

GIRLHOOD WITH GRIT: THE TOMBOY "OTHER" IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE
OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH

by
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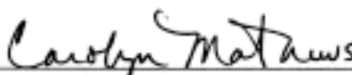
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Abstract

This thesis examines the function of a tomboy protagonist in three twentieth-century, Southern American texts: Carson McCullers's 1946 novel, *The Member of the Wedding*; Harper Lee's 1960 tale, *To Kill a Mockingbird*; and Dorothy Allison's 1992 narrative, *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Basing its analysis in poststructural theory, intersectional feminist criticism, and gender and queer studies—particularly the works of Simon de Beauvoir and Judith Butler—this thesis proposes that McCullers, Lee, and Allison employ tomboy characters to critique socially constructed and hierarchical systems of gender, sexuality, race, and/or class—depending on each novel's particular concerns. Each author highlights her character's marginal position within those structures. This thesis argues that the non-normative gender performance of tomboy characters not only exposes the marginalizing nature of dominant discourses of gender and sexuality but also critiques other systemic injustices in the U. S., such as race or class relations. The first chapter explores McCullers's Frances "Frankie" Addams and her tomboyism as contextualized by wartime rhetoric of the 1940s. The second chapter considers Lee's Jean Louise "Scout" Finch and her tomboy ways as received during 1960s Cold War McCarthyism and the beginnings of the civil rights movement. The third chapter examines Allison's Ruth Anne "Bone" Boatwright and her tomboyish nature in the socioeconomically and still racially divided American Deep South during the late twentieth century. Each chapter considers the historical context of the era, which grounds the analysis of the character and her gender presentation in the normative expectations of their respective time periods. This thesis seeks to establish the tomboy character as a

device by which the author illuminates, examines, and critiques ideological structures of gender, sexuality, race, or class.

Dedication

To the Frankies, Scouts, and Bones,
and those that let them be.

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Introduction: “A Ray of Sunshine in Pants”: The Tomboy as Liminal and Other in 20th Century Literature of the American South

Tomboys have been a staple of American culture since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Shifting economic and political ideologies precipitated a cultural reconsideration of the traditional dichotomy of gender roles and a new paradigm of womanhood began to emerge in the early 1900s. Society came to value the qualities of “intelligence, physical fitness and health, self-sufficiency, economic self-reliance”—characteristics traditionally attributed to masculinity—in women (Cogan 4). The development of “an alternative more physically active code of conduct” opposed the popular image of woman as a “fragile maiden” (Abate ix, Cogan 4). This modification to the construction of ideal femininity contributed to the popularization of tomboyism in adolescent girls as a form of preparation for adulthood and womanhood. Reflecting the cultural development of tomboyism, literary tradition—particularly the literature of the American South—adopts the tomboy as a powerful literary device.

A tomboy character functions as such in that she constructs a viable reality apart from mainstream conceptions of normative gender performance. In her epistemological study, *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History*, Michelle Abate posits, “From their inception, tomboyish characters and their accompanying behaviors have been linked with such elements as social surprise, gender duplicity and unlimited possibility” (xiii). The way that each author frames her characters’ reality operates as a sort of confrontational rhetoric that questions the systemic enforcement and reinforcement of the status quo. By presenting “unlimited possibility” beyond “normal,” she signals that something beyond the normative gender binary can and does exist and that she exists successfully.

Though the history of the tomboy finds its textual genesis in the sixteenth century, many consider the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to be “the heyday of tomboy narratives in the United States” (Abate vx). It should be noted, however, that there is no singular taxonomy for the tomboy archetype. Myriad factors, including historical context, geographic region, racial and ethnic identity, and socioeconomic class, intersect to create a wide and varied representation of the code of conduct that falls under the umbrella of “tomboy.” The scope of this study deals with the concept of the tomboy as she exists in twentieth-century American literature and culture: as an overwhelmingly familiar concept, “who—by whatever standards society has dictated—acts like a boy” (Yamaguchi, Barber 10).

Existing between the socially constructed, binary categories of masculinity and femininity, the tomboyish character occupies a liminal space. Typically characterized by adolescence, she also exists between the realms of childhood and adulthood, which further reinforces her indeterminate position. Though she is not yet fully familiar with the customs of the adult world, nor is she initiated into it, the adolescent tomboy protagonist illuminates its prejudices and defects. The intermediacy of tomboyism situates the character in such a way that she presents an outside view and critique of the structures from which she is excluded; her vision is wholly unique to her existence on the fringes or margins of social institutions. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg suggests, the tomboy’s “existence denies the inevitability of structure and categories” by virtue of her exclusion from them (Smith-Rosenberg 277).

The Member of the Wedding, To Kill a Mockingbird, and Bastard Out of Carolina, published across the mid- and late twentieth century, feature protagonists that

represent the “tomboy” of their eras. Carson McCullers, Harper Lee, and Dorothy Allison each utilize the perspective of an archetypal tomboy protagonist—Frankie, Scout, and Bone, respectively—as a lens to examine and to comment on ideological structures and discourses that construct social and cultural perceptions not only of gender and sexuality but also of race, or class. In disrupting normative gender performance, each protagonist also calls into question the hegemonic structures that define sexuality, race, or socioeconomic class.

Despite a proliferation of tomboy characters in literature and in popular culture, there is little in the way of normalization for the figure if she ultimately rejects the dominant discourse of femininity. Though in contemporary culture “it is now routine for girls to wear pants, play sports, and have short hair,” they are still expected to adopt a socially acceptable air of femininity (Abate xxiii). To not do so, to “[refuse] to relinquish their tomboyism” is to remain Other (Abate xxiii). As Abate suggests, “Tomboys have been variously viewed as icons of feminist defiance, symbols of juvenile delinquency, and precursors of sexual deviance” (vii). Because the tomboy character sits between socially acceptable performances of masculine and feminine gender categories, she is often seen as abnormal, queer, or Other. McCullers, Lee, and Allison, however, utilize the tomboy’s Otherness to challenge the structures that frame her liminality. By intentionally undermining the notion of “normal,” they interrogate the system that privileges normative concepts of gender and sexuality, as well as those systems that privilege the dominant race or social class

The liminality of a tomboy character can be usefully explained using the concept of the Other as postulated by Simone de Beauvoir. In her seminal text, *The Second Sex*,

Beauvoir submits that the woman is Other because man can define himself without woman but woman cannot define herself without man: “Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself” (Beauvoir 5). Woman, then, comes to be defined as what man is not—she is the Other. The concept of the Other is also useful when considering hierarchical structures of identity categories other than sex—gender, race, and class, for example. Beauvoir iterates this notion when she proposes, “The duality between Self and Other ... did not always fall into the category of the division of the sexes. ... No group ever defines itself as One without immediately setting up the Other opposite itself” (Beauvoir 6). Dorothy Allison uses the idea of the Other in her autobiographical essay in which she examines “The Politics of They,” and the marginalizing effects of the Self/Other dyad. She describes the recognition of her own Otherness ascribed to her by her family’s socioeconomic position: “I had heard the word *they* pronounced in that same callous tone before. *They*, those people over there, those people who are not us, ... they are different” (Allison, “A Question” 13). Likewise, the tomboy character is different. She is Other because she defies codes of normative gender performance—she exists between categories of socially constructed masculinity and femininity and is therefore not part of the normative idea of Self and becomes, instead, distinctly Other.

The Otherness of the tomboy character is grounded in the theory that gender is a socially constructed concept distinct from and not necessarily congruent with one’s sex. In Foucault’s view, “[t]o be sexed ... is to be subjected to a set of social regulations” that “reside both as the formative principle of one’s sex, gender, pleasures, and desires, and as the hermeneutic principle of self-interpretation” (qtd. in Butler, *Gender* 130). Likewise,

Beauvoir notes, “One is not born a woman, but rather becomes, woman,” indicating for a young girl, “her vocation [as a woman] is imperiously breathed into her from the first years of her life” (283). Similarly, Monique Wittig suggests, “In the case of women, ideology goes far since our bodies as well as our minds are the product of this manipulation. We have been compelled with our bodies and in our minds to correspond, feature by feature with the idea of nature that has been established for us” (103). All of that is to say that society defines and enforces the behaviors that constitute “nature” or normal presentations of gender.

In her 1990 text, *Gender Trouble*, and her 1991 essay, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” Judith Butler theorizes gender as performative. Building on the work of Foucault, Beauvoir, and Monique Wittig, Butler suggests that it is “an act of expropriation and *appropriation* that assumes gender is the rightful property of sex, that ‘masculine’ belongs to ‘male’ and ‘feminine’ belongs to ‘female’” (Butler, “Imitation” 312). In other words, behaviors and performances constructed as masculine are not the sole property of men and, congruently, behaviors and performances understood to be feminine are not limited to enactment by women. Butler maintains that, “it seems that gender as substance, the viability of man and woman as nouns, is called into question by the dissonant play of attributes that fail to conform to sequential or causal models of intelligibility” (*Gender* 33). For tomboy characters, it is the failure to conform to models of intelligibility that establishes their Otherness and liminality. As Butler affirms concerning gender, “[i]t is as compulsory performance in the sense that acting out of line with heterosexual norms brings with it ostracism, punishment, and violence” (“Imitation” 314-15). Social norms regulate identity categories. Inability or failure to conform or

outright rejection of those social norms determines the Otherness of that identity category and establishes tomboys—non-normative gender performers—as “they” or Other.

Social and political climates profoundly shape public reception of gender non-conformity and, thus, of tomboys. While 1940s wartime rhetoric championed women in the workforce with the likes of Rosie the Riveter, the McCarthyism of the 1960s “radically transformed” social emphasis on femininity and pushed tomboyism to the fringes of mainstream and into counterculture (Abate 167). While tomboyism remained acceptable in young girls, any woman who retained tomboyish characteristics into adolescence or even further into adulthood elicited “societal fears about female gender and sexual nonconformity” (Abate 170). It was the growth of the field of sexology, largely associated with Freudian theory, which fueled the anxieties surrounding non-normative gender performance in young girls. As Abate notes:

Although the nation may value strength, independence, and assertiveness in young girls, it does not esteem such qualities in adult women. As a result, within a few decades after the emergence of tomboyism, a new phenomenon was created, dubbed “tomboy taming.” Young girls were now expected to slough off tomboyish traits when they reached a specific age or stage in life: usually, the beginning of adolescence or the onset of puberty. (Abate xix)

The assumption is that if tomboyish figures continued to dress and “romp like boys” then it is only a matter of time until they start “loving and lusting like them,” implicating tomboys as “proto-lesbians” (Abate xxi). The political and social climate of the 1990s, with pervasive feminist movements and the growth of queer theory, strengthened the

popular association between tomboyism and lesbianism, creating a largely matter-of-fact connection between the two that reinforced societal fears (Abate xxii).

While it is inaccurate and difficult to claim a universal picture of the society across the Southern United States, it is necessary to recognize that the climate of the American South possesses its own nuanced expectations for normative gender presentations. Often in histories, “the South is set apart, [as] a counterpoint to” the rest of the United States (Howard 4). Adherence to tradition is vital to Southerners: “their past and their historical consciousness of that past” is hugely influential in shaping the culture of the American South. While “the South holds no monopoly on racism,” a look at the legislative history of “legally sanctioned racism [and] statutory segregation” illustrates how “racial categories inform and structure” much of the South’s legal, political, and social discourses (Howard 5). Pointing to the particulars of Southern culture serves to both align the archetype of the tomboy with the racial or class-defined Other and, also, to emphasize the exaggerated notion of Otherness as existing in opposition to the widely mythologized values of “Southern heritage” (Howard 5). James T. Sears paints an image of this notion of Southern heritage:

Each person understood her or his role, largely invisible in everyday social life, defined against the taken-for-granted symbols and rituals of Southern life: the flag and the Bible, Confederate Memorial Day ceremonies and barbecues, Southern Baptist and Colored Methodist Episcopal steeples, azalea festivals and Little Miss pageants, the courthouse square and the county fair, “colored” and “white” facilities. (3)

Moreover, “religiosity and religious persecution” are pervasive across the United States but retain a particularly zestful foothold in the American South. The codes that define one’s “invisible role” are based in religion and tradition (Howard 5). To reject that “role,” however, is to become highly visible—the odd one out, as the case may be. The tomboy, in snubbing traditional ideologies of gender performance and gender roles as defined by Southern culture, then, becomes categorically Other.

The three novels examined hereafter—Carson McCullers’s *The Member of the Wedding*, Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina*—span the mid to late twentieth century and each employs an adolescent tomboy protagonist. Each text presents the opportunity to consider the cultural, social, political, and historical factors that determine each character’s position as Other and to examine the ways in which their positions and unique perspectives critique the structures of gender and sexuality as well as those of race or class that define individuals as Other. Though Abate suggests a literary tomboy often is forced to “suddenly slough off her gender freakishness, sexual queerness, and racial difference,” for an identity that coincides with the one prescribed by society as normal, each of the three protagonists avoid—to varying degrees—that trap of heteronormative, patriarchal identity (Abate xix). As White suggests,

The adolescent girl, yet to fulfill her function, is crucial to the replication of the social system. Whatever her present goal, whether it be “social integration” or not, her society will insist on integrating her. ... So long as women’s main function is conceived to be marriage and childbearing, and

so long as wifehood and motherhood carry lower status than male pursuits,
the adolescent girl will be in conflict with society. (qtd. in Saxton xxv)

To allow their respective characters to “deny social integration,” McCullers, Lee, and Allison reject the process of normative “tomboy taming,” thereby offering an overt critique of the normalizing nature of socially constructed gender categories. Each tomboy protagonist bucks the “social system,” with varying degrees of success, in favor of her own idea of “normal.” The gender non-conforming tomboy figure exposes as unnatural and illusory society’s marginalizing discourses of gender; further, the tomboy character affords an outsider’s critical perspective from which the novel can critique society’s systematic Othering of individuals based on their sexuality, race, or class.

