Categorization and the theme of coming of age in Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Russell’s *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves*, and Bechdel’s *Fun Home*.

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Introduction

A great amount of experimental literature is currently produced by American authors. The Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* of November 2, 2012 even focused on this trend in their book supplement celebrating the American election. One experimental author who is often mentioned is Jennifer Egan, who won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction 2011 for her book *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. What makes this book so experimental is its structure; instead of following a linear, chronological line, the story is divided over several chapters placed in random order whose full connections only become clear after reading the entire book. The unusual structure can be hard for readers to tackle; during a lecture on the book in the series “Sprakmakende Boeken” (Controversial books) at the University of Groningen, members of the audience claimed to find the book “unreadable”. That it is not a regular novel also becomes clear after reading several reviews, in which terms like “mosaic of a novel” (*Booklist*) and “novel of interconnecting stories” (*The Independent*) are used to describe Egan’s work. These terms are similar to descriptions given in reviews of Ernest Hemingway’s *In Our Time*, which D.H. Lawrence called a “fragmentary novel” (qtd. in Mann ix). Hemingway’s book stands at the beginning of the development of the short story cycle and the composite novel, which are both subgenres in the short story genre (Mann ix). The creation of these subgenres in the short story genre is a result from the need of critics to categorize these new kinds of texts like Hemingway’s.

Categorization and genre definitions are an integral part of literary studies and have been ever since Aristotle presented his definitions of poetry and drama in his work *The Poetics* (Devitt 697). Based on Aristotle’s definition, genre was generally defined as the “formalistic classification of types of texts” (Devitt 697), and up until Romanticism, the formalistic aspects of literary genres were very important and strictly applied. During the Romantic movement, authors started to play with genres and their meanings, no longer following older conventions in a strict manner (Baldick Romanticism). Genres became associated with political and social ideals; Wordsworth, for example, used the romance as a moral-didactic text to convey his ideas on the Revolution in his poem *Salisbury Plain* (1793-94) (Fosso 160). The idea that a genre has a certain purpose definitively gained ground with theorists in the 1980s, when many of them applied the idea of genre not just to literary texts but also to linguistics and rhetorics. This led to a new understanding of what genre implied,
and rather than being seen as a strict set of rules, genre is now generally considered to be symbols indicating the function of the text, or, as Devitt phrases it, the “rhetorical use of symbols in frequently encountered contexts in order to accomplish writers’ and readers’ purposes” (697). This idea of the purpose of genre has become important and aspects which previously were seen as formal conventions of a genre are now seen as bearers of intent. Specific texts have specific structures, which can be seen as a formal convention, but at the same time this structure can help readers to find the information they are looking for (Devitt 698). Besides this, the structure also helps the reader in reading the text; based on the structure, the text is categorized as a certain genre, thereby creating expectations of how the reading experience will proceed. So perhaps if the reader of Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad* had not read the book with the expectations she usually associates with novels, she would not have considered it to be so “unreadable”. This is one of the reasons why genre categorization is an important part of literary studies.

Especially with the rise of experimental literature, the importance of genre categorization has increased. Experimental literature is concerned with the breaking of boundaries and not keeping to the traditional criteria of genres, thereby confusing the reader on what to expect; new kinds of narratives can be hard to read initially. Particularly when an author plays with form, the reader may not know how to approach the text. Multimodal literature, for example, includes both text and pictures, thereby asking for a different way of reading (Bray, Gibbons, McHale). This means that new kinds of texts start to appear, creating new genres and subgenres, which all need to be categorized.

Genre categorization is also an important part of short story theory in particular, since the short story genre consists of several kinds of collections; there are regular short story collections, short story cycles, and composite novels which differ from each other in the ways the stories are connected, if they are at all. The storylines of the stories in a regular short story collection can be completely unconnected from each other, whilst the stories in a short story cycle and a composite novel form a unified whole despite their separateness. The difference between the last two types of collections lies in the kind of connection formed between the stories. As the term already indicates, a composite novel works very similar to a regular novel and its focus lies on the unified whole rather than on the separate stories; a short story cycle, on the other hand, also forms a unified whole, but the emphasis remains
on the separateness of the stories. I will elaborate on the specifics of these subgenres in Chapter One, but this already shows that it is often difficult to categorize a book in the right subgenre, since the short story cycle and the composite novel are so similar to each other.

It is this connection between the types of sequences and the importance of this connection in genre categorization that I will focus on in this dissertation. Whilst short story theory does contain formal conventions on which the connections between short stories are based, namely organizing principles and unifying elements, these elements alone are not always sufficient to properly categorize a book. Especially when categorizing short story cycles and composite novels, which are so similar to each other, it can be hard to decide to which subgenre a book belongs when the decision has to be based on these elements solely. In this dissertation I will therefore argue that it is necessary to add another criterion to the categorization process, namely the kind of connection formed by a theme playing an important role in all of the stories in the collection. By analysing how the theme is used in the stories themselves and in the book as a whole, it becomes clearer what kind of connection there is between the stories and where in the short story genre a book belongs. So I will argue that by adding an analysis of the function of the theme in the connection between the stories to the current formal conventions, it becomes easier to categorize books in the short story genre.

The three books I will use to explore this system of classification are the aforementioned Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Karen Russell’s *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves*, and Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*. Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad* was first published in 2010 and won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2011. It focuses on the generation from the 60s; Egan herself was born in Chicago on September 7, 1962. Besides *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, her oeuvre consists of novels and a short story collection, *Emerald City and Other Stories*; several of her short stories have also been published in magazines such as *The New Yorker* and *Zoetrope*, and she has also written a number of non-fiction, journalistic articles, most of which were published in the *New York Times Magazine* (jenniferegan.com). Karen Russell’s *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* was first published in 2006, and it contains ten stories all focused on the coming of age of their protagonists. *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* is Russell’s debut; her debut novel *Swamplandia!* appeared in 2011, which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for
Fiction 2012, but the prize was not awarded that year. Her second short story collection, *Vampires in the Lemon Grove*, will appear in February, 2013, and many of her short stories have also been published in magazines such as *The New Yorker* and *Zoetrope* (Goodreads). Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* was first published in 2006. It is Bechdel’s first memoir in the form of a graphic novel and conveys Bechdel’s childhood and coming of age. Bechdel is most known for her comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* which ran from 1983, when it was first published in *Womannews* to 2008 and appeared in several publications. Bechdel became known to a bigger audience in 2006 with the publication of *Fun Home*, which *Time Magazine* named Best Book of 2006. *Fun Home* is part of the current trend of “autobiographix”, memoirs written in the form of a graphic novel, a trend which started with the publication of Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* in 1986 (Chaney 5). In *Fun Home*, Bechdel focuses on her relationship with her father; she has written a sequel titled *Are You My Mother?* (2012), which relates Bechdel’s relationship with her mother (Bechdel About).

The reason I have chosen these three books is that they lend themselves very well for this type of research because, for all three of them, it is ambiguous as to which genre specifically they belong. Russell’s work is categorized as a regular short story collection, but several connections can be found between the stories; Egan’s and Bechdel’s books are both categorized as novels, but they show similarities to the composite novel and the short story cycle respectively. They also all three contain the same theme of coming of age. This enables comparisons between the books, since it is easier to compare the differences in the connections when these are formed by the same theme rather than by different ones.

In the first chapter of my dissertation I will give an overview of short story theory and discuss the different subgenres of the short story genre, namely the short story collection, the short story cycle, and the composite novel. In Chapters Two to Four I will discuss the books individually and examine where in the short story genre they belong based on short story theory and the use of the theme of coming of age in the connection between the stories. In the second chapter I will analyse Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad* and concentrate on the genre conventions of the novel and the composite novel. In the third chapter I will analyse Karen Russell’s *St Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* and concentrate on the genre conventions of the short story collection and the short story cycle. In the fourth chapter I will analyse Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* and concentrate on the genre
conventions of the novel and the short story cycle. In the Conclusion, I will compare the findings and focus on the nuances in these findings which are important for the categorization of these books in the short story genre. I will also discuss what the addition of an extra criterion adds to the classification of short story collections.
Chapter One: Short Story Theory

The short story genre greatly developed in the nineteenth century, especially after Edgar Allan Poe published his review on Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales* in *Graham’s Magazine* in 1842, which became one of the most influential texts on the short story (Winther et al. 136). Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales* is a bundling of previously published short stories, of which the plotlines were completely unconnected. These kinds of short story collections in which the stories are unconnected to each other are quite common, and I will refer to them as regular short story collections to differentiate between this type of collection and the umbrella term of ‘short story collections’ for all the different kinds of collections. When the short story genre started to establish itself as a distinct literary genre in the nineteenth century, other kinds of collections started to appear. Especially in the beginning of the twentieth century, short story collections in which the stories are connected to each other despite their individuality started to appear, eventually resulting in the subgenres of the short story cycle and the composite novel. In this dissertation, I will focus on the connection between the short stories in these subgenres of the short story genre. Therefore, this chapter will present an overview of the short story genre and the different theories concerned with categorization combined in short story theory, which will be applied to Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Karen Russell’s *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves*, and Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* in Chapters Two to Four.

