'Speak sweetly and act sly'

A Study of Gender Nonconformist Children in Three Southern Novels

Anna Hedvig K. M. Young

A Thesis Presented to

The Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages

The University of Oslo

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Master of Arts Degree

Spring Term 2010

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude towards some of the people who helped make this an enjoyable and productive year.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Nils Axel Nissen for his help and guidance throughout the writing process, and for always being able to capture my imagination with his thought-provoking lectures and seminars.

My thanks also to Andreas Løchen Wiig and Vandad Darakhshanfar for taking the time to read and comment on my early drafts.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my friends and family for their support. I am deeply indebted to my parents, Frøydis and Robin Young, for their love and encouragement, and I would especially like to thank my father for all of his thoughtful advice with regards to this thesis. I would also like to thank Bjørn Kjetil Wålberg for his kindness and patience.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Discussing the most important themes within Southern literature, critic Louis D. Rubin Jr. points to the 'contrast between the formidable community patterns . . . and the solitude of the private individual confronting these' (123). Arguably, the contrast between the individual and the community is never clearer than in the coming of age novel, in which the adolescent must come to terms with the harsh realities of the adult world and find his or her place within it. In this thesis, I will be examining three coming of age novels that are all set in the Deep South in the 1930s and 40s: *The Member of the Wedding* by Carson McCullers, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, and *Other Voices, Other Rooms* by Truman Capote. Each features a child protagonist struggling with his or her gender identity – what we might commonly refer to as a 'sissy' or a 'tomboy'. My central question will be: what does it mean to grow up 'different' in the South in these novels?

There are several reasons why I believe these accounts should be able to give us unique insights into the sex/gender system of this particular geographical and historical setting. First, I would suggest that the way in which gender nonconformity in children is viewed in a given society reflects how femininity and masculinity are perceived and valued. Children are seen as malleable and subject to authority in a way that adults generally are not. Therefore, I would argue that prejudices in society that might not otherwise be freely expressed, may surface in the way in which children are treated. Secondly, the child protagonist is in many ways the perfect outsider. Not yet accustomed to the ways of the adult world, he or she is better equipped to observe its absurdities and its injustices. To summarize, the child's perspective offers an incisive view of a society's moral priorities. When that child does not conform to that society's expectations, the effect becomes even more pronounced. Essentially, he or she faces several choices: do I wish to enter this adult world? If so, how am I to reconcile my own desires with those of the community? My central argument in this thesis will be that while *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Member of the Wedding* depict strategies for coming of age in Southern society, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* instead depicts a protagonist who rejects adulthood. It is my intention to examine the choices these characters make, and discuss the implications these decisions have on themes of gender, race and community in these three novels.

This introduction will consist of three main parts. I will begin with a brief introduction to the primary texts, offering information with regards to publication and reception, and

placing myself within the literary debates surrounding these works. I will then move on to more general background information, discussing the gender nonconformist child's place within Southern literature, and more generally within popular culture and psychological and queer discourse. Finally, I will return to the specifics of this thesis, discussing theory, methodology, terminology and structure.

Of the three novels I will be discussing in this thesis, *The Member of the Wedding* was the first to be published, in 1946. For its author, Carson McCullers, the novel was a struggle, taking five years to write, with only a short break in 1943 to write the novella *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. 'It must be beautifully done,' she said, 'For like a poem there is not much excuse for it otherwise' (Cook 60). Her third novel, it was warmly received. A stage version was produced, and became a hit, running for 501 performances on Broadway, thus securing popular as well as critical success for McCullers (Carr 4).

The Member of the Wedding is not the most widely read of the three novels I will be dealing with, yet it has received the most attention from critics and scholars, particularly from the perspective of gender. The novel has become what one might call the quintessential tomboy narrative, to the extent that such a thing exists; any essay or book on the subject of the tomboy in American popular culture would be extremely likely to mention the novel's protagonist, Frankie Addams. Early critics tended to focus on McCullers' universal themes, often viewing Frankie's struggle as symbolic of wider problems of human existence, such as loneliness and unhappiness (Logan 3). As Barbara A. White argues, '[t]he eagerness of critics to make [Frankie] symbolic suggests some anxiety over the subject of female adolescence' (126). Quite simply, it seems that a young girl's struggle with adulthood and femininity was not seen as a sufficiently weighty topic for critical discussion. In later years, however, scholars have been more willing to deal with the specificity of Frankie's situation.

Critics have often been divided in their interpretations of the novel, particularly when it comes to the ending. Many view Frankie's eventual surrender to femininity as a defeat, and thus read the novel as a comment on how tomboys are doomed to be crushed by gender norms once they reach adolescence. Others, such as Lori J. Kenschaft and Melissa Free, are more positive. However, these critics tend to focus heavily on the close friendship that Frankie develops with another girl, suggesting that this marks the development of a queer or lesbian sexuality on Frankie's part. As I find the evidence of Frankie's lesbianism somewhat tenuous, I hope to demonstrate how such an interpretation is not a prerequisite in order to have a glimmer of hope at the end of the novel. By focusing on how Frankie uses verbal and nonverbal communication in order to create a sense of self and a sense of place, I intend to

show how Frankie's development in *The Member of the Wedding* can be read as a continual process of reinvention and self-discovery, rather than simply a story of a lively personality being crushed by convention.

By the time *The Member of the Wedding* was published, another writer had begun to write a semi-autobiographical account of his childhood in the rural South. The writer was Truman Capote, and the novel was *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. *Other Voices, Other Rooms* was Capote's first published novel, although he had already made a name for himself writing short fiction for magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* and *Story*. Capote's burgeoning fame brought him into contact with McCullers, who assisted him in finding both a literary agent and a publisher for his debut novel. Additionally, she provided a stable working environment in which Capote could finish his novel at the artists' colony Yaddo in upstate New York (Davis, *Party* 25). While some critics have also identified McCullers as having a strong influence on Capote's work, Capote himself has insisted that while he admired and respected many of his fellow Southern writers, European authors such as Flaubert had a much more profound influence on his literary style ('A Voice' 4).

Other Voices, Other Rooms was two years in the making, and was finally published in January of 1948. The novel created a sensation upon its release, debuting at number nine on the *New York Times* best-seller list (Davis, *Party* 29). The buzz surrounding the novel was due in part to the author's outrageous public image, and in particular the infamous photograph of Capote featured on the novel's dust jacket. Reclining decadently on a sofa, Capote gazed provocatively at the camera, arguably not looking much older than the novel's thirteen-year-old protagonist (Capote, *Other Voices* xi). Reviews were mixed; while some critics hailed Capote as an exciting new literary talent, others were more sceptical, questioning his sincerity (Davis, *Party* 29). However, despite the author's flamboyant public image, he himself insisted that his first novel was a sincere attempt to, as he put it, 'exorcise demons' ('A Voice' 3). At first, Capote claims, he did not realize the extent to which he was confronting his own past with *Other Voices, Other Rooms*: 'I was not aware, except for a few incidents and descriptions, of its being in any serious degree autobiographical. Rereading it now, I find such self-deception unpardonable' ('A Voice' 3-4). For its time, the novel's depiction of homosexuality was risqué. Along with Carson McCullers' *Reflections in a Golden Eye* and Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*, it is one of a very small number of American novels published in the forties that deal openly with homosexuality. Furthermore, the book resists the stereotype of the tragic homosexual, who more often than not would be killed off at the end of the novel.

In terms of both popularity and research, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* has often been overshadowed by Truman Capote's other works *In Cold Blood* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. It has gained cult status as something of a 'gay classic', but received little mainstream attention. Indeed, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* seems to have been largely ignored between its publication in 1948, and a number of articles published in the late nineties and early two-thousands. Among modern critics, there has been some disagreement regarding the novel's depiction of homosexuality. Some, such as Gary Richards and Stephen Adams, have been critical towards the feminine characteristics of the gay characters, arguing that Capote is suggesting that homosexual men are inherently effeminate. More recently, others such as Brian Mitchell-Peters and William White Tison Pugh have applauded Capote for writing a novel in which gay characters were not punished. These critics are also eager to move away from the common interpretation of the characters in the novel as 'grotesques'. For example, Pugh suggests that the novel should be seen as belonging to the Sentimental rather than the Gothic tradition. My analysis will be somewhat critical towards Capote's depiction of homosexuality, although my focus will be different to that of critics such as Richards and Adams. Rather than concentrating on the femininity of characters such as Joel and Randolph, I will suggest that the portrayal of homosexuality as representing stagnation and immaturity is the most problematic aspect of the novel.

The third author I will be dealing with, Nelle Harper Lee, was a childhood friend of Capote. Said to be the inspiration for Joel's rambunctious tomboy friend Idabel Thompkins in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, it was Lee who accompanied and assisted Capote when he went to Holcomb, Kansas in December of 1959 to research the murder case that later became the subject of his most famous novel, *In Cold Blood* (Davis, *Party* 61). By this time, Lee had finished what was to be her first and, to date, only novel: *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The novel was published in July 1960, and immediately became both a popular and critical success, winning Lee the Pulitzer Prize in 1961.

To Kill a Mockingbird has had a rather unique position in American literary history. Despite its overwhelming popularity and acclaim, it has received minimal attention from scholars and academics. Indeed, it almost seems that the novel has become a victim of its own success, with its didactic appeal in the classroom overshadowing its literary quality. Notable contributions to the literary debate have been Claudia Durst Johnson's *To Kill a Mockingbird: Threatening Boundaries*, published in 1994, and more recently the essay collection *On Harper Lee*, published in 2007. If little research has been done on *To Kill a Mockingbird*, even less has been done on the novel's gender perspective, which is often seen as secondary

to themes of racial prejudice and violence in Southern society. This is perhaps not surprising; if you were to ask the average reader what the *To Kill a Mockingbird* is 'about', they would tend to point to race rather than gender. This is also reflected in the popular filmatization of the novel, in which Atticus Finch, rather than Scout, is the main focalizer, and Scout's aunt Alexandra, who in the novel is very much the most rabid 'gender watchdog', is not featured at all (Shackelford 109). There are, however, some notable exceptions. While gender is not Claudia Durst Johnson's main focus, she offers many valuable insights on the subject in *Threatening Boundaries*. In the collection *On Harper Lee*, there are also contributions from critics such as Laura Fine and Kathryn Lee Seidel that concentrate primarily on gender and sexuality. Then there is Gary Richards, who in his book *Lovers and Beloveds: Sexual Otherness in Southern Fiction, 1936-1961* points to a number of nonnormative heterosexual pairings in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, arguing that Lee uses these pairings to destabilize and satirize traditional heterosexual relationships. While these books and articles offer a solid foundation, there is much more to be said about *To Kill a Mockingbird*. As with *The Member of the Wedding*, many have read Lee's novel as the story of a young tomboy finally surrendering to Southern gender norms. In my reading of the book, I intend to examine the way in which the main protagonist, Scout Finch, redefines the concept of the 'Southern lady'. I will argue that in doing this, Scout is instigating a covert rebellion, subverting gender norms while at the same time placating the powers that be.

I will now move on to a brief discussion of the geographical context of these novels. Much has been written about the subject of Southern distinctiveness. Is there something fundamental that separates Southerners and Southern identity from the rest of the United States, or is this idea of the South merely a lie, a construct used to sell pulp novels and movies? While many preconceptions one has about the South are undoubtedly romanticized fictions, there certainly seem to be important cultural differences between the Northern and the Southern states. On the uniqueness of Southern culture, *The Companion to Southern Literature* points specifically to 'their past and their historical consciousness of that past' (Jones 619). Americans are often accused of being forward-looking at the expense of historical perspective. In the Southern states, however, the opposite seems to be true, as tradition and history are of vital importance. This is perhaps not surprising, given the dramatic history of the South, including slavery and the Civil War and its aftermath.

In contrast with egalitarian ideals of equal opportunities for all, social class and family background have also generally been of greater importance in the Southern states than elsewhere in America (Beck xxviii). In other words, Southern society has traditionally been

divided not only in terms of race, but also class. The idea of aristocracy, of somehow inheriting merit from one's forebears, and the resulting 'ancestor worship' is arguably a particularly Southern phenomenon. In addition to the class aspect, religion seems to play a more important part in Southern society than elsewhere: 'The South is the most overtly Christian region of the country, the most Protestant region of the country, and the most Baptist region of the country' (Beck xxix). In short, religion has been a pervasive element of Southern culture at all levels.

The combination of the South's history, its sense of tradition, its class system and its religiosity have all led to the area being perceived as the most conservative region of the United States, with racism, homophobia and sexism running rife. Yet while the region is often viewed as conservative, queerness and eccentricity seem to be an integral part of Southern culture. In 'Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity', Donna Jo Smith asks the crucial question: is the term 'Southern queer' an oxymoron, or completely redundant (370)? In other words, are the terms 'Southern' and 'queer' inherently opposed, or are they to some extent synonymous?

Within Southern literature, deviance has certainly had a central place. Arguably, the Southern Gothic genre is entirely based around the idea of usurping idealized notions of what the South 'is', deforming its belles and corrupting its preachers. In particular, queer sexuality and gender nonconformist characters have had a central place. Why is this? One explanation is obvious: rebellion is a natural consequence of restrictions. Arguably, if a literary work presents an environment with strict norms in regards to gender performance and/or sexual behaviour, the likelihood is that sooner or later a character is going to break these norms. As gender roles have often been so clearly defined in the Southern states, it is perhaps natural that the transgression of these norms has been a common theme in its literature.

However, a trend that is as noticeable as the prevalence of gender nonconformity and queer sexuality is that the majority of these protagonists seem to be female. Two of the best known examples are perhaps *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell and *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, both of which depict a protagonist who realizes that life within the constrictive role of the Southern lady is simply not viable. Yet one must note that these characters display little gender deviance in the modern sense; they are merely dissatisfied with the restrictive role carved out for women in that particular setting. However, tomboyism and female masculinity have featured in many Southern novels such as *Rubyfruit Jungle* by Rita Mae Brown, *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café* by Fannie Flagg, *Confessions of a Failed Southern Lady* by Florence King and *Bastard Out of Carolina* by Dorothy Allison.

Aside from the given that a masculine or unconventional woman provides a potent central problem in a Southern novel, is it possible to delineate any other reasons why these characters have been so prevalent? In her article 'Launching a Gender B(l)acklash: E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* and the Emergence of (Racialized) White Tomboyism', Michele Ann Abate examines the immense popularity of the 1859 book *The Hidden Hand* and its tomboy protagonist Capitola 'Cap' Black. When the reader first encounters thirteen-year-old Capitola, she is in a perilous position, alone and penniless in New York. What later emerges, however, is that Cap is in reality a plantation heiress, sent away in order to hide her from murderous relatives. Despite her tenuous situation, Cap is no victim. Rather, she is brave, sassy and quick-witted. Outsmarting a multitude of adversaries, she finally reclaims her rightful position as a Virginia lady.

In her article, Abate suggests that the popularity of this tomboy character is indicative of the changes that were taking place in American, and particularly Southern, society in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Tomboyism, Abate argues, offered a healthier alternative to the Cult of True Womanhood, which idealized the passive, weak and sickly woman (43). Pointing to the twin factors of economic instability and emerging feminism, Abate suggests that it was no longer practical for women to view themselves as invalids (44). Thus, '*The Hidden Hand* demonstrates how, by fortifying one imperiled white woman, tomboyism could also fortify an equally imperiled white South' (47). One need only think of Scarlett O'Hara's transformation from idle belle to hard-nosed businesswoman in *Gone with the Wind* to understand what Abate means. Indeed, this point is emphasized further when we think of Scarlett's foil in the novel, the delicate, kind and impeccably behaved Melanie Wilkes. Although Melanie is the perfect lady and admired by all, she stands little chance of survival once the going gets tough (Scura 414).

Yet as Abate points out, the type of tomboyism we see in *The Hidden Hand* was not necessarily linked to masculinity or androgyny in this period: 'Although tomboys were more rough-and-tumble than their prissy indoor counterparts, they remained firmly grounded in a female identity' (51). Any gender-bending in the true sense of the term is seen as a means to an end rather than an enjoyable activity in itself. To quote Marjorie Garber's analysis of transvestism in films such as *Some Like It Hot* and *Victor/Victoria*, it is 'an instrumental strategy rather than an erotic pleasure and play space. . . . cross-dressing can be "fun" or "functional" so long as it occupies a liminal space and a temporary time period; after this carnivalization, however . . . the cross-dresser is expected to resume life as he or she was' (70). Capitola Black dresses as a boy in order to find work, while Scarlett O'Hara gets her

hands dirty in order to secure the financial stability of her family. In both cases, the heroine eagerly conforms to heterosexuality and feminine dress and behaviour once the hard work is over and her situation is stable. Rather ironically, in both of these cases, gender nonconformist behaviour is what finally makes gender conformist behaviour a possibility for the women involved. By rebelling against norms of Southern femininity, they manage to reach a position in which they can securely partake in it.

While we see that the tomboy has a long literary history in the South, the same does not seem to be true of the sissy. If, as I have suggested, gender rebellion is a popular theme in Southern literature, why are feminine boys and men so much less prominent than masculine girls and women? Indeed, this is a general trend in American literature: like the ladylike woman or the 'girly girl', the feminine boy does not seem to have been viewed as a viable literary hero. I would suggest that this is partly a result of the American fascination with boyhood, and particularly wild boyhood. This phenomenon is the subject of Kenneth B. Kidd's book *Making American Boys*, in which he examines how boyology and the feral tale have been interwoven from the postbellum period to the 1990s. From Huck Finn to Holden Caulfield, some of the most memorable and best-loved characters in American fiction have been boys who simply would not do as they were told. Explaining their popularity need not be a complex task: mischief is entertaining, and as adults we like our child characters to enjoy the freedom that we ourselves no longer have. The savage boy and the tomboy fulfil this requirement, while feminine boys and girls do not. Quite simply, a protagonist who possesses stereotypically 'male' qualities such as bravery and roguishness is more likely to provide us with an enthralling adventure than a protagonist who exhibits the qualities that girls and women are encouraged to exhibit, such as passivity, caution and consideration towards others.

When it comes to specifically Southern depictions, I would suggest that gender roles have traditionally been more restrictive for girls than for boys in this region, thanks in part to the exaltation of white femininity. While the tomboy is a prevalent figure in Southern literature, she does not seem all that popular within the fictional South she inhabits. In the novels I will be discussing, it seems to be the girls, rather than the boys, who are the main victims of gender policing. The most clear-cut example of this is perhaps *To Kill a Mockingbird*, in which the main female protagonist is only six years old at the beginning of the story, but is already being harassed by adult women, who are adamant that her tomboyish behaviour is deeply inappropriate. Rather than being allowed a childhood phase of boisterous behaviour, she is encouraged to conform to a restrictive gender role from an extremely young age. Meanwhile, her effeminate contemporaries Dill and Francis are largely left undisturbed

or are even favoured for their 'gentlemanly' behaviour. Similarly, Frankie Addams of *The Member of the Wedding* is in a perpetual state of crisis due to the 'freakish' nature of her gender deviance, while her younger cousin, John Henry West, seems to feel entirely comfortable in his queer nature. In *Other Voices, Other Rooms,* protagonist Joel Knox charms the female adults of Noon City, while his tomboy counterpart Idabel is largely reviled for her disruptive behaviour. While effeminacy would undoubtedly be frowned upon in some Southern settings, it seems that in certain milieus, particularly white, middle-class environments in which older women hold influence, the 'gentlemanly' sissy is much preferred over the 'savage' tomboy. Thus the situation for the sissy appears at first glance to be less problematic than that of the tomboy, and perhaps less of a potent subject for literary examination.

The bias that is evident in Southern literary fiction is reversed in more general sociological and psychological studies of gender nonconformist children. Here, the focus tends to be on explaining and analysing feminine boys rather than masculine girls. This is not particularly surprising, as women and girls are popularly believed to have more flexibility and room for manoeuvre when it comes to gender performance than their male counterparts. Nowadays, one might argue, women can wear masculine clothing, have high-powered careers, or lift weights, and nobody raises an eyebrow. While the male ideal has 'softened' somewhat in the Western world in recent years, many would argue that boys and men still have not been afforded equal rights when it comes to gender flexibility; a woman in a tuxedo may be seen as 'edgy', 'androgynous', or 'powerful', but a man in a dress continues to invoke ridicule. Thus gender nonconformity in male children is seen as deviance or illness, while girls are merely seen as testing the boundaries if they indulge in stereotypically masculine behaviour.

Yet is it really true that girls and women have more gender flexibility than men? And if so, why is this? Part of the problem of discussing the acceptability of tomboyism in general is that the term itself covers such a wide range of behaviours that it has to some extent become a normalized part of female childhood. In her article 'Oh Bondage, Up Yours! Female Masculinity and the Tomboy', Judith Halberstam quotes one study in which 51 percent of the female participants stated that they had been tomboys when young (161). It is unlikely that the majority of these self-identified tomboys experienced a strong sense of cross-gender identification, or behaved in a markedly masculine manner. Instead, one can imagine that these girls perhaps enjoyed active outdoors play, or liked taking centre stage in the classroom – activities and behaviour that continue to be viewed as unfeminine, despite

widespread evidence to the contrary. In other words, it does not take much to be classed as a tomboy. Our idea of what constitutes feminine behaviour is so restrictive that any girl who chooses not to be verbally or physically passive is at risk of getting the label.

Of course, it is also an important factor that 'tomboy' is seldom used as an insult. On the contrary, the word has many positive connotations – tomboys are generally seen as fun, lively and original. As I have already pointed out in connection with my literary examples, the tomboy is largely seen as an inherently likeable and non-threatening figure in popular culture. A possible reason for this is that tomboyism is not closely associated with homosexuality in the same way as feminine behaviour in boys. This is perhaps a result of the traditional view of female sexuality as either hidden or non-existent, something that has led to it being less common for women to be accused of 'deviant' sexuality than men. In any case, this lack of stigma means that both girls and grown women looking back on their childhood years are less likely to resist the tomboy label, and this in turn might be said to effectively create more tomboys.

However, when this incarnation of tomboyism thus becomes a normalized, natural aspect of female adolescence, the danger is that the less typical kind of tomboy, the girl who feels a profound sense of cross-gender identification, becomes invisible. In short, there is a difference between Capitola Black, who dresses as a boy as a matter of necessity, and the tomboys I will be dealing with in this thesis, who enjoy wearing boy's clothes, socialize exclusively with boys, and in some cases would ideally like to *be* boys themselves. Because of this, some theorists have found it useful to differentiate between several types of tomboy. Halberstam separates the feminine tomboy, who may be uncommonly active, independent and outspoken, but is still girly enough to get away with it, from the masculine tomboy, who might wear boy's clothes, take a boy's name, or socialize exclusively with boys ('Oh Bondage!' 155). Similarly, Lee Zevy, whose article 'Sexing the Tomboy' deals with lesbian childhood, chooses to focus on what she calls the 'lesbian tomboys', i.e. tomboys who grow up to become lesbians, and stresses the importance of this childhood phase as a preparation for the homophobia and sexism that these girls are likely to face as adult lesbians. Zevy argues that the lesbian or masculine tomboy is often in a hazardous position: 'The lesbian tomboy exists in a tenuous arena which can turn nasty or sexual at any time if the boundary of male sexuality is breached or shifts unexpectedly' (188). Here Zevy is pointing to the fine line between tomboyism and in effect 'trying to be a boy', arguing that girls who accidentally infringe on male privilege are at risk of being taught a lesson, either violently or sexually.

Halberstam argues that this kind of masculine tomboyism is not tolerated or accepted to the same extent as feminine tomboyism, and also points out that any acceptance of masculine behaviour in young girls is highly dependent upon the knowledge or belief that tomboyism is usually a phase, and that the girl in question is likely to grow up to be a feminine, heterosexual woman ('Oh Bondage!' 155). We understand, even admire, a girl's desire to resist feminine adulthood, provided that we have a guarantee that it will be a losing battle. After all, tomboys seem to be accepted and even loved in a way that grown-up masculine or androgynous women are not. For example, when it comes to the readers who interpret the narrative voice in *To Kill a Mockingbird* to be that of an adult Scout Finch looking back on her childhood, I would wager that the majority do not picture the adult Scout as a butch lesbian, but instead as a feminized, heteronormative version of her childhood self.

While the word 'tomboy' can often have positive connotations, the same cannot be said of the word 'sissy'. One may debate as to the extent to which tomboyism is or is not accepted, but when it comes to boys, effeminate or atypical gender behaviour tends to be frowned upon irrespective of whether it is seen as a 'phase' or not. In other words, we tend to be more troubled by cross-gender identification in boys than in girls. This is not surprising; in the masculine/feminine binary, the feminine is largely seen as inferior. Therefore, a boy or man who takes on feminine traits is seen as somehow devaluating or debasing himself. In cultures in which women are highly valued, however, feminine or androgynous men tend to be accepted rather than shamed. I have already suggested that this is the case in certain Southern environments. Another example is Native American culture, in which women have a prominent position and androgynous male bedarches are seen as valued and important members of the tribe (Williams 65). In white Western culture, however, the same can generally not be said. As Ken Corbett points out in the article 'Homosexual Boyhood': 'within the sissy-boy discourse, femininity becomes a symptom. . . . as if to suggest that one could fall ill with the disease of femininity' (117). This perception of femininity as some sort of affliction, and the resulting stigmatization of feminine males seems inextricably linked to the low status of women and girls, and highly suggestive of an underlying misogyny. In short, I would argue that both the popularity of tomboys and our disregard for feminine boys are symptomatic of the way in which masculinity is highly valued in our society, and femininity is seen as vastly inferior. Ironically, the appreciation of gender-bending girls can be seen as a result of deep-seated sexism: we do not value femininity, and so we applaud the girls who reject it.

It is interesting, then, that the gender norms and expectations in the three novels that I will be writing about in this thesis somehow seem to function in a rather different way to that which I have just outlined. Is this merely a coincidence, or does the uniqueness of Southern culture extend to its valuation of masculinity and femininity? In my thesis I will suggest that Southern society in certain ways values femininity more highly than in other regions of the United States. However, the catch is that this is a kind of femininity that is extremely constrictive and artificial – the goal is to be ladylike, not womanly. I will argue that it is the glorification of this particularly Southern kind of factitious femininity that Lee, McCullers and Capote are to some extent satirizing and problematizing with their gender nonconformist child characters.

Having discussed the gender nonconformist child's place both in Southern literature and more generally, I will now briefly sketch out their place within queer and gender studies. In the process of doing so, I hope to further demonstrate why these characters matter. It is notable that the novels I will be dealing with were all published after the Second World War and before the sexual revolution of the sixties. As a result of the focus on constrictive gender roles and 'family values' in this period, there was also a heightened clinical interest in children who did not adhere to prescribed gender roles. Tomboys and sissies needed to be explained, categorized, and, ultimately, cured. Arguably, this may have been what inspired McCullers, Lee and Capote to write these accounts of gender nonconformist childhood – rather than merely being the passive subjects of clinical studies, these child characters are being given a voice.

