

Madonnas, Whores, and Wives:

Gender construction in *Cien Años de Soledad* and *La plaza del diamant*

by

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Abstract

This paper discusses the gender dynamics in *Cien Años de Soledad* by Gabriel García Márquez and *La plaça del Diamant* by Mercè Rodoreda. While *Cien Años de Soledad* is beloved by critics and read all over the world, not much work has been done in regards to gender in the novel. I use Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance to analyze gender roles in the novel as well as to explore the novel's central problematic: the seemingly inevitable demise of Macondo, the fictional society portrayed within it. In *La plaça del Diamant*, gender roles are also portrayed as problematic, but the protagonist, Natàlia, eventually breaks free from her gender confinement unlike the characters in *Cien Años de Soledad*. I examine the stream of consciousness style of the novel to illuminate how Natàlia eventually asserts her independence, utilizing Hélène Cixous's essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" as a tool to explore the connection between literary style and gender.

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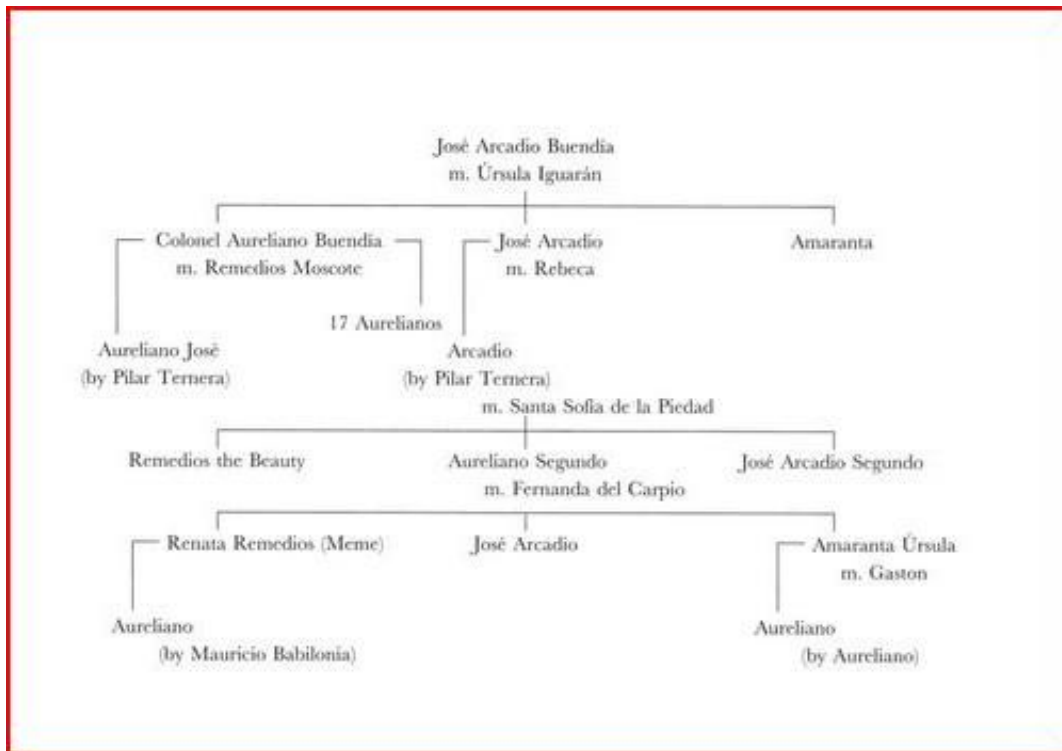


Figure one: Buendía family tree, page eight

Chapter One: The Dynamics of Gender Relations and Their Impact on Macondo in
Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien Años de Soledad*

“Things have a life of their own’, the gypsy proclaimed with a harsh accent. ‘It’s simply
a matter of waking up their souls” (Garcia Marquez 1-2)

1. Introduction

Originally published in 1967, *Cien Años de Soledad* (One Hundred Years of Solitude) has been hailed by the *New York Times Book Review* as “the first piece of literature since the Book of Genesis that should be required reading for the entire human race” (García Márquez book jacket). It is often seen as the signature piece of the so-called “boom” period of Latin American literature, in which the world’s eyes were opened to a heretofore underappreciated literary world, and according to writer Mario Vargas Llosa created “a literary earthquake” (quoted in Swanson 57). The novel has taken its place in high school and university Spanish and world literature courses around the world, and cemented its status in the canon of great Spanish-language literature.

The narrative structure of *Cien Años de Soledad* allows for the world within it to portray a rural Colombian village, but at the same time contain elements of magic or the supernatural. Much literary criticism of the novel has focused on its non-linear conception of time, and how it seems that time works in a circular fashion within the constraint of the novel, including multiple characters with the same name. These characters with the same name also contain similar personalities and character traits,

leading both characters in the novel and the reader to believe that time seems to be repeating itself.

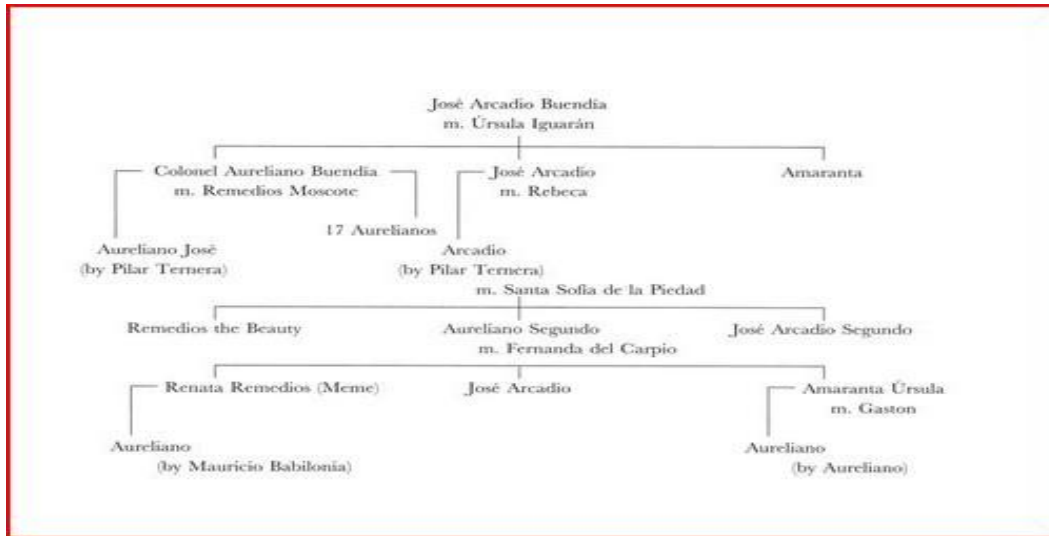
Many arguments can be made for various interpretations of *Cien Años de Soledad*, from it being a representation of the one hundred years of Colombian history prior to Gabriel García Márquez's birth, to its criticism of dictatorships. Modern critics have analyzed *Cien Años de Soledad* in terms of imperialism and issues of post-colonialism. These dynamics certainly contribute to the destruction of Macondan society at the end of the novel. However, they may best be understood by viewing them from the perspective of gender. Despite a plethora of scholarship and interpretation surrounding *Cien Años de Soledad*, not much work has been done regarding gender construction and relations in the novel¹.

