

THE NEW WOMAN OF THE NEW SOUTH: GENDER AND CLASS  
IN 20TH CENTURY SOUTHERN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

by

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## ABSTRACT

The theoretical study of Southern literature has become increasingly popular in recent decades. Many of the studies focus on women's rights, racial inequality, class relations, and other injustices as they are depicted within the texts of Southern authors; this master's thesis is no different. I, too, recognize the social injustices represented in many Southern texts and seek to understand how they translate into an understanding of Southern history.

One of the foundational points of my research is that the South is depicted as a grotesque region, and Southern writers have done little to dispute the grotesque label given to them by scholars. In fact, in the early twentieth century, Southern authors invented a literary genre that emphasizes the queer, distorted, and grotesque culture of the American South. Authors used images of disability, gender bending, and intersexuality as a way of representing the grotesque, economically divided South. Women writers were especially engaged in writing about these themes that generally define Southern literature.

One way that Southern female writers of the twentieth century represented the grotesque in their writing was by employing the archetypal figure of the tomboy. Within the context of this study, tomboys are considered young--pubescent or pre-pubescent--girls who occupy a liminal space in the man-woman gender binary. In addition to the tomboy identity being a liminal space in the gender binary, it is also characterized by a liminal time in lives of girls who claim this identity. Tomboyism is generally given up during adolescence. Carson McCullers's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Member*

*of the Wedding*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and Katherine Anne Porter's "Old Mortality" and "The Old Order" all contain iconic New South tomboys. Through their rejection of, or in some cases queering of, traditional gender norms, Mick Kelly in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding*, Scout Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and Miranda in "Old Mortality" and "The Old Order" all demonstrate the intersectionality of socioeconomic status and gender in the New South era and its relationship to the Southern Gothic.

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## Introduction

The theoretical study of Southern literature has become increasingly popular in recent decades. Many of the studies focus on women's rights, racial inequality, class relations, and other injustices as they are depicted within the texts of Southern authors; this master's thesis is no different. I, too, recognize the social injustices represented in many Southern texts and seek to understand how they translate into an understanding of Southern history.

One of the foundational points of my research is that the South is depicted as a grotesque region, and Southern writers have done little to dispute the grotesque label given to them by scholars. In fact, in the early twentieth century, Southern authors invented a literary genre that emphasizes the queer, distorted, and grotesque culture of the American South. Authors used images of disability, gender bending, and intersexuality as a way of representing the grotesque, economically divided South. Women writers were especially engaged in writing about these themes that generally define Southern literature.

One way that Southern female writers of the twentieth century represented the grotesque in their writing was by employing the archetypal figure of the tomboy. Within the context of this study, tomboys are considered young--pubescent or pre-pubescent--girls who occupy a liminal space in the man-woman gender binary. In addition to the tomboy identity being a liminal space in the gender binary, it is also characterized by a liminal time in lives of girls who claim this identity. Tomboyism is generally given up during adolescence. Carson McCullers's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Member of the Wedding*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and

Katherine Anne Porter's "Old Mortality" and "The Old Order" all contain iconic New South tomboys. Through their rejection of, or in some cases queering of, traditional gender norms, Mick Kelly in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding*, Scout Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and Miranda in "Old Mortality" and "The Old Order" all demonstrate the intersectionality of socioeconomic status and gender in the New South era and its relationship to the Southern Gothic.

The publication years for each of these stories fall between 1930 and 1960, and all of the stories take place between the end of the Civil War and 1940—a time of great cultural change in the South as well as the United States as a whole. These authors' depiction of tomboyism suggests that different outcomes are possible for different types of tomboys based on the family's socioeconomic status.

Socioeconomic class serves as a vital point for analysis because during the time period that these stories were written, the South made several major economic transitions. According to Gavin Wright, "the regions of the American South were known to be economically distinct from those of the North. The economy built on staple crops, plantations, and slavery enjoyed something of a heyday in the antebellum era, but its regional legacy was nearly a century of backwardness, poverty, and isolation from the American mainstream."<sup>1</sup> After the Civil War, many landowners who had relied heavily on slave labor had to find new ways to harvest their seasonal crops.

Because landowners only paid an overhead cost for a slave and did not have to pay them wages or provide them with adequate, much less luxurious living spaces, the formerly wealthy

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, Gavin, "Persisting Dixie: The South as an Economic Region," in *The American South in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Craig S. Pascoe, Karen Trahan Leathem, and Andy Ambrose (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2005), 77.

landowners were forced to reassess their budgets to accommodate for paid labor. Wright notes that “every single southern state moved in the same direction in every single decade between 1880 and 1930—toward smaller farm size and fewer acres per person.”<sup>2</sup> Since farmers were having to downsize their farms in order to manage and maintain the land, families who were able to own land were thought to uphold a certain status within their community. Lee and Porter both demonstrate this rule through the attitudes of their characters in the selected texts.

In addition to the agricultural accommodations, the regional economy was shifting, and many rural families, who once thrived on the belief that the south was “unchanging” and “fixed by its agricultural past and present,” moved to more urban areas in order to cash in on the new industrial economic structure.<sup>3</sup> Small mill towns accounted for a large portion of the new economic structure of the South. According to Dana F. White, around 1950, “towns and cities had been scattered widely throughout the region’s rural landscape.”<sup>4</sup> Small towns and cities provide the landscape for Carson McCullers’s texts and provide details that relate to each family’s financial situation. Porter and Lee’s stories reveal families who were once prosperous landowners but were forced to find new ways of living after the Civil War. These families, for the most part were able to make the transition successfully and maintain their land and their social status. McCullers’s stories utilize the, new, industrial towns as their main setting. While the families are not necessarily mill workers in the towns, they are affected by the poor economy as a result of the Great Depression.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>3</sup> Dana F. White, “Cities in Full: The Urban South during the Final Century of the past Millennium,” in *The American South in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Craig S. Pascoe, Karen Trahan Leathem, and Andy Ambrose (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2005), 131.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 137.

The shift in the economy, on occasion, created an unattainable, nostalgic concept of the economic structure of the South. The longing for the “old days” of the Southern agrarian lifestyle created a distorted mentality among youth and adults alike as to what defined Southernness. Adults viewed the South as an unchanging region noted for white supremacy and patriarchy. These power structures are what ruled the day-to-day lives of adults through their lives, therefore, they wished to continue the lifestyle they were familiar with. Youth, on the other hand, viewed the South differently. While white supremacy and patriarchy was still prevalent, youth are more open to possibilities of change in these power structures. Likewise, youth did not reap the benefits of crops raised and harvested by unpaid, overworked slaves. Instead, youth were subjected to labor themselves and as a result, viewed finances differently than their predecessors had. The result was the confusion between what the South was becoming as opposed to what it used to be. This confusion in the minds of adults carried over to the children so that the traditional mindset of the agrarian lifestyle becomes ingrained into the value system of Southern inhabitants. McCullers, Porter, and Lee all demonstrate that the teaching of traditional gender norms and social class positions to newer generations even in the midst of change in the South is what led to the distorted, grotesque Southern Gothic.

Irving Malin argues this point in more detail in his book-length study, *New American Gothic*. He claims that there are three defining elements of this genre. The three elements are love, family, and reflections.<sup>5</sup> Reflections can mean both mirror reflections and memories. These three elements only serve as categories by which to classify more specific details of the American Gothic. While writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries such as

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<sup>5</sup> Irving Malin, *New American Gothic* (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), 3-13.

Charles Brockden Brown and Edgar Allan Poe made the new American Gothic a distinct genre, the Southern Gothic did not become popular until the early twentieth century. Southern writers adopted some of the characteristics of the traditional Gothic and the American Gothic to make the Gothic genre regionally unique.

The setting of a Southern Gothic is essential to its plot structure. Settings in a Southern Gothic tale often vary, but most often will involve rural life and a family estate, or an old, small town. The small-town setting, according to Malin, is intended to show that “psyche is more important than society.”<sup>6</sup> His argument goes on to say that the “Gothic employs a microcosm” where “there is enough room for irrational (and universal) forces to explode.”<sup>7</sup> The Gothic microcosm is formed out of a twisted and corrupt form of love, a love that could be labeled as masochistic or sadistic.

The twisted, cruel, and harmful forms of love are most easily identified within the family unit. Love, as Malin notes is mostly derived from narcissistic tendencies. Within the family structure, narcissism is manifested in “disfiguring love” that “is often learned at home.”<sup>8</sup> In the particular case of the Southern Gothic, the plot usually involves a family secret such as a lost fortune, an illegitimate pregnancy, or substance abuse, and the tone of the story is usually one of angst and/or confusion. The tone is set by the protagonist. The protagonist is usually an adolescent who is struggling to come to terms with some element of the family secret while also coming to terms with his or her own changing identity--in this case gender identity. This description fits the protagonists found within these texts because they are all struggling to come

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 8.

to terms with the social order around them and their place within that social order as it is defined by their socioeconomic class and gender identity.

Sometimes, according to Malin, confusion can be brought on by the parents' expectations: "Parents see themselves in their children but forget about self-expression on the part of the young; they want to mold unformed personalities."<sup>9</sup> In the attempt to imprint their own wishes and desires on the child, parents are, in turn, creating a rebellious child. The child, conflicted by their own wants and their parents' impressions, becomes a narcissistic figure in its own right. If we engage this idea more broadly, whereas the community and extended family, too, imprint their wishes on a generation of children, then these children, like the child who is imprinted by parents, will become rebellious.

These Gothic elements, over time, take on a grotesque form. In the particular case of this study, the grotesque prevails when the expectations of femininity put forth by the community and family are outdated. Susan Brownmiller suggests in her book *Femininity* that "Femininity, in essence, is a romantic sentiment, a nostalgic tradition of imposed limitations. Even as it hurries forward in the 1980s, putting on lipstick and high heels to appear well dressed, it trips on the ruffled petticoats and hoopskirts of an era gone by."<sup>10</sup> Brownmiller's statement reveals a veneration of eras past that occurs several times in the work of Lee, Porter, and McCullers. The veneration of the past to the extent of acting them out in a modern society is an element of the grotesque. Although women are not still wearing "ruffled petticoats" and "hoopskirts," Brownmiller equates high heels and lipstick with these articles of clothing.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity* (New York, Linden Press, 1984), 14-15.

Brownmiller's assessment speaks heavily to the notion of what the grotesque is and the ways that it appears in literature because as the selected texts of McCullers, Lee, and Porter will show, literary texts were documenting a change in the way that gender and sexuality were perceived among Americans; traditional gender roles were still commonly taught and enforced. However, the traditional gender roles were in conflict with the modern realm of womanhood. The conflict then gives rise to the grotesque.

William Harmon and Hugh Holman define the term grotesque as

as term applied to decorative art in sculpture, paintings, and architecture, characterized by fantastic representations of human and animal forms often combined into distortions of the natural to the point of absurdity, ugliness, or caricature . . . Modern critics use "the *grotesque*" to refer to special types of writing, to kinds of characters, and to subjects matters. The interest in the *grotesque* is usually considered an outgrowth of interest in the irrational, distrust of any cosmic order, and frustration at humankind's lot in the universe. In this sense, *grotesque* is the merging of the comic and the tragic, resulting from our loss of faith in the moral universe essential to tragedy and in a rational social order essential to comedy.<sup>11</sup>

Harmon and Holman's definition seems to fit the needs of the study because the keyword "outgrowth" and the phrase "distrust of any cosmic order" fall perfectly into line with what the literary characters in this study appear to experience. In another sense, the term "outgrowth" applies to what the girls experience as they pass from childhood to adolescence; McCullers's

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<sup>11</sup> William Harmon and Hugh Holman. "Grotesque." *A Handbook to Literature* 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, Pearson, 2006), 244.

Mick and Frankie, Lee's Scout, and Porter's Miranda are all forced to come to terms with the ephemeral nature of occupying a gender-ambiguous, liminal space. The transition from childhood to adolescence causes the girls to "outgrow" the liminal space of tomboyism that they have come to view as their gender identity. Therefore, they experience a "distrust of any cosmic order" when they are forced to prescribe to a gender identity within the male-female binary. These young women all find themselves questioning "the way things are" throughout their stories, meaning that they begin to question the seemingly unchanging power structure of the South.

The grotesque becomes more noticeable during Reconstruction because of the vulnerability of the South. After the Civil War, the South began changing rapidly. The economy transformed from an agricultural-based economy to a manufacturing and industry-based economy. Even large farms that survived the economic change moved to large machines to meet production needs. Because of these rapid changes, the rural communities could not keep up with more urban areas. The contrasts in urban and rural lifestyles created a distorted, broken, and grotesque view of the South for those who were not a part of the Southern community.

The manifestation of the grotesque in the South relates directly to the Southern Gothic. The Southern Gothic is often marked by bizarre towns and their inhabitants, scandalous family secrets, and twisted genealogies. Harmon and Holman define a Gothic novel as "A novel in which magic, mystery, and chivalry are the chief characteristics. Horrors abound: One may expect a suit of armor suddenly to come to life among ghosts, clanking chains, and charnel houses."<sup>12</sup> This definition makes note of many of the primary elements of the late eighteenth to

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<sup>12</sup> Harmon and Holman, "Gothic Novel." *Handbook to Literature*, 241.

early nineteenth century Gothic genre or as it will be called henceforth, the “traditional Gothic.” Harmon and Holman’s use of the term chivalry also introduces the idea that gender roles are key elements of the Gothic style. Robert Harris provides a more detailed account of key elements of traditional Gothic novels. The elements he deems essential to the traditional Gothic plot are as follows: “setting in a castle; an atmosphere of mystery and suspense; an ancient prophecy; omens, portents, visions; supernatural or otherwise inexplicable event; . . . women in distress; and women threatened by a powerful, impulsive, tyrannical male.”<sup>13</sup>

Several of Harris’s elements of the traditional Gothic are based upon expected gender roles of the time. Therefore, the traditional Gothic is sometimes studied as a critique of patriarchy. Just as the traditional Gothic served as a critique of gender roles, the Southern Gothic that developed in the New South also focused on challenging gender roles. Though the time periods that the novels were set in vary, the authors were all writing after the success of the Women’s Suffrage movement. Therefore, all of these women were influenced in some way by this major success in the battle for the equality of women. Since they all wrote their novels post-Women’s Suffrage, each were formulating a critique about the role of women in society either before, which is the case with Katherine Anne Porter, or after women gained the right to vote, as is the case with McCullers and Lee.

Regardless of when the authors’ stories are set, they were all writing post-Women’s Suffrage. Even though women succeeded in gaining the right to vote, they were still not viewed

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Harris, “Elements of the Gothic,” *Vanguard.edu*, Vanguard University of Southern California, August 6, 1998. <http://www.vanguard.edu/rharris/Gothic.htm>.

as equals.<sup>14</sup> With the right to vote but no guarantee for other forms of equality, women were in only a slightly better position, constitutionally speaking, than they were prior to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. The women writers of the early to mid-twentieth century recognized these inequalities and use their writing to illustrate the grotesque position that women were forced to reconcile. Within the framework of the New South, the main difference between the changes taking place for men and women is that women gained power through attaining the vote while men lost power with the abolition of slavery and change in the economic structures. With women taking a small step forward toward equality, the “cosmic order” is unbalanced. Thus the grotesque is invoked. The grotesque position that women faced was a direct result of the progress that women were making with little hope for full equality.

One of the ways that Southern women writers represented this position is through tomboys who were forced to come to terms with societal expectations of traditional gender roles. The image of the tomboy is used to show the overlap between the Southern Gothic and the grotesque because the tomboy acts out a dissatisfaction with the position of women in the “cosmic order,” which, after all, is a phrase that Harmon and Holman describe a distinct element of the grotesque; the Southern Gothic is invoked by the gender-bending elements of tomboyism, which serve as a critique of patriarchy. The performance of masculinity by an individual who is understood to be “female” challenges the very notion of patriarchy by requiring a reconsideration of what constitutes “maleness” and “femaleness.”

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<sup>14</sup> Alice Paul encouraged women who fought so avidly for suffrage to continue their support for women by pushing to pass an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), but her attempt fell to the back burner as the first-wave feminist movement died down with the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment. The ERA was not brought forth as a major feminist concern until second wave feminism in the 1970s.

While all of Harris's elements of the traditional Gothic have a place within the context of these stories, his elements that critique gender roles form the basis of this argument. Another of Harris's elements that serves an important role is "an atmosphere of mystery and suspense." In the Southern Gothic, this element generally manifests not as mystery and suspense, but as angst. Angst emerges in Southern Gothic fiction as a result of dissatisfaction with the socioeconomic class system in the New South, gender expectations, and the changes taking place in the unchanging South.

#### *Women Writers in the South: A Brief Overview*

Though this study only focuses on literature of the twentieth century, literary works by Southern authors date back to North American Colonization. Scholars have studied these texts for well over a century. Louise Manly exemplifies the longevity of Southern literature studies; she published *Southern Literature from 1579-1895: A Comprehensive Review, with Copious Extracts and Criticisms* which was devoted exclusively to Southern literature in 1895. Though the authors and works that are included in her study are vastly different from what most contemporary scholars study now, her work shows that Southern literature has a relevant place within the study of literature. More importantly, her work, which includes authors such as John Smith, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison among others, validates the political influence that Southern literature has; it also highlights the important role that the literary writings of the south has played in American politics.<sup>15</sup>

Southern literature has since maintained its presence on the literary scene, but it was not until the early twentieth century that the South became the American literary locus. According to

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<sup>15</sup> Louise Manly, *Southern Literature from 1579-1895: A Comprehensive Review, with Copious Extracts and Criticisms* (Richmond: B.F. Johnson Publishing Company, 1895).

Thomas Daniel Young's assessment of American Literature, the literary "compass needle moved . . . in about 1920—and pointed South."<sup>16</sup> Young goes on to say that "for thirty years or more, that region dominated literary activity in America."<sup>17</sup> He refers to this point in American literature as the Southern Renaissance (Renaissance). One thing that set the Southern Renaissance writers apart from previous Southern writers was the surplus of talented women writers. The surplus of women writers has not always received equal representation in scholarship, as Carol S. Manning notes in her introduction to *The Female Tradition in Southern Literature*.<sup>18</sup> She notes that the 1980s marked the point in the history of literary criticism that feminist revisionist readings of the writings of such authors as Carson McCullers, Katherine Anne Porter, and Harper Lee began to surface. Manning attributes this movement to scholars such as Anne Goodwyn Jones and Louise Westling.<sup>19</sup>

Within her introduction, Manning also provides further distinction regarding the classification of Southern Renaissance writers: "Ellen Glasgow is usually seen as a precursor of the Southern Renaissance; Katherine Anne Porter and Eudora Welty are identified with that renaissance; and Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor win favor as post-renaissance writers."<sup>20</sup> While Harper Lee receives little acclamation in Manning's anthology of criticism (Lee has only one mention in the last ten or so pages of the text), the time that she was writing would place her alongside McCullers and O'Connor as a post-renaissance writer. In addition to

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Daniel Young, "Introduction to Part III," in *The History of Southern Literature*, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University, 1985), 261.

<sup>17</sup> Young, "Introduction," 261.

<sup>18</sup> Carol S. Manning, ed., *The Female Tradition in Southern Literature* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1993), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Manning, *The Female Tradition*, 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

clarifying the periods of Southern writing, Manning also provides an extensive review of scholarly studies of Southern literature. Her review demonstrates the lack of attention given to women writers prior to the twentieth century.

Manning's anthology is a response to the neglect of women writers in the past, a neglect that she feels has been forced on women writers by the previous generation of scholars who focused on the Southern tradition through a primarily patrilineal lens, some even going as far as to disregard Southern women writers altogether. Manning supports this claim by quoting Louis Rubin who stated, "change . . . [sic] was the keynote of Southern life when the writers of the Southern Renaissance were growing to manhood."<sup>21</sup> Though Rubin is criticized for focusing heavily on male writers, his assessment of Southern Renaissance writers being influenced by change is a notion that proves true as well within the assessment of Southern women writers of the Renaissance.

Rubin is not alone in the neglect of Southern women writers. Manning continues providing support by quoting Richard H. King who "describes the Southern Renaissance as an attempt by Southerners 'to come to terms not only with the inherited values of the Southern tradition but also with a certain way of perceiving and dealing with the past.'"<sup>22</sup> King's perception of the Southern tradition is explained further as Manning continues, "He adds that writers were exploring 'a tradition whose essential figures were the father and the grandfather and whose essential structure was the literal and symbolic family.'"<sup>23</sup> King discounts the works

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<sup>21</sup>Louis D. Rubin, Jr., ed., *The Literary South* (New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1979), vi, quoted in Carol S. Manning, ed., *The Female Tradition in Southern Literature* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1993), 7.

<sup>22</sup> Richard H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1980), quoted in Carol S. Manning, ed., *The Female Tradition in Southern Literature* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1993), 7.

