Miguel Street Part Two

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Setting

Since Miguel Street is a semi-autobiographical, it relates much of what the author went thru. In the novel it’s expressed that is in wartime in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. The story plot involves man vs. society. All the social problems in this novel make the setting as a barbaric one, but it’s the same society that visualizes “these problems” as something normal to their everyday living.

Social Aspects

• Masculinity: There was a constant need to prove this, in any way possible in many aspects: women, work, money, etc.
• Disregards towards women: as a way to prove masculinity, men had no respect whatsoever with the woman.
• Gender Identity: throughout the novel this works out with socialization and how both genders clash with each other, as masculinity needs to prove itself over feminism.
• Visualization of social problems by the narrator: it’s quite interesting when the narrator that grew up with all these problems, and how he can distinguish them as he grows up. Being a witness of this since childhood it what makes this a cycle of path, making these problems “seem okay”.

Plot Summary

Note: Consider every chapter as its own short story narrated from the point of view of the speaker.

Chapter 9:

Titus Hoyt was a natural guide, a philosopher, and an active member of the local board. First man the main character knew in Port of Spain. The narrator met him one day when he got lost, coming back from the market to get to Miguel Street. This man helped him get home, and he said “Cheerio” after he left. He believed the main character was smart, and he told him to write a letter to the guardian, that was never posted. Titus loved teaching, and as soon as he learned something, he liked teaching it to kids. He founded the Miguel Street Literary and Social Youth Club, and many kids entered, but because of Boyee they began to lose interest. In a last attempt to remain the group leader Mr. Hoyt decided to take the children to Fort George, which at first kids declined… but ultimately accepted. When they got there Titus explained to them the history of how France wanted to invade Trinidad, and how they were ready for war. (He also had very wicked ideas in how to win in a war, by pretending to drown while the
others actually drowned) When they got to the top of the hill, it was a disappointment for the kids. The clear water they were promised wasn’t there. Boyee and Mr. Hoyt had a very big argument, which in the end made the group fall apart. In the end Titus Hoyt had his degree in Inter Arts and made a school of his own. He then received a very touching letter of one of his pupils donating for the Needy cases.

Chapter 10:
This story was about Laura, the narrator’s neighbor. She gave him a biology lesson. She had 8 kids, from 7 different fathers. She was very vivacious, happy and perky. One day she met Nathaniel, who was believed to be a bad boy at first. They had two kids together. Laura pretty much beat him up, abused him and made him cry, but he wouldn’t leave. Not until she called the sergeant. Then her older daughter began to work, and had typing lessons. One day her daughter gets home pregnant. She was never the same person again. She started to cry, because she didn’t want her kids to have her same misery, even though she loved to have kids and beat them up for their education. It also shows in this chapter that even though there was poverty, they always found a way to have food on the table.

Chapter 11:
The story is about Eddoes. He is a man that basically cleans the city in the morning. He also wrote poetry. He would usually bring things to people from the rich houses he worked at elsewhere. People got shoes, paintings, books; anything that people might’ve needed. Eddoes would sell them for cheaper prices and he was the first person the community of Miguel Street look for to get supplies. He was also a very clean man, he won the award every year for the cleanest scavenging cart, and he would always have his tooth brush on his mouth. One day he appeared a bit down in the dumps, and the boys found out that he apparently got a girl pregnant, and if he didn’t take care of the baby she could make Eddoes’ employers change his area. He finally took care of his child that ended up being a girl that Hat named “Pleasure”.

Chapter 12:
Miss Hilton died, and no one really knew much about her. She was the usual old lady who basically hated kids. And then, a new family moved in. It was a very beautiful woman, with a very ugly man. He
used to beat her up in regular basis, like it was exercise for him. We then learn that her name is Mrs Hereira or Mrs. Christiani. She left her husband, for Tony the woman beater. One day, she couldn’t take the beating anymore, and she decided to leave him. She went back to her old husband. Then Tony, as drunk as ever wondered around the streets looking for her. Even his dog turned on him. He eventually got tired of following her. She was back to normal with her old husband.

Chapter 13:
Uncle Bhacku was a mechanic. No one really remembers when they haven’t seen him dealing with a car. One day one of the engines he was dealing with fell on top of him. His wife managed to get help in time. As a result, they also started having economic problems. They buy a taxi but it’s not really a big help either. In a fit of rage, They buy a car at first that leaves them waste high in debt. In an attempt to generate money, he started beating his wife while reading: Ramanaya. In the end they found an advantage in his reading, and he subsequently found a job as a pundit.

Chapter 14:
Bolo was a barber who never believed what he read in the papers. He was known for cutting everybody’s hair. He also taught a boy named Samuel how to cut hair. One day Bolo wants to leave. He buys a ticket to Venezuela, but he is fooled by the buyer who only sends him 3 miles away from where he lived. He makes Eddoes give away his cart so he can cut hair again. As a last resort he starts to buy sweepstakes. He never really won, until one day he is called upon by the narrator to tell him he did, which he does not believe because the answer was read in the papers. When he goes to look for it, he actually won, but Bolo refused to believe him and he destroyed the ticket. He then completely stopped cutting and stayed in his house for a very long time. He would only go out once a month.