Like millions of women worldwide, the women in *Cien Años de Soledad*, though fictional, are disregarded in favor of the text's concern with the men in power. However, with a deeper look at the construction of gender in the novel, the men do not have as much power as first appears. At first glance, the characters and their perceived gender roles in *Cien Años de Soledad* seem to lend themselves to the interpretation that the men represent the stereotypical *machista* culture of Latin America, while the women are passive and submissive to the whims of their male dominators. However, at a closer

¹ For example, the chapters on *Cien Años de Soledad* in *The Cambridge Companion to Gabriel García Márquez* barely mention the female characters. A large amount of criticism of *Cien Años de Soledad* focuses on the idiosyncratic way time works in the novel, including the repetition of male characters' names and characteristics. For example, "Historical Time, Narrative Time, and the Ambiguities of Nostalgia in *Cien Años de Soledad*". See also the chapter on Gabriel García Márquez by Ariel Dorfman in *Some Write to the Future*.

glance and on a deeper level of gender construction, the truth is that the men are just as trapped by normative gender roles as the women.

The novel focuses on the Buendía family and the village society of Macondo founded by the Buendía family patriarch, José Arcadio Buendía. Over roughly one hundred years, the village flourishes and declines, eventually destroyed after the two final members of the family, not knowing their relationship to one another, commit incest and are destroyed in an apocalyptic whirlwind. One of the novel's central themes is that of the solitude surrounding the Buendía family as stewards of this society. This theme can be recast as a conflict between allowing their society to be open to the outside world, and thus forgetting their past, and closing themselves off from the outside world, and thus not being open to the future, leading the society to be utterly annihilated. This central problematic of the novel is in part driven by the rigidity of normative gender roles with which characters, male and female, struggle; with some characters embodying openness and others closure. I will approach this problematic by explaining the performance of gender roles in the novel in order to illuminate the impact they have on the fortunes of the Buendía family and their civilization.



2. Rape, the Foundation of Macondo, and the Importance of Gender

The pattern of patriarchal dominance throughout *Cien Años de Soledad* is set by the way the marriage of José Arcadio Buendía and Úrsula Iguarán begins, in a horrific rape scene early in the novel that both expresses and permanently traps both José Arcadio and Úrsula in the confines of gender normativity. The relationship of José Arcadio and Úrsula has its violent beginning a year and a half after their marriage. Úrsula maintains her virginity with a kind of chastity belt, fearing that she and José Arcadio Buendía, who are distant cousins, will produce children with pigs' tails or iguanas, until her husband forces her to have sex with him at spear-point. José Arcadio Buendía had won a cock fight against another villager, Prudencio Aguilar, who had suggested that the winning rooster could do Úrsula a favor, the type of salty language expected of a tough male and emblematic of a cock fight. José Arcadio Buendía proceeds to kill him with his spear for this insult, relying on a violently stereotypically male code of ethics, and then orders Úrsula to remove her chastity belt with the spear

pointed at her when he returns home. José Arcadio Buendía had been emasculated by Prudencio Aguilar, and to prove his masculinity, rapes his wife upon returning home.

This violent first night spent together is clearly not the typical beginning to a marriage, let alone a successful one, and is emblematic of death and destruction, as rape has been used throughout human history as a weapon of war. The bloodshed of Prudencio Aguilar's killing is reminiscent of the bloodshed that had been expected of a virgin's first night of marriage. Traditionally, it was associated with bleeding and blood on the bed sheets signified a successful wedding night. The physical act of bloodshed, symbolic of death and destruction, is necessary in order to produce new life. The bloodshed of the wedding night also goes along with the pain a female virgin is expected to feel when a male enters her for the first time, and the blood released during the menstrual cycle, evincing that the woman is capable of having children. The pain and blood of the hymen breaking are symbolic of the female as the way the pain and blood of a sword or gunshot are of a man fighting for his life on the battlefield, and in this way bloodshed has been gendered both throughout history and in the context of the novel.

It is the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar that allows for Macondo to be founded, as Úrsula and José Arcadio Buendía flee their village to assuage their consciences. In this way, bloodshed, stemming from the violent enactment of rigid gender roles, is the foundation of the doomed society of Macondo, which perishes bloodily, after the last Buendía is born and dies. This scenario of enforced gender normativity and masculine, patriarchal dominance through societal structures exemplifies the trouble with rigid gender normativity, whether in a literary work or in life. The men are just as trapped by

the dichotomy of the way things are gendered in their society as the women, starting with José Arcadio Buendía and Úrsula.

“There are numerous episodes and statements in the book, although not all of them have female protagonists, which reinforce the patriarchal values of the story. The assassination of Prudencio Aguilar by the first José Arcadio Buendía is conducted by a strictly *machista* code of honor, in the strictest tradition of Lope de Vega” (Deveny and Marcos 85). This *machista* code of honor will be elaborated upon later in this chapter. Rape occurs in other works of García Márquez as well, notably committed by Florentino Ariza, the protagonist of *Love in the Time of Cholera*. As a reader, one must wonder what the author thinks when he or she writes something of such brutality. What does this mean for the tone of the rest of the novel? For the characters contained within and their roles? And as a writer, it gives one a host of problems to consider; problems which have been considered by a host of critics since the novel’s publication.

Meredith Harvey notes that “[Úrsula] is treated in most studies as simply the wife of José Arcadio Buendía...or as the mother figure to a long line of the more talked about Arcadios and Aurelianos. Those few texts which have approached her fail to emphasize the significance of her power or to examine its source” (Harvey 136). The male characters in the novel are seen as the dominant forces by most critics, discounting the powerful women and their many contributions to the development of Macondo and the Buendía family. These views echo the traditional gender roles performed by the characters, such as traditional divisions of labor where the male characters work outside the home and are allowed to go out into the world while the female characters maintain the home and the family, exemplifying traditional Western gender conventions of female

domesticity and male dominance. Gender theory has done much in recent years to break down these traditional conventions, particularly in second- and third-wave feminism's critique of gender roles based on sex characteristics.

The idea of repetitive, unconscious gender performance is discussed in great detail by Judith Butler, who contends with the problems of gender, sex, and performance in her book *Gender Trouble*, which will serve as a theoretical framework for this chapter and its discussion of identity and gender performance. According to Robert Dale Parker, "Butler describes identity as constructed by performance rather than a static essence. She rejects what she calls the expressive model, the idea that a given anatomical sex (female or male) necessarily expresses a given gender (feminine or masculine)" (Parker 327).

Butler's idea of repetitive gender performance seems perplexing unless one realizes the socially constructed nature of gender as separate from assigned sex. "That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler, quoted in Parker 332). Butler criticizes enforced gender normativity through patriarchal dominance, also in turn taking aim at the societal structures that allow this enforced normativity to persist.

According to Butler, “the very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes: to be a good mother, to be a heterosexually desirable object, to be a fit worker, in sum, to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands all at once” (Butler, quoted in Parker 335). The demands placed on people and literary characters in a society constructed as patriarchal are obvious. They must fit into their assigned roles based on gender normativity and perform as such. The women in *Cien Años de Soledad* perform a limited set of feminine gender roles and are categorized as either Madonnas or whores; the men are no less constrained by gender normativity, fitting into their assigned roles as soldiers or scholars.