<sup>23</sup> King, *A Southern Renaissance* quoted in Manning *The Female Tradition*, 7.

of women writers because “with the exception of Lillian Smith, the female writers did not concern themselves with this theme and effort.”<sup>24</sup> Manning not only refutes but flat out reject’s King’s statement; she claims that

King is dead wrong here. Indeed the very women he apologizes for excluding prove him wrong. As a careful reading of their works should reveal—and as recent scholarship suggests—no one treats the Southern family romance more incisively than do Ellen Glasgow in *The Shattered Life*, Porter in *Old Mortality*, and Welty in a range of works but most notably in *Delta Wedding*, *The Golden Apples*, and *Losing Battles*. In these works the writers have (to borrow King’s own words) “come to terms not only with the inherited values of the Southern tradition but also with a certain way of perceiving and dealing with the past.” In sum, all three writers progressively demystify the Southern family romance and hence the Southern tradition.<sup>25</sup>

Here, Manning has pointed to a major flaw in King’s assessment and definition of the Southern tradition. He has excluded “fully one half of the Southern family romance.”<sup>26</sup> She attributes his interest in the patrilineal tracing to his gender claiming that male scholars and writers are more interested in the male family figures whereas female scholars and writers tend to be more interested in matrilineal tracings of tradition such as “the mother and the grandmother. . .the Southern belle, the Southern lady, the enduring mammy—and . . . society’s expectations of

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<sup>24</sup> Manning, *The Female Tradition*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

Southern womanhood.”<sup>27</sup> These themes which Manning attributes to the feminist revisionist study of Southern literature are prevalent in my analysis of tomboyism in Southern literature.

In another anthology of essays on Southern women writers, Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weaks note in the afterword that since Manning’s publication on women writers, the focus of the scholarship on these works has shifted. Previously, scholarly works on Southern women writers were focused on establishing the “literary history of Southern women,” but since the confirmation of literary relevance, scholarship has shifted to focus primarily on the issues of gender and race.<sup>28</sup> In an anthology on gender and race in Southern literature, Susan V. Donaldson and Anne Goodwyn Jones note that “Surely no bodies ever appeared more haunted by society [than in the American South].”<sup>29</sup> According to Donaldson and Jones, “The stories of Southern bodies have been structured in large part by the interlocking logic of dichotomy—masculine and feminine, white and black, master and slave, planter and ‘white trash,’ Cavalier and Yankee—that have characterized the dominant public written discourse of the South.”<sup>30</sup> Though the dichotomies are considered to be historically part of the Southern tradition and can be found within a large portion of Southern texts, it was not until the 1990s that scholars began to focus on these issues within women’s texts.

The surge in scholarship relating specifically to gender and sexuality is undoubtedly due to the feminist revisionist readings of women authors that took place in the 1980s. Interest in gender and sexuality in Southern texts extends beyond the literary realm. Historians and scholars

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weaks, eds., *The History of Southern Women’s Literature* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 615.

<sup>29</sup> Susan V. Donaldson and Anne Goodwyn Jones, eds., *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1997), 1.

<sup>30</sup> Donaldson and Jones, *Haunted Bodies*, 2.

of cultural studies have also been interested in examining how gender and sexuality serve as affirmations of power structures in the South.<sup>31</sup> Gender and sexuality, as Donaldson and Jones point out, are inseparable from other dichotomized divisions of power such as race and class because race plays a vital role in understanding class divisions and gender roles.

### *Gender and the Body*

John Money has been a prominent but controversial figure within the study of sexology and has performed several ground-breaking studies, though not without controversy, related to differentiating sex and gender. Gender is defined by Money as “one’s personal, social, and legal status as male or female, or mixed, on the basis of somatic and behavioral criteria more inclusive than the genital criterion and/or erotic criterion alone.”<sup>32</sup> He defines sex as being “one’s person and reproductive status as male or female, or uncertain, as declared on the basis of the external genitalia.”<sup>33</sup> These definitions that Money provides show the distinctions that he makes between gender and sex in his work. He has worked toward promoting these definitions in his research. As a result, however, he was subjected to a great deal of scrutiny and criticism after recommending an infant patient to undergo sex reassignment surgery in the late 1960s. The patient was the victim of a botched circumcision, and as a result, his penis was destroyed. The patient and his family were referred to Money. Money convinced the patient’s family that it would be in the patient’s and the parent’s best interest to have the child’s sex reassigned. He

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 5-6.

<sup>32</sup> John Money, *Gay, Straight, and In-Between: The Sexology of Erotic Orientation* (New York: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 201.

<sup>33</sup> Money, *Gay, Straight, and In-Between*, 223.

assured them that gender is a social behavior. Therefore, if they raised the child, who was twenty months old at the time, as a girl, then he would be able to perform this role in society.<sup>34</sup>

Money's experiment with this patient ultimately failed, and Money's reputation was significantly tarnished as a result. Although Money's radical views changed over the years, the arc of his work reveals that his belief that sex and gender are two distinct elements did not change as a result of his failed study. His work serves as an indication of the discourse taking place within medical and scientific fields to distinguish between sex and gender. Money's scholarship was published in the late 1960s, and therefore postdates the work of Porter, Lee, and McCullers. Although the literary texts used in this study are all published prior to Money's work,<sup>35</sup> and would therefore not have been influenced by his work or the conversations that took place as a result of his work, the fact that these literary works deal with gender and sex as separate and distinct identities suggests that Money's work simply provided a scientific voice to a thought that already existed in the early twentieth century.

The distinction in sex as a biological formation and gender as a social construction might not have been completely acknowledged by the majority of Americans prior to the 1960s, but distinctions between gender and sex are a long-standing literary and historical tradition. *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, *The Member of the Wedding*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "Old Mortality," and "The Old Order" all represent early acknowledgements of distinctions between sex and gender. All of these texts place an emphasis on gender presentation and sexing the physical body based on gender presentation. Each of these stories use a different technique to do so: *To Kill a*

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<sup>34</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "John Money," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Money](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Money), (accessed February 25, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> *To Kill a Mockingbird* is the latest text; it was published in 1960

*Mockingbird* uses a frame narrative and reflection, and *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, *The Member of the Wedding*, “Old Mortality,” and “The Old Order” utilize a third-person omniscient narrator to emphasize gender presentation of characters. Since the narrator is either looking back on childhood or telling the story from an outside point of view, the issues of sex and gender and the distinctions between the two become noticeable.

Susan Brownmiller’s work is useful here as well. Her 1984 text demonstrates that even though there is a movement in the sciences to draw distinctions between sex and gender in the late 1960s, still societal expectations of femininity overpower any scientific or social progress. The claims that Brownmiller makes in her text suggest that second-wave feminism did not succeed in changing society’s view of women and the female body. Therefore, in the 1990s, third-wave feminism shifted its focus by seeking to break down barriers by challenging terms such as “men” and “women” and focusing on deconstructing binaries, thus seeking true equality for all and not just “men” and “women.”

Feminist philosopher Judith Butler set out in *Gender Trouble* to affirm that gender was in fact socially constructed, just as Money suggested in the late 1960s. Her study was radically different, though, from previous texts in that Butler hoped to prove that like gender, sex, too, is socially constructed. More specifically, Butler aims to show that gender and sex are socially constructed as a means of maintaining power structures that result from a binary system of identification.<sup>36</sup> In addition to providing a theoretical background for close readings of literary texts, Butler’s philosophy also opens discussion of the relationship of gender performativity and sex to tomboyism; she also challenges naturalized roles and narratives of gender and sex.

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<sup>36</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, Routledge, 1999), xxix.

In her text, Butler demonstrates how the conceptualization of gender and sex are changing from second-wave feminism. She does so by challenging previous notions of sex and gender: “Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex.”<sup>37</sup> Note, though that Butler uses the adverb “seemingly” to describe the adjective “fixed.” Her use of language suggests that she will soon call into question the degree to which sex is “fixed.” She arrives at her next point by stating,

This radical splitting of the gendered subject poses yet another set of problems. Can we refer to a “given” sex or a “given” gender without first inquiring into how sex and/or gender is given, through what means? And what is “sex” anyway? Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal, and how is a feminist critic to assess the scientific discourses which purport to establish such “facts” for us? . . . If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.<sup>38</sup>

Here, Butler is confirming what John Money suggested: she suggests that gender and sex are culturally constructed. However, she also suggests that there is something in the individual’s choice that cannot be accounted for through philosophy or science. In doing so, she provides a philosophical lens through which to view differences in gender as representations of sexed traits.

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<sup>37</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 9-10.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 10-11.

Butler's work ultimately suggests that gender is largely performative. In other words, humans act out gender based on individual perception of gender. Butler writes,

acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or a substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, the body is simply used as a canvas on which to create a self-portrait of how individuals perceive themselves. Gender and sex serve primarily as a way for others to project an identity, and thus categorize a person within a binary of "male" or "female" or "man" or "woman." Since an individual is categorized based on another's assessment, the individual being assessed is being held to a cultural understanding of what the gender being performed is and is deemed either male or female. Thus, sex, like gender, is a culturally constructed identity label.

Butler makes an important note regarding individuals who do drag; Drag is a particular instance when identity is being presented in a way that is perceived by others' gaze as overly performative to the point of being parodic. In her prologue she asks, "is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established?"<sup>40</sup> Not only is Butler's example of drag useful in regard to setting up the contextual lens by which the gender performance of the selected literary figures will be viewed, but her articulation of the complexities of drag will also prove useful when examining the identities that the several of the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 173.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, xxviii.

tomboys in this study perform. She investigates that question further when she discusses performativity of gender and sexuality:

The notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities . . . such parodic identities have been understood to be either degrading to women, in the case of drag and cross-dressing, or an uncritical appropriation of sex-role stereotyping from within the practice of hetero-sexuality, especially in the case of butch/femme lesbian identities.<sup>41</sup>

However, Butler is quick to refute that presupposition of feminist theory; In fact, Butler uses drag critically to expand on performativity of gender: “[drag] gives us a clue to the way in which the relationship between primary identification . . . and subsequent gender experience might be reframed.”<sup>42</sup> She continues by saying that when someone is in drag then the observer is “in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, Butler concludes by asserting that “If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance.”<sup>44</sup> Through this example, Butler reveals how sex, gender, and gender performance are all distinct signifiers of identity.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 174-175.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

## *Tomboys*

On the issues of sex and gender performativity, tomboyism is a topic that has generated much scholarship in the psychology, literature, and cultural studies fields in the last twenty years. In broad terms, a tomboy is defined as a girl who defies gender norms in her dress, behavior, and day-to-day activities. Most recently, the topic of tomboyism was covered by the HowStuffWorks podcast series *Stuff Mom Never Told You*. The podcast relies heavily on the work of Michelle Ann Abate who is one of the leading scholars on the cultural phenomenon of tomboyism. However, prior to Abate's *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History*, Matthew Rottneck edited an anthology, *Sissies & Tomboys: Gender Nonconformity and Homosexual Childhood*, that focused on two aspects of tomboyism: Psychological studies of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) and theoretical framework to explain the occurrences of GID in childhood. Rottneck's collection contains a third section consisting of essays written by adults reflecting on their childhood identification as a tomboy or a sissy.

Unlike the term "tomboy," which carries little stigmatization in a modern context, the term "sissy," has always been an undesirable identification. A sissy is defined as a boy who defies gender norms and exhibits traits that are associated with femininity. The stigmatization of the sissy occurs implicitly in modern American society in the simple fact that while there has been a surge of tomboy scholarship over the last two decades, little has been done to assess or acknowledge the "sissy." When the sissy occurs in a critical context, he is usually serving as a counterpart, or an honorable mention, to the tomboy. Similarly, within the context of the literary works of this study, the sissy is usually the sidekick to the tomboy— Scout and Dill, Frankie and

John Henry, and Mick and Bubber. Miranda is the exception to this rule; she does not have a sissy sidekick.

Some critics would argue that Bubber Kelly is not a sissy, and I would agree to an extent. He does not exhibit the same “effeminate” traits as Dill and John Henry, but, he does seek to overstate his masculinity. In asserting his masculinity to a point of misogyny, he is compensating for an actual lack of masculinity. Regardless, the sissy serves as a foil to the tomboy as a way to draw attention to the gender differences occurring in the text.

Throughout Rottnek’s work, he emphasizes the importance of reexamining normalcy among youth. He advocates a reconsideration of childhood gender identification, supports the movement to de-pathologize homosexuality, and acknowledges the existence of homosexual tendencies in childhood.<sup>45</sup> Overall, his arguments toward acknowledging homosexual childhoods disrupt the third-wave feminist attempts to separate sexuality from gender identity and perceived sex, but his arguments do show a progressive acceptance of gender non-conformity.

One study in the fields of anthropology and sociology uses a similar methodology as Rottnek’s. C. Lynn Carr conducted a study in which she collected personal accounts of women who identified as tomboys in adolescence and documented their development into adulthood. Carr’s study is particularly useful because in her data collection she notes the participants’ age, race, and sexual orientation. Additionally, in her research she seeks the participants’ definition of tomboyism, or what characteristics they equate it with. Her results reveal 41% of self-identified tomboys identify as lesbian in their adult lives while only 30% identify as heterosexual.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Matthew Rottnek, ed., *Sissies and Tomboys: Gender Nonconformity and Homosexual Childhood* (New York, New York University Press, 1999), 1-3.

<sup>46</sup> C. Lynn Carr, “Where Have All the Tomboys Gone? Women’s Accounts of Gender in Adolescence,” *Sex Roles* 56, no. 7-8 (2007): 441. *Scopus*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 27, 2013).

According to Carr's results "several" of the adults who participated in this study "equated tomboyism with athleticism."<sup>47</sup> Carr's emphasis on adult sexual orientation, like Rottnek's emphasis on childhood sexual orientation, reduces gender presentation to an indication of sexual orientation. Failure to distinguish between sexuality and gender strips individuals of their right to choose how they present their gender.

Ultimately, gender presentation has the capacity to disrupt the "natural" order of sex and gender binaries by challenging what the terms "man" and "woman" mean to society and whether or not "man" and "woman" actually correlate to assigned sex. Therefore the claims that Rottnek and Carr make, while providing useful retrospective insight, suggest that there are prescriptive behaviors that can be expected of tomboys (and sissies) when they transition into adulthood. However, these prescriptive identities are not all encompassing and do not take the element of choice into account.

Carr's study, by pointing out the correlation between tomboyism and athleticism, brings up an important question that has not been asked so far: What traits characterize a tomboy? Carrie Paechter and Sheryl Clark performed a study in the United Kingdom to assess what the twenty-first century definition of tomboyism is and how it serves as a visible marker among young girls. The study is "based on case studies of children in years 5 and 6 in two primary schools."<sup>48</sup> Paechter and Clark "investigated how tomboys are identified by teachers, children and parents, how tomboy identities are constructed, taken up and maintained by pre-pubertal girls, and the extent to which tomboyism is a stigmatized or valorized identity."<sup>49</sup> In conducting

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<sup>47</sup> Carr, "Where Have All the Tomboys Gone," 444.

<sup>48</sup> Carrie Paechter, and Clark Sheryl. n.d, "Who are Tomboys and How do We Recognise Them?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 30 (2007): 343-44 *ScienceDirect*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 27, 2013).

<sup>49</sup> Paechter and Clark, "Who are Tomboys," 343-44.

this research they managed to identify several of the main elements of tomboyism according to those who interact with the students identified as tomboys and label the tomboys as such. The characteristics they give are: Involvement in football (soccer), physical aggression and getting into trouble, physical confidence and taking sports seriously, clothing and physical appearance, language and speech style, wanting to be with boys, being interested in ‘boy’s stuff.’<sup>50</sup>

Tomboyism as a gender identity deals heavily with many of the same issues by which the literary figures of this essay will be assessed. While Paechter and Clark’s research was conducted in the United Kingdom, it is useful to the current study in that it affirms that tomboyism is a cultural phenomenon in other parts of the Western world, not just the United States. Paechter and Clark’s study also provides a critical framework in which to define tomboyism and assess in a way that is understood by other scholars to be useful and accurate.

Although the tomboy has long been an archetype in literature and culture, the first book-length study on the figure was not published until 2008. The author, Michelle Ann Abate, composed a comprehensive history that highlights the history of tomboyism and how tomboys have come to be a key part of American culture since their appearance in the nineteenth century.<sup>51</sup> She claims that her desire to conduct this study stems from the fact that there have been no full-length studies published in any field on the subject of tomboys; likewise, she notes that “Scholars seeking information about tomboys . . . will find no listing for the topic in the Library of Congress or, perhaps more shockingly, either the *Oxford Companion to Women’s Writing* or *The Cambridge Guide to Children’s Books in English*.”<sup>52</sup> She also notes that “works

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 346-51.

<sup>51</sup> Michelle Ann Abate, *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2008), ix.

<sup>52</sup> Abate, *Tomboys*, xi.

on the history of women's gender roles and sexual identities omit tomboyism from their discussions."<sup>53</sup> Abate's text covers tomboyism from the "root of the term" to "the social, political even economic circumstances that precipitated the idea's emergence at this particular point in history."<sup>54</sup> Another important element of Abate's study is the way that she, unlike Rottnek and Carr, deals with gender nonconformity among young girls and the relationship to lesbianism.

The association between tomboyism and lesbianism is an association that has been made heavily since the American Cold-War era.<sup>55</sup> Although Abate does acknowledge the association of gender nonconformity and sexual orientation, she does not attempt to pathologize it and perpetuate this association as Rottnek and Carr do. Additionally, the work of Paechter and Clark serve a similar function. Through collecting data from students, teachers, and parents, they discovered that tomboyism is defined by youth in less confining terms than are used in scientific studies that seek to define gender nonconformity in clinical terms. For instance, Paechter and Clark find that in the eyes of children there are varying degrees of tomboyism. Children of the twenty first century are able to, subconsciously of course, dissect the complexities of gender and sexual identity. Paechter and Clark write: "They [children] were able to describe which 'bits' of themselves and others were tomboy and which bits 'girly-girl', a term used spontaneously by children in both schools."<sup>56</sup> The authors of the study placed a heavy emphasis on how the children define tomboyism because their definitions show how the term has developed and remained a part of twenty-first century culture.<sup>57</sup> In terms of gender nonconformity, the group of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid 170; 176-80.

<sup>56</sup> Paechter and Clark, "Who are Tomboys," 345.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

participants in Paechter and Clark's study reveal that sexual orientation is not something that tomboys consider when identifying as such in youth. This finding contrasts greatly to the work of Rottnek and Carr, as their study focuses on adults who are looking at their youth in retrospect seeming to want to find traces of an explanation for their adulthood sexuality. Because of their focus, the work of Paechter and Clark and Abate prove to be of more use in supporting the argument being made in the current study. Their focus on tomboyism as a gender identity rather than as a marker of adulthood sexual orientation suggests that tomboyism is a manifestation of the Southern Gothic and the grotesque.<sup>58</sup>

### *The Southern Belle*

The Southern Belle is a figure that comes up within the framework of this study; she is the antithesis to the tomboy. Without the Southern Belle setting the standard for gender norms, the tomboy would not emerge as a gender nonconformist. The Southern Belle is a mythical figure that defines beauty and social position for Southern women. Each of the characters in this study all strive to achieve Southern Belle status but are unable to do so. The tomboys are unable to fully reach the idealized image of the Southern Belle; therefore, the Southern Belle serves as the antithesis to the tomboy. For this study, understanding the Southern Belle and Southern womanhood in general is just as essential as understanding the tomboy.

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<sup>58</sup> Other noteworthy studies on tomboyism in either childhood or literature and culture are Joanne M. Hall's "Tomboys: Meanings, Marginalization, and Misunderstandings;" "Tomboys and Sissy Girls: Exploring Girls' Power, Agency and Female Relationships in Childhood through the Memories of Women" published by the *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*; Carrie Paechter's "Tomboys and Girly-Girls: Embodied Femininities in Primary Schools;" and Carol Lynn Martin and Lisa M. Dinella's "Congruence Between Gender Stereotypes and Activity Preference in Self-Identified Tomboys and Non-Tomboys." Additional information on these texts may be obtained through the bibliography for this study.

Anne Firor Scott writes in the preface of her 1970 text *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* that the study “began with the discovery of a paradox.”<sup>59</sup> She recalls:

Some years ago I sought to delineate certain aspects of the progressive movement in the South. Time after time records of political reform movements revealed the presence of a woman or of a group of women who had played a significant role, and this before women were enfranchised. As a southerner I knew, or thought I knew, that “woman’s place” was not in the political arena; yet there she was, active and effective.<sup>60</sup>

Scott exhibits the common understanding of womanhood in the South--Women should be seen, not heard. She states that her book is “not a comprehensive history of Southern women.”<sup>61</sup>

Instead, her book is valuable in the following ways: She details the perception of the lady; explores the impact the cultural perception of womanhood had on women’s behaviors; accounts for discrepancies in reality and perception of womanhood; and presents the barriers that women faced when trying to rid themselves of the conjectures that were the result of the discrepancies between the reality and the perception of womanhood.<sup>62</sup>

Anne Firor Scott’s definition of womanhood makes women sound like mystical creatures. Women were expected to “love, honor, obey, and occasionally amuse her husband, to bring up his children and manage his household. Physically weak. . . she depended upon male

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<sup>59</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1970; 1995), ix.