Even so, one might ask: does this have any relevance today? I would suggest that the Cold War-era attitude towards gender nonconformist children continues to the present day in America. While these novels were published five to six decades ago, the experience and treatment of cross-gender identification in children is still an important topic, and one which often does not seem to receive the attention it deserves. Children who display 'inappropriate' gender behaviour are still diagnosed with and treated for GID, or Gender Identity Disorder, a diagnosis introduced in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 3rd ed. (DSM-III)* in 1980. GID is characterized by strong cross-gender identification, as well as a profound sense of discomfort with one's biological sex (Minter 9). However, these feelings do not need to be verbalized by the child, and so a diagnosis can be given solely based on gender atypical behaviour (Minter 10). In other words, a boy whose favourite hobby is playing with dolls may be diagnosed with GID, even though he has never expressed any distress or dissatisfaction with his biological sex.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has suggested that part of the reason why children who display gender atypical behaviour are still being diagnosed as mentally ill, is that queer activists and theorists have not afforded sufficient attention to the links between atypical gender behaviour in children and adult homosexuality, and have therefore been reluctant to get involved (*Tendencies* 157). In short, gender nonconformist children have often been seen as being outside the 'gay jurisdiction'. This is partly due to an understandable resistance towards the conflation of gender and sexuality. Eager to disprove old stereotypes, there has sometimes been a tendency in the gay community to skirt the issue of gender, emphasizing instead that most gay people are as 'normal' in terms of gender identification as anyone else (Wilchins 17). This can arguably serve to make homosexuality more acceptable in the mainstream, as gay identity then becomes more homogenized with heterosexual norms – on the outside, at least. Also, one could argue that this challenges the heteronormative assumption that the desire for a man can only occur in a feminine subject (irrespective of biological sex), and vice versa (Sedgwick, *Tendencies* 157).

However, while queer theorists may sometimes have been reluctant to see the connection between gender nonconformist behaviour in children and adult homosexuality, the same cannot be said of the American Psychiatric Association. The introduction of the GID diagnosis coincided with the official depathologization of homosexuality; when the *DSM-III* was published in 1980, it was the first edition in which homosexuality was not included as a mental disorder (Minter 12). Arguably, the introduction of GID can be seen as merely being a different kind of pathologization of homosexuals, as treatment of the disorder was so clearly geared towards the prevention of adult homosexuality (Minter 12). While there has been some disagreement among psychologists as to whether or not treatment of GID could in fact prevent adult homosexuality, it is clear that both the diagnosis and treatment of GID is inextricably linked to what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls 'the overarching, hygienic Western fantasy of a world without any more homosexuals in it' (*Epistemology* 42). While, for some, the prevention of future homosexuality in children seems to be more palatable than attempts to 'cure' adults who already define themselves as gay, the long-term goals of both practices are in effect the same. As a result of this, I would suggest that affording attention to gender nonconformity in children and adolescents is a valuable pursuit.

Having argued the validity of my case, I will now briefly outline the theories and methodologies I will be using in my analysis of these texts. In the introduction to her book *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam observes that queer methodology is a 'scavenger methodology' (13), and this will to some extent be what I employ also. Some cornerstones of

queer theory, such as Judith Butler's concept of gender performance, will be used frequently throughout the thesis. In Chapter One I will also utilize Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of erotic triangles and Gayle Rubin's theory of the traffic in women when discussing homosociality as a force within Southern society. Language, discourse and subversion will be recurring themes, particularly in connection with the two tomboy narratives. Essentially, I will argue that being able to decipher the double meanings of adult communication, and, more importantly, being able to use this to strengthen your own position, is a vital part of growing up. In analysing the way in which these gender nonconformist children, and particularly Scout Finch and Frankie Addams, use language, I will be influenced by theorists such as Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Michel Foucault. I hope to look at the way in which discourse 'shape[s] our understanding of ourselves' (Danaher 31), but also how we may use language to shape how others perceive us.

As I have already suggested, history and the past are a vital part of Southern culture, and therefore I will attempt to place Southern gender roles in a historical perspective, explaining the place that antebellum rules and customs are depicted as having many decades later. Because of this, I will also be consulting works dealing with antebellum Southern history and society such as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's *Within the Plantation Household*. These historical perspectives will be particularly useful in discussing norms and stereotypes such as the Southern lady and gentleman. Additionally, I hope that this will be helpful in discussing racial themes in the three novels.

In terms of literary methodology, I will be conducting close readings as well as comparing and contrasting the ways in which the three novels deal with the same subject matter. In connection with my discussion of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, I will also be examining the ways in which formal aspects of the three texts reflect their different handling of similar subject matter. My hope is that comparing and contrasting these three texts will serve both to clarify the unique aspects of each work, as well as helping to delineate general trends and commonalities.

When it comes to terminology, there are certain clarifications that need to be made in this introduction. First, there is 'the South', a term I have already employed countless times over the foregoing pages. Of course, in one respect, discussing '*the* South' is nonsense. As I have suggested, the South has been divided across boundaries of class, race and gender. Arguably, there are many 'Souths'. During the course of this thesis I, like many others, will be guilty of using the term 'the South' when often what I really mean is 'the white middle-class South'. All three of the novels I will be writing about are written from a white point of view,

something that gives somewhat limited scope in terms of discussing the African American Southern experience. However, due to the abundance of important African American secondary characters, all of whom are treated with sympathy and respect, I hope that this thesis also manages to examine more than just the white Southern experience.

Secondly, I feel it is necessary to point out in this introduction that I am aware of the dangers of perpetuating the tomboy/sissy discourse, particularly due to the negative connotations of the word 'sissy' – both in terms of its status as an insult, as well as its discursive connection to theorists such as Richard Green, proponents of the GID diagnosis and its treatment. Substitute words have been suggested; Ken Corbett, for instance, chooses to use the term 'girlyboy' (109). However, I find this rather strained, and prefer instead to try to reclaim 'sissy' as a non-pejorative male equivalent to 'tomboy'.

The underlying problem remains, though, that the tomboy/sissy discourse also tends to reinforce gender stereotypes and the masculine/feminine binary. Would it, perhaps, be more constructive to employ the term 'androgynous', rather than 'feminine', or 'masculine' when discussing these child characters? The concept of androgyny gained popularity in the feminist movement of the 1960s, when it was seen as a way to loosen constrictive gender roles and destabilize gender hierarchies in society, thus paving the way for greater equality (Weil 147). By the mid 70s, however, questions were being asked as to the usefulness of androgyny to the feminist cause. Was this not merely another way of rendering women and the female experience invisible (Weil 150)? Several theorists looked to the misogynistic history of the androgyne myth, noting that mythical androgynous beings tended to be males who took on female qualities, thus making women obsolete (Weil 151). In addition to this, the very notion of a union of two opposites as the ultimate ideal seemed inescapably heterosexist (Weil 151).

Judith Halberstam is certainly sceptical to the androgynous take on tomboyism, as it ignores boy-identified girls with an aversion to feminine behaviour and activities, and deemphasizes the notion of female masculinity ('Oh Bondage!' 159). She argues that 'young girls who exhibit masculine behavior . . . are punished not only because their femininity is in jeopardy, but also because masculinity has been reserved exclusively for male bodies. The fostering of youthful female masculinity, therefore, can constitute a powerful assault on male privilege' (164). In other words, by using the concept of androgyny to describe tomboys, we not only risk ignoring the fact that some tomboys simply do not enjoy feminine activities, but we are in effect denying girls the freedoms and privileges of masculinity. Likewise, by viewing young boys who display atypical gender behaviour as androgynous rather than effeminate, one could argue that one is in a sense confirming that femininity is an illness, that

17

'effeminate' is an insult, that 'femininity, in a person with a penis, can represent nothing but deficit and disorder,' (Sedgwick, *Tendencies* 160). In short, while some gender nonconformist children may fit snugly into the androgyne category and benefit from such a label, there is a risk of alienating and pathologizing children who feel a strong sense of cross-gender identification, rather than an androgynous sensibility that spans both genders.

I have been in two minds as to whether to employ the concept of androgyny in this thesis. All of the characters I will be discussing are in possession of both what would traditionally be seen as masculine and feminine qualities, and would therefore fit into the androgynous category. Also, using the term 'androgyne' would save me from endlessly reiterating gender stereotypes. However, I would suggest that from the view of deconstructing gender, the concept of androgyny is of little help. The very concept of androgyny is entirely dependent upon the masculine/feminine binary it seeks to weaken, as by talking about a 'marriage of opposites' one is inadvertently confirming the existence of gender polarity (Weil 12). Therefore, while the concept of androgyny may save me from directly using words such as 'masculine' or 'feminine' as often, I feel that by calling a character 'androgynous', I would still be classifying feelings and behaviours as specifically masculine or feminine, albeit indirectly, and merely saying that this character happens to display both. Therefore, I choose instead to employ the phrase 'gender nonconformist' when discussing these characters in a general sense, as this merely indicates that the character in question is not performing his or her gender in the conventional way. Also, as my aim is to look at how Capote, McCullers and Lee depict the lives of gender nonconformist children in a specific geographic and historical setting, I find it natural to employ the terminology that would have been used in that particular setting. Therefore, I will use 'tomboy' or 'sissy' when referring specifically to a male or female character.

My thesis will consist of three main chapters, each dealing chiefly with one of the primary texts. Chapter One will deal principally with Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This is a useful starting point, as the novel features not only the youngest protagonist, but also the clearest sense of community and 'gender policing' in Southern society. As a result, this will be the chapter with the most commentary on Southern history and society, and I intend to examine how gender, race and class intersect. By looking at the pressures that Scout Finch faces, I will to examine the ideal – or myth – of the Southern lady, and the way in which these values are enforced upon young women. Many have read *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a depiction of a tomboy's eventual capitulation to gender norms. However, I will argue that Scout actively redefines the role of the lady, and that we should therefore refrain from reading

the novel's ending as a failure of agency. I will also briefly examine other characters in the novel that subvert gender expectations, such as Jem and Atticus Finch, Maudie Atkinson and Aunt Alexandra.

Chapter Two will chiefly deal with Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding*. Essentially, this chapter will in many ways be a continuation and development of certain themes from Chapter One, albeit with a slightly different focus. This novel depicts a situation that Scout Finch may have found herself in at a later stage. Essentially, the novel's main protagonist, Frankie Addams, is a tomboy in crisis. On the cusp of young adulthood, she stands at a crossroads – should she embrace heteronormativity and femininity and become a 'normal person', or remain as she is and become a 'freak'? Again, I will be dealing with a novel that many have read as a narrative of quashed gender rebellion, and once more I will be attempting to suggest alternative ways of reading the text. While in Chapter One I will mainly be discussing Scout Finch's queering of one specific term, 'the Southern lady', in Chapter Two I will suggest that communication is used in a broader way in *The Member of the Wedding*. Essentially, I will be looking at how Frankie Addams uses language to define herself and her place in the world, and how this impacts on the novel's gender perspective. Again, I will argue that coming of age becomes synonymous with coming to grips with the adult world of 'double talk', or saying one thing and meaning another. As in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, there is an awareness of the absurdity of many social norms, including those pertaining to gender, yet at the same time recognition of the need to belong within a community. In order to emphasize this point, I will examine the fates of those characters who refuse to 'play the game', such as Honey Brown and Frankie's cousin John Henry West.

Chapter Three will be something of a departure from the two previous chapters. While *Other Voices, Other Rooms* also depicts a gender nonconformist child protagonist, I intend to argue that this is a very different novel from the other two. Some differences are obvious. First, we have a feminine boy as the main protagonist, with a tomboy sidekick. Secondly, apart from a few short scenes, the majority of this novel is set in a place separated from mainstream Southern society. Yet the more fundamental difference that I will be discussing is slightly less obvious. While I will argue that *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Member of the Wedding* both present strategies for growing up 'different' or 'queer' while at the same time resisting freakishness and outsiderdom, I will suggest that *Other Voices, Other Rooms* does something else. Rather than trying to find a place *within* mainstream Southern society like Scout and Frankie, the protagonist instead chooses to live *without* it. While on the surface *Other Voices, Other Rooms* appears to be a coming of age novel in the same way as the other

two, I will argue that it instead depicts a protagonist who chooses to resist adulthood. My discussion of the novel will examine the impact that this choice has on themes of gender and sexuality. Finally, I will compare how the dreamlike form of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and its contrast with the other, more realist novels. This will then be used as a basis to discuss thematic differences between this novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *The Member of the Wedding*.

Chapter One: Covert Rebellion in
Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*

To Kill a Mockingbird tells the story of a young tomboy, Scout Finch, growing up in a small Southern town in the 1930s. While the subject of race has traditionally been the most discussed aspect of the novel, many readers have also noted *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s attempts to critique and destabilize Southern gender norms. To the extent that there is an obvious question relating to gender in the novel, it seems to be this: will Scout give in to conventional gender norms and become a 'lady'? Scout's most direct comment on her dilemma is the following: 'There was no doubt about it, I must soon enter this world, where on its surface fragrant ladies rocked slowly, fanned gently and drank cool water. But I was more at home in my father's world' (313). This quotation, taken from a fairly late chapter in the novel, has frequently been pointed to as the most explicit sign that Scout has, albeit begrudgingly, accepted her fate, and plans to surrender to the constrictive gender norms so prevalent in Southern culture. Of course, this would not be a surprising development. As Judith Halberstam points out, taking into consideration the pressures of gender conformity on young girls, 'that any girls do emerge at the end of adolescence as masculine women is quite amazing' (*Female Masculinity* 6). Yet is this the only way of interpreting Scout's gender development in *To Kill a Mockingbird*? Or can the novel be read as something other than a familiar narrative of a gender rebel being crushed by the forces of conformity? In this, the first chapter of my thesis, I intend to argue that during the course of the novel, Scout does not merely give in to existing gender roles, but instead actively develops her own understanding of what it means to be a lady. I will examine how different characters, such as Calpurnia, Maudie Atkinson, and in particular Atticus Finch, as well as the central event in the novel, the trial of Tom Robinson, help Scout to reach a new understanding of what it means to become a lady. I will also try to show how her development is paralleled and complimented by that of her brother, Jem Finch.

Essentially, I interpret Harper Lee's project in terms of gender in *To Kill a Mockingbird* to be twofold: first, there is the necessity of tearing down the existing gender system. Secondly, one must replace this with something; an alternative understanding. The first part of my chapter will deal with the first of these undertakings, that is to say Harper Lee's criticism of the existing sex/gender systems in the South. In particular, I will focus on

how the ideal of the Southern lady is critiqued as being both inherently fictitious, and damaging in the way that it both creates, and is created by, racism.

The main pusher of gender conformity in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is Aunt Alexandra, who features intermittently in the first part of the novel, and more prominently in the second, when she comes to stay with the Finch family during the trial of Tom Robinson. It is a poorly kept secret that one of the primary reasons for Aunt Alexandra's descent on the family, at least as far as she herself is concerned, is to have a feminizing influence on Scout. Yet it is not just a general sense of femininity that Aunt Alexandra and other gender enforcers wish to cultivate in Scout. Rather, it is a particular kind of femininity. The goal is not just to help Scout become a woman; Aunt Alexandra wants to turn her into a *lady*. The Southern lady is often characterized in a rather contradictory fashion. Southern novelist Florence King describes her thus: 'She is required to be frigid, passionate, sweet, bitchy, and scatterbrained – all at the same time. Her problems stem from the fact that she succeeds' (32). This paradoxical nature is perhaps due to a certain conflation of the terms 'belle' and 'lady' in modern times. The Southern belle was the younger, unmarried version of the lady. While the lady was meant to be selfless and collected, the moral guide of the family, the belle, perhaps most famously personified by Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, was free to flirt and forgiven for her imperfections (Manning 95). Although more recent conceptions of Southern womanhood may merge these two archetypes into one somewhat confused whole, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the focus is very much on being a lady rather than a belle. This is perhaps a result of there being very few young women in the novel. The only exception is Scout's teacher, Miss Caroline, who 'looked and smelled like a peppermint drop' (21), but is completely incapable of keeping her class in order. Apart from this character, all of the adult females seem middle aged or older, and expect Scout to aspire to a very grown-up version of femininity, despite her young age.

Southern ladies have been nicknamed 'steel magnolias' due to the toughness that is thought to belie their feminine, delicate, and preferably, somewhat helpless, exterior. It is this particularly Southern brand of femininity that is harshly criticized as hypocritical and inconsistent in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Gender is frequently revealed to be nothing but a performance, yet one that the performers themselves attempt to conceal. The narrator is careful to emphasize the performative and tenuous nature of the ladies' femininity during one of the most prominent scenes of gender enforcement, Aunt Alexandra's missionary tea in Chapter Twenty-four. Here, the names of the cosmetics the self-styled ladies are wearing are carefully noted: 'the only lipstick in the room was Tangee Natural. Cutex Natural sparkled on

their fingernails' (307). Here we see how the ladies attempt to disguise artificiality as nature, and Aunt Alexandra's demands that Scout give in to her 'natural' gender seem increasingly absurd (Richards 125).

However, it is not just in the context of gender performance that the ladies are exposed as hypocrites; the critique extends to their entire value as moral beings. The lady characters are frequently presented in a highly ironic light, highlighting the gaping chasm between their loudly proclaimed beliefs and the way in which they lead their lives. Despite their emphasis on Christian values, the women are often portrayed to be anything but. One member of the group, Miss Stephanie Crawford, is portrayed as a vicious gossip who likes nothing more than to talk ill of her fellow townspeople. Meanwhile, Dill's aunt, Rachel Haverford, seems to have a drinking habit that could rival that of any drunkard in town, although she uses her 'lady' status to excuse the fact: 'Miss Rachel Haverford's excuse for a glass of neat whiskey every morning was that she never got over the fright of finding a rattler coiled in her bedroom closet' (186). Here we see how typically ladylike qualities, such as fragility and nervousness, can be used to explain away what these women would normally classify as unladylike behaviour.

Never is the irony more delicious than when, at a late stage in the novel, the ladies are discussing the Mrunas, a fictional African tribe which the missionary J. Everett Grimes is attempting to convert to 'Christian' ways. The irony lies both in the fact that Maycomb's status as a civilized town in which Christian values rule is by this point greatly compromised in the reader's eyes due to the recent conviction of Tom Robinson, but also because there seem to be certain similarities between the Mrunas and the people of Maycomb. For instance, the following evidence is given of the Mrunas' supposedly barbaric nature: 'they had so little sense of family that the whole tribe was one big family. A child had as many fathers as there were men in the community, as many mothers as there were women' (336). To the reader, this seems as apt a description of small town life in Maycomb as anywhere else.

Yet several critics have pointed out that Lee goes even further in connecting the ideal of the lady to more dubious moral values. In his book *Lovers and Beloveds: Sexual Otherness in Southern Fiction, 1936-1961*, Gary Richards argues that by putting racist remarks in the mouths of the most prominent gender enforcers, Lee is underscoring the connection between racial segregation and the ideal of Southern femininity (129). I would disagree with Richards' decision to include Aunt Alexandra among these racist characters. She is undeniably a stickler for a tradition and a history in which slavery was a central part, but I would suggest that she is often presented as a more humane and sensitive character than her cohorts in the missionary

circle. She is, for instance, visibly upset to learn of the death of Tom Robinson. However, I would agree with Richards' main argument; the link between the cult of femininity and racism is inescapable in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Indeed, in order to understand the concept of the Southern womanhood itself, it is essential to look at the social structure of the antebellum South, as it was in this period that the concept of the Southern lady was conceived. In her book *Within the Plantation Household*, historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese stresses the essential role that slavery played in the development of the concept of the Southern lady. First, she argues that the ideal of the Southern lady was created in part to distance her from the African American woman. Her complexion should be as pale as possible, she had to be chaste and pure (a contrast to the popular image of the primal and exotic African American woman), and her life should be filled with leisure time, rather than work (197). Even the word 'lady' served to differentiate the white female from the African American 'woman' or 'wench' (202). In other words, the very concept of white femininity in the antebellum South was defined by its black Other. Secondly, Fox-Genovese points out that this worked in the opposite direction as well – the feminine ideal served to further necessitate slavery, as it was nigh-on impossible to cultivate the desired demeanour of paleness and frailty if one had to do one's own housework, never mind manual outdoors labour. Of course, it must be noted that far from all white women had the luxury of being able to lead an entirely docile life, but nevertheless, this ideal was still a pervasive part of Southern culture at all levels. Therefore, the prospect of the abolition of slavery was not just a question of economic devastation in the South, but it also brought with it the risk of disturbing social gender norms.

This history is very much present in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, not least in the first part of the novel when Atticus, Scout and Jem visit Aunt Alexandra at Finch's Landing. While Atticus and his brother Jack moved away from the family's old cotton plantation in order to study law and medicine respectively, Alexandra has stayed behind. Finch's Landing serves as a relic not only of the family's past as slaveholders – 'traces of an old cotton landing', 'a rusty bell on a pole, used to summon field hands', a rooftop platform from which their forefather Simon Finch 'oversaw his overseer' (106-7) – but also of the constraints that the Finch women have endured through the ages.

For limitations and constrictions seem central to the concept of the lady. As Claudia Durst Johnson points out in her book *To Kill a Mockingbird: Threatening Boundaries*, the superficial changes desired by Aunt Alexandra are indicative of the kind of life she wants Scout to lead. Her pet project is trying to coax Scout out of her overalls and into a dress, thus

limiting Scout's ability to move freely. As Scout puts it so succinctly: 'when I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I wasn't supposed to be doing things that required pants' (108). In the descriptions of Finch's Landing, a long history of restrictions and confinement seems present. We learn that Simon Finch built the house in such a way that the staircase to his daughters' room was located in his ground-floor bedroom, thus preventing them from coming or going without their father's knowledge or permission. This story echoes the views of Florence King, who argues that the notion of the Southern woman as chaste and pure was a construct created by slaveholding white men for political purposes, going so far as to say that 'Antebellum Southern civilization was built upon the white woman's untouchable image' (32). The image of the Southern woman as virtuous and prudish arguably made life easier both for slaveholders and their wives, especially within the context of interracial sexual relations. For white men, the image justified their sexual relationships with slave women – with their frail, chaste wives firmly placed on pedestals, it seemed more appropriate to carry out more base urges with African American women, who, after all, were not 'ladies'. Thus white men profited from the image of the chaste Southern woman in two ways. First, there was the gain of sexual pleasure with African American women. In addition to this, slaveholders stood to profit in a purely financial sense as well, as their relations with black women would often produce children, who in turn would 'follow the condition of the mother', becoming the slave master's property and thus expanding his wealth. While white women can hardly be said to have gained as much from this virtuous image, King argues that being seen as 'aloof, aristocratic and haughty . . . enabled the white woman to maintain her sanity when she saw light-skinned slave children, who were the very spit of Old Massa, running around the plantation' (33). In other words, one could argue that the internalization of the image of the pure, chaste Southern woman could function as a survival mechanism, enabling women to feign ignorance regarding their husbands' wrongdoings, and thus allowing for a semblance of dignity within the household.

Almost all of the short glimpses from Finch's Landing seem to emphasize the historical connection between femininity, money and racism (Richards 129). The narrator describes how 'Finch Negroes had loaded bales and produce, unloaded blocks of ice, flour and sugar, farm equipment, and feminine apparel' (106) – as if feminizing attire were as much of a vital necessity as the other articles mentioned. In passing, we are told the story of the Finch lady who 'donned her complete trousseau to save it from raiders in the neighborhood; she became stuck in the door to the Daughters' Staircase but was doused with water and finally pushed through' (107). Although related in a humorous tone, this story yet again

exemplifies how femininity functions not only as a gender norm, but also as an economic factor. The trousseau, which usually refers to a number of outfits that a young woman collects in preparation for her wedding and the beginning of her married life, but can also be taken to mean a dowry, is both overtly feminine, and a symbol of the very saleability of women in an economy based on slave labour. The story also illustrates the way in which norms of femininity have both literally and metaphorically hindered the movement and progress of Southern women.

The most poignant meeting between race and the ideal of Southern femininity in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is without a doubt the trial of Tom Robinson. The African American man's supposed violation of the white woman, often irrespective of whether or not it was consensual, has historically been a major concern among whites in the United States. The accusation of rape has traditionally been a more common grounds for the lynching of African American men in the Southern states than murder (Pieterse 177). Also, castration was a fairly common part of the lynching ritual – irrefutable evidence both of the threat that black masculinity and black sexuality posed in the eyes of the white mainstream, and the almost sacred status of the white woman (Pieterse 176). With the trial of Tom Robinson, Lee shows how, even seventy years after the end of the Civil War, race, sexuality and gender were still inextricably linked. In the novel's historical setting of the Great Depression, with more and more white people losing both wealth and social status, gender roles naturally became an even more significant tool in differentiating between blacks and whites.

This, after all, is the crux of Tom Robinson trial: despite Tom's obvious innocence, the notion of a 'not guilty' verdict would be a crushing blow to the ideal of Southern lady. The thought of a white woman, even an impoverished, abused, uneducated white woman, both figuratively and literally throwing herself at an African American man would be so fundamentally disturbing to the ideal of Southern womanhood that, as the narrator observes: 'Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed' (323). Effectively, the only way in which the 'polite fiction' of Southern femininity can survive in Maycomb is if Tom Robinson is sacrificed.

The trial also demonstrates how gender functions in the context of class. While Mayella Ewell would normally be considered 'trash' by the general population of Maycomb, as aside from being a) Southern and b) female she possesses none of the qualities of the Southern lady, when it is a matter of her word against that of an African American man she is afforded what Fox-Genovese refers to as 'the full status of [her] gender' (194). It is noticeable, however, that Mayella is only afforded 'lady' status in the context of this racial

threat. It is for instance highly doubtful that Mayella would have received the same kind of support and protection had she accused a white man of rape. After all, the townspeople of Maycomb seem fully aware that Bob Ewell has been both physically and sexually abusive towards his daughter, yet do nothing about it. Indeed, as Laura Fine points out in her article 'Structuring the Narrator's Rebellion in *To Kill a Mockingbird*', even the morally righteous Atticus Finch seems strangely unconcerned by Mayella's plight. In other words, white women belonging to the underclass were not offered the same protection and privileges as women from higher social classes, unless they were violated at the hands of a black man, and it thus became a matter of upholding racial difference and segregation. In this way, Lee shows how important gender roles and sexual relations still were in differentiating between the African American community and so-called 'white trash'.