Chapter 15:
Edward was a painter. He gave many people his pieces, such as a tie or a painting itself. That’s what he did for a living at first. Then the Americans invaded Trinidad, and he began acting like one. He started getting fit, speaking like an American etc. He then got married to this American girl who supposedly couldn’t have a child. She was suicidal, but Edward really did love her and he didn’t care about the fact
that she couldn’t have children. People from Miguel Street made fun of him, until one day they learn that his wife left him for an American soldier. He then left Miguel Street and left for Curacao or some place near. Rumor has it that she had a baby from the soldier.

Chapter 16:
Hat was a very happy man. He would usually make a lot of stories and make people believe the impossible. He was very good at it. He used to be very good friends with the sergeant until one day another cop said something he did with milk and water and Hat had to pay a fine. Time passed and he started to go out a lot, and once he brought home a woman. Her name was Dolly, she didn’t speak much, but because of her, Hat’s dog was chained and the other birds he collected were put in cages. His woman left him for another man and he killed her. His woman became like his brother’s ex woman too. He went to jail for some time. Miguel Street changed after that. Specially the narrator… who started smoking, left school and thought Eddoes was super small and Titus was boring… quoting: “When Hat went to jail, a part of me had died.”

Chapter 17:
The narrator had to leave, because he was, for lack of a better phrase, out of control. He started drinking heavily and going to clubs with lots of women. His mother decided to go to Ganesh Pundit, an old friend of the narrator’s father. He gave him a scholarship to study abroad. He picked to study “drugs” (read as: Pharmacy). The community gives him a goodbye party and his family and friends gave him things like a wallet, a book, and other stuff such as that. He was late for the airport the day after because his uncle took a lot repairing the car. When he arrived, he hated the airport and went back because the flight was delayed. He had one last dinner with his family, and he went back to the airport and left.

Coming of Age aspects

Chapter 10: Laura was the woman who had 8 children from 10 different men. She kept having babies, and after a while, she didn’t really care about it. It was just another day for her. This perspective changed when her eldest daughter Lorna said she was going to have a baby. She cried until she couldn’t cry anymore, and all the screaming everyone used to hear coming from her house ended. The house,
according to the author, “was dead, a silent house”. This can be considered a coming of age, since after her daughter became pregnant; she actually cared about it and learned from it. She never had another baby again.

Chapter 12: Mrs. Hereira was always abused by Toni. She used to run away, calling for help and the narrator’s mother always invited the woman to her home. She was convinced that Toni loved him and she kept suffering because she didn’t leave him. In the end she was smart enough to leave Toni before he killed her, and returned home to her husband.

Chapter 17: When Hat went to jail, we can say that the narrator had his first phase of the coming of age, irresponsibly but still coming of age. The innocent guy we were reading about in the whole book was now smoking, drinking, going to clubs and even interacting with prostitutes. But after one bad party where he got drunk way over his limit, he decided to quit. He finally decided to change, and thanks to his mom, he got a scholarship to study drugs. He went and told Hat and all his friends, and they all gave him farewell gifts. He was disappointed since he had to come back, because the flight was delayed and noticed that everything is the same and that it didn’t matter that he left. But he had one last dinner with his mom, uncle and her wife and he left afterwards. He arrived at the airport and boarded the airplane without looking back. The biggest phase of the coming of age, he’s independent and he’s going to study for his future now.

Miguel Street Vs. Previous texts

“Miguel Street” is rather hard to compare to the other texts because the way of displaying content is different. However, we can still draw strong bits of information just from the context of the novel. For example; if we look at “Wuthering Heights”, everything is very direct and dramatic. “Miguel Street” manages to achieve this with several of its short stories, such as Bolo’s trust issues in chapter 14 but when it comes to the speaker’s coming of age, it falls short. “Jane Eyre” had a similar approach to things but approached the subject of coming of age in a more subtle manner. If we had to directly correlate one of these two texts to “Miguel Street”, we could definitely say that Jane Eyre has more similarities with “Miguel Street” in the way that the main character (in this case the speaker) achieved his “coming of age”. It wasn’t until the speaker in the novel realizes that he let his life fall into a negative influence that he actually changed. The absence of Hat is what caused him to start doing bad things. Hat was a character that the speaker really looked up to. As Hat murdered his wife and getting taken to jail was like a wake up call to the speaker… and not a very positive one in that aspect.

Jane Eyre had her coming of age when she forcibly removed Rochester from her life. We can draw a similarity in this fact by observing that the large shift in character was presented by the absence of somebody in their lives. The circumstance and value of that person was slightly different in both books, but the changes were still brought on by something similar. A lot of the story brings forth a very “naive” outlook on what’s happening, but that’s due to the narrator’s own views on what’s right and what’s wrong.