<sup>60</sup> Scott, *The Southern Lady*, ix.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

protection.”<sup>63</sup> She continues by stating that “To secure this protection she was endowed with the capacity to ‘create a magic spell’ over any man in her vicinity.”<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, women were supposed to be “timid and modest, beautiful and graceful.”<sup>65</sup> The problems with this perception of women are that it does not take into account that not all women are born with the physical attributes that allow for “beauty and grace,” and some women do not learn (or choose to revere) charm in the same way that other women do.

Moreover, this perception applies only to a specific demographic: middle and upperclass white women. Working class women and women of different races do not have the same level of privilege, and therefore, they have to work harder in order to be able provide added income for the family. Even if women of working classes and of different races did not provide monetary income, they provided in other ways such as bringing in food and other resources. Regardless, the image of the Southern Belle, or the “timid and modest, beautiful and graceful” women who cast her “magic spell” over any man in the room persisted well into the twentieth century.

In an essay entitled “On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History,” Joan Wallach Scott comments on the study of gender and language in working-class history. Scott writes that historians largely “ignore gender entirely, insisting either that it is absent from their sources or that (unfortunately) women either played a minor role in the working-class politics that mattered.”<sup>66</sup> As she is calling attention to these oversights and misinterpretations in previous

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, “On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History” in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1988), 55.

scholarship, she suggests that she will focus on a revisionist rewriting. She follows up by affirming assumptions drawn from the previous statement:

Women and children may come up in discussions of working-class family life, for here, they are visible actors, filling discernibly different social roles; in this way gender is equated with and hence reduced to a set of self-evident social categories (the roles played by women or men) and has no critical effect on the way labor history is conceived.<sup>67</sup>

She goes on to argue in her piece that understanding the language of gender in the context of working class history allows historians to “recast . . . understanding of the place of gender in history” which allows for an understanding of “the operations of sexual difference in the ‘making’ of the working class.”<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, Scott concludes that when labor historians refuse to acknowledge gender, they ultimately perpetuate the historical stereotypes.

Joan Wallach Scott’s piece is useful in that it highlights the difference between the perception and reality of Southern womanhood. As she focuses heavily on the issue of gender in the working class, she affirms that the Southern Belle is in fact an upper-class, privileged identity. The Southern Belle was marked by timidity, modesty, and grace; these are characteristics that would have been obtained through a leisurely social life, something that working class women would not have had time for. Thus, working-class women would not have had the opportunity to hone or demonstrate social grace. By revealing that the Southern Belle is a gender identity of the upper class, Joan Wallach Scott demonstrates that the Southern Belle is simply a performance of a feminine identity as it is perceived by upper class individuals.

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<sup>67</sup> Scott, “On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History,” 55.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

By using the tomboy in Southern literature as the antithesis of the Southern Belle, Southern authors such as McCullers, Lee, and Porter have offered their own critique of the gender and class relations of the New South. They question the meaning of gender by having characters that are unidentifiable as either “boy” or “girl” on sight. They use tomboys as symbols of the changes that are taking place in the lives of Southern women and relationship between change and economic class. By challenging traditional gender roles, McCullers’s Mick Kelly and Frankie Addams, Lee’s Scout Finch, and Porter’s Miranda demonstrate the intersectionality of socioeconomic class and gender in the New South and its relationship to the Southern Gothic.

**Carson McCullers *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*:**

**Mick Kelly**

Carson McCullers was born in 1917 as Lula Carson Smith. However, by the age of thirteen, she “dropped” the “embarrassing tag of Lula and a double name.”<sup>69</sup> Carson took on the last name that she made famous when she married Reeves McCullers in 1937 at the age of twenty. Though Carson McCullers’s life led her away from the South, she could not escape her Southern heritage; in fact she chose to identify with it through her writings. Though it is difficult to analyze McCullers’s work and not take into account the striking autobiographical similarities between McCullers and her young female protagonists, this study will not focus on a biographical reading of her work. Instead, this study will look into the ways that McCullers uses the liminal figure of the tomboy to challenge early twentieth century notions of Southern womanhood. The tomboy identity occupies a space between “man” and “woman” in the gender identification binary. In the *Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, McCullers uses the ambiguity of Mick’s gender identity and perceived sex to challenge the very meaning of gender and sexual identity through the clothing that she presents Mick in throughout the text; Mick’s clothing invokes elements of drag and performance, which can be read using a Butlerian lens.

The parts of the novel where Mick is in drag also suggest that there are class struggles taking place. Class struggle is part of what encourages Mick to take on a non traditional gender role. In addition being physically marked as a tomboy, the activities that Mick participates in serve to blur the gender boundaries of the early twentieth century South further. She participates in predominately male-identified activities, thus affirming that rather than just being marked by

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<sup>69</sup> Virginia Spencer Carr, *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2003), 1.

others as a tomboy, Mick recognizes parts of her own identity as being male-identified. In addition to commenting on class struggles and their relationship to gender identity, all of these elements of the novel serve as markers of the Southern Gothic tradition.

In 1940, Carson McCullers's debut novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, became part of an era of many successful Southern women writers. The focus of many of these women writers was on social construction and roles of minorities in the South. While there were several women writers concentrating on these issues, none of the authors captures the devastating societal stereotyping of women better than McCullers. In the novel, McCullers's presents five main characters that face their own isolation and loneliness. Each character experiences his or her isolation differently and at different stages of life. One of the five main characters of the novel, Mick Kelly, is an adolescent with big dreams of fame and fortune. While Mick believes wholeheartedly in these dreams, her fantasies are just out of reach due to her demographic location and her family's socioeconomic status.

When readers first meet Mick Kelly it is through the focalization of Biff Brannon. This introduction is crucial as it is one of the only detailed physical descriptions of Mick. When she walks into the local café, she is described as being “a gangling towheaded youngster, a girl of about twelve.”<sup>70</sup> She is further described as being “dressed in khaki shorts, a blue shirt, and tennis shoes—so that at first glance, she was like a very young boy.”<sup>71</sup> In addition to her physical description, Biff recalls Mick's demeanor: “He thought of the way Mick narrowed her eyes and pushed back the bangs of her hair with the palm of her hand. He thought of her hoarse, boyish voice and of her habit of hitching up her khaki shorts and swaggering like a cowboy in the

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<sup>70</sup> Carson McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1940), 18.

<sup>71</sup> McCullers, *Heart*, 18.

picture show.”<sup>72</sup> Mick’s appearance in combination with her “swagger” show an ability to successfully imitate the societal expectations of what constitutes “maleness,” or in other words she is able to “pass” as a male.<sup>73</sup> Not only does she prefer to wear boy’s clothes, but she also chooses to emulate males, thus enhancing her ability to perform her role as a tomboy. She mirrors the actions of Mr. Singer, a local deaf-mute who boards at the Kelly residence. One Sunday morning, Mick goes “out on the front porch to read the funnies” hoping to run into Mr. Singer, who “would be reading the paper on the porch like he did most Sunday mornings”<sup>74</sup>. Mick’s actions reveal several details of her habits: She watches Mr. Singer’s actions and seeks to imitate them in the best way that she can. Her decision to go outside to read the funnies on the porch the way that Mr. Singer reads the paper creates a childish parody of what it means to be a male.

Thus far, the representation of Mick has been through the perception of others. The narration of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* is third person omniscient. This type of narration is useful to this text because there are five main characters that the reader is learning information about. The first time that readers hear the story from Mick’s focalization, Mick is caught up in youthful day dreams; she wishes to become a world famous symphony composer. However, her family has little money to help her achieve her goals, so she is forced to find ways to bring her goals to fruition on her own. In addition to her family’s financial hardships, Mick’s family has little time to devote to their middle child. Virginia Spencer Carr effectively sums up the Kelly family’s preoccupations in her work *Understanding Carson McCullers*. She writes, “Mick’s

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>73</sup> In this context of this study, the word pass will henceforth be used to mean a demonstration of qualities that meet the qualities/standards to uphold prescribed gender norms.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 33.

father is a watch repairman who sits at home in a world of imagined business that is clouded by alcohol. . . Her mother is too busy trying to satisfy the demands of her paying boarders to provide emotional nourishment for her children. Portia Copeland, the family's black servant, tries, but is equally incapable of meeting their needs."<sup>75</sup> Because of her family's demands, Portia is the closest thing that Mick has to a true mother figure, but as Carr mentions, even she cannot give Mick, or the other children, the parental attentions that they need.<sup>76</sup> The Kelly children are often left to take care of each other or to fend for themselves.

Because she is unable to ask her parents for music lessons and a musical instrument, Mick decides to take some initiative and make a violin out of pieces of different stringed instruments. She keeps her project stowed safely inside of a hatbox. Her violin is described as "a cracked ukulele strung with two violin strings, a guitar string, and a banjo string."<sup>77</sup> In order to make the ukulele better resemble a violin, "the crack on the back of the ukulele had been neatly mended with sticking plaster and the round hole in the middle was covered by a piece of wood."<sup>78</sup> Mick's violin can be interpreted as a symbol in several ways: first, it can be seen as a reflection of the parental influences in her life—pieced together by scraps that she is able to pick up wherever she goes; second, Mick's violin is a reflection of how she sees herself in relation to

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<sup>75</sup> Virginia Spencer Carr, *Understanding Carson McCullers* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 24.

<sup>76</sup> Portia invokes the image of the Mammy that Manning mentions in *The Female Tradition in Southern Literature*. She is the first of four African American hired hands in this study.

<sup>77</sup> McCullers, *Heart*, 45.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

the women around her; third, in making a violin, McCullers is suggesting that Mick has mechanical inclinations, a trait that is often predominately male identified.<sup>79</sup>

McCullers juxtaposes the revealing of Mick's violin with a scene where she is physically compared to her older sisters, Hazel and Etta. Mick is not as feminine as they are, and her masculinity is more pronounced in the presence of her sisters. Etta is described as someone who "primped all the day long," and Hazel is described as "naturally pretty" and "good looking."<sup>80</sup> Not only does McCullers make a point to dwell on Hazel and Etta's femininity but she also uses them to emphasize Mick's masculinity and voice communal criticisms. Etta chastises Mick, "Are you just going to tramp around the room all day? It makes me sick to see you in those silly boy's clothes. Somebody ought to clamp down on you, Mick Kelly, and make you behave."<sup>81</sup> Upon Etta's proclamation against Mick's masculinity, Mick replies, "Shut up. . . I wear shorts because I don't want to wear your old hand-me-downs. I don't want to be like either of you. And I won't. That's why I wear shorts. I'd rather be a boy any day, and I wish I could move in with Bill."<sup>82</sup> In this scene Mick is openly asserting her desire to identify as a male as an alternative to a feminine identity.

Mick's longing for male identification is the result of her sisters' badgering, but it also, in part, derives from her family's financial position. She is the third and last daughter of the six Kelly children; she seldom, if ever, gets new clothes. Her family's finances cause her to wear her

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<sup>79</sup> While this statement may seem to be problematic by equating ability with gender roles, but when she goes to her brother Bill's room to open the box where she keeps her violin, Bill is "hunched over the desk, reading *Popular Mechanics*" (42). This is not a coincidence; McCullers's uses this title as a symbol for the scene unfolding to affirm the gendered perception of mechanical thinking.

<sup>80</sup> McCullers, *Heart*, 41;42

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*.

brother's old clothes rather than wearing clothes that are more feminine. The narrator describes the Kelly Family's system for hand me downs. Because of the system that the Kelly family uses to get the most use out of clothing, Mick's eldest sister, Hazel, is described as "plain lazy."<sup>83</sup> Her laziness is because she is always given "the first and biggest share of everything—the first whack at the new clothes and the biggest part of any special treat. Hazel never had to grab for anything and she was soft."<sup>84</sup> The narrator suggests that even though the family is poor, out of all of the Kelly girls, Hazel is the richest. She has advantages over her two sisters. Likewise, within the Kelly family structure, Mick gets the last "whack" at all the girl clothes.

In order to move up in the Kelly family structure, Mick wears her older brother's hand-me-downs. Doing so allows her to be second in line for boy's clothes. The family's financial arrangement doesn't allow Mick to have new clothes, so by wearing boy's clothes she has the opportunity to wear something newer than what she would otherwise get to wear. Although Mick wearing boy's clothes should invoke a sense of Mick being in drag, it does not. Because of her imitation of males and "swagger," these clothes works for her. Since, according to Butler, drag is over-performative to the point of being parodic, Mick is not in drag here. In order for Mick to be in drag, she would have to overly performing the male identity, but she is not. She is simply exerting a masculine gender identity. Readers do not consider how ingrained Mick's clothing choice is to her character until she is portrayed in clothing other than her brother's hand-me-downs. When she wears her sisters' clothes, she appears to be in drag more so than when she wears her brother's.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

Readers sit back and watch as Mick makes her transition from childhood to adolescence. Part of this transition is moving from grammar school into high school. To help make this transition, Mick throws a prom party so that she can make new friends. While the party is intended to help her make friend at school, she views her party as marking her initial entry into adulthood. While she does not openly state that her party is intended to mark her as an adult, her planning of and preparation for the party illustrate the party's importance to her. Her prom party is decorated in "autumn leaves and vines and red crepe paper."<sup>85</sup> Autumn is symbolic of passing time, and moving from ripened summer to frigid winter. The prom party is foreshadowing Mick's own fall from childhood and her progression in to an unfulfilling adulthood.

In planning her prom party, Mick is careful to exclude many of her neighborhood playmates: "She was strict with the invitations. No Grammar School kids and nobody under twelve years old. She just asked people between thirteen and fifteen."<sup>86</sup> For the party, she borrowed her sister's "best clothes."<sup>87</sup> Her outfit is described as a "long blue crepe de chine evening dress and some white pumps and a rhinestone tiara for her hair."<sup>88</sup> According to the narrator, "These clothes were really gorgeous. It was hard to imagine how [Mick] would look in them."<sup>89</sup> After Mick is dressed, she examines herself in a mirror: "She was so tall that the dress came up two or three inches above her ankles—and the shoes were so short they hurt her. She stood in front of the mirror a long time, and finally decided she either looked like a sap or else

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>86</sup> McCullers, *Heart*, 105.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

she looked very beautiful.”<sup>90</sup> After putting on the dress, she works on getting her hair to lie down flat, she puts on her makeup, and then she puts on her tiara. When she was finished, “she looked—just beautiful.”<sup>91</sup>

Immediately after her beauty is asserted, the narrator states that Mick “didn’t feel like herself at all. She was somebody different from Mick Kelly entirely.”<sup>92</sup> Here, Mick is wearing her sisters’ clothing, not her own, thereby insinuating that Mick is performing an identity that is not hers. What McCullers is suggesting is that Mick Kelly is not herself when she is dressing up in her sister’s feminine clothes. She is merely in drag, performing a parody of womanhood. In addition to being in drag, she is also performing elements of the grotesque: her dress is too short and her shoes are too tight. McCullers’s is using clothing to suggest that womanhood has outgrown the confines of dresses and shoes, meaning that women are capable of taking on roles that allow them to wear pants and sneakers or other “masculine” clothes. However, due to the lack of constitutional guarantees of equality, women were still forced to try to fit into the confines of traditional womanhood, particularly in the South.

At the party, Mick was only asked to prom by three boys, one of which was Harry Minowitz. As the two began to “walk around the block,” Spareribs, one of the neighborhood boys who had not been invited to Mick’s party, began to yell out, “Look yonder at Mick Kelly... Look at her!”<sup>93</sup> Spareribs’s banter breaks the mystical beauty that surrounds Mick. Immediately

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> McCullers, *Heart*, 111.

after his shouts, Harry draws attention to Mick's age, which brings the narrator to reveal Mick's thoughts:

She knew that [Harry] was thinking. It used to worry her all the time. Five feet six inches tall and a hundred and three pounds, and she was only thirteen. Every kid at the party was a runt beside her, except Harry, who was only a couple of inches shorter. No boy wanted to prom with a girl so much taller than him. But maybe cigarettes would help stunt the rest of her growth.<sup>94</sup>

Mick follows up by telling Harry that she “grew thee and a fourth inches just in the last year.”<sup>95</sup>

The next statement takes Mick's growth spurt, and associates it with something freakish: “Once I [Harry] saw a lady at the fair who was eight and a half feet tall. But you probably won't grow that big.”<sup>96</sup> Harry's hesitance to confidently state that Mick will not grow to be eight and a half feet tall reveals that there is something that is unusual about Mick that aligns her with the queer and freakish. However, these alignments are not genuine reflections of Mick. Instead, they are grounded in the expectations that women fulfill traditional Southern womanhood (which relates directly to appearance) as perceived by a male. That is to say that though Harry is seeking to comfort Mick, the backhandedness of his comment suggests that he is holding her to a prescriptive perception of womanhood.

As Mick and Harry's prom came to a close and they approached her home, she saw her party being sabotaged. Upon her return, her party “looked more like a crazy house” than the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

elegant party it had been “just five minutes” before.”<sup>97</sup> The uninvited neighborhood gang had the party “all messed up.”<sup>98</sup> Her anger soon transitioned to excitement: “It wasn’t just her dress and the beautiful way her face looked when she passed by the hatrack mirror and saw the red paint on her cheeks and the rhinestone tiara in her hair. Maybe it was the decorating and all these Vocational people and kids being jammed together.”<sup>99</sup> Soon, Mick joined in the chaos when “a boy came up to her with a sticker and she started running too.”<sup>100</sup> Carr notes in *Understanding Carson McCullers* that the images of the chaotic prom party are “fraught with Freudian overtones.”<sup>101</sup> Because the stick that she is being chased with is seen as a phallic symbol, it is important that she runs from it. In running from the stick, Mick is acknowledging that she is not ready to give up her masculine tomboy role and submit to womanhood.

When Mick begins to take part in the shenanigans of the neighborhood children, the elegance of the party is lost:

The idea of the part was over entirely now. This was just a regular playing-out. But it was the wildest night she had ever seen. The kids had caused it. They were like catching sickness, and their coming to the party made all the other people forget about high school and being almost grown. It was like just before you take a bath in the afternoon when you might wallow around in the back yard and get plenty dirty just for the good feel of it before getting into the tub.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>98</sup> McCullers, *Heart*, 114.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Carr, *Understanding Carson McCullers*, 27.

Everybody was a wild kid playing out on Saturday night—and she felt like the very wildest of all.

She hollered and pushed and was the first to try any new stunt. She made so much noise and moved around so fast she couldn't notice what anybody else was doing. Her breath wouldn't come fast enough to let her do all the wild things she wanted to do.<sup>102</sup>

When Mick finally lets go of her fantasized expectations, she is able to interact with her peers more comfortably. The comfort that she finds is two-fold: she no longer feels that she has to meet her schoolmates' expectations of her family's economic status, but more importantly she is able to throw aside her mask of femininity that she has been wearing for the duration of the party. After the festivities, Mick realizes that her schoolmates are no different that she is; they, too, can be common and simple. McCullers uses the party as a turning point in the novel. After Mick returns to her house, she goes to change out of her sister's dress, which is now dirty and torn. Readers are told after she puts on her shirt and shorts that "She was too big to wear shorts anymore after this. No more after this night. Not anymore."<sup>103</sup> Mick has reached an understanding of her gendered body, and she knows that after having dressed in traditional women's clothing, she will be expected to uphold the female gender presentation. This is when she begins to realize that she is reaching a point where she can no longer wear her shorts and occupy the role of a tomboy and that she must choose to identify with one side of the gender binary. She is no longer able to remain in a liminal space.

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<sup>102</sup> McCullers, *Heart*, 115.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

Mick's clothing has further significance in regard to her tomboyism other than serving as a visible marker of her gender and sexual identity. Her clothing allows her to participate in male-dominated activities. In the beginning of the novel, on the same Sunday that Mick is seen mimicking Mr. Singer on the porch, she takes her younger brothers, Bubber and Ralph, for a walk around the town. She takes them to a construction site for a house that, when finished, will be one of the largest buildings in the neighborhood.<sup>104</sup> Once they reach the house, Mick leaves Bubber in charge of Ralph; then, she ascends the ladder until she reaches the highest point of the house. Tree climbing is a distinct characteristic for tomboys. Mick's climbing to the top of the house is the suburban equivalent of tree climbing. By climbing and reaching the top of the house, Mick is symbolically showing her physical ability. However, her climbing also serves another purpose: it shows an ability to rise and overcome an obstacle. When she is standing on the top of the house, she is able to transcend and rise above the entire town, which is representative of Mick rising above gender and societal expectations of gender, but at this point, Mick is still unaware of her looming adolescence. Ultimately her ability to overcome expectations is part of an isolated event that takes place in her imaginative, youthful mind.

As Mick's character develops readers are able to see more of her traits that suggest she is more comfortable not identifying as female. For example, in school, rather than taking a "stenographic course like Hazel and Etta," she receives "special permission [to take] mechanical shop like a boy."<sup>105</sup> Unlike women who are learning pink collar<sup>106</sup> trades in school such as stenography, Mick is learning "masculine" skills. By learning such skills she is not only asserting

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>106</sup> Pink collar is a term that arose during second-wave feminism which refers to predominately woman filled lines of work. Pink Collar work includes but is not limited to, teaching, nursing, and secretarial positions.

her masculinity, but she is also creating a career path for herself that will prevent her from being caught in “pink collar” work; without the necessary pink collar skills, she will be unqualified to work in those fields upon completing her education. The skills that she has obtained will be useless unless she can learn to pass as male or unless women gain equality in the eyes of employers.