To summarize, the traditional image of the Southern lady is harshly criticized in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, not just as a highly synthetic norm used to create the impression of gender difference where none actually exists, but also as a concept steeped in racism and oppression. However, as I have already hinted, I would like to argue that *To Kill a Mockingbird* goes beyond this critique. It seems to me that it is not only the feminine culture that is being criticized here, but also the male Southern culture.

Like the concept of the Southern lady, the battle of the sexes has had a long history in the South. Some historians have suggested that one of the consequences of the Civil War was a certain feminization of Southern society. With large numbers of men having died in the war, female-headed households became more common. This in turn meant that women gained more power, and young men were more likely to have a strong matriarchal figure in their families (Beck 204). This feminine bias in Southern society was then strengthened by the evangelical movement, which sought to eradicate the rougher side of Southern male culture, such as drinking and carousing, and to make men more domestic (Beck 211). In his book *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920*, historian Ted Ownby suggests that the male culture of violence and competition and the evangelical culture of piety and domesticity were in direct opposition with one another during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the evangelical culture Ownby describes was not necessarily a female-only culture, the focus on domesticity meant that the woman played an extremely important role. In a parallel to the Victorian ideal of the woman as 'the angel in the house', women were seen as the moral guide of their family, responsible both for keeping their husband on the straight and narrow, and raising their children to have the correct set of moral values. It is important to remember, though, that this clash between 'male' and 'female'

culture has a long history in the South. Just think, for instance, of Widow Douglas' and Miss Watson's attempts to 'sivilize [sic]' the boisterous young Huck in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which was set in antebellum Missouri. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this battle of the sexes seems to have continued on into the thirties, and I would suggest that it is in the context of this battle that one must understand the personal development of the nonconformist child characters in the novel.

Certainly, distrust of men seems to be rife in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. At one point in the novel, Scout observes that men, generally, seem to be disapproved of: 'Ladies seemed to live in faint horror of men, seemed unwilling to approve wholeheartedly of them' (313). Aunt Alexandra's marriage is repeatedly described as at best cold, and at worst nonexistent in all but name. Ironically, Alexandra for all extents and purposes actually leaves her husband in order to come and impose traditional heteronormative family values on the Finches (Johnson 52). When Scout asks her aunt whether she will miss her husband while staying with the family, she immediately realizes her mistake: 'Uncle Jimmy present or Uncle Jimmy absent made not much difference, he never said anything' (170). This scepticism towards men and masculinity also seems to lead to Aunt Alexandra's project of feminization extending beyond Scout. As her cousin Francis informs her: 'Grandma says all men should learn to cook, that men oughta be careful with their wives and wait on 'em when they don't feel good' (109). In other words, Alexandra's gospel of femininity goes beyond the world of women; she would ideally also like men to behave in a more traditionally feminine way (Richards 132). I would suggest that this scepticism towards men and masculinity among many of the female members of the community is the reason why gender nonconformist boys such as Dill and Francis are allowed to do as they please, whereas Scout is subject to constant haranguing for her supposedly inappropriate gender behaviour. While sinful 'masculine' behaviour is bad enough in men, the sight of a young girl rejecting what the ladies perceive to be her sacred femininity and instead swearing, getting dirty and generally causing mischief seems too much to bear.

Yet if the self-styled ladies see masculinity and maleness as being inherently sinful, we are given the impression that the complete opposite view, that it is women who represent sin, is also present in the community of Maycomb, especially in connection with religion. In this way, the idea of woman as the moral guide of the community is complicated. In Chapter Five, Miss Maudie Atkinson comments that the so-called 'foot-washing Baptists' of the community 'think women are a sin by definition' (59). Scout encounters a similar view when she and Jem accompany Calpurnia to an African American church service: 'His sermon was a forthright denunciation of sin. . . . Bootleggers caused enough trouble in the Quarters, but

women were worse. Again, as I had often met it in my own church, I was confronted with the Impurity of Women doctrine that seemed to preoccupy all clergymen' (162). While both the Baptists and the African Americans are of a lower social standing than the self-declared ladies of the novel, Scout's familiarity with this sentiment tells us that the idea of women as sinful was also present in mainstream middle-class society. These attitudes serve both to give us a counterbalance to the Cult of True Womanhood, and to offer an intriguing additional explanation for the very development of the concept of the lady. With 'woman' often being so inextricably linked to sinfulness in the Christian faith, the development of the 'lady' can be seen as an attempt to create an alternative form of womanhood, unburdened by the perceived immorality of femaleness.

However, it is not just among the more religious sections of Maycomb society that femininity is seen as a sin. Arguably, this view is also held by the children in the novel. In fact, much of the children's play seems to be centred on masculinity, and the fear of lacking it. More often than not, 'acting like a girl' is a grave insult, and shorthand for being boring, weak, or gossipy. Despite being a girl herself, Scout initially seems to accept the judgment that femininity equals inferiority. Indeed, she herself is sometimes revealed to be a vehicle for chauvinistic, or even misogynistic, tendencies. While she seems to forgive her friend Dill for his unmanliness, perhaps due to his 'masculine' lust for adventure, Scout's even more sissified cousin Francis is a target for nothing but ridicule and contempt. Although Francis is admittedly described as a rather unpleasant character, his sissiness also has the function of revealing Scout's prejudices. When he reveals that Aunt Alexandra has promised to teach him how to cook, Scout is incredulous: '"Boys don't cook." I giggled at the thought of Jem in an apron' (109). While it is arguably unfair to hold such a young character responsible for internalizing misogynistic views, the fact remains that Scout is often complicit and participatory in the devaluation of females and femininity. As Kathryn Lee Seidel observes in 'Growing Up Southern: Resisting the Code for Southerners in *To Kill a Mockingbird*', this chauvinism is also twinned with other prejudices that Scout initially seems to display against African Americans and lower-class whites. If one views Scout as complicit in a misogynistic and chauvinistic culture, her position as merely a victim of the forces of gender conformity, represented first and foremost by Aunt Alexandra, is complicated. By resenting her cousin for his effeminate ways, she too becomes a gender enforcer, yet simply one that favours masculinity rather than femininity.

However, I would argue that both Scout and her brother Jem steadily become less chauvinistic and less opposed to feminization as the novel progresses. For Scout, what I

perceive to be her gradual acceptance of womanhood is primarily a result of a force that she herself has little control over: male bonding. While Scout is initially participatory in the devaluation of femininity, she finds her own position as a biological female to be increasingly tenuous. Eventually, it is inevitable that she herself becomes a victim of this prejudice, as she is more and more frequently excluded by Jem and Dill, simply because she is a girl. This is a recurring pattern, especially within the context of Dill and Scout's 'courtship'.

The relationship between Dill and Scout, two staunchly gender nonconformist characters, heavily satirizes heterosexual pairings: 'He had asked me earlier in the summer to marry him, then he promptly forgot about it. He staked me out, marked as his property, said I was the only girl he would ever love, then he neglected me. I beat him up twice but it did no good, he only grew closer to Jem' (55). Interpreting this passage, Gary Richards argues that, as in the case of Joel Knox and Idabel Thompkins in Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, the gender roles are switched. However, while I would agree with Richards' observation that in this case 'the woman rather than the man disciplines wandering affections through violence' (141), I would argue that apart from this, the behaviour seems rather stereotypical. It is Dill who takes the initiative, and it is Scout who becomes his property. Rather than the roles being reversed, this seems to suggest that even in a relationship between two characters who refuse to perform gender in the conventional way, both parties will still be either privileged or disadvantaged according to their biological sex.

Therefore, I would suggest that in these seemingly innocuous descriptions of Dill and Scout's courtship, there is an underlying criticism of male behaviour and particularly homosocial relationships as a dominant force in a patriarchal society: women are excluded or abandoned in favour of male friendships. Several feminist theorists have dealt with this subject matter. One is reminded, for example, of what Gayle Rubin refers to as 'the traffic in women', in which women are exchanged as 'gifts' between men: 'If it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it' (174). Similarly, in *Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points to 'the routing of homosocial desire through women' (49), arguing that in love triangles, or as she calls them 'erotic triangles', in nineteenth-century English literature, the male rivals are often more interested in one another than the woman they are supposedly fighting over. Despite the young age of these children, and despite the atypical gender behaviour of both Scout and Dill, their 'engagement' fundamentally serves to bring Dill closer to Jem, rather than Scout. While we one would probably not call the Scout-Dill-Jem constellation an 'erotic triangle'

(irrespective of the Finch family's oft-commented upon 'incestuous streak'), one could suggest that Scout is used as a channel through which homosocial desire can be transferred between these two male characters. Indeed, Dill's proposal of marriage is related to us directly after the narrator reveals that 'Dill was becoming something of a trial anyway, following Jem about' (55). In other words, the proposal itself is sandwiched between a clear indication of Dill's interest in Jem, and the information that having used Scout to form a familial bond with Jem, Dill is able to ignore Scout and focus on the person he truly wants to get closer to: Jem. In this triangle, the focus is on Scout's function as a biological female, rather than her boyish personality. First, her femaleness is used as a link through which Dill and Jem may create a bond; Scout is a girl, therefore Dill can 'marry' her. Then, it serves to further strengthen this bond, as Scout's difference emphasizes the boys' sameness. One example of this is when Jem decides to teach Dill how to swim, and Scout is excluded from coming along: 'they said they were going in naked and I couldn't come' (305). Another example is when the children see Mr. Avery urinating in Chapter Six. Dill and Jem proceed to have a contest of their own to see who can pee the farthest, making Scout 'feel left out again, as [she] was untalented in this area' (68). While the children perform gender differently, it becomes clear that to some extent, physical differences are seen as more important than behaviour.

One could of course also speculate on whether the bond between Jem and Dill is not merely homosocial, but homosexual (Fine 69). First one must point out that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is in many ways a profoundly asexual novel. As Claudia Durst Johnson observes, there is a distinct lack of married couples in the novel – Atticus, Miss Maudie, Mr. Radley and Mrs. Dubose are all widowed. Indeed, the only obviously sexual relationship in the entire novel is an incestuous one, that between Bob and Mayella Ewell. While there are many characters in the novel whose gender identities do not fit in with heterosexist norms, I would agree with Gary Richards' observation that 'Lee does not, however, use these [gender] transgressions as consistent cultural shorthand for homosexual or protohomosexual identities' (120). We are provided with what several have perceived to be an identifiably gay character in Atticus' brother Jack, yet he is characterized as such by his aversion to women – he declares for instance that he does not wish to marry, and that his cat is the only female whose company he can stand for any extended period of time – rather than any desire or even fondness for men (Richards 138). Likewise, Boo Radley, whose reclusive life has sometimes been interpreted as a metaphor for closeted homosexuality, is seemingly a child in a grown man's body, innocent and free from desire (Richards 146).

Of course, the young age of the focalizer, and the narrator's unwillingness to move beyond the focalizer's realm of knowledge, creates obvious limitations. Indeed, we are pointedly told that neither Scout nor Dill are familiar with 'the facts of life': 'There was a man Dill had heard of who had a boat that he rowed across to a foggy island where all these babies were; you could order one' (191). However, there is a slight inkling of something beyond childish innocence in their relationship. Scout does at one point say that 'summer was the swiftness with which Dill would reach up and kiss me when Jem was not looking, the longings we sometimes felt each other feel' (154). This does hint at the awakening of some kind of desire, yet one senses from the choice of words that this desire is not directed towards one another. Rather than a yearning for one another, one gets the feeling of a bond of commonality, of being in the same boat. Whether Dill is secretly longing for Jem is of course highly debatable, and perhaps beside the point, but I would certainly argue that the suggestion of such a crush is definitely present in the novel.

As I have already pointed out, the close bond between Dill and Jem forces Scout to seek out female company, and thus we see how female solidarity can develop as a result of exclusion and sexism. In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to show how Lee presents alternative strategies for coping with gender demands, both through inspirational female role models, and a redefinition of the concept of the lady. Two women in particular have a profound influence on Scout: Maudie Atkinson and Calpurnia (Johnson 55). Both of these women manage to exist both within and outside of the concept of Southern womanhood, simultaneously possessing the ability to be infallibly ladylike and an outsider status.

Miss Maudie manages to balance her status as a lady with a strong sense of individuality and pragmatism, performing femininity when the situation calls for it, yet not allowing this to get in the way of activities she enjoys (Richards 132). She is described 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 oft-mentioned preoccupation with and talent for gardening underscores her somewhat androgynous nature, combining stereotypically male physical labour with a stereotypically feminine appreciation of the beauty of flowers. Maudie Atkinson has the function of showing Scout how feminine gender performance does not need to be a full-time job, but a role one can step into and out of depending on the situation and social convention. Scout is shown how one can destabilize or even reject Aunt Alexandra's beliefs of 'natural' gender, yet without constantly being chastised (Richards 134).

Despite the emphasis on racial difference in Maycomb, Calpurnia is the character who comes the closest to being the mother of the Finch family. She is, however, far removed from the 'Mammy' or 'Aunt Jemima' archetype of the black housekeeper (Seidel 87). While the Mammy was most recognizably characterized by her obesity, we are pointedly informed that Calpurnia 'was all angles and bones; she was nearsighted; she squinted; her hand was wide as a bed slat and twice as hard' (6-7). In other words, the Mammy's complete opposite in the physical sense. Yet she is also different in terms of personality; far from being a jolly, unthreatening figure, Scout speaks of her as a 'tyrannical presence' (7). It is clear that, at least in lieu of a white adult female (for, arguably, Calpurnia seems to be demoted somewhat after the arrival of Aunt Alexandra), Calpurnia is a powerful force within the Finch family.

Strangely, though, we get the sense that the Finch children do not really know her. They are surprised, for instance, to learn that Calpurnia is older than Atticus, and it is only after they accompany Calpurnia to church that it occurs to them that she has a separate life, and a separate family outside of the Finch household. Whether one can put this down to racism, childish short-sightedness or Calpurnia's talent for blending in seamlessly with the Finches is, of course, debatable. What is undeniable, however, is that the visit to the African American church is an eye-opener for the children.

Similarly to Maudie, Calpurnia has something of a split personality. The children discover, much to their surprise, that her speech and mannerisms change drastically in the company of her fellow African Americans, so much so that Scout refers to Calpurnia's 'white' and 'black' speech as 'two languages' (167). Again, being a chameleon, and being able to adapt to different social settings is promoted as a desirable skill. However, there are also some slightly worrying value judgments taking place at this point in the novel. For although Calpurnia's mastery of both 'languages' is depicted as an admirable quality, the African American vernacular is nonetheless dismissed as inferior. In effect, we are told that Calpurnia dumbs down when among the African American community, even though she 'know[s] better' (167), as Scout puts it. Calpurnia defends her actions thus: 'You're not gonna change any of them by talkin' right . . . when they don't want to learn there's nothing you can do but keep your mouth shut or talk their language' (167). This mirrors the novel's theme of pretending to go along with something you do not necessarily agree with for the sake of influence or acceptance. However, it is noticeable that even in a novel with such noble intentions in terms of race relations, 'talkin' right' seems to mean 'talkin' white', irrespective of the fact that the majority of the white characters speak in an idiosyncratic and often ungrammatical way. While African American vernacular is seemingly separated out as a

different language to 'standard' white American English, Scout does not seem to take this realization to its logical conclusion – that as a separate language, it can be seen as having its own rules and its own grammar. Instead of recognizing the possibilities and richness of black vernacular in and of itself, it is seen as a substandard derivative of white language (Gates xix). The rather patronizing implication of this is then that African Americans could speak 'just as well as white people' if only they tried a little harder, or had more opportunities.

This privileging of white over black reminds us that unlike Maudie Atkinson, Calpurnia has not had the freedom to choose to be an outsider. She will never be entirely accepted as a lady in white mainstream society due to her race. Yet despite this, or maybe even *because* of this, Calpurnia's intelligence and dexterity are obviously inspiring to Scout: 'by watching her I began to think there was some skill involved in being a girl' (154). Despite unpleasant behaviour from others, Calpurnia behaves with ladylike dignity, and has succeeded not only in becoming literate herself, but also in passing that literacy on to her children, against the odds. Arguably it is Calpurnia's ladylike attitude in the face of prejudice and racism that Scout mimics later on in the novel, when she becomes known in Maycomb as the daughter of a 'nigger-lover'.

While these two female characters help Scout to see possibilities within the restrictive nature of femininity, I would suggest that there is another character in the novel who influences Scout's acceptance of ladyhood even more: Atticus Finch (Seidel 80). It is, of course, ironic and perhaps even slightly dubious from a feminist point of view that it is a man and furthermore a patriarchal figure who in the end shows Scout how to be a lady, but I will argue that Atticus' influence lies in the fact that he presents the children with a gender nonspecific moral code.

For in line with what I would describe as a growing open-mindedness in Scout and Jem Finch, their respect for their father seems to increase exponentially throughout the course of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. That is not to say that the children are not extremely fond of their father and hold him in high regard from the very beginning of the novel, but it would be fair to say that they see him as somehow lacking. Indeed, Chapter Ten is entirely dedicated to rumination on Atticus' masculinity. It begins in the following way: 'Atticus was feeble: he was nearly fifty. When Jem and I asked him why he was so old, he said he got started late, which we felt reflected on his abilities and manliness' (118). Furthermore, we are given the following evidence of Atticus' supposed lack of masculinity: working in an office, being short-sighted, and a preference for reading books rather than 'male' pursuits such as gambling, hunting and drinking. Miss Maudie's comments that Atticus is skilled in checkers

and is able to play a Jew's Harp serve only to make the children even more embarrassed. However, the chapter culminates in a scene in which Atticus shoots a mad dog which poses a threat to the quiet town of Maycomb. Stunned, the children learn that their father's nickname as a young man was 'One-Shot Finch', due to his reputation as the most talented marksman in the area. Initially, neither Jem nor Scout understand why he has never told them this, but Maudie Atkinson is ready to explain the moral: 'I guess he decided that he wouldn't shoot till he had to, and he had to today. . . . People in their right minds never take pride in their talents' (130). While Scout remains a little baffled, Jem, who is older, has understood, admonishing Scout not to brag about the incident at school, and exclaiming that he would not care if Atticus 'couldn't do a blessed thing' (131). From this, we can assume that it is not the violent act of shooting the dog that Jem is proud of, nor even Atticus' skill. Instead, Jem is impressed by Atticus' modesty, and his restraint in not abusing his talents. The chapter ends with Jem telling Scout that 'Atticus is a gentleman, just like me!' (131).

This, then, it a clear indication of what we can interpret Atticus' view on social roles to be: not a matter of restrictive and exclusive gender codes, but of modesty, restraint and consideration towards others (Seidel 86). According to Atticus' worldview, a lady or a gentleman is merely gender-specific term for a polite, considerate person, one who in essence lives by the Golden Rule of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. In other words, his concept of ladylike or gentlemanly behaviour is a matter of ethics. As he explains to Jem: 'you'll see white men cheat black men every day of your life, but let me tell you something and don't you forget it – whenever a white man does that to a black man, no matter who he is, how rich he is, or how fine a family he comes from, that white man is trash' (295). Ironically, while Aunt Alexandra and her missionary circle believe that they are the ones operating under a traditional, time-honoured moral code, they consistently base their judgments on other factors, such as race, class, background, or appearance. Atticus' reinterpretation of the words 'lady' and 'gentleman' reveal the so-called ladies to be shallow and exclusive. While Atticus' inclusiveness extends to non-whites and others excluded from mainstream society in Maycomb, such as the reclusive Radleys or the impoverished Cunninghams, it is clear that for the ladies' missionary circle, some people, whether it is due to their race, class, or family history, will always be 'trash', regardless of their conduct. Likewise, others may be deemed 'well bred', despite atrocious behaviour. This fatalistic view is exemplified by Mrs. Farrow on the subject of the African American community in Maycomb: 'We can educate 'em till we're blue in the face, we can try till we drop to make Christians out of 'em, but there's no lady safe in her bed these nights' (311). Of course, the

central irony is that the ladies themselves fail to live by 'feminine' moral codes such as religion and domesticity, yet do support the kind 'masculine' behaviour they purport to disapprove of, such as violence, racism and oppression.

The universality of Atticus' moral code is exemplified by the fact that his son Jem goes through a similar transformation to that of Scout. Jem is often perceived to be a foil to the more feminine Dill, and arguably Scout as well, as he is apparently more successful in conforming to prescribed gender norms than many other characters in the novel (Richards 120). However, I would disagree somewhat with this. While Jem may be more stereotypically masculine than Dill or Francis, he is still described as physically small (he is, for instance, not allowed to join the football team), and is often presented as vulnerable. It seems that Jem's perceived normalcy often leads to his being seen as less significant – after all, in a novel so full of eccentrics, such a conventional character is at risk of fading into the background. Even critic Kathryn Lee Seidel, who pays extremely close attention to Scout's journey from ignorance to enlightenment, dismisses Jem as a rather insignificant character: '[Jem] is relatively ineffectual in his influence over Scout. . . . [his] actions in the novel do not change the course of events' (89).

However, I would argue that Jem is an extremely important character, especially in terms of gender relations. Indeed, the change in Jem is described the very first sentence in the novel: 'When he was nearly thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow' (3). We further learn that 'His left arm was somewhat shorter than his right; when he stood or walked, the back of his hand was at right angles to his body, his thumb parallel to his thigh' (3). I would suggest that the placement of these descriptions at the very beginning of the novel is a signpost in the text, urging us to pay attention to the change in Jem, symbolized by his disfigured arm. While Harper Lee is less interested in bodily deformities and freakishness than many of her Southern contemporaries, I would argue that Jem's disfigurement, mild as it is, is symbolic of the fact that he has been profoundly marked by his experiences. For better or worse, we learn that Jem will never be just another 'average Joe'.

While I would to some extent agree with Seidel, who argues that Scout is the 'hero of the novel' (89), it is important to differentiate between the adult Scout, who narrates the tale, and the young Scout, who acts as the focalizer. As an adult looking back, Scout the narrator has a deeper understanding of events and their consequences than Scout the focalizer, and I would argue that it is dangerous to attribute the narrator's wisdom to the child character. Being several years older, Jem often seems better equipped to understand the significance of events as they unfold, while Scout the focalizer is often shown to miss the point entirely.

Additionally, it is Jem, rather than Scout or Dill, who is truly on the cusp of adulthood in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Therefore, he has a liminal status which in turn affords him a sense of openness and malleability. Accordingly, I would argue that these factors led to Jem undergoing the most profound changes in the novel, both physically, in terms of puberty, and psychologically. Of all the characters, it is upon Jem that the trial of Tom Robinson seems to have the most profound impact, and Jem's disfigured left arm also serves to link him with Tom Robinson, who, of course, has a crippled left arm.

Yet it is not just the change in Jem itself which is interesting, but also the process and different stages of this change. Essentially, Jem's journey into the adult world begs the question: what does it mean to become a man in the world of *To Kill a Mockingbird*? Initially, Jem behaves the way in which one might expect any teenage boy to behave. As I have already argued, the possession of masculinity is a vital part of the children's games. During the course of the novel, Dill, though profoundly feminine himself, is revealed to be a master manipulator, expertly pressuring Jem into doing his bidding simply by questioning his masculinity. As the narrator explains: 'I suppose [Jem] loved honor more than his head, for Dill wore him down easily: "You're scared," Dill said' (16). By suggesting that Jem is frightened, and therefore somehow unmanly, Dill is easily able to orchestrate events.

In other words, this shows us that Jem is anything but secure in his masculinity. This then leads to further attempts to assert his masculinity. We see again how gender is used to create differences or boundaries – this time between the world of the child, and that of the young adult. Jem wishes to separate himself from his younger sister, and does so by cultivating homosocial relationships (most notably with Dill, who, ironically, is less stereotypically masculine than Scout) and by trying to enforce gender norms on his sister: 'Overnight, it seemed, Jem had acquired an alien set of values and was trying to impose them on me. . . . 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). Essentially, it seems that Jem is trying to exorcise his own insecurities regarding his masculinity by coercing Scout into behaving in a more feminine way.

However, by the time Tom Robinson's trial is over, Jem seems to have little interest in asserting his masculinity – or perhaps one might argue that his perception of what masculinity entails has altered. Rather than trying to coerce his younger sister into conforming to gender stereotypes, his didactic project now involves trying to encourage her to be a gentler human being. In Chapter Twenty-five, he discourages Scout from killing a 'roly-poly insect': '"Why couldn't I mash him?" I asked. "Because they don't bother you," Jem answered in the

darkness' (320). This suggests that Jem has subscribed to Atticus' approach to masculinity: that the choice to withhold force can be as meaningful as the choice to exert force. Scout observes however that: 'Jem was the one who was getting more like a girl every day, not I' (320). In other words, Scout sees Jem's maturation process as a kind of feminization. Yet is she correct in asserting that Jem is somehow abandoning masculinity and male culture?

One could argue that gentility and chivalry have always been important aspects of the character of the Southern gentleman. However, as with the Southern lady, the economic system of slavery necessitated a core of toughness beneath the genteel exterior. Commenting on historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown's theory of the rule of honour as the most important ethical code in the Old South, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese points out that the honour code wedded two opposing ideals, that of control, mastery and using force to hold on to one's position in society and one's property, and that of gentility. Yet these two ideals were not equal: 'The iron fist in the velvet glove captured their notion of restrained lordship. But since the value placed on lordship far outweighed that place on restraint, unchecked brutality surfaced frequently and escaped systematic reprobation' (200). The ethical code which Atticus Finch represents in *To Kill a Mockingbird* can then be seen as an attempt to take the behaviour of the chivalrous Southern gentleman and divorce it from the underlying sense of violence and brutality. Indeed, what emerges as the most central value in Atticus' way of thinking, that one should not take advantage of those weaker than oneself, goes entirely against the grain of the honour code, which was dependent upon using force to exploit those who were at a disadvantage. Instead of chivalrous mannerisms merely being a pretence, this ethical code seems to suggest that this chivalry should extend to the very core of one's being, even if this means putting yourself at a disadvantage. As Atticus himself declares, 'I can't live one way in town and another way in my home' (367).

The result of these changes is that two Finch children begin to regard themselves as a gentleman and a lady, and try to behave accordingly. We learn that, in the wake of the trial, rather than their old methods of violence, Jem and Scout instead try to 'hold [their] heads high and be, respectively, a gentleman and a lady' (326). These social roles have now become associated with dignity and self-restraint, rather than restrictions that need to be rebelled against. Never is this clearer than in the concluding pages, when Boo Radley, the hermit that the children have been trying to coax out of his home since the beginning of the novel, emerges in order to rescue Jem and Scout from Bob Ewell's attack. When it is time for Boo to leave, the following sequence takes place: '"Will you take me home?" He almost whispered it, in the voice of a child afraid of the dark. I put my foot on the top step and stopped. I would

lead him through our house, but I would never lead him home' (372). Scout then helps Boo to lead her to his house, so that 'if Miss Stephanie Crawford was watching from her upstairs window, she would see Arthur Radley escorting [her] down the sidewalk, as any gentleman would do' (372-3). While one could conceivably interpret this as Scout in effect subjugating herself to a mentally retarded adult, simply because he is male and she is female, I would suggest that it would be more in keeping with the novel's moral outlook to view this as an act of kindness towards somebody weaker than oneself.