Short story theory is often considered to have started with Edgar Allan Poe’s review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales*. In this review, Poe expresses his high acclaim of the short story and gives some of the basic generic elements of the short story, namely its length and its unity. According to Poe, “the unity of effect or impression is a point of the greatest importance. It is clear, moreover, that this unity cannot be thoroughly preserved in productions whose perusal cannot be completed at one sitting” (qtd. in Thompson 571). So a short story can be read in one sitting and concerns itself with one particular plotline without subplots. Whilst Poe already presents generic elements of the short story, he still refers to it with the term ‘tale’. According to Winther et al., Columbia University Professor Brander Matthews was the first to declare the short story a separate genre by introducing the term ‘short story’ in 1884, in his article “Short Stories”, which was published in the London *Saturday Review* of July, 5th, 1884 (137). Matthews based his concept of the short story on
Poe’s review and especially the idea of unity of impression. In his book *The Philosophy of the Short-Story*, which was published in 1901, Matthews rephrased Poe’s idea as follows:

A Short-story deals with a single character, a single event, a single emotion, or the series of emotions called forth by a single situation. ... Thus the Short-story has, what the Novel cannot have, the effect of ‘totality’, as Poe called it, the unity of impression. (qtd. in Winther et al. 137)

Poe and Matthew’s definition of the short story is still often used as the base of what a short story is, but the range of kinds of short stories expanded rapidly in the twentieth century, paving the road for the short story cycle and the composite novel. Once the short story had established itself as a literary genre, different kinds of short stories started to appear. Under the influence of realism, local colour stories portraying a slice of life started to appear which were more “loosely plotted” (Winther et al. 137) compared to the strictly developed plotlines Poe attributed to the short story; the influence of modernism was also responsible for short stories which did not adhere to these designed plotlines of Poe by inspiring non-linear storylines and open endings, stories in which “the importance of plot (...) is seriously downplayed” (Winther et al. 137). Poe’s and Matthews’ definitions of the short story no longer applied to these new forms and a great array of new definitions appeared, focusing not so much on generic aspects but rather on aspects such as subject matter (Winther et al. 138). In the extent of the local colour stories, the idea that the short story is a better medium to convey modern-day life than the novel started to appear. This is present in the ideas of authors Frank O’Connor, Elizabeth Bowen, and Nadine Gordimer, whose views on the short story are based on the suitability of the short story to convey a modern sense of isolation and loneliness. All three believe that, as O’Connor argues in his article “The Lonely Voice”, the short story conveys “an intense awareness of human loneliness” (qtd. in Winther et al. 138); it represents the isolation caused by the fragmentariness of modern-day life. Gordimer’s argumentation further explains this by stating that the characters’ loneliness in short stories comes from their realization that they can only depend on the present moment, which is the exact thing on which short stories focus (qtd. in May 123). Charles E. May also believes that there is “an inherent relationship between a characteristic short story structure and its theme” (May 124). According to him, the novel conveys the notion of shared experiences, whilst “[in] the short story we are presented with characters in their
essential aloneness, not in their taken-for-granted social world” (qtd. in Winther et al. 139). These new definitions and the concept of the local colour stories bear similarities with some of the unifying elements in the short story cycle and the composite novel, which will be discussed later on.

Whilst they no longer follow the strict rules for the short story as defined by Poe and Matthews, the theorists and writers in the previous paragraphs do try to come to some sort of definition of the short story. Not all theorists work according to the idea of definitions, and in the 1980s, the different kind of short story theorists could roughly be divided into two camps: those who do believe in a generic definition and those who do not (May 124). This second group uses inductive reasoning rather than deductive reasoning. This means that they reject essentialist definitions and rather describe a genre according to a cluster of characteristics (Winther et al. 140-141). A good example of this is Austin Wright’s set of six genre tendencies, listing characteristics which often appear in short stories. Whilst Wright also includes tendencies such as length, which he classifies as being “between five hundred words long and the length of Joyce’s “The Dead”” (qtd. in Winther et al. 141), the main focus of his genre tendencies lies on plot and development. According to Wright, the short story tends to have a simple storyline without subplots, the storyline tends to focus on character rather than action and this leads to a preference for “plots of small magnitude” and “plots of discovery” (qtd. in Winther et al 141). A final, important tendency is that the short story is generally a strongly unified prose form, more so “than other short prose narrative forms” (qtd. in Winther et al 141). With the aid of such a list of genre tendencies, the question changes from whether a text is a short story to what kind of a short story it is (Winther et al. 142). These genre tendencies also help to distinguish short stories from other prose forms, which will be important in Chapters Two and Four, in which the books I will discuss are generally considered to be novels, but they do contain many similarities to the short story genre.

Even though the storylines of the stories in regular short story collections do not have to be connected, this does not mean that the stories are completely unconnected. Stories can also be connected through their aesthetics, such as style. The stories in Karen Russell’s St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves are all similar in style, since they all contain magical realism. The stories in Jennifer Egan’s A Visit from the Goon Squad, on the other
hand, do not all share the same style; not only do the stories differ in narrator, Egan has also used different media, such as a story in the shape of a PowerPoint presentation and one in the shape of a magazine article. Especially in *Fun Home*, a graphic novel, style can be used to create unity by having specific images reoccur throughout the book. Since these images can also be part of the background, this can be done without the author having to draw extra attention to it, making it a very subtle means to connect different parts together. Although elements such as style can also be used as unifying factors, I have decided not to include these in my analyses, since these factors often only create a superficial connection between the stories rather than the kind of interconnectedness between stories that is characteristic of short story cycles and composite novels.

Before I move on to the characteristics of the short story cycle and the composite novel I will first discuss the characteristics of the novel, which I will need in Chapters Two and Four; these chapters concern the question whether a book is a novel or a short story collection. Even though there are many precursors, Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605) is often considered to be the first novel; the first novel written in the English language is often considered to be Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) (Baldick Novel). Whilst the novel quickly became the dominant literary genre, there are very few set tendencies for the novel; this is because the genre of the novel consists of many subgenres. Despite this, there are a few characteristics novels are expected to contain; novels need to contain “at least one character, and preferably several characters shown in processes of change and social relationship” (Baldick Novel). Another characteristic is that novels need to contain a plot or a kind of narrative (Baldick Novel). This is necessary for the characteristic of novelistic unity (Hale 10); despite its length, the story told through the chapters of a novel needs to be unified. These are some general characteristics a novel needs to contain; all the different subgenres of the novel contain their own specific characteristics. The subgenres of the novel can be concerned with “particular kinds of character (the Künstlerroman, the spy novel), setting (the historical novel, the campus novel), and plot (the detective novel); while other kinds of novel are distinguished either by their structure (the epistolary novel, the picaresque novel) or by special emphases on character (the Bildungsroman) or ideas (the roman à thèse)” (Baldick Novel). The characteristic which most clearly differentiates between the novel and the short story is the length of both texts; because a novel is longer
than a short story, novels can contain “fuller, subtler development of characters and themes” (Balick Novel) compared to short stories.

This fuller and subtler development of characters and themes can happen in novels because novels are longer than short stories and therefore there is more room to explore characters and themes. Whilst this does not apply to regular short story collections, consisting of separate, unconnected short stories, there are also collections of short stories which form a more unified whole together and in which the development of characters and themes can work similar to the way it functions in the novel. When these kinds of collections started to appear in the first half of the twentieth century, they caused quite some confusion amongst critics. In the preface to her book The Short Story Cycle: A Genre Companion and Reference Guide, Susan Garland Mann demonstrates this confusion by providing some of the reviews of Ernest Hemingway’s In Our Time (1925). Edmund Wilson insisted that Hemingway “has almost invented a form of his own” (qtd. in Mann ix) and D.H. Lawrence described the book as follows: “In Our Time calls itself a book of stories, but it isn’t that. It is a series of successive sketches from a man’s life, and makes a fragmentary novel” (qtd. in Mann ix). Lawrence’s review points out the underlying connectedness of the individual stories. When more authors started to produce similar collections in the thirties, forties, and fifties, the need for a generic definition of these types of works started to rise amongst critics. Several terms were proposed, of which ‘short story cycle’ and ‘composite novel’ were most used and accepted.

Of these two terms, ‘short story cycle’ was the first to be introduced. In 1960, the critic Malcolm Cowley first used the terms ‘cycle’ and ‘cycle of stories’ to describe works such as Faulkner’s Go Down, Moses and Anderson’s Winesburg, Ohio, but the term was officially proposed by Forrest L. Ingram in his book Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century: Studies in a Literary Genre which was published in 1971 (Dunn and Morris 3-4). In his book, Ingram defines the short story cycle as “a set of stories so linked to one another that the reader’s experience of each one is modified by his experience of the others” (Ingram 13). Ingram explains how this works in greater detail:

Like the moving parts of a mobile, the interconnected parts of some story cycles seem to shift their positions with relation to the other parts, as the cycle moves
Ingram focuses on the interconnected relationship between the stories, which is also the focus of this dissertation. It is this interconnectedness which creates the difference between a regular short story collection, in which it is not present, and the short story cycle and the composite novel, which both contain it.