Mick’s understanding of women in the workplace comes about when her family encounters a potential lawsuit. After settling out of court, the financial situation of Mick’s family is more strained than before. The narrator tells readers, “[Mick] never even had a nickel to herself any more. They were that poor. Money was the main thing. All the time it was money, money, money.”<sup>107</sup> The exacerbated financial instability of the Kelly family confirms their working-class status. Readers learn that as a result of the financial strain, the music lessons Mick had been paying for with her lunch money were no longer an option because she and George<sup>108</sup> “didn’t get any lunch money now.”<sup>109</sup> Readers learn, moreover, that “sometimes [Mick] and George were downright hungry for two or three days.”<sup>110</sup> Not having money to pay for music lessons signals the beginning of the end of Mick’s youthful fantasies of becoming a composer. Not by coincidence, the Kelly’s newly intensified hardship happens in the winter.<sup>111</sup> While the Kelly family and their boarders are all gathered around the living room fireplace, Mick sneaks

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<sup>107</sup> McCullers, *Heart*, 238.

<sup>108</sup> The lawsuit that the Kellys manage to resolve outside of court involves Mick’s younger brother, Bubber. He shot a young neighborhood girl in the head. After this incident, Bubber is no longer called by his endearing nickname. From this point in the novel forward, he is called George.

<sup>109</sup> McCullers, *Heart*, 239.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> McCullers, like many other of her contemporaries uses seasons as a way to reveal developmental epiphanies. While this argument is not the central focus of this thesis and therefore will not be a central argument, attention does need to be brought to this concept for the point at hand.

off by herself to work on the projects in the hatbox. As she does this, she is wearing “two sweaters and a pair of Bill’s outgrown corduroy pants.”<sup>112</sup> Mick is still shown wearing hand-me-downs, but she is not hindered by the fact that they are boys’ clothes. Instead, when she is wearing her brother’s old pants, she is able to forget, if only for a little while, of her family’s strained finances and focus on her private ambitions.

Although Mick has realized that she must act according to a prescribed gender role as she progresses to adulthood, she still has masculine ambitions that are apparent during her interactions with Harry Minowitz. One afternoon after a streak of bad luck, she called across the fence to Harry. She uses the pretense that she needs help studying for her English test, but their conversation soon strays from diagramming sentences; the two engage in a conversation about politics and foreign affairs. Harry, a Jew, expresses his distaste for Hitler, and the two fabricate a plot to kill Hitler together. Mick decides that she wants to “fight the fascists,” and tells Harry that she could “dress up like a boy and nobody could ever tell. Cut my hair off and all.”<sup>113</sup> Mick understands that to fulfill the societal role that she wishes to hold she will require her to pass as a male. In order to pass as male, she will have to allow her perceived sex to reflect the gender that she is seeking to perform.

In the same conversation, Mick makes an observation about employment opportunities for women:

One thing I’ve thought about. . . A boy has a better advantage like that than a girl. Mean a boy can usually get some part-time job that don’t take him out of school and leave him time for other things. But there’s not jobs like that for girls. When a

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<sup>112</sup> McCullers, *Heart*, 239

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 245.

girls wants a job she has to quit school and work full time. I'd sure like to earn a couple of bucks a week like you do, but there's just not any way.<sup>114</sup>

Here, McCullers is commenting on how the economic structure puts women in a position to choose between work and education. Mick does not want make such a sacrifice: she longs to be able to choose a male-dominated path that involves working while continuing her education, but she is restricted from doing so because she is female. If she chooses to go to work, she will be forced to sacrifice her education. Thus, Mick longs to identify as a male in order to be able to balance a job and continue her education. Mick's struggle, though, is a distinctly working class issue. Other characters in this study are recognized as middle or upper class and are not faced with this decision, as their families do not require added income. Ultimately, the choice between work and school that working-class women were asked to make prevents women from achieving upward mobility and increases their dependence on men to move up in the social class system.

Mick is finally presented with an opportunity to help out during her family's hardship; unfortunately, she is hired into the pink collar work force and gives up her educational dreams. Her sister Hazel comes home from work one night and tells her family of a clerk position at the local Woolworth's. Mr. Kelly, who is disabled and jobless, inquires if it is a job that he can do. Hazel informs him that the job is "just for a girl."<sup>115</sup> The job description is important for several reasons. First, Hazel expresses that the job is pink collar, and applicants should be limited entirely to females. Second, the reason the job came open to begin with is because the clerk that is being replaced is leaving her job because she got married. Mick's family discourages her from taking the position, but she agrees to take it because ten dollars a week is too much money to

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 246.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 315.

pass up. In fact, even though she is only fourteen, she will be making as much money as Bill.<sup>116</sup> Mick applies for the job and is hired.

After working in the store, she begins to get overtime anytime that the manager needs someone to stay. Although she is making money and is able to help her family, Mick is dissatisfied with her life: “What good was it? That was the question she would like to know. What the hell good was it. All the plans she had made, and the music. When all that came of it was this trap—the store, then home to sleep and back at the store again.”<sup>117</sup> One evening after work, Mick is in Mr. Brannon’s café, and readers are given one final physical description of Mick, one that is a definite contrast to the previous one. Biff describes her as having “grown older . . . Her rough and childish ways were almost gone. And instead there was something ladylike and delicate about her that was hard to point out. The earrings, the dangle of her bracelets, and the new way she crossed her legs and pulled the hem of her skirt down past her knees.”<sup>118</sup> The last time that Mick is seen in women’s garb, she is more or less in drag because of her apparent discomfort with her own female identity. Here, she is seen in a slightly different light. While there is something slightly peculiar about a child who is passing in society as a working adult woman, she is somehow more comfortable with her female identity. She is learning to pass as a woman instead of previous, more masculine, identity. In learning to pass, she has relented to the fact that she is unable to move through life occupying a liminal space.

Even though Mick learns to cope with her social role, there are elements of the grotesque and the Gothic that are invoked. For instance, the feeling of angst is a Southern manifestation of

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 316.

<sup>117</sup> McCullers, *Heart*, 350.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 357.

the traditional Gothic element of mystery and suspense. The reader can sense Mick's dissatisfaction with her situation based on her statements relating to the routine that she is stuck in is due to the patriarchal system that she is subjected to. Her options for social mobility are limited because now, without an education, she will not be in a position to marry out of the lower class; moreover, she is unable to move herself out of her social position because she is not trained in skills, such as stenography, that she would have been if she had not chosen to take mechanics. Overall, McCullers is demonstrating the negative social effects for women who choose not to subscribe to traditional gender norms. She invokes the Southern Gothic as a mechanism by which to frame her critique. Her invocation derives from the tension between social classes, tomboyism, and gender norms. Her ending to the novel is appropriately pessimistic. As at least a portion of the novel is focused on class tensions and gender roles, any ending except one of pessimism would suggest hope for improved social mobility, especially for individuals who follow non-traditional gender roles. By ending her novel with a pessimistic tone, she is revealing that she feels that there is no end to oppression in sight.

## Carson McCullers *The Member of the Wedding*:

### Frankie Addams

*The Member of the Wedding* is another novel by Georgia native Carson McCullers. Again, this novel is considered to be largely autobiographical, but it is outside of the focus of this study to read the novel as such. *The Member of the Wedding* is named by scholars as one of McCullers's best works, but critics have noted similarities between Frankie Addams, the protagonist in *The Member of the Wedding*, and Mick Kelly, the protagonist in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. The two share similarities in that they are both tomboys who are on the cusp of adolescence. In transitioning from childhood to adolescence, Mick meets a tragic end when she is forced to quit school and take a job to help support her family. Mick can be viewed as a literary starting point for McCullers. In this sense, Mick might have served as a brainstorm or a form of prewriting for a later masterpiece, *The Member of the Wedding*. In *Understanding Carson McCullers*, McCullers scholar Virginia Spencer Carr points out commonalities that exist between Mick and Frankie:

[Mick and Frankie] evolved with much in common. . . Both are daughters of tired, wan jewelers who had hoped for far more satisfaction in their lives and careers than they actually have. The only maternal nurturing each girl receives is from the black servant (and surrogate mother) in her household. Mick has Portia Copeland and Frankie has the one-eyed Berenice Sadie Brown. Mick's mother is too busy operating her boardinghouse to be concerned with the emotional rearing of her

daughter, and Frankie's mother has died in childbirth. In their restless approach to puberty, both girls fend largely for themselves.<sup>119</sup>

It is true, there are some striking similarities in Mick and Frankie, but the similarities are not strong enough to suggest that Frankie is an evolved form or a redo of Mick. Instead, McCullers uses Frankie to explore the cultural archetype of the tomboy in an environment that does not have the extreme financial burdens that the Kelly family faces.

While social class is still a prominent factor in this study as a whole, the Addams's secure place in the middle class allows for a more detailed examination of how tomboyism and gender non-conformity play out when the individual is not under the pressure of upholding community expectations of Southern womanhood or of putting her own identity aside to provide added family income. Therefore, in examining *The Member of the Wedding*, the primary focus will be on Frankie's perception of womanhood in the South and how her own appearance fails to meet these standards. Unlike Mick, who has to compromise her gender identity based on financial need of her family, Frankie is able to explore her options in more detail. Likewise, she is not forced to choose a compromised identity. Ultimately, gender identity becomes more complex when the constraints of economic burden are removed. The gender identity on which she settles is one that is selected based on her own exploration and self-discovery.

Frankie Addams, like Mick, is a tomboy on the cusp of puberty. She is described by McCullers biographer and critic Oliver Evans as a "gawky twelve-year-old tomboy."<sup>120</sup> Evans's description is very accurate and summarizes many of Frankie's attributes. She is angst-filled and

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<sup>119</sup> Carr, *Understanding Carson McCullers*, 73-74.

<sup>120</sup> Oliver Evans, *The Ballad of Carson McCullers: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Coward-McCann Inc., 1966), 102.

wishes to be anywhere except at home and anyone except Frankie Addams. Throughout the novel, she works through her angst by toying with her identity and rushing her maturity. During the course of the plot, she makes the following progression: Frankie, the discontent tomboy; F. Jasmine, the fancy southern lady with a taste for older men; and Frances, an identity which is comprised of both Frankie and F. Jasmine. The narration of *The Member of the Wedding* is similar to that of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. Both have third-person narrators. However, while the focalization of in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* shifts and the narrator is truly omniscient, the narrator in *The Member of the Wedding* is limited, and the only mind that he or she has complete access to is that of Frankie.

The first description of Frankie that is given is of her through a “watery kitchen mirror.”<sup>121</sup> The description of the mirror suggests that the description of Frankie is distorted. When Frankie looks in the mirror, she is told to do so by Berenice, the housekeeper, who claims that she can see jealousy in Frankie’s eye color. However, when Frankie looks in the mirror, she only sees that “her eyes were gray as they always were.”<sup>122</sup> Frankie is further described:

This summer she was grown so tall that she was almost a big freak, and her shoulders were narrow, her legs too long. She wore a pair of blue track shorts, and a B.V.D. undervest, and she was barefooted. Her hair had been cut like a boy’s, but it had not been cut for a long time and was now not even parted. The reflection in the glass was warped and crooked, but Frankie knew well what she looked like.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding, Collected Stories of Carson McCullers* (New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 258.

<sup>122</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 258.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

There are several important details about Frankie's description. First, she is wearing track shorts. The track shorts suggest that Frankie is an active youth and her activities require her to wear something that allows her to move around freely. Second is that she is wearing a Bradley Voorhees & Day (B.V.D.) undervest. While B.V.D. originally made women's bustles, by the 1930s, they were known for making men's underwear.<sup>124</sup> Finally, Frankie's hair has been cut like a boy's. Her hair cut will cause her much grief as she attempts to perform a more feminine gender role. In a later scene, she agonizes over it as she stands, again, in front of the "watery" mirror. She claims, "The big mistake I made was to get this close crew cut. For the wedding I ought to have long bright yellow hair. Don't you think so?"<sup>125</sup>

Frankie's conflict between who she feels that she should become and the identity that she has taken on through her physical appearance causes her to seek resolution. Her resolution comes as a result of a unity between "maleness" and "femaleness," or in other words maintaining the identity of a tomboy. Throughout the novel, Frankie's desire for male and female unity manifests itself in her preoccupation with her brother's wedding. In the first section of the novel, Frankie's brother comes home with his fiancée and announces that there will be a wedding. Berenice initially identifies Frankie's obsession with the wedding as jealousy, but later she claims that Frankie "got a crush/on the *Wedd-ing*" and has "fall[en] in love" with it.<sup>126</sup> The wedding serves as a symbol for a legal joining of male and female. What Frankie desires is not a legal union of man and woman but a reconciliation with both her male and female impulses and tendencies.

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<sup>124</sup> Carr makes note of Frankie's attire on page 75 of *Understanding Carson McCullers*. She says that "Frankie looks like a boy. Her hair is short, she is barefooted, and she is dressed in a pair of blue track shorts and a B.V.D. undershirt." Carr is associating Frankie's appearance and her attire with masculinity therefore confirming that the B.V.D. undervest is commonly understood to men's clothing.

<sup>125</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 270-271.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 258; 285; 325.

The most common way to explain the battle between masculinity and femininity that Frankie faces is through twentieth century psychologist Carl Jung's theory of duality of the human mind. Jung coins the terms *animus*, or the suppressed male within the female and *anima*, or the suppressed female within the male. Jung argues that what appears to be on the outside of an individual is a front that is put up to mask what truly lies underneath. In males, what will typically lie underneath is the *anima*, and in females, it is the *animus*. He describes what forms the *animus* and *anima* as an inward impression made by the parents on an individual.<sup>127</sup> While *animus* and *anima* are the simplest terms to describe the behavior of tomboys in general, in the case of Frankie, it is an inaccurate assessment.<sup>128</sup>

In *Strange Bodies: Gender and Identity in the Novels of Carson McCullers*, Sarah Gleeson White rejects a Jungian reading of McCullers's tomboys. As a scholar who focuses largely on gender and sexuality, she deems Jung's work to "depict the androgyne as a sexually neuter and static figure" and feels that his "classical depiction is inadequate as a description of the tensions that structure subjectivity in McCullers's texts."<sup>129</sup> White, instead, embraces Mikhail Bakhtin's figure of "two bodies in one."<sup>130</sup> She explains that this model "rejects synthesis to maintain difference."<sup>131</sup> This theory, as White presents it, maintains an overall sense of humanity when examining individuals who do not fit the typical categories for gender or assigned sex. She causes readers to reexamine what it means to be human by explaining that grotesque figures are

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<sup>127</sup> Carl G. Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc, 1972), 196-198

<sup>128</sup> The same argument can be made for Mick Kelly.

<sup>129</sup> Sarah Gleeson-White, *Strange Bodies: Gender and Identity in the Novels of Carson McCullers*. (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>130</sup> Gleeson-White, *Strange Bodies*, 10.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

punished by society through exclusion and marginalization; they are treated as though they are unable to function in society.<sup>132</sup> Bakhtin's "two bodies in one" figure is a more accurate model for McCullers' fiction than Jung's model because it deals more with the physical traits of an individual and places less focus on the psychological influences.

McCullers uses the element of oddity as a vehicle to support Frankie's conflict in choosing how she will identify. The anticipation of choosing a gender role and the anxiety that accompanies Frankie's uncertainty of who she will grow to be causes her to see the entire summer as fearful:

[Frankie] stood before the mirror as she was afraid. It was the summer of fear, for Frankie, and there was one fear that could be figured in arithmetic with paper and pencil at the table. This August, she was twelve and five-sixths years old. She was five feet five and three quarter inches tall, and she wore a number seven shoe. In the past year she had grown four inches, or at least that was what she judged. Already the hateful little summer children hollered to her: "is it cold up there?" And the comments of grown people made Frankie shrivel on her heels. If she reached her height on her eighteenth birthday, she had five and one-sixth growing years ahead of her. Therefore, according to mathematics and unless she could somehow stop herself, she would grow to be over nine feet tall. And what would be a lady who is over nine feet high? She would be a freak.<sup>133</sup>

This passage is important to the discussion of Frankie's tomboyism on multiple accounts.

Initially, it suggests a "normal" pattern of human development. While Frankie's mathematical

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>133</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 271.

calculations are outlandish and skewed, they suggest that the societal standards for female growth and development are something that are patterned and standard. Having a normalized growth pattern creates a space for “freak” and “abnormal” growth, thus allowing for a deviant woman to develop. When a deviant woman grows in the space between the “normalized” female and a “freakish” female, she becomes ostracized from both groups and is forced to create her own standard set of rules since she is neither fully “woman” nor fully “freak.” It is during this process that girls such as Frankie are able to occupy liminal spaces such as tomboyism.

Not only does the paragraph construct the standard to which Frankie is holding herself developmentally accountable, but it also shows her own inner turmoil of being in the space between “woman” and “freak.” Frankie is unable to identify completely with the freaks, since, according to Berenice there is hope for Frankie.<sup>134</sup> However, Frankie is unable to occupy the role of womanhood as she conceives it. Therefore, she uses numbers to rationalize her fears of standing out among her peers.

Finally, this passage is significant in that it opens McCullers’s story up to be viewed through a lens of abjection, meaning cast off. The term also implies degradation. Abjection<sup>135</sup> is first introduced when the narrator recalls the previous autumn when Frankie and her cousin John Henry West went to the local fair and walked through the “Freak House.”<sup>136</sup> The Freak House is juxtaposed with Frankie’s anxieties of becoming a freak because the Freak House is comprised of people who were unable to fit into a “normative” pattern for human development. Thus, they

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<sup>134</sup> Frankie asks Berenice if she thinks that Frankie will become a freak like those at the fair, to which Berenice replies, “You... Why, certainly not, I trust Jesus” (273).

<sup>135</sup> Abjection is, as per Julia Kristeva, a horror-induced reaction to the inability to distinguish between self and “other”

<sup>136</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 271.

are forced to exploit their bodies in order to survive in society. Within the Freak House, there are many “exhibits” “The Giant\ The Fat Lady\ The Midget\ The Wild Nigger\ The Pin Head\ The Alligator Boy\ The Half-Man Half-Woman.”<sup>137</sup> Each of these “exhibits” is a part of the freak house not because of his or her behavior, but ultimately because of his or her body (or his and her body as the case may be).

The freaks in the Freak House further instill anxiety in Frankie because when looking at all of the exhibitions, it “seemed to her that [the freaks] had looked at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with hers, as though to say: we know you.”<sup>138</sup> Frankie’s fears are understandable. Kate Bornstein, a transsexual author and gender theorist,<sup>139</sup> had a similar experience which she describes in her text *Gender Outlaw*:

When I was a young boy, my father took me to the circus. I don’t remember anything about the circus performance. All I remember is the sideshow. And what I remember most is Olaf, the world’s tallest man. He was so tall, I had to stretch my neck way back in order to see all of him . . . On each of his fingers, he wore rings, which he sold as souvenirs. I remember I was standing up front, close to his stage, as he spoke of his life. . . And then he bent down toward me. His already immense head grew larger and larger as his face drew near to mine. And I remember no fear. He knew me, and I knew him. He smiled. I smiled. Then he took one of the rings off his finger, and put it round my wrist. And I knew I was just like him. I knew I was a freak.

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<sup>137</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 271.

<sup>138</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 272.

<sup>139</sup> Bornstein is also recognized as a playwright and performance artist.

Freaks always know that.<sup>140</sup>

Unlike Bornstein, who understood that she was being recognized and, in a way, initiated into the “freak” community, whether or not Frankie is being identified by the freaks is never confirmed—nor is it denied. The importance of her identification with the freaks is highlighted as she attempts to form herself into a “lady.”

Because Frankie is familiar with the fate of freaks, she ventures into a new, uncharted territory—womanhood. She begins to perform womanhood as best she can interpret it. To avoid being a freak, Frankie moves into womanhood--in drag. The first instance that Frankie is presented in drag, or a failed attempt at female identification, is when her brother and his fiancée, Jarvis and Janice, first arrive at the Addams’s house. After the couple leaves, Frankie keeps asking Berenice to explain and retell the events of their visit. Berenice tells her, “Your brother and the bride come late this morning and you and John Henry hurried in from the back yard to see them. The next thing I realize you busted back through the kitchen and run up to your room. You came down with your organdie dress on and lipstick a inch thick from one ear to the next. Then you all just sat around up in the living room.”<sup>141</sup> Frankie is attempting to present herself as a female by dressing in typical 1940’s women’s wear. In this scene, Frankie is also making a statement about her developmental stage. She chooses to adorn herself with copious amounts of makeup, but because Frankie does not have a proper mother figure to assist her with putting her make up on, she is, according to Berenice’s description, clownish.

Unlike the freaks at the fair that recognize Frankie, women do not recognize her as being a woman even when she makes an attempt. This notion is reflected by Berenice’s reaction.

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<sup>140</sup> Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*, (New York, Routledge, 1994), 129.

<sup>141</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 279.

