmother's intuitive deductions and interpretations demonstrate the critical capacities needed to read beyond appearances and to understand the underlying nature of the artificial/mythological discourse in "Los funerales de la Mamá Grande."

The penultimate story centers on a confrontation between Mina, a young artisan who manufactures artificial roses, and her blind grandmother. The insight into the focus characters' consciousness, prevalent in the four previous stories, is absent; instead, the story is mostly comprised of a dialogue between Mina and her grandmother. The story opens revealing Mina's desperate attempt to get ready to go to church for communion as she cannot find her dress sleeves without which "el padre Ángel no le daría la comunión"¹¹⁶ (122). When she finally leaves, Mina comes back only fifteen minutes later discernibly distraught as her grandmother notices she is crying. Avoiding her mother, Mina locks herself in her bedroom and then throws a packet of letters down the toilet. Her unexplained actions seem irrational, and when Trinidad, her friend, arrives, she tells her: "se fue"¹¹⁷ (125). It becomes obvious that Mina tries to keep part of her life a secret from her grandmother and her mother. However, the grandmother, even though she is blind, interprets Mina's behavior and actions and deduces the reason behind her granddaughter's sorrow: Mina's suitor has left her. It is through their conversation, by gauging Mina's reactions and her knowledge of Mina's daily routine that the grandmother is able to deduce her granddaughter's secret life. The grandmother's "mirada clarividente"¹¹⁸ (123) reveals that Mina's actions at the beginning of the story can be construed two different ways. Indeed, it is assumed that Mina tells the truth when she explains her sudden return from church to her

¹¹⁶ "Father Angel would not give her Communion" (191)

¹¹⁷ "He went away." (194)

¹¹⁸ "...knowing look" (191)

grandmother “no pude ir a misa. [...] Las mangas están mojadas y toda mi ropa sin planchar”¹¹⁹ (123). The grandmother, though, correctly interprets Mina’s return to the house: “Si hubiera sido por las mangas no te hubieras tomado el trabajo de salir de la casa. En el camino te esperaba alguien que te ocasionó una contrariedad”¹²⁰ (127). Mina is stunned by her grandmother’s deductive capabilities; however, the grandmother always explains her reasoning clearly demonstrating she cannot be deceived by Mina’s lies. Whereas the delusional focus characters in the previous four stories believe their conception and understanding of reality to be accurate, the grandmother repeatedly admits to Mina’s mother that she is crazy, who, ironically, blindly believes her daughter’s lies.

Mina throughout the narrative deliberately lies, trying to deceive others and to impose a fictitious image of herself. Her job, crafting artificial roses, clearly symbolizes the artificial image of herself she creates for others. On the other hand, the grandmother’s ability to perceive the truth, the tangible behind the fabricated, is represented by her activities, which include taking care of real roses, and her ability to use her remaining senses: “Después de comprobar con una aspiración profunda que ya estaba el café, retiró la olla del fogón”¹²¹ (122). It is the contrast between Mina and her grandmother that initiates the reader to the double *narrataire* in “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande.” Indeed, the concluding story cannot be read and understood without grasping this tale’s presentation of inherent delusion. Devoid of violence, political and social references, “Rosas Artificiales” does not, *per se*, advance the progression of the sequence, but, rather, functions as bridge from the first six stories to the last one. The failure to understand the function of this story in the overall work has led to misinterpretations of Mina by critics;

¹¹⁹ “I can’t go to Mass. [...] The sleeves are wet, and my whole dress is wrinkled.” (191)

¹²⁰ “If it had been because of the sleeves, you wouldn’t have bothered to leave the house. Someone was waiting for you on the way who caused you some disappointment.” (195)

¹²¹ “After testing with a deep breath to see if the coffee was ready, she took the pot off the fire.” (191)

interpretations (usually shallow) of this story have been overshadowed by analyses of “Un día después de sábado” and “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande.” Judith Goetzinger sees Mina as an “individual within a crumbling society in which he can find no solidarity with his fellows and no hope in the future” (244; 245). Goetzinger does not take into account the fact that even though Mina’s grandmother unravels her granddaughter’s secret life, she never exposes Mina’s lies to her mother. As a matter of fact, when Mina’s mother wants to know why she did not go to church, the grandmother helps Mina by echoing her lie: “No pudo ir. [...] Se me olvidó que era el primer viernes y lavé las mangas ayer tarde”¹²² (124). Raymond Williams, on the other hand, perceives Mina as a humble and overworked girl who “maintains her dignity in the end by confronting her grandmother’s excessively personal inquiries” (56). Both Williams and Goetzinger fail to grasp Mina’s relationship with her grandmother because they do not understand the purpose of this story in the sequence. Gracia Márquez clearly intended this penultimate tale to serve as an introduction to the concluding mythical fable of Mamá Grande. Indeed, the correlation between “Rosas Artificiales” and the title story is undeniable given the superimposition of Mina’s lies and her grandmother’s clairvoyance which foreshadows the double *narrataire* in the last story.