3. Gender Performance in *Cien Años de Soledad*

The novel portrays conformity to gender conventions in the way that José Arcadio Buendía receives all of the credit for founding Macondo, without any thoughts given to Úrsula’s role. The men go out in the world, are involved in politics, and exemplify Latin American *machismo* in the fact that they’re forceful and virile, particularly the Arcadios. In his discussion of modern Canadian Latino youth, Ramon Meza Opazo includes a useful discussion of *machismo*, saying

Despite being a popular term in both academic discussion and broader society, machismo has defied clear definitional description. Loosely, it refers to a standard of behavior exhibited by men in Latino cultures, but the implications of its use among both Hispanic and English speaking circles have generally been exclusively negative. Academically, machismo had often been used in describing the chauvinistic, sexist, and reckless

behaviors of Latino youth in much the same way as notions of hyper-masculinity have been used in describing those of other marginalized groups. Having first appeared in Latin American literature in the mid-twentieth century, the term has been used by Latina feminists and scholars to criticize the patriarchal structure of gendered relations in Hispanic communities and beyond, often being evoked as a descriptor of a particular Latin American brand of patriarchy. (Meza Opazo 24)

The male characters in *Cien Años de Soledad* certainly do seem to exemplify this view of *machismo* and Latin American patriarchy, unable to break free from the conventional gender norms that have been set in place for them. In this manner, the female characters must therefore fulfill the other side of the gender dichotomy that has been provided for them in this patriarchal *machismo* construction. Therefore, in *Cien Años de Soledad*, the women are quieter than the men, work mostly at home, and seemingly do not stand up to their husbands.

Machismo as gender normative paradigm and performance entails two sets of binaries that constrain the characters in the novel, from which they cannot break free and between which, in some cases, they oscillate. For men, their choices are to be either an adventurer, soldier, or fighter, which represent openness or engagement with the outside world, and thus involve forgetting the past; or to be a hermit, scholar, or priest, which represent being closed to the outside world, and thus the future. For the women, they can be either a Madonna, mother, virginal figure, which represent being closed to the outside world and thus change and the future; or a whore, a heathen, sensual, which represents being open to the outside world and thus forgetting the past.

The characters may contain elements of both these options, or seemingly represent one half of the binary. Either way, they remain as trapped as their society within this set of binaries.

Úrsula, the Buendía family matriarch, is one of the dominant and consistent forces throughout not only the novel *Cien Años de Soledad*, but also the Macondan village society and Buendía family constructed within the novel's confines. Úrsula's sage capacity to manage her large and unruly family certainly marks her as one of the stabilizing forces of the novel and of Macondo until her death at over one hundred years of age, fitting her into the feminine role of household manager. After her death, Macondo and the Buendía family begin their long process of decline, for there was no one left who would maintain the traditions and maintenance necessary to sustain society. This capacity for wisdom and stability exemplifies how Úrsula is trapped by the stereotype of the subservient housewife, and how the stability created by Úrsula helps trap the family in its repetitive cycle from which it cannot break free.

In one of the few instances of non-conformance to gender role normativity in *Cien Años de Soledad*, after her son José Arcadio runs away with the gypsies, Úrsula is the one who chases after him, leaving behind her newborn baby Amaranta at home. Her husband, José Arcadio Buendía, diapers the baby, takes her to the village women to be nursed four times a day, and sings her to sleep like a mother would. Life goes on in this way for the Buendías for five months until Úrsula returns home, having discovered the route through the jungle that her husband had so longed for. This almost comic-- as it is presented in the context of the novel-- reversal of roles, with the father at home caring for the baby while the mother tears apart the countryside looking for her

lost son, seems only to underscore how, though Úrsula appears to break free from the role of domestic wife and mother, her agency is limited by the larger societal construction that surrounds her. Her goal in departing the patriarchal home is to reinstate stability and normalcy by returning a child to the home. The domesticity of Macondo and stagnation based on the stable patriarchal structure eventually leads to the downfall of the society at the end of the novel, for the last two Buendías, unaware that they are in fact aunt and nephew, commit incest. Úrsula's constant maintenance of the Buendía family over a hundred years partly causes the same mistakes to be repeated and the structure to remain the same, placing her squarely on the "closed" half of the binary. Her rigid enforcement of tradition within the family echoes the rigid enforcement of gender roles in the society in which she lives, and allows for the stagnation that eventually causes her last remaining descendants' deaths.

Some critics claim that José Arcadio Buendía is not the ideal patriarch, as he chooses to remain in the confines of the laboratory within his home, and is eventually tied up to a tree as he is no longer capable of maintaining his role as patriarch.

The characterization of the impractical dreamer José Arcadio, who gets tied up to a tree forever in the second chapter (and whom critics have ironically spent considerable time analyzing) in contrast to Úrsula's characterization as a strong matriarch demonstrates the misinterpretation of Úrsula's contemporaries and critics. García Márquez reveals a new hegemony that goes beyond an equal distribution of power since Úrsula becomes an all-powerful matriarch who financially supports the family through practical and hard work. (Harvey 143)

As with following the gypsies to find the younger José Arcadio and discovering the route through the jungle, Úrsula does what José Arcadio Buendía cannot, and turns the typical gender conventions of a constrained wife and mother on their head. However, while Úrsula is not as constrained as she seems, by maintaining the Buendía family and enforcing her own control Úrsula bolsters the hegemony that eventually leads to her family's doom. It is my contention that Úrsula is the strongest character in the novel, and the link that holds the Buendía family together, but this is not necessarily a good thing in the larger sense of gender roles and the politics of the novel. All of the members of the Buendía family are constrained, leading to the stagnation of the society which they developed in the midst of patriarchal dominance, which becomes their own downfall. The stability created by Úrsula which vanishes when she is gone destroys the family.

The novel sets up a seemingly binary opposition between Úrsula, the stable family matriarch, and Pilar Ternera, who has children by unknown fathers and no semblance of a stable home life. Pilar is introduced as “a merry, foul-mouthed, provocative woman... she knew how to read the future in cards” (García Márquez 25). Soon thereafter, José Arcadio loses his virginity to her, as does Colonel Aureliano many years later, and children result from both of these unions. “Pilar’s role as mother to Úrsula’s two grandchildren born in Macondo reveals Pilar as a second founding mother of Macondo” (Harvey 136-7). In fact, the further generations of Buendías can all count Pilar as an ancestor just as they can Úrsula, though they may not know their relationship to her. Despite the lack of stability surrounding her, Pilar is still just as wise as Úrsula, and just as much a dominant force in the novel, as continuing generations of Buendías continue to find their way to her. When Meme (Renata Remedios) goes to her

to hear her future, Pilar tells her that she doesn't need cards to read the future of a Buendía (García Márquez 289). She is intricately linked with the Buendía family through blood and fate. Like Úrsula, Pilar lives to be over one hundred and to see many further generations of Buendía grandchildren, and is a forceful presence in the novel.

According to Meredith Harvey, Úrsula and Pilar represent archetypal wise women, and therefore act as universal mothers in Macondo. While their wisdom may give them some relative agency, this does not allow them to escape the gender role restrictive paradigm of society in Macondo. The role of a universal mother or wise woman is no better than any other form of gender normativity, for they are still constrained by these roles. The patriarchy is unstrained by a universal mother, for to have a mother, a father is obviously required. They are both sides of the same gender dichotomy, and do not permit them as much agency as Harvey would suggest. The men are allowed to go out into the wider world, but fall into the trap of being either a soldier or a scholar; the women are confined to the home and cannot escape their destinies as either a Madonna (universal mother) or a whore, and it seems the novel sets up Pilar to be the whore and Úrsula to be the Madonna. Pilar is widely considered in the novel to be a woman of ill repute, as when planning the inauguration of their new home, "Úrsula drew up a strict guest list...except for the family of Pilar Ternera, who by then had had two more children by unknown fathers" (García Márquez 60). In this simple instance, Úrsula is designated the protective Madonna, not wanting to introduce her family to scandal, and Pilar a low-class, uninvited and unwanted whore.

