

5-2012

## The Androgynous Tomboy: Adolescent Liminality in the Contemporary Southern Bildungsroman

Brooke Alexandra Shippee  
*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd>



Part of the [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#), [Literature in English, North America Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

### Citation

Shippee, B. A. (2012). The Androgynous Tomboy: Adolescent Liminality in the Contemporary Southern Bildungsroman. *Graduate Theses and Dissertations* Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/296>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact [scholar@uark.edu](mailto:scholar@uark.edu).



THE ANDROGYNOUS TOMBOY:  
ADOLESCENT LIMINALITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN  
BILDUNGSROMAN

THE ANDROGYNOUS TOMBOY:  
ADOLESCENT LIMINALITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN  
BILDUNGSROMAN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English

By

Brooke Alexandra Shippee  
Stephens College  
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, 2009

May 2012  
University of Arkansas

## ABSTRACT

*The Androgynous Tomboy: Adolescent Liminality in the Contemporary Southern Bildungsroman* is an analysis of the adolescent, and specifically, of the young tomboy characters central to three Bildungsroman texts set in the American South during the twentieth century: Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* (1985) and Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1993). I seek to challenge the very notion of the conventional tomboy within the coming of age literary genre by defining these youths as androgynous, rather than as young individuals who assume a singular gender opposite of their biological sex. Throughout my work, I will examine how these figures become classified as individual distortions of normative girlhood and as a result, become threatened by cultural, historical and societal expectations within their respective eras; how their androgynous gender casts them as scapegoats and freaks within a society whose normativity is founded upon a strict masculine-feminine binary; and how their existence in a particular space – the American South – adds unconventional pressures as these tomboys realize their sexuality while enduring the painful, compulsory assimilation into Southern womanhood.

Within this examination, the figure of the androgynous tomboy and the punishment these individuals accrue for their queer identity will serve as a reflection upon the damagingly absurd hetero-normative standards of both the South and our society as whole. Through analyzing the historical progression of gender within the Southern space, the tomboy will emerge as proof that the notion of dual, normative genders is destructive, yet remains relatively unmodified as of late. Ultimately, I will argue that these children, these tomboys, become queer figures because of their androgyny, as well as by the violence they are forced to endure as they realize their sexuality during their relatively innocent formative years. Their characterizations within these

*Bildungsroman* narratives signify how evolved our society has become in terms of the acceptance of queer sexuality and genders in adolescents, and the degree to which society still must transform in order to achieve an identity that encompasses the fluidity of genders.

This thesis is approved for recommendation  
to the Graduate Council.

Thesis Director:

---

(Dr. Lisa Hinrichsen)

Thesis Committee:

---

(Dr. Danny Sexton)

---

(Dr. Amy Witherbee)

THESIS DUPLICATION RELEASE

I hereby authorize the University of Arkansas libraries to duplicate this thesis when needed for research and/or scholarship.

Agreed

\_\_\_\_\_

(Brooke Alexandra Shippee)

Refused

\_\_\_\_\_

(Brooke Alexandra Shippee)



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I must thank my advisory committee, Dr. Lisa Hinrichsen, Dr. Danny Sexton, and Dr. Amy Witherbee, for their consistent support and exceptional guidance during the writing of this work. It has been a pleasure to share my studies with you, and I am honored to have worked alongside such outstanding educational professionals.

I would also like to thank Linda Redfern and Fran Koenigsdorf for encouraging my love for literature and writing during my formative years, as well as the patient librarians at the Johnson County Library in Shawnee, Kansas, for their endless literary recommendations throughout my childhood. Additionally, I have to thank Dr. Marshall Boswell, Dr. Judith Clark, Dr. Kate Berneking Kogut and Dr. Tina Parke-Sutherland for their reassurance and guidance during my undergraduate studies at Rhodes College and Stephens College.

An enormous amount of gratitude is extended to my friends - Jake Aslin, Kyle Elliott, Olwen Phillips, Wally Phillips, Paul Skains, Alley Stonestreet, and Drew Wallis - for their unconditional support at two in the morning *and* during happy hour. Their optimism, encouragement and offers to make coffee runs during the writing of this work were absolutely paramount, and without them, I would still be camped out in Mullins Library.

Additional thanks are due to Caitlin and Joe Covey, for their invaluable emotional support at the Fayetteville Public Library during the early drafts of this thesis, and to Dr. Michael Carragher, whose recommendation to “apply at that college in Arkansas” changed my life for the better.

## DEDICATION

This edition of *The Androgynous Tomboy* is dedicated to my parents, Bill & Sheri Shippee; I cannot thank them enough for their unconditional love and support throughout my life, from my first 'publication' (*The Girl Who Sawed Wood*) to this one.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	MASTER'S THESIS	3
	A. Chapter One	3
	B. Chapter Two	32
	C. Chapter Three	62
III.	WORKS CITED	86

## Introduction

“My darling girl, when are you going to realize that being normal is not necessarily a virtue?”

Alice Hoffman

*The Androgynous Tomboy: Adolescent Liminality in the Contemporary Southern*

*Bildungsroman* is an analysis of the adolescent, and specifically, of the young tomboy characters central to three Bildungsroman texts set in the American South during the twentieth century: Carson McCullers’ *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), Bobbie Ann Mason’s *In Country* (1985) and Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1993). I seek to challenge the very notion of the conventional tomboy within the coming of age literary genre by defining these youths as androgynous, rather than as young individuals who assume a singular gender opposite of their biological sex. Throughout my work, I will examine how these figures become classified as individual distortions of normative girlhood and as a result, become threatened by cultural, historical and societal expectations within their respective eras; how their androgynous gender casts them as scapegoats and freaks within a society whose normativity is founded upon a strict masculine-feminine binary; and how their existence in a particular space – the American South – adds unconventional pressures as these tomboys realize their sexuality while enduring the painful, compulsory assimilation into Southern womanhood. What becomes of an individual who pervades both masculinity and femininity? How does the very existence of these individuals transform the normative structures of gender binaries? How does the subversion of these established gender norms become further compounded when an individual identifies with masculinity and femininity during the ultimate domain of the in-between of human life: adolescence? And at what moment, if ever, are they forced by society to choose sides?

Within this examination, the figure of the androgynous tomboy and the punishment these individuals accrue for their queer identity will serve as a reflection upon the damagingly absurd hetero-normative standards of both the South and our society as whole. Through analyzing the historical progression of gender within the Southern space, the tomboy will emerge as proof that the notion of dual, normative genders is destructive, yet remains relatively unmodified as of late. Ultimately, I will argue that these children, these tomboys, become queer figures because of their androgyny, as well as by the violence they are forced to endure as they realize their sexuality during their relatively innocent formative years. Their characterizations within these *Bildungsroman* narratives signify how evolved our society has become in terms of the acceptance of queer sexuality and genders in adolescents, and the degree to which society still must transform in order to achieve an identity that encompasses the fluidity of genders.

## Chapter One:

### The Androgynous Tomboy

Adolescent tomboys remain a fixture in coming-of-age works, forming the perfect body to encapsulate the identity struggle of young girls caught in the space between childhood and womanhood. These young heroines evolve from little girls into versions of the archetypal tomboy: skinny, knobby-kneed youths who wild ran with the boys, ignored authority, refused to don dresses or play nice with females their own age. Tomboys began appearing in literature during the nineteenth century, alongside the advent of national movements focused on women's civil rights and early feminism. By the turn of the century, the tomboy had cemented its role as a highly popular and influential character within American literature, following the introduction of tomboy prototype Jo March, the spunky young hoyden in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868). The appeal of the tomboy expanded well into the following century, most notably with the appearance of Scout Finch in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960). Tomboys retained their esteem throughout literary history because of their intriguing cultivation, for the curious weaving of their femininity and seemingly inherent masculinity. The role of the tomboy is one of gender resistance and rejection, a conflict between biological identity and gender conformity.

I believe that the young central characters found in Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* (1985) and Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1993), fail to fit this mold in its entirety. Frankie, Sam and Bone are, indeed, little women ensnared in the period between girlhood and womanhood, and they do exhibit similar features that run concurrent alongside what is typically described as, but not exclusive to, tomboyism: an aversion to feminine pursuits of the period, an outer appearance that exudes more masculine than feminine features (despite a female biological sex), the lack of influence from a

stable, consistently present mother figure, and a classical masculine moniker or nickname. The manifestation of gender confusion becomes a fundamental aspect within the evolving identity of the tomboy because of the absence of coordination between gender and sex. Even still, I believe that these three girls are not presented as archetypal tomboys, specifically due to their individual connections to each of the aforementioned factors (though they are present within the girls' lives) and the ways in which the girls achieve agency; in the broader sense, however, the girls cannot be identified as normative tomboys because of their desperate yearning for femininity. This strange element rarely exists within the sphere of tomboyism, as young girls who fall within the tomboy category generally associate themselves to elements of masculinity and tend to reject most alignments with the feminine. I argue that Frankie, Sam and Bone challenge this notion with their longing for feminine accord, and, furthermore, their internal perceptions of their convoluted gender hint at components closely associated with androgyny rather than just tomboyism.

Tomboys are classically depicted as figures “defined by incoherent oppositions,” abnormal because of their fixation on masculine endeavors and their mimicry of a male outer appearance: Karin Quimby theorizes in “The Story of Jo: Literary Tomboys, *Little Women*, and the Sexual-Textual Politics of Narrative Desire” that these characters become the ultimate rebels against femininity. Quimby argues that the tomboy character “points out that such categories as male and female, or masculine and feminine, are indeterminate and unstable...[and] exemplifies that the notion of gender identity is not anchored to any secure, incontestable foundations” (1). Tomboys threaten what is believed to be normative female behavior because their unconventional appearances and interests do not align with their biological sex or those elements associated with the illustration of society's typical female. Traditional tomboys may understand

that they are female, yet typically firmly reject any associations with the feminine and deeply resent their biological sex, wishing instead that they were born male. An example of this behavior can be seen in the opening pages of the traditional tomboy Bildungsroman *Little Women*, in which Jo March laments her feminine position, stating, “it’s bad enough to be a girl... I can’t get over my disappointment in not being a boy” (7). Frankie, Sam and Bone harbor these inklings of male envy alongside strong internal desires for femininity, which renders their own particular tomboyhood inconsistent with traditional ones; of course, they absolutely maintain a similar level of rebellion against certain elements of feminine behavior, most certainly those that threaten what is considered normal within their respective eras, through their boyish apparel and penchant for masculine activities. Tenets of normal female behavior are, in part, regionally determined, and the break between this traditional female behavior and that of a tomboy is strained when these characters are placed within a Southern sphere. Throughout this work, I will show that these three youths are pushed apart from other seemingly traditional tomboys by their aforementioned longing for association with femininity, specifically that of the certain adult women they idolize. The three girls simultaneously venerate particular men and women in their lives, comprehending that their interests and appearances parallel those of the men they idolize, yet they also yearn for membership and acceptance within womanhood. I believe that this languishing to become women hints at their relative lack of agency as young tomboys and their subconscious belief that womanhood will offer them security and identity through solidarity: two elements of agency that cannot exist within tomboyhood because its societal non-normativity and the subsequent ostracization of these individuals on account of their non conformity.



Frankie, Sam and Bone's distinct relationship to both male and female gender roles bears a strong tie to concepts concerning indeterminate gender (the essence of which states that the masculine and the feminine can exist within a singular body) and is similar to Sigmund's Freud's idea of bisexuality. As Gayle Salamon parses it in *Assuming a Body*, Freud conjectures that the body possesses a "felt sense," or internal engenderment, that does not necessarily side with one's outer physicality and stresses that "pure masculinity or femininity is not to be found either in a psychological or biological sense. Every individual on the contrary displays a mixture of the character traits belonging to his own and the opposite sex" (Salamon 16). Freud's theory of gender division, of dual genders coexisting within one body, becomes a fundamental element when considering the girls' brevity between girl and womanhood. The convoluted gender develops into a form of unconscious escapism, a way of subverting conventional roles until a sense of agency materializes. If gender, then, lives at the root of one's identity, and one cannot feasibly grasp an understanding of their identity without agency, how are girls expected to ever grow into a conscious awareness of either during their youth? Unfortunately, without the knowledge of agency, girls' gendered identities, and even their bodies, are deeply manipulated by external influences ('regulatory practices of gender formation'—who are you quoting here?), both societal and familial. Their initial sense of identity, the one imprinted upon them by their families and friends, is decidedly masculine for reasons identical to those of the tomboy; conversely, that which their families designate them expands into something to belittle them by. They cannot accept their little girls as tomboys and, therefore, reject the girls' affinity for masculine activities and their somewhat boyish appearances. Rarely are they likened to female family members within their families or even to women at all and this leads to their ostracization by other female youths.

The girls' adolescence is all the more excruciating because of their ambiguous gender, as they attempt to distinguish what they feel internally with how they appear externally. Though they externally appear to be rather masculine, Frankie, Sam and Bone develop a deep longing to be seen similarly to the women they believe emanate a sense of real or 'normative' femininity. The women who possess this quality are usually older than the tomboys themselves and the women's outward appearance seems to parallel society's normative female, or, what the girls believe to be a model woman. Despite their inability to effectively identify with them during their formative years, the apparent longing in these girls to eventually become equals to the women they hold as the pinnacle of femininity subverts the very basis of the tomboy herself. The willingness to ultimately achieve womanhood therefore negates their inclusion within tomboyism. To allege that each girl is a firm, unwavering model of 'the tomboy' would be a fallacy; rather, it seems more fitting to consider that the girls embody tenets of androgyny, an ambiguous intermediacy between genders that allows them to balance between both while maintaining a somewhat neutral presence, and never displaying the entirety of aspects linked to just masculine or just feminine gender. They are conscious of their biological sex, fully acknowledging that they are, in fact, female, but the understanding of their own gender becomes unidentifiable, due to external suggestion and lack of agency, thus rendering the girls' gender indeterminate.

Furthering societal pressures on these youths to conform to normative female behavior in the wake of their tomboyhood is the influence of the American South within *The Member of the Wedding*, *In Country* and *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Not only must Frankie, Sam and Bone reconcile their androgynous gender with feminine standards in general society, they are pressured to conform to the traditional illustration of the white Southern lady. Louise Westling's

*Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor* focuses on the 'tragic history' of this particular kind of womanhood by epitomizing the "traditional Southern veneration of the lady," the illusion of women as fragile, pure beings who kept house, worshipped their husbands and sat quietly indoors as the rest of the world went on around them (5). Westling affirms that Southern womanhood becomes somewhat of an affliction upon these females: as a result of these ladies becoming the enviable "darlings of their world," they were required to maintain a pristine outer appearance and function as lesser accessories to their men (8). In "A Peculiarly Southern Form of Ugliness: Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor," Sarah Gleeson-White highlights the historically oppressive influence of the Southern woman, theorizing that "...white southern womanhood – the southern lady and the southern belle – [has] dominated southern gender regimes from the antebellum period right up to the present," and theorizes that the entirety of a Southern lady's value was "invested in her body" (46, 47). Indeed, Southern femininity becomes entwined with the appearance of the female body and Gleeson-White's notion of this role becomes crucial to the ideal of womanhood within Southern culture. She surmises that the history of these women becomes "captive to an unrealistic and oppressive image of femininity – that literally manifests itself in twentieth-century white southern women's writing" (50). Similarly, Westling highlights the importance of this subdued female behavior within Southern womanhood alongside its contradictions; she mentions that the tense racial and sexual relations within this culture, particularly during the mid-twentieth century, provided an unstable archetype for femininity. She surmises that white females were molded into sacred agents of virtue, frequently "lauded in public to divert attention from problems of slavery and racism" and became consistent reminders of the Antebellum past in the modern age (8). Westling concludes that "the Southern world

provided only a dishonest basis for a girl's identity as she grew into a woman," and notes that as the pressures of this antiquated ideal of womanhood pressed upon coming-of-age young girls, feminine identity as tied to this old-fashioned model became a "charming fraud" (27).

As much as conventional Southern womanhood rested on morality and submission, this peculiar brand of feminine identity hinged on an antiquated view of female beauty. Gleeson-White expresses the lack of ideal Southern beauty as an element within tomboyism in "Revisiting the Southern Grotesque: Mikhail Bakhtin and the Case of Carson McCullers," as she classifies young tomboys as the antithesis of the normative model. Tomboys become "grotesque figures of resistance" in the face of Southern-inflicted femininity, freakish adolescents who not only challenge previous conceptions of the female gender but notions of the female body as well (111). Just as Frankie, Sam and Bone are caught between childhood and womanhood, yet fully immersed in adolescence, their androgyny allows them to dabble in both masculinity and femininity while denying their full inclusion into either. Their peculiar tomboyhood insures their role as deformed children, unable to fully assimilate into one gender during their pubescent years, displaced in a society where the "conceptions of beauty are the foundations of southern identity itself," (*Ugliness* 50).

As time progressed, however, the tomboy became more socially accepted, alongside the rapidly changing status of women during the mid-twentieth century. In *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History*, Michelle Ann Abate surmises that within the decades following the femininely frigid 1950s, incidences of girls experiencing tomboyhood, rather than the previously conventional girlhood, began to grow rapidly. Abate points to the rising popularity among parents not to raise their girl children under strict, typically 'feminine' guises of "conformity, submissiveness and obedience," but instead to instill in them traits of individuality,

determination and autonomy (196). Tomboyish behavior was slowly becoming more normative as the number of films and television programming concerned with youthful, plucky heroines began to increase during the 1970s and 1980s, a result undoubtedly indebted to the increasing waves of feminism. The steady growth of tomboys in accessible media allowed for the emergence of an evolved society that “tended to imagine girlhood as tomboyhood” and young ladies who were christened as such became much more culturally acceptable (195). Similar to their predecessors, the new wave tomboy still bore fundamental traits closely associated with the role, from the masculine nicknames, scraggly exterior and ‘ne’er-do-well’ attitudes. They were still being born out of broken homes, growing up in destructive environments and grappling with the chaos of reaching adulthood. Tomboyhood was no longer just a result of a young female’s familial influences, but became both a “feminist statement...and survival tactic” (197). A new threat, too, began to parallel the identity of the tomboy, when psychologists linked it with Gender Identity Disorder, a condition in which a child of one biological sex entirely assumed the identity of the opposite gender. GID and tomboyism contained many of the same essential factors, leading to a societal fear that “childhood gender nonconformity would lead to adult sexual nonconformity”; in turn, the link between youthful tomboyism and issues of perversion, eventual homosexuality and adult sexual dysfunction became stronger than in previous decades (202). The transition from childhood to adulthood became a bleak period for tomboys and the outlook for their adult lives became just as grim, as tomboys who grew into adulthood maintaining their masculine behavior were believed to be saddled with instances of with sexual defectiveness, a general lack of coping skills and psychological hardships (231).