4.4.2. “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande”

The cycle’s concluding story recounts the death of Mamá Grande, “soberana absoluta del reino de Macondo, que vivió en función de dominio durante 92 años”¹²³ (131). The narrative approach here shifts drastically. Whereas the narration in the previous stories is relatively simple and to the point, here, the narrator is telling the story directly to an audience in a way that mimics

¹²² “She couldn’t go [...] I forgot that it was Friday, and I washed the sleeves yesterday afternoon.” (192)

¹²³ “...absolute sovereign of the Kingdom of Macondo, who lived for ninety-two years.” (197)

the juglar's¹²⁴ embellished style of storytelling. The repeated use of exaggeration in this tale reflects the political, clerical and elite rhetoric that has been used to control the masses since the Spanish colonization of the Americas. Roberto González Echevarría mentions that, in fact, "the pervasiveness of legal rhetoric in early American historiography could hardly be exaggerated" (17). Therefore, it would be wrong to assume that this story and its narration "es la del rechazo de la historia oficial"¹²⁵ (Victoria Chase 234) but rather, demonstrates how Gracia Márquez's narrative embraces the official discourse by meshing it with the popular genre of storytelling. This tale clearly criticizes the trichotomy of powers that supports the structure of government in Colombia and how its extravagant rhetoric is perceived by the general population, distorted through word-of-mouth and eventually converted into myth. Indeed, Vargas Llosa believes that "esa dimensión mítico-legendaria de la vida que aparece en este relato es fundamentalmente *una retórica*: una operación verbal que transmuta lo real objetivo en real imaginario"¹²⁶ (411). In this story, awareness of both the factual and the fabricated is essential to understand the underlying allegory of politics in Colombia.

"Los funerales de la Mamá Grande" can be divided in two sections. The first half focuses on Mamá Grande's last moments before she dies and the enumeration of her earthly and moral possessions whereas the second half, after she has died, depicts the carnivalesque events that lead to her funeral. Before the narrator starts the tale, he acknowledges her death has shaken the entire nation and that her funeral was attended by the president and the pope instilling in his audience the mythical status Mamá Grande has attained. Mamá Grande has been sick for more than three months; on the verge of death, she calls Father Antonio Isabel del Santísimo Sacramento, one of

¹²⁴ Juglar is a term applied to the Spanish medieval storyteller. Unlike the troubadour, who was a poet from an elevated social class, the juglar was uneducated and his recitation was intended for commoners.

¹²⁵ Is about the rejection of official history.

¹²⁶ That mythical-legendary dimension of life that appears in this short story is fundamentally *a rhetoric*: a verbal operation that transmutes the real objective ad the real imaginary.

the focus characters in “Un día después de sábado,” who is now almost one hundred years old, to give her the extreme unction. As she is a virgin, her nine nieces and nephews, her sole heirs, are called to hear her will. At this point, Gracía Márquez stresses the notion of consanguinity and its relation to the structure of the oligarchy, describing it as a closed inner circle that retains the control over the population which is transmitted from generation to generation. The enumeration of Mamá Grande’s earthly possessions takes three hours and traces the extent of these riches to before the country’s independence. Then, she starts to list her “bienes morales”¹²⁷ (142).

Unable to finish the seemingly infinite list, she dies in a less than dignified manner: “la Mamá Grande emitió un sonoro eructo y expiró”¹²⁸ (144). The news of her death spreads to the capital and its effects can be seen as “el orden social había sido rozado por la muerte”¹²⁹ (145). While the politicians debate endlessly to change the laws in order to allow the president to go to Macondo, Mamá Grande’s body is left to decay in the sweltering heat. These redundant, interminable political debates stem from the legacy of colonial laws that still influence the country’s politics, even though they have become irrelevant, they are still at the root of governmental paralysis. The laws and the texts which form the foundations of the governing structure in Colombia and more generally in Latin America reflect a history that “was made up of a series of conventional topics, whose coherence and authority depended on the codified beliefs of a period whose ideology structure is no longer current” (Echevarría González 20). Finally as the day of her funeral has arrived, the town takes on the aspect of an enormous carnival, which innumerable people attend:

En las calles congestionadas de ruletas, fritangas y mesas de lotería, y hombres con culebras enrolladas en el cuello que pregonaban el bálsamo definitivo para curar la erisipela y asegurar la vida eterna; en la placita abigarrada donde las

¹²⁷ “...immaterial possessions.” (204)

¹²⁸ “Big Mama emitted a loud belch and expired.” (206)

¹²⁹ “The social order had been brushed by death.” (207)

muchedumbres habían colgado sus toldos y desenrollado sus petates, apuestos ballesteros despejaron el paso a la autoridad. Allí estaban, en espera del momento supremo, las lavanderas del San Jorge, los pescadores de perla del Cabo de Vela, los atarrayeros de Ciénega, los camaroneros de Tasajera, los brujos de la Mojana, los salineros de Manaure, los acordeoneros de Valledupar, los chalanes de Ayapel, los papayeros de San Pelayo, los mamadores de gallo de La Cueva, los improvisadores de las Sabanas de Bolívar, los camajanes de Rebolo, los bogas del Magdalena, los tinterillos de Mompox, además de los que se enumeran al principio de esta crónica, y muchos otros.¹³⁰ (152)

While the entire nation comes to the funeral, Gracia Márquez is careful to enumerate each group, reinforcing the fragmented state of the national community. As the funeral procession leaves the streets of Macondo, an infinite amount of trash is left behind which will take an eternity to clean up, again emphasizing the legacy of the colonial rule that has influenced and will continue to influence the legal and political life in Colombia. The story concludes the same way it started, with the storyteller getting ready to tell the tale, making the story a cycle of its own. “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande” includes the societal issues introduced in the first two stories and developed in the subsequent four stories. Indeed, the portrayal of the corrupt government, the history of violence, the ineffectiveness of religion, delusions of grandeur, a flawed perception of reality and social class struggles all appear in the story.