Like Pilar's reading of the cards to tell the future, Úrsula's wisdom contains an element of the perception of time. "I know all of this by heart," Úrsula would shout. 'It's

as if time had turned around and we were back at the beginning” (García Márquez 193). Úrsula and Pilar recognize the Buendía family’s propensity to repeat itself, making the same mistakes as the generation before, expressed and complicated by the fact that so many family members share names and characteristics. Despite Pilar’s perceptions of the future through the cards, time really does seem to repeat itself for the Buendía family, aided by the fact that Úrsula and Pilar are there to maintain some semblance of history and tradition, as well as recognize the futility of fighting against time. It is only a matter of time in the novel before Macondo is destroyed, much like the futile efforts of the seer Cassandra during the Trojan War to warn of the fall of Troy. For all the foresight of Pilar, Úrsula, or Cassandra, they cannot prevent their respective societies’ downfalls.

While Úrsula is on a slow decline, losing her sight but not her wisdom or powers of perception, the Buendía family begins its downfall. “As long as Úrsula had full use of her faculties some of the old customs survived and the life of the family kept some quality of her impulsiveness, but when she lost her sight and the weight of her years relegated her to a corner, the circle of rigidity begun by Fernanda from the moment she arrived finally closed completely and no one but she determined the destiny of the family” (García Márquez 211). Fernanda del Carpio is the wife of Aureliano Segundo, Úrsula’s great-grandson, brought to Macondo for her marriage and raised by her parents from birth to be a princess. Fernanda fits into the same gender paradigm as Úrsula or Pilar Ternera, even though Fernanda comes from what seems to be a different world from that of Macondo, where Spanish colonialism had taken greater hold than Macondo. Upon arrival in the Buendía household, she immediately begins to

change the daily routine and wreak havoc on the lives of those already established there. Fernanda's discarding of tradition is just as much a problem as Úrsula's stubborn clinging to it. In doing so, the stage is set for future Buendía descendants, such as Amaranta Úrsula, to completely forget their roots and not know from where their family originated, or even how they are all related and interconnected with the other residents of Macondo, leading directly to Macondo's downfall at the hands of the last Aureliano and Amaranta Úrsula, who commit incest.

In a similar way to the binary created by the Madonna and whore roles of Úrsula and Pilar Ternera, the rivalry in the next generation between Amaranta and Rebeca for the affection of Pietro Crespi also creates an intriguing binary between two women and exemplifies the inability to escape the confines of gender normativity. "When she discovered Rebeca's passion, which was impossible to keep secret because of her shouts, Amaranta suffered an attack of fever. She also suffered from the barb of a lonely love" (García Márquez 68). In order to mediate the passions between the two adopted sisters, José Arcadio Buendía decides that Rebeca will marry Pietro Crespi, as he desired, and that Úrsula would take Amaranta on a vacation to distract and console her. However, "Amaranta pretended to accept the decision and little by little she recovered from her fevers, but she promised herself that Rebeca would marry only over her dead body" (García Márquez 69). Despite her impending wedding and seeming happiness, Rebeca is frightened by her sister's threats, and goes to see Pilar Ternera for relief, solidifying Pilar's position throughout the rest of the novel as intricately linked with the future of the Buendía family. Their deadly rivalry ends with neither married to the object of their affection, even though he proposed to both of them. Amaranta's

virulence against Rebeca seemingly kills Remedios, Colonel Aureliano's pregnant wife, as Amaranta begs God to do something so that she would not have to poison Rebeca. Remedios's death throws the family into disarray and indefinitely postpones the wedding, which never happens due to the return of José Arcadio and his subsequent marriage to Rebeca. Both women end up content with their choices, however, as their hatred for one another dissolves with time.

As Pilar is sometimes the whore to Úrsula's Madonna, Rebeca is painted as sensual, while Amaranta is virginal, representing the dichotomy of the Madonna and the whore; the pure virgin beyond reproach and the unapologetically sensual heathen given over completely to her pleasures. This dichotomy is abetted by Rebeca's mysterious origin and unknown parentage; she arrives in the Buendía home with her parents' bones in a bag. At first, she will not speak Spanish, but the language of the indigenous people. This adds to her construction as earthy, flirtatious, and sensual, Pietro Crespi's first choice of wife and José Arcadio's choice to seemingly settle down with. When Pietro Crespi proposes to Amaranta, she refuses him, saying "Don't be simple, Crespi." She smiled. 'I wouldn't marry you even if I were dead'" (García Márquez 109). Amaranta's rejection results in Pietro Crespi's suicide. Due to her undying love, Amaranta seemingly is culpable for the deaths of two people, and lives her life in solitude, misunderstood by everyone until Úrsula realizes the truth of Amaranta's love near the end of both their lives.

Amaranta...suddenly became clear to her in the final analysis as the most tender woman who had ever existed, and she understood with pitying clarity that the unjust tortures to which she had submitted Pietro Crespi

had not been dictated by a desire for vengeance...but that [it] had been a mortal struggle between a measureless love and an invincible cowardice, and that the irrational fear that Amaranta had always had of her own tormented heart had triumphed in the end. (García Márquez 249)

Amaranta is seemingly the most misunderstood and tragic figure in the novel. She too has premonitions of the future, like her mother and Pilar Ternera, and predicts her own death with stunning accuracy. Her enmity towards Rebeca had died out at that point, and she had woven both herself and her former rival beautiful funeral shrouds, reminiscent of the eternally waiting and weaving Penelope in *The Odyssey*.

Unfortunately for Amaranta, it is her destiny to remain a virgin until death and a foil for her adopted sister Rebeca, who despite her wild nights of passion with José Arcadio, does not conceive a child. Rather, it is through his son by Pilar Ternera that José Arcadio's descendants come and the further generations of the Buendías flourish, including his granddaughter Remedios the Beauty, named for her deceased great-aunt.

Remedios the Beauty is the quasi-tragic figure that seems oddly out of place in the Buendía family, yet it wouldn't be quite the same without her and her ascension into heaven. "Actually, Remedios the Beauty was not a creature of this world" (García Márquez 196). Her disturbing beauty causes the deaths of several of her suitors, and she cannot seem to grasp the basics of the world surrounding her. However, Colonel Aureliano remarks that "Remedios the Beauty was in reality the most lucid being that he had ever known" (García Márquez 235). Her seeming lucidity to Colonel Aureliano, who remarks that she seems like someone who had just returned from war, however, is simpering stupidity to others in the family. Remedios the Beauty knows nothing of the

household chores that she is requested to perform; she does not eat at regular meal times, does not wear undergarments, and cannot conceive of the fact that her own beauty is disturbing the men of Macondo. When Fernanda finally forces her to perform a domestic duty, folding sheets in the garden, Amaranta notices that Remedios looks ill, and she begins to rise up into the heavens, drawing obvious parallels to the traditional Catholic belief that Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus, ascended body and soul into heaven after her son.

Even though Remedios the Beauty is not long for the physical world of Macondo, she leaves an indelible mark on its society and on her family with her unnatural beauty and preternatural lucidity and ability to see beyond the physical realm. Her mental and emotional simplicity seems to Fernanda to be idiotic, but represents a far deeper problem, that of the valuation of beauty over brains in a woman and the impenetrability of the unattainable sexual object that is Remedios the Beauty. The fact that Remedios lacks a basic education and truly is not meant for the domestic life of a stereotypical woman means nothing to her hordes of male suitors who risk their lives to catch a glimpse of her. She is the paragon of virtue, like the Virgin Mary, while being maddeningly desirable to the men around her, forcing her back into the same Madonna/whore paradigm of her sister in law, aunts, and grandmothers.