Though Berenice's reaction causes readers to see the humor in Frankie's attire, there is something equally as striking about it. According to Bornstein, "camp, or drag in general. . . is an attempt to ape or become the dominant culture. What I learned to see once I got off the straight and narrow road was this: camp performers were taking pieces of the culture and twisting them around to a point of humor and. . . then wearing the scalps (wigs) of their oppressors as badges of victory."<sup>142</sup> Frankie may not yet realize that she is doing what Bornstein describes, but she is. With her short hair, and disastrous venture into womanhood, Frankie is clownish to Berenice. However, were she to surround herself with other individuals who were, as Bornstein states, "off the straight and narrow road" she would not appear unusual. Because Berenice identifies as a woman, she is unable to see and accept Frankie's attempt at womanhood because it is only that—an attempt. Frankie's venture into womanhood is another reason that her summer is one of fear: she is focused on moving away from the "freakish" and toward "womanliness." She knows that freaks recognize her, so her fears continue to resonate because women do not seem to share with her the "knowing look" that the freaks at the fair share. So she is unsure as to whether or not she will be accepted into womanhood with a warm welcome.

After Frankie's venture into drag, re-acquaintance with her brother, and introduction to her brother's fiancée, she takes on a new identity. She calls herself F. Jasmine Addams; her identity is adopted so that her name will be alliterative with Janice and Jarvis. She also realizes that Frankie does not have a group with which to identify:

She was an *I* person who had to walk around and do things by herself. All other people had a *we* to claim, all others except her. When Berenice said *we*, she meant

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<sup>142</sup> Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw*, 137.

Honey and Big Mama, her lodge, or her church. The *we* of her father was the store. All members of clubs have a *we* to belong to and to talk about. The soldiers in the army can say *we*, and even the criminals on the chain-gangs. But the old Frankie had had no *we* to claim, unless it would be the terrible summer *we* of her and John Henry and Berenice—and that was the last *we* in the world she wanted.<sup>143</sup>

Frankie finds a sense of belonging in her brother and his fiancée. She decides that “*They are the we of me,*” and she feels lonely and abandoned when they leave to finalize wedding plans in Janice’s hometown, Winter Hill.<sup>144</sup> In becoming F. Jasmine, she is identifying herself with Jarvis and Janice and their impending legal union.

Upon changing her name, Frankie decides that after the wedding, she will follow her brother and sister-in-law into the world, wherever they go, and live with them. From the beginning of the novel, Frankie has struggled with finding her identity within her community, so she attempts to find her place within a larger sphere--the world. The world is at war, and Frankie feels a strong desire to help:

She saw the battles and the soldiers...She wanted to be a boy and go to the war as a Marine. She thought about flying aeroplanes and winning golf medals for bravery. But she could not join the war, and this made her sometimes restless and blue. She decided to donate blood to the Red Cross; she wanted to donate a quart a week and her blood would be in the veins of Australians and Fighting French and Chinese all over the whole world...She would hear the army doctors saying

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<sup>143</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 291.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

that the blood of Frankie Addams was the reddest and the strongest blood that they had ever known. And she could picture ahead, in the years after the war, meeting the soldiers who had her blood, and they would say that they owed their life to her; and they would not call her Frankie—they would call her Addams. But this plan for donating her blood to the war did not come true. The Red Cross would not take her blood. She was too young. Frankie felt mad at the Red Cross and left out of everything.<sup>145</sup>

Frankie is sorting through her dissatisfaction with her gender and age. She cannot dream of becoming a marine because she is female, and she cannot donate her blood to assist those who are fighting for her country because she is too young. In other words, even when Frankie is trying to live through someone else by donating her blood, she is still unable to do so successfully because of her age. Frankie is being restricted by circumstances that are beyond her control. She occupies two liminal spaces by being a tomboy on the cusp of puberty, and she sees that she is still trapped and unable to move forward with her ambitions.<sup>146</sup>

In order to take more control of her life and attempt to move out of the trapped space that she is in, Frankie chooses to tag along with her brother and sister-in-law. She is allowing herself a freedom of choice by deciding her own destiny. As a way to provide closure to the life of “Frankie,” F. Jasmine spends the next day wandering around the town. While on her excursion, she reminisces on the activities that Frankie used to participate in. In doing so, she is trying on her new identity and practicing her performance of womanhood.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 275.

<sup>146</sup> She is occupying a space between two genders—male and female—and she is also occupying a space between adulthood and childhood.

After her journey through the city, F. Jasmine returns home and inquires about the status of her “good” clothing, as she expects to “take them to Winter Hill.”<sup>147</sup> When Berenice asks why, F. Jasmine reminds her that she will not be returning after the wedding. To which Berenice replies: “Fool’s hill. You have a whole lot less sense than I was giving you credit for. What makes you think they want to take you along with them? Two is company and three is a crowd. And that is the main thing about a wedding. Two is company and three is a crowd.”<sup>148</sup> Since the wedding represents a unity of gender for Frankie, Berenice’s statement reminds readers of the presence of a strict gender binary.

Berenice is suggesting that marriage is based on the unity of two genders, but in saying “three is a crowd” she suggests that the existence of a gender outside of the male-female binary is not possible. Berenice explains her point further as she drifts off into a story about a man she knows by the name of Lily Mae Jenkins:

I have knew womens to love veritable Satans and thanks Jesus when they put their split hooves over the threshold. I have knew boys to take it into their heads to fall in love with other boys. You know Lily Mae Jenkins? . . . He prisses around with a pink satin blouse and one arm akimbo. Now this Lily Mae fell in love with man name Juney Jones. A man, mind you. And Lily Mae turned into a girl. He changed his nature and his sex and turned into a girl.<sup>149</sup>

While there are obvious implications being made about the status of homosexual men in the eyes of the community, the more important implications of this passage is that Berenice is suggesting

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<sup>147</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 321.

<sup>148</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 321.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 324.

that by falling in love with a man, Lily Mae is by default a woman. Because he dresses in a “pink satin blouse” and “prisses,” he is seen as having become a woman. These superficial adaptations have nothing to do with an actual alteration of his body. His performance of gender affects what people perceive to be his gender/sex. Lily Mae challenges gender norms and attempts to conform to prescriptive gender roles by playing the “woman” in the relationship between Juney and himself. As a result of trying to act out a gender role, his physical, anatomical, and hormonal makeup come into question.

F. Jasmine’s cousin, John Henry, is instantly intrigued by Lily Mae’s transformation and enquires further for specific details. Readers are most often left to assume that John Henry will attempt to make a similar transformation, but the argument that I wish to make is that F. Jasmine, too, is left to ponder Lily Mae’s transformation and determine if a similar transformation will be possible for her. In a later scene, F. Jasmine is imagining how the world would be if she was the Creator. At this point, F. Jasmine reveals Frankie’s delight at gender fluidity:

The old Frankie’s world was the best of the three [Berenice, Frankie, and John Henry] worlds. She agreed with Berenice about the main laws of her creation, but she added many things: an aeroplane and a motorcycle to each person, a world club with certificates and badges, and a better law of gravity. She did not completely agree with Berenice about the war; and sometimes she said she would have one War Island in the world where those who wanted to could go, and fight or donate blood, and she might go for a while as a WAC in the Air Corps. She also changed the seasons leaving out summer altogether, and adding much snow. She

planned it so that people could instantly change back and forth from boys to girls, whichever way they felt like and wanted.<sup>150</sup>

Here, McCullers takes care to portray Frankie's (not F. Jasmine's) view of gender fluidity. Her purpose in doing so is to show that, as a tomboy, Frankie engages with two different gender identities, but she does not unify them or successfully find a way to present both gender identities at one time. Frankie's desire for unification of the two genders manifests in her fixation with the wedding.

Within the same meditation, F. Jasmine observes one way in which Frankie's world differs greatly from that of Berenice—gender expression. F. Jasmine notes that “Berenice would argue with [Frankie] about this, insisting that the law of human sex was exactly right just as it was and could in no way be improved.”<sup>151</sup> Then, F. Jasmine concludes the meditation by adding in how John Henry's world would differ: “John Henry West would very likely add his two cents' worth about this time, and think that people ought to be half boy and half girl, and when old Frankie threatened to take him to the Fair and sell him to the Freak Pavilion, he would only close his eyes and smile.”<sup>152</sup> In this conversation, McCullers offers three possible gender structures: a binary structure, a fluid transition from one gender to another, and a hermaphroditic model where two sexes literally manifest within one physical body.

These models, in addition to Berenice's story about Lily Mae Jenkins, are significant to gender themes within the novel because they not only offers different models of gender, but they confirm that gender models are, in fact, a theme of the novel. Oliver Evans makes note of

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 338.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

McCullers's use of gender models in these scenes, but rather than viewing them as multiple solutions to gender presentation, he simply views it as McCullers continuing with her theme of abnormality and isolation.<sup>153</sup> In addition to the isolation of abnormality, McCullers is also demonstrating the isolation of individuals who fall outside of gender norms in the mid-twentieth century.

The fluid model of gender that McCullers presents is Frankie's ideal model. F. Jasmine, on the other hand, subscribes to a more traditional mid-twentieth century model of womanhood. This gender model is affirmed when F. Jasmine is asked to show off her dress that she bought for the wedding. Upon changing, she makes John Henry and Berenice close their eyes when she comes back downstairs. When they open their eyes, she expects to be complimented on her beauty and good taste. She is taken aback when she gets the following response: "Berenice raised her head and when she saw F. Jasmine her face was a study. [She] looked from the silver hair ribbon to the soles of the silver slippers. She said nothing."<sup>154</sup> When F. Jasmine left the house, she had planned on purchasing a pink dress; needless to say that Berenice was shocked when F. Jasmine came down in an "orange satin evening gown."<sup>155</sup> F. Jasmine cannot figure out why Berenice tells her that her dress "don't do," so Berenice explains: "You had all your hair shaved off like a convict, and now you tie a silver ribbon around this head without any hair. It just looks peculiar... And look at them elbows... Here you got on this grown woman's evening dress.

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<sup>153</sup> Oliver Evans, *The Ballad of Carson McCullers*, 123: Other allusions to abnormality occur throughout: Frankie has committed, in the spring, a 'queer sin' with Barry MacKean in the MacKean's garage, and Berenice tells Frankie about the strange case of Lily Mae Jenkins, the negro who, 'to all intents and purposes', changed his sex and turned into a girl. But these allusions are carefully controlled; they are moreover, by no means irrelevant, for they serve as reminders that Mrs McCullers is writing, here as in her earlier work, about the condition of isolation.

<sup>154</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 331.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

Orange satin. And that brown crust on your elbows. The two things just don't mix."<sup>156</sup> F. Jasmine is advised to take the dress back to the store, but since the dress was from the clearance room and cannot be returned or exchanged, Berenice is forced to make alterations to the dress.

Berenice's critique of the dress suggests several things about F. Jasmine. Berenice reminds readers that F. Jasmine is still Frankie—the pubescent, middle class girl who has to buy her dress from the clearance room. Her short hair and crusty elbows are physical indications of F. Jasmine's childhood and tomboyism. Berenice's statements are meant to counter F. Jasmine's risqué behavior with the soldier in the bar earlier in the afternoon.<sup>157</sup> This juxtaposition reminds readers that F. Jasmine is still Frankie; while there has been a change in her attitude and outlook, she is still the same “gawky twelve-year-old tomboy” that readers were introduced to at the beginning of the novel.<sup>158</sup> In addition to reminding readers about F. Jasmine's age, it is also meant to remind readers of her physical appearance. She is not developed enough to fill out a woman's dress, which is why Berenice's has to make alterations to it. With her curve-less body and short hair, F. Jasmine most likely resembles a young boy in a woman's dress rather than a young lady in a woman's dress, making this the second time that Frankie has made an attempt at womanhood, but has only managed to pull off the appearance of being in drag.

After failing to present herself as a woman for a second time, F. Jasmine begins to question how marriage and unity is supposed to function. When she leaves to go with Jarvis and

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> During her venture through the town, F. Jasmine meets a soldier who has been granted a three-day leave from his base. He takes her into a bar, and his intentions with her are suggested by a glance he gives her: “He was staring at her with a peculiar expression, not as one traveler gazes at another, but as a person who shares a secret scheme” (316). After drinking a beer, F. Jasmine excuses herself from the situation. The soldier asks to see her again later that evening to take her dancing.

<sup>158</sup> Evans, *The Ballad of Carson McCullers*, 102.

Janice on their honeymoon, she will be married to them. In her mind, in being married, she will achieve a perfect Jungian balance of man and woman, so she is confused as to why she has not been able to yet make the transition. She attempts to sort through her complex understanding by talking with Berenice:

Listen... What I've been trying to say is this. Doesn't it strike you as strange that I am I and you are you? I am F. Jasmine Addams. And you are Berenice Sadie Brown. And we can look at each other, and touch each other, and stay together year in and year out in the same room. Yet always I am I, and you are you. I can't ever be anything else but me, and you can't ever be anything else but you. Have you ever thought of that? And does it seem to you strange?<sup>159</sup>

F. Jasmine is articulating her misunderstanding of marriage. She understands it as a union of two people who are becoming one another. She is beginning to see that the unity of marriage is not one that allows both parties to adopt physical characteristics of the other. Instead, it has to do with being in a partnership where each person contributes his or her unique identity to complement the other person in the relationship.

In terms of gaining understanding of what marriage really is, the most deciding moment for F. Jasmine is when she goes to meet the soldier from the Blue Moon again. Immediately upon reengaging with him, F. Jasmine notices that “their two conversations would not join together.”<sup>160</sup> Even though their conversations cannot seem to converge, F. Jasmine stays with the soldier at the bar and lets him treat her to a drink, which she takes one sip of and refuses because she can taste liquor in it and “although a child no longer, she was shocked. It was a sin and

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<sup>159</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 353.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, 369.

against the law for people under eighteen to drink real liquor.”<sup>161</sup> The soldier kept drinking and eventually became drunk; all the while, F. Jasmine kept trying and failing to engage in conversation. Her attempts are described as “a nightmare pupil in a recital who has to play a duet to a piece she does not know.”<sup>162</sup> Because their two conversations would not converge, it is apparent that F. Jasmine and the soldier are not compatible, but in an attempt to keep performing the role of womanhood for someone who disregards how poorly she plays the role, she keeps attempting to interact with him. Despite the fact that their date is quickly turning sour, the soldier invites F. Jasmine upstairs to his hotel room.

F. Jasmine finds herself in a situation that she is not familiar with and she does not know how to get herself out of. Since she feels as though she cannot decline the offer to accompany the soldier to his room, she follows him. When F. Jasmine enters the room, the scenery transforms from that of a small, quaint southern town to a dirty, grotesque slum:

It was the silence in the hotel room that warned and frightened her. A silence she noticed as soon as the door was closed. In the light of the bare electric bulb that hung down from the ceiling, the room looked hard and very ugly. The flaked iron bed had been slept in and a suitcase of jumbled soldier’s clothes lay open in the middle of the floor. On the bureau there was a glass pitcher full of water and a half-eaten package of cinnamon rolls covered with blue-white icing and fat flies.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 370.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 371.

More than anything, though, the silence is what F. Jasmine notices. She realizes that the silence is the one that was present “once in the Sears and Roebuck Store the moment before she became a thief, and again that April afternoon in the MacKeans’ garage.”<sup>164</sup> Frankie tries to make her way out of the room when she is pulled down on the bed beside the soldier. After pulling her down, he attempts to rape her. Frankie gets away mostly unharmed by breaking the glass water pitcher over the top of his head. She fled the room and ran back home, not staying to see whether the soldier was alive or dead.<sup>165</sup>

The silence of change that she felt in the hotel room serves as a realization that she would be facing a decision the following day. There is not a scene devoted to the wedding; instead, the story picks up in the third section during the bus ride home. During this time, readers are told that:

The wedding was like a dream, for all that came about occurred in a world beyond her power; from the moment when, sedate and proper, she shook hands with the grown people until the time, the wrecked wedding over, when she watched the car with the two of them driving away from her, and, flinging herself down in the sizzling dust, she cried out for the last time: ‘Take me! Take me!’—from the beginning to the end the wedding was unmanaged as a nightmare.<sup>166</sup>

At this point, Frankie/F. Jasmine’s name has once again changed. After “they put old Frankie out of the wedding,” as John Henry so eagerly notes, F. Jasmine is referred to by her proper, given

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 371-72.

<sup>166</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 376

name, Frances.<sup>167</sup> F. Jasmine’s final appearance is before the wedding while Janice is getting dressed. She longs to speak to Janice about leaving with her and Jarvis after the ceremony but instead gets lost in the pre-wedding excitement. When Janice finally turns her attention to F. Jasmine, she “put[s] her arms around her, and said she was glad to have a little sister—and when Janice kissed her, F. Jasmine felt an aching in her throat and could not speak.”<sup>168</sup> Her ache is caused by her longing to be a part of the relationship that Jarvis and Janice share. More importantly, F. Jasmine’s reaction to the kiss is a realization that she is attracted to Janice in the same way that her brother is attracted to his bride.

Oliver Evans makes note of Frankie’s attraction to her brother’s bride, but he also takes it a step further. He states that Frankie is attracted to both Janice and Jarvis. He supports his statement not with textual evidence, but instead with an anecdote from McCullers:

One Thanksgiving at February House, after everyone had eaten the big turkey dinner and were sitting down before the fire with brandy and coffee, they heard the sound of a fire engine. Gypsy Rose Lee rushed out to look; Carson followed, and then, in a flash of illumination, the idea of the book [*The Member of the Wedding*] suddenly became clear to her. Catching Gypsy’s arm, she shouted over the noise of the fire engine: ‘Frankie is in love with her brother and his bride and wants to become a member of the wedding.’<sup>169</sup>

This same anecdote can be found in McCullers unfinished autobiography entitled *Illumination and Night Glare*. The two accounts vary only slightly. Rather than using the title phrase “member

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 377-378.

<sup>169</sup> Evans, *The Ballad of Carson McCullers*, 98.

of the wedding” in her explanation, McCullers writes, “Frankie is in love with the bride of her brother and wants to join the wedding.” The two accounts vary only in Evans’s inclusion of an incestuous desire that Frankie has for her brother and in McCullers’s use of the word “join” instead of “member.”

The incestuous desire proves to be of little value to the current study. Instead, the word that McCullers chooses when describing Frankie’s desired involvement in the wedding is of utmost importance. A member of a wedding could constitute any position, from the bride and groom to the bridal party, and so on. However, when McCullers states that Frankie wishes to join the wedding, she is revealing her authorial intentions when composing the text. In wishing to join the wedding, she wishes to join the marriage. In marrying Janice (and Jarvis) she will take part in a recognized union in which she is literally occupying a space that is not “woman” and is not “man.” Janice and Jarvis would occupy those roles. She is instead a gender neutral figure that can easily adopt either gender as necessary.

The transformation of Frankie/F. Jasmine/Frances throughout the novel reveals the complexity of gender. Frankie is the adolescent tomboy who is afraid of men and male authority.<sup>170</sup> F. Jasmine is Frankie’s attempt at being of a higher class; it is her attempt at being a Southern Belle. F. Jasmine engages with Berenice in a conversation about love. The narrator observes: “The old Frankie had laughed at love, maintained it was fake, and did not believe in it...The old Frankie had always gone to the Saturday matinee, when the shows were crook

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<sup>170</sup> On page 277 The narrator explains that by “dog days” Frankie was “five feet five and three-quarter inches tall, a great big greedy loafer who was too mean to live. She was afraid, but not as she had been before. There was only the fear of Barney, her father, and the Law.” Her fears are of men and male-identified institutions. She was afraid of Barney MacKean because of the “sin” that she committed with him in his garage—readers can only imagine that the sin committed is of a sexual nature. Her fear of her father and the Law suggests a fear of male dominated institutions. In the South, women in the mid-twentieth century were not law makers, nor did they serve in law enforcement. Therefore, to McCullers, and Frankie, the Law represents a patriarchal institution.

shows, war shows, or cowboy shows.”<sup>171</sup> In fact, the narrator reveals that the previous May, there was a “confusion” at the cinema when *Camille* played which Frankie was the cause of: “She had been in her seat on the second row and she stamped and put two fingers in her mouth and began to whistle. And the other half-fare people in the first three rows began to whistle and stamp also, and the longer the love picture lasted the louder they became.”<sup>172</sup> F. Jasmine on the other hand, is fascinated by love.

The love that F. Jasmine imagines though, is Romantic or marked by the imaginative and emotional appeal of what is heroic, as opposed to romantic meaning conducive or suitable for lovemaking . She rejects “the physical aspect of love” when it is introduced to her by the local girls from the girls who have ousted her from their club.<sup>173</sup> She refers to “the facts of life” as “nasty lies.”<sup>174</sup> Basically, F. Jasmine entertains the idea of love and its association with adulthood, not the idea of love as a partnership between two individuals, or as Berenice suggests, “A thing known and not spoken.”<sup>175</sup> F. Jasmine goes through the motions of acknowledging love without understanding it. This notion is confirmed by her actions during her conversation with Berenice:

The old Frankie had never admitted love. Yet here F. Jasmine was sitting at the table with her knees crossed, and now and then she patted her bare foot on the floor in an accustomed way, and nodded at what Bereniece was saying.