Chapter 1: “Hanging Around in Doorways”: Frankie Addams’s Liminal Perspective in Carson McCullers’s *The Member of the Wedding*

The Second World War initiated “a paradigm shift” that saw “millions of women—young and old, married and single, black and white, urban and rural” join the public labor forces in the early 1940s (Abate 145). The depression era notion of a woman’s place as being limited to the home was trumped by a “time of national crisis” that necessitated women in the workforce (Abate 145). As such, women were not confined to typically feminine professions such as secretaries and nurses and maids. Instead, they filled the gaps in employment left by men enlisting in and being drafted into the armed forces and began to build a feminine presence in traditionally masculine fields such as factory work and manual labor. Born of the era is perhaps the twentieth century’s most iconic tomboy character—the bandana-clad Rosie the Riveter, championing her legendary mantra, “We can do it.”

The conventional gender binary, however, was then, and still is, firmly rooted in American culture and particularly so in the American South. Traditional images of womanhood—the southern belle, for example—will not be easily eclipsed by Rosie’s flexed bicep. Michelle Abate notes, “While displays of tomboyish female strength and independence were a tremendous boon to the nation during the war, they were also a source of tremendous anxiety” (Abate 149). Though wartime tomboyism was championed as a national duty, “many factories required women to wear not only safety goggles on the job, but lipstick as well” (Abate 149). This served as a means of reinforcing and reiterating that the structures of traditional femininity remained rigidly enforced despite the influx of women into the traditionally masculine realm of the public

workforce. Long-held ideologies of womanhood and femininity clashed with the radical shift in societal expectations for women brought about by wartime tomboyism.

This is the cultural atmosphere into which Carson McCullers introduced her third novel, *The Member of the Wedding*. As Abate suggests, McCullers's novel "does more than simply embed elements of wartime tomboyism; it discusses the conflict directly" (154). Southern ideals of femininity clashed with the blurred distinctions between masculine and feminine roles that came with wartime industrialization. Working women of the 1940s South sought to reconcile traditional femininity with gender-blind economic demands. As a result, womanhood, then, existed somewhere between societal constructions of desirable femininity and necessary masculinity.

Frankie Addams, McCullers's adolescent tomboy protagonist, embodies the liminal position of feminine identity in the 1940s American South. But, at twelve years old, she also finds herself somewhere between childhood and adulthood and in search of "her true self" (McCullers 64). She is distinctly at odds with and separate from her family and her community and she is "an unjoined person who hung around in doorways" (7). Frankie, in wrestling with aligning her perception of herself with socially prescribed images of identity, personifies the in-between: "She belonged to no club and was a member of nothing in the world" (3). By situating Frankie outside of the club of those who adhere to socially determined concepts of normalcy, McCullers uses her character to critique the discourses that create and govern the social structures from which she is excluded. By dramatizing Frankie's struggles to function within conventional structures not only of gender but also of sexuality, race, and class, McCullers offers a uniquely critical perspective from the outside looking into these structures.

“The summer when Frankie was sick and tired of being Frankie”

We meet Frankie Addams in “the summer when Patton was chasing the Germans across France” (23). Frankie is thoroughly immersed in the propaganda of World War II as she listens to radio reports and reads “the war news in the paper” (23). Just as her image of the world at war is that of a globe that is “cracked and loose and turning a thousand miles an hour,” so, too, is her perception of her own identity and her place in the world, for this is also “the summer when Frankie was sick and tired of being Frankie” (23, 22).

Frankie appears to epitomize the image of the stereotypical American adolescent tomboy. Abate describes the conventional American tomboy character as “having a proclivity for outdoor play (especially athletics), a feisty independent spirit, and a tendency to don masculine clothing and adopt a boyish nickname” (xvi). Barefooted and clad in “a pair of blue black shorts, a B.V.D. undervest” and sporting the nickname “Frankie,” there is little question that Frankie personifies Abate’s formula for a tomboy character (McCullers 4). McCullers works to further complicate Frankie’s identity as a tomboy. Though her “hair had been cut like a boy’s” she has not had it “cut for a long time and [it] was now not even parted” (4). With this imagery, McCullers signifies Frankie’s shifting perception of her own identity and the beginnings of her subscription to compulsory heteronormativity.¹ Though it was once decidedly masculine, Frankie’s hairstyle now places her somewhere between the binary extremes of socially constructed ideals of masculinity and femininity. Judith Butler, in exploring cultural constructions of identity by means of biological sex, suggests:

Inasmuch as “identity” is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of “the person” is called into question by the cultural emergence of those “incoherent” or “discontinuous” gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. (*Gender* 23)

Frankie’s inconsistent physical gender presentation indicates that she does not comply with the “gendered cultural norms” that associate male and female sex with masculine and feminine gender. As a tomboy, her non-normative gender presentation places her at odds with cultural norms and contributes to her struggle with her perception of her own identity. Frankie catches her warped reflection in the glass and notes that she “knew well what she looked like,” suggesting that she is aware that her identity does not reflect society’s definition of appropriate femininity for a twelve-year old girl (4). While Frankie may know well what she looks like, she recognizes that her appearance and, by association, her gender performance are marginalizing factors and, as a result, begins to reject that look for one that affords her desirable membership based on normative gender performance determined by socially and culturally constructed standards.

Frankie has dreams of “[going] to war as a Marine” and of “flying aeroplanes and winning gold medals for bravery” (23). Much like Radclyffe Hall’s Miss Ogilvy of the 1934 short story, “Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself,” Frankie uses wartime rhetoric to create an image of herself with which she can honestly and happily identify.² Frankie “wanted to be a boy” and she understands that she essentially needs to become a boy to allow her dreams of military glory to come to fruition (23). When she recognizes that she “could

not join the war,” she feels “restless and blue” (23). While Miss Ogilvy “wished to go up to the front-line trenches” and serve her country, she is eventually able to “[find] herself quite at ease” in “doing excellent work for the nation” by leading an ambulance unit (Hall 28). Her military service instilled in her an intense feeling of pride to the extent that the normally shy and quiet woman “even swaggered a little” when she walked (Hall 28). It gave her membership and associated her with a community of women with whom she strongly identified: “[F]or many other of her kind was in London. . . . It was really surprising how many cropped heads had suddenly appeared as it were out of space; how many Miss Ogilvies, losing their shyness, had come forward, asserting their right to serve, asserting their claim to attention” (Hall 28). When she is separated from that community after the war ends, she loses her sense of membership and her sense of self. Illustrating Abate’s assertion that wartime tomboyism is “a temporary condition,” Hall notes, “Wars come and wars go but the world does not change” (Hall 29).

In a similar concession to patriarchal military tradition, Frankie decides to make the only contribution she can—by donating her blood to the war effort. She imagines that Army doctors will sing her praises, calling her blood “the strongest blood they had ever known” (McCullers 23). Much to Frankie’s despair, she finds that, despite her nationalistic enthusiasm, she is not allowed to donate her blood:

She was too young. Frankie felt mad with the Red Cross, and left out of everything. The war and the world were too fast and big and strange. To think about the world for very long made her afraid. She was not afraid of Germans or bombs or Japanese. She was afraid because in the war they

would not include her, and because the world seemed somehow separate from herself. (24)

Frankie's sense of separation, of isolation, and of non-membership hurt her in ways she had never before experienced. The identity she imagines—one of a celebrated military hero—comes crashing down around her. It is her inability to participate in the war—essentially, her lack of membership by virtue of both her sex and her age—that forces her to “suddenly wonder who she was, and what she was going to be in the world” (24). Like Miss Ogilvy, the rhetoric of wartime tomboyism gives Frankie an identity and a sense of membership. Frankie's rejection from that club by means of socially constructed gender roles as well as by her inability to claim adulthood sets her on a search for membership, the price of which is a successful performance of society's definition of “normal.”

Accordingly, McCullers allows her readers to follow Frankie on an exploration of self-identity that is signposted, in part, by Frankie's experimentation with her own name. By positioning Frankie in the indeterminate space between childhood and adulthood, McCullers affords her character a certain mutability of identity that is privileged to juveniles, who claim a social code that is largely separate from that of adults. As Sally Mitchell suggests, adolescents “increasingly occupied a separate culture” that she describes as “a provisional free space” in which they are unbound by the socially constructed constraints that they will inevitably meet as they mature and enter into adulthood (qtd. in Saxton xxiii). Frankie's blatant uninterest in the legal ramifications of name changing evidences this notion. She muses, “I wonder if it is against the law to change your name. Or to add to it,” to which Bernice responds, “Naturally. It is against the law” (17). Unconcerned with the legality or legitimacy of it, Frankie avows that she

doesn't care and, nevertheless, proceeds to declare her new name to be F. Jasmine Addams.

Frankie's rationale for changing her name is that it affords her membership in her brother's wedding. She perceives that her new name, F. Jasmine, intrinsically aligns her with her brother, Jarvis, and his bride-to-be, Janice, because all three names begin with the same two letters, J and A. When contrasted with Frankie's original moniker, F. Jasmine carries overtly feminine overtones; "associated with sweet fragrance and pale yellow flowers, [it] has obvious romantic, feminine connotations" that also imply maturity complicit with adulthood (White 127). That association, however, is doubly undermined. First, in the same breath that she declares herself to be F. Jasmine, Frankie also snubs the doll gifted to her by her brother. By complaining that he must have "pictured [her] as a little girl" when he chose it and wishing he had, instead, sent her a gift that recalls the wilds of Alaska where he is stationed, she rejects association with traditional images of girlhood femininity in favor of tomboy leanings (McCullers 18). Secondly, as White suggests, "the new 'feminine' name 'F. Jasmine' is ambiguous because it is generally a male practice to use an initial and a middle name" (128). And while, as White continues, "[o]ne might conclude that Frankie is unconsciously subverting her outward attempt to become more womanly," it seems, too, that the ever-present, consciously chosen "F." signifies the vestiges of the "old Frankie," the tomboy Frankie, that won't allow her to fully adopt a conventionally feminine persona (White, 128; McCullers 50). Further, the immaterial and imagined nature of Frankie's membership in her brother's wedding by means of alphabetic similarity points to her childlike naiveté. So, while her new name might outwardly signify maturity and

womanhood, it also signifies gender ambiguity. Frankie doesn't fully embody the outward signs of womanhood, and the masculinizing use of an initial for her new first name further complicates or "troubles" neat gender categories. In this sense, McCullers is subverting notions of socially constructed gender roles.

John Henry, Frankie's first cousin, serves as McCullers's foil to Frankie's tomboyish disposition. At six years old, John Henry is still very definitely childlike and his character further substantiates the notion of childhood as a protected territory that is absolved of the social constructions of identity enforced by the adult world. McCullers paints John Henry as diminutive, "small to be six years old," with "a little screwed white face" and "tiny gold-rimmed glasses" (5). This characterization is a stark contrast to Frankie's, whom McCullers describes as "so tall she was almost a big freak" and "dark white" skin (4). As Frankie casts off the doll Jarvis gifts her, John Henry readily adopts the toy, carefully clarifying with Frankie that he is allowed to claim it as his own before he "rocks it in his arms" and names her Belle (18). Frankie proclaims that the doll "makes [her] nervous" and demands that John Henry take it "somewhere out of her sight" (18). Her angst surrounding the doll points to her awareness that socially constructed ideals of womanhood include foundational insinuations of motherhood but neither she nor anyone else comments on the reversal of gender roles between John Henry and Frankie when a little boy, rather than the girl, takes the doll as his own.

John Henry serves not only as a foil to Frankie but also an ally. As Kristen B. Proehl suggests, tomboy and sissy characters "are drawn to one another out of a shared sense of 'difference'" (129). Frankie and John Henry share membership by virtue of their respective rejection of normative gender behaviors. John Henry, in another display of

effeminacy, pays particular attention to Frankie's emotions. While his attentiveness is markedly feminine and contrasts with Frankie's egocentrism, his sensitivity towards Frankie is arguably the most honest and genuine compassion she receives. Frankie, upon being excluded from yet another club—this time a group of older neighborhood girls—notes, "I think they have been spreading it all over town that I smell bad" (12). John Henry attempts to comfort her, patting her neck and saying "I can smell you the minute you walk in the house without looking to see if it is you. Like a hundred flowers ... Like a thousand flowers" (13). His comments—referencing flowers—and his actions—a sort of motherly patting—further evince his effeminacy and contrast with Frankie's masculinity. McCullers highlights Frankie and John Henry's mutual rejection of normative gender performance in their shared alliance. As Proehl suggests, "John Henry possesses a unique capacity to comfort her because he, too, fails to conform to society's gendered expectations" (130).