By the very nature of the narrative mode in “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande,” Gracia Márquez makes a critical assessment of the rural communities in Colombia; more specifically, he links Colombia’s political and social structures and its paralysis to the general public’s acceptance of partisan, religious and popular rhetoric. The easily molded beliefs and passive

¹³⁰ “In the streets crowded with cars, hawkers of fried foods, and lottery stalls, and men with snakes wrapped around their necks who peddled a balm which would definitely cure erysipelas and guarantee eternal life; in the mottled little plaza where the crowds had set up their tents and unrolled their sleeping mats, dapper archers cleared the Authorities’ way. There they were, awaiting the supreme moment: the washerwomen of San Jorge, the pearl fishers from Cabo de la Vela, the fishermen from Ciénega, the shrimp fishermen from Tasajera, the sorcerers from Mojajana, the salt miners from Manaure, the accordionists from Valledupar, the fine horsemen of Ayapel, the ragtag musicians from San Pelayo, the cock breeders from La Cueva, the improvisers from Sábanas de Bolívar, the dandies from Rebolo, the oarsmen of the Magdalena, the shysters from Monpox, in addition to those enumerated at the beginning of this chronicle, and many others.” (212)

subjectivity of the core population result in a society at risk of repeating history, which, in turn, leads to the cyclical emergence of authoritarian, dictatorial regimes. “The title story is a précis of the seven previous stories,” (Oberhelman 31) the sum and synthesis of the preceding stories’ fragmented and multifaceted approaches give shape to the communal perspective. It effectively concludes the depiction of the people’s ingrained belief in a fabricated, imagined “reality” rather than to interpreting and understanding the truth beyond official rhetoric that reflects Gracía Márquez’s own critical perception of the deep-rooted belief in myths in the Colombian rural communities.

Lon Pearson was the first critic to discover that Gracía Márquez was inspired by a series of articles he had previously written in 1952 on La Marquesita, a Spanish woman who lived over the span of two centuries as the uncontested ruler of Sierpe “un país de leyenda dentro de la costa atlántica de Colombia”¹³¹ (510). Pearson’s article, however, does not offer any new critical insight on the short story but rather, merely parallels the accounts of La Marquesita to Gracía Márquez’s Mamá Grande. This corollary is plainly evident when Gracía Márquez introduces La Marquesita: “Los más viejos habitantes de La Sierpe oyeron decir a sus abuelos que hace muchos años vivió en la región una española bondadosa y menuda, dueña de una fabulosa riqueza representada en animales, objetos de oro y piedras preciosas. [...] La Marquesita era una especie de gran mamá quienes le servían en La Sierpe”¹³² (512). As a matter of fact, many of the fabulous elements Gracía Márquez had described in his article can be found in “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande.” Although there are discrepancies between the two characters - Mamá Grande certainly is not a kindhearted woman - the accumulated and extravagant wealth and the shared

¹³¹ A country of legends inside the Atlantic’s Coast of Colombia.

¹³² The old inhabitants of La Sierpe heard their grandparents saying that many years ago a kind and slight Spanish woman lived in the region, owner of a fabulous richness represented in animals, golden objects and precious stones. [...] La Marquesita was a sort of big mama who served her in La Sierpe.

characterization indicate Gracía Márquez based his own allegorical macrofigure on an established mythical figure in Colombian lore in order to highlight the authenticity of the rural tendencies to believe in the delusive. Gracía Márquez insists that this legend is thought to be true by the inhabitants of Sierpe: “creen en La Marquesita”¹³³ (512) However, The use of sharp irony in the series of articles already shows that Gracía Márquez highly disparaged such popular beliefs, as Pearson notes that “the four articles ramble and criticize the superstition of the religion” (43). What Pearson fails to notice is that Gracía Márquez’s articles display an interesting double narrative which presages the use of a double *narrataire* in his own 1959 short story. Indeed, the news vignettes not only recount the story of La Marquesita de la Sierpe, but also that of a man who endeavors to find this legendary figure’s hidden treasures.

The complex narrative of the story is intended to be read from a double perceptive. The primary audience or *narrataire* is fictional. The reader, then, becomes the other *narrataire*. However, Gracía Márquez assumes the role of this literary external audience, just as the grandmother in “Rosas artificiales,” is to discern the exaggeration and “[is] able to gauge the distance between official history, folk legend, and demythifying literature” (Foster 104). The primary audience is unquestionably the uneducated, gullible rural population of Colombia. As the story begins, the narrator ironically addresses his listeners as he declares “esta es, incrédulos del mundo entero, la verídica historia de la Mamá Grande, soberana absoluta del reino de Macondo”¹³⁴ (131). The satire here is obvious since it has been demonstrated in the previous stories that the masses are, in reality, extremely credulous. Indeed, in fact, the fictional nature of this story implies the reader knows it cannot be “verídica.” David William Foster, in “The Double Inscription of the *Narrataire* in “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande,” suggests that for