There are several generic features which can distinguish short story cycles from regular short story collections. Whilst not all of these features appear in every short story cycle or short story collection, they are often connected to these subgenres and give an indication as to in which genre a book belongs. These features can be given on direction of the author, but they can also be added to the book by the publisher; so the indication of these features as to which genre a book belongs may or may not correspond with the author’s ideas. The first indication is the title of the book; the titles of short story collections often include the title of one story from the collection followed by the phrase “... and other stories”, emphasising the individuality of the stories. Titles of short story cycles, on the other hand, can be used to emphasise the connectedness between the stories by giving the entire collection an individual name which is representative of the entire collection and is not the name of one of the stories from the cycle. The title of a book can indicate the difference between a short story collection and a short story cycle, but the titles of the stories indicate the difference between a short story cycle and a novel. Whilst the title of the book indicates the unity of the entire book, individual titles of the stories indicate the individuality of the stories. In a novel, numbered chapters can indicate that all the parts form a whole and should be read according to the numbering of the chapters for the story to make sense. One chapter directly follows the next one, while individually titled stories do not follow each other directly; they are self-sufficient and do not need the other stories to make sense. Another generic feature of short story collections is the table of contents; short story collections always contain one to indicate where each individual story begins, since they can be read separately from each other (Mann 14-15). These generic signals can be used to give a first indication of where a book belongs in the short story genre.
The most important indication of a short story cycle, though, is the fact that all the stories are completely understandable “without going beyond the limits of the individual story” (Mann 15), yet at the same time “work together, creating something that could not be achieved in a single story” (Mann 15). The way in which these stories work together is often supported by a unifying element, resulting in several types of short story cycles. The first and, according to Mann, most common one is character-dominated (Mann 8). These stories are based on or are variations on the bildungsroman or, when the protagonist is an artist, on the künstlerroman. Besides the künstlerroman, many short story cycles also focus on “statements about art in general, especially the difficulty of being an artist” and the process of making art (Mann 13). Another unifying element can be a certain setting or community, ranging from mythical kingdoms to historical places (Mann 13). Short story cycles can also be connected through the unifying element of the use of a theme; since the stories are separate entities on their own, they are especially suitable to convey the themes of isolation and fragmentation (Mann 11). By analysing whether and to what extent the unifying elements are present in a book, it can be determined whether the stories function as a short story cycle.

The second term, ‘composite novel’, puts more emphasis on the unity of the stories, ranking it as a novel, whilst ‘short story cycle’ emphasises the individuality of the stories. However, are there any differences in what is meant by these terms? After all, several works, amongst which Anderson’s Winesburg, Ohio and Joyce’s Dubliners, are discussed both in Mann’s The Short Story Cycle: A Genre Companion and Reference Guide and Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris’s The Composite Novel: The Short Story Cycle in Transition and are referred to as ‘short story cycle’ in the one and ‘composite novel’ in the other.

The term ‘composite novel’ originally indicated a collaborative work between several authors who each “[contribute] a chapter or individual section” (Dunn and Morris 2). The first time it was used to indicate a work of several stories working together as a whole written by only one author was in 1976 by Eric Rabkin; he used it to emphasise the novelistic cohesion of these works. Dunn and Morris paraphrased him as follows: “though these books may be composed of autonomous pieces, each book is nevertheless, in toto, a composite novel” (Dunn and Morris 3). A similar term was already used years before Rabkin’s introduction of the term ‘composite novel’, in 1932, by Joseph Warren Beach. He used the
term ‘composite view’ to indicate the works of authors who “build up a set of stories into a larger whole, in which, by some compositional device, they are given a semblance of organic unity” (qtd. in Dunn and Morris 3). So the generic indications of the two terms emphasise different parts; ‘short story cycle’ implies that, while the stories are connected, they are separate, self-sufficient stories, while ‘composite novel’ emphasises the unity formed by the individual stories and indicates a familiarity with the novel. Not only do these two terms place the focus on different entities, the phrase ‘cycle’ in ‘short story cycle’ also seems to indicate a cyclical motion created by the stories. The reader will expect “a return to the beginning, all of which preclude linear development” (Dunn and Morris 5). This limits the ways in which the stories can work together and follow each other.

Despite this difference, the generic aspects are very similar: in both cases the title of the book indicates the unity of the stories, whilst the self-sufficiency of the stories is emphasised by their own, individual titles. However, the term ‘composite novel’ is more exclusive because of its generic alliance with the novel. Whilst multivolume works and ‘series heroes’ clustered works, such as the Sherlock Holmes canon, do meet the requirements of the short story cycle, they are not considered to be composite novels: a composite novel “resides under one cover” (Dunn and Morris 16).

The unifying elements and different types of composite novels are also similar to those of the short story cycle. Dunn and Morris have divided the elements responsible for the interconnectedness, termed ‘organizing principles’, in five groups defined by: setting, a single protagonist, collective protagonist, pattern or ‘patchwork’ composite novel, and the art of storytelling (14-16). The organizing principles of setting, including the ‘village sketch’ tradition, and protagonist, often resulting in a bildungsroman or künstlerroman effect, are also mentioned by Mann as unifying elements of short story cycles. The organizing principle of pattern, resulting in a ‘patchwork’ composite novel, is established when all the stories “feature identical story patterns or reflect identical sharply etched motif patterns” (Dunn and Morris 15). This is similar to the idea of Mann where the reoccurrence of a particular theme in each story is responsible for the unity of the short story cycle. The fifth organizing principle of Dunn and Morris, the art of storytelling, focuses on the process of fiction making. By using metafictional elements, the author presents the principles behind his work of art, showing “the transactional process involved in getting the story told” (Dunn and Morris 16).
While Dunn and Morris only focus on the art of storytelling, Mann focuses on the unifying element of art in general. Since metafiction presents the creative process behind a text and in that way could be said to present the text as a work of art, regardless of the quality of the text, this organizing principle of the composite novel is also very similar to the unifying element of focusing on art in general and the process of art in the short story cycle. As was the case with the unifying elements, an analysis of the presence of organizing principles in a book can determine what kind of connection there is between the stories and whether the book can be categorized as a composite novel.

Since the generic aspects and unifying elements of the ‘short story cycle’ and the ‘composite novel’ are rather similar, the choice of which term to use comes down to their generic definitions. The difference between the two terms is their focus on either the individual stories or the unity formed by them. In the analyses of Fun Home by Alison Bechdel and A Visit from the Goon Squad by Jennifer Egan it will be interesting to see whether this focus is similar, since both books are usually categorized as novels. In the case of St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves it will be interesting to see in how far unifying elements can be found in what is normally categorized as a regular short story collection.

In the following chapters I will apply Wright’s genre tendencies of the short story, Mann’s unifying elements, and Dunn and Morris’ organizing principles to the books in order to categorize them. I have chosen to use these theorists because they are all respected in their field and they all present the qualifications for categorization in the specific subgenres in a very clear manner. Besides this, I will also analyse the theme of coming of age in the books. Whilst this theme was not mentioned by any of the theorists or authors mentioned in this chapter, it is related to the themes of isolation and loneliness; these themes were mentioned by the theorists and authors in this chapter because they all believe the short story to be a very suitable medium to convey them. Since these themes often are important elements in the theme of coming of age, this might make this theme a very suitable theme to use in the categorization process.
Chapter Two: Jennifer Egan’s A Visit from the Goon Squad

A Visit from the Goon Squad by Jennifer Egan was first published in 2010. The book portrays the beginning and demise of a generation. Upon publication, many reviews mentioned the form of the novel, since it consists of chapters following each other in a non-linear, non-chronological order. Christian House called it a “novel of interconnecting stories” in his review for the Independent, thereby indicating the difficulty in categorizing Egan’s work: is it a novel or a collection of short stories? This is similar to a composite novel, which consists of separate short stories which together form a unified whole; as the term already indicates, this unified whole is similar to a novel. Therefore, this chapter will deal with the question whether A Visit from the Goon Squad should be categorized as a composite novel or a novel.

In order to determine which elements from the composite novel can be found in A Visit from the Goon Squad, I will look at the generic signals of the chapters and compare the genre tendencies of the short story, based on Austin Wright’s genre tendencies, to see whether the chapters function as short stories. Secondly, I will analyse which unifying elements, based on Dunn and Morris’ definition of them, are present in the book. Finally, I will analyse the use of the theme of coming of age in the chapters and in the connection between the chapters to determine what kind of connection there is between the chapters. Based on these analyses, I will argue whether A Visit from the Goon Squad belongs in the short story genre or not.

The generic signals of A Visit from the Goon Squad are more reminiscent of the novel than the composite novel. The book has an original title and is not titled after one of the chapters and all the chapters have their own title, which are generic signals for both the novel and the composite novel. The absence of a table of contents, however, may indicate that the book is a novel, since short story collections almost always have a table of contents to indicate where each new story begins, whilst for novels the presence of a table of contents is more random. The chapters are also numbered, indicating that there is a right order to read them in. So the generic signals are similar to those of a novel.

Despite this, the way the chapters function in the book is similar to short stories in a composite novel. Unlike chapters normally do in novels, the chapters in Egan’s book do not follow each other in a linear line, and the end of one chapter does not flow over into the
beginning of the next. The chapters are stand-alone pieces and they provide a “total experience”, as Jennifer Egan herself writes in the Random House’s Reader’s Guide. This is similar to Austin Wright’s genre tendency that short stories generally are “strongly unified” (qtd. in Winther et al. 141). Other genre tendencies which are also present in the chapters is that they are concerned more with character than with action, as all the chapters focus on the personal, psychological growth of the characters, and that they are concerned with “externally simple” (141) plotlines. A final indication that the chapters may not be chapters, but short stories, is that some of them were published separately. The New Yorker published three stories from the book: the first story in the book, “Found Objects”, was published on December 10, 2007; the fourth story, “Safari”, was published on January 11, 2010; and the third story, “Ask Me if I Care”, was published on March 08, 2010. The ninth story, “Forty-Minute Lunch: Kitty Jackson Opens up About Love, Fame and Nixon!”, was published as early as 1999, when it was placed in the August issue of Harper’s Magazine under the shorter name of “Forty-Minute Lunch”. So whilst the generic signals indicated that the book was a novel, the way in which the chapters function indicates that they are in fact short stories, making it likelier that A Visit from the Goon Squad is a composite novel rather than a novel.