McCullers describes Frankie as being "in so much secret trouble that she thought it was better to stay at home" (3). While we are never privy to the exact nature of Frankie's "secret trouble," it can be surmised that it is born of a social anxiety surrounding non-normative gender performance as she approaches adulthood and, necessarily, womanhood. While John Henry's gender bending tendencies resist commentary by virtue of his younger age, the internalized apprehension surrounding Frankie's tendency towards tomboyism is twofold in that there is both a contemporaneous national sentiment that tomboyism is a "temporary condition of the war effort" and that, as young girls reach adolescence, their social value is dependent on their ability to shed their tomboy tendencies in order to adopt socially constructed

performances of femininity and womanhood (Abate 150). So, while her dreams of contributing to the war effort serve as an acceptable justification for her masculine attributes, she is unable to retain those dreams as an essential part of her identity because, “[a]lthough, the nation may value strength, independence and assertiveness in young girls, it does not esteem such qualities in adult women” (Abate xix). Once the war is over and once she reaches puberty—the socially recognized marker for the transition from childhood to adulthood—society demands that she begin to subscribe to a more traditionally feminine identity.

That McCullers allows Frankie such freedom to move across the spectrum of gender presentation points to the artificial, arbitrary, and unnatural quality of normative gender performance. That is, the ease with which Frankie crosses between presentations of tomboyism and womanhood highlights the performed nature of gender identity. With Frankie’s character, McCullers underscores the absurdity of the notion that membership in the category of “normal” hinges on such an artificial performance. Frankie grasps for inclusion by means of membership wherever she can find it, both with the war effort as well as with her brother and the news of his impending wedding. She mirrors that which she thinks is expected of her and that which will gain her membership and connection. Frankie’s adoption of the name F. Jasmine signals the beginning of her struggle to reconcile her identity, as she perceives it, with the identity that society demands in exchange for full membership. The price of that membership is a normative performance of gender. For Frankie, “[t]his is the summer when for a long time she had not been a member” (McCullers 3). As the next section examines, the price of full membership in

post-War American society is also appropriation of dominant ideas concerning sexuality, race, and class.

“She knew who she was and how she was going into the world”

To Frankie, her brother’s wedding—specifically, her membership in it—offers her the opportunity to escape the liminal space she inhabits. Marriage is an institution of adulthood and, by joining it, Frankie can leave the doorway of adolescence and assert her membership in the adult world. It is a more permanent solution than her dreams of wartime glory. She imagines that, after the wedding, she will accompany Jarvis and Janice not only on their honeymoon but after that “to whatever place they will ever go” (45, 46). “I belong to be with them,” she says (46).

The wedding, being held in Winter Hill, serves as both a literal and figurative escape from her town. By associating herself with the wedding, Frankie signals her desire to move towards maturity—distinct as *her* understanding of maturity and incongruous with reality as it may be. She begins making the moves that she perceives will initiate her into adulthood. By society’s standards, adulthood implicitly means womanhood, which positions the female as the binary pairing to male. Hence, female sexuality—namely heterosexuality—is assumed with the adoption of normative womanhood. White suggests, “Frankie’s plan to join the wedding is also a symbolic way of resolving her conflict of wanting to be an adult but not wanting to be a woman, not wanting to ‘grow up—if it’s like that’” (White 138). Associating herself with her brother’s wedding points to Frankie’s resistance to heteronormative gender relations. By inserting herself into the marriage couple to create a curious crypto-incestuous and/or homoerotic and/or lesbian ménage, Frankie refuses the normative, binary nature of heterosexual marriage, allowing

her to snub the sexual implications of marriage and of womanhood while still adopting airs of adulthood. We see that “Frankie exists in a divided state: while she hesitates to stay in childhood, she cannot fulfill her desire to be ‘grown-up’ without accepting her identity as female, and she already suspects that her gender will be confining. Frankie thus vacillates between striving for adult status and resisting it” (White 127).

McCullers highlights Frankie’s inconsistent gender performance—her failed attempts at adulthood and, by association, womanhood and female sexuality—in her exploration of her town. The morning before the wedding day, Frankie “sat at her desk wearing only the blue-and-white striped trousers of her pajamas” as she contemplates the things she needs to do on her “last day” at home (50). Her unabashed shirtless-ness indicates, if not a tomboy tendency for masculinity, then, at the very least, androgyny. As she begins to ready for her day on the town, however, Frankie dons “her most grown and best, the pink organdie” dress and “lipstick and Sweet Serenade” (51).

Over the course of a single paragraph, McCullers illustrates how Frankie approaches gender as a performance for which the costume is determined by socially constructed ideals of femininity. “‘Sex’ is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time” and “it is not a simple fact or static condition of the body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize ‘sex’ and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms,” says Butler (*Bodies* xii). In Frankie’s escapades, McCullers illustrates Butler’s notion that sex is not a static condition and that it is mutable given the contextualizing factors of gendered norms. Frankie imagines herself as entering the town as “grown” by means of imitating that which she understands to define womanhood, which to her, is signified by little more than feminine gender

presentation. This speaks to the artificiality of sex as determined by gender performance in Frankie's superficial adoption of femininity. While wandering through town, she feels the presence of "the ghost of the old Frankie" when she comes across a particularly attractive motorcycle. The vestiges of her tomboyism shine through her feminine garb as she "spat on the broad leather seat and shined it carefully with her fist," an act that would not be considered lady-like in many social circles and serves to juxtapose the conflicting images of Frankie's tomboy and ostensibly feminine behaviors (63).

Furthermore, McCullers paints the image of Frankie, still outfitted in her pink dress, running alongside a tractor spreading gravel and tar: she was "running beside him, her head thrown back" as "[s]he [cupped] her hands around her mouth to make her voice heard" as she shares the news of her brother's wedding with the construction worker (62). The absurdity of the episode, ending with Frankie's slip and dress "stuck wet to her chest" with sweat illustrates the extent to which a complete picture of socially acceptable femininity is alien to her. While Frankie costumes herself in a dress and make-up, she retains her tomboy behaviors, a juxtaposition which belies her rank as a socially acculturated, grown woman and signals her "[failure] to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility," once again (Butler, *Gender* 23). These instances further illuminate McCullers' critique of the social structures defining femininity as confining and superficial.

Frankie's newfound feeling of membership as she tries on her idea of adulthood offers her a sense of agency and intrepidity: "For when the old question came to her—the who she was and what she would be in the world, and why she was standing there that minute—when the old question came to her, she did not feel hurt and unanswered" (46).

Frankie perceives that she is a member because she adopts behaviors that she understands to be reflective of adulthood, which signifies her understanding of membership as a performance. Once she identifies that initial feeling of inclusion, her sensation of belonging extends far beyond that of her brother's wedding: "The day before the wedding was not like any day that F. Jasmine had ever known. ... [T]he town opened up before her and in a new way she belonged" (49). This sense of belonging instills in her a boldness to cross thresholds she had never previously considered.

While in town Frankie pauses outside of the Blue Moon Café, a local watering hole that "she had never been inside" (57). Frankie understands the café to be "a forbidden place to children" and before this day, "she had only hung around the edges and never once had she gone inside" (58). With her new sense of maturity and daring, however, she notes that "[t]he old laws she had known before meant nothing to F. Jasmine, and without a second thought she left the street and went inside" (58). To Frankie, her newfound adulthood is her ticket—her membership, essentially—to pass through, rather than simply to hang around in the doorway. Yet, the guilelessness that McCullers instills in Frankie undermines her air of maturity. Were Frankie to be truly initiated into the sphere of adulthood, she would be aware of the potential consequences of entering an establishment such as the Blue Mood Café. Rather than fully understand the nature of the café—one where soldiers carouse and townsfolk get in bar fights—she only recognizes that there is an "unworded way" in which it is off limits to children (58).

Frankie returns, as she had promised, to the Blue Moon Café to meet a soldier she had encountered earlier in her escapades about town. In this instance, McCullers demonstrates the restrictive nature of the patriarchal sex/gender system that defines

womanhood and sexuality.³ While Frankie longs for genuine connection through conversation with the soldier, she instead finds in him a lesson in the way society objectifies and sexualizes womanhood. Frankie tries to build a “connection” with him “but their two conversations would not join together” and “try as she would, she could not follow” his “kind of double-talk” (133). The soldier’s double-talk serves a two-fold purpose in McCullers’s critique of the patriarchal sex/gender system. First, as the soldier’s talk is presumably laden with sexual innuendo that Frankie, as a child, would not be privy to, it works to further reinforce Frankie’s position as an underage adolescent and highlights the soldier’s objectification of the female body without regard to the legality of his advances. Secondly, it implies the soldier’s trivialization and objectification of Frankie; he doesn’t bother to inquire about her name until he’s ready to invite her to his room. Despite the “unexplainable feeling that there was a mistake” as she returns to the Blue Moon Café, and that “every footstep [she] took, she felt somehow was wrong,” Frankie feels ensnared in her interactions with the soldier, disclosing that she felt she “could not leave until [the date] ended” (133, 135).

Frankie is trapped by the customs dictated by the heteronormative, patriarchal binary sex/gender system that she understands to be indicative of adulthood. Once in the soldier’s room, however, Frankie loses her sense of “connection” with him as she snaps back into reality. He now “seemed to her unjoined and ugly,” the very qualities she worked to eliminate from her own character (136). As she rejects the soldier’s advances and turns for the door, he “grasped her skirt and ... she was pulled down beside him on the bed” (136). Here, it is her literal performance of gender—her wearing of the dress—that causes her to be trapped both physically and figuratively in the confines of her

position as female in the male dominated sex/gender system. In rejecting the soldier's sexual advances, Frankie rejects heteronormative initiation into adulthood. McCullers depicts Frankie as refusing to perpetuate the patriarchal sex/gender system.

So, while Frankie may find her way across physical thresholds, her character remains sidelined by her incomplete adoption of behaviors characteristic of adulthood and particularly womanhood, namely sexuality. After her encounter with the soldier, Frankie hastily retreats to the familiarity of home and John Henry and, ostensibly, from adulthood back to childhood: "And after first starting toward the door, she turned and climbed out on the fire-escape and quickly reached the alley ground. ... [S]he was glad to see John Henry West[;] ... the familiar sight of him calmed her a little" (137). It is curious that she cannot exit through the doorway through which she entered the Blue Moon Café. Once home, "[she] locked the front door before she went into the living room. ... [She] was glad to have her father between her and the front door" (138). As she calms, Frankie returns to her fixation with the wedding—her asexual concept of adulthood. In highlighting Frankie's lack of understanding of the entire prescription of socially constructed womanhood, McCullers rejects heteronormative notions of sexuality and womanhood. She illustrates the unnaturally constructed presuppositions about female sexuality by allowing Frankie to remain aloof to its implications. With Frankie's character, McCullers seeks to imply that heteronormative female sexuality is not, or at least, should not be the only means by which one can enter into adulthood.

McCullers seems to saddle Bernice, the African-American surrogate mother to Frankie, with the job of socializing Frankie to the cultural norms of Southern womanhood, including the cultural construction of normalized sexuality. That Bernice is

visibly unhappy in her heteronormative relationship serves as McCullers's means of commenting on the restrictive nature of marriage. Despite her despondency at the state of her own relationship, she offers to Frankie that "[w]hat you ought to be thinking about is a beau" (82). Frankie cannot be faulted for her wild ideas of what constitutes marriage and how it functions as an entrance into adulthood. She has no consistent example of a happy and successful relationship from which to build her expectations and, as Jewett suggests, Frankie is "afraid of inhabiting a heterosexual self" in part "because [Bernice] models it as painful" (96). Frankie's mother died in childbirth, so she was never witness to her parent's relationship and Bernice, her surrogate mother figure, is on her way to her fourth marriage, an unhappy one at that. That Frankie attaches herself to her older brother's wedding is no surprise, as it is the closest approximation to Frankie's understanding of "normal" that she has.

Bernice, in referencing the Biblical story of Noah and the Ark, establishes her vision of marriage as based on the heteronormative model. She advises Frankie that "the main thing about a wedding" is that "two is company and three is a crowd" (78). She goes on to associate the two members of the wedding with the pairs of animals Noah leads onto the Ark, which implies, for reproductive purposes, that each is a binary pair of a male and a female. Further, Bernice warns Frankie that "[i]f you start out falling in love with some unheard of thing like that, what is going to happen to you? If you take a mania like this, it won't be the last time and of that you can be sure" (107). In this instance, Bernice is subscribing to the notion that the heteronormative ideal of marriage—marriage between a man and a woman—is the only means by which Frankie can avoid a "fancy trap" of "trouble" (108). Bernice asks, "And what kind of life would that be?" signaling

both her and society's distrust and disapproval of non-heteronormative or "queer" relationships. (108).

Bernice further reinforces structures of heteronormativity as indicated by gender performance. While Frankie is modeling the wedding dress she chose for her brother's wedding, Bernice, in commenting on Frankie's "peculiar" appearance, quickly changes her mind about returning the gown after she references an adage that suggests "you have to cut your suit according to the cloth, and make the best of what you have" (90).