In keeping with the movement of time and the gradual acceptance of the androgynous tomboy character within the twentieth century, my examination of these tomboys within this

work will proceed chronologically, following the publication dates of the novels, thus beginning with Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) before moving onto Bobbie Ann Masons' *In Country* (1985) and Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1993). My aim in doing so is to illustrate the shift in the cultural perception of these youths, as well as examine whether or not elements of Southern womanhood change when tomboys become more conventional individuals.

*Frankie, F. Jasmine, Frances*

Frankie Addams, the girl-boy child of Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), is, perhaps, the roughest of the three tomboys and the youth who faces the greatest challenge in coming to terms with her androgyny. Her struggles in reconciling her blossoming identity within the confines of just one gender stands at the forefront of the work and the gender conformity demanded of Frankie is far greater than that of Bone Boatwright or Sam Hughes, as the period in which Frankie grapples with womanhood is still firmly tied to the "traditional Southern veneration of the lady" (Westling 5). Frankie's unorthodox upbringing as a half-orphan left within care of a black maid, outward appearance likened often to that of a ragged, wild boy, and subsequent alienation from other young girls within her social stratosphere become the most telling traits in Frankie's reversal of the culturally accepted ladylike appearance during this era. As a result, her rebellious, subversive nature has earned Frankie the position as one of most popular and heavily lauded tomboy characters within adolescent literature, joining the ranks of Jo March, Scout Finch, Katy Carr (Author's *What Katy Did*), Caddie Woodlawn (Author's *Caddie Woodlawn*) and McCullers' own Mick Kelly (*The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*). In spite of this labeling, Frankie still falls within the aforementioned category of the ambiguously gendered

youth, as her longing for womanhood and wish for a close association with the feminine leave her somewhat at odds with the aforementioned traditionally defined notion of tomboyism.

Within the confines of the three texts analyzed, none are so steeped inside the realm of the Southern grotesque as Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding*. It would be remiss to mention the novel and not address the grotesque and its pivotal relationship to the text, particularly when analyzing Frankie's youth and tomboyhood. The concept of the grotesque was first outlined in the 1960s by Russian philosopher and theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who deemed the theory to be the process of a body becoming. The image of that process becomes the grotesque: "...an image which reveals incomplete metamorphosis [which] no longer represents itself" (Brandist). This illustration of the evolution of a strange, unstable body is absolutely crucial to the cultivation of not only the tomboy, but of the Southern tomboy. The Southern grotesque emerges within texts concentrated with deformed, almost freakish characters that challenge classically accepted forms of the body. Sarah Gleeson-White's "Revisiting the Southern Grotesque: Mikhail Bakhtin and the Case of Carson McCullers" attempts to link the theorist's account of the body with McCullers' fiction, citing that both "illuminate the oddness of embodiment" and confront ideas of "corporeal contortion" (111). Adolescence provides the fertile environment in which Frankie's body becomes unfixed, stemming from her entanglement between the two worlds of childhood and adulthood. Gleeson-White surmises that "the female adolescent is perhaps even more grotesque than her adult counterpart for not only is she female, but also she is in that liminal state between childhood and adulthood...between masculine and feminine gender identification" (111). Indeed, Frankie acknowledges her obvious struggle between genders, both external and internal, while relying on the term 'membership' to signify

the inclusion within one gender or another, as she claims that “she belonged to no club and was a member of nothing in the world” (McCullers 1).

Frankie’s behavior and outward appearance is rugged for a girl her age, evidenced by her lack of female friends and her affinity for worn hand-me-downs appropriate for boys. She runs wild and barefoot through her hometown, dressed in the same shorts and undershirts as her lone companion, John Henry, whose relationship to Frankie mirrors that of *Bastard’s* Bone and her male cousins. While Bone and Frankie share similar tastes in clothing and comrades, there is an interesting split between how each girl chooses to wear her hair. Long, flowing locks have been closely associated with femininity, particularly with young, unmarried women, and the period in which Bone and Frankie exist is no exception to the trend (Sherrow 192). Bone prefers to keep hers long and tangled down her back, and refuses to let her mother and aunts cut it, while Frankie’s coif is described as being “cut like a boy’s” and “all shaved off like a convict” (McCullers 4, 90). The length of their hair does not, of course, determine that one girl fits better within the confines of tomboyhood than the other, but does suggest that their preferences are connected to their familial structures. The fear that Bone feels when her mother threatens to hack her hair into a bowl cut stems from a belief that her hair is what simultaneously links her to the Boatwright women and divides her from them. Without the same color and style as the women she believes she is not truly a Boatwright woman, but the *length* of the hairstyle keeps her somewhat within the feminine realm. Frankie has no mother or female family member to attribute her hairstyle, though one could argue that her shorn hair mimics Berenice’s, described as being “parted, plaited and greased close to the skull” (5). As the wedding draws near, Frankie admits that her hair is detrimental to her role as a wedding guest: “the big mistake I made was to get this close crew-cut. For the wedding I ought to have long bright yellow hair” (18). Frankie



believes that long, ladylike hair will help to gain her ‘membership,’ possibly both as a distinctive wedding guest and as an easy entry into womanhood. Hair is attributed to the essential concept of outward beauty as they transition from tomboys to young women as each girl wishes to be seen as pretty and being deemed as such becomes extremely important.

Numerous factors prevent Frankie from membership within any of the groups she so desperately desires to be a part of, but her flirtation between masculinity and femininity excludes her from what she believes to be the most important club of all, the group of teenage girls with whom she was once close:

The members of the club were girls who were thirteen and fourteen and even fifteen years old. They had parties with boys on Saturday night. Frankie knew all of the club members, and until this summer she had been like a younger member of their crowd, but now they had this club and she was not a member. (12)

While it is never outright stated as to why Frankie is no longer a part of their group, it is clear that her sudden ostracization was in part due to her tomboyish behavior that summer. Frankie is incapable of garnering the attention she once had from the older girls, young women she sees as embodiments of the perfect female and as possessing normative femininity. As she lacks a biological mother and because Berenice can hardly stand in for this figure in her life due to the racial differences between them, the untouchable girls become Frankie’s models of pure, unwavering feminism. They appear angelic to Frankie at one point, as “the long gold sun slanted down on them and made their skin look golden also, and they were dressed in clean, fresh dresses” (95). The older girls appear in stark contrast to the devilish Frankie, who is reminded by Berenice that she may become like those ‘golden girls’ one day if she “filed down them horns a inch or two” (21). The older girls are consistently outside of Frankie’s radius: they appear on the edge of her property or as blurred streaks across her lawn, always in motion, always just beyond her reach, silently taunting her with their golden femininity. Their sudden abandonment leads

Frankie to question why they no longer invite her on their outings. She briefly believes that there must be a terrible smell emanating from her and douses her skin with perfume in a weak attempt at inclusion. During her desperate effort to become apart of their group, Frankie overlooks the fact that she has already gained membership into a club of her own: the mismatched, patchwork family of Berenice, John Henry and Frankie's father, Royal Addams.

Frankie's kin can be viewed as somewhat responsible for her tomboyhood and rugged identity. They have alienated her by giving her a male nickname, remained unsupportive of her evolution into a young woman and looked down on her efforts to become 'pretty'. Her family's response toward Frankie's actions during that summer unconsciously reinforces her masculine behavior while also rallying against the demeanor. During one of their many card games that summer, Berenice counsels Frankie to act more feminine and tells her to "change from being so rough and greedy and big...fix yourself up nice in your dresses. And speak sweetly" (83).

Berenice's advice to change from "being big" illustrates the notion that Southern women were supposed to speak in a mild tone, and appear dainty and petite. When Frankie eventually does dress herself as Berenice advises, the elder woman deems her to be unacceptable still. She highlights the combination of the mature dress with dirtied skin as the culprit: "Here you got on this grown woman's evening dress...and that brown crust on your elbows. The two things just don't mix" (90). Berenice's advice not to mix adult, womanly things with remnants of tomboyhood suggests to Frankie that it is culturally undesirable to combine elements of masculinity and femininity. The disgust Berenice exudes at Frankie's nice dress hanging on a dirtied body, too, reinforces this theory. Tomboyish appearance and behavior becomes dirtied and disgusting, while the womanly, fresh dress is labeled as clean and acceptable. Gleeson-White makes similar claims in "Grotesque," insisting that cleanliness becomes fiercely entwined with

womanliness, just as beauty and the female body are tied together within Southern feminine identity. She notes that “tomboys attempt to clean themselves up in order to become proper women...the need to “get clean” chimes with cultural perceptions of the unruly grotesque female body” (113). Berenice’s instructions are a result of the importance she places on the female body, as well as finding a suitable male partner, and her advice hints to Frankie that if she were to change her appearance to mimic that of the angelic club girls, she might win herself a date with an acceptable young male, a “nice little white boy beau your own age” (McCullers 84). Berenice regales her with stories of her own beaus, conjuring up a parallel between perfect femininity and the pursuit and capture of a masculine lover. Her speech conjures up the idea that once normative femininity is reached within womanhood, one finds the elements of masculinity they had given up in tomboyhood in their male counterpart.

Frankie pinpoints her evolution from girl to woman as happening quickly, within “that green and crazy summer when [she] was twelve years old” and the bulk of the evolution spans just a few days in late August (1). She is consistently bombarded with change during that summer, from being forced to accept her beloved brother’s impending marriage to the sting of the harsh rejection and subsequent abandonment by the elder, more feminine girls in town. Frankie is alienated from her own gender, as evidenced by her physical self and her wavering emotional state in the weeks leading up to the wedding, most notably by the transformation of her name and the self-realization she garners with each revolution. Frankie’s name is the essence of her identity and the changes it incurs reflect one facet within the unfolding of her sense of self. Her moniker is what indicates her gender, and determines her physical demeanor and behavior over the course of that summer, beginning with the masculine nickname of ‘Frankie’ to the flowery ‘F. Jasmine,’ before she finally settles with her birth name, ‘Frances’.

The first name shift, from 'Frankie' to 'F. Jasmine' is, in part, an attempt for Frankie to associate herself with her brother, Jarvis, and his bride, Janice. Frankie latches onto the couple immediately after they announce their intent to wed, viewing them as the 'we of me,' an extension of herself (42). Curiously, she also mentions that she "sociate[s] the two of them together," instead as separate beings (17). While she obviously recognizes that Jarvis is male and Janice is female, her references to the pair hint at her understanding of them as one blended person, both male and female; the grouping of the two suggests Frankie's belief that a being can retain a sense of gender fluidity - dabbling in both masculinity and femininity - despite the being's biological sex. This is evident in her intent on changing her name from Frankie to F. Jasmine: she holds onto her original tomboyish masculinity from Frankie with the singular 'F,' while adding a feminine flair, Jasmine, to the end of the name. The evolution of the name signals the beginning of Frankie's identity shift from a youthful tomboy into a proper young lady. She admits to Berenice that she longs for a feminine moniker, commenting, "'if only my name was Jane,' she said. 'Jane or Jasmine,'" but each name change echoes an element of her original labeling as she is ultimately unable to fully give up her given name (17). The presence of both masculine and feminine elements within a singular body is irreconcilable to Frankie only when she applies the idea to her future adult self. Frankie cannot grasp the possibility of her tomboyism as existing within the space of her impending womanhood. Completely contradictory to how Janice and Jarvis cannot possibly be without the other, Frankie cannot comprehend the continuation of split engenderment within her *own* adult body.

Coupled with this gender instability is the sudden fluctuation of that body. At twelve years old, Frankie stands on the brink of puberty and has begun to notice the changes taking shape to both her interior self and to her outer appearance. The disconnect she feels between the

two proves the lack of a 'felt sense' within her body (clearly a connection to the Freudian theory of bisexuality), a struggle between genders, and the continuous effort throughout the work to match how she appears externally with how she feels internally. This disjunction fuels the desire within Frankie "to be recognized for her true self" (61). Her identity, her "true self," however, hinges on the comprehension of her body as a gendered space, a realization she cannot fully grasp because of the consistent evolution of that body. She wants to be female and cannot reconcile her identity as one dabbling in both masculinity and femininity; the idea of gender fluidity cannot exist within Frankie's understanding of her adult identity. Just as Frankie becomes trapped between girlhood and womanhood that summer, her body, too, becomes a vice. She cannot comprehend the boundaries of her physicality because of the growing changes exacerbated upon it by puberty, the leading example of which becomes Frankie's epiphany surrounding her future self.

At the height of that summer, Frankie concludes that she is a big freak: her long limbs, large feet and climbing stature remind her of the circus folks she had encountered the fall before. She concludes that she will "grow to be over nine feet tall" if her height continues to increase and will be labeled similarly to the adults who live in the circus' "Freak House" (18). Frankie believes these freaks sense in her a connection to their own kind, mentioning "they had looked at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with hers, as though to say: we know you" (20). She is particularly frightened of the Half-Man Half-Woman, whose booth she recalls as being perpetually crowded; the interest in a being divided between both genders fascinates the other circus-goers as well as Frankie, who is living out her own sense of this half-masculinity and half-femininity. The notion of a human bearing both genders appears later in the narrative, when Berenice tells Frankie and John Henry about Lily Mae Jenkins, an effeminate cross-

dressing male who falls in love with another man. Berenice's tale sparks a heated discussion between Frankie's mismatched family, who all disagree on matters of gender and sex. Berenice believes "the law of human sex [was] exactly right just as it was and could in no way be improved" (98). Frankie affirms that human beings should "instantly change back and forth from boys to girls, whichever way they felt like and wanted," instead of dabbling between genders simultaneously, like the Freak Pavilion's hermaphrodite (92). While she may wish that humans could shift back and forth between genders, Frankie does not mention that she wishes human beings could become a mix of both. In "A Mixture of Delicious and Freak: The Queer Fiction of Carson McCullers," Rachel Adams asserts that Frankie's plan "affirms the necessity of a correspondence between sex and gender when she makes the conservative assertion that a body must occupy only one side of the binary divide at a time: 'boys' or 'girls'"(562). Frankie fantasizes about "remaking the world to allow for a better correspondence between gendered identification and biological sex," once again conjuring up the unsettling thoughts she has about mixed gender and hermaphroditism (561).

The reality of an adult grappling with dual engenderment leaves her with the fear that she may not ever shed the feeling of 'in-betweenness' and could be condemned to feel this way for the rest of her life. Furthermore, the anxiety Frankie feels when contemplating the Half-Man Half-Woman is linked to the confusion she feels surrounding her own gender and leaves her both fearful of her own future and signals "an acknowledgement of the socially perceived oddness of her tomboy status, which exceeds the limits of 'proper' feminine identity" (Gleeson-White 23). The labeling of the Half-Man Half Woman as both a "freak" and as a "miracle of science" conjures up an image of a being so rare it that it could not possibly come into existence naturally and must have been crafted by science, just to be caged and put on display (McCullers 20). The

fear that the circus freak ignites in Frankie hints at her comprehension of society's normative gender roles and that she, like the man-woman in the booth, does not fully fit within those confines. The man-woman at the circus instills in Frankie a threat of hermaphroditism and this frightening notion solidifies the possibility "of a third sex in which the difference between 'man' and 'woman' would be blurred and hybridized" (Adams 559). This blending of genders becomes dangerous in Frankie's mind, and hermaphroditism, which she believes to be an identity saturated in elements of both masculinity and femininity, becomes her greatest fear.

*"Samantha was an afterthought"*

At seventeen, Samantha 'Sam' Hughes, the fiercely independent protagonist of Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* (1985), stands between the brink of adulthood, yet she still retains the behaviors and interests associated with tomboyhood. Sam is the eldest tomboy analyzed within this work, and, at first glance, she appears to be proof that all tomboys have the possibility of blossoming into grown women with their tomboyish behaviors intact. She keeps house for herself and her mentally unstable uncle, Emmett, while fraternizing with a pack of debilitated Vietnam War veterans; she makes love frequently and openly with her boyfriend, Lonnie, and takes up long distance running as a way to set herself apart from girls her own age. Even still, Sam has not completely transitioned into womanhood; she may recognize elements of both masculinity and femininity within herself, but still grapples with harsh judgment for these traits from her family and friends. She struggles with desperately wanting to be viewed as exuding her own kind of normative femininity and eventually to be seen similarly to the women she idolizes, but she slowly begins to understand that she may never fully realize these aspirations due to her inability to fully part with her internal masculinity.