¹³³ They believe in La Marquesita

¹³⁴ “This is, for all the world’s unbelievers, the true account of Big Mama, absolute sovereign of the Kingdom of Macondo.” (197)

these “*incrédulos* [...] the details of the story are simply too far beyond his everyday experience to be assimilated in terms other than the fantastic and the marvelous” (104). While Foster’s commentary certainly ascertains that the complexity of the story’s allegorical message cannot be perceived by its audience, he fails to understand that “the fantastic and the marvelous” are indeed intrinsic parts of Colombia’s daily reality. The naïve primary audience also serves to establish the popular (*mis*)conception of governmental authority, as Mamá Grande’s possessions not only include material, physical belongings, but also moral and invisible ones:

La riqueza del subsuelo, las aguas territoriales, los colores de la bandera, la soberanía nacional, los partidos tradicionales, los derechos del hombre, las libertades ciudadanas, el primer magistrado, la segunda instancia, el tercer debate, las cartas de recomendación, las constancias históricas, las elecciones libres, las reinas de la belleza, los discursos trascendentales, las grandiosas manifestaciones, las distinguidas señoritas, los correctos caballeros, los pundonorosos militares, su señoría ilustrísima, la corte suprema de justicia, los artículos de prohibida importación, las damas liberales, el problema de la carne, la pureza del lenguaje, los ejemplos para el mundo, el orden jurídico, la prensa libre pero responsable, la Atenas sudamericana, la opinión pública, las lecciones democráticas, la moral cristiana, la escasez de divisas, el derecho de asilo, el peligro comunista, la nave del estado, la carestía de la vida, las tradiciones republicanas, las clases desfavorecidas, los mensajes de adhesión.¹³⁵ (143)

These invisible possessions represent the beliefs of common people for whom these abstract concepts differ radically from their concrete daily life. To speak of human rights, free elections, purity of language is meaningless in a rural Colombia where corruption, abuse of power, rigged elections are part of the daily norm. However, these concepts are part of the political rhetoric used to control and undermine the rural masses. By juxtaposing the oral and the written, Gracia

¹³⁵ “The wealth of the subsoil, the territorial waters, the colors of the flag, national sovereignty, the traditional parties, the rights of man, civil rights, the nation’s leadership, the right of appeal, Congressional hearings, letters of recommendations, historical records, free elections, beauty queens, transcendental speeches, huge demonstrations, distinguished young ladies, proper gentlemen, punctilious military men, His Illustrious Eminence, the Supreme Court, goods whose importation was forbidden, liberal ladies, the meat problem, the purity of the language, setting a good example, the free but responsible press, the Athens of South America, public opinion, the lessons of democracy, Christian morality, the shortage of foreign exchange, the right of asylum, the Communist menace, the ship of state, the high cost of living, republican traditions, the underprivileged classes, statements of political support.” (206)

Márquez also implies that “the official writing [corresponds to] official myths and lies that become guiding truths by virtue of their cunning rhetoric,” (Foster 104) reflecting the political manipulation of the rural uneducated population.

Written after Gracia Márquez witnessed the downfall of both Pérez Jiménez in Venezuela and Fulgencio Batista in Cuba and Rojas Pinilla in Colombia, this concluding story also parallels his vision of the celebrations in Cuba: “Por todas partes se veían banderas rojas, guerrilleros barbudos con rifles al hombro se mezclaban con campesinos de Mirada soñadora y sombrero de paja, y se respiraba una euforia inolvidable [...] que recuerda como un caos absoluto”¹³⁶ (Martin 286). The death of Mamá Grande marks the end of her domination in this fictional town, a despotism that is felt throughout the sequence, and suggests that “a new era is on the horizon for Macondo, and by extension, for Latin America” (Cida Chase 78). Indeed, in the concluding paragraph, the narrator declares that “algunos de los allí presentes dispusieron de la suficiente clarividencia para comprender que estaban asistiendo al nacimiento de una nueva época”¹³⁷ (154; 155). The sequence comes to an end by seemingly offering the notion of hope, an end which José Luis Méndez interprets as “un canto de esperanza ante lo que el autor espera que sean los funerales de toda una época”¹³⁸ (102). However, such a conclusion denotes a lack of insight, and a failure to comprehend the cyclical aspect of *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*. Indeed, throughout the cycle, Gracia Márquez repeatedly makes use of references to Colombian history and parallels two eras during which the Conservatives dominated the political scene and oppressed the majority of the population, stressing Colombia’s cyclical history.

¹³⁶ Everywhere there could be seen red flags, bearded guerrilleros with rifles on their shoulders who were mixed with peasants of dreamer Miranda and straw hat, and there as an unforgettable euphoria in the air [...] that reminds of an absolute chaos.

¹³⁷ “Some of those present were sufficiently aware as to understand that they were witnessing the birth of a new era.” (214)

¹³⁸ A chant of hope before what the authors hopes to be the funerals of an entire era.