Bernice's sudden change of heart at even the indirect and offhand mention of a suit as an alternative to a dress for Frankie's attire indicates a cultural fear that unchecked childhood tomboyism is a precursor to lesbianism. Bernice serves to socialize Frankie to normative gender behaviors. Frankie notices and is aware of Bernice's sudden change of heart and, without saying so, indicates that she is conscious of the subtle accusation that Bernice had made. As Abate recalls, "[a]nxiety about the persistence of childhood tomboyism into adulthood" causes many "to worry that it was only a matter of time until tomboyish figures who were dressing and romping like boys would begin loving and even lusting like them" (xxi). Bernice exhibits the fear that Judith Halberstam describes: "There is always the dread possibility ... that the tomboy will not grow out of her butch stage and will never become a member of the wedding" (qtd. in Abate xxi).

Abate notes, "[r]ecalling the antebellum origins of tomboyism as a preparatory stage for marriage and motherhood—along with societal fears about lesbianism—one of the primary reasons that tomboyish cinematic figures abandoned their iconoclastic ways was the affections of a man" (151). Curiously so, it is not for "the affections of a man" that McCullers dissolves Frankie's tomboy behaviors. Instead, Frankie moves beyond her

adolescent stage of alienation for a friendship with Mary Littlejohn, a highly feminine appearing young lady about two years Frankie's senior, and their dreams of traveling the world together. Some critics argue that Frankie's friendship with Mary signifies her total submission to a traditionally feminine identity.⁴ Others, however—Rachel Adams, for example—argue that such a “reading places undue emphasis on the novel's ending and forecloses the possibilities of its more radically affirmative moments” (573). The latter argument supports the notion that McCullers rejects social norms in favor of creating a rhetorical confrontation with the status quo. By engulfing Frankie in “the wonder of her love” for Mary Littlejohn, McCullers presents Frankie with the option of escaping childhood and adopting the discourse of womanhood apart from the normative model she sees in her brother's wedding (160). As Adams notes, “a negative understanding of Frankie's acceptance of female sexuality ignores the lesbian implications” of Frankie's relationship with Mary Littlejohn (573). McCullers suggests, then, that adult female sexuality is not limited to the paradigm of heteronormativity, that lesbian sexuality affords another form of adult female sexual expression, and that lesbianism is not limited only to girls who reject normative femininity.

“Pretty is as pretty does”

Frankie's tomboyism places her in a liminal space that allows her to cross boundaries not only of sexuality but also of race and class. Her adolescent naiveté allows her to un-see, as it were, the marginalizing boundaries created by racial and socioeconomic differences. As Frankie wanders through the House of Freaks at the Chattahoochee Exposition, she fears the association of her own oddities with those of the Freaks she sees on exhibition. Frankie's unconcealed anxiety signals her awareness of her

own position on the outer boundaries of what she perceives to be socially normal. While she fears the isolation that comes with non-membership, ironically, in the first place where we see her sensing her own membership, she rejects it outright: “She was afraid of all the Freaks, for it seemed to her that they had looked at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with hers, as though to say: we know you” (20). It is in this sense that Frankie’s desire for membership is qualified by social acceptance—not just any membership will suffice. James Baldwin suggests, “Freaks are called freaks and are treated as they are treated—in the main, abominably—because they are human beings who cause to echo, deep within us, our most profound terrors and desires” (828). Frankie exemplifies Baldwin’s notion as she observes the final booth in the exposition’s tent. She describes the strangeness of the Half-Man, Half-Woman, who “was divided completely in half—the left side was a man and the right side a woman” (20). The extended description of this character, as compared to the other Freaks she encounters, indicates a sort of curious but fearful fascination and identification with this man-woman. She describes “both eyes” as being “strange,” suggesting that it was potentially the Half-Man Half-Woman that prompted the look that caused her to fear they knew her and identified her as one of their own (20). Sarah Gleeson-White suggests,

In the dynamics of freakishness, the category of “normal” is contingent on the category of “abnormal.” In other words, normality and freakdom are interdependent. In ... *The Member of the Wedding*, it is the tension between ... Frankie’s tomboyishness and the ideal of the southern belle or lady that most obviously makes manifest this interconnected dichotomy. (12-13)

The ideal of the southern belle, the proper lady that Bernice imagines for Frankie, and Frankie's failed attempts to emulate that ideal contextualize her position as a freak. Bernice further highlights Frankie's association with freakishness when she indirectly draws a parallel between Frankie in her gown and the Half-Man Half-Woman. Bernice characterizes her as "peculiar" and notes that her tomboy qualities "just don't mix" with a "grown woman's evening dress" (90). At this "judgment," Frankie "hunched her shoulders and covered her rusty elbows with her hands," pointing to her acknowledgement that she felt "queer" (90).

Frankie's tomboyism affords her another element of freakishness apart from her non-normative gender performance. Racial difference is historically associated with tomboyism; they share a mutual dependency on darkness or blackness as a symbolic feature. As Abate notes, "Anticipating associations of whiteness with 'normality' and blackness with difference, the word 'freak' emerged in the seventeenth century to denote a heterogeneous coloration" (Abate 162). On her jaunt about town the morning before her brother's wedding, she "mingled everywhere," from the "very nice neighborhood near the edge of town" to the "sad alleys and crooked streets of the mill section" where "she crossed the unseen line dividing Sugarville from the white people" (McCullers 49, 63). Frankie crosses the unseen but very real "color line" that demarcates the strict separation of the races in the U. S. South as she crosses from the white section of town into the section where blacks live. Frankie, in searching for "connection" and "membership" looks to anyone who will recognize her "for her true self" regardless of divisive social constructions of identity (55, 61).

Walking down the main street in town, Frankie experiences “a connection close as answers to calls” with a variety of characters about town, the first of which is “[a]n old colored man, stiff and proud on his rattling wagon seat” (55). Frankie describes the look they shared, noting that it was “as though they were known to each other” (55). Frankie adds, “And she wanted him to know her, too—about the wedding” (55). The qualification that Frankie feels necessary to include—that what she wanted him to know was “about the wedding”—implies that there is an alternative insinuation, that the man could know something else about her and that she is aware of it. That the man she feels so connected to is a black man in the 1940s American South poses the question of whether that “unnamable connection” Frankie describes is one of membership or of exclusion (55). The question McCullers leaves to the reader is whether the black man “knows” Frankie as adult, for he is “old” and therefore a member of the adult club which Frankie longs to join, or whether the way he “looked at her” implies that he knows that she, too, is a marginalized being. Frankie feared the knowing looks of the Freaks at the fairground but she is blind to the possibility that the connection she feels with the black man is of the same nature; they are connected because they are both excluded and marginalized by dominant social structures: in his case, the structures of a white supremacist society; in hers, the structures of a heteropatriarchal society .

McCullers continues to align Frankie’s tomboyism with racial difference in her relationship with Bernice. The pair share a mutual bond over Bernice’s supposition that “[w]e born this way or that way and we don’t know why. But we caught anyhow” (119). Bernice understands herself and her people to be caught by their race in a white supremacist society, while Frankie considers herself to be caught by her non-conforming

gender in a heteronormative society. Laura Fine suggests, “[a]lthough at times McCullers highlights Frankie’s own uncertainty about the world of heterosexual relationships and resentment about conventional gender roles for women, she uses the novel’s African American characters to project Frankie’s most violent feelings” (122). Bernice and other African American characters, however, seem to work less as a projection of Frankie’s feelings and more as parallels or counterparts. In aligning Frankie’s sensation of being systematically “caught” by her gender with the prejudices aimed at those defined as Others because of their race, McCullers analogizes the marginalizing qualities of the social systems that stigmatize individuals based on categories of identity.

McCullers further reinforces the relationship between all marginalized Others in the moment Frankie finds herself in the alley where Lon Baker, an African American man in her community, was brutally killed. She aligns her feelings of Otherness with the ostracizing of the racial Other and recognizes the danger in both. The novel links Frankie’s fears of being Othered by virtue of her gender performance and sexuality with the fears felt by those who are Othered because of their race. By equating race with sexuality and gender as Othering factors, McCullers is suggesting that one’s deep feeling of gender identity is an innate and essential quality that is as natural, static, and invariable as skin color. McCullers deconstructs socially constructed categories of gender by signifying that the gender performance that feels “natural”—Frankie’s tomboyism—stems from an innate quality as immutable as that of race and skin color. To ask an individual to change skin color to match socially defined ideals is absurd, and, so, too, is it unnatural to require one to shed a gender performance that feels “natural” to that person in favor of socially acceptable gender performance.

“I am simply mad about—”

Frankie’s position as a juvenile allows her to explore identity as defined by social and cultural norms but also serves as a means by which McCullers comments on the nature of identity as constructed by society. Frankie’s position as a tomboy allows her to move between the binarized extremes of gender identification, trying on the visage of a masculine war hero as well as the temperament of a “grown and free” woman going about town “in her most grown and best” clothing (51). Butler suggests, “identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression” (“Imitation” 308). In this sense, McCullers engages Frankie’s character as a critique of “normalizing categories.” We see Frankie lose her sense of self as she struggles to function within the oppressive structures of normalized gender, sexuality, race, and class categories. To be a Freak, a non-member, an Other in Frankie’s eyes, is a fate worse than losing herself and losing her dreams. As White suggests, “Frankie now resigns herself—the world seems too ‘enormous’ and ‘powerful’ for her to fight ... When Frankie suddenly puts together the sexual facts she previously refused to connect and thinks she might as well ask the soldier to marry her, we realize that she is giving up her rebellion and submitting to her female fate” (139). Frankie doesn’t entirely submit, though. The fact that Frankie loses her dreams of a world where individuals can change sexes as they please and her aspirations of being a military hero speak to the stifling nature of patriarchal, heteronormative conformity. However, in pairing the final image of Frankie in “happiness” with her “unfinished” thought, McCullers leaves her reader to wonder what it is exactly that Frankie is “simply mad about” (163). The

strongest suggestion is that she is “simply mad about” Mary Littlejohn. Her dreams of traveling the world with Mary Littlejohn—with whom her daytime is now “filled”—seem to negate her earlier feelings of being “caught.” The “instant shock of happiness” she feels when the front doorbell rings at the end of the novel appears to indicate some sort of liberating realization that belies the popular critical opinion that Frankie has fully resigned herself to conformity and normativity. The indeterminate and open-ended conclusion of the novel suggests that it is Mary Littlejohn at the front door on the other side of the threshold across which Frankie has the opportunity to walk, leaving the normalizing heteropatriarchal household of her childhood.

Chapter 2: “Not Girls Like You”: Scout Finch’s Subversive Otherness in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*

In 1960, fourteen years after McCullers published *The Member of the Wedding*, Harper Lee made her authorial debut with the iconic novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Though Lee’s novel is set in the 1930s—only a decade before McCullers’ novel takes place—the social, political, and economic climate into which Lee sent her story of Scout Finch was drastically different from that which received McCullers’s tale of Frankie Addams. World War II ended in 1946 and the United States “took a conservative turn in all areas” when society set about regaining its sense of “normalcy” after the war (Faderman 119). For women who found a place in the civilian and military workforce in the early 1940s, the emancipatory effects of wartime economic necessity dwindled in the postbellum decades of the 1950s and ‘60s as “the surviving men returned to their jobs and the homes that women needed to make for them” (Faderman 119). Adaptations and evolutions of gender roles afforded by the wartime rhetoric of patriotism and national duty gave way to traditionally dichotomous ideals of “normal” masculinity and femininity reminiscent of the pre-war era, not unlike the 1930s of Scout’s childhood portrayed in Lee’s novel. With the influx of conservatism in the post-war decades, ideals of femininity were largely restored to the realm of the home, and model masculinity generally reclaimed the work-a-day world.

The mid-twentieth century was a reactionary era that worked to calm and counteract what McCullers’s Frankie describes as the “spinning views of war and distant lands” that left the previous decade “loose and cracked and turning a thousand miles an hour” (McCullers 71). The years after World War II “became an age of authority, in the

hope that authority would set the country back in balance” (Faderman 139). Congruently, “[i]f political conformity was essential to national security, sexual [and gender] conformity came to be considered, by some mystifying twist of logic by those in authority, as no less essential ” (Faderman 140). Though the intensified focus on and enforcement of “normalcy” that followed the chaos and uncertainty of the 1940s pushed non-normative gender performances out of mainstream American culture, it far from eliminated their existence. Abate suggests as much, noting that,

[I]n the same way that the Cold War era was politically bifurcated by U.S. democracy and Soviet communism, tomboy culture was split into mainstream and countercultural forms. ... While the 1950s are commonly considered a period of moral wholesomeness and sexual repression, they were also a time of dissident desires and alternative value systems. (170, 171)

Reflecting the era’s “bifurcated” atmosphere, Lee’s novel walks a fine line between “mainstream” conservatism and “countercultural” subversion. The text’s beauty is born of its ability to elicit disparate readings with regards to Scout’s acculturation into the world of femininity. While some critics read Scout’s submission to Aunt Alexandra’s womanly influence as a curtsy to the social ideal of the southern belle, others identify Scout’s incomplete adoption of the southern model of femininity and resulting liminality to be a rejection of the popular process of taming adolescent tomboys and a nod to a future that resists the conservatism of southern tradition. The following analysis adopts the latter view to argue that Lee uses the tomboy character, Scout, to critique not only the

rigid sex/gender system of the U. S South but also the South's dominant racial and class structures.