Fernanda, Remedios the Beauty's sister in law, must contend with her husband's mistress Petra Cotes, creating yet another permutation of the Madonna/whore paradigm so prevalent throughout *Cien Años de Soledad*. Petra brings great happiness to Aureliano Segundo, Fernanda's husband, which Fernanda cannot, in addition to his animals having great fertility while he is with Petra. In the repetitive nature of time for the

Buendía family, “Úrsula remembered her own experience and wondered whether Fernanda might have a chastity belt too which would sooner or later provoke jokes in the town and give rise to a tragedy. But Fernanda confessed to her that she was just letting two weeks go by before allowing the first contact with her husband” (García Márquez 209). Fernanda’s strict upbringing causes her to be unable to break away from tradition, and fortunately, Aureliano Segundo does not rape Fernanda, but she rarely allows sexual relations and wants to wear a nightgown during the marital act with a hole through which her husband could enter, causing him to return to the more welcoming arms of Petra Cotes with his excuse that “I had to do it so that the animals would keep on breeding” (García Márquez 210). Fernanda eventually agrees to allow her husband to continue seeing Petra Cotes, fixing herself squarely in the Madonna camp and placing Petra in the vengeful whore camp. Petra’s association with Aureliano Segundo’s prosperity through the prodigious fertility of his animals while he sees her cannot be overlooked as a symbol of her status as the whore, like Pilar Ternera’s many children by various fathers, including two of the Buendías. While Petra does not bear Aureliano Segundo children, she does provide for him in a way that the Madonna-aligned Fernanda cannot.

The forced binaries among the pairs of female characters, labeling them as either Madonnas or whores, parallels the Arcadio and Aureliano characteristics of the males in the family. Generally, with the exceptions of the twins Arcadio Segundo and Aureliano Segundo, the Arcadios of the family fall into the soldier and fighter half of a soldier/scholar paradigm. Úrsula, whose stabilizing force helps to continue the stagnation of the family through these dichotomies and enforced gender normativity,

thinks “Throughout the long history of the family the insistent repetition of names had made her draw some conclusions that seemed to be certain. While the Aurelianos were withdrawn, but with lucid minds, the José Arcadios were impulsive and enterprising, but they were marked with a tragic sign” (García Márquez 181). In spite of these characteristics, the first José Arcadio Buendía exemplifies the scholar half of the soldier/scholar paradigm, losing his mind over Melquíades’s parchments, while his son Colonel Aureliano, the quiet introvert, becomes the great soldier while losing all his battles.

The men are just as trapped by normative gender roles as the women, falling into a paradigm as harmful as that of the Madonna/whore. The enforcement of gender normativity causes José Arcadio Buendía to murder Prudencio Aguilar and rape his wife; Colonel Aureliano to have eighteen sons by eighteen mothers, including Pilar Ternera; and Aureliano Segundo to forsake his suffering, saintly wife for his mistress. The final male member of the family, simply known as Aureliano, is the illegitimate son of Renata Remedios (Meme), Fernanda’s disowned daughter. His lack of knowledge about his own parentage causes him to fall in love and have a child with his own aunt, Amaranta Úrsula, which eventually causes the final downfall of the Buendía family. He represents the final closure of the society and its destruction.

José Arcadio Buendía, the family patriarch, oscillates between halves of a normative gender role binary. In his younger years, he travels great distances and founds Macondo, hoping eventually to create a much more efficient route to the village through the jungle, representing the outward looking adventurer. However, in his later years he becomes consumed by experimentation and attempting to translate the

parchments left behind by the gypsy Melquíades, eventually speaking only in Latin, representing the inward looking scholar. He dies literally confined, tied to a tree in his home's courtyard, and perfectly exemplifies the constraints placed on the characters by normative gender role binaries. José Arcadio Buendía may oscillate between the soldier or scholar paradigm, but he is still trapped with only those two choices.

However, to me, the most striking example of gender performance in *Cien Años de Soledad* is that of Colonel Aureliano. The quiet, reserved Aureliano who enjoys working with his father and Melquíades quickly grows into a strong, proud warrior who fights for his convictions. The men in the novel are socialized and forced into the soldier/scholar dichotomy, just as the women cannot break free from the patriarchal oppression and are categorized as Madonnas or whores. Colonel Aureliano is an interesting figure to view from the lens of socialized gender normativity because while his chosen profession is that of the soldier, his personality fits him more on the scholar line of the dichotomy; his brother, José Arcadio, is not a soldier but a sailor by trade, but undoubtedly is a fighter by personality. His irrepressible masculinity is referenced throughout the novel, and is evidenced physically by his large stature and genitalia, which frightens his mother and impresses Pilar Ternera.

Colonel Aureliano performs his gender by going to sleep with Pilar Ternera and by sleeping with seventeen women before his battles, producing seventeen children, in addition to his son by Pilar. His first night with her, she refers to him as "My poor child", and tenderly allows him to use her for what he needs to do. This scene, while indeed tender, exemplifies the roles that Colonel Aureliano and Pilar are supposed to fulfill. Pilar is deemed a whore, so she is therefore expected to be available to any men who

want her, even as in this case, brothers or fathers of the men she's already been with. Colonel Aureliano, as a young, virile male, is supposed to want to sleep with women like Pilar. They must fit into their assigned gender roles and to not fit into that structure is condemned and discouraged. Immediately before Colonel Aureliano goes to Pilar, he is drinking with his friends and rejects a woman who tries to come on to him while his friends "more skilled in the ways of the world, drank methodically with the women seated on their laps" (García Márquez 66). Colonel Aureliano is characterized as innocent by this remark about his friends. He has a certain vulnerability that the other male characters in the novel do not possess.

When Colonel Aureliano does make love with Pilar, "When he came to the surface he was weeping. First they were involuntary and broken sobs. Then he emptied himself out in an unleashed flow, feeling that something swollen and painful had burst inside of him" (García Márquez 67). This sort of characterization would probably typically be used to describe a woman; "feeling that something swollen and painful had burst inside" recalls the rape of Úrsula, Colonel Aureliano's mother, and the loss of her virginity. It is expected that the loss of virginity is painful for a woman, but not for a man, as it is his right through patriarchal dominance to take a woman's virginity. Pilar is not a virgin, and she allows herself to be taken by Colonel Aureliano for his purposes, but does she really allow herself or is she merely doing what she is expected to do by performing her feminine gender and being forced into the category and binary of the whore? Pilar's tenderness towards Colonel Aureliano, showing pity towards the brother who cannot compare to his counterpart's impressive masculinity, fits her into the trope

of the “whore with a heart”, placing her even more firmly under the dominance of the patriarchal society.

This scene, involving the profoundly intimate act of sex, truly shows Colonel Aureliano’s vulnerability. Vulnerable is not a word used to describe many of the male Buendías, but it seems to fit Colonel Aureliano perfectly. Throughout his battles in the war, he is profoundly vulnerable, as he is putting his life on the line for his ideals. While fighting in the war, earning his title of colonel, “He [Colonel Aureliano Buendía] had seventeen male children by seventeen different women” and survived multiple assassination attempts, as well as a firing squad (García Márquez 103). Despite all of this, he returns to Macondo and dies of old age, the younger generations not knowing of his famous exploits; despite his longevity, much like Úrsula, his role in the family contributes to its stagnation and downfall. Macondan society is doomed because it cannot break free from its own repressive structures based on patriarchy.