In essence, what Scout and Jem are doing is using the terms of the dominant discourse in new ways. This is critically important, because although the saying goes that if you have to tell people you are a lady, the likelihood is that you are anything but, Lee shows the opposite to be true in Maycomb. Aside from some minimum requirements – being white, female, and of a reasonable social standing, as well as conforming to a certain level of femininity – proclaiming yourself to be a lady, performing that verbal act of affiliation, is also vital. The ladies of the missionary circle have defined themselves as ladies, and are thus viewed as such, despite appalling behaviour, alcoholism, masculine characteristics, disastrous marriages and so forth. Lee then subverts this by having Scout, Jem and Atticus partake in this discourse, yet while doing so, they are attributing different meanings to its terms. Even the very notion of these terms having to be gender specific is called into question, with Jem at one point instructing Scout to 'hold [her] head high and be a gentleman' (135). This suggests that the terms 'lady' and 'gentleman' can be used almost interchangeably, irrespective of gender. In a parallel to what Henry Louis Gates Jr. identified as the African American rhetorical strategy of Signifyin(g), what these characters are partaking in is 'repetition and revision, or repetition with a signal difference' (Gates xxiv) of the terms 'lady' and 'gentleman'. Scout pledges allegiance to the concept of the lady, thereby placating the most passionate gender conformists, yet her understanding and use of this word signifies something completely different. Thus a covert rebellion has taken place. In short, what Scout, Jem and Atticus Finch are doing throughout the novel is queering the terms 'lady' and 'gentleman'. While seemingly taking part in the dominant gender discourse and thus appeasing possible assailants, they are at the same time subverting the discourse by assigning different meanings to these words.

In the light of the foregoing arguments, then, allow me to look once again at my opening quotation. First, Scout states that while she still does not understand the world of women, '[t]here was no doubt about it, I must soon enter this world, where on its surface fragrant ladies rocked slowly, fanned gently, and drank cool water' (313). I would argue that perhaps the most important word in this sentence is 'surface'. Essentially, it appears that

Scout is beginning to see beyond the façade of Southern womanhood, and seeing something of value beneath the surface, at least in the ladies who seem worthy of emulation, namely Maudie Atkinson, Calpurnia and, in her more humane moments, Aunt Alexandra. It is through her bond with these women that Scout begins to open up to the prospect of becoming a lady, or at the very least a woman.

Then we have the qualification that Scout still feels 'more comfortable in [her] father's world' (313). Based on my arguments thus far, I would disagree with the interpretation of several critics, including Claudia Durst Johnson, who have taken this to mean that despite accepting the inevitability of her impending womanhood, Scout would prefer to stay in the male world. As I have tried to show in this chapter, the vital point is that 'my father's world' does not necessarily mean the same thing as the male world; as Johnson and many others have observed, Atticus is far from being a stereotypically macho character. Instead, I would suggest that he rejects the hypocritical, violent or just generally unpleasant aspects of both the existing male and female cultures, and presents a third way. This approach does not discard gender norms outright, but lessens their importance. In a society in which these mores are seen as important, one should be able to adapt oneself when the occasion calls for it. Gender performance is seen as exactly that: a performance. In other words, not a defining aspect of who you are as a person, but a set of social conventions one can choose to follow in order to be polite. Like using the correct fork at a dinner party, it becomes a matter of etiquette.

Of course, this is far from unproblematic. As I have already pointed out, the gender conventions of this society are based on oppression and racism. Therefore, can it really be portrayed as morally correct to adhere to these norms, even if it is just for show? In order to answer that question, it is perhaps worth taking a brief look at the characters in the novel who do not adhere to society's norms. We are provided with several characters who act as foils to Scout and Jem's development. Most prominently, there is the hermit Boo Radley. In the first half of the novel Boo is a ghostlike absence, a 'boogeyman' that the children use to scare one another. However, in the second half of the novel, Boo emerges as the hero, as it is he who saves Scout and Jem from Bob Ewell's vicious attack. Yet despite this sympathetic depiction, it is clear that he is an irreversibly damaged character. Boo Radley may not be the monster the children thought him to be, but his long separation from society has meant that he has never really grown up. This, after all, is why Sheriff Tate decides to keep quiet about the fact that Boo has murdered Bob Ewell. Atticus initially thinks that it is Jem who has killed Ewell, and is vehemently opposed to the idea of the crime being hushed up. However, when he learns that Boo is responsible, Atticus goes along with the plan, despite his belief in fairness and

justice. In other words, Boo Radley is seen as less capable and less responsible for his actions than even a 13-year-old boy. Sheriff Tate comments that 'draggin' [Boo] with his shy ways into the limelight – to me, that's a sin. . . . If it was any other man it'd be different' (369-70). While there is some hint that Boo has been 'not quite right' from the outset, I would suggest that it is his complete isolation from society that has made him what he is, rather than any mental deficiency. Therefore, while Boo becomes less of a 'boogeyman' as the novel progresses, he continues to serve as a warning as to what happens to those who live outside the community.

However, Boo is an extreme case. An example who is much closer to Scout and Jem in experience and age is Dill Harris. Dill is a somewhat ethereal presence in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. While he is good friends with both Jem and Scout, he has a delicate, otherworldly quality that marks him as 'different'. The narrator informs us that Dill 'could get into any character part assigned him, and appear tall if height was part of the devilry required' (52). This, along with his tendency to tell extravagant lies, makes Dill's identity seem fluid. In short, he seems more grounded in a fantasy world than that the 'real world' of Maycomb. This can perhaps be explained by his background. Like Boo, Dill has had an unhappy childhood (Seidel 88). He is depicted as an unwanted child who is shuttled back and forth between various relatives, and the resulting distress may account for his overactive imagination.

The trial of Tom Robinson affects all three children, but I would suggest that Dill reacts differently to Scout and Jem. While the Finch children are fairly pragmatic throughout the trial, Dill at one point starts sobbing uncontrollably because he dislikes the way in which the prosecutor cross-examines Tom Robinson. Scout and Jem understand that this is simply the way things work, but Dill is unable to be matter-of-fact about the situation. Like Boo, Dill possesses a sense of childish innocence that one suspects might be his downfall. In Chapter Twenty-two, after Tom Robinson has just been given a guilty verdict, all three children are attempting to come to terms with the feelings of injustice. Yet while Scout and Jem are trying to understand how this could have happened, Dill has once again retreated into a fantasy world. He has decided to become a clown when he grows up: 'I'm gonna join the circus and laugh my head off' (289). When Jem points out that Dill has got it wrong, that it is the audience that laughs at the clown and not vice versa, Dill is unphased: 'Well I'm gonna be a new kind of clown. I'm gonna stand in the middle of the ring and laugh at the folks' (290). While the trial has to some extent made the Finch children tougher and more realistic, Dill seems to be resisting such a change. In his clown fantasy, he is effectively casting himself as

the outsider, the freak (Seidel 88). Again, one is reminded of Boo Radley, and thus Dill's future seems uncertain.

In other words, Boo and Dill lack the adaptability and the toughness needed to survive in the real world. Dill enjoys make believe, but is unable to partake in the charade of everyday life. As Laura Fine, who focuses particularly on the concept of role-playing and charade in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, points out: 'Lee depicts the revered structures of society – the educational system, the court system, the church – as thoroughly corrupt or as at best absurd' (62). Yet this does not mean that one can boycott these structures entirely. In order to try to save Tom Robinson's life, Atticus must work within the court system, even though he knows the likelihood of a fair trial for an African American man is virtually nonexistent (Fine 63). Similarly, Lee shows the gender system in the South to be both bizarre and based on prejudice, yet acknowledges the need to work within the system rather than outside it (Fine 63). For instance, Maudie Atkinson is able to counterbalance and correct the oppressive views of the ladies' missionary circle. Had she not been able or willing to perform the role of the lady, she would not have had the same social influence. Great emphasis is placed on the community, and in order to function in that community, it is helpful to at least be seen as adhering to accepted social conventions. That is not to say that rebellion is discouraged. Rather, the suggestion is that covert rebellion within the community is preferable to being an isolated outsider like Boo Radley. In other words, I would suggest that *To Kill a Mockingbird* takes a pragmatic rather than radical approach to gender: the end justifies the means. However, what is repeatedly emphasized is that whether one opts for a frilly dress or a pair of overalls, the most important thing of all is how one lives one's life, and how one treats other people.

In this chapter, I have attempted to explain what I perceive to be Harper Lee's project in terms of gender in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In addition, I have tried to offer an alternative interpretation of Scout Finch's gender development, arguing for a more positive approach to her apparent surrender. Rather than reading Scout as a passive victim accepting the 'pink cotton penitentiary' (182) as her fate, I have attempted to show how she can be seen as a character actively developing and expanding her own understanding of what it means to be a 'lady', in essence finding a gender identity that satisfies the demands of the society around her, while also being compatible with her own sense of individuality.

Chapter Two: Deciphering Adulthood in
Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding*

In an essay entitled 'The Vision Shared', Carson McCullers wrote the following about the function of art: 'Of what value is creation that cannot be shared? The vision that blazes in a madman's eye is valueless to us' (269). In this chapter, I will argue that this awareness of both the value and the problematic nature of communication is also what lies at the centre of McCullers' tomboy narrative *The Member of the Wedding*. Like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this novel depicts the challenges of coming of age as a tomboy in a small Southern town. Yet while *To Kill a Mockingbird* depicted the developments and challenges its characters faced over the course of several years, *The Member of the Wedding* follows a just few short days in the life of twelve-year-old Frankie Addams. This compressed form is indicative of the novel's heightened sense of urgency: our tomboy heroine has reached crisis point. On the cusp of adolescence, Frankie feels at odds with everything and everyone around her, she is 'an unjoined person who hung around in doorways' (7). Unwilling to settle for the freakish and stifling world of the family kitchen, where she has spent the summer with her younger cousin John Henry West, and the family's African American cook Berenice Sadie Brown, and unable to fit in with the older girls in the neighbourhood, Frankie feels 'a member of nothing in the world' (7). Yet suddenly she is struck by an idea – she will run away with her older brother and his bride-to-be, and become a member of their wedding.

Like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Member of the Wedding* is concerned with how one can balance individuality with a sense of belonging within a community. In my analysis of McCullers' novel, I will focus particularly on the integral part that communication and language play during the process of coming of age and finding one's place in the adult world. *The Member of the Wedding* is a novel that poses the question: can difference be communicated, or are those who do not comply with dominant discourses doomed to a life of isolation? Also, if language privileges that which is shared and common, then how can that which is different or Other be expressed (Wilchins 35)? This, in essence, seems to be the problem that both Frankie Addams and her younger cousin John Henry face in *The Member of the Wedding*. Neither fit comfortably into the binary gender categories that the society they live in has circumscribed. Therefore, coming of age presents a crisis. Is it better to join in with the charade of conformity, or to resist? I will argue that, in lieu of a vocabulary or language that may accurately describe their feelings and identities, these two characters present

different strategies for coping, or perhaps failing to cope, with the demands of gender conformity. In this chapter, I will focus on how stringent gender norms are shown to isolate those who do not comply with them, and how narrative and communication are presented as methods of easing this sense of alienation: in effect, how language can be used to create both a sense of self and a sense of belonging. Following on from my analysis of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I will also focus on how this relates to the way in which racial difference both mirrors and intersects with gender difference in Southern society. Additionally, I will attempt to show how McCullers uses silence and miscommunication to indicate when something is amiss, and discuss how silence relates to the queer themes in this text.

First, it is necessary to attempt to trace the roots of Frankie's alienation, as I believe this is helpful in delineating some of the central themes and ideas in *The Member of the Wedding*. For this purpose, it is perhaps most fruitful to examine Part I of the novel, in which we are introduced to Frankie and her predicament. Like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this novel is set during the summer. Yet here summer represents stifling claustrophobia rather than freedom and childish innocence. This sense of fear and alienation seems to be a new development, as we learn that, until recently, Frankie had 'been like other people' (29) and felt a natural sense of belonging. While the pressures of feminization and adulthood that Scout Finch faced were represented as troublesome obstacles that needed to be negotiated, in *The Member of the Wedding*, they seem more threatening. The overwhelming feeling that Frankie seems to be experiencing is not one of annoyance, but of fear.

Where, then, does this fear come from? Obviously, Frankie's problems are in part a natural consequence of adolescence and her resulting liminal position, which is often emphasized by the fact that she is frequently depicted as standing in doorways or on thresholds. She is no longer a child, yet she is not an adult, either. In addition to this, her tomboy status makes her transition to the adult world even more complicated, as she is also caught between genders, and with puberty looming, the pressure to conform to gender norms increases. While she has previously been able to ignore demands to behave in a more 'feminine' way, Frankie now feels womanhood breathing down her neck. With her crew cut, boy's clothes and rough skin, she does not look or act the way girls are supposed to. She has suddenly become acutely aware that she does not fit in with the idealized image of femininity, and as a result of this, feels isolated.

Yet it is not just Frankie's liminal status that has left her feeling isolated. In a definite contrast to the close-knit community of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, here we seem to have an environment in which there is a distinct lack of adult guidance and a historical perspective and

moral code to live by. While Harper Lee confronted us with an image of a South in which the heavy burden of tradition played an important part in everyday life, this is less blatant in *The Member of the Wedding*. In her book *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor*, Louise Westling observes that Carson McCullers' heroines 'live in a world practically devoid of traditional Southern femininity. . . . [They] inhabit a flat present bereft of myth, history, or even family traditions' (110). Yet this does not necessarily mean that the novel could easily be set in another region of the United States. Westling also points to the strong tradition of the tomboy in the South, and emphasizes the stark contrast between the liberty of childhood and the stringent demands for gender conformity that were placed upon women once they had married (112). Similarly, Louis D. Rubin Jr. observes that while McCullers' fiction tends not to thematize Southern history or societal norms directly, 'the capacity for recognizing and portraying and sympathetically identifying with pain and loneliness, could arise only out of a social situation in which the patterns and forms and expectations of conduct and attitude are very firmly and formidably present' (119). In other words, Frankie's extreme anxiety regarding her identity, often described in terms of actual physical pain and discomfort, is in itself indicative of the pressure she is under. Furthermore, examples of correctly performed Southern femininity litter the background of this novel, from the older girls who refuse to let Frankie join their club, to her brother's petite and seemingly effortlessly pretty fiancée Janice (Gleeson-White 113). There is, in other words, little doubt in the reader's mind as to what Frankie is 'meant' to be like.

However, while Scout Finch faced a barrage of women eager to mould her into a lady, Frankie Addams faces the opposite problem: there does not seem to be anyone who can guide her through adolescence into womanhood. As Frankie herself exasperatedly observes towards the novel's ending: 'If there was only somebody to tell her what to do and where to go and how to get there!' (179). Like in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the mothers of this story are either dead or absent, but here we have no father figure willing to take on a dual mother/father role. Again, we see an African American woman, Berenice Sadie Brown, functioning as a mother figure in a white household. In this case, she is acting as a stand-in for both Frankie's mother, who died in childbirth, and for Frankie's father, who is most frequently portrayed as either absent, or preoccupied with his own affairs.

Berenice has been interpreted as both a permissive and a conservative element in *The Member of the Wedding*; I would suggest that she is both. As her one blue eye and one brown eye show us, she seems to be in possession of a certain kind of two-sightedness. On the one

hand, as her surname, Brown, indicates, Berenice is down to earth, and attempts to talk sense into the children. For instance, she pokes gentle fun at Frankie's crush on the wedding and tries to persuade her to find a beau instead, urging her to '[r]emember Noah and the ark' (93), implying that 'two by two' (93) is the way things work. When Frankie says that in an ideal world, people should be able to change their sex back and forth at will, Berenice insists that 'the law of human sex was exactly right just as it was and could in no way be improved' (116).

Berenice also tries to encourage Frankie to develop some feminine wiles: 'You ought to fix yourself up nice in your dresses. And speak sweetly and act sly' (98). Here we are once again made aware of the necessity of toughness behind the delicate exterior of Southern femininity; in effect, how adult Southern femininity becomes an exercise in neither saying what one means, nor meaning what one says. Both in appearance and speech, Berenice is attempting to teach Frankie that the message that must come across is one of sweetness and innocence. Therefore, this advice from Berenice has often been interpreted as further evidence of her conservatism. However, it is important to note that Berenice is not indicating that Frankie need change her personality, but merely how she presents herself. Indeed, there seems to be analogous behaviour in Berenice's own life: 'Berenice always spoke of herself as though she was somebody very beautiful. Almost on this one subject, Berenice was really not in her right mind' (100). While Frankie may not be entirely convinced by Berenice's self-belief, one can imagine that many others have been. Certainly, she does not seem to have lacked admirers at any stage in her life. By believing herself to be beautiful, and presenting herself as beautiful, Berenice has made people perceive her as beautiful. In other words, by being aware of how we present ourselves, we can change how others see us, even to the extent of drawing their attention away from what is blatantly in front of them – in Berenice's case, the shortcomings that would render her physically unattractive in a conventional sense. Like the home-rolled cigarettes she keeps in a Chesterfield package, it becomes a matter of charade or 'trompe l'oeil', of fooling people into believing you are something different than what you actually are. Berenice seems to be encouraging Frankie to engage in a similar type of pretence or trickery, although in terms of gender rather than beauty. Again, becoming a lady can be seen as an act of 'perform[ing] affiliation . . . verbally' (Freeman 128), whereby pledging your allegiance to femininity, along with some token gestures of cooperation, can be enough to grant you mainstream access and acceptance.

In any case, Berenice is far from being a gender role enforcer of the same ilk as Aunt Alexandra. She allows Frankie's cousin John Henry to dress up in her clothes, and only voices

real scepticism towards Frankie when she takes on the exaggerated femininity of the F. Jasmine persona in Part II of the novel. While race is perhaps not as much of a prominent theme in this novel as in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, there is the suggestion that Berenice's experiences as an African American woman make her more understanding towards the children's atypical gender behaviour. This may be both because she herself knows what it is to be an outsider, and perhaps also because the experience of oppression and segregation has given her a different set of priorities, with gender roles being somehow less important. For instance, when the three characters discuss their ideal worlds, Frankie and John Henry focus solidly on gender freedom, while Berenice dreams of a world without racial divides, without war, without hunger. Berenice also functions to show once again how race and gender intersect in the South, for while she may try to point Frankie in the right direction, Berenice's status as an African American woman in a segregated society means that she is unable to be a complete role model in terms of gender. As we saw in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, different rules applied to women according to which side of the racial divide they were on. Thus we can see how having a non-white primary female role model serves to make Frankie feel even more isolated from the mainstream.

It is not just female role models that are absent in this story, the adult male figures in Frankie's life also seem to be somewhat distant and frightening. Indeed, two specific events relating to the opposite sex seem to have played an important part in the identity crisis that Frankie is undergoing. The first is having recently been rejected by her father, and the second is her first sexual experience. We learn that until recently, Frankie 'slept in the bed with her father, but not because she was scared of the dark' (29). However, now that she has reached puberty, her father has obviously deemed this arrangement inappropriate, and this rejection seems to have made a deep impression on her: 'Since June she had had this secret grudge against him that almost she did not admit – since the night he had asked who was the great big blunderbuss who still wanted to sleep with her old Papa' (62). This need for physical comfort is emphasized by the fact that she uses her younger cousin, John Henry West, as a sort of surrogate, as they often share a bed: 'She heard him breathe in the darkness, and now she had what she had wanted so many nights that summer; there was somebody sleeping in the bed with her' (21). Significantly, Frankie refers several times to a 'secret and unknown sin' that she committed in May with Barney MacKean, an event we can interpret to be Frankie's first sexual experience. The experience seems to have been anything other than pleasurable: 'She hated Barney and wanted to kill him. Sometimes alone in the bed at night she planned to shoot him with the pistol or throw a knife between his eyes' (33). As her encounter with

Barney actually predates being barred from her father's bed, one could argue that in Frankie's mind, the proceeding 'rejection' is actually a result of what she herself refers to as her 'sin'; in effect, she has been cast out from the Garden of Eden that was her childhood, and pushed into an adult world that she does not yet fully understand.

This confusion is twinned with a dawning awareness of the ways in which her biological sex may potentially limit her possibilities. Similarly to Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, while Frankie may not 'act like a girl', this does not mean that she is not subject to the limitations of being a woman. Frankie is slowly beginning to see how divided the world is in terms of gender, and how her own gender may limit her options. She dreams, for instance, of going to the war as a Marine and donating her blood to the Red Cross, yet comes to realize that they would not have her. The thought of not being able to participate is what scares Frankie the most: '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' (31). 'The world' in this context may be interpreted as the *male* world, the world of politics and wars, rather than the domestic world of womanhood and femininity (Matlok-Ziemann 126). While we are not told explicitly that Frankie is excluded from these activities because of her gender – Frankie herself blames her age, rather than being a girl – we are aware of the fact that her daydreams of belonging are incompatible with the expectations for girls and women at this time.

In effect, Frankie is at once being rejected by the male world, both on the level of her prospects in life, and also on a personal level by her own father, and at the same time being offered a new way of belonging, as a 'normal', feminine, heterosexual woman. The problem is that she is in no position to step into this new role, for two main reasons. First, her gender identity is incongruent with demands. Secondly, while boys and men are beginning to view her as a sexual being, she either has not yet developed this sort of desire, or alternatively, this desire is not directed towards men. Meanwhile, the 'nasty lies about married people' (18) that she has heard from her contemporaries have left her disturbed and incredulous. Thus Frankie is left alone, disjointed, confused and, above all, afraid. Both the perceived rejection by her father, and the disturbing nature of her experience with Barney come together to create a distrust of men, resulting in a constant fear of 'the Law', another symbol of male authority, being after her.

Having attempted to point at some catalyzing factors in Frankie's crisis, it is now time to examine how she herself decides to solve this problem, and the significance of her choices. At the end of Part I, Frankie has a revelation: she will become a member of her brother's

wedding. The idea becomes her escape from isolation: 'Yesterday, and all the twelve years of her life, she had only been Frankie. She was an *I* person who had to walk around and do things by herself. All other people had a *we* to claim, all other except her' (52). How are we to interpret this strange ambition? Several critics have suggested that Frankie's crush on the wedding is indicative of an emerging bisexual or lesbian desire: either a crush on her brother *and* his bride, or a crush on the bride and a desire to take her brother's place. However, while I would not disagree with the fact that Frankie can, in the novel as a whole, be read as a lesbian or proto-lesbian character, I would suggest that her crush on the wedding is not the result of an attraction to either member of the engaged couple. As Westling observes: 'This absurd fantasy is a denial of the adult sexuality which Frankie cannot bear to acknowledge, but her attraction to it is obvious in her infatuation with the engaged couple' (129). Jarvis and Janice cease to be individuals in Frankie's mind, and become instead a symbol of something bigger. The wedding is, of course, a cultural symbol of two people becoming one. This, I would argue, ties in with the novel's underlying theme of whether or not two people can ever truly connect with one another. Frankie is attempting to align herself with a symbol of normalcy, belonging and acceptance. Becoming a member of the wedding represents being a member of a heterosexual union, while at the same time *not* being a member. Frankie wants to join in, but from a safe distance.

Obsessing over boys or potential relationships is hardly uncommon in young girls, but Frankie's unusual and somewhat askew method of doing this, focusing on a relationship that she herself cannot actually be a part of, lends a sense of satire to the novel. I would suggest that McCullers is mocking the way in which the heterosexual romance has, as Adrienne Rich puts it: 'been represented as the great female adventure, duty and fulfillment' (242). In other words, girls and women are taught to seek a sense of identity and belonging from the successful – i.e. traditional – heterosexual relationship and marriage, rather than through any other type of achievement (Adams, 'A Mixture' 573). In *The Member of the Wedding*, McCullers seems to be emphasizing how difficult it is to forge one's own identity through relationships with others.

At the same time, Frankie's allegiance with Janice and Jarvis seems very much related to her desire to be a public figure. While she uses the clichéd language of romantic love to describe her yearnings, such as when she says of the couple: 'I belong to be with them' (57), Frankie's fantasies do not actually involve trespassing on their private sphere. As Elizabeth Freeman observes, what she wants is 'to inhabit publicly a couple she is not a part of' (113). Rather than more traditionally feminine ambitions of domesticity and intimacy, Frankie's

dreams of life with Janice and Jarvis are very much connected to the public sphere; with her brother and his bride she wishes to see the world, to meet people, to witness important events and speak about them on the radio. What Frankie yearns for is not the twosomeness of coupledom, but the chance to make 'thousands of friends, thousands and thousands and thousands of friends' (139). In short, she wishes to employ a traditionally feminine way of attaining status or sealing one's fate, the love affair and the wedding, yet she rejects the natural consequences that these methods entail for women, that is to say married life and domesticity.

In Part II of the novel, Frankie's plans are put in motion. In order to become a member of the wedding, a transformation seems to be needed. First, of course, there is the matter of the physical makeover. A stark contrast to the old Frankie, the rebranded 'F. Jasmine Addams' feels a sense of belonging and entitlement in the world: 'all was natural in a magic way' (59). This naturalness, though, is not reflected in her appearance. The wedding crush seems to have brought with it a pressure of feminization, perhaps because, as Ellen Matlok-Ziemann suggests, Frankie 'is keenly aware of the fact that for a female to be grown up . . . it is necessary to put on femininity' (132). Accordingly F. Jasmine has put on a dress of pink organdie, Sweet Serenade perfume, and bright pink lipstick. When contrasted with her boyish looks, the effect is comical, prompting Berenice to call her a 'human Christmas tree' (107). The description is both apt and telling, indicating that Berenice sees F. Jasmine's tomboy body, with its crew cut and dirty elbows to be as natural as a tree, and the feminizing attire she has put on to be as artificial and gaudy as cheap tinsel. In this section of the novel, the markers of traditional femininity can be seen as a language, and one Frankie is not fluent in, thus creating a strange and disjointed communication. When she feminizes her appearance, Frankie is in effect dallying with a code she does not quite understand, a language she is not yet fluent in, something that is shown towards the end of Part II to be potentially dangerous when a drunken soldier interprets her to be a sexually available older girl. As I will suggest later, Frankie becomes more fluent in the language of 'natural' femininity in the final section of the novel, in which she reverts to her given name, the more adult 'Frances', adopts a more demure style of feminine attire, and has developed a keener understanding of how the world actually works.