So the book consists of stories and not of chapters. But how do these separate stories connect together to form a whole? The book contains several organizing principles. As discussed in Chapter One, there are five organizing principles to connect the stories in a composite novel: setting, a single protagonist, collective protagonist, pattern or ‘patchwork’ composite novel, and the art of storytelling (Dunn and Morris 14-16). The ones which occur the most in A Visit from the Goon Squad and are therefore the most helpful for my analysis are the collective protagonist and pattern, in the shape of the reoccurrence of a theme throughout the book. I will first discuss the collective protagonist and then the pattern.

The collective protagonist in Egan’s work consists of characters who all belong to the same generation or, in two exceptions, are the link to the next generation. The connection between the characters is formed by the two characters of Bennie and Sasha; their stories are at the centre of the book and all the other characters know them in some way. The characters not only connect the stories by the relationships between them, but also by reappearing in several stories. Table 1 gives an overview of which characters appear in more than one story, thereby providing a connection between the stories. From this table it is
clear that the characters of Bennie and Sasha appear the most often throughout the book, as Bennie appears in five and Sasha in six stories, and that the only character to appear in both the first and the last story and no stories in between is the character of Alex. So it could be said that the presence of Alex links the book together; in the first story, “Found Objects”, Alex is on a date with Sasha who mentions Bennie’s name and in the final story Alex works for Bennie, intrigued by the man whose name he has heard years before, and the two of them share their memories of Sasha. So not only Alex, but also Bennie and Sasha, the characters who appear the most throughout the entire book, are present in both the first and the final story; in the first story Sasha is present remembering Bennie and in the final story Bennie is present remembering Sasha. It is not strange that the book begins and ends with them, since the recurring characters are all characters who Bennie and Sasha either know or are connected with in some way.

So Bennie and Sasha are the most prominent characters in the book. The way in which their life stories are told shows how the order of the stories can influence the reading experience. Sasha appears in “Found Objects”, “The Gold Cure”, “Out of Body”, “Goodbye, My Love”, and “Great Rock and Roll Pauses”. If these stories would have been placed in a chronological order, the order would be: “Goodbye, My Love”, “Out of Body”, “The Gold Cure”, “Found Objects”, and “Great Rock and Roll Pauses”. So apart from “Great Rock and Roll Pauses”, Sasha’s story is told in reverse order. Bennie appears in “The Gold Cure”, “Ask Me if I Care”, “You (Plural)”, “X’s and O’s”, “A to B”, and “Pure Language”. Chronologically they are ordered as “Ask Me if I Care”, “X’s and O’s”, “A to B”, “You (Plural)”, “The Gold Cure”, and “Pure Language”. Bennie’s life story is scattered in a more random order than Sasha’s. However, these orders do have in common that the penultimate story is placed first and that the final story is placed last. So in both cases the reader meets the character in a specific time and place in his life, then reads about how they got there before being told how the story continues. Because the stories are not told in a chronological order, the reader often receives information before the event has occurred. In “The Gold Cure”, Sasha is Bennie’s assistant, but the reader knows she will not be his assistant for much longer, since she no longer works for him in “Found Objects”. The reader also knows that Sasha receives therapy for her kleptomania in “Found Objects”, so when Bennie has lost his box with gold flakes and Sasha conveniently finds it, the reader realizes that when she says “you dropped it
coming out of the recording room” (36), he did not drop it. At the same time, the reader is missing information; when Sasha mentions her former boss Bennie Salazar in “Found Objects”, the reader has no clue yet as to who he is and if he will be important. So the reader starts reading “The Gold Cure” thinking about Bennie as the person “who was famous for founding the Sow’s Ear record label and who also (Sasha happened to know) sprinkled gold flakes into his coffee – as an aphrodisiac, she suspected – and sprayed pesticide in his armpits” (5). So by playing with the order in which things are told, certain things become clear when another clue has been given in a later story and expectations are raised for the next story. In this way, the reader’s view on the book as a whole is constantly changed by being presented with more information which is relevant to the previously read stories.

The second organizing principle is pattern, which in A Visit from the Goon Squad is presented as the re-emergence of the theme of the passing of time in each story. The passing of time is something all the characters have to deal with and, as the title reveals, time is not always kind to them; “Time’s a goon” (134), as Bosco says in “A to B”. Besides in the title, this theme is also reflected in the subdivision of the book in the two parts named “A” and “B”, which reflects a concept formed by Bosco in the story “A to B”; he wants to call his new album A to B and it needs to explain the way his life has gone; “And that’s the question I want to hit straight on: how did I go from being a rock star to being a fat fuck no one cares about?” (134). This is what the book deals with: how did its characters go from a to b? In the stories, the characters reflect on the past or try to imagine possible futures. These pasts and futures then occur in the other stories, in this way connecting the stories together. In “Found Objects”, Sasha is wondering which direction her life will take and whether it will change for better or worse. In “Great Rock and Roll Pauses”, her future is revealed and the reader now knows Sasha took her moment of change in the right direction.

So the organizing principles create clear connections interlinking the stories. The theme of coming of age works in a similar manner. In the book, the theme of coming of age is presented in the literal sense of coming of age, by describing the transition from adolescence to adulthood, and it also uses the elements which are combined in coming of age and takes it out of the restriction of age. The stories relate the transition of growing up by focusing on the moral and psychological growth of the characters, which gives the characters wisdom and insight into the world, a change the characters undergo at different
ages. This aspect of change also often resurfaces in connection to the ‘growing up’ of the characters. Egan focuses on both the physical and psychological coming of age.

The theme of coming of age connects the stories by portraying different stages of the process in different stories. This also happens with the coming of age of Alex, who appears in the first and last story, as he undergoes a complete character change between the first and the final story. In the first story, he is still a naïve young man, just new in New York, whilst in the final story he has become somewhat disillusioned with life; he no longer believes in a fantasy-life but has become aware of reality. In “Found Objects”, Sasha recognizes that Alex is new in town; “He was angry, and the anger made him recognizable in a way that an hour of aimless chatter (mostly hers, it was true) had not: he was new to New York” (10-11). Alex still has ideals and feels he can change the world. “He had a thing or two to prove about how people should treat one another” (11). Therefore, he is disapproving of how New Yorkers act: “you have no fucking idea what people are really like. They’re not even two-faced – they’re, like, multiple personalities” (13). However, in the final story, “Pure Language”, Alex has become two-faced himself. Whilst retaining the identity of a purist, he leads the blind team to promote a concert. He has sold out and does not even dare to tell his wife about this. He is unsure of when this change took place; there is no specific moment in time responsible for it, but just the passage of time itself. “Alex didn’t know. He didn’t need to know. What he needed was to find fifty more people like him, who had stopped being themselves without realizing it” (324). This seems to indicate Alex feels like he has lost his identity; however, it is not necessarily lost, but it has changed during the process of growing up. When Bennie and Alex try to find Sasha’s apartment, Alex feels a longing to be his younger self again and he says “I don’t know what happened to me” (348); Bennie tells him: “You grew up, Alex, (...) just like the rest of us” (348).

Whilst Alex is uncertain of when this change took place, with other characters the psychological growth takes place at a precise moment. A moment when this happens to Sasha in “Found Objects” is when she lets Alex take the bath salts from her stack of stolen things. Sasha identifies this as a moment of change. “She was aware of having made a move in the story she and Coz were writing, taken a symbolic step. But toward the happy ending, or away from it?” (17). This idea that a specific moment can be a turning point recurs at several places throughout the book where characters suddenly feel like a new person. In
“Safari”, Rolph changes as he dances with his sister: “As they move together, Rolph feels his self-consciousness miraculously fade, as if he is growing up right there on the dance floor” (87). By overcoming his shame of dancing, Rolph has become more mature from one moment to another and he imagines a new him: “a boy who dances with girls like his sister” (87). Rhea’s maturation in “Ask Me if I Care” also coincides with a specific moment. After meeting Lou and realizing how this can change their lives, Rhea thinks “and I realize that I’m beginning my adult life right now, on this night” (53). The possibilities of their future are starting to open up for them. The same goes for Sasha: by taking this symbolic step, she opens up new possibilities as well. However, she is still uncertain whether these new possibilities will give her what she wants and whether it is significant enough to change her life. “She wanted badly to please him, to say something like It was a turning point; everything feels different now, or I called Lizzie and we made up finally, or I’ve picked up the harp again, or just I’m changing I’m changing I’m changing: I’ve changed! Redemption, transformation – God how she wanted these things” (19).