Like McCullers's Frankie, Scout's juvenile age and non-normative gender performance afford her a certain in-between-ness that is unique to adolescent tomboys. Scout's liminality by virtue of her position on the cusp of adolescence is key, as Lee constructs her character to be highly malleable and receptive to outside influences, particularly those of the adult world, which bombard Scout from many directions. She "absorbs, and learns from, everything that happens around her" (Fine, "Structuring" 76). Holly Blackford proposes, "Scout is actually an architecture or even an archeology of Maycomb voices and social roles: she is a microcosm of Maycomb because of the diverse parenting she receives there" (Blackford 171). And as Fine suggests, "Harper Lee fills her novel with examples of acceptable breakings of boundaries, codes or laws, and these violations set the stage for Scout's own boundary breaking" ("Structuring" 64).

Unlike McCullers's novel with its open-ended closing, in which readers are left to do what they may with Frankie's future, Lee allows the reader brief glimpses of Scout as an adult.⁵ As Seidel argues, "[T]he narrator recalls the story of herself as a child some thirty years earlier," and it is through Scout's adult eyes that Lee illuminates how those adult influences construct Scout's identity as "one who is not a southern belle, ... not a bigot, ... not violent" (79). From these adult examples, we see how Scout explores not only a sense of gender identity but also her place within and, eventually, beyond her community. Parallel to her exploration of gender identity, Lee portrays Scout's formation of her own guiding principles. Seidel writes, "Scout must grow from innocence to maturity but her innocence is sharply defined by tendencies which if developed could

lead her to becoming the worst type of Southerner with the worst prejudices and behaviors—a member of the mob rather than a member of the good” (81). By conflating non-normative gender performance with moral fortitude, Lee critiques the South’s hegemonic social structures of race and class. She suggests that if a character can defy the codes that dictate “normal” gender performance, he or she may also be able to reject the traditions of racial and socioeconomic prejudices that sustain the rigid social hierarchy of the Deep South. Ethical judgment of social injustices, then, affords Lee’s characters a sense of liminality similar to that of Frankie’s tomboyism. The same fluidity that allows them to cross boundaries of socially constructed gender performances offers a liminality that enables them to reject codified social boundaries of race and class that are deeply rooted in Southern heritage.

“Can’t you take up sewin’ or somethin’?”

Scout’s hometown of Maycomb, Alabama, is steeped in the codes and traditions of the American South—gender being chief among them; “[Scout] is a southerner and southerners have conventional beliefs regarding their upper-class women” (Seidel 80). As Scout describes her hometown, she notes, “[s]omehow, it was hotter then. . . . Men’s stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before nine, after their three-o’clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum” (Lee 6). Similarly, she depicts Sunday afternoons: “Sunday was the day for formal afternoon visiting: ladies wore corsets, men wore coats, children wore shoes” (11). In Scout’s portrayal of Maycomb, gendered conventions are at the forefront of her awareness. Protocols for the expectations of “men” and “ladies” are starkly delineated by the dress considered appropriate for each gender. Despite Maycomb’s deeply rooted

southern heritage, Scout encounters a number of adults who reject—both subtly and overtly—the traditional performances of the masculine/feminine gender binary, which, as Richards suggests, is indicative of how Lee intends to portray “how rarely normative gender is *ever* performed” (120).

As Scout doesn’t have any memory of her mother, the most immediate influences in the formation of her identity and behaviors are her older brother, Jem, and her father, Atticus. Much to the chagrin of Mrs. Dubose, the Finches’ “wrathful” and “vicious” neighbor, Scout’s unconventional family structure lacks traditionally feminine influence (132, 133). As Abate suggests, “[w]hether the absence of a mother stems from a physical or psychological source, it is seen as the cause or impetus for tomboyism in many narratives” (xix). Mrs. Dubose offers her unsolicited opinion that “it was quite a pity” that Atticus hadn’t remarried to provide his children with a mother figure and that “it was heartbreaking the way [he] let her children run wild” (133). In her critique of the Finches’ family arrangement, Mrs. Dubose reinforces the patriarchal structure that positions the male as the breadwinner and the female as the caregiver and draws moral value from adherence to that structure. Additionally, she overtly attributes the children to the mother with possessive pronouns, suggesting that, though she has passed away and Atticus is their father and guardian, the Finch children are somehow not his, but only “hers.”

Many of the masculine habits that substantiate Scout’s tomboyism are born of her tendency to emulate her brother and father. As Ware suggests, “she looks to Jem and Atticus as her guides to appropriate behavior” concerning both her gender performance and her understanding of morals and ethical principles (286). Aware of Scout’s eventual entrance into adolescence and the associated societal expectations for young ladies to

adopt the behaviors of the southern belle, Atticus and his sister, Scout's Aunt Alexandra, decide, "it would be best for [Scout] to have some feminine influence," which Aunt Alexandra would provide (170). The extent to which Atticus's opinion is included in this decision is questionable, however. Scout notes that when Aunt Alexandra advises Atticus on raising his daughter, he "either forgot it or gave [Scout] hell, whichever struck his fancy" (107). As such, Aunt Alexandra, with her "uncompromising lineaments," enters Scout's world and, alongside Jem and Atticus, contributes to the shaping of Scout's gender identity (77).

As Scout's older brother and primary playmate, Jem is crucial in Scout's development of her gender identity. He both reinforces and destabilizes the binary poles of masculinity and femininity. And though he outwardly privileges masculinity over femininity, he also exhibits certain features that undermine his adherence to normative masculinity. In their play, Jem rejects femininity outright. He tells Scout "girls always imagined things, that's why other people hated them so" (54). He also takes offense when his own masculinity is threatened. Dill is able to exert control over him when he threatens, "You're scared" (16). Jem's fear of being perceived as cowardly and, by association, feminine, is enough to persuade him to test his limits at the Radley house. It is from Jem that Scout learns to detest being called a girl; he adopts the term as a pejorative slur and uses it on numerous occasions with Scout as his target. Scout notes that "on pain of being called a girl," she bows out of some of Jem and Dill's "more foolhardy schemes" (55). Jem's tendency to privilege masculinity over femininity is a reflection of the social atmosphere in Maycomb. It's likely that he's learned to value masculinity from his community and from his peers. That he passes that systematic

privileging on to his sister illustrates the ease with which the discourse is perpetuated. By Jem's example, Scout has no reason to value femininity and essentially knows it as only an insult: "After one altercation when Jem hollered, 'It's time you started bein' a girl and acting right!' I burst into tears and fled to Calpurnia" (153).

Jem is four years older than Scout and closer to adolescence than she is, but both her understanding of the world and her maturity largely mirror Jem; he works to educate her in the ways of society as he acquires his own understanding of it. They share in their liminal position as youngsters beginning their acculturation to adolescence and adulthood. As Jem gradually adopts a more mature version of masculinity—a version reminiscent of Atticus—he sets an example for Scout by loosening his grip on the socially constructed and bifurcated division between masculinity and femininity. Following his father's example of non-violence and logical thinking, Jem eventually, like Atticus, helps to shape Scout's gender identity without the conflict exacted by socially constructed categories of masculinity and femininity. Scout is aware of Jem's maturation and shifting values but is not entirely accustomed to it. After, in a show of mature compassion and calculated logic, he stops her from smashing a "roly-poly," Scout proclaims, "Jem was the one who was getting more like a girl every day, not I" (320). Jem's character, however, serves as an example of a successful amalgamation of masculine and feminine features. The undercurrent of principles inherent in Jem's motivation for stopping Scout from senselessly killing an insect signals Lee's association of ethical judgment and goodness with those characters who reject the dominant social discourse—in this case of gender—and refuse to perpetuate its damaging effects.

Atticus, an unquestionably patriarchal figure, rejects the gendered norms of heteronormative, patriarchal society in both his own performance of gender and in the values he instills in his children. Atticus, as a single parent, snubs the socially constructed ideal of a nuclear family made up of a mother figure and a father figure and, instead, simply works to “do the best [he] can” with his children (108). Though he is a model parent and citizen, Atticus does not subscribe to the heteronormative model of masculinity. Lee, in using a traditionally patriarchal figure to subvert patriarchal norms, undermines the validity of social structures that privilege masculinity and heteronormativity. Scout and Jem recount how Atticus was “feeble,” “didn’t do anything [their] schoolmates’ fathers did,” and “was too old” so he “sat in the living room and read” (118, 120). They felt his choices in activities “reflected upon his abilities and manliness” (118). However, through his own rejection of normative gender performance, Atticus sets an example for both Scout and Jem that they both come to respect—eventually.

Rather than adopt normative behaviors, Atticus thrives in his uniqueness and he encourages his children to do the same. He, however, recognizes that, for “common folk,” the “law remains rigid” (40). In certain circumstances, though, he permits that, “it’s better to bend the law a little” (40). If we take “the law” to mean socially constructed norms, then Atticus is suggesting that it is, at times, necessary to conform to social standards. He allows, though, that there are times—“special cases”—when it is ok to reject those standards; for example, when the institution enforcing those laws is unfairly regulatory and illogical. He imparts this knowledge when Scout’s schoolteacher scolds her for having learned to read at home. Atticus, in a deal with Scout, agrees to continue

reading with her under the condition that she “not say anything at school about [their] agreement” (42). Atticus sees value in teaching his daughter to read but, for the sake of getting along in school, he encourages her to, at the least, appear to submit to her teacher’s wishes—to adhere to “the law.” In his lesson to Scout about compromise, Atticus establishes the notion of performance as a means of functioning within society’s regulatory frame. He recognizes that Scout’s time in school will be much smoother if she presents a performance that appears to bow to hegemonic structure while there. But he also teaches her that there is no need to allow those structures to hold authority over her when they are not necessary for her survival. Atticus takes a similar approach to gender performance.

Aunt Alexandra arrives in Scout’s world to “force Scout’s tomboyishness into sharp relief” (Richards 123). She subscribes to the ideal of the southern lady that she attempts to impart to Scout: “Aunt Alexandra rose and smoothed the various whalebone ridges along her hips. She took her handkerchief from her belt and wiped her nose. She patted her hair and said, ‘Do I show it?’” (317). As Butler suggests, “[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (*Gender* 33). Here, Aunt Alexandra’s character is literally confined to the “rigid regulatory frame” of the whalebone ridges in her corseted dress. She is outwardly concerned with her physical appearance and anxious to conceal any vestiges of emotional distress. Her outward presentation takes priority for her character. Scout perceives the constricting nature of performed femininity as Aunt Alexandra presents it. She notes,

“[t]oday was Sunday and Aunt Alexandra was positively irritable on the Lord’s Day. I guess it was her corset” (170).

As Richards notes, Lee “draws attention to such transgressive performances [of gender] through alterity to normative ones, such as those of Aunt Alexandra, and by overt communal demands for gender conformity” (120). While Scout is subject to Aunt Alexandra’s parroting of “communal demands” regarding gender performance, Aunt Alexandra’s own gender performance is not entirely normative, nor does she fully embody the “lingering representatives of the antebellum Slave-owning South and undeniable racists,” as Richards would suggest (129). In agreeing to stay at the Finch home “[f]or a while,” which, according to Scout, “in Maycomb meant anything from three days to thirty years,” Aunt Alexandra chooses to leave her husband and her participation in a heteronormative, patriarchal structure behind, a detail not overlooked by Scout and Jem (169).⁶ Additionally, contradicting the racist remarks of her fellow ladies, Aunt Alexandra expresses sympathy for Atticus in the aftermath of the Robinson trial. She acknowledges that the people of the town are “perfectly willing to let [Atticus] do what they’re too afraid to do themselves” (316). In a moment of camaraderie after an uncharacteristic show of emotion at the news of Tom Robinson’s death, Aunt Alexandra, Miss Maudie, and Scout compose themselves before joining “the ladies” (317). It is a curious juxtaposition of the novel’s most stringent enforcer of conventional gender performance, with the two characters most likely to treat gender as just that—a performance. In a similarly uncharacteristic moment after Mr. Ewell’s attack and Boo’s subsequent rescue, Aunt Alexandra offers Scout a pair of overalls for comfort. Scout recalls, “She brought me something to put on, and had I thought about it then, I would

never have let her forget it: in her distraction, Aunty brought me my overalls[,] ... the garments she most despised” (354). Aunt Alexandra’s character functions as an example of the superficiality of normative gender performance—an example that Scout can readily see. Lee suggests that, underneath her southern belle façade, there is a morally good individual. From her movement away from the rigidly racist outlook of her feminine peers to the instance in which she offers Scout a pair of overalls for comfort, she illustrates the performative nature of ideal southern femininity; she can move in and out of its structure as the situation allows. Given that these instances take place later in the novel, perhaps Lee is signaling an Atticus-like faith in the fundamental goodness of Aunt Alexandra’s character. The time she spends with Atticus, Scout, and Jem—all non-normative gender performers in their own right—begins to erode her grasp on the performance of ideal southern femininity.