Interestingly, Frankie uses verbal as well as physical means to communicate to the world that she has become a new, better person. Despite the fact that Berenice has informed her that it is illegal to change one's name '[b]ecause things accumulate around your name' (134), Frankie has given herself a new moniker: 'F. Jasmine'. The name change is symbolic,

with the shortening of her own first name, representing the way in which she has, in effect, attempted to abbreviate the tomboyish aspects of her personality. Meanwhile, 'Jasmine' serves to link her to the 'Ja' of her brother Jarvis and his bride Janice, and to create a more overtly feminine persona, with 'Jasmine' arguably being more exotic and girly than Frankie's other suggestion, the more sober 'Jane'. However, this metamorphosis seems to have happened mainly in our protagonist's head, as everyone around her continues to call her 'Frankie'. Only the narrator humours her, obediently referring to her 'F. Jasmine' throughout this section of the novel, which I would suggest sets a tone of deep sympathy mixed with gentle humour. As Elizabeth Freeman points out, Frankie's decision to change her name ties in with the imagery of the wedding, as marriage is of course the most common reason that women change their name. I would argue that this change emphasizes Frankie's creative nature, as in contrast to the bride who dutifully adopts her husband's surname, she is naming herself. Rather than passively conforming to a prescribed role, I would suggest that she is creating a persona that she would like to inhabit.

In addition to this new name, there is the telling of the wedding. In Part II of the novel, what is as striking as her physical transformation into F. Jasmine is Frankie's almost insatiable desire to tell anyone who will listen, and quite a few people who will not, about the wedding. This becomes a ritual in itself: 'the telling of the wedding had an end and a beginning, a shape like a song' (74). The process of narration seems to comfort Frankie, and lends a sense of order to her chaotic existence. In retelling her story, F. Jasmine's plans are reified and her sense of identity is strengthened: 'The plans about the wedding stiffened and fixed with each new telling and finally came unchangeable. By eleven-thirty she was very tired, and even the tunes dragged with exhaustion; the need to be recognized for her true self was for the time being satisfied' (76). The idea of the extremely synthetic F. Jasmine persona being Frankie's 'true self' is of course rather comical to the reader, but again, I would suggest that there is also a serious undertone to this. The F. Jasmine persona may not be a particularly successful attempt at forging a new identity, but it is an attempt nonetheless, and an important exercise. By changing her appearance, her name and the way in which she speaks, Frankie is creating a character for herself. With the telling of the wedding, she is creating a narrative in which this character can exist.

Acting as a foil for Frankie throughout her bid to transform herself is her cousin, John Henry West. Several years younger than Frankie, he is described as physically puny, an absolute contrast to the mythical figure of John Henry, an African American railroad worker who, according to American folklore, challenged a steam-powered railroad hammer that was

threatening to make his job redundant and won, only to die afterwards of exhaustion (Chapell 16). While John Henry West bears little physical resemblance to this legendary figure, I would suggest that John Henry is something of a strongman in terms of individuality and determination to stick to his own rules. With the character of John Henry, McCullers seems to have taken the innocence, originality and eccentricity so naturally present in many children before they become too acquainted with the way in which the adult world works, and turned it into something grotesque. By picking these qualities apart and by extension distancing the reader from them, McCullers makes John Henry seem profoundly queer and strange.

Unlike Frankie, John Henry does not actually want to be a member of anything – or at least not anything beyond the kitchen group of himself, Frankie and Berenice. Like Dill in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, he seems content to stand on the outside, looking in. This absence of a need to fit in with everyone else is coupled with a blatant disregard for rules and norms. Even when playing a simple game of cards with Berenice and Frankie, John Henry follows his own logic rather than the rules of the game, laying down cards in a seemingly arbitrary way. This leaves Frankie exasperated: 'He don't even follow the first beginning laws! He is a child! It is hopeless! Hopeless! Hopeless!' (23). Here, as in several other sections of the novel, John Henry's reluctance to follow rules is taken as a personal affront by Frankie, perhaps because she herself would like to be as carefree as John Henry, rather than constantly feeling like a criminal. Like Jem in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Frankie attempts to exorcise her own insecurities by stepping into the role of norm enforcer. In the above quote, it is evident that language is one of the tools Frankie is using to distance herself. She apparently reels herself in after the petulant and ungrammatical 'He don't even follow the first beginning laws!', moving on to the accusatory 'He is a child!', before launching into Southern belle-style melodrama of 'It is hopeless! Hopeless! Hopeless!' (23). Thus language is shown to be a tool that can create difference both in terms of age and gender.

John Henry's maverick nature extends to his own gender performance. He does not shrink from feminine dress or behaviour, allowing Frankie to douse him with Sweet Serenade perfume, and dressing up in Berenice's pink hat and high heels. When Frankie rejects the doll she is given as a present by her brother, John Henry gladly adopts it, taking on a motherly role, rocking it in his arms and naming it 'Lily Belle'. The idea of behaving in a certain way merely because he is a boy does not seem to occur to him. When this is contrasted with Frankie's extreme anxiety regarding her gender identity and role in the world, one begins to wonder why this is. Perhaps one could argue that John Henry is younger than Frankie, and that he is therefore still protected from the pressures of the adult world. Or perhaps, as is the

case in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this is a reflection of greater pressure on girls to conform to gender norms and cultivate femininity in Southern society. Arguably, as Louise Westling points out, the contrast between the freedoms of childhood and the restrictions of adulthood would often have been more profound for girls than boys in this historical and geographical setting.

However, John Henry's idiosyncrasies seem the result of something more than just male privilege. While Frankie struggles to conform to the ideals of what she thinks a girl should be, John Henry's ideals of beauty are far from mainstream. At one point, he declares that the Pin Head he saw at the freak show, who is described as having 'a shrunken head no larger than an orange, which was shaved except for one lock tied with a pink bow at the top', to be 'the cutest little girl [he] ever saw' (27). Similarly, when what the narrator repeatedly describes as moths are banging against the window, John Henry exclaims 'Those beautiful butterflies. . . . They are trying to get in' (19). Of course, moths are generally perceived to be the butterfly's poor relation – less beautiful and colourful, but are also wrongly perceived as parasitic due to their reputed fondness of wreaking havoc on clothes. The moth, which flies compulsively towards the light is also an apt symbol for the way in which John Henry single-mindedly follows the beat of his own drum, and the danger that lies in thoughtlessly following your instincts, especially if you are a fragile creature. In both this example, and the one of the Pin Head girl, we see how John Henry finds beauty in what others may consider unsettling, degenerate, or downright ugly. While Frankie reimagines herself as the exotic, feminine and entitled F. Jasmine, John Henry reimagines moths as butterflies.

Yet it is important to remember that while John Henry arguably seems to lead a happier, freer life than Frankie, his premature death from meningitis means that he never actually makes it beyond childhood. This, then, leads me back to the subjects of individuality, communication and belonging. I would argue that John Henry's death from meningitis is symbolic of the fact that his eccentricity also causes problems, the main one being the difficulty he has in communicating with others. In short, his free and idiosyncratic nature also serves to isolate him. Throughout the novel, John Henry's speech patterns seem to consist of almost inaudible whispers, strange repetitions of words spoken by other people, and nonsensical questions: 'Again he asked a question which by itself meant nothing. "Why?" he asked. "Why what, Baby?" said Berenice. He did not answer' (133). At one point, we are told about a drawing that John Henry has done of a repair man climbing a telephone pole. The man has been drawn in side-view profile, yet John Henry has drawn two eyes on one side of his face. The drawing makes Frankie feel uneasy, but she knows she cannot reason with her

cousin: 'You might as well argue with cement. Why did he do it? Why? Because it was a telephone man. What? Because he was climbing the pole. It was impossible to understand his point of view' (163). While some critics, such as Louis D. Rubin Jr., have labelled John Henry's gruesome death both arbitrary and gratuitous, I would suggest that it can be seen as a symbolic event, with the death of what it arguably the most 'freakish' and idiosyncratic character coinciding with Frankie's apparent surrender to normalcy. In this way, John Henry's premature demise raises questions with regards to communication with others. We each live with our own individual perceptions of the world, but if our point of view becomes too far removed from mainstream logic, or if we are unable to convey our point of view to others, is it viable? Can those who are entirely incomprehensible to others survive?

This, I would argue, is a prominent theme in *The Member of the Wedding*. Coming of age means finding your place in the adult world, and being able to articulate and communicate who you are and what you want is an integral part of this process. Those who are Other, whose identity and experience does not comply with the dominant binary discourse of masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, white/black and reality/fantasy, face additional challenges. Frankie lacks a language of difference, and tackles this problem by in turns attempting sameness, such as when she adopts a more feminine style of dress, or trying to carve out a unique identity by using words to narrate her own story.

Yet throughout the novel, Frankie's search for belonging seems tinged with doubt as to what extent two people can ever really understand one another: 'we can look at each other and touch each other, and stay together year in and year out in the same room. Yet always I am I and you are you' (136). Frankie is observing that we are all, despite our relationships and apparent closeness to others, somehow alone. Berenice perhaps puts it best when she says: 'We all of us somehow caught. We born this way or that way and we don't know why. But we caught anyhow. I born Berenice. You born Frankie. John Henry born John Henry. And maybe we want to widen and bust free. But no matter what we do we still caught' (141). This quote can be interpreted both as a comment on the inescapability of what we might call our 'true nature', and the futility of trying to be something you are not; a comment perhaps on Frankie's attempts to transform herself. However, it also seems to say something about our ability to connect with something outside ourselves. This is elaborated on in the following pages, with Frankie saying that as well as being caught, people also seem loose: 'you don't see what joins them up together' (142). Yet at the same time, all this talk of isolation is contrasted with the extreme physical closeness of the three characters while they are saying these things. Frankie has climbed onto Berenice's lap and the two of them are 'close together

as one body' (141). Soon John Henry joins them, and the scene concludes with the three characters starting to cry simultaneously. This seems to suggest that while there may be limits to how much one can fully understand another person, it is still possible to forge very intimate emotional bonds.

One way in which such bonds can be formed in the novel is through language, story-telling and narrative. This is also presented as extremely important in terms of self-definition and identity-building. As I have already discussed, Frankie uses language in a very literal way to try to tell people who she is, as in Part II with the telling of the wedding. Yet perhaps more subtly, Frankie is shown to be experimenting with language throughout the novel, presumably motivated both by a desire to express the feelings she cannot yet name, and also a wish for others to perceive her in a certain way. As with the name-changing, the way in which Frankie speaks seems to indicate that she is experimenting with different characters, often attempting to use grandiose words or statements that fit poorly with the rougher, more relaxed sociolect of her natural speech, which tends to resurface when she gets upset or angry. For instance, in Part II, attempting to strike up conversation with the bartender at the Blue Moon, she says: 'It certainly has been an unseasonable summer, hasn't it?' (70). This is the kind of statement that Frankie thinks is appropriate of a grown, elegant lady, yet the setting of a sleazy bar in the wrong part of town and her young age makes the statement simply seem comic. Similarly, when Frankie attempts to run away from home in Part III, after the fiasco at the wedding, the note to her father concludes: 'The whole thing is a irony of fate and it is inevitable. Later I will write. Please Papa do not try to capture me' (175). These over-the-top and sometimes clumsy formulations do not just serve to make *The Member of the Wedding* a darkly humorous novel, they also underscore the way in which Frankie is using language to carve out an identity for her adult self. Significantly, we are repeatedly informed that the characters can hear the sound of a man tuning a piano for much of the second section of the novel. This could be said to reflect the fact that Frankie is also trying to find her key, as it were, and hitting a few bum notes on the way.

Another person for whom narrative and storytelling are shown to be helpful throughout the novel is Berenice. Her position as an African American woman means that she has a central role with regards to storytelling and orality. As with Frankie, Berenice's speech is idiosyncratic and occasionally somewhat 'off' – for instance she uses the term 'candy opinion', rather than 'candid opinion' and the children follow suit. Of course, the sugar-coated connotations of the word 'candy' are the exact opposite of those of the forthright 'candid', thus giving the text a humorous element. Yet these idiosyncrasies are not only for

comic effect, they also show how Berenice's unique perspective is expressed through language. As with Calpurnia in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, there is an emphasis on the difference between 'white' and 'black' language, a theme I will discuss further in connection with Honey Brown.

Berenice's narratives, the telling of her stories, have the purpose of helping her make sense of her choices, and also educating the children. There is one story in particular that she tells more often than the others, and that is the story of Ludie Freeman, Berenice's first and most loved husband, who died young of pneumonia. Berenice never gets over the grief of this loss, and finds herself trying to recreate this first love in her later marriages. As she tells the children, she marries her second husband because he has a deformed thumb just like Ludie's. As for her third husband, they meet when he is wearing Ludie's coat, which Berenice had to sell to pay for his funeral. In effect, she is doing something similar to the protagonist in Edgar Allen Poe's short story 'Berenice', which McCullers may have had in mind when naming this character. In 'Berenice', the protagonist becomes entirely obsessed with the teeth of his terminally ill fiancée, as they are the only healthy part of her body. In *The Member of the Wedding*, Berenice becomes so obsessed with her lost love that she sees parts of him everywhere. She explains it thus: 'I loved Ludie and he was the first man I loved. Therefore, I had to go and copy myself forever afterward. What I did was to marry off little pieces of Ludie wherever I come across them. . . . they all turned out to be the wrong pieces' (126-7). Berenice mistakenly hopes that, like a synecdoche, the parts stand for the whole. The sad truth is, of course, that the whole has been lost forever, and that attempting to recreate one's first love is in any case an impossible task.

As with Frankie's telling of the wedding, Berenice is using narrative to create order in her existence, making sense of profoundly illogical feelings and desires. Yet this tale also has an educational purpose. Berenice feels that the story of Ludie Freeman and her later husbands is a cautionary tale that the children, and Frankie in particular, need to hear. She sees a connection between this story and Frankie's crush on the wedding, perhaps surmising that Frankie, too, is mistaking a part for a whole. In effect, Frankie is focusing on one traditional aspect of the heterosexual love affair, the ritual of the wedding, rather than the relationship itself. Rather than seeking belonging, validation and normalcy in the heterosexual relationship, as young girls are generally encouraged to do, Frankie instead places inordinate focus on what could be called a symbol or by-product of the heterosexual relationship. Then again, Berenice's story also seems to highlight 'the dangers of compulsory heterosexuality'

(Davis, 'Erasing' 209), or being with a man simply because this is what society dictates. Thus Berenice's messages once again seem rather conflicted.

While narratives and storytelling are shown to be helpful in connecting with others, the text is also riddled with examples of silence and miscommunication. Silence in particular is a recurring theme in McCullers' work, most notably perhaps in her debut novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, in which the central character is a mute. In *The Member of the Wedding*, these silences or misunderstandings are directly related to themes of belonging, generally indicating isolation. In short, silence and miscommunication are often used by McCullers to indicate that all is not as it should be.

Perhaps not surprisingly, silence is often attributed to the most transgressive characters in the novel. For instance, the freaks Frankie sees at the carnival seem unable to communicate verbally, and the bond she feels with them is one of silent, knowing glances: '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' (27). Elizabeth Freeman argues that this silence further emphasizes and compounds their freakishness: 'Frankie links [the freaks'] inability to "get married or go to a wedding" with their inability to affiliate in ways that transcend this exchange of glances' (120). This silent freakishness also mirrors themes of gender performativity and charade. For while some of the freaks are physically deformed, such as The Giant and The Pin Head, it is suggested that certain others, like The Wild Nigger, may have chosen freakishness: 'Some said that he was not a genuine Wild Nigger, but a crazy coloured man from Selma' (26). Thus freakishness and abnormality, like gender or beauty, becomes a performance. Yet again, the emphasis is on how people are framed rather than who they actually are. Freakishness, like femininity, is shown to be a construct rather than an innate quality (Gleeson-White 20).

Then there is the story of Lily Mae Jenkins, a man who 'prisses around with a pink satin blouse and one arm akimbo. . . . [he] fell in love with a man name Juney Jones. A man, mind you. And Lily Mae turned into a girl. He changed his nature and his sex and turned into a girl' (96). This character is not shown to us directly, but instead related to us through Berenice, as another of her cautionary tales. The limitations of language and discursive tools available to the characters is particularly evident when Berenice tells this story. She says that Lily Mae 'turned into a girl' (96), but it is highly unlikely that this character would have undergone any of the medical procedures available to transgender people today, such as sex reassignment surgery. In other words, we may assume that Lily Mae has not 'become' a woman in the modern use of the term (Free 439). Thus becoming a woman seems once again to be a matter of performance. First there is the cross dressing, although it must be noted that

it seems to be rather low-level cross dressing; Lily Mae's pink satin blouse is certainly transgressive, but I would suggest less so than a skirt or a dress, for instance. Unless Berenice is trying to modify the truth in order to somehow protect the children, we can assume that the satin blouse is as far as Lily Mae goes, sartorially speaking. In other words, we may assume that Lily Mae does not dress from head to toe in women's clothing, but merely wears token items of feminine attire as s/he sees fit. Then, of course, there is the name Lily Mae. With Frankie's name changes fresh in mind it is easy to assume that Lily Mae, too, decided on a new moniker. Yet it is equally possible that this is some sort of derisive nickname that Lily Mae has been given by the local community. In summary, then, Lily Mae wears some items of female clothing, 'prisses' around in a stereotypically feminine way, and may or may not have substituted his/her given name for a female one. This, though, is a far cry from actually 'turn[ing] into a girl' (96), an assumption that seems as much based on Lily Mae's homosexuality as any gender deviance s/he displays. Even Berenice seems aware that her description of events is not quite correct. After all, she continues to refer to Lily Mae as 'him', even though he has supposedly turned into a girl.

Berenice's apparent misinterpretation has both positive and negative implications. Rachel Adams argues that '[Berenice's] account of Lily Mae reinforces the idea of sexuality as a continuum by suggesting that a man who desires another man can voluntarily change from one sex to another' (561). This, in a sense, makes biological sex irrelevant and boils gender down to performance alone. In other words, anyone who performs femininity may be considered female. However, I would suggest that this mistake is also a testimonial to the fact that one man loving another is a concept that Berenice does not fully comprehend. By saying that Lily Mae turned into a girl, a notion aided by Lily Mae's feminine appearance and behaviour, she is in effect turning Lily Mae and Juney Jones into a heterosexual couple. With the story of Lily Mae, we are reminded of the lack of a queer discourse in this particular setting. As the community has no adequate terms to describe Lily Mae's gender identity and sexuality, s/he is misrepresented and misunderstood. What Berenice is showing is that if nothing outside of the gender binary exists as a discursive reality, then those who do not comply with gender norms risk simply being shunted over to the other side of the binary. Lily Mae's gender behaviour and sexuality do not comply with Berenice's idea of what a man should be, therefore she seems to have concluded that he has become a woman.

Of course, Lily Mae makes us immediately think of the other character in the text who is trying to 'turn into' a woman. The links between Lily Mae and F. Jasmine are blatant: the change of name, the overtly feminine mannerisms, Lily's pink satin blouse an amalgam of

F. Jasmine's pink organdie dress and her gown made of orange satin. Berenice also directly links Lily Mae's homosexuality to Frankie, as an example of the 'peculiar things' she has seen, none of which compare to Frankie's crush on the wedding: '"No," said Berenice, "I never before in all my days heard of anybody falling in love with a wedding. I have knew many peculiar things, but I never heard of that before' (98). The simplistic view of gender that the narrative of Lily Mae represents would naturally be rather frightening to a character such as Frankie, as the suggestion seems to be that if she fails to comply with the rules of femininity, she may 'turn into' a boy. The view of gender being a matter of either/or is something Frankie herself seems to subscribe to. For instance, her vision of a perfect world includes the possibility of moving back and forth between genders at will – a contrast to John Henry's perfect world, in which one could be half male and half female. Thus we see how that which falls outside of the gender binary is silenced.

I would suggest that the subject of silence also emerges in the case of two of the most important male characters in the novel, John Henry West and Berenice's foster brother Honey Brown, both of whom meet unfortunate endings in the final section of the novel. As I have already suggested, John Henry is perhaps the most eccentric character in the novel. He, more so than any of the other characters, is 'caught' inside himself, and unable to connect with those around him. Like the mythical figure of John Henry, whose struggle and death has been seen as symbolic of the futility of fighting the forces of industrialization, the life and death of John Henry West seem to suggest that a complete disregard for the way in which the world actually works can never be successful. Therefore, while Rachel Adams has argued that John Henry must die because 'in McCullers' fiction, bodily difference often must be hidden, normalized, or punished, leaving hope for change in the utopian imaginings of a better world' (575), I would suggest that John Henry does not die just because of his freakish nature, but also because of his inability to convey his perspective to others, or understand where they are coming from. Indeed, it is even suggested that a misunderstanding may have been a contributory factor in his death; when he becomes ill, his complaints of a headache are ignored by Berenice, which in turn allows his condition to deteriorate (Free 442).

Honey Brown seems to be suffering from a similar problem. Some critics, such as Rachel Adams, have interpreted Honey to be a homosexual or queer character due to the description of him as 'a boy God had not finished' (Adams, 'A Mixture' 567). This interpretation is debatable, as this remark is perhaps more likely to be a comment on Honey's erratic nature; he is intelligent and talented, yet is prone to bouts of uncontrollable wild behaviour. In truth, we are given little insight into Honey's sexuality, although one could I

suppose argue that, in contrast with what one might expect from a wild young man, womanizing is not mentioned as one of his misdemeanours. However, from a gender perspective, Honey can certainly be discussed as a queer character. With his sartorial flair, delicate mannerisms and 'lavender lips' (48), he is presented as somebody who, in one way or another, is too different to fit into this small town. His indeterminate difference manifests itself in his appearance, as we learn that Honey 'did not resemble Berenice – and it was almost as though he came from some foreign country, like Cuba or Mexico' (47). Later on, Frankie urges him to move away to some such exotic destination, as she does not believe he will ever be happy if he stays in town.

Essentially, Honey's problem seems to be that he resists binary classifications. He is neither wholly masculine nor wholly feminine, neither wholly white nor wholly black, neither wholly intelligent nor wholly stupid, neither wholly 'good', nor wholly 'bad'. This sense of falling between categories seems to be reflected by the problems he has in communicating with others. Honey only appears twice during the course of the novel, but as with John Henry, when he does appear much focus is placed upon his speech and communication with others, or lack thereof. Although John Henry seems unable to articulate his ideas, Honey seems in some ways to lack the will rather than the ability. This is emphasized both times we encounter him in the text: 'Honey could talk like a white school-teacher; his lavender lips could move as quick and light as butterflies. But he only answered with a coloured word, a dark sound from the throat that can mean anything. "Ahhnnh," he said' (48) and 'he could talk as well as any human she had ever heard – but other times he would answer with a coloured jumble that even his own family could not follow' (152). The final time Frankie meets Honey, he is described as almost petrified; he is 'still as stone', 'cold', 'quiet', 'still as a dark statue, and as silent' (151-5). While Honey has previously been able to communicate with clarity on occasion, he now appears to have withdrawn completely. As with John Henry, there is a price to pay for this; at the end of the novel we learn that Honey has been given an eight-year sentence in prison for a drug-related crime. Like John Henry, and perhaps also Boo Radley and Dill Harris in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it seems that Honey is simply too fragile to survive in mainstream society.

In the case of Honey Brown, it is notable that his problems in expressing himself seem inextricably linked to his liminal racial identity. His lack of clarity is explicitly linked to his blackness: 'a coloured word . . . that can mean anything' (48), 'a coloured jumble' (158). Meanwhile, his more articulate moments are linked to his whiteness: 'Honey could talk like a white school-teacher' (48). This notion of 'black' and 'white' speech communities and the

privileging of white language over black is a theme we recognize from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Honey's problem seems then to be that he switches between these two modes of expression and thus becomes an outsider both at home and elsewhere. Thus we once again see how language discriminates against those who inhabit a liminal position.

What, then, of our tomboy protagonist's troubles with communication? While Frankie is seldom silent, she often has trouble making herself understood. Despite her eagerness to communicate with as many people as possible, she often finds herself unable to do so in a meaningful way. Ironically, Frankie is best able to express her ideas when talking with Berenice and John Henry in the kitchen – the 'we' she dreads the most. Communicating with those that she thinks she belongs with seems much more difficult. For instance, Frankie is completely unable to express her feelings towards Janice and Jarvis, and is frustrated by the fact that they see her as a little girl. At the wedding, '[s]he stood in the corner of the bride's room, wanting to say: I love the two of you so much and you are the we of me. Please take me with you from the wedding, for we belong to be together' (170), but she is physically unable to speak.

Another prominent example is the red-headed soldier whom Frankie meets in Part II of the novel, and ends up going on a date with. Initially, this is an example of how non-verbal communication can be misunderstood. As I have already pointed out, through her exaggerated femininity, Frankie is sending out the signal of being an older girl who could potentially be sexually available, but she herself does not understand this. However, their miscommunication extends to the verbal as well. A key factor in F. Jasmine's fear and uneasiness during her first encounter with the soldier is the sense that they are somehow talking past one another: 'It seemed to her the soldier said: "Who is a cute dish?" There were no dishes on the table and she had the uneasy feeling he had begun to talk a kind of double-talk' (86). F. Jasmine's gut instinct is, of course, exactly right; the soldier is talking in a kind of code that she is as yet unable to understand. Again, this emphasizes the way in which coming of age means being able to partake in a charade, while at the same time seeing through it. Rather than connecting in the way that F. Jasmine desires to, she and the soldier seem to be having two completely different conversations. This feeling of uneasiness does not lessen when the two meet for their evening date. Again, they are talking past one another, and F. Jasmine senses an undertone that she is unable to decipher: 'their two conversations would not join together, and underneath there was a layer of queerness she could not place and understand' (158). When the soldier asks her to accompany him upstairs to his room, it

becomes painfully clear that F. Jasmine is out of her depth. Unable to communicate properly with him, she is also unable to refuse.

In the two-and-a-half pages detailing F. Jasmine's ascent to the soldier's room, and the sexual advances he makes towards her, the word 'silence' is repeated twelve times. We learn that 'It was the forewarning hush that comes before an unknown trouble, a silence caused, not by lack of sounds, but by a waiting, a suspense' (160-1). This silence is only broken when F. Jasmine hits the soldier over the head with a pitcher and makes her escape. Here a lack of communication, the lacking ability to decipher codes and double meanings, is represented as posing a serious threat to those who are, in effect, out of the loop.

While Frankie is sometimes mistaken in her perception of events, and is often depicted as unsure of what she wants to say and how she wants to say it, there is a difference between her and these other characters that have difficulty communicating. I would argue that it is Frankie's overwhelming desire to connect with others that makes the difference. Throughout most of the novel, she has an almost compulsive eagerness to share, to explain, to bond, to narrate her life and her decisions in a way that John Henry and Honey Brown do not. When Berenice asks Frankie who she wants to know, Frankie replies: 'Everybody. In the world. Everybody in the world' (137). It seems to be this quality more than any other that determines whether or not a character is able to survive in the world of *The Member of the Wedding*.