Sam's upbringing appears very similar to the one Bone becomes subjected to in *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Both girls are raised without biological fathers and are forced to look to their imperfect uncles for fatherly influence: Bone is imparted with abusive, alcoholic male relatives while Sam is granted Emmett, a live-in uncle saddled with grief and lunacy from his stint in Vietnam prior to her birth. Both girls idolize these male figures, despite their flaws and ostracization within their communities. Their names, too, are tied to prominent men in their lives and come to hint at the girls' dual genders. Sam's name becomes a setback in her progress toward normative femininity and she recognizes its adaptability in both genders, commenting, "Sam's an all-purpose name. It fits boys and girls both" (82). The possibility of her name being used for both genders does not seem to bother her; curiously, she does point out that her mother "never could stand it that everybody called me Sam," hinting at her family's disapproval at her association with tomboyish traits (53). The transformation of the feminine 'Samantha' into the boyish 'Sam' harkens back to the popularity within this era to link a girl's youth with tomboyish identity; girlhood and tomboyhood became interchangeable. Similar to Bone's nicknaming by her uncle, Sam was given a masculine name by a male family member: the father she never knew. 'Samantha' was a name that her father liked, and in his last letter from Vietnam, he mentions, "if it's a girl, name it Samantha. That sounds like something in a prayer, doesn't it?" (182). She romanticizes the idea that her name is Biblical, and therefore could have been deeply significant to her father, but later realizes that he only chose the name because it was the feminine version of Samuel, his favorite name. When she discovers there is no Samantha in the Bible, she is crushed and the illusion of her father anticipating her birth is shattered, as she believes her father, ultimately, "...was counting on a boy. Samantha was an afterthought" (182). Discovering the personal history behind their names is important to the transition into a feminine



space, not only for Sam but for Bone and Frankie as well. Their nicknames, too, are a significant factor in this progression from girlhood to womanhood, as their monikers reflect their pasts, their families' intentions for their lives and their struggle to become associated with femininity. Sam appears to be the only one out of the three analyzed tomboys within this text to fully accept her masculine name: a trip to the Vietnam War memorial allows her to literally touch a version of her name, leading her to reconcile her bitterness surrounding the familial history of her moniker with the reality of her new-found identity and womanhood.

The atypical familial structure present in both *Member of the Wedding* and *Bastard Out of Carolina* reoccurs once more in *In Country*; Sam is orphaned of one parent and cast aside by the other, and as a result, must raise herself. While the text does not document Sam's childhood in detail, it does briefly outline her upbringing in Hopewell by her mother, Irene, who remarries the 'dull' Larry Joiner when Sam is still a child. Her stepfather's career and Irene's devotion to her new family, now complicated by the birth of Sam's stepsister, sparks her move to Lexington during Sam's adolescence. The lack of parental supervision within her life hints at Sam's deep longing for femininity, as her role as lone female in the home will undoubtedly encompass that of homemaker, caretaker and stand-in mother for Emmett. This desire for alignment with the feminine eclipses Sam's wish to escape Hopewell, a craving mentioned repeatedly throughout the text, by both Irene, who tells her daughter she "...would be stupid not to get out of Hopewell," and Sam herself, who mentions that she "wants to live anywhere but Hopewell...she would like to move somewhere far away" (164, 7). Sam presents a strong eagerness to leave town, yet her lack of action to do so helps preserve what little alignment with femininity she has garnered by living without a parental figure; curiously, her obsession with long distance running negates this feminine association, as her family and the citizens of Hopewell deem the sport

masculine and the pursuit tomboyish. Her love for running strikes an odd balance between the stationary and the fixed within *In Country*, as she cannot bring herself to move from Hopewell (and sever ties with femininity) but also cannot stop running (a decidedly masculine activity). Her thinness, a result of the running, becomes a trait associated with tomboyhood and her physique is frequently commented on. Emmett's group of ragtag veterans label her 'long-legged,' her grandfather calls her a "skinny little squirt" and Mamaw, her paternal grandmother reminds Sam that she's "too skinny" and "holler-eyed" (199, 5). Despite their innocent name-calling, Sam embraces her appearance and the constant movement that manipulates it, believing that it added to her uniqueness: "Sam loved to run because it set her apart from the girls at school who did things in gabby groups, like ducks. When she ran, she felt free, as if she could do anything" (75).

Just as Bone and Frankie share their yearning for femininity and womanhood with Sam, the three girls each admire a woman they believe exudes normative femininity, glorifying this role model because of her seemingly unobtainable status as an unwavering symbol of the feminine. While Bone and Frankie look to their own mother figures as role models of femininity, Sam does not look to Irene in the same capacity; on the contrary, Irene encapsulates traits of femininity that Sam finds particularly repulsive. Irene's marriage, pregnancy and to some extent, even motherhood, take on an air of disgust when Sam refers to them, becoming even more complicated when her only friend Dawn discovers she is pregnant. The two lead nearly identical lives and are both seen as outcasts (40). The aversion to the aforementioned feminine traits Sam initially saw in Irene only amplify when they are applied to her best friend; her repulsion becomes more apparent when the pair discusses Dawn's impending motherhood and Sam states that pregnancy "...just ruined your life," reminding her friend that "having kids is what

everybody does. It doesn't take any special talent" (103, 177). Dawn and Irene manifest an entirely new breed of domesticity that does not sit well with Sam, one that links the role of homemaker with that of motherhood, and because of this, neither Dawn nor Irene can become a model of the normative womanhood Sam so desperately desires. Instead, Sam looks to Anita Stevens, Emmett's beautiful ex-girlfriend, who seems to embody the characteristics of perfect femininity while lacking those that Sam deems repulsive; she has never given birth or mothered a child, had been previously married but was now happily divorced. Sam glorifies Anita's seemingly impeccable life, mentioning that "everything about Anita was elegant...it was as though she were sitting in a perfectly arranged setting" (61, 62). Similar to how Bone and Frankie depict their own normative females as being the pinnacle of beauty and perfection, Sam revels in Anita's appearance, taking note of the woman's "full breasts...hair that hung down to her shoulders...flawless skin"; the consistency of the women having an ample bosom, long, flowing hair and clear skin is a sharp contrast to the girls' skinniness, shorn hair and pallor (63). Femininity for the girls is deeply related to a woman's externality, a trait that is closely associated with the previous definition of Southern womanhood. Her beautiful appearance and mannerisms is what labels her a woman, not her foray into motherhood or any other female-specific trait. Despite her desperation to be viewed similarly to Anita, Sam still struggles against how her family and friends see her: namely, as a tomboy. Her grandparents consistently liken her to her late father, telling her she looks and acts very much like him; his diary, too, ignites a fear in Sam's mind that her family did not truly want her, but instead wanted a male child. She harbors her family's resentment long after she finishes reading the diary, and this feeling is reinforced by her grandfather, who admits to Sam, "everybody expected a boy, of course," prompting her retort of "everybody *wished* I was a boy" (199).

*Bone the Boy-Child*

Ruth Anne Boatwright, the protagonist of Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*, is primarily defined by two truths: her masculine nickname and her explicit illegitimacy. At birth, she is christened 'Ruth Anne,' names that reflect two women (Aunt Ruth and her mother, Anney) who later prove to be highly influential in her young life, because of their representations of femininity and Bone's devoted admiration of them as such. Interestingly, she mentions that she is "lucky I'm not Mattie Raylene like Granny wanted," ostensibly content with her namesake; her 'luck' is remarkable, for it is Aunt Raylene, not her mother or Aunt Ruth, who comes to Bone's aid by the narrative's end (Allison 2). The women from whom Bone takes her names actually become a catalyst for much of the negativity surrounding Bone's identity and fail to rescue her from Daddy Glen's sexual advances. Bone is also given her mother's surname, as her father is unmistakably absent and Bone's grandmother angrily refuses to even utter his name, let alone allow her granddaughter to bear it. Thus, Bone is deemed a Boatwright, and the weighty importance surrounding her full title hints at the seriousness of the pursuit that the elder female Boatwrights have in uniting the new girl child with the rest of the female-laden family, especially in the securing of the baby to two of the lead women. This seemingly rampant, proud femininity would tend to indicate that Bone's upbringing will be directed by strong matriarchs bent on fostering a deep sense of femininity within her and perhaps allow her to recognize the privileges and strength that comes with being born female; however, a closer look at the Boatwright clan reveals a dark, twisted lineage of cowardly, ignorant women who attempt to control their lesser-than counterparts, uncles and boy-cousins who prove with age to be violent alcoholics and nasty womanizers.

Despite the authenticity of the name on her birth certificate, her feminine moniker fades quickly and upon her first day home from the hospital, 'Ruth Anne' is immediately replaced by 'Bone,' a nickname in reference to her size as an infant. Any connection Bone had to the two women she is named for is reinstated by her Uncle Earle, who takes one look at the baby and "...announced I was no bigger than a knucklebone" (2). Earle's declaration culminates in a final name that is not only gender neutral but is also imparted upon her by a male, in spite of the great lengths Aunt Ruth and Bone's grandmother take to make sure she remained connected to the feminine Boatwrights. Further adding to the initial deterioration of Bone's identity is the repeated name-calling by her grandmother, who remarks that Bone is "ugly" and "pretty ugly," as well as "almost pretty" (21). These jabs lower the young girl's self-worth and add a hateful slant to the list of nicknames Bone is forced to own. The transformation of her names, particularly the move from one steeped in powerful femininity to one distinctly neutral, become the primary event leading to Bone's instability surrounding her identity and mark the beginning of her struggle against, and questioning of, her own gender.

*Bastard* offers a wide array of feminine role models for Bone to emanate as a young girl, yet these women are hardly commendable examples of Southern womanhood. They birth babies out of wedlock, obviously raise ne'er-do-well children and marry men with dark reputations: "rumor told deadly stories about the Boatwright boys, the kind of tales men whispered over whiskey when women were not around" (12). Bone's mother follows suit, eventually giving birth to three children by just as many men, marrying a pair of them and, despite help from her sisters and mother, bemoans her struggles in mothering her two surviving daughters. Anney quickly finds a way out of working at the small mill in town and turns to flaunting and flirting as a waitress at the local diner. The manager seemingly hires her for this very reason and mentions,

“you got a way with a smile,” to which she replies, ““Oh, my smile gets me a long way,”” proudly recognizing the powerful distance she believes her feminine wiles have taken her (9). While the text states Anney didn’t truly mean to hint that her sexuality has earned her the job and notes she “firmly passed back anything that looked like a down payment on something she didn’t want to sell,” her inner dialogue offers a much different desire; shortly after meeting Daddy Glen, Anney admits that she needs a husband and notices not his supposed gentle nature or steady job, but instead that “he’d make a good daddy...a steady man” (13). Anney becomes somewhat of a paradoxical character in Bone’s life, becoming the central mother figure and woman Bone idolizes as the model of Southern womanhood, but she is also simultaneously a detriment to Bone’s identity. Her mother offers an illustration of adult womanhood that does not necessarily encompass traditional elements associated with Southern womanhood. Anney does, indeed, appear to fall in line with the conventional appearance of a Southern woman; she maintains a delicately clean outer appearance and has a pretty “open face and bright sparkling eyes, an easy smile and a soft mouth” (12). However, Anney does little to hide her sexuality or the fact that she no longer retains a sense of purity. Anney’s womanhood couples sexual lust with violence while displaying a seemingly untouchable normative female appearance, and showcases a side of womanhood not seen in her aunts or grandmother, one that uses sexuality as an instrument in gaining what she wants (12). Despite the hurt and anguish Anney brings upon her daughter, Bone garners a sense that her mother can do no wrong and maintains that she persistently “...believed anything that Mama said was so” (18).

While Bone steadfastly worships her mother during her tomboyhood and recognizes the strange womanhood that seems to tie together the Boatwright women, she cannot grasp for herself a connection between her biological sex and supposed gender. She remains aware of her

own femaleness, distinguished by a growing exploration of pleasurable masturbation and hungry, lustful sexual fantasies, while also conceptualizing a sense of her own gender ambiguity; Bone's understanding of her gender is at odds with her innate sex. In "Hopeful Grief: The Prospect of a Postmodernist Feminism in Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina*," Vincent King affirms this notion and mentions that Bone "instinctively understands that her identity, far from being stable or fixed, is transactional – the result of the ongoing conflict between the names... thrust upon her by others and those she creates for herself" (124). Bone herself is caught up in an internal gender crisis while her family bolsters this struggle, relating her to male family members through her dress and mannerisms, refusing to acknowledge her paternity and examining her masculine physicality. Her earliest realization of the alienation she feels from femininity lies within her appearance, the exact form her family uses to distance Bone from them. The Boatwright women's hair is of major concern to both Anney and Aunt Alma and the styling, texture and color seems to bond the elder women to each other. The women fawn over Reese's delicate, auburn curls and attribute the color and style to Anney's as a child. Bone's locks, of course, lay tangled, long and dark down her back. Her refusal to allow the women to set her hair in pin curls, perhaps in an attempt to feminize her, quickly evolves into a threat from the women, who tease her by saying they will hack her hair into a bowl cut. As the women laugh at Bone's overreaction against that as well, she realizes in that instant that she cannot see likeness of herself in her mother or her Aunt Alma. Fear rises in her as she faces a grim reality: "My mouth wasn't like that, or my face either...I didn't look like anybody at all" (30).

This moment provides Bone with the possibility that she is a foreign object. Bone lacks what she believes to be the most important Boatwright family tie – light-colored hair – and her dark locks become the first marker to ostracize her from the women. Anney quickly reassures

Bone, telling her, “you look like me...you look like my own baby girl,” despite the differences, but her reasoning comes not from how Bone’s facial features mimic her mother’s at the moment but rather from what Anney believes Bone will look like when she grows older (30). Anney’s insistence that her daughter has ‘the look’ and that she can “see it, see what [you’re] gonna be like when you grow bigger,” hints that the fact that Bone truly does not look like them at this stage in her life, but might when she grows older and, perhaps, more feminine (31). Anney predicts Bone’s future looks, forecasting that they will be a combination of her grandfather and of Anney herself, a strange blending of sharp beauty and masculinity. No matter the women’s efforts to reassure Bone of her outward link to the rest of the family, she rejects their claims: “I smiled wide, not really believing them, but wanting to” (30).

Similarly, Bone’s appearance crisis leads her to believe that if she does not wholly look like the women in her family, her appearance may mimic that of her invisible father, which could remove her even further from a feminine sphere. The stamp of ‘bastard’ on her birth certificate only adds to the crisis, as the loss of a biological father leaves her further at odds with her younger sister, Reese; like their mother and aunt, Reese is consistently depicted as an overly feminine little girl and, equally, as Bone’s counterpart within the Boatwright clan. Butch, one of Bone’s beloved cousins, later reinforces her belief in her outward male guise, stressing, “[Boatwright Women] been rinsed in bleach as they’re born... ‘cept you, of course, all black-headed and strange.’ His face became expressionless, serious, intent. ‘But that’s because you got a man-type part of you’” (54). Contrary to Reese’s beautiful, steadfast girlhood, Bone slowly grows into a strange, gender-neutered version of a tomboy, relating solely to ‘her men’: her uncles and male cousins. Identical to the erroneous devotion she has to Anney, Bone’s fascination with the men’s mannerisms borders on religious worship:



I begged my aunts for Earle's and Beau's old denim work-shirts so I could wear them just the way they did when they worked on their trucks, with the front tucked in and the tail hanging out. Beau laughed at me affectionately as I mimicked him...I followed them around and stole things from them that they really didn't care about – old tools, pieces of chain and broken engine parts. I wanted most of all a knife like the ones they carried – I found a broken jackknife with a shattered handle that I taped back together around the bent steel tang. I carried that knife all the time until my cousin Grey took pity and gave me a better one. (23)

Whether it was given to her out of pity or ardor, it is clear that Grey's gift of a newer, better knife reinforces the familial pressure behind Bone's boyishness. She falls prey to the men's suggestions of how to act and they seemingly raise her up like a boy child, showing her how to wield a weapon and craft things: “‘you hold a knife like this,’ they told me. ‘You work a screwdriver from your shoulder, swing a hammer from your hip, and spread your fingers when you want to hold something safe’” (22). What is so unusual about this obstinacy is that Anney does nothing to aid her daughter's gender confusion. Anney sits idly by as her family drives Bone into almost believing she is innately male and rarely protects her during these outbursts, instead often laughing at the men's remarks about her daughter's ruggedness. Bone's grandmother looks down upon her, citing, “‘Lord, you were a strange thing...I've always thought Granddaddy would have liked you. You even got a little shine of him’” (27). Regardless of the incessant put-downs, Bone still looks to her mother with nothing but love, almost shockingly so despite her mother's inability to shield her from the horrors of abuse.

*Bastard Out of Carolina* provides the perfect ground for an experimentation in the manipulation of gender against biological sex, and familial suggestion plays a bigger role here than in *The Member of the Wedding* or *In Country*. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the girls' willingness to ultimately achieve womanhood negates their inclusion within the realm of archetypal tomboyism and Bone proves to be the best model for this theory of the androgynous tomboy. While she recognizes, proudly, the connection she has between 'her men'

and her affection for masculine activities, Bone has a deep longing to ultimately become what she believes is a normal, adult female, a woman perfectly in step with the elements and appearance of a Southern lady. Her internal dialogue offers more than enough proof of this longing: “Gawky, strong, ugly – why couldn’t I be pretty? I wanted to be more like the girls in storybooks...I hated my short fingers, wide face, bony knees, hate being nothing like the pretty girls with their delicate features and slender, trembling frames” (206).

## Chapter Two:

### What We Do Together: Burgeoning Feminine Sexuality and the Realization of Desire

Parallel to Bone, Frankie and Sam's existence as androgynous tomboys struggling to break free from the confined space between girlhood and womanhood is the onset of their sexuality, a force that threatens to upend the previous conception of their ambiguous gender. Their burgeoning sexuality – that is, the girls' realization of masculine and feminine desire, the understanding of their own sexual nature and their comprehension of how these elements within sexuality allow for the contrast and compatibility between biological sexes - threatens their tomboyhood. As their tomboyhood begins to dissipate, the girls' identification as an ambiguously gendered youth is inevitably challenged, particularly by the intersection of their sudden understanding of what men and women 'do' together and how the girls' realization of their own sexual desires (and subsequent fear of those desires) undoubtedly places them within the space of both *adult* sexuality and *female* sexuality. This assignment, coupled with the changing physicality of their bodies, becomes incompatible with their former label of tomboy. Their markedly feminine behavior grows as masculine identifiers vanish: they ditch their male sidekicks and take up with young girls, trade their cutoff shorts for party dresses and grow out their shorn hair.