From its independence, Conservative and Liberal governments have alternated, never truly initiating deep, meaningful, long lasting policies needed to change the nature of Colombian politics. When Gracia Márquez returned to his native country in 1959, he did not perceive the same drastic political metamorphosis he had experienced in Venezuela and Cuba, and was discouraged to see nothing had changed. Gerald Martin in *Gabriel García Márquez: una vida* mentions that the title story represents “la frustración acumulada del escritor, y el desprecio y la rabia hacia un país que consumía sin cesar a sus propios hijos y que parecía que nunca jamás fuera a cambiar”¹³⁹ (294). The end of the story depicts the elite bickering over Mamá Grande’s coffin, which goes unnoticed by the rest of the population: “Obnubilados por el espectáculo del poder, el populacho no determinó el ávido aleteo que ocurrió en el caballete de la casa cuando se impuso el acuerdo en la disputa de los ilustres, y se sacó el catafalco a la calle en hombros de los más ilustres”¹⁴⁰ (154). Mamá Grande’s death, like the death of her predecessors and Montiel in “La viuda de Montiel,” which takes place later in the historical timeline, does not indicate an end in and of itself, but rather denotes that the cycle will continue. The final story in the sequence, “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande” forces a retrospective assessment of the sequence and illustrates the stagnancy of political life in Colombia.

4.5. Conclusion

Just as in V.S. Naipaul’s *Miguel Street*, these postcolonial societies continue to exhibit the absence of a true national identity. This quest for communal identity is also present in Gaines’s *Bloodline* as the collective black male protagonist searches for the meaning of manhood in a segregated southern rural locale on the verge of the Civil Rights movement. The gradual

¹³⁹ The accumulated frustration of the author, and the disdain and the rage towards a country that was incessantly consuming his own children and that seemed that was never going to change.

¹⁴⁰ “Dazzled by the show of power, the common people did not discern the covetous bustling which occurred on the rooftop of the house when agreement was imposed on the town grandees’ wrangling and the catafalque was taken into the street on the shoulders of the grandest of them all.” (214)

unfolding of the sequence of stories, at first glance, is not as clear and straightforward as that of V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street*, or Gaines's *Bloodline*, but Gracía Márquez purposefully arranged the stories to emphasize the roots of paralysis in rural Colombia. The sequence progressively presents, explores and exposes key sociocultural problems that stifle the growth and progression of a nation still in search of its own identity. The elite at the reins of power continue to rely on judicial and legislative texts inherited from the Spanish colonizers, using an outdated rhetoric even they do not understand, while the majority of the population, unable to relate to a meaningless political discourse, cannot move forward. In the first two stories, Gracía Márquez merely outlines, sketches the two major problems he sees as dominant in rural Colombia and presents the four major social classes that divide Colombia's rural communities. In "La siesta del martes," the poor and the clergy take center stage showing the great divide between a poor woman accustomed to poverty and the prosperous priest. These two characters have different views on morality, one based on religion and the other based on sheer daily necessities. In a reversal of their moral and social standing, the woman exits the parish house with dignity having morally challenged the priest's notion of right and wrong, leaving him mystified by her behavior as he declares "la voluntad de Dios es inscrutable"¹⁴¹ (15). In "Un día de estos," Márquez leaves aside the social dichotomy to focus on the political conflict which is the source of the violence that plagues rural communities in Colombia. The dentist and the mayor represent the two political parties that have dominated the country's political scenery. Both stories introduce three issues that will be present throughout the cycle. Violence is omnipresent in both stories, just as the heat which represents the oppressive atmosphere of Colombia's sociopolitical life, and a lifeless, stagnant environment devoid of any meaningful progress.

¹⁴¹ "God's will is inscrutable." (112)

In the core cluster, these elements are developed and reinforced, eventually culminating in “Un día después del sábado” where the plague of dead birds, symbolic of the pervasive violence, the brutal heat and static town overwhelm the three focus characters. However, these more convoluted narratives introduce the underlying yet quintessential source of this community’s paralysis: the delusional. Gracia Márquez develops this concept in all four stories showing that the focus characters ignore the root of their problems because they live in a personal imagined world. Dámaso, Baltazar, Montiel’s widow and Father Antonio are unable to understand or perceive reality and therefore are never truly capable of analyzing and resolving the problems they face. In this core cluster, Gracia Márquez reveals and reinforces the notion of a fragmented community as the focus characters live in separate personal social realities unable to relate to or comprehend the other. The only element of hope comes from the community in “Un día después del sábado” which is able to grasp father Antonio’s madness; although it is only too obvious.

The final two stories close the sequence and introduce the means to overcome the colonial rhetoric that stifles Colombia’s rural communities. The penultimate story, “Rosas artificiales,” is devoid of the violence, the heat and static atmosphere that prevail in the previous stories. Yet, Mina continues to develop the concept of delusion. However, unlike the previous focus characters, she projects a false personality by lying to her mother and friend. Mina displays the origins and necessities of fabricating an image of oneself to others, and does so in order to fit into the predetermined socioreligious expectations others have of her. Her grandmother, though, has the capacity to peer beyond the projected and truly understand the roots of her granddaughter’s distress. In this story, Gracia Márquez introduces the necessary clairvoyance to understand the underlying agendas behind the clerical, political and oligarchy’s purposefully

confusing rhetoric. The grandmother is the only person able to confront Mina, to challenge and teach her how to logically decipher a codified discourse based on verifiable facts. This concept is the key to understand the concluding story, “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande,” which includes all the elements presented and developed throughout the sequence to form an overreaching representation of the Colombian rural community. Far from symbolizing a final rupture with the past, a meaningful change, Mamá Grande’s death and funeral reaffirm and reinforce the notion that the roots of Colombia’s predicaments are still present and will continue to influence the social hierarchy and political dichotomy. Yet, a glimmer of hope offers the means to mature, to move beyond this static sociopolitical environment. The population needs to start analyzing, interpreting and understanding the colonial rhetoric that maintains the oligarchy in place and break away from the personal and communal delusions that hinder their perception of reality.