Frankie's desire to communicate only falters in the first half of Part III, which details the humiliation of the wedding and its aftermath. Of course, Frankie's plans do not come together, and her brother and his bride leave without her. The wedding is described as 'a dream outside her power, or like a show unmanaged by her in which she was supposed to have no part' (171). In effect, Frankie has discovered the limitations of narrative. While the ritual of storytelling seemed to reify her plans and expectations, she discovers how little control she has over her life: 'It was a framed game. The cards were stacked' (173). Rather than wanting to talk to everyone in the world, all Frankie wants now is for 'no human being ever to speak to [her] so long as [she] live[s]' (174).

Following on from the anticlimax of the wedding and Frankie's painful disappointment, there is an ellipsis, followed by a short final section. Time has passed, and we are shown what is to be Frankie's, or as she is now known, Frances', final afternoon in the kitchen – she and her father are moving. We learn that John Henry has died of meningitis, and Berenice is leaving the Addams household in order to marry her beau, T.T., despite the fact that she does not have any romantic feelings for him. There has been much debate as to the meaning of the novel's ending, in which, like Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Frankie seems

to accept her destiny, becoming a 'normal', feminine teenage girl. Many critics have interpreted this as a defeat, and often in quite dramatic terms. For instance, Ellen Matlok-Ziemann describes it as 'Frankie's terrible fate' (135). The wedding humiliation seems to give Frankie a clear view of how caught she is by her gender: 'It was better to be in a jail where you could bang the walls than in a jail you could not see' (184). Can the acceptance of this invisible jail of womanhood really be construed as a triumph, when we know that Frankie has experienced this moment of clarity?

The critics who assert that *The Member of the Wedding* has an optimistic ending tend to focus heavily on Frankie's new, intense friendship with Mary Littlejohn, arguing that this bond is indicative of an emerging lesbian relationship. In 'Relegation and Rebellion: the Queer, the Grotesque and the Silent in the Fiction of Carson McCullers', Melissa Free argues that the novel should be read as a lesbian coming of age story. Relating to the themes I have explored thus far in this chapter, Free argues that in McCullers' work, silence is inherently connected to the queer, and suggests that the silences in the novel are indicative of queer desire that Frankie is not yet ready to explain. In light of my foregoing arguments relating to communication, I would certainly agree that Frankie's new friendship is shown to be a positive development. Tellingly, the final line of the novel shows Mary Littlejohn quite literally breaking the silence of the Addams house: 'the hush was shattered when, with an instant shock of happiness, [Frankie] heard the ringing of the bell' (190). As Melissa Free suggests, Mary Littlejohn certainly seems to be 'shatter[ing] the silence of Frankie's former loneliness' (443).

Yet, at the risk of being accused of underplaying lesbian possibilities in the text, I would suggest that one should not overemphasize the importance of Mary Littlejohn herself. First, I would agree with Rachel Adams that 'queer', a word that is constantly repeated in the novel, is a more accurate description of 'the wide array of erotic groupings that appear in McCullers's work' (561) than 'lesbian'. As Adams points out, the word 'queer' is frequently used to describe heterosexual encounters, such as Frankie's encounter with Barney, or her date with the soldier, thus questioning the supposed naturalness of heterosexual unions (562). I would also concur with Elizabeth Freeman's point that reading *The Member of the Wedding* as a specifically lesbian novel would encourage the reader to '[understand] Frankie's obsession with the wedding of her brother Jarvis and his bride Janice as the misguided "before" to a happily lesbian "ever after"' (112-3). Quite simply, the crush on the wedding seems deeply significant in its own right, and should not be dismissed as a mere precursor to Frankie's sexual development. Another danger of interpreting the novel as a specifically

lesbian coming of age story is that Frankie's gender trouble is at risk of being belittled, as it becomes merely a 'symptom' of her sexuality. The rather dangerous underlying assumption is that female masculinity and lesbianism go hand in hand. Taking this to the next logical step, one implication of this is the suggestion that heterosexual girls are unlikely to feel uneasy about performing their allotted gender role. In other words, stereotypical femininity is natural and unproblematic – as long as one is heterosexual. Inadvertently, one is then suggesting that gender rebellion is the preserve of lesbian girls, and thereby quashing suggestions that gender norms are problematic irrespective of who you are sexually attracted to.

While the friendship between Mary and Frances may or may not signal the fact that Frances is now forming a lesbian identity, it also has more general implications. Like Frankie's crush on the wedding, her crush on Mary Littlejohn seems to be functioning as a stage in which she can further develop her sense of self. What seems important is not necessarily this particular friendship, but the fact that Frances has survived the disappointment of the wedding and moved on. Throughout the novel, Frankie's dreams are not centred on heterosexual or homosexual love, but are instead related to recognition and belonging. She wants to be seen and, more importantly, wants to be heard – not within the confines of a one-on-one relationship, but on a grandiose scale. This is, after all, essentially a novel about a girl who dreams of escaping the feminine penitentiary of the kitchen in favour of the wild nature of Alaska. Frankie wants to speak on the radio, to play an integral part in the war effort, to be a great writer. Her search is not for belonging through coupledom, but for a place in the world. Therefore, proffering Mary Littlejohn as the answer to Frankie's quest seems a rather unsatisfactory ending.

Meanwhile, for those critics who do not interpret Mary Littlejohn to be Frankie's lesbian Prince Charming, the reaction to Frankie's final metamorphosis has been overwhelmingly negative. Gleeson-White describes Frances as 'the "dried-up" version of Frankie and F. Jasmine' (34). Louise Westling characterizes Frances as 'a silly girl who no longer produces her own juvenile works of art . . . but instead gushes sentimental nonsense about the Great Masters' (131). I would disagree with this analysis. After all, Frances' dream is to become a great poet. Whereas before she was inarticulate and could only dream of giving something physical, her blood and her body, her ambitions now suit her desire to express her feelings and communicate with as many people as possible. I would also question Elizabeth Freeman's assertion that Frankie's final name change is involuntary (114). While the Frances persona is more palatable to mainstream society than the proto-butch Frankie and the subversively affected F. Jasmine, I think it is slightly dangerous to suggest that this incredibly

imaginative and creative character has somehow ceased to make independent choices by the time the novel ends. To cast Frankie Addams as a hapless victim of conformity is, I would argue, to do her a disservice. As Frances, it seems that Frankie is still very much playing a role, carving out a character for herself and creating narratives in which this character can exist. Reading the novel in this way, there is little reason to believe that being Frances is the end of the line for Frankie's development. Instead, there is every suggestion that she will continue to change, continue to search for her authentic self, and continue to search for better ways to communicate this identity to others.

In short, what the Frances persona really represents, rather than simply a full stop, is that Frankie has 'learn[t] the discretion that is necessary for survival in a world where she is, indeed, a freak, but she does not in the process renounce her freakishness' (Kenschaft 229). Quite simply, it seems she has taken Berenice's advice to 'speak sweetly and act sly' (98). Of course, one may disapprove of the fact that Frankie has, at least for the moment, 'sold out' her tomboy self. Yet in the text, it is blatant that those who do not adjust somewhat to mainstream norms are unable to survive. As in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the ability to adapt to, communicate with and live in mainstream society becomes a critical point, perhaps more so than how strange or different one actually is. Again, we are presented with a vision of the South in which compromise is necessary for survival. Often, the contrast between race and gender is emphasized in this respect. Rachel Adams puts it thus: 'queer sexuality has the potential to remain dangerously undetected, whereas race in McCullers's fiction is the visible signifier of difference' (566-7). In other words, unlike those who are considered outsiders due to their race, white gender nonconformist or queer child characters have the option to blend in with the mainstream (Davis, 'Erasing' 217). As Berenice herself says, she is caught in a way that Frankie and John Henry are not, and Honey, being an outsider both in terms of race and gender, is doubly caught. While it is unlikely that the authors of these texts believe that gender difference *ought* to be silenced, the consensus seems to be that compromise is preferable to isolation or destruction.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Member of the Wedding*, to enter the adult world means learning to understand coded language and double-talk, and to use them to your advantage. Those who do not manage to do this seem unable to grow up. In Harper Lee's novel, we have Boo Radley, whose development is arrested due to isolation, and Dill Harris, who shows signs of retreating into a fantasy world. In *The Member of the Wedding*, characters such as John Henry and Honey Brown initially suffer a metaphorical type of isolation – rather than being locked inside a house like Boo Radley, they are caught within themselves. Yet by

the end of the novel, this has turned into literal confinement, with Honey in a jail cell and John Henry in his grave. In other words, the stakes are high, and in both of the novels I have discussed thus far, partaking in the charade of gender conformity in order to gain acceptance is presented as more viable than simply remaining an outsider.

In this chapter, we have once again seen the theme of gender nonconformist children being encouraged, or perhaps forced, to adopt a veneer of conventionality in order to survive in mainstream Southern society. While I would suggest that *The Member of the Wedding* has a slightly darker tone than *To Kill a Mockingbird*, we still see how the tomboy protagonist's continuing project of self-discovery, self-expression and reinvention can leave us with a sense of optimism. Furthermore, I have argued that we may take this view irrespectively of whether or not we perceive the novel to be a lesbian coming of age story. More generally, I have attempted to show how Carson McCullers uses the concepts of communication and silence to explore the subject of belonging, and how language and narrative is presented as vital in terms of survival, allowing one both to connect with others and find one's place in the world.

Chapter Three: Arrested Development in
Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*

If the first two chapters of this thesis have dealt with coming of age narratives, the third will deal with what I would classify as an 'anti-coming of age narrative'. Previously I have argued that *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Member of the Wedding* both depict child characters who come to realize that some degree of conformity is necessary in terms of survival. In Scout Finch's case, a redefinition of the term 'lady' allows her to play along with society's expectations. In Chapter Two, I suggested that Frankie Addams' continual enthusiasm for reinvention and self-expression will be her route into adulthood. My argument in this chapter is that the third novel I will be discussing, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* by Truman Capote, depicts a situation in which the reverse happens. The main character in the novel, a thirteen-year-old boy, goes from wanting to be 'where everybody was like everybody else' (86) to seemingly accepting his difference and retreating from mainstream Southern society. Rather than attempting to delineate ways in which the gender nonconformist protagonist may make his way into adulthood, I will suggest that this novel instead poses the question: is this process necessary and desirable? In this chapter, I intend to compare and contrast *Other Voices, Other Rooms* with the two other books I have already dealt with, examining how Capote's novel presents, or, as I shall argue, fails to present, a different way of moving forward into adult life. I will primarily focus on the way in which the setting of Skully's Landing and its inhabitants seem to represent stagnation and permanent childhood, and the implications this has for the themes of race, gender and sexuality in the novel. I also plan to examine how the form of the novel might be said to reflect this sense of arrested development, and how this also serves to make this a fundamentally different novel from those I have discussed thus far.

The protagonist of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is called Joel Knox. After the recent death of his mother, he has been living with his Aunt Ellen in New Orleans. However, on his thirteenth birthday, a letter arrives from his father, whom he has never met, requesting that Joel be sent to live with him at Skully's Landing. Upon arrival, Joel is surprised to be met, not by his father, but instead by his step-mother, Amy Sansom, and later on her cousin, Randolph. It later transpires that the letter was in fact written by Randolph, and that Joel's father, Edward Sansom, has been paralyzed by a gunshot wound, and is only able to communicate by blinking his eyes and dropping red tennis balls.

In the novel, the setting of Skully's Landing comes to represent a place where lives simply stop. Viewing the Landing from a distance, Joel observes that 'it was as though the place were captured under a cone of glass' (86). Even in terms of modern conveniences, time seems to have frozen; Amy informs Joel that the house has neither plumbing nor electricity, as 'Randolph is opposed to contrivances of that sort' (38). Also, not unlike Edgar Allen Poe's House of Usher, the house is described as quite literally sinking into the ground, taking its inhabitants with it. In the permanent twilight of the Landing, the traditional barrier between childhood and adulthood seems to be almost entirely absent. As Joel points out in his letter to his friend Sammy Silverstein, '[o]ut here a person old as us is a grown up person' (72). Here Joel is referring to the fact that he is allowed to drink alcohol at the dinner table, and that Randolph treats him as an equal. However, one gets the sense that this is not merely a matter of children being treated like adults. Ironically, while Joel realizes early on in the novel that 'grown ups were suddenly the only friends he wanted' (13), the adults he encounters at Skully's Landing seem not to have grown up. Indeed, it appears that almost all the characters that inhabit Landing and the surrounding areas have, in one way or another, failed to move beyond adolescence. Randolph, Amy, Edward Sansom and Zoo and Jesus Fever: these are all characters whose lives have in effect come to a halt, either because they have chosen it themselves, or because something has happened to them; they are 'outside time, all circling the present like spirits' (98).

In the novel, Cousin Randolph is perhaps the character who most clearly represents this stagnation. In his room of 'faded gold and tarnished silk' (105), 'there is no daytime . . . nor night' (107). We are told that he is in his mid-thirties, but physically, he is described as a kind of grotesque overgrown child. His face is 'round as a coin, smooth and hairless . . . curly, very blond, his fine hair fell in childish yellow ringlets across his forehead' (62). Like a child, his hobbies include playing dress-up and gluing feathers onto bits of card. This sense of childishness also extends to his personality and his relationships with others. Randolph's cousin Amy frequently refers to him as a 'poor child', and the dynamic between the two is often closer to a mother and son relationship than cousins. Indeed, the way in which Amy speaks of Randolph initially leads Joel to believe that he is a child of his own age. Spiritually speaking, the indication in the text seems to be that this is not far from the truth at times. When Joel asks Randolph if he has ever been as young as him, he is given the response: 'I was never so old' (156). While *Other Voices, Other Rooms* has often been interpreted as detailing a boy's search for a father figure, I would suggest that Randolph is not shown to be suitable for this role. Although technically he is the boy's step cousin, Randolph's relationship

with Joel could sometimes be more accurately described as avuncular rather than paternal. This is significant in relation to the novel's queerness, for as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out, '[b]ecause aunts and uncles (in either narrow or extended meanings) are adults whose intimate access to children needn't depend on their own pairing or procreation, it's very common, of course, for some of them to have the office of representing nonconforming or nonreproductive sexualities to children' (*Tendencies*, 63). However, even the boundaries of the avuncular relationship are often transgressed, as the relationship between Randolph and Joel frequently seems more like a friendship of equals than anything else. While Randolph performs the part of 'uncle' by eventually becoming something of a role model for Joel, he remains vulnerable and needy, begging Joel to tell him that 'everything is going to be all right' (118).

Joel's father, Edward Sansom, is not much help in this respect either. Having been reduced to an infantile state after having supposedly been shot by Randolph, he is unable to take care of himself, and is only able to communicate by throwing red tennis balls. Edward's wife, Amy Sansom, also seems to have failed to grow up. In effect, I would suggest that she is living in a state of married spinsterhood. She has the status of being a wife, yet her husband has been completely impotent in every sense of the word from the outset of their marriage. As a result, Amy functions as a nurse for both her crippled husband and her hypochondriac cousin. In some respects this may be considered a weighty adult responsibility, yet one gets the sense that more than anything, Amy is 'playing' nurse. We learn that she married Edward Sansom only after he became completely paralyzed, and Randolph observes that 'she was at last what she'd always wanted to be, a nurse' (117). Rather than a heavy burden she is forced to bear, the role of nurse seems a fulfilment of some sort of juvenile fantasy on Amy's part. Furthermore, her capacity for nurturing others and taking responsibility is shown to be highly selective. After all, while she willingly volunteers to take care of Randolph and Edward, she is rather indifferent towards the vulnerable and newly bereaved child that has been placed in her care. Amy's childishness is further emphasized by her rather immature behaviour. For example, she is prone to petulant hissy fits, at one point berating the other members of the household for forgetting her birthday, until Randolph points out that her birthday is several months away.

Jesus Fever, the family's pygmy servant, is also innately childlike, both in stature and personality, despite being described as almost freakishly old. On his deathbed, he demands to see his 'treasures', which include 'a dusty cracked violin, his derby with the feather [and] a Mickey Mouse watch' (121). These somewhat tatty items are reminiscent of the sort of

collection of precious things that a child might keep, and that Joel is indeed described as having early on in the novel. Jesus Fever later dies in a fit of giggles.

Jesus' daughter, Zoo Fever, can also be said to embody a mix of the adult and the juvenile. In a way, she is slightly more in touch with the expectations of the outside world than the other inhabitants of Skully's Landing. Like Calpurnia in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Berenice in *The Member of the Wedding* before her, she tries to encourage Joel to conform to gender expectations in order to avoid trouble: 'can't have you runnin round here lookin like some ol gal: first thing you know, boy, folks is gonna say you got to wee wee squattin down' (89). At the same time, one could argue that Zoo is also the victim of arrested development. Despite being in her early twenties, she treats Joel as an equal. This is of course a contrast to the motherliness of Calpurnia and Berenice. One explanation for this is that the boundaries between adults and children simply do not seem to exist in the same way in this novel. Another explanation is that of Zoo's own personal trauma. We learn that she is still haunted by the memory of Keg Brown, the man she married at fourteen, who attempted to cut her throat. Zoo's overwhelming fear that Keg will return to finish what he started seems to have left her frozen in time.

For these characters, the sense of childishness seems also to be intimately related to either gender, sexuality or race. By extension, the novel's Southern setting becomes significant. The traditional ideal of Southern womanhood, as I described it in Chapter One, has had a strong sense of childishness about it. The prettiness, the helplessness, the dependency, the primness and asexuality, the dependency on slave labour and the resulting lack of responsibility and excess of leisure time, even the vanity and impetuousness of rebels such as Scarlett O'Hara – all of these characteristics served to keep Southern women in a childlike state well into adult life. Even after childbirth, the presence of black 'Mammies' arguably allowed many white women to shrink away from the full responsibility of motherhood. Meanwhile, the African American slaves and servants who made this leisurely lifestyle possible were themselves hindered at every step from building their own independent lives. Therefore, the prevalence of overtly childlike characters in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* could be seen as a comment on the region as a whole, with gender and racial divides rendering the South itself immature and stunted.

I would suggest that the two characters in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* who are most prominently attempting to cast themselves as the stereotypical Southern woman are Amy and Randolph, although they seem to have interpreted the role differently. As Gary Richards points out, 'Randolph is himself as delicate as *Gone With the Wind*'s dithering Pittypat and

other parodic stereotypes of Southern femininity' (36). Even when not in drag, Randolph's melancholy and tarnished glamour is also reminiscent of that of the stereotype of the faded Southern belle, most famously typified by Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which was published the year before *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. Randolph and his cousin Amy seem to represent the two conflicting sides of Southern womanhood, with Randolph representing the glamorous, flirtatious, decadent and witty belle, and Amy the prim, traditional, repressed, and God-fearing lady. The two are described as being 'fused like Siamese twins: they seemed a kind of freak animal, half-man half-woman' (93). Yet one does not get the sense that it is Randolph who represents the male half and Amy who represents the female half, but rather that both are in possession of somewhat indeterminate gender identities. For Amy, with 'the vague suggestion of a moustache fuzzing her upper lip' (37), her lack of maternal instinct towards Joel and her apparently asexual nature is really no more conventional than her cousin. Despite this, she professes to subscribe to the ideal of the Southern lady: 'whatever else I may be, I'm a lady: I was brought up to be a lady, and I had my full four years at the Normal School' (128).

The strange connection between Southern ladyhood and age is also emphasized in Florabel Thompkins, the twin sister of Joel's tomboy companion Idabel. Although in Florabel's case, rather than being overtly childish, she takes on the mannerisms of an elderly lady. As a character, Florabel is reminiscent of a more successfully feminine F. Jasmine Addams. Despite not displaying any evidence that her gender identity is anything other than stereotypically feminine, Florabel's brand of femininity is so overt and exaggerated that one begins to wonder what lies beneath. Indeed, I would suggest that Florabel's gender identity seems more grotesque and strange than that of Idabel or Joel, despite the fact that she is essentially conforming to given norms in a way that the others are not. Yet as I have pointed out, the problem is not just one of gender, but of age. Florabel is adopting the mannerisms of a much older woman, 'a certain type of old lady' (28), as the narrator observes. Florabel seems freakish not because she is using a tomboy body to mimic a Southern belle, like F. Jasmine, but because she is using a pubescent body to mimic the ways of an elderly lady, referring to Joel as 'Mister Knox', and uttering phrases such as: 'well, the poor child does have a reputation' (80). Thus the Southern lady is simultaneously connected to two different kinds of stereotypically non-threatening femininity: the innocent, pre-pubescent child, and the prim, post-menopausal elderly woman. I would suggest that here we are reminded of Amy Sansom and the image of the spinster embodying both the childlike and the elderly.

In addition to the matter of age, the concept of the Southern lady is inextricably linked to racial prejudice and segregation. This was especially clear in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and seems true in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* as well. Amy's classification of herself as a lady is closely followed by the following statement: 'Angela Lee warned me time and time again, said never trust a nigger: their minds and hair are full of kinks in equal measure' (128). The close proximity of Amy's declaration of ladyhood and her racist comments suggest that, like Harper Lee, Capote is drawing a connection between the Southern lady and racist notions. As Gary Richards points out, the novel also seems to perpetuate the stereotype of the overtly masculine and aggressively sexual non-white male, in the form of the Randolph's 'almost Negroid' (106) lost love Pepe Alvarez and Zoo's former husband Keg Brown. Both of these men seem to fascinate Randolph, who in effect casts himself as the prim and passive Southern belle in relation to them.

It is important to keep in mind that the discourse of immaturity which is so present in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* also relates to race. Historically speaking, black stereotypes have often been characterized partly by their childishness, particularly with the 'Sambo' stereotype of the fool, the ridiculous, carefree eternal child. Sociologist Jan Nederveen Pieterse writes: 'It was a commonplace in the South that "slaves never grow up". Masters talked about adult blacks as boys and girls, or "big children"' (153). This discourse of immaturity is, of course, a step in the dehumanization process, as it indicates the supposed primitivism of black people and the belief that they were of inferior intelligence and unable to become fully fledged adults in the same way as white people. It also served the function of making African Americans seem more harmless, thus alleviating fears of possible rebellions. By casting their slaves in the role of 'child', slave owners also gained confidence that their actions were appropriate; they, the 'parent' knew best (Pieterse 153). A similar line of thinking was also used in connection with colonialism, with the supposed need for the white man to educate the primitive, non-white 'children' of distant lands.

As I have already pointed out, Zoo and Jesus Fever are both presented as somewhat immature. However, I would suggest that the relative immaturity of the white characters in the novel prevent this from merely becoming a matter of racial stereotypes. Indeed, Zoo is one of the few characters in the novel who shows any desire to escape the Landing and create a new life. However, this spirit is doomed to be crushed. At the beginning of the story, Zoo is 'tall, powerful, barefoot, graceful, soundless . . . like a supple black cat' (44), but by the end, she is as crippled and defeated as the other characters who inhabit the Landing. Her punishment for attempting to escape is severe: when she elopes for Washington DC, she is

held captive by a group of men who rape her and burn her with a cigar. With this sequence of events, Capote may have been showing how racism in Southern society made it difficult for African Americans to create their own independent adult lives when the constant threat of physical attack made it dangerous even to travel freely on one's own.

Similarly to Zoo, Joel eventually faces a choice between venturing out into the world, where he will be 'different' and arguably in danger due to his nonconformist gender performance and queer sexuality, or staying in the safe but stifling world of Skully's Landing. Joel's choices regarding the way forward also come into play in the novel's tomboy/sissy pairing. He becomes close friends with his tomboy neighbour Idabel Thompkins. Both children are on the cusp of adolescence and both are gender nonconformists. However, their experiences of what this means varies, and we are shown once again that boys and girls are treated differently in this historical and geographical setting. This is particularly evident in the opening scenes of the novel, where we see Joel on his trip from New Orleans to Skully's Landing, via Noon City, the closest town to the Landing. While, as we have now come to expect, the female citizens of Noon City are shown to be rather indulgent towards Joel's somewhat feminine appearance and delicate mannerisms, Joel's tomboy counterpart, Idabel Thompkins, elicits a rather different reaction. A woman in the town diner remarks that she 'always knew [Idabel] was a freak, no ma'am, never saw that Idabel Thompkins in a dress yet' (20) and claims that Idabel's teacher stated that 'she oughta be in the penitentiary' (20). Again, we see how femininity is related to captivity and confinement, like Scout Finch's fear of the 'pink cotton penitentiary' (Lee 182) or Frankie Addams' certainty that 'the Law' is on her trail.

Yet what makes this situation difficult to judge is that Idabel's transgressions against gender norms seem somehow linked to transgressions of a more general nature. She is frequently violent, commits acts of vandalism, and generally seems to enjoy creating havoc in Noon City. In a sense, her bad behaviour then becomes a question of chicken and egg. Is Idabel's gender nonconformity just one part of a wider rebellion against society's norms, or are her other rebellious acts a consequence of the isolation and rejection she has faced as a result of being a tomboy?

Certainly, violence is a recurring theme in connection with all three of the tomboys I have dealt with in this thesis. We saw analogous 'criminal' behaviour in *The Member of the Wedding*, when Frankie steals a pistol from her father's study and 'a three-way knife from the Sears and Roebuck store' (33). However, while Idabel seems to prefer to direct her anger outwards, Frankie's acts of violence are largely self-destructive. She may have stolen her

father's pistol, but the only person she actually threatens to shoot is herself. In short, while Frankie constantly describes herself as 'mean' and can be verbally cruel and dismissive, it is difficult to imagine her being physically violent towards another character, and especially one weaker than herself. In fact, the only violent act she commits during the whole novel is one of self-defence, when she smashes a pitcher over the head of the red-headed soldier. For all her supposed roughness, Frankie Addams is simply not volatile in the same way as Idabel Thompkins or Scout Finch. Of course, these different ways of reacting also relate to gender stereotypes, as turning anger inwards is generally seen as feminine behavioural pattern, and lashing out a more typically male response. To the extent to which such things may be graded and compared, one could therefore suggest that in this respect, Idabel and Scout go further in transgressing gender norms than Frankie, by turning aggression outward rather than inward.

Like Idabel, Scout Finch seeks to control others through violence, although in Scout's case this behavioural pattern seems somehow less destructive. There are several possible explanations for this. For one thing, Scout is several years younger than Idabel, and is therefore physically less capable of doing serious harm to others. Secondly, she has a more stable moral compass than Idabel, who does not seem to have a comparable support system in place. Whereas Scout has a loving and accommodating family, Idabel is depicted as being very alone in the world. Indeed, her closest friend and ally seems to be her dog, Henry. Perhaps as a result of her sense of belonging, Scout's violent actions tend not to be just uncontrollable aggressive urges, but often have some moral or idealistic motivation. Like a cliché of a Southern gentleman, Scout's fisticuffs tend to be the result of a sense of honour, such as when she beats up her cousin Francis for calling her father a 'nigger lover' (114). However, through her father and other adult role models, she eventually learns more productive ways of tackling these matters. Because of this, Scout's eventual renunciation of violent means is presented as indicative of her wider moral awakening, rather than simply a surrender to femininity.