While the gradual understanding of human sexuality is a natural part of the chronology of adolescence, the comprehension of this occurrence is undoubtedly influenced by a variety of sociological and societal factors, most ostensibly stemming from the specific time period in which the youth was raised. Theories surrounding childhood and adolescent sexuality are not without controversy, however, as the notion of child sexuality was subject to several radical

changes during the twentieth century. The existence of childhood sexual desire was a relatively common belief held by theorists and scholars within the early part of the era, though, interestingly, child sexuality was severely negated and considered largely inconceivable just a century before. Concurrent with the prevalent supposition of child sexuality during the early and mid-1900s comes the emergence of child sexual abuse, instances that faced heavy scrutiny over the course of the era. In “Feminism, Child Sexual Abuse, and the Erasure of Child Sexuality,” Steven Angelides analyzes the dynamics of child sexuality and sexual abuse by tracing the history of the concern from its birth in the seventeenth century to its “rediscovery” in the mid-twentieth century and emphasizes the profound importance of this reinterpretation between the sexes and within adult-child relationships. Prior to the 1900s, campaigns were enacted to suppress childhood sexuality and sexual impulses, particularly masturbation, as a strong belief in morality and restraint dominated the era; child sexuality was viewed as a “social evil,” and an issue that threatened public health (143). Fresh from this morally righteous society came the exceedingly different beliefs of the twentieth century, influenced by the Freudian theory of infantile sexuality, which suggested that childhood sexuality is natural and completely normal, and the suppression of these behaviors can be detrimental to the child.

By mid-century, these beliefs consistently appeared in psychiatric findings and “representations of child sexuality were commonplace, particularly in the context of sexual encounters with adults” (143). Angelides examines the assumption that many scholars, including contemporary sexologists Alfred Kinsey and Wardell B. Pomeroy, “dismissed the idea that intergenerational sexual interactions were in themselves harmful...because of the widespread assumption that not only was child sexuality normative, but children could be sexually precocious,” a notion backed by the Freudian theory of infantile sexuality, in which Freud

surmises that children naturally expressed sexual desires and the stifling of these needs were harmful (144). It was assumed that child sexual abuse was somehow self-inflicted by the child herself (referenced from the belief that children were capable of seduction and widely engaged in the practice) and any adverse repercussions from a sexual relationship between an adult and a child were overstated. Angelides relies on one study in the 1950s as further proof of this claim, which again pinpoints the popularity of the mindset that female victims within sexual abuse cases were responsible for their own offenses:

A prominent state government-sponsored study of child sexual molestation in 1955 described the mostly female victims as seductive, flirtatious, and sexually precocious, claiming that in most cases there was 'evidence of participation' and, indeed, evidence of pleasure on the part of the child. Lindy Burton's analysis of sexual assault against children between the 1930s and the 1960s reveals the popularity of this view during that period. The adult offender was often portrayed as a harmless victim of child seductiveness. (145)

The trauma of incest, too, was challenged in an equally-controversial case by psychiatrist Alayne Yates, who theorized that sexual experiences between a father and daughter could hold some importance and stated "early erotic pleasure by itself does not damage the child" (145).

During the 1980s, however, the dynamics of child sexuality shifted toward the notion that children were largely unaware of the connotations of sexual intimacy and began linking instances of sexual abuse with issues of power, dominance and coercion on the part of the adult. The passivity surrounding child sexual abuse was done away with, largely due to the emergence of the feminist movement and the advent of an authoritative discourse on rape by the feminist community, following the reassignment of rape from a purely sexual act to an exploit backed by power and violence. The connection between the feminist reanalysis of rape and the advent of a new definition of child sexuality and sexual abuse came down to the identical elements of consent and powerlessness. Feminists maintained that children could not fully understand the

repercussions of sexual encounters and could not be held accountable for their supposed actions in terms of sexual abuse. David Finkelhor reiterates this notion in “What’s Wrong with Sex between Adults and Children? Ethics and the Problem of Sexual Abuse” by stating that children are primarily unaware of the consequences of sexuality and “they are generally unaware of the social meanings of sexuality... they are unlikely to be aware of the rules and regulations surrounding sexual intimacy, and what it is supposed to signify” (694). The understanding of consent, then, lies parallel with the girls’ comprehension of sexuality, and together these tenets of adolescence exist only within the space between childhood and adulthood. Angelides confirms this idea, concluding that with the advent of child sexuality as innocent experimentation, sexuality as a whole becomes the dividing line between childhood and adulthood: “The traumatic kernel of a child’s sexual experience with an adult is formed...by the child’s premature introduction into adult sexuality...all forms and developmental stages of childhood eroticism [became] a kind of childhood exploration that was seen to differ from, and to precede the onset of, “real” adult sexuality. Childhood and adulthood are thus separated by sexuality, rather than bound together by it” (Angelides 158, 154).

Sexuality undoubtedly plays a large role in the adolescence and remains a crucial tenet within the *Bildungsroman*. These historical notions of childhood sexual exploration and abuse become absolutely essential in analyzing the sexualities and sexual encounters of the protagonist youth within *The Member of the Wedding*, *In Country* and *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Though each of the girls is equipped with differing preconceived notions of this issue, Bone and Frankie are more closely linked because of the ambiguity and conflicting perceptions that surrounded child sexuality and abuse during the mid-twentieth century, while Sam’s sexuality manifests itself differently due to the change in how adolescent sexuality was perceived during the 1980s.

These experiences do not materialize solely out of innocent curiosity but rather out of fierce, adult lust: incestuous rape and vicious molestation appear in *Bastard Out of Carolina* and *The Member of the Wedding*, and painful or apathetic sexual intercourse emerges in *In Country*. This threatens their maturing sexuality, as the abuse of their bodies through violent sexual acts diminishes their emerging identities, labels them as victims and adds to the denial of the girls' impending womanhood, a theory outlined in Sabine Sielke's *Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture* (Sielke 12). Violence within their primary sexual experiences undoubtedly plays a role in the weakening of the girls' agency; however, the crucial, greater realization of sexuality - both of their own and that of adults - serves to bolster their self-awareness by overriding the violent aspect of their sexual experiences and ultimately strengthens their identities as the girls mature into women. Similar to how the primary sexual encounter appears during the brief pause between childhood and adulthood, the experience allows for the reconciliation of the girls' youthful, preconceived notions about sexuality and the sudden reality of the issue. Even as these tomboys are transformed into women, their understanding of sexuality manifests by concurrent experiences and is diluted by childhood supposition: "The psychic field of childhood - its desires, unconscious fantasies, identifications, defenses, and so on - is not superseded by adulthood but remains an ever-structuring force in the production adulthood subjectivity and sexuality" (Angelides 164).

As Frankie, Sam and Bone reconcile their previous understanding of sex with their concurrent experiences, they are forced to confront their own sexual desires with the desires of men, both the ones responsible for the malicious sexual violence and harmless men that pose no threat. They are surrounded and threatened by adult lust and the degrading nature of their loss of purity forces each girl to realize they have the ability to become sexually objectified by males,

leading them to an awareness of their own femininity as well as aligning it with an understanding of adult sexual pleasure. But what effects do sexual experiences have on the self-identity and agency of a tomboy struggling with gender issues, specifically within the differing historical context of each text? How do these experiences manipulate the girls' primary ideas of femininity or what it means to become not just a woman, but to become defined as the Southern lady and associated with the strict tenets of Southern womanhood?

*'A funny feeling'*

The pressures of sexual conformity – a strict adherence to one's own biological sex - and the sudden awareness of adult sexuality abound within Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding*, stemming from historical stressors and from the author's own conflict with sexual and gender issues. Louise Westling suggests in *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens*: that the text becomes saturated with these concerns because of McCullers' personal sexual ambivalence and as a result, Frankie bears the brunt of McCullers' struggles. Westling goes on to surmise that Frankie is effectively destroyed as a character when she is forced to suffer under the “pain of adolescent sexual awakening” in order to reach womanhood because McCullers never fully achieved inclusion within that sphere herself (119). While this assumption may very well be true – evident in her contemporaries' assertion of her androgyny and childish demeanor, as well as her own declaration that she was born a man – it is certainly a stretch to conclude that Frankie's character becomes annihilated because of her struggle to cope with her sexual awakening. The recognition of her queer sexuality becomes the foundation of her selfhood and Frankie's tomboyhood becomes decimated in the wake of her sexual acceptance.



Early in the narrative, it is insinuated that Frankie's sexuality strays as far from normativity as her ambiguous gender does. These instances could, again, reflect back to McCullers' personal tension with heteronormative sexuality, as she herself was engaged in relationships with both men and women. In *Tomboys*, Michelle Abate confirms, "the terms 'heterosexual,' 'homosexual,' and 'bisexual' do not accurately describe Carson McCullers' sexual identity. Given the diverse range of her erotic relationships, the multivalent classification 'queer' is more accurate" (161). Similarly, within *The Member of the Wedding*, the concept of the queer becomes primarily entangled with Frankie's perception of sexuality while simultaneously appearing as a multi-functioning term within the text, used to describe an array of non-sexual moments and feelings. From its earliest definition in the early sixteenth century, the definition of 'queer' meant "oblique, strange, [or] odd". The term underwent a semantic shift within the twentieth century and alongside the aforementioned definition, 'queer' became interchangeable with notions of non-normative sexual performance, specifically male homosexuality. The text effectively exhausts the term, extensively manipulating 'queer' to the maximum of both definitions; McCullers' repeated use of the term throughout the narrative, especially the instances where the term is joined together with a relatively commonplace experience, allows for the transformation of the most normative behaviors into strange, unconventional expressions. The childish scribbles by John Henry become queered. The sweltering kitchen in which the patchwork family of Berenice, John Henry and Frankie deal cards becomes queered. Frankie believes the whole season leading up to the wedding to be one long, queer season. When her sexuality begins to develop, the expression becomes enmeshed with these experiences and transforms Frankie into a queered adolescent. The shameful moment with Barney MacKean in the garage becomes a secret *and* queer sin. The evening of Frankie's

date with the red-haired soldier appears quiet and queer, and upon her arrival at the Blue Moon Hotel, a hot smell hits Frankie and makes her feel queer. This queerness, as Rachel Adams surmises, becomes “associated with [McCullers’] characters’ receptiveness to otherwise unthinkable permutations of sex and gender, which are defined in opposition to normative categories of identification and desire” (554). Just as the ambiguous tomboy cannot exist within the confines of Southern womanhood due to their abnormal mixed gender, the queered adolescent cannot function within the same realm because their sexuality lies in opposition to those considered normative. They must conform to society’s demands of normative sexuality or risk inclusion within Southern womanhood.

Frankie’s comprehension of her sexuality runs parallel with her adaptation to normative femininity and she must come to an understanding of this sexuality if she is to ever achieve womanhood. At the narrative’s beginning, the few glimpses of sexuality she has witnessed horrify and astound her. She cannot fathom the stories she has been told about married people by the older girls she idolizes, calling the tales “nasty lies,” and puts the disgusting narratives out of her mind. Frankie later walks in on a couple in the throes of passion and runs sobbing from the room, confused by their actions. When she tries to recall the event a few years later, she still cannot understand it, though she knows from Berenice’s explanation of the incident that “there was more to it than she was told” (McCullers 40). As her body develops from a nearly ambiguously sexed youth in form to a curvaceous young woman, Frankie’s impending femininity becomes increasingly clear, not just to Frankie herself but to males as well. The moment that she embraces femininity and traipses around town in her very best pink organdie dress and lipstick solidifies her inkling, and her violent sexual encounter with the soldier at the Blue Moon Hotel forces her to confront the notion that her body’s evolving physicality makes

her attractive to men. Suddenly she is no longer an innocent little girl but a young woman, vulnerable to masculine desire as a result of her appearance and physicality.

Frankie's comprehension of sexuality appears to be relatively underdeveloped for a twelve-year-old girl. She cannot understand why it is suddenly no longer appropriate for her to sleep next to her father or why Berenice insists that she catch herself a "nice little white beau" to go with (83). Her conception of sexuality does not truly manifest itself until she is met with the realization of masculine desire and feminine expectation after two separate sexual encounters. Frankie notes that she committed a "secret and unknown sin" that summer with a boy her age, Barney MacKean, in his garage (25). While this scene is never definitively explained within the text, there is a strong possibility that Frankie and Barney engaged in a relatively harmless sexual act, fueled by adolescent curiosity. She makes no mention of specific details, other than to say that the secret sin had "been shown to her" by Barney, and the lack of a physical exchange between the pair may be a hint at the innocence of the moment. Nevertheless, Frankie remains confused about the ordeal, repeatedly referring back to the moment with equal parts queasiness and dread, knowing well that the action may have consequences and remembers, "how bad it was, she did not know. The sin made a shriveling sickness in her stomach, and she dreaded the eyes of everyone" (26). Interestingly, above the shreds of gut-wrenching embarrassment she feels when recalling the moment, Frankie feels a surge of anger toward Barney and admits she wants to stab him with a knife. The violent urges she feels when remembering the secret sin in Barney's garage become a theme attached to unwarranted or non-consensual sexual advances within not only *The Member of the Wedding* but *Bastard Out of Carolina* as well. Frankie's desire to lash out following a sexual advance repeats itself following her date with the soldier at the Blue Moon hotel and she succeeds in carrying out her violent wish; Bone, too, is consumed

with an identical yearning to physically harm her attacker. As the girls become victimized in the moments trailing their primary sexual experiences, they maintain complete silence about the incidents and fantasize about killing their assailants, which allows the girls to become detached from the attackers. While this behavior may seem backwards, Patricia L. Fanflik notes in “Victim Responses to Sexual Assault: Counterintuitive or Simply Adaptive?” that victims generally tend to “react to situations and other individuals based on cultural ideas and normative expectations,” and mentions that their behavior falls in line with what is socially accepted within that period (8). The aforementioned historical timeline of the beliefs regarding childhood sexuality and sexual abuse position both texts within the notion that children were capable of seduction and adults themselves were the victims. Compounded by this cultural mindset is the overwhelming pressure to maintain her façade of Southern femininity. Frankie’s comprehension of sexuality becomes trapped between her own personal (violent) feelings toward these males and the strict societal expectations regarding womanhood and childhood sexuality.

Frankie’s initial meeting with the soldier and the ‘date’ that ensues become the defining moments of her transition into womanhood. These events instill in her the realization that she has developed into a sexual being, which makes her susceptible to masculine desire, yet also allows her to bear a similar sexual yearning. The first meeting between the pair leaves her feeling as though she has left her childhood behind. Gone is her envy of the soldier for his freedom and international exploits, which she believes to be an extension of his masculinity, and in its place appears Frankie’s premature assumption of her place as a nearly grown girl. However, despite her relative innocence in the situation, Frankie’s actions leading up to the date are distressingly reminiscent of the commonly held beliefs regarding child sexuality and adult-child encounters during the mid-twentieth century. While she does not fully understand the intentions behind the

‘date,’ Frankie seemingly implicates herself in the situation: she cleans herself up, puts on her nicest organdie and drinks a beer at the hotel in order to impress the soldier and, as it appears, beguile him into thinking she was much older. Her peculiar interest in him takes an unnatural turn when Berenice advises Frankie to find a beau and mentions Barney MacKean as a suitable match. Frankie instead envisions the soldier as an acceptable partner, believing that the adult man – not Barney, a boy her own age – would be a far better candidate for partner. This belief stems from Frankie’s realization that she has already begun her transition into an older, more adult space than the one she previously inhabited during her tomboyhood, and therefore sees herself as too grown for the little MacKean boy.

Frankie’s misconception of the impending date with the soldier is just one element of her burgeoning sexuality. She leaves her old nickname, ‘Frankie,’ behind and becomes ‘F. Jasmine,’ a hyper-feminized version of her former tomboy self. F. Jasmine does not run barefooted and dirty with John Henry or wear undershirts and cutoffs, but instead dons lipstick, Sweet Serenade perfume and a pink dress. It is this version of Frankie, the suddenly and overtly feminine F. Jasmine, which catches the eye of the soldier and holds her within a strange gaze. She repeatedly mentions his “peculiar look” during their date, and tries without success to escape his “strange eyes,” a steady stare that instills within F. Jasmine the realization of her vulnerability as a newly minted young woman: “He was staring at her with a peculiar expression, not as one traveler gazes at another, but as a person who shares a secret scheme” (McCullers 136). Laura E. Tanner’s *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction* refers to this recurring stare within the literary representations of sexual violence as the ‘conventional male gaze,’ a long, fixed look “voyeuristically directed at an arousing spectacle or desirable object,” that propels the female recipient in victimization (13). Tanner relies on Joel Black’s

criticism of this theme, noting that the reflection of the feminine gaze, in contrast, becomes a “scene of violence...object terror is gendered feminine,” and maintains that the feminine gaze also expresses a “look of anguish as she reacts to a tragic scene of suffering and violence with the classical responses of pity and fear” (13). Indeed, F. Jasmine falls prey to the soldier’s masculine gaze and responds precisely as Black and Tanner describe, with a violent outburst as a result of overwhelming fear.

The hotel encounter between F. Jasmine and the soldier again reflects back on the historical notions of coercion (on the part of the child) and helplessness (on the part of the adult) within adult-child sexual relations. During the encounter in the hotel room, she becomes seemingly normative in the earlier historical sense and the current, by playing the role of the prototypical provocative-seductive child because of her appearance and a helpless child who simply longs to be seen as feminine and a member of womanhood. Here, the adolescent becomes sexualized: F. Jasmine purposefully arrives for their date in another dress, silver shoes and silk stockings, in an effort to appear much older than her twelve years. F. Jasmine yearns to impress the soldier with her display of femininity, hoping that he may mistake her for a young woman (such as one of her idolized ‘golden girls’) and not a little girl. The possibility that he may fall for her womanly façade fills F. Jasmine with the hope that she is, indeed, transitioning into womanhood and leaving her previous – and ambiguously gendered – self behind. During their date at the bar, the soldier indulges F. Jasmine in a beer and makes her feel as though she is engaging in the type of romance Berenice suggested she find. The affair makes her feel extremely proper and she takes special care to maintain her newly feminine appearance in front of the soldier, from keeping her voice in a lithe, high pitch to smoothing the front of her dress to avoid wrinkling. These notions, along with F. Jasmine’s carefully put together appearance,

become reminiscent of her association with Southern womanhood. She keeps in mind Berenice's earlier advice to "change from being rough...and big" and to "speak sweetly" in front of her beau, and takes great care to appear quietly subdued and somewhat submissive to the soldier while taking a deep pride in how properly feminine she looks while on their date (McCullers 83). The two ideals outlined in Berenice's advice reflect elements associated with Southern womanhood: to appear petite and dainty, and to match one's tone with an equally mild nature.