4. Style and Gender in *Cien Años de Soledad*

Cien Años de Soledad is told from the perspective of a seemingly normal third person omniscient narrator. However, throughout the course of the novel, it becomes apparent that the narrator too is one of the characters in the novel, and actually has bearing on events. He is not only omniscient, but prescient, and is so powerful that he appears responsible for bringing about the final destruction of Macondo. The last remaining member of the family, Aureliano Babilonia, finally deciphers the parchments left behind by Melquíades, which had driven his great-great-great-grandfather, the

original José Arcadio Buendía, insane. This final deciphering of the parchments brings about the final destruction of Macondo.

Macondo was already a fearful whirlwind of dust and rubble being spun about by the wrath of the biblical hurricane when Aureliano skipped eleven pages so as not to lose time with facts he knew only too well, and he began to decipher the instant that he was living, deciphering it as he lived it, prophesying himself in the act of deciphering the last page of the parchments, as if he were looking into a speaking mirror. Then he skipped again to anticipate the predictions and ascertain the date and circumstances of his death. Before reaching the final line, however, he had already understood that he would never leave that room, for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments, and that everything written on them was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth. (García Márquez 416-7)

The narrator in *Cien Años de Soledad* is drastically different from that of *La plaça del Diamant*, which will be discussed in the next chapter. He is a dictator, determining the proceedings and the lives of the Buendía family before they have even lived them, determining characteristics of the male family members based on their names and trapping them inside normative gender roles and Macondo. In contrast, *La plaça del Diamant* features a stream of consciousness first person narrative style told in the voice of the protagonist, Natàlia. The dictatorship by narrator in *Cien Años de Soledad*

underlies the differing construction of gender roles in the two novels, as well as underlies the inevitability of the destruction of Macondo. The narrator determines that the society constructed within its confines will remain confined, closed to the future, and utterly destroyed on the novel's last page.

Chapter Two: *La plaça del Diamant* and Hèlène Cixous

“Potser escric per afirmarme. Per sentir que sóc.”² Mercè Rodoreda

In the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, the Franco dictatorship in Spain banned all that was not Castilian Spanish, including the historic languages and traditions of Catalunya, Galicia, and the Basque territory. Signs were displayed saying “no ladres, habla la lengua del imperio español”³ (Rodoreda 7). The vibrant Catalan culture was violently repressed and hidden underground until the twilight years of Franco’s reign of terror over Spain, after which according to Christine Arkininstall, “It is not coincidental...that it is during the 1960s that Rodoreda’s literary reputation is mainly forged and consolidated. This is a time when increasingly visible opposition to the Franco dictatorship throughout Spain coincides with the reclaiming and fomenting of a Catalan literature and national identity” (Arkininstall 13). Since the 1960s, a vibrant resurgence in Catalan culture has occurred, including the popularity and canonization of the works of Mercè Rodoreda.

Published in 1962, at the onset of intensified challenges to the Franco dictatorship and beginning of the Catalan resurgence, Mercè Rodoreda’s *La plaça del Diamant*, like *Cien Años de Soledad*, is considered a masterpiece in its language and is regularly taught in secondary schools throughout Catalunya. The novel deals with the impact of the Spanish Civil War on a woman and her family, and demonstrates her growth from a woman repressed by her husband to a strong woman, taking care of her

² “Perhaps I write to affirm myself. To feel that I am.” (my translation)

³ “Don’t bark, speak the language of the Spanish empire”

family. Its stream of consciousness style allows for the reader to grow along with Natàlia on her journey, which is by no means linear, much like the complicated trajectory of time in *Cien Años de Soledad*. According to Kathleen McNerney, “even though the passage of time is basically chronological in *La plaça del Diamant*, its flow is interrupted by flashbacks and flash-forwards, in the manner of those great Latin American storytellers, Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende” (McNerney 16). A discussion of the narrative styles in the novels will add an element to the discussion of the construction of gender, and complicate the effect of the work.

Mercè Rodoreda’s works are not nearly as well known in the United States as are those of Gabriel García Márquez, but a great deal of feminist criticism in recent years has utilized them. “La perspectiva feminista és la que més s’ha utilitzat en els darrers anys per revelar aspectes poc tractats de l’obra de Rodoreda⁴...Elizabeth Rhodes afirma el 1994 que ‘the majority of Rodoreda’s gardeners now tending the field are women, or feminist critics of either gender’” (Mencos 13). This is a welcome change from the lack of feminist criticism available on Gabriel García Márquez; however, even though Rodoreda is beloved by feminist critics, more work on gender normativity within her work remains to be done.

In terms of repressive structures based on patriarchy, there are few more emblematic of such than Spain under the Franco dictatorship. Written around the same time as *Cien Años de Soledad*, *La plaça del Diamant* also contains many issues involving gender, sex, and enforced gender normativity, while dealing with the backdrop

⁴ “The feminist perspective is that which has been most utilized in recent years to reveal lesser treated aspects of Rodoreda’s work” (my translation)

of the Spanish civil war and its traumatic aftermath. The story is told from the perspective of a young woman named Natàlia, detailing her relationship with her husband Quimet and her journey from a frightened young bride to an older, mature woman, choosing her own path for herself. The text is obviously feminist, and does much to deconstruct the concept of gender, as do many of Rodoreda's works.

“Questions of representation and self-representation of a woman as seen by a man and as seen by herself, underlie much of Mercè Rodoreda's fiction. What, she asks in these works, does it mean to be a woman, to be the object of the male gaze and the subject of one's own attempts at representation” (McNerney 80). What does it mean to be a woman for Natàlia? At first, it means that she must sacrifice her own life for her husband and children, serving them and taking care of them. However, after her husband's death in the war leaves her with nothing, Natàlia must learn take care of herself and provide for her children rather than merely obeying her husband.

It is evident from the first pages that there is a gender problem in *La plaça del Diamant*, much like that of *Cien Años de Soledad*. Quimet does not physically rape Natàlia as José Arcadio Buendía rapes Úrsula, but he does rape her symbolically, as he takes her name away from her. Throughout the novel, Quimet refuses to call Natàlia by her name, Natàlia, but rather calls her Colometa, meaning “little dove”. “Colometa. Me'l vaig mirar molt amoïnada i li vaig dir que em deia Natàlia i quan li vaig dir que em deia Natàlia encara riu i va dir que jo només em podia dir un nom: Colometa”⁵ (Rodoreda 18). This rape by name occurs right after Quimet and Natàlia first meet in the Plaça del

⁵ “Little dove. I looked at him very annoyed and said to him that my name is Natàlia and when I said to him that my name is Natàlia he started to laugh and said that I could only be called one name: little dove” (my translation)

Diamant, and sets the stage for the rest of the novel, after which Quimet ignores Natàlia's wishes and forces her to conform to rigid gender normativity, and thus unknowingly traps himself in the role of the patriarch. In one of their first dates, outside of Güell Park, while Natàlia and Quimet are talking about La Sagrada Família, "He [Quimet] hit my knee with the edge of his hand and made my leg fly up with surprise and said if I wanted to be his wife I had to start by liking everything he liked. He delivered a long sermon about men and women and the rights of the one and the rights of the other and when I was able to cut in I asked him: 'What if I just can't bring myself to like something?' 'You've got to like it, because that means it's something you don't understand'" (Rodoreda 22). By hitting Natàlia's knee, Quimet demonstrates ownership over her body. By delivering his "long sermon about men and women and the rights of the one and the rights of the other", Quimet is emphasizing the perceived differences between men and women and his expectation that Natàlia conform to the normative role for her gender. His further expectation that she likes everything he likes is yet another way that Quimet takes away Natàlia's agency. Her role is defined as conforming to gender normativity and to her husband's desires, not her own.