Miss Maudie, the Finches’ neighbor of whose yard the Finch children have “free run,” offers her own kind of “transgressive” parental guidance as Scout is gradually excluded from the boys’ play (Lee 55, Richards 120). Scout notes that, “[u]ntil Jem and Dill excluded [her] from their plans, [Miss Maudie] was only another lady in the neighborhood” (56). However, as Scout begins to spend “twilights ... sitting with Miss Maudie Atkinson on her front porch,” she finds Miss Maudie is not just “another lady” of Maycomb (55). Her rejection from the boys’ play by virtue of her gender introduces her to the complexity of Miss Maudie’s character. For Scout, Miss Maudie represents the most approachable representation of womanhood. She describes her as “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” (56). Her deftness with gender performance fascinates Scout and further represents Lee’s notion of gender performance as a means to an end or a process of survival. She “indeed has constructed a public identity contingent upon adroit manipulations of such performances” (Richards 132). Lee presents Miss Maudie in sharp contrast to the ladies of the missionary circle, who “anthropomorphize presumptively biological gender most acutely” (Halpern 755). In the juxtaposition of Miss Maudie amongst their ranks, “Lee stresses the performative aspects of their practices” (Halpern 755). Miss Maudie, like Scout, crosses boundaries of gender and sets the example of a practice that Scout can carry into adulthood if she acquires a similar dexterity in her performance. Miss Maudie’s value is established as she defends Boo Radley, rejects the “interpolated racism” of the missionary ladies, and fiercely upholds Atticus as a town hero for his work in defending Tom Robinson (Halpern 155). Her character functions not only to reinforce the nature of gender as a strategic performance—conform when you must; do as you will the rest of the time—but also, she, like Atticus, underscores the link between ethical judgment, inherent goodness, and non-normative gender performance.

“It’s not necessary to tell all you know”

Fine notes the “radical” nature of Lee’s novel is partially due to the fact that it “so resolutely indicted the racist patriarchal society of the small southern town” (“Structuring” 75). Lee overtly rejects the rampant racism of southern tradition by challenging the stereotypes of African Americans in the 1930s South. Rather than associating the race with darkness and Otherness, as is a common literary trope, she instead constructs them as morally respectable members of the Maycomb community and regards them more highly than many of their white counterparts. Fred Erisman

illuminates Lee's view of the American South: "On the one hand she sees the South as still in the grips of traditions and habits. ... On the other hand, she argues that the South has within itself the potential for progressive change" (133). Additionally, Erisman notes, "if, as she suggests, the South can exchange its old romanticism for the new, it can modify its life to bring justice and humanity to all its inhabitants, black and white alike" (133).

Scout and Jem's escapades in building Maycomb's snowman reflect Lee's hopeful but necessarily wary views of racial relations in the South. The snowman Scout and Jem construct crosses boundaries of both race and gender, illustrating not only the constructedness of socially defined categories of identity but also the intersectionality of racial and gendered prejudices. As Scout and Jem form the base of their snowman out of mud, for lack of adequate snowfall, Jem reassures Scout that "[h]e won't be black for long," for it is only a coating of snow that differentiates the snowman as black or white (89). As the snowman begins to take shape it first looks like Stephanie Crawford, then Mr. Avery, then, with the addition of Miss Maudie's hat and tools, "an absolute morphodite" (91). Atticus praises Jem's resourcefulness and ingenuity in constructing the snowman, indicating that he approves of his rejection of the bifurcating nature of racial relations in the South. Atticus says to Jem, "from now on I'll never worry about what'll become of you, son, you'll always have an idea" (90). However, as fire engulfs Miss Maudie's home, the snowman "[goes] black and crumble[s]," representing Lee's understanding that the community doesn't yet share Atticus and Jem's anti-racist views (94). Though Jem and Scout represent a glimmer of hope, the fiery flames of prejudice have yet to be quelled in Maycomb's community, as Lee later reveals in the Tom

Robinson trial.⁷ Lee's commingling of gender and race in the snowman's kaleidoscopic appearance, however, reveals how both race and gender are "the products of diverse institutional pressures and histories, as well as personal agency in different contexts" (Halpern 749).

Like Miss Maudie, Calpurnia illustrates the performed nature of her social identity. Starkly aware of the position afforded to her by hierarchical systems of both gender and race, Calpurnia represents a character that, conscious of her marginalized existence, makes the best of her situation and uses performances to resist social forces intent on Othering her. Calpurnia evinces her awareness of and dexterity with performance when she invites Scout and Jem to attend church with her one Sunday. Lee underscores Calpurnia's position as a racial Other by emphasizing the segregated nature of the churches; her church is distinct from the Finches' church despite her being very much a part of the Finch family. Calpurnia suggests, "How'd you and Mister Jem like to come to church with me tomorrow" (156). Pointing to her awareness of and participation in socially constructed prescriptions for appropriate gender performance, Calpurnia spends extra time cleaning and dressing Scout and Jem as they get ready to accompany her to church. Scout, dressed in a heavily starched dress, petticoat, and sash with shined shoes and Jem in a suit and tie wonder as to the occasion. "It's like were goin' to Mardi Gras," Jem wonders (157). Calpurnia replies, "I don't want anybody sayin' I don't look after my children" (157). Acutely aware of the way society makes judgments based on appearances, Calpurnia enforces societal norms for the sake of her own reputation. In contrast, when around the home, Calpurnia has little to say about Scout's gender presentation. Lee, in linking Mardi Gras with Scout's feminine dress and Jem's

masculine tie, further associates socially prescribed normative gender performance with a sort of costumed play.

Further, Calpurnia embodies a more morally sound image of southern femininity than do the ladies who subscribe to socially constructed ideals of femininity. Atticus entrusts the upbringing of his children to her care and fiercely defends her and her ability to do so to Aunt Alexandra (209). In illuminating both Calpurnia's goodness and the darkness of her skin in contrast to the notably white missionary ladies' racist and judgmental ways, Lee rejects the southern tradition of using fair skin as an indicator of ethical principles. In the case of Calpurnia, Lee flips the traditional hierarchy to favor the dark in the light/dark binary.

The Ewells further substantiate Lee's rejection of the traditional binary. Though they are members of the white community by virtue of their skin color, Scout describes them as less human than other citizens of Maycomb, including African Americans—a reversal of the traditional southern prejudices of the 1930s: "they were people, but they lived like animals" (40). In discussing the Ewell family with Scout, Atticus details how the Ewells "were members of an exclusive society," further highlighting the distinction between them and the rest of the community (40-41). It is their lack of ethical principles that demarcates their "exclusive society." Bob Ewell rejects the law, often resorts to physical force, and rapes his daughter and instead blames Tom Robinson, an African American man who had been trying to help the family. Though through his racism and his familial heritage he embodies traditional southern ideals of masculinity, Bob Ewell is described as "absolute trash" (164).

Lee, however, does not conflate the poor with the immoral. The Cunninghams, too, are poor, white members of the Maycomb community. But the Cunninghams do not stoop to the lawlessness of the Ewells, which garners them a society of their own. The Cunninghams “are country folks, farmers, and the crash hit them the hardest,” as Atticus explains (27). He and the community of Maycomb respect that Mr. Cunningham pays for goods and services as he can and Calpurnia counsels Scout to see beyond socioeconomic position and recognize that they are just as human as she is. Scout says of Walter Cunningham, “he’s just a Cunningham,” as if he shouldn’t garner the respect of her other peers (33). But Calpurnia scolds her, saying it “[d]on’t matter who they are, anybody sets foot in this house’s yo’s company” (33).

In Calpurnia, the Ewells, and the Cunninghams, Lee rejects the traditional southern social hierarchy that privileges its members by means of race and class but also by normative gender performance. Calpurnia cannot physically embody the fairness of the southern belle but serves as a moral guide to Jem and Scout. Mr. Cunningham, though illustrated as distinctly poor, still adheres to the gentlemanly code of honor by paying his debts in the most honest ways he can. Bob Ewell, who most stringently adheres to the codes of southern masculinity, is portrayed as so lacking principles that he rapes his daughter. It is his lack of ethical judgment that constitutes Bob Ewell’s Otherness, not his socioeconomic status. And it is Calpurnia’s and the Cunninghams’ adherence to principles of goodness and honor that affords them equal footing regardless of class or race. In her portrayals of these characters, Lee erases socially constructed categories of race and class and replaces them with boundaries established by the presence of inherent goodness. In this way, she illuminates the superficiality of the traditional southern social

hierarchies and reestablishes one that privileges honor rather than identity categories based on arbitrarily constructed hierarchical systems of race or class.

“I began to think there was some skill involved in being a girl”

Lee presents Scout with numerous examples of both normative and non-normative gender performance. In doing so, she also offers Scout a variety of examples of ethical judgment. Lee’s portrayals of non-normative gender performance are strongly aligned with the most ethical of characters. In doing so, Lee privileges those characters that recognize the performative nature of gender and associates them with the capacity to make independent ethical judgments. While gender may be a performance, an understanding of and respect for principles of humanity is not. Atticus’ lesson to Scout mirrors Lee’s to the reader. He gives Scout a “simple trick” to “get along better with all kinds of folks,” in which he says, “[y]ou never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view ... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it” (39). Atticus’ advice illuminates the nature of performed identities but also the need to recognize the humanity in “all kinds of folks.”

Chapter 3: “Lord, You Were a Strange Thing!”: Bone Boatwright Resists

Categorization in Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina*

In the decades leading up to the turn of the twenty-first century, cultural and societal shifts including the “gradual erosion of essentialist views of gender” meant it had become common practice for women to wear pants, enter the civilian and military workforce, and play sports (Abate xxiii). Those and other activities previously deemed strictly masculine and, thus, indicative of tomboyism, no longer explicitly negated femininity. However, “societal tolerance for [tomboyism] changes” when a community “[deems] a certain form of tomboyishness more ‘natural’ or ‘normative,’” causing “increased stigmatization” for the less favorable forms (Abate xxiii). Thus, the divide between “mainstream” and “countercultural” tomboyism that was initially established mid-century and championed by psychologists and earlier sexologists widened. So, while tomboyism was seen as “a very common phase through which little girls would pass on their way to the safe harbor of domestic femininity,” it was still just that—a phase expected to give way to the contemporary brand of womanhood (O’Brien qtd. in Abate xix). Associating tomboy “‘masculinity’ with her ‘inappropriate’ sexual drive” implied “a supposed correlation between ‘masculinity’ and female same-sex love” (Faderman 41,42). The growth of feminism, the LGBTQ movement, and queer theory also worked to “strengthen the connection” as “tomboyism went from being seen as an effective preparatory stage for marriage and motherhood to a potential breeding ground for lesbianism” (Abate xxi). Abate asserts, “by the 1990s, the association of tomboyism with lesbianism had become so pervasive that many began to see this code of conduct as a firm indicator of, or at least an adolescent precursor to, homosexuality” (xxi).

Tomboyism in childhood was seen as “natural” and “normative” while tomboyism that bled into adulthood drew social ostracism, which established the non-normative tomboy as distinctly Other.

Foucault describes the power dynamics that are inherent in the systematic labeling and categorization produced by social discourses. As Moira Baker explains, “[t]his form of power seeks to regulate behavior by ‘categoriz[ing] the individual,’ thereby attaching to him or her an identity that he or she accepts and others recognize, an identity intended to regulate behavior” (“Resistance” 23). Inherent in categorization is a hierarchical systemization. As J. Brooks Bouson notes, “those who are stigmatized as different or those who fail to meet social standards of success are made to feel inferior, deficient, or both” (101). As Frankie and Scout illustrate, non-normative gender performance by means of tomboyism places them outside of the normative and privileged categories of masculinity and femininity. In Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina*, the narrator Bone is also marginalized by the categories of identity thrust onto her. Allison suggests, “[c]lass, race, sexuality, gender—and all the other categories by which we categorize and dismiss each other—need to be excavated from the inside” (“Question” 35). With Bone, Allison does just that, using her tomboy narrator to critique the systemic injustices created by these categories.

“Lord, you were a strange thing,” Uncle Earle muses to Bone in the early pages of Dorothy Allison’s seminal novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina*; “you are the strangest girl-child we got” (27). Ruth Anne “Bone” Boatwright, Allison’s pre-adolescent, tomboy protagonist, is situated on the fringes of her family and her community. Her strangeness, as Uncle Earle designates it, is compounded by her tendency towards non-normative

gender performance, her “embattled sexuality,” her social position as defined by her family’s economic status, and her racial standing as a “white-trash bastard”—all of which serve to establish her character as distinctly “other” amongst her community, her peers, and her extended and immediate family (Baker, “Resistance” 23). As Klusakova suggests, “tomboyism operates as a subversive element undermining the idea of fixed and clear-cut identity categories” (39). Additionally, “gender non-conformity disturbs racial, class, and sexual stability, and makes the tomboy into a liminal figure operating between binarized identity poles” (39). Through Bone, Allison offers her reader a glimpse of “the complex subjectivity of persons who must endure the contempt” of their own community (Baker, “Politics” 117). Allison employs Bone’s character as a critique of systematic Othering by means of gender, sexual, class, and race ideologies. By constructing Bone as a tomboy Other, Allison affords Bone a unique perspective on the means by which these ideologies intersect and systematically marginalize people.