By dividing the process of coming of age of a character over several stories, a connection between the stories is created for the reader; this connection is also created by the similarities and differences in this process. The storylines of Benny and his mentor Lou start out very similar but end differently. Lou’s end is connected with his no longer growing with the music industry. Bennie identifies this moment in “The Gold Cure”: “He remembered his mentor, Lou Kline, telling him in the nineties that rock and roll had peaked at Monterey Pop. (...) Bennie had looked into his idol’s famous face and thought, You’re finished. Nostalgia was the end – everyone knew that. Lou had died three months ago, after being paralyzed from a stroke” (38-39). When Bennie remembers this, he is in a similar place as Lou was. He has become disillusioned with the music industry and starts to become nostalgic for older music. However, unlike Lou, he is able to grow with his time and manages to organize the concert in “Pure Language”. Besides this revival of his career, Bennie has also gotten a complete new start in life, finding a new wife with whom he has another child. Seeing the parallels between Bennie and Lou, Lou’s end in “You (Plural)” could make the reader suspect a similar ending is waiting for Bennie. However, Bennie changes the story and comes out victorious.
The way in which the theme is used is very similar to Ingram’s description of interconnectedness. In Chapter One, Ingram’s description of interconnectedness was given:

Like the moving parts of a mobile, the interconnected parts of some story cycles seem to shift their positions with relation to the other parts, as the cycle moves forward in its typical pattern of recurrent development. Shifting internal relationships, of course, continually alter the originally perceived pattern of the whole cycle. A cycle’s form is elusive. Its patterns must be studied in detail and as the cycle progresses from first story to last. (Ingram 13)

Ingram focuses on the continual changes caused by the individual stories in the overarching story. This is exactly what Egan also does; by raising expectations and giving information in one story, she changes the reader’s view on the story as a whole. She does the same thing on the short stories level: by placing characters in similar situations or dilemmas, the outcome for one character is taken into consideration when reading about the other character. The differences and similarities in how the characters confront issues like growing up creates a dynamic reading experience. Each story itself is a total experience, but the complete picture is not revealed until all the stories are read. By looking at how Egan uses the organizing principles and the theme of coming of age throughout the book, this pattern which is so unique for a composite novel can be brought to the surface. After reading the entire book, the focus has shifted from the separateness of the stories onto the unity between them and the whole story that is told through the separate stories. It is this connection that categorizes *A Visit from the Goon Squad* as a composite novel.

The thing that makes a composite novel so unique is that the use of a theme is not limited to one story; by using it similarly or differently in each story, the progress of the theme becomes dynamic. The writer is able to show different sides from one theme in a way a regular short story collection cannot, since the stories are not connected to each other. The short story collection *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* also deals with the theme of coming of age. The next chapter will look at how the theme is used in this collection and whether the stories really are unconnected.
Chapter Three: Karen Russell’s *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves*

*St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* by Karen Russell was first published in 2006. Russell’s debut work consists of ten short stories which are inspired by her childhood growing up in Florida and the Everglades (BookBrowse), a setting which she often uses in her stories. Besides setting, the stories also have the theme of coming of age in common; in all the stories, the protagonists undergo a psychological growth through which they achieve a better understanding of the world. Even though *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* is presented as a regular short story collection, these similarities between the stories already indicate that the stories form more of a unity than usually found in regular short story collections. It is, however, found in short story cycles. Therefore, this chapter will deal with the question whether *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* might be better categorized as a short story cycle rather than as a short story collection.

In order to determine what elements from the short story collection and the short story cycle *St. Lucy’s Home* contains, I will look at the generic signals of the stories and analyse which organizing principles, based on Mann’s definition of them, are present in the stories. Finally, I will analyse the theme of coming of age in the stories themselves and in the connection between the stories to determine the kind of connection present between the stories. Based on these analyses, it may be determined where in the short story genre *St. Lucy’s Home* belongs.

The generic signals of *St. Lucy’s Home* present the book as a regular short story collection. This can firstly be seen in the title, which is not only the title of the entire collection, but also of one of the stories in the book. The title story is often placed first or last in the book, and in this case it is placed last. However, though not necessary, titles of regular short story collections traditionally end with the phrase “and other stories”, indicating that there is no unity amongst the stories (Mann 14); this part is left out of the title. Other indications that it is a short story collection are the table of contents and the individual titles of the short stories. Short story collections almost always have a table of contents to indicate where each separate story begins, whilst novels do not necessarily need a table of contents for their chapters. What becomes noticeable in the table of contents is that the stories are not numbered, which could indicate that they do not need to be read in a specific order. This
is different from the stories in Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, a composite novel, which were numbered, a possible indication that there is a right order to read them in. The short stories are all separately titled, emphasizing the individuality of the stories; they are complete units on their own. Their individuality is also indicated by the fact that some of the stories were published separately. “Haunting Olivia” was published in the *New Yorker* on June 13, 2005, and “Accident Brief, Occurrence #00/422” was also published in the *New Yorker* on June 19, 2006, under the shorter name of “Accident Brief”. “Ava Wrestles the Alligator” was published in *Zoetrope* in vol. 10, no.2, the summer issue of 2006. However, this does not exclude the possibility of *St. Lucy’s Home* being a short story cycle, since these indications of separateness were also present in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, in which the stories are clearly connected.

Whilst the generic signals of *St. Lucy’s Home* point in the direction of the short story collection, several unifying elements from the short story cycle are present in the book. The unifying elements of a short story cycle as presented by Susan Garland Mann are that the stories are character-dominated (8), focused on art (13), connected through the use of a certain setting or community (13), or through the use of a theme (11); a theme which often resurfaces in short story cycles is the maturation process (Mann 14). The two unifying elements which are the most prominent in *St. Lucy’s Home* and which are the most useful for my analysis are character-dominated stories and the use of a certain setting or community.

The unifying element of a certain setting or community is used to connect the stories together. All the stories are set in a place similar to Southern Florida. The feeling that the stories take place in the same world is enhanced by the reappearance of certain names and family names. The family name of Bigtree resurfaces in several stories; it first appears in “Ava Wrestles the Alligator”, where Ava Bigtree is the protagonist and the theme park Swamplandia is introduced for the first time. When Sawtooth in “Out to Sea” shares Ava’s last name, the mention of the alligators in the swamp confirms that they are from the same family. Ava’s father, who is referred to as “Chief” in “Ava Wrestles the Alligator”, is also mentioned in “Lady Yeti and the Palace of Artificial Snows”. When Reggie and Badger watch the adults entering the Blizzard, they also see “Chief Bigtree’s gator leather” (139). Apart from family names, specific characters also reoccur in other stories. Raffy first appears in
“The Stargazer’s Log of Summer-Time Crime”, in which he commits “comical and ironical
crimes” (79) which often have a cruel side to them. When Raffy first explains the plan of
smuggling baby turtles to Ollie, Ollie finds it “unnecessarily cruel” (78). When the name Raffy
reappears in “The City of Shells”, there is no indication that it is the same character.
However, the description of Raffy as having “a bad reputation around the City for pranks
that are more cruel than funny” (173-174) makes it very plausible that this is the same Raffy
as from “The Stargazer’s Log of Summer-Time Crime”.

Besides the reappearances of names, the sense that all the stories take place in the
same community is also strengthened by the reappearance of certain locations. The swamp
is mentioned in several stories; however, more specific locations also reoccur. The Bowl-a-
Bed Hotel is part of the setting in “The Stargazer’s Log of Summer-Time Crime”, as it is the
hotel where Ollie is staying with his father and sister. The hotel is mentioned in “Z.Z.’s Sleep-
Away Camp for Disordered Dreamers” as the backdrop of Emma’s sleepwalking: “they would
find her walking up and down the empty gutters at the Bowl-a-Bed Hotel” (56). The story in
“Haunting Olivia” also takes place near the hotel. The island on which the brothers Timothy
and Wallow spend their summer is the place where the hotel is located. “We are halfway
around the island, on the sandbar near the twinkling lights of the Bowl-a-Bed Hotel” (41). So
the backdrops of the stories create connections between the stories by making it seem as if
the stories take place in the same setting and community.

The unifying element of the stories being character-dominated is also present, but it
is not used in a unifying way. All individual stories are character-dominated, but since
protagonists do not appear in other stories besides their own, it is not used to connect the
stories together. As mentioned, sometimes family names and secondary characters appear
in several stories, but their appearances do not play an important part in the storylines or
the protagonist’s psychological growth. So when the reader has read the other stories in
which one of these reappearing characters appear, it will cause a moment of recognition;
however, when someone has not read the other stories with this character in it, he or she
will still understand the story and does not miss any significant information.

Whilst unifying elements are present in St. Lucy’s Home, their effect is not strong
enough to truly classify the book as a short story cycle. Even the use of a certain setting or
community which is used in a unifying matter is not present in every story, resulting in it only connecting some stories together. An example of this is the setting in the title story “St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves”, of which the setting only appears in that story; neither is the institution of St. Lucy’s mentioned in any of the other stories, whilst other locations such as the Bowl-a-Bed Hotel are mentioned in more than one story. The characters and names which appear in the title story do not make reappearances in any of the other stories. So the title story stands completely separate from the other stories. Since the title story is often considered to be the most important story in a collection, it is odd to leave it out of the connection if the book had been intended as a short story cycle. Therefore, the reoccurrence of setting and names seems to me to be more an indication that the stories were written by the same author than a conscious attempt to unify the stories.

With the unifying elements failing to create a proper connection between all the stories, what kind of connection does the theme of coming of age create? The theme of coming of age is present in all the stories in St. Lucy’s Home. Almost all the protagonists are on the verge from childhood to adulthood or adolescence and experience the gaining of insight into the world that comes with it; this makes the theme an important element in the stories.