After Quimet and Natàlia have married and have had their first child, Quimet never seems to help take care of him. This exemplifies conformance to gender normativity, as Natàlia is expected to care for the baby and the father does not help. Quimet decides to turn their shed into a dovecote, saying "We're evicting Colometa" (Rodoreda 67). They take all of her belongings out of the shed, one of the only spaces Natàlia has for her belongings, and turn it into a dovecote. Quimet is removing his wife's things, "evicting" her, in order to build a home for real doves, rather than his figurative

“dove”, his human wife, truly the one he should be building a home for, but never does. The doves eventually begin to take over Natàlia’s life; she cannot escape them, not even in her dreams. “Només sentia parrupeig de colombs. Em matava netejant els coloms. Tota jo feia pudor de colom. Coloms al terrat, coloms al pis; els somiava. La noia dels coloms. Farem una font, deia en Cintet, amb la Colometa a dalt amb un colom a la mà”⁶ (Rodoreda 111). Surrounded by doves, Natàlia is trapped physically, emotionally, and into a normative gender role.

After the number of doves in the dovecote gets unmanageable, doves, symbolic of peace in traditional Christianity, are destroyed by Natàlia’s hand when she shakes their eggs, unable to deal with the sheer number of them, as well as the life that Quimet has forced upon her with the doves that they keep in their shed. Natàlia is expected to maintain their household, care for the children, and maintain the increasing number of doves in the shed, with no help from her authoritative patriarchal husband. Natàlia’s responsibilities at home cause her to associate the children with the doves, with almost tragic consequences later in the novel. She tells their friend Mateu that “Li vaig explicar que els nens i els coloms eren com una família...que coloms i nens era tot u”⁷ (Rodoreda 120-1). The doves had become part of the family just as the children had, and Natàlia was expected to care for all of them.

Natàlia’s never-ending responsibilities at home draw parallels with Úrsula in *Cien Años de Soledad*. Úrsula has a lot in common with Natàlia, despite their very

⁶ “I only heard doves cooing. I was killing myself cleaning for the doves. All of me had the stench of doves. Doves on the ceiling, doves in the apartment; I dreamed of them. The girl of the doves. Let’s make a fountain, said Cintet, with Colometa on top with doves in her hand” (my translation)

⁷ “I explained to him that the children and the doves were like a family...that doves and children were all one” (my translation)

different functions in their respective novels. In many ways they are ignored and repressed by their husbands, who represent the power of patriarchal authority. They are expected to conform to gender normativity, maintaining their households and acting as figures of stability despite war and upheaval. Quimet is emotionally abusive towards Natalia while Úrsula is raped by her husband, the first José Arcadio. Neither one of their relationships start off well, as Natàlia is terrified of sex with Quimet similar to the way in which Úrsula is raped by José Arcadio. On their wedding night, Natàlia explains

I felt terrified in my corner...I'd always been afraid of that moment. They'd told me the path leading to it was strewn with flowers and the one going away was strewn with tears. And that joy leads to disillusionment. Because when I was little I'd heard people say they rip you open. And I'd always been scared it would kill me. They said women die ripped open. It begins when they get married. (Rodoreda 50)

Natàlia's fear of death via being ripped open recalls the powerful association with the breaking of the hymen symbolizing virginity and the bloodshed thereof. This motif of death and bloodshed remains in the background of *La plaça del Diamant*, as the Spanish Civil War breaks out and eventually takes the lives of Quimet and their friend Mateu, who perform their masculine gender role by going off to fight in the war.

The females are forced to conform to gender normativity and are repressed by the patriarchal structures surrounding them, with seemingly no escape. While Natàlia does attain some agency after Quimet is killed, Úrsula and the rest of the Buendía

women never do. They are doomed to die as Madonnas and whores, forced to conform to normative gender roles and oscillating between two halves of a dichotomy.

Natàlia, however, rebels against her husband by killing some of the unborn doves. “In her secret and silent killing of the doves, Natàlia seeks to regain her space, and, in the process, the part of herself that she has surrendered in her marriage to Quimet. This self-assertion causes guilt pangs” (McNerney 117). Natàlia feels guilt because she has acted out against the patriarchal authority of her husband for the first time. Throughout her life, she has been accustomed to obeying first her father’s and then her husband’s authority through patriarchal structures. She has completely given up her life for Quimet, obeying his whims and accepting that he never calls her by her given name, but rather Colometa. Her anger slowly builds throughout the novel, although she never calls it anger. She refers many times throughout her life with both Quimet and the doves to her exhaustion. “Cada dia estava més cansada. Els nens, quan entrava al pis, els trobava moltes vegades adormits”⁸ (Rodoreda 107). It creates a pressure within her that must be released, and it is when she shakes the doves’ eggs to prevent them from being born. This act of profound violence and rebellion completely changes the course of both the novel and Natàlia’s life. As the unborn doves’ lives are ended, the seeds of a new life are planted in Natàlia, ones that must flower once her husband is killed. Natàlia begins to take her first steps towards her own life, free from patriarchal authority, by killing the doves, and they are strong steps indeed, even though she is plagued by guilt over what she has done.

⁸ “Each day I felt more tired. The children, when I entered the apartment, they were asleep most of the time” (my translation)

Natàlia, who has conformed to passive female gender normativity and performed her role as wife and mother for so long, begins to assert her own independence. What allows her to do so? How is she different from the women of *Cien Años de Soledad*, who never get their chance to truly be free?

The stream of consciousness style employed by Mercè Rodoreda in *La plaça del Diamant* is part of the reason why Natàlia can break free from gender normativity and the characters of *Cien Años de Soledad* cannot. This style allows the reader to experience her more fluid and open-ended development and her self-shaping growth during the course of the novel, and witness Natàlia take action for herself, rather than being passive and doing what her husband Quimet wants her to do. Rodoreda gives Natàlia the freedom to think her thoughts, giving the novel a sense of flow over time and development. Natàlia is a complex human being, which is illuminated by this narrative style. She is trying to live her life, provide for her children, take care of them and her husband, maintain all the doves, and somehow keep her sanity with the Spanish Civil War lurking in the background. The reader reads between the lines of Natàlia's thoughts, knowing her anguish over leaving her children while she works and killing the doves, even though in both cases the action she takes is necessary in order for survival. Flash-backs and flash-forwards also punctuate the stream of consciousness flow, indicating the time and space necessary for Natàlia's development.

This development through the stream of consciousness style utilized by Rodoreda is exemplified in Natàlia's narration of her thoughts.

I could feel that red-hot coal burning in my brain. Birdseed, water dishes, food trays, dovecote, baskets of dove droppings: out! Ladder, straw, bowls of sulfur, pouters, beady red eyes and red legs: out! Turkeytails, hoods, nuns, chicks and grownups: out! The roof shed mine, the trapdoor shut, the chairs in the shed, no more circling doves, the hamper on the roof, the clothes hung out to dry on the roof. Round eyes and sharp beaks, the mallow-rose rainbow and apple rainbow: out! Without meaning to, Quimet's mother had given me the solution... (Rodoreda 111).

By allowing her own thoughts to flow freely, Natàlia is reaching for her own freedom, trying to enact it without even realizing it. This style perfectly epitomizes the humanity in Natàlia; she is not perfect, she is trying to make do as best as she can, and by the end of the novel, she has escaped enforced conformance to gender role normativity, aided by the novelistic style which permits her to do so.

Hélène Cixous's essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" provides useful commentary on the connection between gender and style, describing how writing is evocative of the body, especially for women. Cixous exhorts women to take their bodies for themselves, and rejects the Freudian notion that women are defined by their lack of a penis. She argues for a rejection of gender normativity, saying that "Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem" (Cixous, quoted in Parker 246). This reference to "the margin or the harem" recalls the binary into which the women in *Cien Años de Soledad* are forced as either Madonnas or whores.