Alternatively, the fact that Idabel's behaviour seems more destructive than that of Scout may have something to do with her choice of victims. While Scout only seems to get into fights with boys, Idabel has no qualms about punching girls in the face or harassing adult women. Arguably, Idabel is attacking the ideal of the Southern lady not only by refusing to become one, but also by quite literally committing acts of violence towards members of this group. After all, her final misdemeanour before being sent away is breaking the nose of her hyperfeminine twin, Florabel. Thus she is not only violating the norms of how one should

look and behave *as* a woman, but also the rules that dictate permissible ways in which to treat and interact *with* women.

In any case, while the women of the town seem to find Joel's feminine nature endearing, and by turns flirt with him or baby him, Idabel's gender transgressions are taken as a personal affront. Irrespective of her other crimes, I would suggest that as in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, rejecting the gift of sacred femininity is viewed in itself as a grave offense. When the adults confront Idabel, the focus is firmly on her appearance rather than her behaviour: 'don't come back till you put on some decent female clothes' (24), admonishes Miss Roberta Lacey, the proprietor of the local diner in Noon City. Like Lee, Capote also delights in pointing out the shortcomings of these gender norm enforcers. One example is the aforementioned Roberta, who despite disparaging Idabel's masculine dress sense, is herself described as having a 'long black hair extending from her chin wart'(145), and 'scratching under her armpits like a baboon' (145). In other words, the ideal of Southern femininity is once again revealed to be a polite fiction.

It is interesting to compare *Other Voices, Other Rooms* with the other two novels I have dealt with, as the male focalizer in the novel gives us the opportunity to examine the sissy/tomboy friendship from a new perspective. Initially Joel, like the people of Noon City, is sceptical towards Idabel, believing that '[l]ike every other tomboy, Idabel was mean' (85). It is not particularly surprising that Joel takes this view, as Idabel tends to be as caustic with him as with everyone else. Rather than seeing him as an ally, she makes fun of his feminine mannerisms: 'Go on home and cut out paper dolls, sissy-britches' (85). Yet Joel's uneasiness seems more than just a reaction to Idabel's rudeness. Indeed, Joel has 'had a special hatred of tomboys ever since the days of Eileen Otis' (29), a bully who had regularly 'stripp[ed] off his pants, and toss[ed] them high into a tree' (29). I would suggest that the nature of these attacks that Joel describes is not coincidental. Forcibly removing someone's clothing is not the same as merely beating them up; it is a different kind of humiliation. Therefore I would argue that the incidents with Eileen Otis were not just examples of physical violence, but also of sexual harassment. Indeed, had Joel been a girl and Eileen a boy, this point would probably not have to be made.

In this way, I would suggest that the tomboy/sissy pairing in this novel has a more serious undertone than in *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *The Member of the Wedding*. While Joel comes to care for Idabel during the course of the novel, their relationship remains strained. Critics such as Brian Mitchell-Peters have emphasized their friendship as mutually supportive, but I would argue that their relationship is also fraught with antagonism and

tension, tension that is suggestive of the gender norm pressures of the outside world. For while Skully's Landing may seem like a 'never-never land' (Mitchell-Peters 108), I would suggest that the real world is never far away, and this is very clearly expressed through the relationship between Joel and Idabel.

More than anything, the problems Joel and Idabel experience seem to be a question of power and the fear of being exposed. Joel and Idabel are drawn to one another because they are different, yet the nature of their difference compels both to fear that that the other may humiliate them in some way. A natural melancholy seems to arise from the fact that each of the children possesses what the other feels they lack. Idabel 'want[s] so much to be a boy' (101), while Joel 'wish[es] he were as brave as Idabel' (92). In essence, both perceive themselves to be a 'garçon manqué', with Idabel lacking in terms of the biological attributes, and Joel lacking in terms of traditionally masculine qualities such as bravery and toughness. The fact that we might view both of these characters as failed boys, or boys who lack something, is indicative of the way in which masculinity and femininity are valued. A boy who displays feminine characteristics would not commonly be referred to as a 'fille manquée' or a failed girl, perhaps because we assume that femininity is not valuable enough to be strived for. As in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, femininity, whether it is biologically or culturally expressed, is perceived as a weakness among the children, despite the apparent reverence for femininity in Southern society as a whole. Just as Idabel fears that she will be 'exposed' as female, Joel fears that he will be exposed as insufficiently masculine. In some ways, their relationship is akin to the kind of clichéd notion of male friendship in which displays of emotion are secondary to displays of machismo. It is obvious that the two care deeply for one another on some level, but neither is willing to admit this outright, for fear of being exposed as weak.

In other words, this pairing seems more fraught than the others I have previously discussed. There are several possible explanations for this. First, there is the obvious matter of age. Scout and Dill were still slightly too young to experience this sort of tension, and in *The Member of the Wedding*, the age difference between Frankie and John Henry allowed for a natural allotment of authority. Frankie was the eldest, and therefore she was in charge. In *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, however, both Joel and Idabel are on the cusp of adolescence. Secondly, there was more of a familial bond in the other novels – John Henry is Frankie's cousin, and Dill is very much a part of the Finch family, even though he is not a blood relation. Indeed, by asking for Scout's hand in marriage, it seems that Dill is actively seeking to become a Finch. In contrast, Joel and Idabel's friendship exists outside of the family sphere

and mostly outside the small town community as well. Apart from a few appearances from characters such as Florabel and Miss Wisteria, Joel and Idabel are very much alone together. Thus they are somewhat removed from the patriarchal structures that would normally privilege Joel and afford him power over Idabel.

This lack of power on Joel's part is, I would argue, a major source of tension. For despite his fundamentally gentle nature, Joel frequently expresses uneasiness at the prospect of being dominated by a girl: 'no matter what Idabel said, he was a boy and she was a girl and he was damned if she were going to get the upper hand again' (136). Realizing he has little chance of overpowering Idabel in real life, Joel fantasizes of becoming Governor and 'hav[ing] her locked in a dungeon cell with a little trapdoor cut in the ceiling where he could look down and laugh' (85). He takes visible pleasure in Idabel's failures: 'all the rough spirit seemed to have drained from her voice. Joel felt stronger than she, and sure of himself as he'd never been with that other Idabel, the tomboy' (131). Indeed, it seems that all Joel's warmest feelings towards Idabel occur when she is at her lowest ebb. Here we are again shown how gender nonconformist children are as susceptible to chauvinism as anyone else, and how insecurities regarding one's own failure to live up to expectations can be expressed through disapproval towards others.

Yet Joel's fears pale in comparison with Idabel's. He does not enjoy being the weaker party, but the loss of power is not as frightening for him as it seems for Idabel. One gets the sense that Idabel is perhaps less innocent, and more keenly aware than Scout Finch or Frankie Addams of the dangers she faces as a girl refusing to conform to the given norms. After all, Zoo Fever, who is in many ways something of a masculine woman, ends up being raped and assaulted when she makes a break for freedom and independence. It is perhaps because of this awareness that Idabel is clinging so vehemently to boy-identification. For Idabel does not want to be a masculine girl, she wants to be a boy. Ironically, going too far in terms of male identification is likely to make Idabel more vulnerable rather than less so. As Lee Zevy points out in her article 'Sexing the Tomboy', tomboyism becomes increasingly hazardous as one begins to trespass on male privilege, and 'trying to be a boy' is the gravest sin of all. As we have seen, even Joel, who is fundamentally kind and sympathetic, becomes increasingly hostile towards Idabel as she makes him feel less of a man.

It is perhaps as a result of this fear of retribution that Idabel is much less open to the pretence of heterosexual romance than Joel is. When the two children stumble across a pair of lovers in the woods, Joel feels the urge 'to walk with Idabel's hand in his', yet Idabel's hands are 'doubled like knots' (143). When the two run away together, Joel suggests that they could

get married, but Idabel is repulsed and infuriated: 'you behave like we're brothers, or don't you behave at all' (133).

This tension comes to a head after the two go skinny dipping in the river. Idabel confesses to Joel that she cries sometimes, and, touched by her sensitivity, he kisses her on the cheek. After a pause, Idabel responds by pulling Joel's hair, and the two end up fighting violently, before Joel finally surrenders. The episode tells us a lot about the anxiety both children are experiencing. Once again, Joel is responding to Idabel's vulnerability, finding weakness more appealing than her stronger tomboy identity. Meanwhile, the extent of Idabel's feelings of vulnerability becomes clear. While Idabel claims she 'never think[s] like [she's] a girl' (101), she seems acutely aware of the danger of sexual violence and being exposed as vulnerable. Her sensitivity towards others trespassing on her personal space is so heightened that even a kiss on the cheek can be experienced as a violation.

How, then, are we to interpret this friendship? Brian Mitchell-Peters refers to the relationship between Joel and Idabel as 'a faux-heterosexual story line, where the traditional reader is fooled by Joel's interest in Idabel' (128), and insists that one should instead focus on the mutually supportive nature of their friendship. Essentially, he argues that these are two queer or proto-queer characters who create an environment in which they can safely develop their respective identities. Yet ironically, while *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is the novel which has been seen as having the most explicitly homosexual content of those I have discussed in this thesis, that is to say it has been read as a gay coming of age tale more frequently than *The Member of the Wedding* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I would suggest that the relationship between Joel and Idabel seems in certain ways the most genuine of the tomboy/sissy pairings. By this I mean that, despite their power struggle, Joel and Idabel's friendship is not merely a game or a satire on heterosexual relationships, but based on genuine emotions, at least on Joel's part. Indeed, the power struggle between the two is what makes the relationship seem all the more real. The tension, the vulnerability, the insecurities, and the agonizing that Joel and Idabel experience is arguably much closer to adult romantic relationships than the relatively carefree play of for instance Dill and Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Developing my previous observations that Joel is uncomfortable being dominated by a girl and appreciates Idabel more when she seems weak and by extension traditionally feminine, one could argue that Joel's feelings can be read as an attempt at 'normalcy' on his part. By casting himself and Idabel as a potential heterosexual couple, Joel could arguably be seen as attempting to regain a sense of masculinity. However, I would suggest that ignoring the heterosexual desires that are present in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* would be doing the

novel a disservice. For Idabel is not the only girl Joel has feelings for. He also mentions a certain Annie Rose Kuppermann, a pretty girl who in real life snubs Joel, but who in the world of his imaginary far-away room 'jingled on and on: "I love you, Joel. I love you a bushel and a peck and a hug around the neck"' (66). These crushes seem largely to be of a non-sexual nature, but then one could say the same of Joel's eventual love for Randolph, which has so often been interpreted by readers as his acceptance of homosexuality. Like Frankie in *The Member of the Wedding*, I would suggest that Joel seems not yet ready for adult sexuality. A somewhat sentimental character, the relationships he forms and the affection he feels for others tend to take on a more emotional and idealized nature. Both his troubled camaraderie with Idabel and his feelings of love for Randolph seem more akin to the concept of romantic friendship than more modern notions of what a heterosexual or homosexual romance should be. Therefore, while one can argue that characters such as Idabel and Randolph are identifiably lesbian and gay, as they clearly express lust towards members of the same sex, Joel is a character who may be more accurately described as queer (Mitchell-Peters 135).

The relationship dynamic of a dominant female and a passive male that we see with Joel and Idabel is not unique in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. In Chapter Eight, Randolph tells Joel about Dolores, a woman he professes to have been deeply in love with before he met Pepe Alvarez. Randolph's relationship with the aggressive, tempestuous Dolores, who 'had no personal feeling or respect for men or the masculine personality' (113) is closely reminiscent of the dynamic between Joel and Idabel. Like Idabel, Dolores is presented as a physical threat, with Randolph eventually fearing for his life when he learns that she dreams of murdering him. With such unusually fiery and aggressive female characters as Dolores, Idabel, Eileen the bully, the pretty yet snobbish Annie Rose and their unions or non-unions with feminine males Joel and Randolph, Capote seems to be queering traditional female/male relationships. However, while much of the interaction is good-natured role-reversal, there are moments when these female characters seem genuinely frightening.

One such character is Miss Wisteria, a midget who makes sexual advances towards Joel. She appears rather late in the story, but plays an important part in both Joel and Idabel's development. The children first encounter her at the fair, where she has been performing with the sideshow. Despite being twenty-five years old, Miss Wisteria's stature makes her look like 'a darling little girl' (146). A parody of Southern femininity, she also seems to mirror other characters in the story. With her 'gold sausage curls' and 'baby-plump face' (146) she reminds one of Randolph, while her overtly courteous and ladylike mannerisms remind one of

Idabel's more feminine twin sister Florabel. However, the qualities that made her sister seem repugnant and weak, now make Idabel fall head over heels in love; she drops her usual spikiness in favour of 'a dumb adoring smile' (147). In a scene reminiscent of *The Member of the Wedding*, Idabel even borrows Miss Wisteria's lipstick, and 'paint[s] an awkward clownish line across her mouth' (146-7). The giddy sensation of love seems to allow Idabel to let down her guard, and momentarily have a more playful attitude towards her own femininity, or lack thereof.

Miss Wisteria's own life story is a tragic one, steeped in loneliness: 'I never have found a sweet little person, There are children; but I cry to think little boys must grow tall' (148). Of course, this relates directly back to themes of stagnation and of coming of age or failing to do so. Miss Wisteria is saddened that children grow up, although she seems sad for her own sake rather than theirs. Her life story informs us that she was the only small person in her family. Therefore, we can assume that her own smallness represents difference to her. In this way, her sadness over little boys growing up can be interpreted as sadness that they abandon the strangeness of childhood in favour of 'normal' adulthood, and thereby leave her behind. This provides a rather worrying parallel to the prospect of Joel's growth being 'stunted' by Skully's Landing. Like Miss Wisteria, Randolph does not seem to want children to grow up either.

While it is obvious that Miss Wisteria's presence serves to solidify Idabel's lesbian identity, her influence on Joel is more difficult to determine. Mitchell-Peters argues that Joel's encounter with Miss Wisteria also paves the way for his own developing queer identity, as 'with Idabel Joel witnesses first-hand homosexual identification, love, and coupling, as portrayed through Idabel's liaison with Miss Wisteria' (128). However, I find this analysis problematic, as we are given little evidence of such a 'liaison' actually taking place. While Miss Wisteria recognizes Idabel's feelings for her and seems both sympathetic and flattered, the evidence given in the text does not suggest that she herself feels any desire towards girls or women. Indeed, it is Joel, rather than Idabel, whom she makes sexual advances towards while they are on the ferris wheel: 'She placed her hand on his thigh, and then, as though she had no control over them whatsoever, her fingers crept up inside his legs' (149). Idabel's love for Miss Wisteria seems doomed to be unrequited, and I would therefore argue that this relationship should be no more uplifting or encouraging than Randolph's painful obsession with Pepe Alvarez.

Yet strangely, Joel seems to interpret this situation differently towards the novel's end. Idabel disappears completely after their misadventure at the fairground, and is only heard

from again via a postcard, in which she claims to have been sent away to a Baptist preacher, where she has been 'put to life' (158). In this religious context, 'put to life' can be interpreted as reborn, resurrected or baptized. Joel, however, does not believe her: 'she'd put herself to life, and it was with Miss Wisteria, not a baptis prechur [sic]' (158). Joel's reinterpretation of events is somewhat inexplicable. With Idabel's twin Florabel being striking evidence of the conservative nature of Mr. and Mrs. Thompkins, it is perfectly believable that they may have sent Idabel away, particularly after she violently attacked her sister. Why, after all Miss Wisteria's advances towards him, would Joel think that she would take Idabel away with her? I would suggest that this could be interpreted as a defence mechanism on Joel's part. Having recognized his love for and identification with Randolph, Joel seems to be using his imagination to create a happy ending to Idabel's story.

Arguably, the most prominent way in which Miss Wisteria helps Joel recognize his own queerness or homosexuality is by making him realize that he cannot give her what she wants. The limitations of his previous crushes on girls seem to dawn on him, and his plans to break free from Skully's Landing and make a life with Idabel are dissolved: 'he saw their plans, his and Idabel's, break apart like the thunder-split sky' (150). In short, Joel's experience with Miss Wisteria seems to put the final nail in the coffin of his dreams of 'normality' (Mitchell-Peters 134).

Although William White Tison Pugh argues that through Miss Wisteria Capote is 'allow[ing] a traditionally grotesque figure the symbolic opportunity to reclaim herself from misreadings' (669), I would suggest that Miss Wisteria is a more sinister character than she is often given credit for. After all, while the character of Randolph has sometimes been criticized for his supposed seduction of a young boy, Miss Wisteria in fact goes much further in making sexual advances towards Joel. Again, this seems a result of female sexuality being seen as less threatening or forceful than male sexuality, a preconception that Capote appears to be challenging in this novel. Miss Wisteria may not be a monster, but her character certainly has grotesque elements, and it is undeniable that she evokes fear as well as sympathy in Joel.

Through Miss Wisteria and Idabel, I would therefore suggest that heterosexuality for Joel comes to represent passivity and emasculation rather than the more traditional connotation of having power over or ownership of women. It is common to depict the entrance to heterosexual adulthood as symbolizing a loss of power for girls and young women. Indeed, this seems partly to be what tomboys such as Frankie Addams and Idabel Thompkins are struggling against. Yet suggesting that the same is true for boys is a more

novel prospect. Certainly, both Joel and Randolph are depicted as the weaker party in all of their attempts at heterosexual unions, and not in a mild sense of the word, either. Both face physical violence, and the way in which Eileen Otis and Miss Wisteria behave towards Joel could be classified as sexual assaults. One could interpret these depictions as an attempt to outline the way in which compulsory heterosexuality can be as damaging to men as to women. This is a valid point, and one cannot argue with the assertion that women are capable of violence and abuse, and that men, too, can be victims. However, both the notion that women are dangerous and that homosexuality is some sort of flight from the emasculation of heterosexual relationships is rather problematic.

This brings me back to the theme of permanent childhood, as homosexuality seems to be represented as some sort of shelter from all of these frightening female characters, yet one that prevents development and growth. Indeed, homosexuality and immaturity seem intimately linked throughout *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. The most openly gay character, Randolph, is also the most childish. If Skully's Landing at times resembles Neverland, then Randolph is most certainly its Peter Pan. Furthermore, the point at which Randolph's life in effect stops coincides exactly with his realization that he is gay and his love for Pepe Alvarez. Although his feelings were never reciprocated, Randolph continues to search for his lost love, writing letters to Pepe in care of the postmaster in every town in the world. In this way, one could argue that Randolph's childishness or failure to grow up seems directly related to his homosexuality.

The novel is full of both explicit and indirect allusions to Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Snow Queen', a fairy tale that is very much connected to the theme of arrested development and how relationships may help or hinder both physical and emotional growth. In the tale, a small boy, Kay, is whisked away to the North Pole by the evil Snow Queen. His rescuer and ultimately his saviour is his playmate Gerda, who, after a host of trials and tribulations, finally finds Kay and melts his frozen heart with her tears and kisses. Despite the gender reversal of this tale, with Gerda taking on the role of rescuer while Kay waits passively, the story is ostensibly a paean to the power of heterosexual romance. This, of course, is more or less the opposite of what *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is about, thus making it an interesting choice of allusion.

Joel actively identifies with the story, which his Aunt Ellen has read to him: 'suppose, like Little Kay, he also were spirited off to the Snow Queen's frozen palace?' (13). This is a foreshadowing of what is to come, when Randolph, posing as his father, requests Joel's presence at Skully's Landing. In other words, Randolph, and his drag queen alter ego the

Queer Lady, are our chief Snow Queens in this story, although there are others. Miss Wisteria is an obvious candidate, with her desire to capture little boys and stop them from growing up. Amy Sansom is another character who inhabits the ice queen archetype with aplomb, although she lacks the cunning of Randolph or Miss Wisteria. A further character tied to Snow Queen imagery is Joel's dead mother. Joel claims at one point that she froze to death in an ice cave in Canada, and describes her as having 'passed to sleep with dew of snowflakes scenting her hair . . . she'd splintered like frozen crystal' (151). As in both *The Member of the Wedding* and to some extent *To Kill a Mockingbird,* snow and ice come to represent the Southern climate's Other. However, while in the other novels this icy symbolism tended to represent freedom and adventure, in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* it seems only to represent stagnation, isolation and ultimately death, either literal or symbolic. Thus we have a range of 'Snow Queens', characters who are all frozen in time, trying to somehow lure Joel away.

Who, then, is Joel's potential rescuer? Arguably, Idabel is the closest thing we have to Gerda; she too is quick-witted and brave, and attempts to save him from the enchanted world of the Landing by suggesting that they run away together. However, while she cares for Joel, she is not in love with him, and 'saving' him is not her priority. Perhaps as a result of this, her eventual getaway is a solo mission. Another possible Gerda is Zoo, who upon leaving the Landing promises to send for Joel when she is financially secure. Like Gerda, Zoo faces characters sent to thwart her mission. However, Zoo's experiences are much more brutal than Gerda's, and rather than soldiering on, she rather understandably gives in and returns to Skully's Landing, her spirit broken. As with Idabel, Zoo has a different set of priorities to Gerda; the main one is saving herself. In both cases, Joel finds himself to be an afterthought rather than a primary concern. This can perhaps be read as a humorous comment on the way in which women's priorities were changing, but it is also in line with the novel's depiction of women as somewhat selfish.

Thus we are left with a situation which our young hero is in fact never saved from the clutches of his own personal Snow Queen. How are we to interpret this? In the fairy tale, the intention of the Snow Queen is to quite literally keep Kay frozen in time, as he will only be released if he is able to spell out the word 'eternity' in a puzzle made of ice. While in her castle, he remains a boy. Gerda, too, remains a little girl during her quest to save Kay. However, when she succeeds and they finally find their way home, the two children have suddenly turned into adults. In other words, it is only together that they are able to become fully fledged grown ups. I would suggest that linking Randolph to the Snow Queen

emphasizes the idea that Joel's eventual love for him, which is so often interpreted as his acceptance of homosexuality, represents a sense of stagnation.

The perception of homosexuality being linked to immaturity is, of course, nothing new, and it is perhaps not surprising, considering that so many of the traditional rites of passage of adulthood such as marriage and procreation are closely linked to the heterosexual union. Intense romantic relationships with members of one's own sex is something that many self-identified heterosexuals associate with their early teens, and as a result, the idea that gay people have somehow failed to move beyond this point into 'mature heterosexuality' has been rife among homophobes and anti-gay movements (Drescher 58). In short, the argument goes that homosexuality is a phase that we all go through, and those who do not grow out of it are 'childish' or 'selfish'. Psychoanalyst theory of the early twentieth century also tended to emphasize this notion of arrested development. While Freud argued that homosexuality was not an illness, his model of psychosexual stages nevertheless classified homosexuals as having failed to develop beyond the immature sexuality of the oral and the anal phases (Drescher 58-9). Arguably, these theories of immaturity paved the way for further pathologization of homosexuality.

With this background in mind, the emphasis on childhood and arrested development in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* seems rather disturbing. Most recent discussion of the novel has focused particularly on its depiction of homosexuality, and critics have often been divided (Christensen 62). For those who argue that *Other Voices, Other Rooms* portrays gay or queer characters in an unflattering light, the novel's focus on deviance from gender roles is often perceived to be the most problematic aspect. One example of this line of argument is Gary Richards, who in his book *Lovers and Beloveds: Sexual Otherness in Southern Fiction, 1936 – 1961*, compares *Other Voices, Other Rooms* unfavourably to the lesser known novel *The House of Breath*, by Truman Capote's Southern contemporary William Goyen. Richards argues that *Other Voices, Other Rooms* 'superimposes gender transitivity on male homoeroticism, simplistically holding the two to be mutually and exclusively indicative of one another and to constitute male homosexuality' (31). Meanwhile, Richards observes that Goyen's novel depicts both feminine and masculine men experiencing homosexual desire, and is therefore more valuable and interesting. Stephen Adams also focuses on aspects of gender in his criticism of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. In his book *The Homosexual as Hero in Contemporary Fiction,* he writes that 'By Joel's identification with Randolph, Capote implies that homosexuality is a failure of manliness' (58). Adams goes on to assert that there is 'a

mysterious and somewhat arbitrary absence of the masculine principle in the novel's world' (58).

While I agree with Richards and Adams to some extent, I would beg to differ on certain points. First, I would question the assumption that Capote's novel is as simplistic in its depiction as Richards suggests. As I have already pointed out, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* does not really depict mainstream Southern society in the same way as for example *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The purpose of Skully's Landing is that it is a dreamlike escape from reality, and by default its inhabitants are outcasts. However, in the instances in which mainstream society does creep into the novel, Capote, like Harper Lee, does attempt to queer supposedly mainstream, heteronormative characters. Even the most hypermasculine of Southern stereotypes, hillbilly truck driver Sam Radclif with whom Joel hitchhikes, is afforded homoerotic undertones, when he remarks that if he was Joel's father, he would 'take down [his] britches and muss [him] up a bit' (11). Thus I would argue that the seemingly straight and normative becomes queer, and effeminacy is not presented as a necessary component of homosexuality.

Secondly, from a feminist point of view, I would suggest that the underlying value judgment beneath this line of argument is somewhat problematic. By depicting two gay characters, one of whom is more feminine and the other traditionally masculine, Richards is correct in asserting that Goyen is presenting a wider spectrum of gay identities. However, suggesting that by 'deem[ing] the masculine man preferable to the feminine one' (41) Goyen was creating a more forward-thinking novel is highly debatable. After all, refusing to conflate sexuality and gender is not necessarily the same as privileging the 'normal', that is to say 'straight-acting' gay male over the 'deviant' feminine gay male.

The insinuation seems to be that depicting the gay male as feminine is to insult him, and thus femininity once again becomes synonymous with weakness and depravity. In terms of the depiction of homosexuality in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, I would argue that the novel's underlying suggestion that homosexuality equals some sort of permanent childhood is more damaging and insulting than the admittedly skewed and clichéd notion of the gay man as somehow inherently feminine. I would suggest that Randolph's primary problem is not that he is sexually attracted to men or that he enjoys wearing women's clothes, but instead that he is 'more paralysed than Mr. Sansom, more childlike than Miss Wisteria' (170). Of course, one could argue that Randolph's gender rebellion and homosexuality have contributed to making him the person he is, as the prejudices of others may have prevented him from leading a full life. However, this does not mean that effeminacy or homosexuality are innately bad in and of

themselves. Rather than 'a failure in manliness' (Adams, *Homosexual as Hero* 58), I would therefore point to a failure in adulthood as the novel's main problem.