Russell seems to present the theme of coming of age according to a specific structure involving a rite of passage. A rite of passage is a normal element in the presentation of coming of age, but Russell puts extra emphasis on it. In A Visit from the Goon Squad, Egan presents specific moments which influence the characters’ lives, but the emphasis is more on the entire process of coming of age and specifically the improved insight into the world her characters gain. With the character of Alex, for example, the reader reads about a young Alex in “Found Objects” and an older and wiser Alex in “Pure Language”, without gaining insight into what happened to Alex in between and which events changed his perception on the world; the focus is more on the outcome of his coming of age than the specific moments which caused it. Russell, on the other hand, puts much emphasis on the specific moment which changes a character and thereby makes the rite of passage a very important element in the coming of age of her characters.
The structure Russell uses to present the coming of age of her characters consists of three stages. First, the character is still childlike; second, the character undergoes a specific event, which is often traumatic; third, the character has grown up and has a better understanding of the world. This structure is very clear in “Ava Wrestles the Alligator”. In this story, the protagonist Ava has to undergo a rite of passage to psychologically grow. In the first stage before the rite of passage, Ava is still childlike and has two specific fears: the first one is “stringing up the swamp hens on Live Chicken Thursdays” (7) and her second fear is the marsh. When her sister Ossie sleepwalks into the marsh, Ava is afraid to follow her so she can stop Ossie and bring her back. “I pace along the edge of the marsh, too afraid to follow her, not for the first time. This is it, this is the geographical limit of how far I’ll go for Ossie. We are learning latitude and longitude in school, and it makes my face burn that I can graph the coordinates of my own love and courage with such damning precision” (10-11). In the second stage she undergoes her rite of passage, which is the traumatic event of being abused by the Bird Man. In the third stage, Ava has grown up and has overcome her fears. She performs Live Chicken Thursday for the first time. Whilst she is normally “nervous around the rooster, and too squeamish to tie the knots” (15), this time Ava puts the chickens in the crate and lowers them over the alligators without emotion. “There, I think, I’ve done it” (15). Ava is not only no longer afraid of feeding the alligators live chickens, she has also lost her fear of the marsh at night. When her sister elopes with Lucius, she follows Ossie out onto the marsh and even follows her into the water to drag her out. Not only has her coming of age helped Ava to overcome her fears, it has also left her with a different understanding of the world; Ava has become aware of the loneliness in the world and she fears this loneliness. Her fear to be left alone motivates Ava to rescue Ossie. “But this burst of speed comes from an older adrenaline, some limbic other. Not courage, but a deeper terror. I don’t want to be left alone” (22). Ava now understands that she is alone in this world and that there is no one to take care of her; she has to take care of herself. She experiences this feeling of loneliness as the most human emotion; “[a]nd I’d be tempted to tell Ms. Huerta that this is the feeling that separates us from the animals, if I hadn’t seen so many of the Chief’s dogs die of loneliness” (21). So there is a clear difference in Ava’s character before the Bird Man and after, and her coming of age has left her with a sense of loneliness in the world.
The same structure can be found in “Out to Sea”, the only story which does not revolve around the coming of age of a teenager, but where the protagonist is Sawtooth Bigtree, an old man living in the “Out-to-Sea Retirement Community” (179). Whilst Sawtooth does not literally grow up in the story, he does undergo a psychological growth and comes to a better insight into the world. Despite their age difference, Sawtooth experiences the same three stages as Ava; being naïve, undergoing a rite of passage, and finally gaining insight into the loneliness of existence. The difference with Ava’s experience is that Sawtooth was already aware of this loneliness before he participated in the “No Elder Person Is an Island Volunteer Program” (179), but the buddy program made him believe he did not have to be lonely and made him feel as if he had reconnected with the world; it made him return to the naïve state. He then undergoes a rite of passage, losing his buddy from the program, and after this Sawtooth regains the insight that the world is a lonely place and that he is disconnected from the rest of the world. “All around him, the muted yellow lamps of his neighbours’ boats blink off quietly, one by one, until Sawtooth is left bobbing alone in the darkness” (196). Whilst he tried to escape his loneliness, Sawtooth has learned for a second time that loneliness is an unavoidable part of life.

This sense of being disconnected from the world is also very clear in “Z.Z.’s Sleep-Away Camp for Disordered Dreamers”, in which the protagonist Elijah undergoes the same three-stage structure as Ava and Sawtooth. In this story, there is a clear difference in Elijah’s view on the world right before and right after the rite of passage. Elijah’s rite of passage consists of the discovery that Anna, one of the camp leaders, is responsible for killing the sheep and the ordeal of having to hide a dead sheep’s body with her. Before this ordeal, Elijah is still naive in his perception of the world and he feels very connected to his friends Emma and Oglivy. As they run through the woods, Elijah thinks: “This is the happiest that I have ever been. I wish somebody would murder a sheep every night of my life. It feels like we are all embarking on a nightmare together” (65). Right after the rite of passage, Elijah is no longer connected to his friends. With Emma, he feels a physical distance. As Elijah lies in the sleeping balloon of the camp, he thinks: “Now that I am ballooning solo, I’m afraid to pull the rip cord. At least with Emma I could feel the warmth of another body in the basket” (70). With Oglivy, he feels an emotional distance which is the biggest part of his sense of loneliness. Elijah and Oglivy were connected through their shared sleeping disorder, as they
both had postmonitions in their dreams: prophesies of past events. Now that Oglivy no longer has them, the bond between them is broken. “Oglivy really spoiled me. I had almost forgotten this occipital sorrow, the way you are so alone with the things you see in dreams” (71). Elijah has reached the final stage of coming of age and is aware of the loneliness of the world, just as Ava and Sawtooth are.

This sense of loneliness which the characters are left with after their coming of age suits Frank O’Connor’s idea that the short story conveys “an intense awareness of human loneliness” (qtd. in Winther et al. 138). As Charles E. May phrased it: “[in] the short story we are presented with characters in their essential aloneness, not in their taken-for-granted social world” (qtd. in Winther et al. 139). This represents the states the characters in *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* are in after they have gone through their rites of passage. The protagonists, like Ava, Sawtooth, and Elijah, have come to the realisation that they are essentially alone and that they have to take care of themselves.

As can already be seen with these three examples, the theme of coming of age resurfaces in all the stories of *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* in a similar structure. This structure can be simplified as follows: first, the protagonist is still childlike in his or her perception of the world; second, the protagonist goes through a specific, traumatizing event; third, this event has left the protagonist with a better understanding of the world as a consequence of their coming of age. This means that after reading a couple of the stories, the reader is somewhat able to guess the progress of a storyline based on the progress in the other stories. However, this does not mean that the depiction of the theme of coming of age forms a connection between the stories. Whilst the progress of a story can be guessed from the other stories, the other stories do not influence the storyline; each story starts at the beginning and ends at the end. How character A functions in story 1 has no relevance to how character B functions in story 2; their psychological growth is not influenced by the characters or the storylines from the other stories. Each story chronicles the same process, not different parts from this process. So whilst the theme of coming of age connects the stories in their similar structure, I would not say that it connects them in such a way that they form a unified whole; the individual storylines remain separate from each other and having read one story does not change your view on another, as is the case with a short story cycle. If *St. Lucy’s Home* had contained the same connection as a short
story cycle, reading one story would change the reader’s perception on the previous story, as is the case with Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, but this is not the case here.

So whilst the stories in *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* do share some connections between them, these connections are not enough to make the book a unified whole. Had stories been left out of the collection, it would not have made an impact on the book as a whole. Both the unifying element of setting and the presence of the theme of coming of age in all the stories connect the stories by creating similarities between them, but the storylines themselves remain completely unconnected. Whilst *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* contains more connections between the stories than a regular short story collection, the connection between the stories is not strong enough to categorize it as a short story cycle.

This means that *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* is a short story collection displaying some unifying elements; separate entities with slight connections. The graphic novel *Fun Home*, by Alison Bechdel, is the opposite; whilst considered to be a unified novel, its chapters display a sense of autonomy. As in the previous chapters, an analysis of the theme of coming of age will indicate what kind of connection there really is between the chapters of the book.
Chapter Four: Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*

*Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel was first published in 2006. It is a memoir based on Bechdel’s own life and is written in the form of a graphic novel. In *Fun Home*, Bechdel chronicles her own coming of age and sexual orientation, and she presents her life story in seven chapters. Whilst the seven chapters together form a unified story, they display a certain sense of autonomy. The fact that each chapter begins with its own title page strengthens the autonomy of the chapters and lessens their unity. This effect is similar to the working of a short story cycle, in which separate stories form a unified whole despite their autonomy. Since the chapters in *Fun Home* are so reminiscent of the short stories in a short story cycle, this chapter will deal with the questions of how similar the novel *Fun Home* is to the short story cycle and to what extent the novel belongs in the short story genre.

In order to determine which elements from the short story cycle can be found in *Fun Home*, I will look at the generic signals of the chapters and compare the genre tendencies of the short story, based on Austin Wright’s genre tendencies, to see whether the chapters of *Fun Home* function as short stories. Secondly, I will analyse which organizing principles, based on Mann’s definition, are present in the chapters. Finally, I will analyse the theme of coming of age in the chapters themselves and in the connection between the chapters to determine the kind of connection present between them. Based on these analyses, it can be argued whether this graphic novel belongs in the short story genre or not.

The generic signals of *Fun Home* consists of elements from the short story cycle and the novel. The book has a table of contents, which is a requisite for all types of short story collections, but is also sometimes used in novels. In the table of contents, the titles of the stories are numbered, indicating that there is a right order to read them in. This was also the case for Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, so it does not necessarily mean that *Fun Home* should be a novel. In the table of contents, there is no indication of whether the stories are chapters or stories, they are just indicated by their title. However, Bechdel does use the term chapters on the title pages for each chapter. The mention of chapters is a generic signal of the novel, but the use of title pages for each chapter gives the idea of a new beginning and creates a clear separation between the chapters. Each title page of a chapter contains the title of the chapter and a picture. Whilst it is not unusual for chapters in novels...
to be preceded by a picture, as is the case in *Fun Home*, these pictures are often at the top of the page, followed by the beginning of the text at the lower half of the page. In *Fun Home*, the chapter title and a picture fill an entire ‘title’ page, followed by a blank page, after which the chapter begins on a new page. The title does not categorize the book as either a novel or a short story cycle, since both forms use a title which is different from the titles of the chapters or stories. So whilst many of the generic signals could indicate both a short story cycle or a novel, the use of the term ‘chapters’ would seem to categorize the book as a novel rather than a short story cycle.