In regards to the powerful connection between gender and literary style, Cixous says “It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain” (Parker 248). Throughout the essay, Cixous discusses ‘women’s writing’, which raises the question of how it can be discussed and utilized without a definition. This lends itself to her deconstructive discourse about language and writing, and her criticism of phallogocentrism, patriarchal reasoning using patriarchal language. For Cixous, ‘women’s writing’ is not necessarily that which is written by a woman; she says that women can write patriarchally and men can write femininely. The importance of ‘women’s writing’ is the manner and style in which it is done and its goals rather than the gender of the person writing. ‘Women’s writing’ should be encouraging women to write and supportive of their writing, exemplified by the work of Mercè Rodoreda herself, despite the lack of a definition for ‘women’s writing’.

According to Cixous, even though ‘women’s writing’ will bring people together and develop non-patriarchal structures, she also sets up ‘women’s writing’ as deconstructive, breaking down barriers of language and gender. She describes the new and feminine breaking away from the old, and states that “there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman...you can’t talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes” (Cixous, quoted in Parker 243). In this way, Cixous posits the exact opposite of the patriarchal society of Macondo in *Cien Años de Soledad* and the Franco dictatorship menacing in the background of Natàlia’s Barcelona. Both the society in Macondo and under Franco in Spain attempted to force women to conform to one sexuality, one normative gender role.

Despite Natàlia's initial passivity, her exhaustion and frustration eventually surmounts the gender normativity into which Quimet has placed her and she shakes the doves' eggs. Her guilt over killing the unborn doves and her desperation after Quimet's death leads her down a path of despair, as she explains

Sometimes I'd heard people say, 'That person's like a cork,' but I never understood what they meant...And finally I understood what they meant when they said, 'That person's like a cork...' Because I was like a cork myself. Not because I was born that way but because I had to force myself to be. And to make my heart like stone. I had to be like a cork to keep going because if instead of being a cork with a heart of stone I'd been like before, made of flesh that hurts when you pinch it, I'd never have gotten across such a high, narrow, long bridge. (Rodoreda 138)

Making herself "like a cork" is Natàlia's coping mechanism for the life she must face without her husband, during the Spanish Civil War, with two children to take care of. She gets herself across the "high, narrow, long bridge", but it is not easy for her. At one point, after not having eaten in two days, Natàlia contemplates killing herself and her children by pouring hydrochloric acid down their throats while they slept. However, she does not have the money to buy the acid. After working up the courage to go see a grocer she had known before the war, "And when it came time to pay and a little smoke was still coming from between the glass and the stopper I opened my purse and acted surprised and said I'd left my money at home. The grocer said not to worry or make a special trip to pay him, that I could pay him some day when I happened to be passing by and it was convenient" (Rodoreda 154). Knowing her economic hardship, after

leaving the shop, the grocer chases after her and offers her a job as a housekeeper, her job prior to the war. He sticks some food in her bag, “And without realizing what I was doing I took the bottle of acid out of my basket and carefully placed it on top of the counter. And I went out without a word. And when I got home, I—who’d always had a tough time crying—burst into tears like it was the simplest thing in the world” (Rodoreda 155).

Due to the grocer’s kindness, Natàlia is finally able to release the emotion she’s kept built up inside after years of her husband forcing her into gender normativity and his untimely death during the war. Her desperate attempt to kill herself and her children, tragically represents yet another step in Natàlia’s independence. First she shakes the doves’ eggs to prevent their birth, next she contemplates killing her children, which she also sees as doves’ eggs forced upon her by Quimet in a hallucination. The final step in Natàlia’s independence from Quimet occurs towards the end of the novel, and is her final breakdown. After working for the grocer, Antoni, as a housekeeper for a little over a year, he explains to her that due to a wound from fighting in the war, he cannot have children, but has always wanted to get married and have a family. He tells Natàlia that he had been fond of her from the first time he had met her, and asks her to marry him. She eventually says yes, and forms a new life with her new husband. Her children take to him, and eventually her daughter gets married as well. But not long after her daughter’s wedding, Natàlia cannot sleep and becomes overwhelmed by smells in the same way that she was overwhelmed by the smell of the doves everywhere. Taking a paring knife from the kitchen, she returns to the apartment where she had lived with Quimet and the doves.

The door was locked. I looked up and saw Quimet in the middle of a field by the sea when I was pregnant with Toni and he gave me a blue flower and then laughed at me. I wanted to go upstairs to my apartment...I'd gone in that door many years ago married to Quimet and I'd come out with the children behind me to marry Antoni...I realized I couldn't get in....And I was going to start pounding on the door but then I thought it might make too much noise so I hit the wall and it hurt a lot. And I turned around and rested and I still felt like I had to do something. So I turned back to the door and took my knife and carved 'Colometa' on it in big, deep letters. (Rodoreda 196-7).

On the way back to her home with Antoni she walks through la plaça del Diamant, where she had met Quimet for the first time. The powerful act of physically carving the name her husband had given her into the door of their old apartment completes Natàlia's independence. Her emotional breakthrough, beginning when she can no longer contain her frustration and shakes the doves' eggs, continuing when she bursts into tears after Antoni, the grocer and later her husband, offers her a job and food, and culminates in her carving of her former name into the door. By carving it, she symbolically leaves it to remain there, in that apartment, while she leaves it behind and continues to her new life in her new apartment with her new husband and her real name, Natàlia. Natàlia leaves "Colometa" behind, literally and symbolically. She goes home to be happy with her new husband and her independence, curling up beside him in bed and realizing when she awakens that she feels different—she is finally happy, completing her journey and truly breaking free from the gender normative trap set by

her first husband and exemplified by the stream of consciousness style that allows her to flourish. Though she appears to conform to these normative gender roles, the novel demonstrates that independence from gender normativity is not about the specific actions taken, such as Natàlia's marriage to the grocer, but rather why she chose to marry the grocer—for her own happiness and well-being. Natàlia is a complex human being, making choices for herself.

Concluding thoughts

In writing this conclusion, which was extremely difficult after working on the formal, academic body of my thesis for so long, I had to give myself permission to feel freer in my writing. The experience of working on this project brought forth many emotions and memories for me; reflections on my childhood and my relationship with my family, reflections on the past four years of my life as I prepare to graduate from college. My own personal relationships with the novels about which I was writing also provided me a context with which to think about them critically, but I think it is far more important that I chose those two particular novels in the first place due to my own issues with gender role normativity and interest in feminism and gender studies.

I'm very proud of the way this thesis has turned out; it feels incredibly strange to have it done. I had been thinking about writing a thesis since exactly four years ago, when I was accepted to the Honors Program here at the University of Michigan and was also offered a scholarship to attend U-M, without which I would not have been able to. Since then I had known that I wanted to write a thesis, and began actively thinking that I would write about Mercè Rodoreda and *La plaça del Diamant* since the beginning of my second year here, after studying Catalan in my first year.

I have mixed feelings about graduating next month. I am excited to begin a new chapter in my life, to leave behind my undergraduate life, like (or not like) Natàlia's decision to marry the grocer Antoni and leave "Colometa" and her life with Quimet behind. However, I am uncertain of what my next steps on this journey will be—this chapter has not even begun to be written yet. I know though, that I will go into it with a

deeper understanding of myself and my own capabilities as a human being, of my identity as a woman, of my ability to make my own choices for myself.

I am immensely grateful for the many experiences I have had as an undergraduate here at U-M, this thesis being at the top of the list. It is time now to begin writing the next chapter.

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