“Why, you look like our Bone, girl”

When we meet Ruth Anne “Bone” Boatwright in Greenville, South Carolina, in 1955, Allison establishes Bone as categorically Other from birth (17). Her birth certificate is marked with “the red stamp on the bottom,” which labels her a bastard and sets the stage for a childhood in which Bone seeks to reject the categorizations of gender, sexuality, race, and class that society uses to define her existence. In the opening pages of the novel, Allison illustrates how, from day one of her life, Bone’s identity is constructed for her by forces over which she has no control.

It is the “dynamic coalescence of all facets—her sexuality, as well as gender, race, and class—which positions Bone at the very margin of the southern community”

(Klusakova 41). Bone's categories of identity are not strictly polarized, however. They are connected, and they intersect to inform Bone's sense of self. Her label as a bastard is intertwined with her identity as "white-trash;" her racial history is tied to her socio-economic status; all of which contribute to her tomboyism, which, in turn, establishes her as distinctly Other and places her on the edges of society, between categorical definitions of identity.⁸

In addition to Foucault's notions of power in terms of its relationship to categorization, Butler's theories provide a frame within which to examine Bone's gender identity as non-normative and thus something that defines her as Other. Like Frankie and Scout, Bone refuses to submit to traditional categories of masculinity and femininity; she subverts society's expectations for the behavior associated with both categories. Butler defines gender as, "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (33). The "highly rigid regulatory frame" is the socially constructed concept of masculine and feminine behaviors and the "repeated stylization of the body" is the physical performance of the social constructions of one or both of those categories. The "appearance of substance," then, becomes the performer's gender as received by society. Thus, Bone's gender is perceived by society as non-normative because she adopts characteristics of both masculine and feminine categories.

Allison displays Bone's struggle with conforming to normative gender identities as she approaches adolescence. In establishing Bone's tomboyism, Allison focuses heavily on and draws numerous parallels between both Bone's physical appearance and her personality and her lesbian Aunt Raylene's penchant for pushing against the

boundaries of the community, potentially suggesting that Bone is to follow in Raylene's footsteps. While Raylene wears trousers as often as she does skirts and "moved as easily and gracefully as a young boy" (180), Bone, too, falls into the habit of wearing jeans to school and wishes she "were bigger, wider, stronger" (109), to the extent that she says, "I wished I was a boy" (109). Allison employs blurred gender boundaries to establish Bone as Other, which causes issues for Bone in a southern society that isn't always particularly accepting of those who don't adhere to gendered expectations. Though not a universal or totalizing account of the American South, it can however, be said that certain aspects of southern culture tend to produce a "mythologized, planter-class world imbued with racism and misogyny" (Howard 5). That is to say, tradition rules strong in the South, particularly with regard to traditionally binarized gender roles and racial attitudes, according to John Howard in his study of Lesbian and Gay history in the South.

Bone's position as a lower class, "white-trash bastard" compounds her position as an Other on the edges of society. Her tendency towards tomboyism directly contrasts with the traditions of the southern middle-class woman that is privileged with societal acceptance because of her adherence to the categorical expectations associated with her gender performance. According to Klusakova, the notion of "tomboyism as gender transgression has a special relevance, as it is inherently set against another institution—southern white middle-class womanhood" (38). As Klusakova notes, "the tomboy is seen as crossing the barrier between traditional femininity and masculinity, preferring boys' attire and activities to girls' ones, whatever these may be at the time" (37).

For Bone, her gender is a limiting and conflict-laden factor. She notes, "What men did was just what men did. Some days I would grind my teeth and wish I had been

born a boy” (Allison, *Bastard* 23). Allison constructs Bone as a tomboy, in part, in that she rejects patriarchal notions of binary gender roles. Bone sees the privilege afforded to men by virtue of their masculinity and she attempts to claim that privilege for herself by “resist[ing] subjection to mutually reinforcing class and gender ideologies that define her as trash because she is both woman and poor” (Baker, “Politics” 117). The men in the Boatwright family, however, are “philandering, alcoholic, ineffective husbands and fathers” and are poor models of masculinity and adulthood (Horvitz 244). Bone’s female role models, too, leave much to be desired as they have “so internalized patriarchal norms” that they believe “that their life is incomplete without a male lover, that their ultimate validation comes from bearing children to their husbands, and that they are nothing without a man” (Baker, “Politics” 121). Bone’s Aunt Raylene is the exception to the rule and the family member with whom Bone most closely identifies: “She had always lived out past city limits” and she was able to provide for herself (Allison, *Bastard* 178).

Notions of immodesty, inappropriateness, and general un-ladylikeness of tomboyism beyond adolescence are evident in contemporary references to tomboys, particularly so in the cultural phenomenon of “tomboy taming.” Tomboy taming is the insinuation that tomboyism is a phase to be grown out of by the time a girl reaches adolescence, which suggests that while “the nation may value strength, independence and assertiveness in young girls, it does not esteem such qualities in adult women” (Abate xix). Daddy Glen’s character is the primary force which Bone must resist as he imposes “tomboy taming” on her to enforce social constructs of masculinity and femininity. He warns her, “Don’t run like that. ... You’re a girl not a racehorse” (106). In resisting

Daddy Glen, Bone works against the normalizing forces of patriarchal society. She rejects notions that girls should be fragile, obedient, and confined to the home.

Bone has “little use for conventional ‘girl’ behavior” and her participation in the “standards for proper behavior result in the elevation of males over females” (Fine 123, 124). Bone’s tendency to adopt masculine characteristics is, at first, a desire for the social standing of men. But later, it becomes a means of survival as her position as a tomboy “other” conspicuously associates her with her Aunt Raylene. Raylene is an example of a character that maintains tomboyism into adulthood and experiences the social consequences of such behavior. She eventually becomes Bone’s means for not only survival but also the promise of recovery from sexual abuse at the hands of Daddy Glen and from stigmatization as a “white trash bastard.” As Baker suggests, “It is Raylene who carves out the ‘lesbian space of resistance’ within which Ruth Anne (Bone) Boatwright ... begins to construct a positive identity as a working-class woman” (Baker “Resistance” 23).

“Hellfire. We an’t like nobody else in the world”

Raylene is Other in many of the same ways Bone is Other. Allison aligns Bone with Raylene to offer her a role model that successfully rejects the categorizations that Bone works to resist. As Baker suggests, “Raylene quite pointedly redefines gender, class, and sexual ideologies for herself and for Bone” (“Politics” 123). Bone muses, “[n]o Matter what Mama said, I knew that it wasn’t just because of where she lived that I had never spent much time with Aunt Raylene. For all she was a Boatwright woman, there were ways Raylene had always been different from her sisters” (178). Despite her

mother's attempts to keep Bone away from Raylene, when Ruth abandons Bone for her abuser, Daddy Glen, Raylene becomes her surrogate parent.

At the end of the novel, Allison allows Bone's future to remain ambiguous, which allows the reader to construct his or her own narrative for Bone, as she becomes an adult. Carr's notion of adolescence as the formation of adult identity explains the tendency towards a strict adherence to social constructions of adult gender expectations. Allison's permission of Bone's character to retain her gender ambiguity in the care of Raylene in the final pages of the novel indicates her rejection of the notion of an inherent relinquishing of tomboy characteristics upon reaching adolescence and a rejection of "tomboy taming" as described by Halberstam. The assumption that the maturation of a female adolescent means the adoption of feminine characteristics is the most commonly conceded reasoning for relinquishing the tomboy persona. As Halberstam notes, "Lesbianism has long been associated with female masculinity and female masculinity in turn has been figured undesirable by linking it in essential and unquestionable ways to female ugliness" which contributes to the social tendency towards tomboy taming (2650). The social implication of adult tomboyism is typically an assumption of lesbianism, which carries a social stigma. As Miller suggests, "tomboys occupied a contradictory, in-between status" (27). And as Carr found, "[p]resumptions of childhood sexual innocence may protect the 'tomboy' from the stigma of many other masculine or androgynous tags;" however, upon reaching adolescence, that protection is often lost, as heterosexual women lack "the benefits of gendered identifications such as 'butch' and 'dyke,' which have been reclaimed in some lesbian and bisexual communities" (446). That is, being associated with tomboyism past adolescence implies lesbianism. And, while relevant in

the case of Raylene, the implied lesbianism is not necessarily applicable to Bone. Though it does seem that Allison employs Bone—and Raylene, as well—as a means of subverting traditional negative connotations associated with tomboyism that bleeds into adulthood. Raylene is the Boatwright woman who refuses to remain trapped in a patriarchal household, instead choosing to support herself by repurposing the trash and debris that floats in the river by her home and selling it by the roadside along with “selling her home-canned fruits and vegetables” (18).

Social constructions of girlhood categorically do not include discussions of their sexuality or sexual desires. The notion that Bone has, is aware of, and discusses her sexual desires completely subverts the traditional notion of what a young girl should be considering. Bone’s “embattled sexuality” also works to highlight her Otherness as Allison “articulates ... the violent masochistic, masturbatory, thoroughly queer sexual desire” of Bone’s childhood (Baker, “Resistance” 23). However, if, as Baker proposes, “Bone’s sexuality is masochistic, perverse, ‘queer,’ it is her own, wrenched from her painful experience of violence, transformed by the power of her will” (“Resistance” 26). That is, even if Bone’s sexual identity is Other, it is very much her own, born of the abuse she survives.

Bone is not only conscious of divisions of identity categories in society, but within her own family, as well: she repeatedly acknowledges how, even in her immediate family, she is the outsider; she considers on numerous occasions that Daddy Glen, Mama, and Reese function fine as a family and that it is her own presence that upsets the balance, as it were. Illustratively, in the closing paragraphs, Allison describes Bone’s forays into grappling with the trauma that she experiences: “I wanted my life back, my

mama, but I knew I would never have that. The child I had been was gone with the child she had been. We were new people and we didn't know each other anymore" (307). It is here that Bone seems to solidify her notions of her own Otherness, conceding, "I was already who I was going to be" (309), that she would be some combination of her Mama, her aunts, and distinctly a Boatwright woman, which, given the family's history and standing in the community, despite the clean birth certificate, would forever mark her as an outsider. Bone, however, finds strength in her position as a Boatwright woman, even if it does confine her to the fringes of socially constructed ideologies of gender, sexuality, class, and race. As Baker notes, "By the end of the novel, Allison suggests that the private, oppositional discourse spoken among the Boatwright kinswomen empowers Bone to resist such labels as 'bastard' and 'white-trash'" (Baker, "Resistance" 24).

Though her surname serves to position her as Other her within her community, Bone's relationship with the women in her family becomes her means of recovering. Saxey suggests, "For the bastard lesbian protagonist, the choice often arises between aligning herself with a higher authority—her parents, dominant social discourses such as religion or biology—or, alternatively, critiquing and overturning such authority" (Saxey 35). Allison depicts Bone as offering a critique, if not entirely overturning authority. Bone does not particularly conform to the gendered stereotypes of southern femininity, and Allison implies that it is under the care of Raylene—whom the text both implies and confirms to be a lesbian—that Bone will be raised. Allison's implication is that Bone is better off in Raylene's charge because she is in opposition to the dominant heteropatriarchal discourse on the family. Saxey also examines the ways in which "[w]omen and bastards are prevented from holding or bestowing power" and the ways an

author may “use bastardy as a metaphor for their deprivation and exclusion, not solely from financial inheritance but also from inheriting the privileges of men in general” (Saxey 34). It is through Bone’s bastardy along with myriad other factors, including her class, gender, and sexuality, that Allison establishes Otherness and, subsequently, lack of power. Saxey suggests,

The family name is the marker of an oppressive system privileging legitimate offspring. This intersects with the experience of young lesbians in relation to naming. Names and labels for same-sex desire (such as ‘lesbian’, ‘queer’, ‘dyke’) provide meaning for otherwise unintelligible feelings, but also often hold negative associations. (Saxey 36)

Bone’s relationship with her family name is multi-faceted; it associates her with her family’s reputation but, ironically, it is ultimately part of her identity and a means whereby she comes to identify herself positively: “ultimately her position as a Boatwright woman—kin to strong, independent women like Granny and Aunt Raylene—is one factor that allows her to survive the abuse” (Baker, “Politics” 121) of Daddy Glen’s physical and sexual assaults but also the mental abuse enacted by her mother in her decision to choose her husband, Daddy Glen, over her daughter.

Primarily, Bone’s tomboyism serves to align her character with Aunt Raylene whose liminal position on the edges of society provides a safe space for Bone to heal and mature into adulthood. Her association with Raylene, the only adult character who maintains tomboy tendencies, also indicates Allison’s rejection of society’s propensity for “tomboy taming” and, as such, “Bone’s untamed tomboyism carries a brighter promise than most other tomboy narratives” (Klusakova 47). That Bone survives and

potentially thrives in Raylene's care on the fringes of society allows Allison to use her character as a critique of the systematic Othering caused by ideologies of gender, sexuality, class, and race.