The generic signal which classifies *Fun Home* as a novel is the term ‘chapter’, so it is interesting that this term is not initially used in the table of contents and is only mentioned on the title pages. So compared to Austin Wright’s genre tendencies, are the chapters in *Fun Home* really chapters or do they function as short stories despite this indication? Two of the genre tendencies for the short story are that the short story is more concerned with character development than action and that the storyline is “externally simple” and contains no secondary lines or subplots (Wright qtd. in Winther 141). These tendencies also apply to *Fun Home*; the book is focused on the coming of age of Bechdel herself and each chapter portrays a certain theme related to this or a specific time period which was of importance in this process. Whilst all the chapters focus on one particular theme or event, the plot lines of the chapters do allow for secondary lines of action, which do not tend to appear in short stories. The book not only focuses on Alison Bechdel’s coming of age, but also on her parents’ relationship and especially on her father’s secret homosexuality. Though these are two separate storylines, they do always come together again at the end of the chapters. Important moments in Alison’s development are often connected with her father’s homosexuality. In chapter six, Alison is not yet aware of her sexual orientation, but she does become aware of her sexuality, as she discovers masturbation. This beginning of her sexual nature happens around the same time when her father’s homosexuality is almost made public because of a lawsuit. When Alison comes to the realization that she is a lesbian, her coming out is followed by the discovery that her father is homosexual. So whilst the chapters do contain secondary storylines, these storylines always come together again. Whilst the discussion of a specific theme or period does not limit the chapters to one storyline, as is the case in short stories, it does create the feeling that each chapter is a unified whole. The
chapters do not end on cliffhangers, but always end with a conclusion on the specific theme or of the time period discussed. The unified storyline presented in the chapters is also a genre tendency for short stories (Wright qtd. in Winther 141) and creates the feeling of autonomy of the chapters. Nevertheless, whilst the chapters in Fun Home share similarities with the short story, they fail to meet the most important criterion: a short story needs to stand on its own as a complete and fully understandable story. This is not the case for the chapters in Fun Home, since it is necessary for the reader to read all the chapters in order to fully understand all the storylines. So even though the chapters are very similar to the short story in their construction, they do not fully function as a short story.

Although the chapters fail to stand on their own as individual stories, they nevertheless function like the stories in a short story cycle. This feeling is enhanced by the presence of unifying elements, characteristics of the short story cycle. The unifying elements as presented by Susan Garland Mann are that they are character-dominated (8), focused on art (13), connected through the use of a certain setting or community (13), or through the use of a theme (11); one of the other themes which often resurfaces in short story cycles is the maturation process (Mann 14). Almost all these unifying elements appear in one way or another in Fun Home; I will pay the most attention to the element of being character-dominated, since this element is the most prominent in the book and is the most helpful for my analysis.

The unifying elements of being character-dominated, focused on art and the process of making art, and the often resurfacing theme of maturation are combined in Fun Home. All chapters are character-dominated as they are concerned with the development of Bechdel’s growing up; each chapter chronicles a certain period or aspect from the life of Alison Bechdel as she grows up. As Mann explains, this element can result in variations on the bildungsroman or on the künstlerroman when the protagonist is an artist. Fun Home could be categorized as a kind of bildungsroman, as the personal progress of Bechdel is the main focus of the book, but it also contains elements of the künstlerroman; especially chapter one, “Old Father, Old Artificer”, a direct reference to James Joyce’s künstlerroman The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man, and chapter five, “The Canary-Colored Caravan of Death”, discuss several influences on Bechdel’s aesthetic. The first chapter explains Bechdel’s preference for “the unadorned” (14) and the fifth chapter explains Bechdel’s
preference for simple black-and-white line work and her reluctance to use colour in her work. Related to this is the use of the maturation process, which is often the focus of twentieth-century short story cycles. *Fun Home* also focuses on the maturation process, and all the chapters together give a clear image of the maturation process of Bechdel.

Setting is also a connecting element in *Fun Home*. There are several places of action in *Fun Home*, but the majority of the story is set in and around the family home in Beech Creek; other places which also often occur are Alison’s university and New York, especially the area around Bleecker Street. Not only is setting used as a background for the action, but Bechdel also assigns significance to setting in her father’s life. “If only he’d been able to escape the gravitational tug of Beech Creek, I tell myself, his particular sun might not have set in so precipitate a manner” (125). She almost blames Beech Creek for her father’s death, considering it as a place which constrains her father.

*Fun Home* contains many of the unifying elements of the short story cycle, but what kind of connection does the theme of coming of age create between the chapters? *Fun Home* portrays the coming of age of Alison Bechdel herself in connection to her sexual orientation and her relationship with her father; each development in her psychological growth and each step of her coming of age is connected to an event related to her father. Like her father, Bechdel is homosexual; unlike her father, she is open about it, whilst he kept it a secret for most of his life. During her childhood, there are many moments which foreshadow Bechdel’s realization that she is a lesbian. Around the age of four or five, Bechdel and her father see a lesbian truck-driver in a luncheonette in Philadelphia. “I didn’t know there were women who wore men’s clothes and had men’s haircuts. But like a traveller in a foreign country who runs into someone from home – someone they’ve never spoken to, but know by sight – I recognized her with a surge of joy” (118). This is the earliest moment Bechdel describes which indicates that she has homosexual feelings. In this moment, Bechdel feels a sense of recognition from the woman’s sexual orientation and the masculine aspect of her character. As a child, Bechdel wanted to wear men’s clothes. She advises her father on what to wear and receives *Gentlemen’s Quarterly* for her fourteenth birthday (181); she also plays dress-up with her friend Beth in her father’s old clothes (182).
Putting on the men’s clothes, Bechdel almost feels like a newborn person: “Putting on the formal shirt with its studs and cufflinks was a nearly mystical pleasure, like finding myself fluent in a language I’d never been taught” (182).

Bechdel’s desire to wear men’s clothing and her preference for the masculine over the feminine is presented in opposition to her father’s preference for the feminine and his feminine character traits. Whilst Bechel’s character is very butch, her father’s character is much more feminine. He takes great care of his appearance and has a love for gardening and interior design. About his love for gardening and flowers, Bechel remarks: “What kind of man but a sissy could possibly love flowers this ardently?” (90). Bechdel not only considers her father’s hobbies and interests to be feminine, his entire figure is. When Bechdel is browsing through a box of photographs, she also finds one of her father in a woman’s
“He’s wearing a woman’s bathing suit. A fraternity prank? But the pose he strikes is not mincing at all. He’s lissome, elegant” (120). Alison and her father are opposites from each other in their characters, whilst having a preference for the other’s gender. “Not only were we inverts, we were inversions of each other” (98). Therefore they try to express themselves through each other. “While I was trying to compensate for something unmanly in him... He was attempting to express something feminine through me” (98). Alison wants to dress butch and advises her father on how to dress, while her father wants her to wear dresses and making her wear accessories, making her look like a girl. So when Bechdel comes to the transition between her youth and her adult life, her realization that she is a lesbian and coming out about it, it is no surprise that this moment is juxtaposed by her father, who is revealed to be a closeted homosexual. “I’d been upstaged, demoted from protagonist in my own drama to comic relief in my parents’ tragedy” (58). By constantly juxtaposing Alison with her father, the book portrays Alison’s growth in connection to her relationship with her father.

The way in which the theme of coming of age connects the chapters is that each chapter deals with a specific theme related to coming of age which resurfaces throughout Alison’s life or a specific period which is influential in the maturation process. In this way, the theme of coming of age is divided into subthemes and all the chapters together portray the entire experience of Bechdel’s coming of age. In this way, each chapter contains a clearly defined story. The first chapter, “Old Father, Old Artificer”, centres around Bruce Bechdel’s passion for restoring the house to its former glory and how this affected Alison’s aesthetic ideals. She developed a “preference for the unadorned and purely functional” (14), claiming: “When I grow up, my house is going to be all metal, like a submarine” (14). The chapter also deals with the theme of keeping up appearances and how her father held his more
aggressive nature hidden behind a sparkling façade. The second chapter, “A Happy Death”, deals with the presence of death in Bechdel’s life; it discusses how her father’s job at the funeral home brought death into her daily life and focuses on her father’s death, his funeral, and his tombstone. The third chapter, “That Old Catastrophe”, focuses on Bechdel’s coming out and her theory that it influenced her father’s death. “And with my father’s death following so hard on the heels of this doleful, coming-out party, I could not help but assume a cause-and-effect relationship” (59). The fourth chapter, “In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower”, focuses on Bruce Bechdel’s feminine character traits and Alison’s desire to be more masculine and how this influenced their father-daughter relationship. The fifth chapter, “The Canary-Colored Caravan of Death”, describes the development of Alison’s obsessive-compulsive behavior and how she managed to deal with her obsessive-compulsive disorder. It also focuses on the aspect of compulsion in her family’s life. All family members are compulsive in pursuing their artistic talents and Bechdel’s father’s specific attention to color is one example of the compulsive streak in her family. The sixth chapter, “The Ideal Husband”, chronicles the summer in which Alison has her first period, thereby making the transition to womanhood; her sexuality also starts to blossom as she discovers masturbation. It is also the summer in which her father’s secret is almost revealed, as he is charged with buying an under-aged boy alcohol. The seventh and final chapter, “The Antihero’s Journey”, chronicles Bechdel’s emersion into the gay and lesbian community at university, which she compares to Odysseus’ journeys. It also focuses on the relationship between her and her father, which is based on their shared interest in literature and which she compares to the relationship between Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus in James
Joyce’s *Ulysses*. “It was not the sobbing, joyous reunion of Odysseus and Telemachus. It was more like fatherless Stephen and sonless Bloom having their equivocal late-night cocoa at 7 Eccles Street” (221).