While F. Jasmine has undoubtedly put herself in a precarious situation by meeting the soldier for a date, she cannot be held entirely responsible for the attack that happens in the hotel room. The scene evokes the previously established notion of the female adolescent being caught between two worlds – childhood and womanhood – as she desires to be seen as a grown woman on behalf of her changing physicality yet cannot fully understand the consequences of this longing. Despite her feminine guise and budding body, F. Jasmine is still just a young girl, unable to comprehend the severity of her actions with a much older man; indications of this inability arise as she is led to the soldier's hotel room, and makes note that "[she] did not want to go upstairs, but she did not know how to refuse" (135). Her innocence is shattered during the encounter in the hotel room, as she finally realizes what it is that grown men and women 'do' together, and her position as the woman in that encounter frightens her. As she becomes instantly exposed to adult sexuality, F. Jasmine realizes the lack of power she has against masculine desire, in her performance as a grown woman and as her position as a young child. The sudden loss of innocence exposes F. Jasmine's violent nature and she lashes out when the soldier commands her to "quit stalling" (136). For a moment, F. Jasmine becomes frozen with horror by his strange gaze and bold advances, completely entrapped by the conventional male gaze. He

forces her down onto the bed and presses their mouths together, a movement that triggers F. Jasmine to react violently, which solidifies the theory of violent victimization in Tanner's *Reading Rape*. She bites down on his tongue and smashes a glass pitcher over his head before climbing down a fire escape and running away into the night.

As she flees the scene, she is plagued with "twisted remembrances of a common fit in the front room, basement remarks and the nasty Barney" (McCullers 137). The realization of what men and woman do together has become tangible and real in the moments following the sexual attack and F. Jasmine's perception of adult sexuality becomes increasingly concrete. Just moments after the attack, F. Jasmine runs into John Henry and begins to relay to him the story of the 'crazy' soldier, yet, before she can fully explain what had happened in the hotel room, she is struck with another realization: her cousin cannot possibly understand what had happened because of his youth and, therefore, has no notion of sexuality. In this instant, F. Jasmine's transition into womanhood is set in motion and her former identity as an innocent tomboy begins to fade.

*'You can't call this corruption of a minor'*

Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* uses the character of Samantha Hughes to indulge in the absolute tomboy fantasy: the possibility of the tomboy maturing into adulthood with their ambiguous gender intact, while gaining societal acceptance in light of their convoluted gender. Written in the mid-1980s, the text balances between earlier historical notions of strict adherence to a gender binary and the birth of queer theory, which triggered the onset of acquiescence about ambiguous gender. Adolescence has become extended within Mason's text, transforming from a relatively short period of a two or three years in *The Member of the Wedding* and *Bastard Out of Carolina*, to an interval that stretches nearly a decade; at seventeen, Sam is still not considered a



grown woman. With the stage between childhood and adulthood significantly lengthened, the tomboy figure is given ample room to ‘try out’ elements of both masculinity and femininity before they are ushered into adult womanhood.

The very concept of adolescence is a relatively new idea; psychologist G. Stanley Hall introduced the theory in his text *Adolescence*, near the turn of the twentieth century. Hall’s work became primarily concerned with defining the specific group of young people who seemed to be separated from both childhood and adulthood, as they had achieved sexual maturity but were not yet considered adults because they were too young to legally wed. Hall coined this odd separation ‘adolescence,’ and, along with the definition, sparked massive change in the way young people were regarded within this era. Jeffrey Moran’s *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* outlines the significant evolution that adolescence has undergone since the birth of its definition in 1904, particularly the association of this period with the awakening of sexuality. At its inception, adolescence was closely affiliated with strict morality in terms of desire and there was an increasing pressure to maintain one’s sexual appetite with the proper self-control, but as the twentieth century wore on, the formerly tight bonds of adolescence were loosened. The period between childhood and adulthood became a space of sexual liberalism, where acts of sexual discovery began to flourish. By the 1980s, adolescence had transitioned alongside the sexual revolution and owned many of its changes to the growth of the feminist movement, which sought to question conventional gender roles. Moran concludes that as shifting gender roles became a prominent topic in society “the rapidly proliferating changes in the norms and attitudes associated with masculinity and femininity were leading to a sex-role revolution” (196). These modified gender roles are most certainly at work within *In Country*.

Mason's narrative constructs an illusion of freedom and acceptance surrounding gender normativity, as Sam is allowed to age past adolescence while still clinging to her tomboyhood. Although her body has fully developed from child to woman, she continues to dress in cutoffs and dirty tee shirts while trifling with seemingly masculine pursuits, such as camping and cross country running. *In Country* insinuates that by this time period, the cultural acceptance of ambiguously gendered individuals has grown substantially (as opposed to societies presented in *The Member of the Wedding* and *Bastard Out of Carolina* that threatened tomboyhood past a certain age) and hints that these tomboy figures may be able to carry their ambiguous appearances and behaviors over into womanhood. Sam stands on the brink of adulthood and has become self-sufficient and responsible. She relishes the promise of college at Murray State in the fall and rejoices at her opportunity to finally escape Hopewell. Sam's specificity on attending Murray State stems from its notable track team, and this decision seems to coincide with her affection for long distance running. The hobby consistently leaves both her family and passerby calling attention to her tomboyhood. Concurrent to her determination in attending college is Sam's delight in the possibility of "being anything" when she finishes college, as her mother has explained that adult women can do "just about anything now" once they are awarded their degrees (Mason 167). However, as the summer wears on, it becomes increasingly obvious that Sam's tomboyish behavior cannot exist in adulthood, and it must be stripped from her identity upon her arrival at college and inclusion within womanhood.

The illusion of gender freedom is inevitably shattered as Sam enters a wholly feminine, adult space and becomes a Southern woman; however, Sam is not required to become the antiquated Southern lady that Bone and Frankie must emulate. Instead, she becomes an updated derivative of the Southern woman, one with renovated ideals shaped by societal progression and

the dawn of feminism. In “Gender Issues in Bobbie Ann Mason’s *In Country*,” Ellen Blais notes that many of the women in the narrative “still accept conventional, pre-sixties notions of masculinity and femininity. The women marry early, bear children in their late teens, and fuss over their homes,” while Sam rejects these tenets of dated femininity by breaking up with her boyfriend, going to college and escaping from Hopewell (107). Her mother, Irene, becomes a convoluted example of the Southern woman that Sam desperately tries to avoid becoming. Similar to her daughter, Irene experienced an untamed adolescence leading up to her transition into womanhood, yet abandoned her hippie lifestyle and traveling for a domesticated existence. She married and gave birth to Sam when she was nineteen, but by the novel’s opening, Irene lives in Lexington with her second husband and new baby. It appears as though Dawn, too, will become subject to an identical lifestyle to Irene’s, having become pregnant at an early age and pressured into marriage to the child’s father. Sam contemplates Dawn’s future with disgust, and essentially disregards her, believing that “she’ll be like my mother, stuck in this town, raising a kid. That’s not what I want to do with my life” (Mason 187).

Despite Sam’s belief that the fate of all young women in Hopewell is to get married and produce children, she views both with all-out repulsion and claims she will not seek out either in her own life. Blais surmises that though the essence of Sam’s gender ambivalence stems from her aversion to these roles, she is ultimately fighting “biological imperatives” when she refuses to conform to motherhood; Sam’s unwillingness to conform to these biological performances hints back to her idolization of Anita, rather than her own mother (113). Sam rejects Irene and the domesticated lifestyle in favor of venerating Anita, who has evaded the same roles that Sam wishes to escape. Anita has been married and divorced (citing her ex-husband’s dominant behavior as cause for the split) and maintains that her marriage was a result of societal pressure:

“I was eighteen, and it was just what you did back then” (62). She has never given birth, dates freely and openly while refusing to be possessed in relationships, and maintains a sexy exterior appearance that Sam desperately wishes to exude herself. Blais proposes that Anita “combines behavior that suggests feminine values with a rejection of practices the culture uses to celebrate publicly women’s place within social institutions” and she becomes an example of the new Southern woman, a figure that Sam believes she can mature into (111). Interestingly, by the narrative’s end, it is Irene, *not* Anita, who encourages Sam to seemingly break through the conventional Southern womanhood present in Hopewell and become a new kind of Southern lady. Despite her own ensnarement within normative Southern womanhood, Irene’s beliefs about the new Southern lady are refreshing and supportive. She maintains that Sam must go to college and become one of these new women that are capable of “just about anything”; this insistence proves that although Irene understands and accepts that the tenets of conventional femininity are still very much the norm in the South during this era, she also realizes that there is a reconfiguration of womanhood happening simultaneously and that her daughter will be included within that changed space (Mason 167). Sam may believe that her mother’s lifestyle is the antithesis of her own future, but she cannot deny the reality of Irene’s insistence. She will, eventually, become one of these new Southern ladies and must give up her tomboyhood and the behaviors that accompany it in order to achieve this goal. The new Southern lady may be afforded new independences that become considered the norm, such as attending college and acquiring degrees, but several of the fundamental elements of Southern womanhood remain standard; they are still required to exude impeccable femininity by way of their outward appearance and demeanor, comply with the original values of marital submission and wifely duties, and maintain an illusion of purity despite changing societal notions of sexuality.

For the tomboys in Allison and McCullers' *Bildungsroman* texts, the realization of their sexuality and sexual objectivity to males, as well as the understanding of their own desires, becomes the driving force behind their acquisition of femininity and transition into womanhood. *In Country*, however, presents a tomboy who has long been experiencing sexual intimacy and has ostensibly realized her sexuality—as well as the desires of both men and women—and yet still has not completely achieved womanhood. This could stem from the aforementioned extension of the adolescent period within the era that *In Country* was written, but could also be a result of the rapidly changing notions surrounding adolescent sexuality in the later half of the twentieth century. Could the inclusion within the space of womanhood no longer heavily depend on the occurrence of one's primary sexual experience or even realization of sexuality? Despite Moran's assertion that "adolescence is a separate stage of life defined by sexual awakening," could it be that sexuality became a lesser element of one's transition into womanhood, and is replaced by the importance of one's breaking down of conventional gender roles within society during this period (230)? Just as the notion of the Southern lady (and, furthermore, some crucial tenets of Southern womanhood) began to evolve, the very definition of what it meant to exist as a woman was subject to major changes as well.

Moran concludes that by the late 1970s, instances of premarital sexual relations became a prevailing, consistent development within adolescence as these youths began to "achieve greater freedom to engage in certain 'adult' activities – including sexual activity" (233). While marriage began to lose its position as the only proper place for sexual intimacy, concerns of chastity and morality within adolescent sexuality were also beginning to lack importance (198). Sexual pleasure was slowly separating from notions of biological reproduction and, as a result,

public opinion toward sexual relations prior to marriage shifted as well. Relying on a report issued twice over a twenty-year span, Moran highlights the transition regarding premarital intercourse and chronicles how “fewer than a quarter of Americans in the 1950s endorsed premarital sex for men and women, according to one report, [and] in the 1970s more than half approved...young people themselves, however, approved of premarital intercourse by ‘substantial majorities’” (199). Although marriage rates gradually began to decline, the rates of sexual activity climbed within adolescence, as “more than half of eighteen-year-old women had had sex, even as they were far less likely to be married” by the late 1970s, and the average age of adolescent primary sexual intercourse was dropping steadily (199).

This reformed sexuality thrives within Mason’s narrative. Sam and Dawn are afforded boyfriends, with whom they frequently sleep with, and Sam gushes to Dawn that Emmett, “doesn’t even care if I sleep with Lonnie. Lonnie stayed over three nights since he quit his job” (Mason 40). Adolescent sexuality becomes openly acknowledged here, not hidden away or downplayed as it were in decades past, and sexual relationships between teenagers become essentially accepted. Sam is extremely honest about her sexuality, as evidenced by her remarks to Emmett about Bruce Springsteen (“He turns me on *high*...it’s something about the way his jeans fit”) and her admittance about taking birth control (97). She regularly engages in sexual activity throughout the narrative, both with her boyfriend and a much older man, Tom, a Vietnam veteran and friend of Emmett’s. As she grows closer to Tom, Sam notices her desire for Lonnie begins to wane. Sam’s longing for Tom, instead of a male her own age, is tremendously reminiscent of Frankie’s belief that an older man, the red-haired soldier, would make a far more suitable partner than the young Barney MacKean. Like Frankie, Sam cleans herself up and wears “tight jeans with her studded belt and a turquoise tank top” in order to impress Tom at the

veteran's dance, where, regardless of her relationship status, she plans to seduce him (109). Her sexual experience with Tom is vastly different than any she shared previously with her boyfriend; when she and Tom reconvene at his house after the dance, Sam embraces a more masculine role, becoming somewhat domineering during their sexual encounter and appears far more in control here than during any sexual intercourse she experienced with Lonnie.

Sam clearly initiates the sexual episode between the two of them, convincing Tom that she does not have a curfew, does not need to return home and mentions that Emmett will never find out if they spend the night together. Her consistent comforting of Tom during the encounter, from her careful, strategic movements in bed so that she does not hurt him, to Tom's suggestion, that Sam hold him close while they sleep, proves her masculine position during their brief rendezvous, as does his affirmation that he "has never felt muscles on a girl like you've got" (129). Indeed, Tom's behavior as they explore one another contrasts Lonnie's rough, hyper-masculinity: whereas Lonnie is described as "labor[ing] over her, mashing her breasts" while Sam laid beneath him during sexual intercourse, Tom appears to take his time and gently embraces her (104). Sam notes that Tom's touch is nothing like Lonnie's, particularly the manner in which "[Tom] held her breasts, lifting up on them, very slowly," and she recalls that he caressed her "not the way Lonnie did, so rough and fast" (126). When it becomes apparent that Tom is unable to get an erection due to his mental block concerning sex, Sam draws away from him and this distancing movement causes him to begin vehemently denying that he did anything wrong or illegal with the teenaged Sam, stating "you can't call this corruption of a minor...because you turned me on so much" (127). Tom is clearly aware of his potentially incriminating position during their encounter and bitterly rejects the possibility that he can be held accountable for his sexual advances on a minor, because Sam herself was the instigator and

seductress by way of her appearance. Following her night at Tom's apartment, Sam breaks up with Lonnie because of her overwhelming desire for Tom, noting that "she had to figure out a way to make it work with him" and chastises herself for not being "sexier, more grown-up, more understanding" during their encounter; yet, as quickly as Sam falls for Tom, her sexual desire vanishes by the narrative's end and she suddenly becomes sexually apathetic, believing that "sex ruined people's lives" and resigns herself to the single, college life in Lexington with her mother (131, 158).

*In Country* deeply contrasts the coming-of-age period that both Bone and Frankie experience, as Sam lacks sexual innocence (and, furthermore, a queered sense of sexuality), having already realized her sexuality and become familiar with intercourse. Sexuality, though vital to Sam's adolescence, does not necessarily become the sole element that propels her into womanhood; it is her embodiment of the shifting, conventional gender roles that does. Her ambition to finish college, ignore any 'biological imperatives,' and leave Hopewell in order to escape the submissive fate that awaits young women signify her manifestation of these changing gender roles but also exposes the conflicting idea that she will have to give up the very behavior, her tomboyhood, that allows for her inclusion within this new womanhood. Mason's narrative highlights the evolution of both the Southern woman and Southern womanhood brought about by cultural and societal changes concerning conventional gender roles and adolescent sexuality; however, as one looks back on a text that was penned nearly thirty years ago, *In Country* ultimately proves that womanhood still cannot exist without a few of the traditional gender performances - such as full compliance with femininity and its trappings, as well as a dissent from any conventional male behavior - and attests that 'new Southern woman' of the 1980s is hardly distinct from her earlier, antiquated predecessors.



*'I just went crazy!'*

Although Dorothy Allison's semi-autobiographical narrative *Bastard Out of Carolina* was published in 1992, it centers upon the goings-on of a close-knit, matriarchal family during the mid-twentieth century; by penning a novel three decades after the era within the narrative, Allison's text promotes a similar effect as Mason's *In Country*. Aside from highlighting the damaging effects of the formerly normative gender roles within the 1950s and 1960s, her voyeuristic narrative opposes the notion of child sexuality and exposes the consequences that violent, incestuous rape and molestation has on a young girl's understanding of sexuality by looking back at these issues from the current era. *Bastard Out of Carolina* serves as a reflection upon society's supposedly forward advances within the realm of gender normativity and conventional sexuality, as the novel's debut becomes inextricably linked with the advent of queer theory and the 'rediscovery' of child sexual abuse. How does the premature (childhood) realization of sexuality affect a female adolescence's comprehension of her own sexual nature? If this child is subject to a violent, primary sexual experience, what roles do violence and sadomasochism play in the sexuality of an abused adolescent?

Ideas of desire, rape and molestation between adults and children, particularly between family members, are assuredly different within *Bastard Out of Carolina* due to the time period in which the text was written. Notions of child sexuality were subject to several radical changes during the twentieth century. By the 1950s and 1960s, the commonly held belief in the existence of a child's sexuality flourished, as did the assumption that a child was capable of feeling and thoroughly comprehending sexual desire. Situated alongside these beliefs was the assumption that children had the ability to trap adults in sexual situations through child seductiveness; the blaming children instead of their adult attackers in instances of child sexual abuse during the

mid-twentieth century ran rampant. Instances of blaming do appear in the narrative, as Daddy Glen attempts to justify his actions to Bone while he repeatedly molests her. He insists that Bone “drives him crazy,” and swears that she alone is responsible for the attacks, a claim Bone accepts: “I shuddered but believed him” (Allison 109). Daddy Glen’s remarks to her immediately before the rape echoes the same sentiment, that she willingly participated in their encounters and gained pleasure from the experiences; he asserts that Bone “always wanted it. Don’t tell me you don’t” and warns, “I’ll give you what you really want,” hinting at her impending rape (285). When Anney discovers Daddy Glen and Bone in the bathroom, he assumes the role of helpless adult, driven mad by a sexual, pre-pubescent child by claiming, “I went crazy. I went crazy...I wouldn’t have hurt her...but I went crazy. I just went crazy!” (289).