Though Raylene "always seemed completely comfortable with herself," Bone has work to do in gaining that same level of contentment (182). In situating Bone in Raylene's care at the conclusion of the novel, Allison suggests, though, that it is under Raylene's watch that Bone has the best opportunity to do so. Raylene and Bone, "together on the margins of sexist, homophobic, and elitist society ... carve out a space in the cracks of social institutions" (Baker, "Resistance" 26). Allison recognizes that it is "only Raylene ... [who] successfully resists assimilation to" ideologies of gender, sexuality, class and race and by suggesting that Bone is best suited under the watchful eye of her lesbian Aunt, Allison employs Bone as a critique of each of those ideologies (Baker, "Resistance" 24). Allison's critique of those systems is apparent in that Bone's potential for survival and healing is evident only once she escapes the grip of those ideologies.

"Don't want no trouble with these people"

Allison uses Bone's tomboyism and resulting liminality to subvert the hierarchical structures of both race and class. Race and class are inextricably intertwined in Allison's text. As such, this section will examine the parallel and redundant systems of Othering by means of race and socioeconomic position. Allison aligns Bone with characters defined as racial Other to subvert categorical Othering by means of such arbitrary factors as skin color. Similarly, Allison constructs Bone and her family as undeniably "white trash"—another racialized category--in the eyes of their community. Within that category,

however, Allison works to deconstruct the social discourses that define and perpetuate its existence.

Allison uses African Americans to highlight Bone's status as Other but also to undermine the social category of race. This notion is evidenced when Bone's Aunt Alma leaves her husband, Wade, to strike out on her own. While her family is horrified by the black families that share the apartment complex they temporarily call home, Bone, while visiting, sees herself mirrored in one of the African American children living there. Bone catches the eyes of a girl peering out of a window in the complex:

The face in the window narrowed its eyes. I couldn't tell if it was a boy or a girl—a very pretty boy or a very fierce girl for sure. The cheek-bones were as high as mine, the eyes large and delicate with long lashes, while the mouth was small, the lips puffy as if bee-stung, but not wide. The chocolate skin was so smooth, so polished, the pores invisible. I put my fingers up to my cheeks. (84)

Bone sees many of her own features in the African American girl watching from the window; she notes the girl's ambiguous gender performance but, most specifically, her cheekbones, which were "high as [hers]" (84). Bone identifies herself with the girl in the window and, rather than fearing her as her family does, she instead sees beauty. Notably, Bone notes that her own cousin, in contrast, seemed "almost ugly" (84). The rest of her family sees the girl and her relatives as Other—Grey calls them "niggers" and asserts that they're "scared of us" (83). The contrast between Bone's reaction and that of her family to the African American family highlights the Otherness of African Americans. Bone's connection with the girl in the window, while it serves to highlight her own Otherness,

also works to deconstruct the divisive ideology of race as a system of categorizing and marginalizing people. Bone, a white girl, sees pieces of herself mirrored in an African American girl. By aligning the two characters with such similarities, Allison subverts socially constructed racial ideologies that create hierarchical and oppressive categories based on skin color and other irrelevant characteristics. Allison highlights skin color as an arbitrary and absurd characteristic in that she constructs Bone's perspective in such a way that she sees beyond skin color to find more ways in which she is similar to the African American girl in the window than she is different from her.

Allison briefly illustrates a moment in which Aunt Alma, apart from her children, subtly rejects Othering by means of racial categories in favor of finding a shared identity category. Concurrently, she demonstrates how completely racial and socioeconomic ideologies are entwined. Aunt Alma warns Grey not to "be mean to those kids downstairs," conceding, "she don't want no trouble with these people" (85). Aunt Alma's shifting use of demonstrative pronouns—from "those" to "these"—signifies her recognition of ingroups and outgroups.⁹ While Aunt Alma views the African American children as a racial Other, she recognizes that, by virtue of their mutual existence in the same, low rent apartment complex, she and the African American family are part of an ingroup defined by their socioeconomic position. In this instance, Allison demonstrates the unifying possibilities of deconstructing the hierarchical paradigm of "us versus them."

In her description of the apartment complex to which Aunt Alma chooses to move her children, Allison reveals the interlocked nature of race and class. The complex is located downtown, "with a shaky wide porch hanging off one side," and the neighbors have "shiny brown faces" peering out of the window (83). It is described as "that dirty

place with niggers running all around” (86). The explicit association of downtown housing largely occupied by African Americans with a low rent or seedy living situation demonstrates the socially constructed interconnectedness of race and class. If African American families are able to afford to live there, Aunt Alma, having left her husband, can as well. Allison knowingly uses African Americans as a signifier of poverty in this instance. But she deconstructs that signifier by inserting a white family into an environment largely relegated to African Americans.

The contrast is further highlighted by the way the African American and white children watch each other closely because they have never seen each other “up close” (84). Highlighting the absurdity of the social hierarchy structured by race, Allison depicts the African American family as being just as standoffish to the white family as they are to them. After a short time living there, however, the two groups of children, as well as the adults, seem to have developed a relationship that, if it is not particularly neighborly, is at least mutually respectful. The mother of the African American woman “wouldn’t do more than nod to Aunt Alma” but she allowed the “kids to start hanging out on the steps” after prohibiting them from leaving the apartment when Aunt Alma and her crew first moved in and, after the first week, the boys bonded over tools and pocket knives (Allison, *Bastard* 85,86). The kids, and the two mothers to a limited extent, relinquish their respective fears of the racial Other in recognition of their shared identity and experiences based in socioeconomic class. After a few weeks living in the apartment complex, Aunt Alma “looked better than ever” despite her relatives’ disgust with her choice of living situation (86). Here, Allison illustrates the ways in which “excavating from the inside”

and rejecting the fears fueled by socially constructed categories—in this instance, race, class, and gender—can benefit a person’s sense of self.¹⁰

Another instance in which Allison associates Bone with racial Others is in her interactions with Shannon and their experience with the African American gospel choir. Bone and Shannon overhear “real gospel” that captivates Bone’s attention (Allison, *Bastard* 169). It stops her in her tracks as she listens, enthralled by the “gut-shaking, deep-bellied, powerful voices” (169). Bone had been briefly interested in gospel music but had moved on because “God hadn’t given [her] a voice” (167). This music, however, “the real stuff,” captures her attention and her imagination. Bone, enchanted by the beauty of the music, is essentially blind to the fact that the choir is singing from a “colored church” (170). It isn’t until she suggests to Shannon that they should “tell [Shannon’s] daddy” about the voices they’ve discovered that Bone realizes the implications of race (170). And even then, her realization doesn’t alter her feelings about the music: “That ain’t one good voice. That’s a churchfull” (170). Shannon, on the other hand, ignores Bone’s praises of the choir and asserts that her father “don’t handle niggers” (170). In Shannon, Allison illustrates the hierarchical nature of socially constructed identity categories. Despite their talent that is obvious to Bone, Shannon dismisses them solely for being “colored.”

Bone’s reaction to Shannon’s outburst—her anger at the way Shannon marginalizes and devalues the gospel choir—further indicates her identification with and rejection of systematic Othering by means of arbitrary identity categories. Bone erupts at Shannon’s “tone pitched exactly like the sound of Aunt Madeline sneering ‘trash’” and in doing so, she highlights Shannon’s whiteness, calling her a “white-assed bitch,”

associating her whiteness with ugliness (170, 171). In focusing on Shannon's whiteness, Bone signals her own identification with the marginalization of African Americans. In the "us versus them" paradigm, Allison depicts Shannon as "us" and consolidates Bone and the African American gospel choir as "them." By identifying with the black gospel choir, Bone enacts the frustration she feels at being alienated for her social class.

Shannon retorts, "You nothing but trash. Your mama's trash, and your grandma, and your whole dirty family."

By conflating Bone's character with the racial Other, Allison illuminates and rejects socially constructed and redundant categories of race and class that create a systematically oppressive hierarchy. Allison notes, "[t]he horror of class stratification, racism, and prejudice is that some people begin to believe that the security of their families and communities depends on the oppression of others" ("Question" 35). In Aunt Alma and her kids, Allison illustrates a brief rejection of that belief. In Shannon, she shows its damaging effects.

"How am I supposed to know anything at all?"

In Bone's rejection of the myths surrounding identity categories, Allison acknowledges and criticizes their power to oppress but also the oppositional struggle of the individual to resist them. Bone, in her association with Raylene, finds safety outside of the identities created for her by socially constructed standards of inclusion and exclusion, normative and non-normative. As McDonald notes, "Allison incorporates many of the 'true' elements of dominant stereotypes into her characters so that they simultaneously reinforce and resist standard images of white trash. By refusing the one-dimensionality of traditional cultural stereotypes, Allison allows her characters to move

beyond them” (18). In doing so, Allison returns a sense of agency and power to those characters that create their own identity outside of the structures society prescribes for them.

Conclusion

McCullers, Lee, and Allison each utilize the liminality of the tomboy character to highlight the artificiality of gender categories as determined by socially constructed ideals. Frankie, Scout, and Bone each, to varying degrees, resist the “taming” of their non-normative gender performance and, in doing so, deconstruct the notions of “normalized” femininity. The degree to which each character rejects social norms largely depends on the era in which their stories are told. Frankie most wholly concedes her tomboyism in exchange for a normative performance of femininity, but unlike many tomboy narratives, her acculturation is not for the benefit of a boy; rather, it is for a young lady. Scout very much remains liminal, reflecting the bifurcated era of the 1960s. And Bone outright rejects categorization. The tomboy characters’ liminality fully embodies Butler’s suggestion that “[t]here are no direct or expressive causal lines between sex, gender, gender presentation, sexual practice, fantasy and sexuality. None of those terms captures or determines the rest” (“Imitation” 315).

Notes

¹ Adrienne Rich illuminates the concept of compulsory heterosexuality in her essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” She suggests the existence of a “bias” that assumes “women are ‘innately’ sexually oriented only toward men” and that bias exists

because of a patriarchal social framework that essentially renders invisible any alternative to heterosexuality (Rich 229). Here, I adapt compulsory heteronormativity from Rich’s work to apply it in broader sense, in which society demand that individuals fall into complementary identity categories that align sexuality, gender, and biological sex with socially constructed ideals.

² “Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself” is short story that, in abbreviated form, mirrors the themes of Radclyffe Hall’s novel, *The Well of Loneliness*, which was the first openly lesbian novel in British literary history.

³ Gayle Rubin, in her essay “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” postulates the “sex/gender system” as “the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied” (159). That is to say, patriarchal sex/gender system—the one McCullers critiques—is the system by which society grants the male power over the female’s body, which becomes “the locus of oppression of women, of sexual minorities” (Rubin 159).

⁴ See Louise Westling's text, *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Garden*, in which she argues that McCullers portrays "Frankie's ultimate submission to the inexorable demand that she accept her sex as female" (127).

⁵ Harper Lee is set to release a second novel, *Go Set a Watchman*, in July 2015. It is said to chronicle Scout as an adult, who has built her life in New York, on a visit home to Maycomb to visit her father. According the publisher, HarperCollins, the story follows Scout as "[s]he is forced to grapple with issues both personal and political as she tries to understand her father's attitude toward society, and her own feelings about the place where she was born and spent her childhood" ("Recently Discovered"). Laura Fine comments on the open-endedness of Lee's story; "Scout's incipient struggle with gender and sexual issues is left open-ended; Lee gives her readers no answers to these difficult questions about life choices that might not be so forgivable in an adult. The silence itself is significant" ("Structuring" 68). The novel (which is said to be the earlier and much longer draft of Lee's *Mockingbird*) has the potential to break that silence and offer answers to many of the questions scholars and readers alike have about Scout's adult life.

⁶ The Southern culture in Lee's text tends to conflate gender and sexuality. In Maycomb, normative gender performance implies participation in heteronormative systems. Aunt Alexandra, mirroring the amalgamation of womanhood and heterosexuality, declares to Scout, as if she has no other options: "It won't be many years, Jean Louise, before you become interested in clothes and boys" (170). And, though Lee's novel is notably asexual, she does offer a critique of the heteronormative structures of Southern society. Fine writes: "Yet although it would have been easy enough to have the adult Jean Louise

make a reference to her current husband and children, she does not. Lee affirms neither a heterosexual nor a homosexual identity for Scout, choosing instead to obscure the entire issue of adult sexual identity” (68).

⁷ The legal injustices of Tom Robinson’s trial deserve a more complete examination than is possible in this context. Look to Claudia Durst Johnson’s 1991 text, “The Secret Courts of Men’s Hearts: Code and Law in Harper Lee’s *To Kill A Mockingbird*” and Eric J. Sundquist’s 1995 piece, “Blues for Atticus Finch: Scottsboro, Brown, and Harper Lee” for extensive examinations of the legal ethics in Lee’s novel.

⁸ Here, “white-trash” becomes a racial category. As Homi K. Bhaba suggests, “the ‘not quite/not white,’” exist “on the margins” of society (131). And Matt Wray qualifies that the term “is not just a classist slur—it’s also a racial epithet that marks out certain whites as a breed apart, a dysgenic race unto themselves” (1).

⁹ See Henri Tajfel’s study “Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations” in which he posits, “The two necessary components [of ingroups] are: a cognitive one, in the sense of awareness of membership; and an evaluative one, in the sense that this awareness is related to some value connotations” (2).

¹⁰ See Dorothy Allison’s essay, “A Question of Class,” in which she suggests, “Class, race, sexuality, gender—and all the other categories by which we categorize and dismiss each other—need to be excavated from the inside” (35).

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