This division of subthemes related to the overarching theme of coming of age is used in both a unifying and dividing manner in *Fun Home*. All the chapters deal with the theme of coming of age and together they form the entire process of Bechdel’s coming of age; in this way it unifies the chapters. Despite this, the theme of coming of age is also used to create a division between the chapters. Each chapter sets itself apart from the others by focusing on a particular aspect from or theme related to this process and this is what creates the autonomous feeling of the chapters. This does not mean that the chapters fully function as short stories, since it is still necessary for the reader to read all the chapters in order to fully understand the storylines of them all. What it does mean is that all of the chapters have a closed ending; all that there is to say on the time period or theme has been said, and the next chapter will go on with a new theme or time period. As said before, there are no cliffhangers to connect the chapters together and though the storyline has not yet ended, the chapter most certainly has. If the chapters were fully functioning stories on their own, the overarching theme of coming of age would work in a unifying manner, as this unifying element would normally do in a short story cycle. But since *Fun Home* is a novel, its subthemes create a division were there normally should not be one.

So whilst Alison Bechdel’s novel *Fun Home* does contain elements from the short story cycle, the chapters do not fully function as individual short stories. For a great part, the unity of the book is dependent on the unifying elements which also occur in short story cycles. Besides this, the way the story is divided into the chapters gives the chapters a likeness to short stories; all the chapters focus on one specific theme and end in a conclusion to these theme. However, since the storylines of the chapters are not able to stand on their own without the other chapters, the chapters cannot be classified as short stories. So while the presence of these aspects from the short story genre does create a more divided sense between the chapters than there normally is in novels, it is not enough to call the book a short story cycle.
Conclusion

In the previous chapters, I have argued whether and where in the short story genre the following books belong: Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad* can be called a composite novel, Karen Russell’s *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* a short story collection with elements from the short story cycle, and Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* a novel with chapters similar to short stories. The three books all contain unifying elements and organizing principles, even though they are not generally categorized as short story cycles or composite novels. These unifying elements and organizing principles are used to create a connection between the stories and link them together. Since the books all contain the theme of coming of age, I have tried to expose the connection between the storylines of the stories in these books by adding an analysis of this theme in addition to just the generic signals and the unifying elements and organizing principles which are normally used in short story theory to categorize a book. Since unifying elements and organizing principles are present in these books, there has to be some sort of unity between the stories in them; however, they do not say anything about the connection between the storylines of the stories, and it is this connection between the storylines which ultimately decides to which category the book belongs. Therefore I have added an analysis of the theme of coming of age, inherent to the storylines of these three books, to aid in the categorization process.

I have based my argumentation of the categorizations of the books on the generic signals, the unifying elements and organizing principles, and the connection formed by the theme. The generic signals I have discussed are the title of the book, the titles of the stories, and the table of contents. These generic signals are not limited to short story collections or even literary texts, but the way in which they are applied and used in combination with each other can give an indication of what kind of a text a book is. All three books have a table of contents; the tables of contents differ from each other in that the contents in *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* does not number the stories, whilst the stories in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* and *Fun Home* are numbered in the table of contents. This numbering can indicate that there is a right order to read the stories in, suggesting that the stories might form a bigger picture when read in the right way. A second indication of whether the stories form a unified whole is the title of the book. Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad* and Bechdel’s *Fun Home* each have an original title for the book in its entirety which is not also
the name of one of the stories; this indicates that the separate stories form a unified whole which deserves its own title. Russell’s St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves, on the other hand, has as title for the book a title from one of its stories; this indicates that the stories together do not form a unified whole which needs to be indicated by a separate title. Based on their generic signals, St. Lucy’s Home would be categorized as a regular short story collection, while A Visit from the Goon Squad and Fun Home could be categorized as either a short story cycle, composite novel, or novel.

The generic signals already give an indication of whether a connection between the stories can be expected. However, the generic signals of St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves, and especially its title, do not indicate a connection, whilst the book does contain organizing principles. So what kind of connections do the organizing principles and unifying elements create between the stories? As discussed before, organizing principles are used in short story cycles and unifying elements are used in composite novels, but they are very similar to each other. A Visit from the Goon Squad and Fun Home both rely the most on the character-based unifying element; they have either a single or collective protagonist which appear in all the stories. By connecting the stories through characters, it can be expected that this creates a connection between the different storylines, since they centre on the same characters. In St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves, the main unifying element is that of setting; certain locations appear in several stories. Whilst this creates a connection between the stories, it does not have to create a connection between the individual storylines. St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves uses reoccurring characters, but these are always secondary characters who do not play an influential part in the storyline. So some unifying elements have a direct influence on the connection between the storylines, whilst others connect the stories, but not necessarily the storylines together. The type of connection created by the unifying elements can be exposed by a shared theme between the books.

In A Visit from the Goon Squad and Fun Home, the theme is used to connect the storylines together, whilst the theme in St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves shows that there is no connection between the storylines. In A Visit from the Goon Squad and Fun Home, the stories together form a unified whole, another complete story formed by the separate stories. However, despite the books containing similar unifying elements, there is a
difference in the connection between the stories in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* and *Fun Home*. In *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, the theme is used to unify the stories. Through the different stories, the coming of age of the recurring characters is told; this progress continues from one story to the other and is not yet completely fulfilled at the end of one story. The processes of coming of age from the different characters also influence each other and the way in which the reader views the characters in the different stories. So the continuation of the theme throughout all the stories unifies them and the focus is on the whole rather than the separate stories, and that is why I categorized it as a composite novel. In *Fun Home*, the theme is divided into subthemes, of which one is discussed in each chapter. So whilst the chapters together do form a unified whole, the focus remains on the separateness of the chapters, and this is why I categorized it as a novel containing characteristics of the short story cycle. This difference in categorization is not made clear by the unifying elements, which are similar in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* and *Fun Home*; in order to see this difference, the extra criterion of theme had to be used. For these two books, the categorization was based on the nuances in the connections between the stories, which were exposed by the theme rather than by the unifying elements and organizing principles. The same goes for *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves*, which does contain unifying elements, albeit sparingly, but the theme of coming of age does not connect the storylines of the stories together. Each story displays the coming of age of its protagonist; whilst this happens according to a similar structure, the different characters and their processes of coming of age do not influence the characters in other stories. Each story contains a finished process which is of no consequence for what happens in the next story. In this instance, the theme shows that, while there are unifying elements present in the book, the storylines still remain completely separate from each other and that the separate stories do not form a unified whole.

So while the unifying elements and organizing principles do give a good indication of to which subgenre in the short story genre the books belong, the analysis of the theme was necessary to exactly pinpoint to which subgenre the books belong, since it exposed the very nuanced differences between the connections of the stories. The presence of unifying elements and organizing principles in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* and *Fun Home* made clear that the stories are connected, but the theme indicated what kind of connection there was
between the stories. In *St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves*, the unifying elements were present in only some of the stories, indicating that if there is a connection between the stories, it would not be a very strong connection; this was confirmed by the theme, which showed that the storylines remained unconnected from each other.

Based on this, I can conclude that an analysis of a theme relevant to the storylines is a useful and perhaps even necessary addition to the current criteria on which the categorization process of short story collections is based. Generic signals and unifying elements and organizing principles do give an indication of where in the short story genre a book belongs, but they were not precise enough in categorizing the books. By analysing the theme of coming of age, I was able to confirm the indications of the generic and unifying aspects or give a more precise argument in addition to them. Particularly in categorizing a book either as a short story cycle or a composite novel, the theme is much more precise in identifying the kind of connection between the stories and whether the focus lies on the whole or the separate than the unifying elements and organizing principles. Especially since unifying elements and organizing principles are so similar to each other, it is difficult to decide what kind of connection there is between the stories based on these elements alone, since they do not expose the nuances in these connections, like the theme did, but rather indicate that there is some sort of connection between the stories without specifying what kind of. Therefore, an analysis of the thematic interconnectedness has proven to be the perfect addition to the current theoretic framework used for categorization in the short story genre.

The books on which I tested this hypothesis combined characteristics from subgenres. Though I could not find statements of the authors claiming they did so consciously, the combination of aspects from different subgenres in the books shows that the authors did not strictly follow generic rules and did not feel bounded by them. The rise of experimental literature might enhance this feeling of liberation from the rules in more authors, thereby encouraging the creation of new forms and subgenres. Because of this continuing of the evolving of genres, categorization will always be an important aspect of literary studies.
Works Cited


Table 1

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<td>Scotty</td>
<td>3. Ask Me if I Care</td>
<td>You (Plural)</td>
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<td>6. X’s and O’s</td>
<td>13. Pure Language</td>
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<td>3. Ask me if I Care</td>
<td>6. X’s and O’s</td>
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<td>Rob</td>
<td>10. Out of Body</td>
<td>1. Found Objects</td>
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<td>Dolly / La Doll</td>
<td>7. A to B</td>
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