Similarly, the notion of incest, particularly between a father and daughter, was extremely downplayed during the mid-twentieth century. In “‘Acting Out the Oedipal Wish’: Father-Daughter Incest and the Sexuality of Adolescent Girls in the United States, 1941–1965,” Rachel Devlin notes that the majority of incestuous encounters and relationships were historically denied, yet psychoanalysts of the period simultaneously accepted the possibility of these instances and “interpreted girls’ claims of sex with their fathers as proof of the strength of female adolescent Oedipal desire” (609). Psychoanalysts believed girls who “acted out the Oedipal wish” with their fathers were simply responding to the radical changes taking place within adolescence within this era, including the “rising rates of female adolescent juvenile delinquency, the advent of “youth culture,” and, not least of all the perception that paternal authority” and their radical behavior became, essentially, a reflection of the sexually liberated environment during the Postwar period (610, 11). Furthermore, Devlin concludes, it was believed that “any activity with the father - including sex - was perceived to be somewhat

benign,” and, again, became a result of an adolescent female’s ability to seduce and entrap an adult (611). This subdued discourse on incest evolved during the 1970s, following the birth of feminist movement and the group’s crusade to re-evaluate child sexuality and child sexual abuse; the lax beliefs regarding incest were later extinguished by what Stephen Angelides calls the “pedophilia panic” of the late twentieth century (Angelides 147). By confronting the issue of child sexual abuse in such a blatant, revealing manner, Allison is able to negatively comment on the tragic, erroneous historical notion of children’s sexuality and seductiveness and place Bone as the unwilling component of the sexual encounter. Furthermore, the scenes involving sexual encounters between Bone and Daddy Glen achieve the completely necessary shock value surrounding the abuse: during a contemporary era that promised changes in terms of conventional sexuality, Allison exposes the horrors of a previously silent issue and demands these criminal encounters be brought to light, while simultaneously examining how the reintroduction of child sexual abuse within society allows for a reconsideration of normative sexuality.

As the youngest androgynous tomboy within the three *Bildungsroman* that I analyze here, Bone’s primary sexual experience and the onset of her understanding about sexuality occurs far earlier than the encounters experienced by Frankie or Sam; Bone is seven years old when Daddy Glen takes her into his lap and molests her in the front seat of the family car. Thus, the realization of her sexuality becomes much more convoluted than that of the elder tomboys, as she is still firmly situated within childhood – not trapped between youth and adulthood - when she begins to experience sexual contact. Frankie and Sam were both given glimpses into the inner workings of sexuality (shown, indeed, through Frankie’s interruption of a young couple in the throes of passion) and have been somewhat subconsciously aware of sexuality before they

experience an encounter themselves. Bone, however, possesses very little knowledge of sexuality, masculine or feminine, nor is she afforded a Lonnie or Barney MacKean with whom she could sexually experiment. She garners only slivers of information about the issue when she awakens to the muffled sounds of Anney and Daddy Glen's lovemaking, or overhears her aunts' conversations about sex. Instead of gradually discovering sexuality throughout the duration of her adolescence by way of hearsay from girls her own age or innocent sexual exploration with a male child, Bone realizes sexuality through the onslaught of several violent, incest-riddled performances with Daddy Glen. The forceful nature through which she comes to gradually comprehend sexuality warps her very notion of the issue, and, as a result, her sexuality begins to manifest itself through twisted, violent fantasies and frequent, masochistic masturbation. Bone's relatively young age, coupled by the dark stain of incest within an era that kept the issue secretive and silenced, instills within her a vengeful rage that ultimately queers her sexuality by violence.

The violent element of the encounters becomes a hugely important aspect of her basic understanding of her own sexuality and desires as a female, as well as how those contrast and assent with the desires belonging to men. Violence is primarily entwined with the lack of control Bone feels she possesses over her own body (and, of course, the overwhelming loss of authority over her sexuality), and this element works its way into her conscious thoughts. In the months following the first attack she begins to explore her body, masturbating frequently by her own hand or with help from her potentially harmful object of choice, a long silver hook, referred to as her "sharp killing hook" (Allison 291). As Bone's sexuality burns within her, she becomes horrified at the sadistic, recurring daydreams that plague her thoughts, yet cannot help but revel in them. She daydreams about her body being set ablaze by both orgasm and fire, two

components that intersect at the ultimate fantasy of ridding her life of her stepfather and only within the realm of these sadistic sexual fantasies is she finally able to gain power over Glen. Bone indulges herself by dreaming of hacking his chest open or shooting him with a shotgun, and notes that she "...would have to be careful, not let anyone stop me until I could blow his head off, blow his neck open, his blood everywhere like a whirlwind" (288). These fantasies, both real and imagined, become firmly intertwined with Bone's conception of sexuality and the violent daydreams allow for her emotional survival and for the escape from her equally violent reality.

*Bastard*, as a result, becomes highly reminiscent of Sielke's 'rape revenge' narrative, a theory mentioned previously (albeit, briefly) within the analysis of *The Member of the Wedding*. In *Reading Rape*, Sielke contends that modern interpretations of rape within literature seem to "correlate with modern conceptions of sexuality and changing sexual mores" and outlines the subgenre of the rape revenge narrative as being primarily concerned with a young woman's burning retribution following an unwanted sexual encounters (139, 43). Indeed, Bone and Frankie long to exact revenge upon their attackers, but it is only Bone who fantasizes about the violence while she indulges herself sexually. Bone's masturbatory habits parallel Sielke's theory that feminine desire becomes intertwined with violence, as she suggests "white women's sexual desire is almost exclusive in contexts of sexual aggression"; the theory becomes epitomized within *Bastard*, as Bone masturbates to the fantasy of being beaten (evidence of sadomasochism) and wields a potentially harmful metal hook as her masturbatory object of choice (143). The repeated, flagrant references to Bone's masturbation, again, draws on the historical notion of the presence of child sexuality and the showing of her private sexual moments provocatively sexualizes her. In "'Sadism Demands a Story': Oedipus, Feminism, and Sexuality in Gayl

Jones's 'Corregidora' and Dorothy Allison's 'Bastard Out of Carolina,' Deborah M. Horvitz concludes that "Allison constructs violence as the site of convergence for...sexual desire and sexual sadomasochism" (245). Vengeful, sexually violent young women are born out of sexual trauma and its repression, and Horvitz states that while Bone's repeated beatings "destroy her self-image and cause her to feel alienated or detached from her body," her survival becomes dependent on "salvaging [these] sexual capacities and pleasures" (240).

In *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction*, Horvitz concludes that sexual violence within the narrative becomes "the result of collusion between the projection of the male gaze and the eroticization of the female," an assumption echoed not only within Allison's text but within Mason and McCullers' narratives as well (45). This link becomes far more complicated here, as Bone lacks the feminine body of her elder counterparts and does not actively seek out attention on account of her changing body, yet she still becomes sexually objectified within the masculine gaze of Daddy Glen. Even still, her objectification by way of this masculine gaze leads Bone to the realization that despite her ambiguous gender and tomboyhood, she performs a feminine role during her sexual encounters with her stepfather, a notion similar to Frankie's sudden understanding of her alignment with femininity when she is attacked by the soldier. This realization begins to propel her away from her ambiguously gendered tomboyhood, toward femininity and womanhood, as does the understanding that her sexual experiences liken her to the woman she so desperately longed to emulate: her own mother. Bone slowly understands that what Daddy Glen forces her to do "...wasn't sex, not like a man and woman pushing their naked bodies into each other, but then, it was something like sex," an act she knows Daddy Glen and her mother engage in (Allison 109). She notes that this performance becomes "something powerful and frightening that he wanted

badly and I did not understand at all,” and she links masculine desire with the notion of power and feminine desire with powerlessness, as sex manifests itself into an action that men do to women (109). She understands that the sexual acts Daddy Glen forces her to experience are backed by the same desires that allow him to make love with her mother and could be held responsible for triggering her own masturbatory habits: “It was powerful, too. Sex. Was that what Daddy Glen had been doing to me in the parking lot? Was it what I had started doing to myself whenever I was alone in the afternoons?” (63).

Although the molestations appear to taper off as she grows older, they leave an impact on her, nonetheless. Having experienced these events, and realized her sexuality during childhood rather than adolescence, Bone sees herself as growing up far more quickly than either Frankie or Sam. Despite her young age, she proudly and prematurely notes that she “wasn’t a baby anymore. I was eight, then nine years old, growing up,” yearns to dress like other girls and wishes she had a pair of “classy little-girl patent leathers” to wear to school instead of her cheap shoes and hand-me-down dresses (66). She leaves behind her former playmates – her idolized boy cousins – in favor of Shannon Pearl, a homely, yet seemingly angelic-like, young girl with whom she engages in feminine activities such as sewing and singing. There are frequent reminders from her family that Bone has begun to look more like Anney and Alma, instead of the Boatwright men or her biological father, and she notices that her body has begun to transform when she is told that she has grown “too big to run around in a T-shirt with no bra” (176). She has become firmly entrenched within adolescence here, stuck between a fading tomboyhood and imminent adulthood; however, Bone does not fully transition into womanhood until she is forced into suffering from one last act of sexual cruelty. The vicious rape Bone endures during her adolescence forces her to confront not only what has happened to her at the hands of Daddy

Glen, but also forces her to scrutinize her conception of womanhood, as well the behaviors and actions of the unconventional women who have raised her.



### Chapter Three:

#### “New” Southern Women: Achieving Selfhood and Issues of Power

During my extensive examination of the tomboys - and their tomboyhood – within *The Member of the Wedding*, *In Country* and *Bastard Out of Carolina*, I have concluded that their inclusion within womanhood offers them a far more concrete sense of self than their adolescent tomboyhood is capable of. As tomboys, these youths are deemed abnormal on account of their interests, behaviors and ambiguous gender. They are belittled by their friends and family because of these traits and become generally unaccepted within society as a result of their lack of conformity to the conventional gender binary. Their tomboyhood is met with extreme disapproval and is consistently looked down upon because their rough, masculine demeanors do not align with those considered to be culturally normative (such as a subdued, quiet nature) for girls during their respective eras. Consequently, these youths struggle and fail to gain a conception of their own identity amidst a society that persistently renders their existence as a wild deviation from the norm. They cannot achieve normalcy and acceptance because of their queer labeling; they must evolve in order to fit in. Furthermore, the tomboys’ understanding of this evolution is tied directly to their childhood idolization of certain women. Frankie, Sam and Bone whole-heartedly believe that the women they revere are accepted members of society and have become ingrained with a sense of self as a result of their inclusion within womanhood. The tomboys’ yearning for a sense of self (agency) becomes a longing for the same kind of submissive normalization that their women have surrendered to. By achieving their own membership into womanhood (as defined within previous chapters), these tomboys believe that they will gain what they have been looking for throughout their tomboyhood - societal

acceptance and selfhood – because their changed behaviors and pursuits as women will finally align with a culturally normative grouping of individuals.

C. Lynn Carr’s “Tomboy Resistance and Conformity: Agency in Social Psychological Gender Theory” investigates issues of gender identification and individual agency as they pertain to the young tomboy, identifying the latter as “the (potential) ability of individuals to create their identities (given social constraints) through social practice” (529). Carr challenges the predominant hypothesis that gender stems from biological sex by examining the figure of the tomboy, and calls for greater exploration into the role that agency plays within the selfhood of these ambiguously gendered youths. While Carr surmises that cultural stressors have the ability to influence gender, she notes that “questions of agency concern the relative *power* of individuals. While identities are social constructions, individuals do not have identities manufactured for them” (530, emphasis mine). Similarly, Fiona Webster concludes in “The Politics of Sex and Gender: Benhabib and Butler Debate Subjectivity” that agency becomes “a product of highly gendered relations of power in society” and that power is fundamental in terms of agency of adult women (2). Indeed, the issue of power becomes a major element to the eventual selfhood that these tomboys achieve and Carr’s connection between power and agency hints at the earlier analysis of similar power struggles within tomboyhood and adolescence; as tomboys, Frankie, Sam and Bone not only lack agency because their existence within tomboyhood puts them in direct opposition of societal gender norms but also because they become scapegoats within society as they have little power in their ambiguously gendered roles. As they are sexualized by adults and experience their first sexual encounters, tomboys lack the power and capability to refuse these advances. When these three tomboys eventually transition into womanhood they gain acceptance, a sense of agency and, alongside those achievements, a

sense of power: the inclusion within a culturally accepted and societally normative group is what affords them these ideals. However, even as these youths are granted the notions that they so desperately desire, they also suffer a great loss as they transition into womanhood. Not only are they required to leave behind their tomboyhood and all of its trappings as they evolve into women, but they also lose the youthful innocence that runs alongside this space. This loss is presented similarly in all three analyzed texts, as each tomboy must be physically removed from her tomboyhood in order to complete her transformation into a woman: Frankie moves away from her childhood home, Sam leaves Hopewell for college at Murray State, and Bone moves away from Anney to her Aunt Raylene's farm.

By achieving womanhood and becoming ingrained with femininity, Frankie, Sam and Bone finally exist within the same adult space as the women they idolized as ambiguous tomboys. An examination of the appearances and behaviors of these women proves that they were chosen because of their seemingly powerful presence. As they make the transition into womanhood (as a result of the realization of their sexualities), Frankie, Sam and Bone must suddenly conform to the established, cultural standards of the feminine side of the gender binary, adding structure to their selfhood and affording them a deep sense of solidarity; incorporation within an enormous collective like womanhood offers, again, a sense of power and the assumption of an individual's strength in numbers. Simply put, the tomboy figure not only lacks the agency to grow up as an ambiguously gendered adult, and cannot exist within adulthood as the traits associated with tomboyism go against what has been considered historically as normative behavior. As tomboys, these adolescents lack agency; as women, they achieve it.

*'There were the changes'*

Moments after the attack inside the Blue Moon Hotel, F. Jasmine runs across John Henry, to whom she hurriedly describes how she has just “brained a crazy man,” yet as John Henry presses her for information, she realizes that she cannot further explain her actions to the young boy (McCullers 137). As she looks into his eyes, F. Jasmine becomes aware of his childish innocence and, as a result of the attack in the hotel, her own sudden lack thereof. She senses that a shift has occurred because of what she has just experienced; the ‘nasty lies’ about what men and women do together is solidified in that moment and adult sexuality becomes genuinely, frighteningly palpable as F. Jasmine realizes she has performed the part of woman, not gender-bending tomboy, during the encounter. Her masquerade as a grown female has seemingly duped the soldier into taking her for one, and the charade that follows in the hotel room gives her a brief impression of the power given to females within womanhood. As the soldier leads her to the hotel room, F. Jasmine cannot find the words to say ‘no’; it is only after she is confronted by the reality of sexuality and her position as woman in the exchange that she can refute his advances. This brief glimpse into her impending womanhood holds the promise of power, a sense of self and, quite possibly, the membership she so desperately longs for, all capabilities that have been restricted from tomboyhood but afforded within adulthood. She cannot possibly begin to explain to John Henry the intricacies of what has just occurred because he remains fully ingrained within childhood, left behind in a space she no longer completely occupies. John Henry retains a sense of innocence that F. Jasmine no longer possesses. His “cold, child eyes” give her a strange feeling and she discovers a curious link between his gaze and the gaze of the soldier; John Henry’s becomes reminiscent of the ambiguous childhood and innocence she must leave behind, while the soldier’s uneasy, voyeuristic peering - referred to previously as the ‘conventional male

gaze' - represents the sexual desirability she will contend with during her womanhood (138). As F. Jasmine ponders this connection, she becomes suddenly aware that her relationship with John Henry will never be as it was previous to that evening, not only because of his innocence but because he will eventually grow into a man, like the soldier. She notes, glumly, that it was now "impossible to understand [John Henry's] point of view. And he did not understand her either" (138).

Despite F. Jasmine's realization of sexuality and the brief glimpse into her impending womanhood that she is afforded as a result of the attack, she continues to cling to her childish 'we of me' fantasy: a delusional daydream in which she is able to start a new life by running away with her brother and his bride after their wedding. F. Jasmine adheres to this fantasy as though her very existence depends on it, and, indeed, it becomes a reflection of her desperate need for agency during tomboyhood. The role she plays as the 'in between' of Janice and Jarvis highlights the tomboyish necessity to appear as the median between femininity and masculinity, while the notion that she suddenly identifies herself in conjunction with the pair during that complicated summer (and not previously within her tomboyhood) hints at her realization that F. Jasmine has lacked a sense of agency throughout the adolescent period and, perhaps, subconsciously, understands the need for it. The strange awakening that F. Jasmine endures at the wedding, however, proves yet again that she will not gain a sense of self or transition into womanhood with her ambiguous gender intact.