While the sequence gradually develops the notion of paralysis, the last story pulls the reader back to the first story and compels a reassessment of the whole. Mamá Grande’s death and funeral both take place on a Tuesday, the same day as in “La siesta del martes.” Comprised of eight stories, the timeline is dysfunctional, going from the past back to the present seemingly at random, emphasizing the repetition of failure. Vargas Llosa believes that this represents the general population’s inability to learn its own history, the history of the nation and overcome its past mistakes: “La ideología dominante en este mundo estático y jerárquico es [...] feudal: nadie cuestiona lo establecido porque, simplemente, no existe la noción de cambio, de movimiento histórico”¹⁴² (418). Robin Fiddian, only exploring the title story declares it “deserves to be recognized as occupying a prominent place within the cultural and discursive space surrounding the historical process of decolonization” (220). However, it is not only the title story that stresses

¹⁴² The dominant ideology in this static and hierarchical world is [...] feudal: nobody questions the established simply because the notion of change, of historical movement, does not exist.

the postcolonial discourse; the cycle as a whole functions to establish the influence of the colonial powers that continues to oppress rural communities, and by extension the entire nation.

Table 4.1: Table of Stories / *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*

Story	Focus character(s)	Social class	Place / Time	Main themes
# 1 “La siesta del martes”	A mother and her daughter (nameless) Priest	Poor	Macondo 1910s-1920s	Dignity Violence Religion/morality
# 2 “Un día de estos”	Aurelio Escovar: Dentist without a degree Mayor	Mid-class bordering on poverty	El pueblo 1910s-1920s	Politics Violence Corruption
# 3 “En este pueblo no hay ladrones”	Dámaso Ana (secondary)	Poor	El pueblo 1940s-1950s	Violence Gossip Dream Morality Corruption
# 4 “La prodigiosa tadre de Baltazar”	Baltazar (carpenter)	Mid-class	El pueblo 1940s-1950s	Dream Class struggle
# 5 “La viuda de Montiel”	Chepe Montiel’s widow Chepe Montiel	Elite	El pueblo 1940s-1950s	Politics Corruption Class struggle Loss of power Delusion
# 6 “Un día después del sábado”	Rebecca (widow) Father Antony Isabel Outsider (Young)	Elite Clergy Poor – Middle class	Macondo 1920s	Religion Politics Dementia
# 7 “Rosas artificiales”	Mina & her Grandmother	Middle class	El pueblo N/A	Deception Clairvoyance Understanding
# 8 “Los funerales de la Mamá Grande”	Mamá Grande	Elite Entire population	Macondo 1920s	All of the above

5. Concluding Statements

The short story cycles examined in this study grapple with communities or nations which have been subjugated either by colonial powers, in V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street* and Márquez's *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*, or by a white judiciary system (the Jim Crow laws), in Gaines's *Bloodline*, to much the same effect. The focus characters in these cycles have been oppressed, stripped of their personal and communal identities and forced to endure an imposed rhetoric by an elite to which they cannot relate. These characters are, for the most part, poor or lower middle class individuals who confront a bleak daily reality in which there are essentially no opportunities for socioeconomic improvement. Whether it is in Trinidad, Colombia or the American South, they live in, or rather under, a state or regional fabricated concept of national identity that differs vastly from their own experience and environment. Even though they are afforded, by constitutional law, certain rights and limited freedom, by the very essence of their condition, they are unable to truly assert themselves, to fulfill their dreams and desires.

To speak of a national identity, though, is to refer to an already flawed concept which, in and of itself, is a governmental abstraction especially in these places where the colonial rule still influences every aspect of life, and where the political, religious, and hierarchical foundations have been prefabricated by the colonial state. In *Miguel Street*, the destitute street community is undergoing the long process of a transition of power from the British colonizers to the people of Trinidad which took from 1921 to 1956 to attain self-governance and another six years to achieve independence, yet, all the while, the mainly white upper class elite maintains control over the governmental institutions. (Eric Williams 244) In *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*, Colombia has been independent since 1819; however, the country is still under the influence of inherited colonial laws and struggle to move forward. Márquez's cycle focuses on two violent

eras in Colombian history, when the Conservative party dominated the political scene, first from 1885 to 1930 and then a period known as La Violencia from 1946 to 1957. The black post-slavery South, in *Bloodline*, although technically free, still suffers under the oppression of the Jim Crow laws created by a white elite unwilling to accept defeat after the Civil War. Focusing on the emergence of the Civil Rights movement in the rural South, Gaines highlights the dichotomy between the school taught concept of national identity versus the regional reality in “The Sky is Gray.”