Furthermore, when she reached out quietly toward the Chesterfield package

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<sup>171</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 340.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Evans, *The Ballad of Carson McCullers*, 113.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> McCullers, *Member*, 340.

beside the saucer of melted butter, Berenice did not slap her hand away, and F. Jasmine took herself a cigarette. She and Berenice were two grown people smoking at the dinner table.<sup>176</sup>

F. Jasmine sees her conversation and her cigarette as a rite of passage; the rite is confirmed when she is allowed to smoke without being scolded by Berenice. However, this identity is ephemeral and fades away after she was left behind by Janice and Jarvis.

The final identity that Frankie takes on—the one that she is assumed to maintain—is that of Frances. Frances is a newly invented version of Frankie/F. Jasmine. What pushes F. Jasmine over the figurative speed bump of maturity is her rejection and being “put out” of the wedding. Frances, though heartbroken, realizes the foolishness of thinking she would get to go with the bride and groom. She says to Berenice, “I never meant to go with them! . . . It was all just a joke. They said they were going to invite me for a visit when they get settled, but I wouldn’t go. Not for a million dollars.”<sup>177</sup> While trying to console Frances and comfort her, Berenice offers to throw her a party:

Soon as you get settled in school and have a chance to make these friends, I think it would be a good idea to have a party. A lovely bridge party in the living room, with potato salad and those little olive sandwiches your Aunt Pet had for a club meeting you were so carried away about—the round shaped kind with the tiny round hole in the middle and the olive showing. A lovely bridge party with delicious refreshments. How would you like that?<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 341.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 379.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

The party, however, does not end with fancy olive sandwiches. Berenice tries to further entice Frances by adding another dimension to the party. She continues, “We can have that bridge party going on in the living room. And out in the back yard we can have another party at the same time. A costume party with hot dogs. One party dainty and the other one rough.”<sup>179</sup> The party that Berenice is imagining caters to both sides of Frances: Frankie and F. Jasmine. Frances is the compromised identity that incorporates the masculinity of Frankie and the delicacy of F. Jasmine.

Unlike Mick, who, by financial force, had to take on a feminine identity shortly after reaching adolescence, Frankie is able to transition into adolescence and continue exploring her sexual and gender identity because she does not have to take on the adult concerns of providing income for her family. Because she is not burdened by these concerns, she is able to try on different identities throughout the text. McCullers uses the wedding for a two fold purpose: she uses it as a symbol for unity and union of maleness and femaleness, as it is perceived and understood by Frankie and Society; and she uses it as a means of exploration of gender and adult identities for Frankie.

Through self-exploration, Frankie is able to come to terms with some of the grotesque and abject results of the othered body. Because she is exposed to these forms of abjection, she understands that there is more to identity than a binary system. She also knows that the result of stepping outside the binary system of identities is, according to societal standards, “freakish.” Notably, unlike *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, this text ends with a hint of optimism, though not entirely rid of pessimistic features.<sup>180</sup> The reasoning behind the optimism lies in the role that

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 379-80.

<sup>180</sup> Even if the optimism is only such when compared to the ending of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*.

class plays in the text. There is hope for Frankie only because she is not held back by social determinism. She has an element of choice because of her solid, middle class status.

## Harper Lee *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

### Jean Louise “Scout” Finch

Harper Lee, was born in 1926 in Monroeville, Alabama. She published her first and only novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* in 1960. Lee Biographer, Charles J. Shields notes that “not only does [Lee] not solicit attention, she also actively discourages it, refusing to speak in public and turning down all requests for interviews and all forms of cooperation with writers and reporters.”<sup>181</sup> Lee has, for the most part, stayed out of the spotlight and has refused to grant interviews since around the time *To Kill a Mockingbird* was published. Even though she has not been interviewed for a number of years there is enough information about Harper Lee to support the claim that her novel is semi-autobiographical. Though reading her work as such reveals many insights into the Southern way of life, a biographical reading would prove to be slightly tangential to this study. Through the years, *To Kill a Mockingbird* has by and large been examined for its depiction of racial tensions in the South in the 1930s, but this study focuses heavily on the gender of the protagonist, Scout Finch and its relationship to her family’s socioeconomic class. While her decision to perform any one gender identity is not clearly stated, it does not have to be. Scout is noted to be approaching adolescence, but it is not as imminent for Scout as it is for Mick and Frankie.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is written as a frame narrative. Scout is the narrator and she is looking back on a time when she experienced several life-altering events. These events have often been assessed in terms of the racial turmoil that was indicative of the time period. Gender as a point of critical analysis has been largely overshadowed by the focus on racial issues.

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<sup>181</sup> Charles J. Shields, *Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 2.

However, gender is not intended to be overlooked by critical readers. Holly Blackford notes in her text, *Mockingbird Passing: Closeted Traditions and Sexual Curiosities in Harper Lee's Novel*, that “Sexual difference seems much more of a problem between male characters in the novel.”<sup>182</sup> However, the frame-style narrative of the novel is one of the primary indications that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is intended to be read as a novel about gender; in looking back on her childhood and youth, Scout is noticing certain details of her gender that she wishes to share with readers. Because the narrator deems the detail significant enough to share, it is a detail worth taking note of.

When Scout is first introducing readers to her family's history, she mentions that “being Southerners it was a source of shame to some members of the family that [the Finch Family] had no recorded ancestors on either side of the Battle of Hastings.<sup>183</sup> All [they] had was Simon Finch, a fur-trapping apothecary from Cornwall whose piety was exceeded only by his stinginess.”<sup>184</sup> Scout reveals that her father proved to be a controversial figure within his family at an early age: “It was customary for the men in the family to remain on Simon's homestead, Finch's Landing and make their living from cotton. . . the tradition of living on the land remained unbroken until well into the twentieth century, when my father, Atticus Finch, went to Montgomery to read law.”<sup>185</sup> By providing her family's history, Scout is revealing a set of standard Southern practices that her family and her surrounding town uphold. She introduces these traditions early on in her

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<sup>182</sup> Holly Blackford, *Mockingbird Passing: Closeted Traditions and Sexual Curiosities in Harper Lee's Novel*, Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2011), 219.

<sup>183</sup> A European battle that took place in 1066 between the Norman-French and England

<sup>184</sup> Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (New York, Warner Books, 1960), 3.

<sup>185</sup> Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 4.

story to open a discussion of the morality of Southern tradition and to challenge those traditions as her story builds.

After telling of her family's history, Scout gives the setting of the story. Maycomb, Alabama, as she tells, "was an old town. . . In rainy weather the streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the courthouse sagged in the square. Somehow, it was hotter then. . . Men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o'clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frosting of sweat and sweet talcum."<sup>186</sup> While the effects of humidity on the wardrobes of men and the bathing habits of women might seem like frivolous details, they hold more value to the critical conversations of the story than the humidity in Maycomb on a given day. These actions show that the traditional, "normative" family structure is still highly regarded by locals: Men take care to look nice and refined when leaving their homes, as is shown by their stiff, starched collars, and women take care to lead a delicate life at home. However, their attempts are made in vain, which is illustrated by the men's "wilted" collars and women's constant need to freshen up.

These gender roles are only further affirmed by Scout's depiction of Sunday afternoons. She shares, "Of all days Sunday was the day for formal afternoon visiting: ladies wore corsets, men wore coats, children wore shoes."<sup>187</sup> Again, these details seem insignificant, but they reflect a style of the Old South that still lingers within the town limits of Maycomb. By the 1930s, women had no need to wear corsets on a day-to-day basis. Thereby, wearing them on Sunday would have been a way to bask in the former glory of the South and to perpetuate many of the antiquated traditions of the antebellum era. However, by making note of children wearing shoes

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 9.

on Sunday and not every other day, Scout reveals that Sunday afternoon wear is not typical. It is merely a façade.

Scout, however, did not have a mother to teach her how to dress and perform in the traditional, virtuous ways of Southern women. Scout and her older brother, Jem, are raised by their father, Atticus Finch, who they simply refer to as Atticus. In addition to the paternal influence provided by Atticus, Scout and Jem are subjected to the semi-maternal influence of their cook, Calpurnia who worked for the family “ever since Jem was born.”<sup>188</sup> Scout was aware of Calpurnia’s “tyrannical presence as long as [she] could remember” because her mother died when she was two.<sup>189</sup> Therefore, Scout has no memories of her mother, unlike Jem who was six years of when their mother died. Scout recalls:

Our mother died when I was two, so I never felt her absence. She was a Graham from Montgomery ; Atticus met her when he was first elected to the state legislature. He was middle-aged then, she was fifteen years his junior. Jem was the product of their first year of marriage; four years later I was born, and two years later our mother died from a sudden heart attack. They said it ran in her family. I did not miss her, but I think Jem did. He remembered her clearly, and sometimes in the middle of a game he would sigh at length, then go off and play by himself behind the car-house. When he was like that, I knew better than to bother him.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

Not only does the information provided give details as to their mother's death, but it also provides details as to their father's role in their lives. Scout previously mentions that she and Jem thought their father to be "satisfactory;" as she puts it, "he played with us, read to us, and treated us with courteous detachment."<sup>191</sup> These actions were all that Scout and Jem knew of their father; therefore that is all that he would need to do in order to maintain his position with them as a courteous father.

Scout and Jem's relationship with Atticus might not provide the most ideal parental model, however. Fortunately, Maycomb is a small town, so in addition to Calpurnia, the two children receive parental attentions from their neighbors. Through these parental attentions, different types of maternal figures are displayed. A few of the prominent mother figures that Scout and Jem look to as role models are: their Aunt Alexandra who teaches them "proper" and polite behavior for children of a prominent local attorney; their cook Calpurnia who is the disciplinarian; and their neighbors, Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose the Old Regime tyrant, and Miss. Stephanie Crawford, the local gossipmonger, and Miss Maudie Atkinson, the children's secret keeper. These mother figures all provide different influences in the lives of the children. Therefore, one cannot be said to have a greater maternal influence than another. Instead, all of their unique personalities comprise the village which raises the Finch children.

While the Finch children are not familiar with the "normative" family structure that is highly praised in Maycomb, they are very familiar with their financial position within the town's socioeconomic structure. While Scout and Jem know that they are better off financially than most of their schoolmates, they are expected to uphold a certain moral position when it comes to

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

those people in the town who are less privileged than they are. One scene where the Finch children's financially sensitive upbringing is obvious is on Scout's first day of school. Her teacher, Miss Caroline, is new to Maycomb and does not understand the local families and their values. She unknowingly offers a member of the Cunningham family money for lunch with the expectation of being paid back on the following day. Upon the Cunningham boy's refusal of the loan, Scout is forced to tell Miss Caroline what she knows of the Cunningham family: "My special knowledge of the Cunningham tribe—one branch that is—was gained from events of last winter. Walter's father was one of Atticus's clients. After a dreary conversation in our livingroom one night about his entailment, before Mr. Cunningham left he said, 'Mr. Finch, I don't know when I'll ever be able to pay you.'"<sup>192</sup> Atticus assures his client that payment should be the least of his worries.<sup>193</sup>

Upon Mr. Cunningham's departure, Scout inquired of Mr. Cunningham's intent to pay. Atticus, addressing his daughter not as a child but as an adult, assures Scout that Mr. Cunningham would pay what he owed for Atticus's services, but he would not pay in cash. Scout and Jem accept Atticus's answer, and she tells readers: "We watched. One morning Jem and I found a load of stovewood [sic] in the back yard. Later, a sack of hickory nuts appeared on the back steps. With Christmas came a crate of smilax and holly. That spring when we found a crokersack full of turnip greens, Atticus said that Mr. Cunningham had more than paid him."<sup>194</sup> After seeing how Mr. Cunningham pays off his debt to Atticus, Scout wants to know why he is forced to pay in goods as opposed to money. Atticus reveals that it is because "the Cunninghams

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<sup>192</sup> Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 20.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, 20-21.

are country folks, farmers, and the crash hit them hardest.”<sup>195</sup> Additionally, he assures his daughter that they are not excluded from the financial hurt that Maycomb is suffering as a result of the 1929 stock market crash; he tells her that they, too, are poor, just not as poor as the Cunninghams. Atticus further explains how the stock market crash affects the entire economic structure of the town:

Atticus said professional people were poor because the farmers were poor. As Maycomb County was farm country, nickels and dimes were hard to come by for doctors and dentists and lawyers. . . . As the Cunninghams had no money to pay a lawyer, they simply paid us with what they had. “Did you know,” said Atticus, “that Dr. Reynolds works the same way? He charges some folk a bushel of potatoes for delivery of a baby.”<sup>196</sup>

By putting their own well being into terms with that of the rest of the town, Atticus is able to show his children that their financial well being is the directly impacted by the financial well being of the rest of the town.

Atticus also teaches his children to be sensitive to the fact that others have not been brought up with the same financial advantages that they have. After Scout successfully presents the Walter Cunningham case to Miss Caroline, she proceeds to chase the boy down in the recess yard and attempts to beat him up. Before she is successful in doing so, Jem intervenes. Then, Jem invites Walter to dinner. The Finch-family morality comes through at this lunch. Walter “drowned his dinner in syrup,” and when Scout points out his actions, she is called into the kitchen to finish her dinner:

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 20-21.

[Calpurnia] was furious. . . . When she squinted down at me the tiny lines around her eyes deepened. “There’s some folks who don’t eat like us,” she whispered fiercely, “but you ain’t called on to contradict ’em at the table when they don’t. That boy’s yo’ comp’ny and if he wants to eat up the table cloth you let him, you hear?”

“He aint company, Cal, he just a Cunningham—”

“Hush your mouth! Don’t matter who they are, anybody sets foot in this house’s yo’ comp’ny, and don’t let me catch you remarkin’ on their ways like you was so high and mighty! Yo’ folks might be better’n the Cunninghams but it don’t count for nothin’ the way you’re disgracin’ ‘em—if you can’t act fit to eat at the table you can just set here and eat in the kitchen!”<sup>197</sup>

In saying that Walter was “just a Cunningham,” Scout is suggesting that there is something that sets her apart from him. Calpurnia will not stand for this type of behavior, nor will Atticus. Scout is punished and taught that when she disgraces her family in the way that she has, there is nothing that sets her apart from someone of a lower class. In disciplining Scout’s actions, Calpurnia and Atticus are reinforcing Scout’s awareness of class differences. Instead of perpetuating upper-class entitlement, though, Calpurnia and Atticus teach Scout that social standing does not make her a better, more honorable person when she acts out and calls attention to her privilege.

The Finch family is not only better off than most of the town financially, but they also have a better educational background than most natives of Maycomb. In fact, unlike most of her

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<sup>197</sup> Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 24-25.

first grade classmates, Scout is literate before she begins school. On the first day, after story time, Miss Caroline writes the alphabet on the board. She asks her class if they are familiar with the alphabet, to which everyone affirms their familiarity. Scout reveals, “Everybody [was familiar with the alphabet]; most of the first grade had failed it last year.”<sup>198</sup> Scout, on the other hand, is familiar with the alphabet because she is literate. Scout was called on to read the alphabet on the board; she recalls, “I suppose she chose me because she knew my name; as I read the alphabet a faint line appeared between her eyebrows, and after making me read most of *My First Reader* and the stock-market quotations from *The Mobile Register* aloud, she discovered that I was literate and looked at me with more than faint distaste.”<sup>199</sup> The distaste that Miss Caroline has for Scout’s ability to read is due to the fact that she is attempting to introduce a new teaching style to the town. The teaching style operates under the assumption that most of the children are illiterate.

Scout has learned to read in a male-dominated household under the instruction of her father. Miss Caroline tells Scout that her father is not to interfere with her reading any more by teaching her at home. Miss Caroline tells her “Now you tell your father not to teach you any more. It’s best to begin reading with a fresh mind. You tell him I’ll take over from here and try to undo the damage—.”<sup>200</sup> While Miss Caroline’s reaction is, in part, because of the new teaching style that she is trying to introduce, her reaction might also be that her father, an attorney, is educating her from home, and therefore her education is absent of the teaching of societal gender norms. Although Lee’s text does not directly support this claim, it can be argued based on the fact that there are seemingly very few female children in the classroom. The stories of Scout’s

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

day at school only mention male classmates. Because of Miss Caroline's reaction to Scout's ability to read and the absence of female classmates, it can be inferred that gender norms being taught within the classroom have been absent from Scout's teaching so far. Although there is little textual support to show that gender norms were being instilled within the classroom, Julia Kirk Blackwelder writes in her article, "Women and Leadership: A Century of Change in the South" that during the nineteenth century, "ordinary southern women, black or white, rarely earned a high school diploma, and the vast majority of rural children did not complete the elementary grades."<sup>201</sup> Blackwelder's assessment on women in education greatly reflects Miss Caroline's attitude toward Scout's prepossessed literacy. It also explains why Scout mentions so few female schoolmates. Seeing as Maycomb is a small, rural town, it is highly unlikely that there would be many girls in school on a day to day basis.

Scout's lack of education of gender norms is apparent not only in the classroom but also when she plays with her brother Jem and their neighbor's nephew, Dill. During their second summer with Dill, they often play games in which they have to act out roles. One of the games is "the Rover boys" in which Jem, Dill, and Scout each take a role—Tom, Sam, or Dick.<sup>202</sup> In this game, Scout plays the role of a boy which suggests that she is not seen differently than Dill or Jem. The only indication that she is treated differently is that she always has to play "Tom Rover, who suddenly lost his memory in the middle of a picture show and was out of the script until the end, when he was found in Alaska."<sup>203</sup> The fact that she has to play the roles in which the

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<sup>201</sup> Julia Kirk Blackwelder, "Women and Leadership: A Century of Change in the South," in *The American South in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Craig S. Pascoe, Karen Trahan Leathem, and Andy Ambrose, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 41.

<sup>202</sup> Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 36.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

character disappears and is excluded from the game for the majority of the time can be attributed to her age and not her gender. Out of Scout, Jem, and Dill, Scout is the youngest.<sup>204</sup> Therefore, according to playground etiquette, she naturally receives the worst roles of the games.

While Scout's gender is not an issue when it comes to the games they play, when Scout exhibits undesirable qualities, her gender is the first thing that is called into question. For example, one afternoon, Jem has to retrieve an item they were playing with out of the foreboding Radley yard. The two were arguing over who should go and get the tire they were playing with. Jem conceded to do so, and when he returned he told Scout, "you act so much like a girl it's mortifying."<sup>205</sup> In a similar situation, Atticus caught Jem, Scout, and Dill playing "Boo Radley," a game in which the children acted out a dramatized version of town lore regarding their neighbors. While Atticus had not told them to stop playing the game, he did suggest that they stop, and he took away their only prop for the game, a pair of scissors. Jem concluded that Atticus had not directly told them not to play, so they could continue to play. But Scout insists that she "was not so sure, but Jem told me I was being a girl, that girls always imagined things, that's why other people hated them so, and if I started behaving like one I could just go off and find some to play with."<sup>206</sup> Again, Jem is suggesting that Scout is not viewed as being particularly different from himself and Dill until she exhibits undesirable traits. He uses femininity and girlhood as indications of difference and negativity in order to affirm the more

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<sup>204</sup> The previous summer, readers learn that Scout was "almost six" and Jem was "nearly ten." Though Jem only supposes Dill to be "four-and-a-half," Dill was a year older than Scout; he was "goin' on seven."—Lee 6-7

<sup>205</sup> Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 38.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

masculine traits in Scout. Eventually, though, Dill, Jem, and Scout stop playing “Boo Radley,” and Dill and Jem exclude Scout from their games unless “they needed a third party.”<sup>207</sup>

Scout, left to her own devices for the summer, recalls that she “kept aloof from [Dill and Jem’s] more foolhardy schemes for a while, and on pain of being called a girl, I spent most of the remaining twilights that summer sitting with Miss Maudie Atkinson on her front porch.”<sup>208</sup> Miss Maudie is described by Gary Richards in *Lovers and Beloveds: Sexual Otherness in Southern Fiction* as being “transgressive.”<sup>209</sup> Miss Maudie’s transgressive nature sets her apart from other women in the community. She serves as one of Scout’s mother figures from the surrounding community. The Finch children have what Scout describes as “a free run of Miss Maudie’s yard.”<sup>210</sup> The condition of this agreement is that the children had to “keep out of her azaleas;” however, the contract is one that is merely understood and is not “clearly defined.”<sup>211</sup> The agreement reached by Miss Maudie and the Finch children is explained more thoroughly: “Our tacit treaty with Miss Maudie was that we could play on her lawn, eat her scuppernongs if we didn’t jump on the arbor, and explore her vast back lot, terms so generous we seldom spoke to her, so careful were we to preserve the delicate balance of our relationship, but Jem and Dill drove me closer to her with their behavior.”<sup>212</sup> That summer, it was more than just Dill and Jem’s behavior that allowed Scout to relate to her neighbor. Scout begins to seek maternal influences to

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 41-42.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>209</sup> Gary Richards, *Lovers and Beloveds: Sexual Otherness in Southern Fiction*, (Baton Rouge: U of Louisiana P, 2005), 120.

<sup>210</sup> Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 42.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

guide her into her impending adolescence, and she views Miss Maudie as someone who can provide her with the proper guidance.