When F. Jasmine arrives at the wedding, she rushes from Janice to Jarvis, intent on making her 'we of me' plan known, but she discovers that she cannot find the right words to explain her proposal and that "her tongue was heavy in her mouth and dumb...[she] could not speak" (146). The actions of the bride and groom exacerbate the situation, forcing F. Jasmine to

realize they still regard her as a child; Janice refers to her as ‘little sister,’ and Jarvis roughhouses with her while teasing about her nickname. The guests at the wedding, too, speak to her “in the tone grown people use when speaking to a child” and, these folks were cordial, “they called her Frankie and treated her too young” (145, 7). Even though F. Jasmine has made a strong effort to appear feminine and mature in her wedding attire, she is treated like a child. She has anxiously anticipated this moment for the duration of the summer and now that the time is upon her, F. Jasmine is deflated by the guests’ behavior and becomes powerless in her role as a little tomboy all dressed up. The wedding evolves into “a dream outside her own power, or like a show unmanaged by her in which she was supposed to have no part,” and she contends later that the whole occasion was a failure (147). From here, F. Jasmine slowly disassociates herself from the wedding and her odd behavior does not unfold chronologically, instead happening in a series of recollected flashes. She cannot experience the incident as it occurs, and is capable only of recalling the event later that evening on the ride back home; interestingly, by the time she is able to process the embarrassing scene, she has replaced ‘F. Jasmine’ with ‘Frances’. The renaming signals a major change within her sense of self and the onset of her inclusion into womanhood, as Frances, her given name, is unmistakably proper and conventionally female. She recalls later that she became a ‘wild girl’ when the bride and groom attempt to make a getaway for their honeymoon and has to be pulled from their car, yelling for them to take her along. Similar to the violent, physical act that propels her into realizing sexuality, she must be tangibly restrained, held back, and physically forced into an understanding that her ‘we of me’ fantasy will remain unfulfilled and she will not be able to maintain her gender-bending ways within womanhood; she must move forward alone. This awakening is compounded by the unsettling loss of innocence she experienced the night before. Following one last attempt to run away, F. Jasmine-turned-

Frances resigns from her tomboyhood in the wake of these realizations and finally transitions into womanhood.

By autumn, Frances has turned thirteen and the shameful wedding is never spoken of again, the incident lost to Frances' tomboyish childhood. She and her father have packed up their boarding house for a move into the suburbs. Her male sidekick, John Henry, succumbs to meningitis, and her mother figure, Berenice, decides to leave her position in the Addams household so that she may run away and get married. After his death, Frances is briefly haunted with nightmares of John Henry, in which he appears as a stiff 'child dummy' with a painted face. His presence offers a reminder of her past, the tomboyhood and ambiguous gender she once identified with and the memory frightens her; this terror is quickly assuaged by the security she finds within her new feminine identity. Frances has taken up with a new friend, the girlish Mary Littlejohn, with whom she traverses the proceedings of femininity; they read poetry and collect pictures of great art, share sleepovers, and dream of traveling the world together. When the fair arrives that fall, Frances and Mary go twice, yet they refuse to walk by the "Freak Pavilion," the attraction that both frightened and intrigued Frances the year before; instead, they agree with Mrs. Littlejohn's conclusion that "it was morbid to gaze at the Freaks" (161). Frances no longer sees a reflection of herself in these freakish entities, and she is no longer afraid of their "long Freak eyes...that tried to connect their eyes with hers" (20). In fact, Mrs. Littlejohn's statement places Frances as a spectator at that year's fair, the gazer instead of the looked upon. The narrative's concluding glimpses of Frances positions her in the kitchen, cutting sandwiches into dainty shapes and carefully arranging them on a plate for a sleepover with Mary, anxiously awaiting the ring of the doorbell. It appears that her 'green and crazy summer' lay firmly in the

forgotten, ambiguous past and she has embraced her feminine evolution from ruthless, unabashed tomboy to silly, egotistic young woman.

*The Member of the Wedding* ends here, settling with a tidy, yet peculiarly slight and altogether conventional conclusion; a strange finish for a narrative seemingly bent on challenging and subverting the confines of sexual and gender normativity during the mid-twentieth century. Frances' hasty and welcomed inclusion within Southern womanhood appears inconsistent with her earlier rejection of proper female behavior, as does her abrupt adaptation of the trappings of this particular kind of antiquated femininity. Louise Westling surmises that Frances' quick incorporation into Southern womanhood stems from McCullers' purposeful and swift removal of "the 'deviants' from Frances' life so that safe conformity can triumph" by the end of the narrative (131). Evidence of the eradication of these supposed 'deviants' from Frances' life seemingly appears when she returns to the fair that fall. Mary Littlejohn and Mrs. Littlejohn are by her side, not Berenice and John Henry, and Frances heeds the elder Littlejohn's advice not to go inside the Freak Pavilion. In "Somatic Syntax: Replotting the Developmental Narrative in Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding*," Nicole Seymour argues that "this explanation for their avoidance might indicate Frankie's submission to the older woman's authority, thus serving as evidence of her ultimate normalization" or, perhaps, as proof that Frances sees her agreement with Mrs. Littlejohn as a reflection of her own inclusion within womanhood. Frances' embrace of a feminine identity, indeed, coincides with the erasure of 'deviants' such as her masculine behavior and identification with an ambiguous gender, that conflict with her new, conventionally feminine selfhood.

Additionally, alongside her adaptation of the normative roles expected within womanhood, Frances' perception of her racial identity, her whiteness, becomes abundantly clear.



In the wake of her womanhood, Frances is filled with the awareness of her power as a white, middle class woman. Michelle Abate notes in *Tomboys* that although Frances was a “tomboy who formerly possessed a strong identificatory link with Berenice now asserts her privileged status as a white person” through the use of a racial slur, as well as Frances’ sudden lack of respect for her (165). Berenice once stood in as a mother figure and became the source of womanly advice for the younger Frankie, yet the elder Frances pities her and becomes highly critical of Berenice’s assumptions about her feminine transformation. Berenice teases Frances about her friendship with Mary Littlejohn, calling the girl “marshmallow-white” and becomes suspicious about her religious background; Frances adamantly defends Mary and harshly maintains that Berenice cannot possibly understand her now. As an unassuming tomboy, Frankie had seen Berenice as an authoritarian, robust and deft, but now, from her position within white, Southern womanhood, Frances describes the woman as a pitiful thing, “sitting idle in a chair, wearing an old raveled sweater, her limp arms hanging at her sides” (McCullers 159). While the removal of both John Henry and Berenice from the narrative appears severe and immediate, it is altogether necessary that the pair vanish from Frances’ life, as reminders of her tomboyhood and a close, motherly bond with a black woman fundamentally oppose the feminine and staunchly white role Frances embodies as a member of Southern womanhood.

At the conclusion of *The Member of the Wedding*, Frances willingly abandons her tomboyish ways and ambiguous gender –as well as the former security she found in both—in favor of the submissive normativity Southern womanhood offers. Despite McCullers’ own personal conflicts with non-normative sex and gender issues during her lifetime, she is not blind to the era’s strict enforcement of the gender binary and pressures to maintain adulthood heteronormativity; her acknowledgment of these important elements are affirmed in Frankie’s

eventual and enthusiastic submission to femininity and womanhood. McCullers used her texts, including *The Member of the Wedding*, to challenge these societal and cultural stressors, and Louise Westling affirms that she “sought to deny the feminine entirely and allow a woman to function successfully as a man” (126). Even though McCullers attempted to defy the prevailing submissive normativity within *Member* by centering the narrative on a tomboy character, she ultimately allows Frankie to grow up into womanhood and leave her tomboyish ways behind. McCullers could not succeed in figuratively raising an ambiguously gendered child into adulthood because, as Westling notes, “...she knew it was impossible” (126).

*‘A woman, not a girl’*

Sam’s inclusion within womanhood becomes undeniable at the conclusion of *In Country*, as she escapes Hopewell to attend college in Lexington, ostensibly leaving behind her former fate as a young woman confronted with ‘biological imperatives’ such as motherhood and marriage. Before she finally achieves incorporation within womanhood and association with femininity, however, Sam’s interpretation of normative womanhood undergoes a radical transformation. Sam begins to realize that she no longer wishes to emulate the period’s conventional feminine role and would rather embody tenets of the quickly emerging contemporary femininity. As illustrated earlier in this text’s second chapter, she yearns to become one of the ‘new Southern women’ that Irene raves about, single women who earn college degrees, strike out of their hometowns for better lives and rely solely on themselves. While these reformed women may embody various pursuits previously aligned with masculinity, they are still ingrained within femininity, by way of their archetypal, outward appearance and intrinsic (if not marginally predominant) feminine behavior. Sam must abandon her tomboyhood

and its masculine trappings, such as her ardor for cross-country running and her short hair, in order to become one of these new women and gain a sense of self.

Within the decades following the publication of *In Country*, the gender-bending tomboy became far more culturally apparent and relatively acceptable due to shifting sentiments regarding both childhood and girlhood. In *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History*, Michelle Ann Abate concludes that the onset of ‘millennial girl power’ during the 1990s, the simultaneous LGBTQ movement and the steady rise of television programming and films including tomboy characters provided a fertile environment in which the tomboy began to be seen as a more socially accepted position during female adolescence. Abate notes that as the “societal presence and cultural power” of the tomboy continued to grow, “increasing gains by the feminist movement allowed adolescent girls and young women to challenge traditional gender roles” by way of their appearance and behavior; ‘grunge’ rock music influenced trends in unisex clothing and Title IX maintained that school-aged girls were no longer relegated to ‘feminine sports’ such as gymnastics and swimming, but could participate in a wide variety of physical activities (219, 22). The tomboy’s relative cultural accessibility within the 1990s ran concurrent to the modern analysis of sexuality, both heterosexuality and homosexuality, as related to non-normative gender. The future sexualities of gender-bending children became the newest issue of contention within queer theory. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick maintains in “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay” that the gay movement and, by extension, queer theory, also aided in the dissolution of the “long tradition of viewing gender and sexuality as continuous and collapsible categories” as queer theorists began investigating the link between adulthood homosexuality and childhood gender non-normativity (72). The future sexualities of effeminate young boys and rough, tomboyish girls could possibly reflect their oppositely gendered adolescence, and a mindset concerning “the

reconfiguration of adult homosexuality as a form of childhood gender dysphoria” began to take hold (Abate 202).

While the tomboy figure achieved a major cultural presence within the 1990s, these individuals lacked *total* acceptance within contemporary society. Tomboyhood did not necessarily register within the sphere of normative adolescent behavior, as it conflicted with the fixed gender binary and a young girl’s interest in masculine pursuits and cross-gendered demeanor was still largely considered non-normative. The mental ‘illness’ known as Gender Identity Disorder, published within the 1980 (III) edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, continued to linger in the societal consciousness during this period and threatened to blend tomboyhood with a psychiatric disorder. By the 1990s, the outline of symptoms for a child afflicted with Gender Identity Disorder had become nearly parallel with the general description of a tomboy, as girls who had been diagnosed with the illness seemed to “prefer boy’s clothing and short hair” and “prefer boys as playmates, with whom they share interests in contact sports, rough-and-tumble play, and traditional boyhood games” (Abate 231). Queer theorists and psychologist researchers continued to question the connection between tomboyhood and future homosexuality, adding yet another stigma attached to the tomboy: not only were these children of an obscure gender, they had the potential to become sexually obscure as well. Classifying tomboyhood or tomboyish behaviors as a disorder could force these young girls into believing that they have become abnormal or defective; furthermore, the disorder labeling gives these young girls a sense of wrongness concerning their interests and behaviors, while adding even more pressure upon them to conform to conventional femininity. The tomboy may have gained some power through its widening cultural presence, but such a complicated figure could only function within the equally convoluted confines of adolescence, where, it has

been previously noted, very little power or agency exists at all; the tomboy is unable to enter the realm of adulthood because that space demands strict observance of the dated, yet 'normative' gender binary.

Throughout the narrative, Sam wrestles with the overwhelming pressure to conform to several competing feminine roles: the supremely conventional yet antiquated femininity possessed by her paternal grandmother, Mamaw, and her boyfriend's mother, Martha; Anita's modern, progressive femininity; and the convoluted feminine mean of these two exhibited by Irene. Early on, evidence surfaces regarding Sam's disgust toward several elements and performances associated with dated, normative femininity. Martha's dainty, pink bathroom and perfect canopy bed, penchant for dinner parties and excitement over her son's nuptials become illustrative of what Sam believes to be conventional femininity, as are Mamaw's dated beliefs and subsequent embarrassment over sharing a hotel room with Emmett because of her fear of what others back in Hopewell would make of her sleeping in a room with a man who wasn't her husband. Women aligned with this specific femininity are similar to those illustrated in Westling's theory of the historical Southern woman (as defined in this text's first chapter), as they strive to maintain an impeccable outer appearance and a sense of purity, while becoming powerless in their total submission to their husbands. Additionally, these women hold fast to a stationary existence, exposed when Mamaw criticizes the possibility of Sam's move to college, stating that "if she went up there, look how she might turn out. I think its fine when children want to stay where they was brought up" (193). Sam cannot imagine possessing the kind of femininity that Mamaw and Martha emulate, as she does not wish to get married, objects to pregnancy and motherhood and does not see the necessity in keeping an immaculate home; at

any rate, the ambiguity surrounding her gender and tomboyish behavior throughout the novel renders her virtually incompatible with this conventional feminine role.

Even the semi-modern womanhood that Irene abides by does not completely satisfy guidelines of the reformed, Southern womanhood that Sam desperately seeks. The kind of womanhood that Irene exudes manages to balance the current, culturally accepted role of the Southern woman with a seemingly progressive outlook regarding her own sex. Irene may have traded her liberated lifestyle for a husband, new baby, and house in the Lexington suburbs, but glimpses of her former open-mindedness rise to the surface through her suggestion that Sam attend college in order to become anything she desires. In “New Roles, New History and New Patriotism: Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country*,” June Dwyer notes that Irene has become somewhat of a feminist as a result of her existence within this convoluted womanhood, by “avoiding old mistakes and striking out in new directions”; she drives a flashy, red Trans-Am, returns to school to extend her education, openly breastfeeds her baby daughter and admits her naïveté concerning the practice while she raised Sam (76). Alternatively, Irene balks about the cultural change in feminine terms, laughing at how she should use the word “a woman, not a girl. We’re supposed to say ‘women’ now. *Not* ‘the girls in the office’” (Mason 158). Irene makes a point to correct the misuse of the word in front of her daughter, whom Irene herself claims has the makings to become one of these ‘new women’. Though Sam agrees with many of Irene’s beliefs regarding women (particularly those concerned with politics), she has no desire to mimic her mother’s new lifestyle and rejects her complicated feminine role. It is the young, liberated Irene of Sam’s childhood, “the Irene of the sixties, the Irene who was rebellious in high school, and...ran off with a hippie friend of Emmett’s” whom Sam idolizes and longs to imitate, not the settled, hypocritical mother figure Irene has become (Dwyer 76).

It is the sexy, effervescent, and immensely feminine Anita whom Sam regards as the pinnacle of femininity and longs to emulate. Anita commands attention through her overtly sexual appearance and forward thinking attitude, balancing her voluptuous curves with seemingly feminist beliefs and defies the still-functioning “conventional, pre-sixties notions of masculinity and femininity” that exists in Hopewell during the 1980s (Blais 107). Anita’s liberated appearance – and her viewpoint to match – make her incredibly intriguing and worthy of reverence. As a result, Anita becomes the epitome of the ‘new Southern woman,’ seemingly powerful in her feminine sexuality and progressive beliefs. Anita may keep house and bake treats for her guests, but she comments to Sam that her brownies are from a box, and a gendered one at that: “I got Betty Crocker this time...I like her a whole lot better than Duncan Hines. That old fool” (Mason 61). She does not claim purity by way of her appearance, unafraid to expose her womanly form in slinky dresses and low cut tops, yet she takes pride in her looks and does not dress to impress men. While visiting Anita at her apartment, Sam remarks that the woman “was dressed up, and she wasn’t even going anywhere,” hinting at Sam’s own antiquated incredulity that Anita would dress up solely for herself (61). Anita’s attitude toward the opposite sex is relatively forward as well. She doesn’t necessarily need a man but wants one, admitting that she refuses to submit to a possessive man and that her marriage failed due to her lack of submission to her husband. Instead of waiting to be pursued by a man, Anita has “been after [Emmett] for years” and tells Sam that she initially chased him down by offering him rides in her bright red Mustang (115). She is, as Sam concludes, to be taken seriously. By the narrative’s end, Sam is seen in a shopping mall in Maryland, buying “a hot-pink tank top, something like Anita’s red one” and a pair of black leatherette panties, doubting anyone will ever see them, but investing in them nonetheless because they are “outlandish” (237). Sam’s imitation of Anita’s style gives

way to the notion that she, too, wants to garner power through her feminine appearance. She admits that the flashy top and underwear are not something she would normally buy, yet at the end of the summer, her impulsive actions and the clothing she purchases signifies that she is evolving into one of these radical ‘new women’ and will leave her former self behind in Hopewell.

Even still, the epitome of the new woman becomes trapped by remnants of the ever-present conventional elements of femininity. While Anita becomes the most progressively feminist woman in town, Sam points out that she is still ‘stuck’ in Hopewell. Anita replies that she has remained there because her “Daddy’s been real bad – he has a heart condition” and suggests that she has become his caretaker, a predominantly feminine position that she seems unconcerned with. Oddly enough, her role as nurse and caretaker does not bother the seemingly feminist, anti-possessive Anita. Similarly, her negativity toward marriage (on account of her disapproval of female gender performances within the institution) and her apparent indifference toward dating men conflicts with her actions regarding Emmett, as she incessantly chases him all over town. Despite Hopewell’s outdated notions concerning gender roles, Anita calls the town her own, claiming, “I like it here O.K. People are good here, and it’s home” (63).

With Anita’s eventual submission to the basic normative gender role in mind, it becomes overwhelmingly clear as to why Sam must give up her tomboyish behavior and transition into womanhood if she ever hopes to gain any sense of agency: it is the lack of power in tomboyhood that denies Sam a sense of self and she must submit to the fundamental elements of the feminine gender in order to gain agency and power. A new Southern woman is afforded power because of her inclusion within femininity and its trappings, but a young, ambiguously gendered adolescent who cannot conform to either does not. Sam does indeed leave her tomboyhood and masculine



behaviors behind in Hopewell, moves to Lexington to live with her mother and attends the University of Kentucky rather than Murray State; despite Sam's remark that Murray State has a better and more personal track team than the University, her decision to move to Lexington, again, hints at her acceptance of femininity and the removal of her tomboyish ways upon her entry into the adult world. Despite the relative progressiveness of Anita's womanhood and femininity, one must keep in mind the historical standpoint of Mason's text. Anita and Sam can only become as femininely liberated, as the 1980s will allow; from the current standpoint of this writing in 2012, their 'radical' femininity seems hardly progressive at all. Anita may be the 'new Southern woman' and Sam may eventually evolve into one as well, but what was considered reformative thirty years ago does not necessarily hold true today. Anita's status as a divorcee, her resistance to motherhood, and strong feminist beliefs has become far more feasible and widely accessible within the current era, though, arguably, they are not entirely accepted within society. Even during this modern, supposedly forward-thinking time period, there still exists a societal power struggle between masculinity and femininity, and the presence of a normative gender binary reigns supreme. The pressure to align one's biological sex with a culturally constructed gender (and, furthermore, heteronormative sexuality) prevails and remains steadfastly consistent within the contemporary era and conventionality, rather than individuality, in terms of these gender roles, remains normative.