In all three cycles, the focus characters undergo a transitional period in the history of their nation which is derived from the postcolonial experience. Frantz Fanon in *Les Damnés de la Terre* (1961), insightfully describes such transitions:

History teaches us clearly that the battle against colonialism does not run straight away along the lines of nationalism. For a very long time the native devotes his energies to ending certain definite abuses: forced labor, corporal punishment, inequality of salaries, limitation of political rights, etc. This fight for democracy against the oppression of mankind will slowly leave the confusion of neo-liberal universalism to emerge, sometimes laboriously, as a claim to nationhood. It so happens that the unpreparedness of the educated classes, the lack of practical links between them and the mass of the people, their laziness, and, let it be said, their cowardice at the decisive moment of the struggle will give rise to tragic mishaps. (148)

While the dynamics of such a transition varies according to the focus region, I believe these transitions can all be seen as postcolonial. Naipaul’s *Miguel Street* embodies the typical postcolonial theory that emerged in the 1980s as Peggy Nightingale asserts it is “microcosm of Trinidad society [...] and for Naipaul, Trinidad in turn becomes representative of postcolonial societies everywhere.” (14) While Latin America has been somewhat left out of the early postcolonial discourse, the emergence of works in the late 1990s such as *Teoría sin disciplina. Latinoamericanismo, postcolonialidad y globalización en debate* (1998) and *Debates Post Coloniales. Una introducción a los Estudios de la Subalternidad* (1999) reassessed Latin

American authors from a postcolonial perspective. Robin Fiddian, in “Legend, Fantasy and the Birth of the New in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* by Gabriel Gracia Márquez,” certainly believes “*Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*” deserves such treatment and I show how considering the tales this way, but as a short story cycle, can be productive in my third chapter.

The concept of postcolonialism is slightly different in the American South, given that the former white masters remain fundamentally the same; however, it runs along the same concept called ‘internal colonialism’ which Mario Barrera defines as “a form of colonialism in which the dominant and subordinate population are intermingled, so that there is no geographically distinct ‘metropolis’ separate from the ‘colony’” (194). Indeed, in these three regions, the elite at the reins of power mimics the past colonial control. Instead of creating a new state, they follow the same conceptualization of governmental power over the masses, which, in turn, accept the ‘imagined’ projection of a seemingly new state for the time being.

Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities*, demonstrates that “this blend of popular and official nationalism has been the product of anomalies created by European imperialism”¹⁴³ (114). The population is then caught in a conundrum. They have experienced a symbolic change of status, from colonized to independent or freedom, yet, their overall condition remains the same. In *Miguel Street* and *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*, the dynamics of the sequence emphasize a state of stagnation which is reinforced by its cyclical aspect. In both of these cycles, there is no hope for a brighter future as the nameless narrator of *Miguel Street* is forced to escape Trinidad to avoid inevitable failure and in *Los Funerales de Mamá Grande*, the title story encloses the entire sequence in a recurrent state of paralysis. However, in *Bloodline*, although stagnation is certainly present, it is counterbalanced by the progression of the quest for manhood,

¹⁴³ While Anderson refers to “European imperialism,” this term, however, is too specific since in the American South it is not specifically European but white imperialism which dominated over the black masses.

which emphasizes the dichotomy between the Old South and an emerging New South. While Emmanuel, in “Just Like a Tree,” demonstrates the potential for authentic change, the fate of the community has yet to be determined and when asked about the black man’s future, Gaines acknowledges that in his fiction it is still uncertain: “I don’t know where anything is going” (Ingram 40). Unable to experience the transition they have supposedly experienced, the still oppressed population’s only means to evade a contradictory position comes through mental or behavioral escape.

In these three cycles, the focus characters, in different ways, elude their daily reality, work, family or communal duties and obligations. V.S. Naipaul’s characters, Bogart, Big Foot or Hat, to name only a few, project false personas and live accordingly. They embrace an ‘imagined’ reality in which they experience a new, yet ultimately artificial social position, as they are repeatedly confronted by failure, or are drawn back to the actual bleakness of underachievement, poverty and a status of inferiority. The same can be said about Dámaso and Baltazar in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*, as both of these characters live in personal delusions because there are no opportunities for them, even for the skilled middle class craftsman who made “la jaula más bella del mundo”¹⁴⁴ (Márquez LFMG 65). For both of them, despite their achievements, since nothing has changed. In Gaines’s *Bloodline*, Eddie, Sonny’s father in “A Long Day in November,” Proctor, at the beginning of “Three Men,” and Copper, in “Bloodline” reflect similar patterns. Indeed, Eddie and Proctor live according to their own desires. Eddie neglects his wife and son to drive his car around, in order to avoid the marital and parental problems he is confronted with at home. Proctor, engaging in repeated empty romances and violence, also attempts to escape the harshness of an unfulfilled life, emulating a stereotypical fabricated image of the black male by the white society before realizing the

¹⁴⁴ “the most beautiful cage in the world” (148)

repetitive void of his past behavior. Copper, on the other hand, reflects the rhetoric of another elite: the black northern intellectuals and their flawed conception of the southern rural Negro. He is obviously on the verge of madness, as he attempts to advance a social agenda he believes is for the greater good of these ‘uneducated peasants,’ but which is inconsistent with the communal reality he encounters on Walter Laurent’s plantation. The population’s repetitive tendencies to avoid concrete reality reinforce the elite’s own perception of the masses, as they continue to mirror a “knowledge affiliated with domination: vocabulary of classic nineteenth century imperial culture [...] with words and concepts like ‘inferior’ or ‘subject races,’ subordinate people,’ ‘dependency,’ [...] and ‘authority’” (Said 9). This representation of the individual male in these cycles is to a certain extent representative of the process of emasculation that stems from slavery or colonial domination. Indeed, these underprivileged men have been deprived of the typical role of provider for their family.