Being excluded from her brother and friend's activities is the first experience she has with being excluded from playing because she is a girl. However, by spending time with Miss Maudie, she is able to see that gender is not as clear cut as the terms "man," "boy," "woman," and "girl" suggest. Scout relates to Miss Maudie, and sees her as a gender role model. Scout describes Miss Maudie: "[She] hated her house: time spent indoors was time wasted. She was a widow, a chameleon lady who worked in her flower beds in an old straw hat and men's coveralls, but after her five o'clock bath she would appear on the porch and reign over the street in magisterial beauty. She loved everything that grew in God's earth, even the weeds."<sup>213</sup> Miss Maudie is an unconventional Southern woman. By day she works in the outdoors and wears men's clothing, but by evening, she cleans up and sits on her porch just as any other Southern Belle would. Because Miss Maudie moves so fluently between the identities of "tomboy" and "lady," Scout is able to look at her and see a possible solution for adolescent and adult gender identification.

Miss Maudie's influence is outweighed by other women in Scout's life who represent the ideal model of Southern femininity. Stephanie Crawford is the local gossip who is also very involved with her church. Through various interactions between Scout and Miss Maudie, a portrait of Stephanie Crawford is pieced together. Miss Maudie tells Scout about a time when she was judged and condemned by the foot-washing Baptists for taking such pleasure in her garden. Scout contemplates Miss Maudie in Hell,

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

My confidence in pulpit Gospel lessened at the vision of Miss Maudie stewing forever in various Protestant hells. True enough, she had an acid tongue in her head, and she did not go about the neighborhood doing good, as did Miss Stephanie Crawford. But while no one with a grain of sense trusted Miss Stephanie, Jem and I had considerable faith in Miss Maudie.<sup>214</sup>

Through this examination of Miss Maudie, Miss Stephanie is revealed to be someone who does good for the community, but because of her busy-body ways, she cannot be trusted. In Scout's eyes, Miss Stephanie's bad habits outweigh her good intentions. However, it could also be said that her good behavior is outweighed by her less than admirable intentions.

On the same evening, Scout asks Miss Maudie about the legendary tales of local recluse, Arthur "Boo" Radley. To which Miss Maudie replies, "That is three-fourths colored folks and one-fourth Stephanie Crawford . . . Stephanie Crawford even told me once she woke up in the middle of the night and found him looking in the window at her. I said what did you do, Stephanie, move over in the bed and make room for him? That shut her up a while."<sup>215</sup> Miss Maudie suggests that Stephanie is accustomed to making room in her bed for men; a detail that is probably well-known but seldom discussed in public.

Another maternal figure from the community is an older woman up the street named Mrs. Dubose. Mrs. Dubose is an elderly woman who represents the predominate ideology of the mid to late nineteenth century. However, now that the South is approaching the mid-twentieth century, her ideology is archaic. Mrs. Dubose lives "alone except for a Negro girl in constant attendance" and is described as, "very old" and as spending "most of each day in bed and the rest

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>215</sup> Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 45.

of it in a wheelchair.”<sup>216</sup> Scout also tells that “It was rumored that she kept a CSA pistol concealed among her numerous shawls and wraps.”<sup>217</sup> The pistol is not just any pistol, but a CSA pistol. The Confederate symbol confirms that she is placed in the story as a reminder of the South’s antebellum social structure.

Jem and Scout “hated” Mrs. Dubose, and neither of them “could do nothing to please her.”<sup>218</sup> Scout states, “If I said sunnily as I could, ‘Hey, Mrs. Dubose,’ I would receive for an answer, ‘Don’t you say hey to me, you ugly girl! You say good afternoon, Mrs. Dubose!’”<sup>219</sup> In addition to simply trying to correct the children’s behavior, she also passes judgment on Atticus for letting his children “run wild.”<sup>220</sup> She believed that Atticus should have remarried when his wife died so that Scout and Jem would have had a mother to raise them. Mrs. Dubose’s outspoken distaste for Atticus’s parenting serves as a voice for the community. While there are those, such as Miss Maudie, who admire Atticus and thinks that he is raising his children well, there are just as many members of the community who quietly agree with Mrs. Dubose.

A few days after his twelfth birthday, Jem takes Scout to town with him to spend his birthday money. Passing Mrs. Dubose’s house was unavoidable, so they have an encounter with her on their way back from town. After accusing Jem of “breaking down” Miss Maudie’s scuppernong tree, she moves on to Scout:

“And *you*—[sic]” she pointed an arthritic finger at me—“what are you doing in those overalls? You should be in a dress and camisole, young lady! You’ll grow

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 100.

up waiting on tables if somebody doesn't change your ways—a Finch waiting on tables at the O.K. Café—hah!”

I was terrified. The O.K. Café was a dim organization on the north side of the square. I grabbed Jem's hand, but he shook me loose.

“Come on, Scout,” he whispered. “Don't pay any attention to her, just hold your head high and be a gentleman.”<sup>221</sup>

Here, Scout is being criticized for performing the tomboy identity. Her brother comforts her, though, and reminds her to act like “a gentleman.” In encouraging Scout to act this way, he is assuring her that it is okay for her to exert her masculinity.

Ironically, In this passage, Mrs. Dubose is taking sides with Miss Maudie. She wants to see Jem punished for tearing down Miss Maudie's tree, but Miss Maudie wears men's coveralls when she is outside working in her garden. Thus, Mrs. Dubose is defending someone who does the exact thing that she is badgering Scout for albeit for a different transgression. The only difference between Scout and Miss Maudie is that Scout is a motherless child who “runs wild” where as Miss Maudie is an adult who has been married and who also fulfills her role of womanhood in the evenings when she sits on her porch.

The final woman who influences Scout as a model for femininity is her Aunt Alexandra. Alexandra is Atticus's sister and she comes to live with the Atticus, Jem, and Scout “for a while” when Atticus takes on a controversial court case.<sup>222</sup> According to Scout, “For a while” in Maycomb meant anything from “three days to thirty years.”<sup>223</sup> Alexandra did not say that her

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>222</sup> Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 127.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

visit was because of the court case, however. Alexandra justified staying “for a while” by noting that “Jem’s growing up now and you are too . . . We decided it would be best for you to have some feminine influence. It won’t be many years, Jean Louise, before you become interested in clothes and boys—.”<sup>224</sup> A significant detail that is included about Aunt Alexandria is that she wears a corset every Sunday. Scout states, “She was not fat, but solid, and she chose protective garments that drew up her bosom to giddy heights, pinched in her waist, flared out her rear, and managed to suggest that Aunt Alexandra’s was one an hour-glass figure. From any angle, it was formidable.”<sup>225</sup> Wearing a corset is both literally and figuratively restraining. The corset literally restrains Aunt Alexandra’s body to suggest a more youthful physique. Figuratively, the corset, again, reflects the Old South mentality of some inhabitants of Maycomb. Aunt Alexandra is one of the Maycomb women who still wears a corset on Sunday. Wearing a corset suggests that she is bound to the ideology of the Antebellum South.

One goal on Aunt Alexandra’s agenda while she stays is to tame Scout and mold her into a genteel young woman. Richardson notes that “Alexandra is correspondingly adamant about enforcing normative mappings of gender onto biological sex.”<sup>226</sup> Her fervor for drawing these connections are derived, as Richardson suggests, from her performance of “proper southern white femininity.”<sup>227</sup> Because she constantly performs this identity, she expects other to follow suit. In one attempt to have Scout perform proper, white Southern femininity, Aunt Alexandra invites Scout to sit in on the refreshments portion of her missionary circle meetings, but out of

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>226</sup> Richardson, *Lovers and Beloveds*, 122.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

fear of spilling something on her “pink Sunday dress,” Scout stayed in the kitchen. Calpurnia allowed her to take the coffee pitcher to the table where the ladies were communing. After sitting the pot down, Scout was asked to sit down at the table. Scout claims, “This was a part of her campaign to teach me to be a lady.”<sup>228</sup> Scout joins the social gathering and takes a seat next to her confidant, Miss Maudie:

It was customary for every circle hostess to invite her neighbors in for refreshments, be they Baptists or Presbyterians, which accounted for the presence of Miss Rachel (sober as a judge), Miss Maudie and Miss Stephanie Crawford. Rather nervous I took a seat beside Miss Maudie and wondered why ladies put on their hats to go across the street. Ladies in bunches always filled me with vague apprehension and a firm desire to be elsewhere, but this feeling was what Aunt Alexandra called being “spoiled.”<sup>229</sup>

But Scout settles into her first introduction into being a Southern Lady; she maintains the “proper” role of a child, which is being seen and not heard, and waits for someone to speak to her.

Miss Maudie is the first to invite Scout into the conversation. She does so by commenting on Scout’s attire for the afternoon and the following conversation ensues:

“You’re mighty dressed up, Miss Jean Louise . . . Where are your britches today?”

“Under my dress.”

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<sup>228</sup> Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 229.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

I hadn't meant to be funny, but the ladies laughed. My cheeks grew hot as I realized my mistake, but Miss Maudie looked gravely down at me. She never laughed at me unless I meant to be funny.<sup>230</sup>

Stephanie Crawford took advantage of the silence that followed, and piggybacked on Scout's humiliation. She asked, "Whatcha going to be when you grow up, Jean Louise? A lawyer?" Scout, to this point, has not considered a vocation, much less practicing law. Stephanie continued:

"Why shoot, I thought you wanted to be a lawyer, you've already commenced going to court."

The ladies laughed again. "That Stephanie is a card," somebody said. Miss Stephanie was encouraged to pursue the subject: "Don't you want to grow up to be a lawyer?"

Miss Maudie's hand touched mine and I answered mildly enough, "Nome, just a lady."

Miss Stephanie eyed me suspiciously, decided I meant no impertinence, and contented herself with, "Well, you won't get very far until you start wearing dresses more often."

Miss Maudie's hand closed tightly on mine, and I said nothing. Its warmth was enough.<sup>231</sup>

This is one of the more tragic scenes for Scout in novel. Her first introduction into Southern womanhood is nothing more than an episode of embarrassment on her part. The scene is

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 230.

important, as it allows for the reader to decide and redefine what it means to be “just a lady.” Miss Stephanie reveals what a “lady” is not through her excessive aggravation of Scout. Scout, on the other hand, presents herself with poise and grace even through her embarrassment. It would have been easy for her to fire witty remarks back at Miss Stephanie, but she does not. Therefore, she shows that she is learning how to adapt and pass as a girl or young woman when social situations are deemed necessary.

Here, even though there is no indication that Scout is going to give up her overalls for dresses, there is a more important decision being made. Scout has determined her definition of womanhood. By Scout coming to terms with womanhood, the text suggests that she will learn to be like Miss Maudie and mold herself to fit the necessary social situation. This characteristic is unique to *To Kill a Mockingbird*: while the text suggests that with the upper class, there are certain expectations for women it also shows that with an upper class social identity, there comes a freedom to adapt to the degree of womanhood that is necessary for a given situation. In other words because she is upper class, Scout is able to wear her overalls when she wants, but she can also put on a dress and perform the expected role of women when necessary. Her ability to do so is a privilege that she owes to her social class. Though her class does offer her privilege in this regard, her class can also serve as a set back to her movement toward a more progressive gender role. As her conflict with Mrs. Dubose illustrates, Scout receives just as much criticism for her behavior as she does affirmation.

The criticism Scout receives from the community is unlike that of Mick and Frankie who received little to no retribution for their gender presentation. Seeing as though Mick is working-class and Frankie is middle-class, they were not seen as a threat for expressing a gender that was

not in accordance to the expectations of the time. Scout, on the other hand, is criticized because she has a more important role in the community, and what kind of example would an upper-class lady set for middle and working classes if she runs around in overalls starting fights on the playground? The position of power that the class system of the South bestows upon upper class individuals serves as a model for lower classes to aspire to. Therefore, if Scout is in disaccord with what is expected of an upper class young lady: she throws off the paradigm of Southern girlhood. If Scout is thought of as a symbolic figure rather than an individual, then Lee's text is without a doubt speaking to the shift in the perception of womanhood that was taking place across the South in the Twentieth century.<sup>232</sup> This shift that Lee references throughout the text is a common theme that shows up in other stories of upper-class, Southern girlhood.

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<sup>232</sup> Another example of how this idea is embedded in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is the scene after the trial where Atticus attempts to explain the outcome to Scout. During this conversation she learns and is outraged that women in Alabama cannot serve on jury. Even Atticus, who is arguably one of the most progressive figures in southern literature, says that the reason that women aren't allowed to do so is to "protect our frail ladies from sordid cases like Tom's" (221). Even though he does allow his daughter some freedom, he still operates under the Old South ideology of womanhood. Scout's outrage, though, signals a shift in perception that is taking place among a newer generation.

## **Katherine Anne Porter “Old Mortality” and “The Old Order”:**

### **Miranda**

Katherine Anne Porter was born into a working-class family in Texas.<sup>233</sup> Her mother died when she was nearly two, and her father did little to support his family. She relied on her grandmother who was very stern in her traditional Southern beliefs, but her grandmother died when she was eleven. Porter married at sixteen to escape her economic circumstances, but she divorced her husband in 1915 to pursue other interests such as travel and work.<sup>234</sup> Overall in her life, she embodied the New Woman that she often represented in her fiction, so similarly to Harper Lee and Carson McCullers, it is easy and tempting to read her fiction as largely autobiographic. This study, though, will be absent of a biographical analysis of Porter’s life. However, there are some of the similarities will be analyzed, specifically Porter’s depiction of the grandmother figure. The grandmother figure, Sophia Jane, serves as a matriarch to the protagonist, Miranda, and her family. She rules her family in a similar fashion to how Nina Baym and Robert S. Levine describe Porter’s own grandmother. However, the similarities are, for the sake of this argument, representative not of a specific biographical reading but as a matrilineal genealogy.

To understand how matrilineal genealogy pertains to the Southern Gothic “Old Mortality” and “The Old Order,” these stories should be read in combination with Irving Malin’s Gothic element “narcissistic familial love.” An understanding of how this type of love relates to the Southern grotesque and the Southern Gothic makes it is easier to understand how Porter’s

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<sup>233</sup> She was given the name Callie Porter at birth but later changed it.

<sup>234</sup> Nina Baym and Robert S. Levine, “Katherine Anne Porter,” *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* (New York, W.W Norton & Company, 2012), 484-85.

seemingly common tales of an old Southern family fall into these categories. Through matrilineal genealogy and narcissistic familial love, the Miranda stories demonstrate a cycle of oppression of women by women: Because Sophia Jane was limited financially and was forced to provide for her family, she oppresses her granddaughters by expecting them to conform strictly to female gender roles. In doing so, she is reifying what some would call “the American dream,” but Porter shows that upward mobility without human rights only perpetuates a harmful cycle of repression for women

“Old Mortality” and “The Old Order” are parts of a series of stories referred to by scholars as the Miranda stories. Miranda is a recurring character who is generally central to the plot. The stories are vignettes that reveals different poignant moments in Miranda’s life and developmental growth. Sophia Jane is the primary figure of feminine influence in Miranda’s life. Though she provides Miranda with a wholesome upbringing, she also serves to perpetuate a life that she was never able to have herself. While Sophia Jane has some influence in Miranda’s upbringing, there are other figures, both men and women, who serve as influences to Miranda. The men who influence Miranda inspire her think beyond the restrictiveness of her gender and pursue her ambitions, and the women demonstrate different models of womanhood. Her family’s financial position allows her to explore different identities than she might otherwise explore. Her options, though seemingly open, are limited by the expectations of her father and her grandmother. Her grandmother believes in the traditional role of women and expects her granddaughters to uphold these values, and she has instilled a similar belief into her son, Miranda’s father. Therefore, Miranda’s father enforces the patriarchy that his mother values.

However, there are some elements of Sophia Jane's personality that are, for their time, radical. She possesses a deep-rooted hatred of men, and she speaks on behalf of the African Americans on who help out around her family's property. These actions influence Miranda more than Sophia Jane's nagging about proper womanhood. She influences her granddaughter by providing an example that is different from the one that she venerates. Sophia Jane's radical actions have an equally important role in Miranda's development. Miranda, like other characters in this study, makes the decision to pursue womanhood as her gender identification after a hunting trip in the woods with her brother. By the end of Miranda's childhood stories, she has chosen to pursue a womanly identity that is not chosen by the other girls in this study. She understands that she will eventually have to submit to femininity to become a functioning member of the community.

Katherine Anne Porter's Miranda is a character who reoccurs in several of Porter's works. Porter uses Miranda as a way of emphasizing changes taking place in the American South during the early twentieth century. Andrea K. Frankwitz notes that "In charting Miranda's maturation through these two sets of stories ["The Old Order" and "Old Mortality"]. . .one may discern her gradual disillusionment with the patriarchal ideology of gender and her steady movement toward a self-fashioned identity free from social constructions."<sup>235</sup> Frankwitz also argues that "characters... in 'The Old Order' and 'Old Mortality' serve to show Miranda the repressive nature of this cultural ideology."<sup>236</sup> Just like Scout in Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Miranda is at a time in her life when she is able to freely identify as a tomboy. Although her gender identification is more burdened by socioeconomic privilege than Mick Kelly's or Frankie

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<sup>235</sup> Frankwitz, 474

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

Addams's, she is not yet to the developmental stage where she must choose a definite gender identity. These stories show how her decision will be affected by the influences around her.

“Old Mortality,” even though it is a story that focuses on Miranda’s social development, begins, not with an introduction of Miranda, but instead to a woman who plays a vital, but passive role in the tale. This woman is Miranda’s Aunt Amy:

She was a spirited-looking young woman, with dark curly hair cropped and parted on the side, a short oval face with straight eyebrows, and a large curved mouth . . . She sat thus, forever in the pose of being photographed, a motionless image in her dark walnut frame. . . her smiling gray eyes following one about the room. It was a reckless indifferent smile, rather disturbing to her nieces Maria and Miranda. Quite often they wondered why every older person who looked at the picture said, “How Lovely”; and why everyone who had known her thought her so beautiful and charming.<sup>237</sup>

Amy, although long deceased, is a central figure to the story. She represents the Southern Belle. Significantly, she is dead, and her nieces are unable to understand what made Amy beautiful. Amy’s portrait represents the perpetuation of antiquated southern traditions. Amy’s portrait is the symbolic equivalent to corsets in Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

“Old Mortality” defines an ideal sense of beauty that Southern women are expected to uphold. Amy serves as an idle reminder of what a Southern beauty should be. According to the narrator, “a beauty must be tall; whatever color the eyes, the hair must be dark, the darker the

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<sup>237</sup> Katherine Anne Porter, “Old Mortality,” *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (Orlando, Harcourt Inc., 1979), 173.

better; the skin must be pale and smooth.”<sup>238</sup> In addition to these traits, a beauty must act with physical and social grace: “Lightness and swiftness of movement were important points. A beauty must be a good dancer, superb on horseback, with a serene manner, an amiable gaiety tempered with dignity at all hours. Beautiful teeth and hands, of course, and over and above all this, some mysterious crown of enchantment that attracted and held the heart.”<sup>239</sup> Miranda, who is eight years old, finds all of these qualities to be “very exciting and discouraging.”<sup>240</sup> She “persisted through her childhood in believing, in spite of her smallness, thinness, her little snubby nose saddled with freckles, her speckled gray eyes and habitual tantrums, that by some miracle she would grow into a tall, cream-colored brunette.”<sup>241</sup> Miranda’s sister, Maria, who is twelve, does not entertain such fantasies. She would often tell Miranda, “We are going to take after Mamma’s family . . . It’s no use, we are. We’ll never be beautiful, we’ll always have freckles. And *you* . . . haven’t even a good disposition.”<sup>242</sup> In these first few pages, it is apparent that Miranda will, like Scout, be faced with having to strive to attain a nineteenth-century, stylized model of beauty and manners. Throughout her developmental journey, Miranda learns that the model of beauty that Amy represents died along with Amy.

In addition to not meeting the standard of beauty her family sets forth, Miranda longs to engage in activities that are primarily male-dominated. For instance, at one point, she decides she wants to be a jockey like her idol, Tod Sloan. Her career choice and her idol are important when discussing Miranda’s gender identification because she is looking to a man who

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<sup>238</sup> Porter, “Old Mortality,” 176.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

participates in a predominately male sport. She is identifying with this male figure as someone to emulate; thus, she views herself as being able to occupy a similar space as someone who is male identified. She does not feel restricted by her biological sex.

One Saturday, her father takes her to see the horse races where her idol will be competing. They are there not to see Tod Sloan; instead they are there because Miranda's Uncle Gabriel is racing his horse Miss Lucy. Though Miranda longs to "bet her dollar on Tod Sloan," her father insists she "bet on Uncle Gabriel's horse."<sup>243</sup> The odds of Uncle Gabriel winning are "a hundred to one."<sup>244</sup> Miranda, though, is more interested in observing the jockeys rather than watching Miss Lucy. Regardless of Miranda's intentions, Miss Lucy pulled through in the end and finished "a neck ahead."<sup>245</sup> Though after the race Miss Lucy had a bloody nose and it was apparent that the race had taken its toll on her.<sup>246</sup>

While Miranda's intentions become overshadowed by Miss Lucy's victory, the horse's victory provides an opportunity for Miranda to see the brutality of horse racing in addition to also giving Porter a chance to demonstrate the financial status of Miranda's family. After the race, Miranda sees the tragic state that Miss Lucy is in and quickly retracts her previous vocational declaration: she no longer wanted to be a jockey. Her father teases her, "so you aren't going to be a jockey! That's very sensible of you. I think she ought to be a lion-tamer, don't you Maria? That's a nice, womanly profession."<sup>247</sup> Here, her father is teasing her and pointing out the absurdity of her chosen profession by comparing it to something as outlandish as a lion tamer.