*'A Boatwright woman'*

*Bastard Out of Carolina* presents Southern womanhood as strikingly divergent from the type appearing in either *The Member of the Wedding* or *In Country*. All three tomboys analyzed may long to possess the tenets associated with archetypal Southern womanhood during their respective eras, but only Frankie and Sam are afforded females to idolize who truly conform to

these feminine standards. While Bone appears to be the only youth to have been primarily brought up by women, her notion of womanhood and, arguably, femininity, remain just as warped as her comprehension of sexuality; the role models of womanhood presented within the narrative are hardly exceptional figures of culturally normative Southern womanhood as they fail to conform to the elements of womanhood mentioned in earlier analysis.

The elder Boatwright females may bear outward appearances of proper femininity – small hands, soft smiles and curvaceous bodies – as well as the internal drive that they were “born to mother, nurse, and clean up after the men,” but they certainly maintain a sour reputation as well (Allison 23). Uncle Earle solidifies this claim to Daddy Glen, warning the women had been born to a “...mama [like] a rattlesnake and our daddy was a son of a gun”; as young women, the Boatwright women ran wild, producing children out of wedlock and marrying abusive husbands (11). They repeatedly warn their “philandering, alcoholic, ineffective husbands and fathers” that they will leave them, yet these gestures are empty threats: the women seemingly refuse to abandon their husbands and, as a result, force themselves and their children to endure extreme emotional and physical abuse at the hands of these men (Horvitz 244). A terrifying power struggle between husbands and wives evolves out of the women’s behavior and not only regularizes abuse within the Boatwright family, but apparently solidifies their position as ‘trash’ within their South Carolina community. Southern womanhood, as depicted within Allison’s narrative, therefore becomes heavily affected by the Boatwright’s position below the poverty line. Womanhood, at least the kind exuded by the Boatwright women, struggles to exist within a “masculinist working class” culture, a space defined by Gillian Harkins in “Surviving the Family Romance? Southern Realism and the Labor of Incest” (120). ‘Normative’ womanhood (at least, the kind supported within Mason and McCullers’ texts) cannot survive here, as elements of

conventional womanhood such as a typically subdued nature, the strict maintenance of one's morality and the illusion of purity, conflict with the basic tenets of "living hard, dying young, drinking, brawling and sleeping around" apparent within the masculine working class environment (118). Even though the Boatwright women appear to become hardened, non-normative figures of womanhood, as a result of their upbringing in a harsh, poverty-stricken space, they are never afforded gender or sexual equality. The women within *Bastard out of Carolina* become oppressed by violence and their combative, strong-willed nature emerges as a weak defensive effort against the dominance they face by their men and by the masculine environment in which they exist.

Even as Bone bears witness to the aggressive behavior and actions set forth by these women throughout her childhood, she longs for inclusion within their unconventional – and seemingly precarious – womanhood. Bone cannot imagine, nor desire, a different and more socially acceptable structure of womanhood because she has long associated the fierce power struggle between Boatwright men and women as a tenet of womanhood, believing that the emotional and physical violence is a standard occurrence within the space. The brutal womanhood of the Boatwright women becomes the only kind Bone has ever observed, and, at first, becomes the womanhood she longs to achieve. Ostensibly, her desperate yearning to become a Boatwright woman stems from her lack of a sense of belonging felt throughout her androgynous tomboyhood, an overwhelming feeling of alienation not just from the female gender, but from her own family. Bone venerates the elder Boatwright women during her tomboyhood while longing to solidify her a place of her own among them, and likens entry into their womanhood as "feeling a part of something nasty and strong and separate from my big rough boy-cousins and the whole world of spitting, growling, overbearing males" (Allison 91).

She is aware of the strong-willed feminine unity among them, a bond that she feverishly wishes to infiltrate because it would fill the void of belonging she sustains as a tomboy; Earle dismantles this fantasy by reminding her that she is not a ‘purebred Boatwright child,’ but a bastard instead (54). His remark, that Bone is “all black headed and strange,” hints at her lesser status within their family, and, Bone believes, the real possibility that she may never gain status or equality among the purebred Boatwright women (54). The longing to become one of them, however, dissipates alongside Bone’s sexual awakening, as she begins to comprehend the perverse wrongness of Daddy Glen’s actions. When she realizes the encounters with her stepfather “...had all been the way *he* wanted it. It had nothing to do with me or anything I had done. It was an animal thing, just him using me,” Bone finally begins to understand her own innocence during the exploits and refrains from blaming herself for Daddy Glen’s behavior (Allison 253, emphasis mine). Alongside the understanding of her faultlessness, Bone realizes that Anney has betrayed her as a mother, by repeatedly threatening, yet never truly leaving Daddy Glen, through her willful ignorance of these encounters and because of her choice not to protect her daughter; it is Anney’s incapacity and sheer refusal to shield Bone from harm that leads to Bone’s horrific rape.

Bone’s inclusion within Boatwright womanhood becomes unquestionably unappealing – yet unavoidable – following her rape by Daddy Glen, as the twisted nature of the women’s bond becomes clear. Just as Bone discovers she has been ‘used up’ by her stepfather during the sexual encounters, she realizes that the elder Boatwright women suffer from a similar masculine manipulation and do next to nothing in order to avoid it. They may appear to be strong willed and capable, but they wield as much power over their men as Bone does over Daddy Glen. As she transitions out of tomboyhood, Bone bitterly comprehends that she has become a reflection of these women, noting, “I’m just another ignorant Boatwright, you know. Another piece of trash

barely knows enough to wipe her ass or spit away from the wind. Just like...Mama and Alma and everybody else” (258). Bone’s longing to become a Boatwright woman is fulfilled in the wake of her rape, despite her wish to deny any association with these women. The dread she feels about this inclusion is compounded by Anney’s decision to abandon Bone in favor of returning home to Daddy Glen and her choice affords Bone the bleakest realization about the Boatwright women: that they will always, inevitably, choose their husbands and lovers over their own children. Indeed, by the narrative’s conclusion, Bone cannot escape evolving into a Boatwright woman, yet her transition into womanhood is not fostered by Anney, Ruth or Alma, women most condemned for their reprehensible behavior; instead she is ushered into womanhood under the security of her Aunt Raylene.

Though she may have suffered under the same poverty-stricken upbringing and bear the family name, Raylene has clearly become a different woman than her sisters. She is fiercely private, and content with living alone on the edge of town away from the other of the Boatwrights. Prior to Bone’s rape, Raylene is regularly mentioned yet rarely seen, and usually only referred to by the adult Boatwrights because of her peculiar behavior and odd disparity from the rest of the family. Raylene’s farm functions as a mysterious space for the Boatwright children, where they can escape the darkness of their own homes; here they can play and run wild, “smoke and curse and roughhouse without interference,” and are allowed the freedom to “do pretty much anything they wanted” (178).

Her land becomes a place where, Raylene notes, “trash rises”; it is only here that the spirits of the ‘trashy’ Boatwright children are lifted, and, similarly, where Raylene transforms landfill waste that washes onto her property into art. (180). Raylene’s weathered house, too, seems shrouded in strangeness, from its inextricably clean interior yet abundance of ‘art’ that

clings it its walls, to the rotting fish that flop on the river banks, and the musty cloud of smoke that rises from burning tires on the lawn. Raylene herself becomes an unusual figure, as she dresses in overalls and boots and spends her days doing backbreaking yard work, brewing her own whiskey, and collecting trash from the river behind her home to turn into art and ‘oddities’; Earle explains that her unusual behavior as a young woman irritated the other aunts, who insisted that Raylene should “learn to use makeup and fix her hair [and] start working on getting herself a man” (89). Instead, she fled from her family, and spent two decades doing hard labor at a textile mill, retiring childless and husbandless to an old shotgun house away from her sisters. Raylene has consistently rejected the seemingly conventional elements of abusive marriage, willfully negligent motherhood and matrimonial violence that exist within Boatwright womanhood. She is the only constant, unwavering figure in the Boatwright family, solid and unchanged in her actions and beliefs; this stability does not go unrecognized by Bone, who notes that “my aunts were always moving too – all of them except Aunt Raylene...no one else seemed to stay any one place for very long”; this commendable stability proves to be a crucial element to Bone’s survival following her horrific rape by Daddy Glen (79).

When the rest of the Boatwright family – including her own mother – abandons Bone in the period after her rape, Raylene comes to her rescue and promises Bone that she will look after her and keep her safe. As she settles into her new way of life with Raylene, Bone realizes there exists several similarities between herself and her mysterious aunt; both have been deemed relative outsiders to the rest of family because of their tomboyish behavior. Bone remembers a story Earle told her of Raylene’s youth, in which “Raylene had worked for the carnival like a man, cutting off her hair and dressing in overalls. She’d called herself Ray, and [had] short, stocky build, big shoulders, and small breasts” (179). Even as a grown woman, she keeps up this

masculine appearance by wearing “her gray hair cut short” and donning overalls; Bone notes that despite her age, Raylene “moved as easily and gracefully as a young boy” while she tends to her farm (179, 80). It is here, on this small plot of land far away from the rest of the community, that Raylene has built a safe, queer haven for herself, a space in which she can evade conforming to both the era’s socially normative womanhood and ‘conventional’ Boatwright womanhood, evolving into a grown up tomboy. Raylene’s existence as the adult androgynous tomboy could conceivably allow Bone the same possibility, to transition into womanhood while retaining a sense of her androgynous gender. She revels in Raylene’s ability to maintain her masculine tendencies well into adulthood, noting, “it was astonishing to imagine...and I would think about it with wistful longing” (179). Similarly, the farm affords her liberation from the pressures of the mid-century norm of heterosexuality and it is within this space that Raylene confides in Bone about the female lover she had while working for the carnival, a woman who ultimately chose her husband and child over her relationship with Raylene. Despite its lack of abuse, her lost love and broken relationship becomes a reflection of those suffered by her sisters, proving the defectiveness of romantic and sexual relationships within the Boatwright family.

*Bastard Out of Carolina* concludes as Bone finally grasps a sense of belonging and security within the queer environment of Raylene’s farm, dual notions that were previously unattainable because of her existence as outsider to the rest of the family. At thirteen years old, Bone is released from both her mother’s detrimental influence and her status a bastard, when Anney gives her a new, unstamped birth certificate; without the labeling of ‘bastard,’ Bone herself becomes suddenly unmarked. This new birth certificate gives Bone the ability to shape her own future and impending womanhood, affording her the freedom and agency to become a woman of her own making. However, even as Bone takes comfort in this possibility, it becomes

clear that Bone can only transition from adolescence into womanhood while retaining masculine elements from her youthful, androgynous tomboyhood if she remains tucked away within the secluded safety of the strange homestead, just as Raylene herself has done. Even though she faces a relatively unmarked future of her own accord, Bone resigns herself to a fate she has understood for her entire life and acknowledges, “I was already who I was going to be...a Boatwright woman” (309).



## Bibliography

- Abate, Michelle Ann. "Trans/Forming Girlhood: Transgenderism, the Tomboy Formula, and Gender Identity Disorder in Sharon Dennis Wyeth's *Tomboy Trouble*." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 32.1 (2008): 40 -60. Print.
- Abate, Michelle Ann. *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008. Print.
- Adams, Rachel. "A Mixture of Delicious and Freak: The Queer Fiction of Carson McCullers." *American Literature*. 71.3 (1999): 551 -583. Print.
- Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1915. Print.
- Allison, Dorothy. *Bastard Out of Carolina*. New York: Penguin Group, 1992. Print.
- Angelides, Steven. "Feminism, Child Sexual Abuse, and the Erasure of Child Sexuality." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10.2 (2004): 141 – 177. Print.
- Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner. "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?" *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 110.3 (1995): 343 – 349. Print.
- Blais, Ellen A. "Gender Issues in Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country*." *South Atlantic Review* 56.2 (1991): 107 – 118. Print.
- Brandist, Craig. "The Bakhtin Circle." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 11 Apr. 2001. Web. 9 Oct. 2011.
- Carr, C. Lynn. "Resistance and Conformity: Agency in Social Psychological Gender Theory." *Gender and Society* 12.5 (1998): 528 – 553. Print.
- Devlin, Rachel. "Acting Out the Oedipal Wish: Father-Daughter Incest and the Sexuality of Adolescent Girls in the United States, 1941 – 1965." *Journal of Social History*. 38.3 (2005): 609 – 633. Print.

- Dwyer, June. "New Roles, New History and New Patriotism: Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country*." *Modern Language Studies* 22.2 (1992): 72 – 78. Print.
- Fanflik, Patricia L. *Victim Responses to Sexual Assault: Counterintuitive or Simply Adaptive?* Alexandria: American Prosecutors Research Institute, 2007. Print.
- Fine, Laura. "Going Nowhere Slow: The Post-South World of Bobbie Ann Mason." *The Southern Literary Journal* 32.1 (1999): 87 – 97. Print.
- Finkelhor, David. "What's Wrong with Sex between Adults and Children? Ethics and the Problem of Sexual Abuse." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 49 (1979): 692 – 697. Print.
- Fishman, Sterling. "The History of Childhood Sexuality." *Journal of Contemporary History* 17.2 (1982): 269 – 283. Print.
- Freeman, Barbara Claire. *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. Print.
- Gleeson-White, Sarah. *Strange Bodies: Gender and Identity in the Novels of Carson McCullers*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003. Print.
- Gleeson-White, Sarah. "Revisiting the Southern Grotesque: Mikhail Bakhtin and the Case of Carson McCullers." *The Southern Literary Journal*. 33.2 (2001): 108 – 123. Print.
- Gleeson-White, Sarah. "A Peculiarly Southern Form of Ugliness: Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor." *The Southern Literary Journal*. 36.1 (2003): 46 – 57. Print.
- Green, Richard. *Sexual Identity Conflict in Children and Adults*. New York: Basic Books, 1974. Print.
- Harkins, Gillian. "Surviving the Family Romance? Southern Realism and the Labor of Incest." *The Southern Literary Journal*. 40.1 (2007): 114 – 139. Print.

- Haynie, Dana L. "Contexts of Risk? Explaining the Link between Girls' Pubertal Development and Their Delinquency Involvement." *Social Forces*. 82.1 (2003): 355 – 397.
- Heller, Dana. "Anatomies of a Rape." *American Literary History*. 16.2 (2004): 329 – 349. Print.
- Horvitz, Deborah M. *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction*. Albany: State University of New York, 2000. Print.
- Horvitz, Deborah. "'Sadism Demands a Story': Oedipus, Feminism, and Sexuality in Gayl Jones's 'Corregidora' and Dorothy Allison's 'Bastard Out of Carolina'." *Contemporary Literature*. 39.2 (1998): 238 – 261. Print.
- King, Vincent. "Hopeful Grief: The Prospect of a Postmodernist Feminism in Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina*." *Southern Literary Journal*. Fall 2000: 122 – 140. Print.
- Mason, Bobbie Ann. *In Country*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1985. Print.
- McCullers, Carson. *The Member of the Wedding*. New York: Mariner Books, 1946. Print.
- Moran, Jeffrey. *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000. Print.
- "queer, *a., n., and v.*" The Oxford English Dictionary. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press. 8 February 2012. Web.
- Quimby, Karin. "The Story of Jo: Literary Tomboys, Little Women and the Sexual-Textual Politics of Narrative Desire." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. 10.1 (2003): 1 – 22. Print.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Journal of Women's History*. Fall 2003: 11 – 48. Print.
- Richards, Gary. *Lovers and Beloveds: Sexual Otherness in Southern Fiction*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007. Print.

- Robertson, Stephen. "Separating the Men from the Boys: Masculinity, Psychosexual Development, and the Sex Crime in the United States, 1930s – 1960s." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 56.1 (2001): 3 – 31. Print.
- Rubenstein, Roberta. "Feminism, Eros, and the Coming of Age." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*. 22.2 (2001): 1 -19. Print.
- Sacco, Lynn. "Sanitized for Your Protection: Medical Discourse and the Denial of Incest in the United States, 1890 – 1940." *Journal of Women's History*. 14.3 (2002): 80 -104. Print.
- Salamon, Gayle. *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. Print.
- Satter, Beryl. "The Sexual Abuse Paradigm in Historical Perspective: Passivity and Emotion in Mid-Twentieth Century America." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12.3 (2003): 424 – 464. Print.
- Seymour, Nicole. "Somatic Syntax: Replotting the Developmental Narrative in Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding*." *Studies in the Novel*, Fall 2009. 293 – 311. Print.
- Shaw, Denise. *The Rape Narrative in the American South: A Psychoanalytical Examination of Sexual Violence and the Melancholic Internalization of Loss in the Modern Southern Novel*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007. Print.
- Sherrow, Victoria. *Encyclopedia of Hair*. Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006. Print.
- Sielke, Sabine. *Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture, 1790-1990*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. Print.
- Stockton, Kathryn Bond. *The Queer Child*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. Print.
- Warner, Michael. "Queer and Then?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 1 Jan 2012. Web. 25 Jan. 2012.

Warner, Michael. *Fear of a Queer Planet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. Print.

Westling, Louise. *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008. Print.

Wilkerson, William S. *Ambiguity and Sexuality: A Theory of Sexual Identity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.

Zizek, Slavoj. *Organs without Bodies*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.