It is interesting to note that in all three cycles, lower class women are the ones who take care of their families, who work and endeavor to provide opportunities for their children. In *Miguel Street*, Laura (“The Maternal instinct”), Mrs Bhakcu (“The Mechanical Genius”) and the narrator’s mother all have an accurate vision of their environment and strive to push their children or husband to study or work in order to attain a better life. In Márquez’s *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*, Ana, in “En este pueblo no hay ladrones,” Ursula, in “La prodigiosa tadre de Baltazar,” and the grandmother, in “Rosas artificiales,” have a concrete understanding and perception of their surroundings and they try to convey their insight to their husband/partner or, in the later story, to her granddaughter. Gaines’s women have similar roles, as Amy, Sonny’s mother in “A Long Day in November,” is the driving force behind her husband and child, forcing both of them to take responsibility for themselves, pushing her child-like husband to be a man, to

take charge of his duties as a husband and as a father. In “The Sky is Gray,” James’s mother also pushes her son to endure their social condition with dignity and teaches him how to be responsible. Aunt Fe, in “Just Like a Tree” passes on her knowledge of communal history to Emmanuel while encouraging him to repress his anger, thus leading him to the path of peaceful resistance. In these cycles, V.S. Naipaul, Márquez and Gaines present parallel portraits of communities struggling through issues of class, economic oppression and issues of gender and racial identity.

The form and structure of the cycle allow an overreaching view of its focus communities. Each story portrays one or more individuals allowing a specific insight into the focus character or a precise societal problem. This results in a fragmented representation of a given community. These communities function as a whole; yet, the individuals that compose them do not necessarily sense they are part of this whole. In *Miguel Street*, the focus characters feel alienated from the community as a result of their repeated failures. In the last story, “How I Left Miguel Street,” the narrator realizes he was never truly a part of the street community when he briefly comes back from the airport and sees that life has gone on, unaffected by his departure. The same is true for the majority of the focus characters in this cycle. The Miguel Street Club only provides a temporary haven for the men; yet, they come and go without genuinely being an intricate part of the group. The fragmentation differs in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*. Here, the focus characters are never able to relate to one another. Even Dámaso and Ana’s relationship is flawed as they live in different realities, conceptions of their environment. Indeed, Ana cannot persuade Dámaso to follow her advice. In *Bloodline*, however, the community itself is crumbling, as adult men and some women leave the oppressive environment of this southern rural locale, while for the most part, only the old and children remain behind. In each of these

cycles, there is a discernible fragmentation of the community, even though it is portrayed differently in each of them. The purpose of the cycle, nevertheless, is not merely to emphasize a disconnection within the focus community. The stories or cluster of stories also show a movement, a progression through the sequential arrangement of the whole.

The stories in a short story cycle are necessarily sequential, that is to say they must be read in the order in which the author arranged them. The progression from one story to the next develops and reveals the significant thematic elements of the aggregate. This gradual movement allows the reader to perceive the dynamics of the cycle. In *Miguel Street*, the order of the stories emphasizes how the narrator's vision of Miguel Street and its colorful characters changes as he grows older. As he becomes more mature, he perceives the failures of his past mentors and eventually realizes that Miguel Street is a dead end. The cycle is composed of sixteen stories which represent the cycle of failure, while the seventeenth and final story illustrates the narrator's flight towards enlightenment. The progression in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* gradually unfolds Márquez's perception of Colombia. The cycle is comprised of three clusters of stories, each leading to the next. In the first two stories, Márquez presents a simple sketch of the characters, their social class and the problems they are confronted to. The next cluster, while retaining the elements of the first two stories, develops the concept of the delusional in all his focus characters. Finally, the last cluster introduces the means to overcome the delusions of the previous characters while embracing the whole in the form of a carnivalesque funeral. In Gaines's *Bloodline*, the sequence stresses the rise of the Civil Rights movement as well as a slowly decaying community. The sequence concurrently highlights the development of the African American quest for manhood. In all these cycles, the last story compels a retrospective

interpretation of the whole. Short story cycles thus stress a double movement, as they gradually unfold, and as they ultimately lead back to an assessment of the whole.

The three cycles presented in this study reveal a shared postcolonial emphasis. The form of the short story cycle allows the author to stress the fragmented nature of a community undergoing a drastic change. The cycle, indeed, reveals the dynamic duality of societal progress, evolution, the new versus the old, the will for society to remain the same. This study is representative, not exhaustive. James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* (1938) and *Go Down, Moses* (1942) and Albert Camus's *L'Exile et le Royaume* (1957) all take place during transitional periods in their respective regions. More recently, though, the cycle has also been a means to renegotiate transplanted communities. Transnational writers such as Julia Alvarez, Sandra Cisneros or Edwidge Danticat have written short story cycles. Analyzing Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent* (1991), Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* and Danticat's *Krik! Krak!* or *The Dew Breaker* through the lens of the short story cycle's dual dynamics presented in this study will allow a better understanding of their sociopolitical significance.

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Vita

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