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 197.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Porter, "Old Mortality," 205.

He is also underhandedly (by mention of a “womanly profession”) encouraging Miranda to seek out pink-collar professions. He affirms the expectation that women aren’t to engage in activities—work or otherwise—that would call for anything other than grace and elegance.

Another significant point of the horse race is how their father treats money. He allows his daughters to bet, as a “polite gesture,” on their Uncle Gabriel, but when the horse wins, he proudly collects the winnings. Once they are leaving, Maria is the first to ask her father where her money is, to which her father replies, “It’s going in the bank.”<sup>248</sup> He assures Miranda that hers will going in the bank as well. The girls imagine what they might buy with one hundred dollars:

“Just so they don’t buy me stockings with it,” said Miranda, who had long resented the use of her Christmas money by their grandmother. “I’ve got enough stockings to last me a year.”

“I’d like to buy a racehorse,” said Maria, “but I know it’s not enough.” The limitations of wealth oppressed her. “*What* could you buy with a hundred dollars?” she asked fretfully.

“Nothing, nothing at all,” said their father, “a hundred dollars is just something you put in the bank.”<sup>249</sup>

Here, their father is explaining to them that one hundred dollars is not enough money to buy anything although for many people, it would be plenty of money to buy many things. In 1904, when part two of “Old Mortality” takes place, one hundred dollars would have been worth the

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

equivalent of approximately \$2300 in 2013.<sup>250</sup> Harry's treatment of such a sum of money indicates that his family is accustomed to such wealth and they treat it as though one hundred dollars is insignificant. Harry's blasé attitude toward the money serves as an indication of the family's economic class and well being.

Another series of stories about Miranda entitled "The Old Order" reveals more about Miranda's social education. The stories place a heavy emphasis on how the women in Miranda's life influence her perception of womanhood. Her primary feminine influence is her grandmother, Sophia Jane, as her mother passed away when Miranda was young. The narrator tells of Miranda's grandmother, "They loved their Grandmother; she was the only reality to them in a world that seemed otherwise without fixed authority or refuge . . . just the same, they felt that Grandmother was tyrant, and they wished to be free of her."<sup>251</sup> Sophia Jane is a dominant figure in the lives of Miranda and her siblings. She is still of the Old Regime mentality and believes in perpetuating Antebellum South values and social structure.

In several ways, Sophia Jane appears to be self-contradictory. Frankwitz notes, "While a surface-level examination of 'The Old Order' may seem to indicate that . . . Sophia Jane . . . is rebelling against these ideological codes of behavior and thinking, she is, in fact subtly and, perhaps naively, perpetuating them."<sup>252</sup> Frankwitz continues, "While she may appear to be going against patriarchal culture in doing these traditionally unfeminine jobs, she simply performs these tasks out of necessity to provide for her family's needs."<sup>253</sup> Ideology can be, at times,

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<sup>250</sup> In 1913, \$100 would have been the equivalent of \$2352.23 in 2012 according to "What is a Dollar Worth" application produced for Apple OS by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

<sup>251</sup> Porter, "The Old Order," 324.

<sup>252</sup> Frankwitz 474

<sup>253</sup> Frankwitz 475

unclear for anyone. Sophia Jane is torn between necessity and desire. Because Sophia Jane was forced to work for what she wanted in life, she projects her own desires onto her children and grandchildren—she wants to provide them with the comfortable life that she was unable to obtain.

Since she was forced to work for what she wanted in life, she criticizes her sons for choosing women who were content with working. The narrator reveals that she criticizes the bride of one of her sons because “she was altogether too Western, too modern, something like the ‘new’ woman who was beginning to run wild, asking for the vote, leaving her home and going out in the world to earn her own living . . . [She] shuddered to the bone at the thought of women so unsexing themselves.”<sup>254</sup> Though Sophia Jane is adamantly traditional and supports the patriarchal structure when it comes to women working outside of the home, she possesses one trait that challenges the patriarchy—a deep-rooted hatred of men. Her hatred stemmed, in part, from her relationship with her childhood attendant, Nannie.

Nannie and her family were given to Sophia Jane as a wedding gift, and they stayed with Sophia Jane even after the Emancipation Proclamation: “Emancipation was a sweet word to [Nannie]. It had not changed her way of living in a single particular, but she was proud of having been able to stay with her mistress, ‘I am to stay wit you as long as you’ll have me.’ Still Emancipation had seemed to set right a wrong that stuck in her heart like a thorn.”<sup>255</sup> The two had even nursed each other’s children. It was not uncommon for a black attendant to nurse her mistress’s children, but Nannie became ill while nursing a child of her own, and Sophia Jane

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<sup>254</sup> Porter, “The Old Order,” 333.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid*, 336.

took on the responsibility of nursing one of Nannie's sons.<sup>256</sup> Even though Sophia Jane was nursing a child of her own at the time: "she fed them justly turn about, not favoring the white over the black, as Nannie felt obliged to do. Her husband was shocked, tried to forbid her; her mother came to see her and reasoned with her. They found her very difficult and quite stubborn. She had already begun to develop her implicit character, which was altogether just, humane, proud and simple."<sup>257</sup>

Her progressivism regarding racial differences is one of the main factors that contributes to her distaste of men. The narrator explains that

Miss Sophia Jane had taken upon herself all the responsibilities of her tangled world, half white, half black, mingling steadily and the confusion growing ever deeper. There were so many young men about the place, always . . . They came visiting and they stayed, and there was no accounting for them nor any way of controlling their quietly headstrong habits. She learned early to keep silent and give no sign of uneasiness, but whenever a child was born in the Negro quarters, pink, worm-like, she held her breath for three days . . . to see whether the newly born would turn black after the proper interval . . . [sic] It was a strain that told on her, and ended by giving her a deeply grounded contempt for men. She could not help it, she despised men. She despised them and was ruled by them.<sup>258</sup>

In addition to having to worry about the well being of the Negro community on her property, Sophia Jane had her dowry and property squandered by her husband. Given the opportunity, "she

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 334.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 337.

felt that she could have managed her affairs profitably.”<sup>259</sup> However, she was never given such an opportunity because she was a woman in a patriarchal society. Therefore, when he died and she was able to manage her affairs, both personal and financial, the way she pleased. While Sophia Jane is traditional in some of her social ideals, she is equally as progressive in others. Though she despises the patriarchy of the nineteenth century, she reveres traditional social values and expects her grandchildren to uphold them, even to the point of perpetuating the strict patriarchy.

Miranda is exposed, however, to more feminine influences than that of her grandmother. In one of the anecdotes from “The Old Order” called “The Fig Tree,” readers are introduced to Miranda’s Great-Aunt Eliza. The first time readers meet Eliza, she is on a stepladder telling someone how to set up her telescope. Sophia Jane is quick to pass judgment on her sister for “clambering up stepladders . . . at [her] time of life.”<sup>260</sup> Readers also find that Eliza is not “the pretty one”—that title remains with Sophia Jane.<sup>261</sup> In addition to not being “the pretty one” Great-Aunt Eliza dips snuff and is interested in the natural sciences, but despite her unladylike qualities, “Great-Aunt Eliza’s ways and habits kept Miranda following her about, gazing, or sitting across the dining-table, gazing.”<sup>262</sup> Miranda is captivated by her Aunt because unlike her family, who never told her “about anything until the last minute,” Eliza takes the time to answer Miranda’s questions about the noises she keeps hearing. It turns out that the noises are tree frogs.<sup>263</sup> By talking to Miranda and helping her solve her problem, she acknowledges that

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Porter, “The Old Order,” 358.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid, 359.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 360.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 352-61.

Miranda deserves to be more than seen: she deserves to be heard. Frankwitz suggests that Eliza “introduce[s] Miranda to the possibility that there is something beyond patriarchal culture.”<sup>264</sup> Through Eliza’s interactions with Miranda, she teaches Miranda that despite her grandmother’s Antebellum values, times are changing, and with that change comes a broader horizon for girls and women.

Even through her grandmother’s rigidly traditional guidance, Miranda manages to develop some qualities of the “new” woman. The women who surround Miranda play a vital role in her learning. However, in the story entitled “The Grave” found within “The Old Order,” Miranda’s gender identification is influenced by nature. Frankwitz makes note of Miranda’s predicament in this story: ““The Grave” represents Miranda’s reaction to the patriarchal codes of gender at a more mature age.”<sup>265</sup> While Frankwitz claims that Miranda is at a “more mature age” she is still at an age where she can run with the boys and not be considered a threat to gender norms.<sup>266</sup> In this particular instance, she is in the woods hunting with her brother Paul. While she is outdoors with her brother participating in activities that are generally male-gender identified, one might argue that she is following in a strict gender pattern because “Miranda always followed at Paul’s heels along the path, obeying instructions about handling her gun when going through fences; learning how to stand it up properly so it would not slip and fire unexpectedly; how to wait her time for a shot and not just bang away in the air without looking, spoiling shots for Paul, who really could hit things if given a chance.”<sup>267</sup> The value of Miranda and Paul’s

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<sup>264</sup> Frankwitz 486

<sup>265</sup> Frankwitz 480

<sup>266</sup> Miranda is only nine; see Porter 362.

<sup>267</sup> Porter, “The Old Order,” 363.

interactions are most revealing when they are viewed as Paul teaching Miranda how to carry out the masculine role of hunting: He's teaching her how to handle herself with a gun and how to take proper safety precautions with firearms.

While they are out in the woods, Miranda and Paul come across an old family cemetery that is being relocated. The two climb over the fence to explore the land where coffins were once buried. While they are exploring, Miranda finds a "silver dove no larger than a hazel nut" that turns out to be screw head from a coffin, and Paul finds a "thin wide gold ring carved with intricate flowers and leaves."<sup>268</sup> Esim Erdim, quoted in Frankwitz, "reminds us that the dove symbolizes 'freedom and the flight of the sprit'" and that the ring symbolizes womanhood."<sup>269</sup> Each finding the other's treasure to be more fascinating, the two switch, leaving Miranda with the ring and Paul with the dove. Frankwitz notes that when the two "exchange treasures," the "elegance of the ring (conventionally a feminine symbol) is what gets Miranda interested in taking a bath, using violet talc, wearing dresses instead of her overalls, sitting in a wicker chair under the trees, and dreaming of luxury."<sup>270</sup> Miranda's desire serves as a complete opposition to her attire and appearance that day. While out in the woods with her brother, Miranda is wearing her "summer roughing outfit":

dark blue overalls, and light blue shirt, a hired-man's straw hat, and thick brown sandals . . . Ordinarily Miranda preferred her overalls to any other dress, though it

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Esrin Erdim, "The Ring or the Dove: The New Woman in Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction," in *Women and War: The New Woman from the 1930s to the 1950s*, Ed. Maria Diedrich and Dorothea Fischer-Hornung (New York: Berg, 1990), 59. Quoted in Andrea K. Frankwitz, "Katherine Anne Porter's Miranda Stories: A Commentary on the Cultural Ideologies of Gender Identity," *Mississippi Quarterly* 57, no. 3: 473-488. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed June 23, 2012).

<sup>270</sup> Frankwitz 480

was making rather a scandal in the country side, for the year was 1903, and in the back country the law of female decorum had teeth in it. Her father had been criticized for letting his girls dress like boys and go careering around astride barebacked horses.<sup>271</sup>

Miranda is just like many of her fellow tomboys of literature—she prefers clothing that allows her to keep up with the boys, but after she puts on the ring, she finds herself wanting to follow a more traditional pattern of womanhood.

In addition to finding the ring that unlocks a new set of desires, Miranda also learns something about the destiny of women that day in the woods. Her brother shoots and kills a rabbit, and the two immediately go over and begin to field dress the kill. They notice that the rabbit was “going to have young ones.”<sup>272</sup> Her brother proceeds to remove the “tiny rabbits” from the mother rabbit’s womb, and Miranda wishes to “see.”<sup>273</sup> After she looked, she was “excited but not frightened” and “filled with pity and astonishment . . . she wanted most deeply to see and to know. Having seen, she felt at once as if she had known all along. The very memory of her former ignorance faded, she had always known just this.”<sup>274</sup> Here, Frankwitz notes that Miranda is acknowledging the power of the womb in this story and the ultimately she realizes that “it is not the female that is powerful, but rather her womb.”<sup>275</sup> Frankwitz states that because of Miranda’s gained knowledge, “‘The Grave’ works as an effective closure for ‘The Old Order’

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<sup>271</sup> Porter, “The Old Order,” 364.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, 366.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Frankwitz 481.

sequence because it signifies the waning of a passive acceptance of patriarchal culture.”<sup>276</sup>

However, just as “The Grave” can be seen as an “effective closure” because of its acceptance of patriarchy, it can just as easily be seen as an effective closure because of its subtle nod toward the power of the womb.

The story does not provide a definitive evaluation of what Miranda did with her knowledge. Readers only learn that Miranda carried the experience with her for years to come. Only in young adulthood is she able to make sense of it and move on, and her final vision of that day was “her brother, whose childhood face she had forgotten, standing again in the blazing sunshine, again twelve years old, a pleased sober smile in his eyes, turning the silver dove over and over in his hands.”<sup>277</sup> This is the final line of the story; in this line, there is no indication that Miranda conceded to the patriarchy. The story is left open ended. Miranda has come to terms with what she learned that day, and she will use her knowledge to move forward and establish an identity in adulthood.

Though Miranda is subjected continually to her grandmother’s tyranny, which is a result of the grandmother’s own oppressed state within the patriarchy, she gains an understanding of how the social factors that shape her life are influencing her and how they will continue to influence her. She tests the status quo by identifying with male figures and male-dominated activities, and she even dresses outside of the female gender norm when participating in outdoor activities such as hunting with her brother. The stories do suggest by the end of “The Old Order” that Miranda seeks to identify with traditional womanhood. This is decided when Miranda wears the ring that she traded her silver dove for. Her confirmation of traditional womanhood is

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<sup>276</sup> Frankwitz 482

<sup>277</sup> Porter, “The Old Order,” 368.

different from the other figures in this study because Mick is forced into womanhood by the economic needs of her family, Frankie rejected a feminine identity and deferred her decision, and Scout, like Frankie, does not make a definite decision in regard to her gender identity. I attribute Miranda's difference in chosen identification to the time period in which the stories takes place. They are apparently two decades earlier than the other texts, and many significant changes took place during those two decades, most importantly women's suffrage. Therefore, by the time Scout, Mick, and Frankie are facing the challenge of choosing a gender identification, they have more options than Miranda had.

## Conclusion

In recent years, the critical focus of Southern literature has been on gender identity in the South as they are represented through regional literature. The works of Carson McCullers, Harper Lee, and Katherine Anne Porter exemplify why this shift in focus has taken place. The authors focus on social class and its relationship to gender norms. Though the works of these authors stretched across only three decades, the stories that they write show a phenomenon that dates back to at least the turn of the century. These three authors demonstrate the shifting attitudes of society toward women and womanhood. The shift in attitudes does not stop after the publication of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in 1960. Instead, the issue of conflicted womanhood came to the forefront of American consciousness in 1963 when Betty Friedan's controversial work entitled *The Feminine Mystique* was released.

*The Feminine Mystique* was empowering to middle class housewives who were suffering from "the problem with no name" as a result of what Friedan calls the feminine mystique. The feminine mystique was the result of the restrictive gender norms and expectations that were projected onto women. Because Friedan's work caused a major upheaval in the patriarchal social structure, it was viewed at the time of its publication as a radical work. One conservative magazine still considers it to be one of the most detrimental works of the last two centuries: In 2007, it was ranked by *Human Events* as number seven on a list of the ten most harmful books to influence the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was not too far behind Adolph Hitler's work *Mein Kampf*.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books 2011), XV.

*The Feminine Mystique* became a controversial work primarily because it questioned what most Americans saw as a normal way of life. Through her work, Friedan proposed that perhaps women seek more gratification from their lives and careers. In the first chapter, Friedan opens by simply acknowledging that there was a problem that women faced:

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—“Is this all?”<sup>279</sup>

Fridan’s claim caused an instant stir because only a month before the publication of her book, an article published in the *Post* claimed that women were more or less satisfied with their roles as housewives. In fact, they claimed that only seven percent expressed regret for choosing to be married over having a career.<sup>280</sup> The information that the *Post* published was contradicted by the reaction Friedan’s book’s caused. Many women read the opening paragraph of *The Feminine Mystique* and were suddenly able to identify with a feeling that they had previously been unable to place; a feeling which came to be known as “the problem with no name.”

The “problem with no name” is associated with the yearning for something more out of life than simply running a household. Friedan’s work figures into this study of tomboyism because each of the female protagonists in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, *The Member of the*

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<sup>279</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc, 1963), 15.

<sup>280</sup> Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, 2.

*Wedding, To Kill a Mockingbird*, “Old Mortality,” and “The Old Order” are all faced with a similar longing for more out of life than what is presupposed of them. Also, most of the girls in this study would have been a part of the generation of dissatisfied women leading up to Friedan’s work, which suggests that “the problem with no name” was not a temporary condition that affected only a small number of women. Instead, the “problem with no name” was a marker of twentieth century women and served as a distinguishing mentality that sparked the movements for women’s rights in the twentieth century. Adult women were not the only ones affected: The “problem with no name” existed even among female youth.

*The Feminine Mystique*, has justifiably been brought under recent criticism by family historian Stephanie Coontz. She argues in one chapter of *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* that *The Feminine Mystique* was written by and targeted toward a privileged demography--white, middle-class housewives. Coontz reveals that even middle-class readers retrospectively noticed “how little Friedan seemed to know about the issues facing women who had to work out of necessity.”<sup>281</sup> Stephanie Coontz uses this generalized observation as a way to invoke to the issue of privilege and its relationship to the feminine mystique. She continues, “Friedan actively encouraged the belief that she was writing from her own middle-class experience, speaking to the largely apolitical, white, middle-class, suburban woman because she had been one herself.”<sup>282</sup> Upon making this claim, Coontz is quick to dispel Friedan’s middle-class identity. She notes that Friedan was a politically active, college graduate, who lived in a community surrounded by other politically active figures.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, 103-104.

The discord between Friedan's presentation of herself and the reality of her privileged circumstances highlights one of the major issues that I have proposed throughout the course of this study, which is that social class relates to gender and gender presentation. For instance, Mick falls into the category of women that is left out of the demographic that *The Feminine Mystique* was intended to reach. She is forced to subscribe to standard gender norms and compromise her identity as a result of the need to provide additional income for her family, whereas Frankie and Scout are able to adapt their gender identities and move freely (but not always smoothly) between different gender identities. However, in doing so they are both faced with a realization that they will be unable to maintain their masculine roles outside of their homestead as they move into adulthood. Miranda is a peculiar character in this study because the perpetuation of the feminine mystique and affirmation of patriarchy within the text is the result of her grandmother's need to work to provide for her family. Therefore, she demonstrates how the cycle of the feminine mystique operates and why girls and women are faced with it.

The discrepancies that take place between what is expected of women in combination with the changes that are taking place in the South during the early to mid-twentieth century all account for the Southern Gothic genre that these stories fall into. *The Feminine Mystique* is important when considering these stories in terms of the Southern Gothic. These texts in combination with *The Feminine Mystique* show the development of the struggles that women faced as a result of changing ideologies in America and invoke Harmon and Holman's feature of "distrust of the cosmic order." Mick, Frankie, Scout, and Miranda would have been a part of the generation of women who began to voice their dissatisfaction with the passive role of women or "the happy house wife" role and would have called this heteronormative lifestyle into question--

that is assuming that they married and fulfilled the role to begin with. Although if biographical readings of these texts have any say in that hypothesis, these young women probably did not go on to fulfill this role but instead chose to face the struggle of being taken seriously in more socially active or “masculine” roles. McCullers, Lee, and Porter laid the groundwork for future authors who wish to continue the discourse of gender and class. They also contribute to the feminist thought that surfaces with second wave feminism and, to an extent, third wave feminism.

However, the progressive thought that surfaces through works of women writers does not stop with Harper Lee in 1960. The themes of the Southern Gothic and their relationship to gender identity and gender roles prove to be more than a passing literary trend. The tradition carries over into Southern women’s fiction of the late twentieth century including works such as Fannie Flagg’s *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe*, and I would also argue that writing about gender also crosses racial boundaries through works such as Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*.

Though there have been adaptations made in the construction of gender depending on the time period the story was written during, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, *The Member of the Wedding*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and “The Old Order” and “Old Mortality” all show that there is a relationship that occurs between gender and social class. The study that I have conducted and presented here is by no means exhaustive or comprehensive. Another area of study that needs to be further illuminated in relation to my study is the role that race plays in these stories and the gender anomalies found within them. This work serves as a starting point for future analyses within the fields of gender studies, literary studies, and socioeconomic studies, as it focuses

heavily on the intersectionality of these fields and demonstrates the interplay of important texts of these disciplines.

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