How, then, are we to interpret the perspective on gender and sexuality in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and how does it compare to the two novels I have already discussed in this thesis? The novel ends with Joel allowing himself to be lured indoors by the Queer Lady standing at the window, who we know to be Randolph in drag, stopping only briefly to look at 'the boy he had left behind' (173). This finale, in which Joel effectively separates from his old self, is the culmination of a development that has been taking place throughout the whole third section of the novel. Somewhat before this, after realizing that all he wants is 'to be dependent upon [Randolph] for his very life' (157), Joel gazes into a hand mirror and observes that: 'it was as if now only one eye examined for signs of maturity, while the other, gradually of the two the more attentive, gazed inward wishing him always to remain as he was' (157). Joel's will to break free, represented by the eye searching for signs of maturity, is weakening. Meanwhile, the urge to stay the same, to avoid adulthood, is growing stronger and stronger. In this way, Joel's devotion to Randolph is explicitly linked to his waning desire to change and mature.

Yet not everyone would agree that the ending of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* represents a decline. Brian Mitchell-Peters applauds Capote for writing 'the first modern representation of homosexuality where a character's queerness does not lead down some version of the river Styx to a contemporary Hell' (108). However, while it is true that Joel seems to escape the tragic and often violent endings of many gay characters in literature, I would suggest that calling it a happy ending may be going too far. When Joel ponders 'what was there in Randolph to fear?' (150), one suspects that the answer is: 'not very much'. However, this does not mean that Randolph is a character worthy of Joel's imitation and devotion. While Joel does not literally die, I would agree with Stephen Adams that the novel's ending depicts 'an act of resignation to a deathly, ghost-ridden existence' (60). Indeed, the third section of the novel, in which Joel resigns himself to a life at Skully's Landing, begins with him having a vision of his own funeral. This seems to indicate that the end of the novel represents a kind of death at the symbolic level. Joel is clearly 'burying' his old childhood self, yet his future seems uncertain.

Meanwhile, William White Tison Pugh points out that much of the criticism towards the novel's ending is based on the fact that the union between Joel and Randolph is interpreted in terms of traditional family structures, that is to say that we see Randolph as a paternal or avuncular figure abusing his authority. Instead, Pugh argues that 'the two are

equals, nearly mirror images of each other' (679). I would agree fully with this point, while at the same time arguing that this equality is precisely where the problem lies. There is *meant* to be a disparity in authority and experience between a middle aged man and a boy who has barely reached adolescence. Therefore, in a narrative in which an adult man and a child are depicted as equals, it is difficult not to see this as a dubious comment on the faculties of the man in question. For a comparable example, one may look at the way in which some have questioned the friendship between Huck and Jim in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. While it is obviously positive that a white child in an extremely racist society learns to see an African American as an equal, is it really all that progressive to show a white child and a black adult as essentially being on the same level? I would argue that the fact that Joel and Randolph are depicted as equals merely serves to emphasize Randolph's dysfunctionality. Accordingly, one need not read Randolph as some sort of wicked or predatory figure in order to question whether Joel's decision to devote himself to such a person is a positive choice. '[W]hatever became of me?' (105), Randolph ponders languidly at one point in the novel. As a reader, one cannot help but wonder whether this is a question that Joel too will ask himself sometime in the future.

It is of course puzzling that an openly gay writer would compose a novel in which homosexuality seems to be viewed in such a pessimistic light. Yet the form of the novel lends it an indeterminate quality, what critic Paul Levine refers to a 'difficult and fantastic remoteness' (88) that makes it difficult to determine what exactly Capote may have been trying to say. This form, or perhaps lack thereof, also reflects the sense of stagnation, of unfinishedness. Indeed, to quote Joel's thoughts on one of Randolph's tales, 'the story [was] like a movie with neither plot nor motive. . . . And, most important of all, where was the ending?' (117-8). While the novel's focus is undeniably on lingering descriptions of characters and setting, rather than plot, one must also point out that the plot itself is often strange, misshapen and nonsensical. Like the characters, I would argue that the plot does not seem to 'go' anywhere. That is not to say that there are not changes or revelations in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, but they are somehow half-changes and half-revelations, obscured and difficult to grasp. As the title of the novel suggests, the underlying themes seem muffled and out of reach, like distant voices one cannot quite make out.

This is a contrast to the other two novels I have dealt with in this thesis. With *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the most innovative formal aspect at the time was the fact that the story was told from a child's perspective. Although, as I have tried to show in my analysis, it is a complex and layered novel, it is at the same time very straightforward and easy to read. It also has a

clear moral or didactic agenda, at least in terms of race relations. These are undoubtedly some of the factors that, along with its literary quality, have made the book such a staple of school syllabi in the United States. Meanwhile, although some early critics argued that *The Member of the Wedding* lacks plot, I would disagree with this. It is true that, objectively speaking, the novel is not as eventful as for example *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but there is a clear sense of suspense and the wedding functions well as a climax, or rather anti-climax. In short, McCullers' novel has a tightness and a sense of urgency that *Other Voices, Other Rooms* seems to lack. Marguerite Young describes the structure of *The Member of the Wedding* thus: 'There is no lush undergrowth. Control is never absent. The framework is always visible' (9). In contrast, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is overflowing with 'lush undergrowth', in both the literal and the figurative sense. Like its characters, the text itself exhibits a level of immaturity in its indulgent verbosity and flights of fancy. It, too, seems somehow unfinished. What one might single out as the turning point of the novel, the storm in which Joel is caught and his resulting illness, is diffused in its dreamlike quality. This climax does not stand out in the narrative in the same way as Tom Robinson's trial or Jarvis and Janice's wedding, and this in turn makes the proceeding resolution more difficult to understand. When the novel draws to a close, one is aware that Joel has changed somehow, but the nature of this change and the motive behind it remains elusive.

The characters in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* seem to offer plenty of metacommentary on the nature of the novel itself. Like the reader, Joel is unsure of what to believe and what not to believe. Is Joel, and indeed, are we, to believe that Randolph is the person who shot his father? What of the other burlesque narratives within the narrative, tales of cats killing babies, hauntings, and hotel-owners setting themselves on fire? And what really happens to Idabel? Indeed, even events directly reported seem less than believable, such as Joel desperately hiding from Miss Wisteria in the abandoned house, and John Brown the mule accidentally being hung from the beams at the Cloud Hotel. Although *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Member of the Wedding* are novels in which childish fantasies and make believe feature heavily, the boundary between the characters' daydreams and the reality of the novel's world is extremely clear. Indeed, this is often the point. For example, we know that Frankie's dream of joining the wedding is incongruent with the reality of the novel. This awareness that her dreams are doomed to failure is arguably what creates the pathos in the book. In *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, this boundary is much more blurred. Like the world of Skully's Landing, the narrative seems to exist in a twilight between dream and reality. This quality also serves to mirror the novel's themes of liminality, both in terms of age and gender.

In short, the loose, dreamlike structure of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is a stark contrast to the tight structures of both *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Member of the Wedding*, and I believe this also reflects how *Other Voices, Other Rooms* differs thematically from these two novels. Both tomboy narratives emphasize gender norms as part of the structure of society, and how these norms come to shape the way in which the protagonists must lead their lives. Scout Finch and Frankie Addams both, at least to some extent, give in to society's demands for structure and conformity. This is then reflected in the way both novels adhere to certain literary norms. They both have clear beginnings, climaxes, and endings. We see how plot elements both reflect and influence the development of the central protagonist. I would suggest that the comparatively messy and uneventful nature of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* seems to reflect the protagonist's, and indeed Truman Capote's, choice not to conform to mainstream norms or structures.

The link between *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and the two other novels I have discussed in this thesis is that they all deal with gender nonconformist child protagonists attempting to negotiate a future in a seemingly gender-segregated adult world. While I have argued that Scout Finch and Frankie Addams come to realize that they could manage to find a place for themselves without losing their core identities, Joel Knox chooses instead to eschew mainstream society in favour of the reclusive and dreamlike world of Skully's Landing. Rather than being a triumph of individualism, I would suggest that this is a more negative ending than those of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Member of the Wedding*. While these two novels were very much about finding one's own identity, albeit within a community, in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* we instead see Joel instead subsuming his own identity into Randolph's. Rather than individuality, the result is loss of self. As I have suggested, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* thus becomes something of an anti-coming of age novel. Read in this light, the book seems to have a rather questionable 'moral': that an atypical gender identity and/or queer sexuality dooms one to an unfulfilling, stagnant and reclusive life.

In this chapter I have attempted to show how *Other Voices, Other Rooms* by Truman Capote is saturated by a sense of arrested development, and how this discourse of immaturity is connected to negative stereotypes in relation to race, gender and perhaps most significantly, sexuality. While several of those who have been critical towards the novel's depiction of homosexuality have focused on Capote's emphasis on gender transitivity, I have suggested that it is the failure of growth and development that signifies homosexuality as 'a living death' (Adams, *Homosexual as Hero* 60), rather than gender nonconformism per se.

Conclusion

In my introduction I posed the question: 'what does it mean to grow up "different" in the South in these novels?' There is no simple answer to this question, yet I would suggest that the foregoing chapters have given certain insights into the challenges of this process. My argument throughout this thesis has been that these novels offer two main solutions to this problem. On the one hand, there is the option of cooperation: you can join in with the charade of gender conformity. On the other hand, you may choose to reject constrictive gender norms entirely, and separate yourself from the community.

In Chapter One and Chapter Two, I argued that both *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and *The Member of the Wedding* by Carson McCullers are examples of the strategy of cooperation and charade. Essentially, both novels are characterized by the fact that the female protagonists come to a deeper understanding of how gender works during the course of the story. At the beginning of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Scout Finch not only resists the notion of becoming a lady, but is hostile towards femininity in general. As I have suggested, this scepticism is linked with other forms of chauvinism, against non-whites and so-called 'white trash'. However, by the end of the novel, Scout has ceased to view femininity as a threat. There are several explanations for this. First, the homosocial bonds between her brother Jem and their friend Dill forces Scout to seek out female company. Observing the adult women she had previously viewed as adversaries, Scout's eyes are opened to the skill and toughness required of women, despite their frivolous demeanours. Secondly, the conviction of an innocent black man provides Scout with an insight into the injustices of the adult world. Ultimately, one may argue that this shock makes gender performance seem a rather trivial affair in comparison. Rather than focusing on divisive notions of sex, class and race, Scout learns to appreciate other qualities, such as honesty, fairness, consideration towards others and modesty. With the guidance of her father and a variety of female role models, she learns to attribute new meaning to the concept of the lady, and thus manages to carve out a new identity for herself. While her process of feminization does not go as far as that of Frankie Addams, Scout no longer resists femininity at all costs. Instead, she comes understand that women are not inferior and that playing one's part can have certain advantages.

In *The Member of the Wedding*, Frankie Addams' initial problem seems to be that she has not yet learned how to perform femininity appropriately and convincingly. Both her tomboy self and her extravagant transformation into 'F. Jasmine' emphasize this fact.

Initially, Frankie copes with the overwhelming sense of fear and isolation she feels as a result of her liminal status by channelling her hopes and dreams into her brother's wedding. The following disappointment provides her with a steep learning curve – in effect, her dreams are shattered. Nevertheless, I do not wish to suggest that this breaks Frankie's spirit. The final part of *The Member of the Wedding* is very much about facing harsh truths, with Frankie observing that 'It was better to be in a jail where you could bang the walls than in a jail you could not see' (184). Several critics have argued that this realization marks Frankie's decline; deflated, she simply accepts her fate. However, I would suggest that in this act of recognition, these confines, this 'jail', cease to be invisible. While many have read *The Member of the Wedding* as a story of failure, I would argue that for Frankie, acknowledging the difficulties of her situation is more empowering than ignoring it. Finally, Frankie sees that she is closed in, and that life for girls is 'a framed game' (173). Armed with this knowledge, I would suggest that she is better equipped to move forward with her life.

Instead of gender being mystical and elusive, Scout Finch and Frankie Addams learn how to 'unlock' the gender code. They understand that femininity is not something you either inherently do or do not possess or something intangible and mysterious that lies beyond their grasp. Rather, it becomes something that can be put on, a game you can choose to play. Your given gender role comes to be seen as exactly that – a role, a character, an impersonation. In other words, it becomes something you *do* rather than something you *are*. Thus minimized and distanced from what one might refer to as their core identity, I would argue that conforming in terms of gender becomes less of a humiliation than many critics have suggested. Indeed, I would suggest that the insinuation that feminization automatically equals passivity and the eradication of originality and independent thought is in itself rather dangerous. Far from withdrawing or giving up, I would argue that the apparent surrender to femininity is the point at which these characters start playing the game. Accordingly, this is what I would identify as the moment at which both of these characters grow up or come of age. Instead of retreating into fantasy, they begin to see the world as it really is, and negotiate their position within these limitations. The point is not necessarily that they have conformed to gender norms, but that they have begun to understand how the adult world works.

In my introduction I cited Scarlett O'Hara of *Gone with the Wind* and Capitola Black of *The Hidden Hand* as examples of characters for whom stepping outside of their gender role was a means to an end. For these women, gender rebellion was something they were forced to do in difficult times in order to be able to once again live a life of feminine passivity. For Scout Finch and Frankie Addams, however, the opposite seems to be true. Although Scout

and Frankie are willing to modify certain aspects of their appearance and behaviour, I would suggest that they continue to rebel in other ways. When the novels end, these characters are neither passive, nor silent, nor intimidated. Indeed, Scout observes on the penultimate page of *To Kill a Mockingbird* that 'nothin's real scary except in books' (375). Meanwhile, Frankie, far from having resigned herself to a lifetime of domesticity, still has her sights firmly set on a life of adventure with her new companion: 'When Frances was sixteen and Mary eighteen, they were going around the world together' (186). In Frankie's case, many have pointed to the possibility of an emerging lesbian relationship with her friend Mary Littlejohn. If one chooses to read their friendship in this light, Frankie's sudden conformity to gender norms can be seen as rather savvy. Performing her gender role 'correctly', she is arguably better able to disguise the fact that she is not conforming to sexual norms.

The alternative to compliance with gender norms that I have mapped out in this thesis is refusal. This, I have argued, is what Joel Knox does in Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. Yet Joel is not only rejecting stereotypical masculinity, but arguably also heterosexuality and adulthood. Of course, it may seem somewhat churlish to select the one novel in which the protagonist is actually allowed to continue his gender rebellion freely as that most worthy of criticism. Yet, as I have argued, the life of an outsider is not shown to be joyous or liberating. Joel's choice does not seem to be depicted as a happy one, but rather an act of resignation. Joel's newfound role model Randolph Skully is little more than a more glamorous and articulate version of Boo Radley. He is a child in a grown man's body, someone who has withdrawn completely from society, and a deeply unhappy character. Therefore, the fact that Joel finally succumbs to him is, I would argue, not necessarily represented as a positive development.

While Joel may be permitted to refuse gender norms in a way that Scout and Frankie cannot, crucially this does not actually seem to take place in the 'real world', but instead a dreamlike hinterland. Whereas Scout and Frankie find ways to join in with mainstream Southern society, Joel becomes increasingly distanced from it during the course of the novel. In fact, this happens quite literally as he moves from New Orleans to the isolated world of Skully's Landing. Finding a 'queer family' or subculture at the Landing, and being protected from the homophobia and sexism of the more conventional South, could easily be read as a positive development. However, I would argue that the fundamental unhappiness of the inhabitants of Skully's Landing makes such a reading rather difficult. Thus Joel's refusal to 'play the game' is depicted as leading to isolation and unhappiness.

What is problematic is that gender conformity and maturity almost become synonymous in this particular setting. Thus we are forced to ask ourselves: to what extent is refusing one's gender role synonymous with refusing adulthood? My suggestion is not that mindless conformity to society's norms is a mark of maturation. However, realizing that one is in a weak position and learning how to use the system to one's advantage *is*. Essentially, I would argue that Scout and Frankie learn how to 'pass' as feminine, heterosexual women, without necessarily losing their fundamental queerness. One can compare it to the phenomenon of passing in racial terms, whereby a person classed as a member of one racial group assimilates him or herself with another racial group. Most often, a light-skinned black person would try to pass as white. Needless to say, the fact that such a pretence is required is worthy of criticism. People should not have to pretend to be something they are not in order to gain privilege or acceptance, and in an ideal world, this would not happen. Nevertheless, in an imperfect world, this injustice does not negate the potential benefits for the individual in question.

In my analysis of these three novels, I have interpreted Southern society in the 1930s and 40s to be a place in which gender rebellion must be a covert undertaking, rather than an overt one. To put it simply, I have painted a rather bleak picture, despite my initial suggestions that Southern society has traditionally been tolerant towards eccentricity and difference. If the two main options are to either remove oneself from the mainstream, or to sham one's way through life, then this is suggestive of extremely limited choices for those who resist binary classification in terms of sexuality and gender. While I suggested in my introduction that feminine male characters are subject to less gender policing than masculine female characters in Southern literature, at closer inspection it seems that these characters face their own challenges nonetheless. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Member of the Wedding* and *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, it tends to be the nonconformist male characters who are eventually shown to be the most lonely and disjointed – Boo Radley, Dill Harris, John Henry West, Honey Brown, Joel Knox and Randolph Skully. Meanwhile, the female characters who do not comply with the idealized image of the Southern belle or lady, whether it is because they are an adolescent tomboy, or because they are African American, seem infinitely better equipped to fit in and make the best of the situation. Ironically, the fact that girls and women are more frequently encouraged to be accommodating and malleable may have worked in the favour of these characters. As a result, they are able to become chameleons and thus fake their way to acceptance.

In my introduction, I also drew attention to the prevalence of tomboys and unconventional women in Southern fiction. A noticeable constant in all three novels is the contrast between the reverence for femininity among the adult female characters and the resistance towards it among the child characters, at least initially. Particularly in the cases of Scout Finch and Idabel Thompkins, the tomboy's biological sex becomes an elephant in the room: obvious to all, but only to be mentioned if it is your intention to hurt or shame her. This suggests that the South's supposed glorification of femininity does not run as deep as one might think. Indeed, it is possible that strict gender norms and the exaltation of womanhood may have created something of a backlash against femininity. In other words, we can see evidence of a continuation of what Michele Ann Abate pointed to in her article on the popularity of Capitola Black and *The Hidden Hand*.

With these three novels, Harper Lee, Carson McCullers and Truman Capote offer us an insight into a world in which, on the surface, gender roles are strictly regulated, and cannot be openly transgressed without the risk of ridicule and exclusion. However, when we take the time to dip below this surface, the picture becomes rather different. Gender enforcers are themselves revealed as deviant, and their admonitions suddenly seem to contain more shades of grey and more room for manoeuvre than is apparent at first glance. In this thesis, I have attempted to delineate the ways in which this allows for covert rebellion, and unmasking these hidden acts of nonconformity has had a rather converse effect. The novel which ostensibly seems to be the most progressive of the three, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, in which the protagonist is not forced to conform, is revealed as in some ways being the most restrictive. Whereas Scout Finch and Frankie Addams arguably have the world at their feet, Joel Knox instead confines himself to a claustrophobic wasteland. My intention with this reading has not been to sing the praises of gender norms, but rather to dig deeper and identify the more subtle nuances of these situations. Instead of interpreting conformity simply as submission, I have attempted to identify ways in which we may see conformity as a kind of negotiation, a matter of give and take. In doing this, we are able to view the 'normalized' versions of Scout Finch and Frankie Addams as more than just casualties of conventionality.

Works Cited

Abate, Michele Ann. 'Launching a Gender B(l)acklash*: E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* and the Emergence of (Racialized) White Tomboyism'. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 31 (2006): 40-64.

Adams, Rachel. '"A Mixture of Delicious and Freak": The Queer Fiction of Carson McCullers'. *American Literature* 71 (1999): 551-583.

Adams, Stephen. *The Homosexual as Hero in Contemporary Fiction.* London: Vision, 1980.

Beck, John J., Aaron Randall, and Wendy Frandsen. *Southern Culture: An Introduction.* Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2007.

Capote, Truman. *Other Voices, Other Rooms.* London: Penguin, 2004.

---. 'A Voice from a Cloud'. *The Dogs Bark: Public People and Private Places.* New York: Random House, 1973. 3-11.

Carr, Virginia Spencer. *Understanding Carson McCullers.* Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1990.

Chapell, Louis W. *John Henry: A Folk-lore Study.* Port Washington, New York: Kennikat, 1968.

Christensen, Peter G. 'Capote as Gay American Author'. *The Critical Response to Truman Capote.* Ed. Joseph and John Waldmeir. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1999. 61-67.

Cook, Richard M. *Carson McCullers.* New York: Ungar, 1975.

Corbett, Ken. 'Homosexual Boyhood: Notes on Girlyboys'. *Sissies & Tomboys.* Ed. Matthew Rottnek. New York: New York University Press, 1999. 107-139.

Danaher, Geoff, Tony Schirato and Jen Webb, eds. *Understanding Foucault.* London: Sage, 2006.

Davis, Deborah. *Party of the Century: The Fabulous Story of Truman Capote and His Black and White Ball.* New Jersey: John Wiley, 2006.

Davis, Thadious M. 'Erasing the "We of Me" and Rewriting the Racial Script: Carson McCuller's Two *Member(s) of the Wedding'*. *Critical Essays on Carson McCullers.* Ed. Beverly Lyon Clark and Melvin J. Friedman. New York: G.K Hall, 1996. 206-219.

Drescher, Jack. 'Causes and Becauses: On Etiological Theories of Homosexuality.' *The Annual of Psychoanalysis.* 30 (2002): 57-68.

Fine, Laura. 'Structuring the Narrator's Rebellion in *To Kill a Mockingbird*'. *On Harper Lee: Essays and Reflections*. Ed. Alice Hall Petry. Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 2008. 61-78.

Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Free, Melissa. 'Relegation and Rebellion: the Queer, the Grotesque and the Silent in the Fiction of Carson McCullers'. *Studies in the Novel* 40 (2008): 426-446.

Freeman, Elizabeth. '"The We of Me": *The Member of the Wedding*'s Novel Alliances.' *Women and Performance* 8 (1996): 111-135.

Garber, Marjorie. *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing & Cultural Anxiety.* New York: Routledge, 1992.

Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Gleeson-White, Sarah. *Strange Bodies: Gender and Identity in the Novels of Carson McCullers.* Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2003.

Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University, 1998.

---. 'Oh Bondage Up Yours! Female Masculinity and the Tomboy'. *Sissies & Tomboys*. Ed. Matthew Rottnek. New York: New York University Press, 1999. 153-179.

Johnson, Claudia Durst. *To Kill a Mockingbird: Threatening Boundaries*. New York: Twayne, 1994.

Jones, Diane Brown. 'The Past'. *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs.* Ed. Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda H. MacKethan and Todd Taylor. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2002. 619-20.

Kenschaft, Lori J. 'Homoerotics and Human Connections: Reading Carson McCullers "As a Lesbian"'. *Critical Essays on Carson McCullers.* Ed. Beverly Lyon Clark and Melvin J. Friedman. New York: G.K Hall, 1996. 220-233.

King, Florence. *Southern Ladies and Gentlemen*. New York: Bantam, 1976.

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central, 1960.

Levine, Paul. 'Truman Capote: The Revelation of the Broken Image'. *The Critical Response to Truman Capote*. Ed. Joseph and John Waldmeir. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1999. 81-93.

Logan, Lisa. 'Introduction'. *Critical Essays on Carson McCullers.* Ed. Beverly Lyon Clark and Melvin J. Friedman. New York: G.K Hall, 1996. 1-14.

Manning, Carol S. 'Belle'. *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs.* Ed. Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda H. MacKethan and Todd Taylor. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2002. 95-97.

Matlok-Ziemann, Ellen. *Tomboys, Belles, and Other Ladies: The Female Body-Subject in Selected Works by Katherine Anne Porter and Carson McCullers.* Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2005.

McCullers, Carson. *The Member of the Wedding*. London: Penguin, 2008.

---.'The Vision Shared'. *The Mortgaged Heart*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975. 268-271.

Minter, Shannon. 'Diagnosis and Treatment of Gender Identity Disorder in Children'. *Sissies & Tomboys*. Ed. Matthew Rottnek. New York: New York University Press, 1999. 9-33.

Mitchell-Peters, Brian. 'Camping the Gothic: Que(e)ring Sexuality in Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*'. *Journal of Homosexuality* 39 (2000): 107-38.

Ownby, Ted. *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920.* Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1990.

Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture.* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992.

Pugh, William White Tison. 'Boundless Hearts in a Nightmare World: Queer Sentimentalism and Southern Gothicism in Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*'. *Mississippi Quarterly* 51 (1998): 663-682.

Richards, Gary. *Lovers and Beloveds: Sexual Otherness in Southern Fiction, 1936-1961.* Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2005.

Rich, Adrienne. 'Ch. 16: Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence'. *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader.* Ed. Henry Abelove et al. New York: Routledge, 1993. 227-254.

Rubin, Gayle. 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex'. *Towards an Anthropology of Women*. Ed. Rayna Reiter. New York: Monthly Review, 1975. 157-210.

Rubin, Louis D. Jr. 'Carson McCullers: The Aesthetic of Pain'. *Critical Essays on Carson McCullers.* Ed. Beverly Lyon Clark and Melvin J. Friedman. New York: G.K Hall, 1996. 111-123.

Scura, Dorothy M. 'Lady'. *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs.* Ed. Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda H. MacKethan and

Todd Taylor. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2002. 413-415.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

---. *Epistemology of the Closet.* New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.

---. *Tendencies.* Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.

Seidel, Kathryn Lee. 'Resisting the Code for Southerners in *To Kill a Mockingbird*'. *On Harper Lee: Essays and Reflections*. Ed. Alice Hall Petry. Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 2008. 79-92.

Shackelford, Dean. 'The Female Voice in *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Narrative Strategies in Film and Novel.' *Mississippi Quarterly* 50 (1996-97): 101-113.

Smith, Donna Jo. 'Queering the South: Constructions of Southern/Queer Identity'. *Carryin' On in the Lesbian and Gay South.* Ed. John Howard. New York: New York University Press, 1997. 370-385.

Weil, Kari. *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992.

Westling, Louise. *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens:The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985.

White, Barbara A. 'Loss of Self in *The Member of the Wedding*'. *Modern Critical Views: Carson McCullers*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1986. 125-142.

Wilchins, Riki Anne. *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer.* Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2004.

Williams, Walter L. *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.

Young, Marguerite. 'Metaphysical Fiction'. *Modern Critical Views: Carson McCullers*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1986. 7-10.

Zevy, Lee. 'Sexing the Tomboy'. *Sissies & Tomboys*. Ed. Matthew Rottnek. New York: New York University Press, 1999. 180-195.