

A large, ornate decorative frame in dark brown and light beige colors, surrounding the title and author information. The frame features intricate scrollwork and floral motifs.

From Alienation to Accommodation
A Study of Carson McCullers's
The Member of the Wedding

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**Abstract:**

Carson McCullers (1917-1967) is an acclaimed American novelist, short story writer, playwright, essayist, and poet. *The Member of the Wedding* is her third novel. It was published in 1946, but was adapted for the stage and won the New York Drama Critics' Award in 1950. As indicative of her Southern roots, most of McCullers' oeuvre focuses on lonely, disconnected people who seek escape from their stifling, small hometown existences. Partly biographical, the novel sounds like a typical *Bildungsroman* story. Because the characters and themes of McCullers's fiction were created in the 1940s and 1950s, a time of tension between the changing status of women and the southern ideal of womanhood, they are particularly fertile ground for a modern reexamination of this nature.

The present study explores, as its central focus, the troubled adolescent protagonist Frankie's psychological journey from being entrapped, ostracized and alienated to achieve maturity and accommodation. It traces not only the three stages Frankie undergoes to shape her personality, but also analyzes her inner realms and how she abandons her childhood self in order to adopt and portray a new feminine, adult image. To achieve what she aspires to, the study shows how a distinct change of direction in Frankie's life occurs and she succeeds, at last, to assert herself and change her identity in that patriarchal Southern world.

Keywords: alienation, entrapment, accommodation, childhood, adolescence, maturity, psychological constraints, dullness, disorientation, identity, sense of belonging.



المستخلص

كَارْسُنْ مَآكَلَرُزْ (1917-1967) روائية أمريكية، وكاتبة قصة قصيرة، وكاتبة مسرح ومقال أيضاً، وشاعرة. نُشِرَتْ روايتها الثالثة "عُضُوٌّ فِي العُرْسِ" عام (1946)، وتم إخراجها للمسرح وحصولها على جائزة نقاد الدراما في نيويورك عام (1950). تركز جُلَّ أعمال مَآكَلَرُزْ، كدليل على جذورها الجنوبية، على الكيانات الخائفة للإقامات الصغيرة. رغم أنها تُعدّ جزئياً من أدب السيرة، إلا أن الرواية تبدو كقصة نمطية لأدب التكوين، أو ذلك النوع من الأدب المعروف بـ "أدب التنشئة والتعليم" أو "الرواية التكوينية".

ونظراً لأن شخصيات وموضوعات أدب مَآكَلَرُزْ تقع في عقد الأربعينيات والخمسينيات من القرن الماضي، وهي فترة تتسم بالتوتر بين الوضع المتغير للمرأة، والمثل الأعلى الجنوبي للأوثوث، فهي بمثابة تربةٍ خصبةٍ لإعادة نظر معاصرة لهذه الطبيعة. تتقصى الدراسة الحالية الرحلة النفسية للمراهقة المضطربة بطلّة الرواية "فرانكي" من النبذ والاعتراب كي تحقق النضج والتعاش، كما تقتضي ليس فقط المراحل الثلاث التي تمر بها لتشكّل شخصيتها، بل تحلل عواملها الداخلية وكيفية تخليها عن الأنا الطفولية لتتخذ وتصور صورة أنثوية جديدة لفتاة ناضجة. ولتحقق فرانكي ما تتوق إليه من النضج والتعاش، تبين الدراسة كيف أن ثمة تغير واضح يحدث ليغير دفة حياتها، وتنجح في نهاية المطاف لتأكيد ذاتها، وتغيير شخصيتها في هذا العالم الذكوري الجنوبي.



The turn of the twentieth century has been known as an adolescent age. Adolescence, in turn, is understood as “a distinct psychological, somatic and social period preceded by childhood and followed by adulthood”(Seymour 48). It is also considered as a difficult period as it brings about changes in the way individuals see themselves and the way they want others to see them. So, their sense of identity seems to be subject to change, or, in other words, fluid and uncertain, since they face the confusion of being caught between childhood and adulthood. Many of these adolescents also have a yearning to be treated as adults while, at the same time, desiring to maintain the innocence of their childhoods. Moreover, it is known that their identities are often formed in response to the changes occurring during their development into adulthood. Even the groups those adolescents belong to play crucial roles in shaping and forming their identities. In *The Member of the Wedding (MW)*, McCullers explores skilfully the ways in which an adolescent changes as Frankie rejects the groups she belongs to since childhood to reach accommodation, such as family.

The omniscient narrator’s statement that Frankie, the main character of the novel, “was twelve” (*MW*, p.1), immediately positions her in the mind as a liminal figure, inevitably undergoing a series of changes as a grown-up female in the South. In *The Adolescent Through Fiction: A Psychological Approach*,



for example, psychologist Norman Kiell notes that: “fiction has made us perhaps over familiar with the agonies and absurdities of adolescence,” and writes of this stage as an “awful springtime of beauty” and a “season of shames”(12-13). More specifically, in her analysis of the female adolescent, the French existentialist philosopher and social theorist, Simone de Beauvoir says that the young girl

does not accept the destiny assigned to her by nature and by society; and yet she does not repudiate it completely; she is too much divided against herself to join battle with the world; she limits herself to a flight from reality or a symbolic struggle against it. (375)

Judith Halberstam also points out that “for girls, adolescence is a lesson in restraint, punishment, and repression. It is in the context of female adolescence that the tomboy instincts of millions of girls are remodeled into compliant forms of femininity” (6). Yet, a first notable approach to the American novel of adolescence is undergone by Elaine Ginsberg in her article, “The Female Initiation Theme in American Fiction.” In it, Ginsberg tackles female adolescence as a category in need of its own terms of description and experience. Ginsberg writes:

First, unlike some of their male counterparts, the young girls are always introduced to a heterosexual world, a world in which relationships between men and women, males and females, are the most important, if not the only, relationships which need to be understood. Second, whereas to the young men their newfound roles in the world may mean many different things, the



young girls seem to see their future roles as women almost always in relation to men. Third, though the seduction-punishment pattern changes considerably in the twentieth century, the initiation process for females is still more often than not seen in terms of sexual experience either explicitly or implicitly. Fourth, there is an interesting anomaly in the fact that so many of the young girls depicted in these initiation stories are, at first, dressed in boys' clothing or bear boys' names, attributes they drop as the stories progress. They begin, it would seem, as little androgynous creatures, changing their names and their clothing only as they become more aware of their approaching womanhood. Fifth, whereas the young male initiates often have a male companion or mentor to aid or guide them [...] the young girls seem never to be aided or guided by an older female who serves as a teacher. More commonly they are accompanied or even initiated by a boy or a man. (31)

Ginsberg's main point is that initiation, or "the loss of innocence and acquisition of knowledge are all too often regrettable" (30). She draws the conclusion that of the female characters, "there is none for whom the acquisition of knowledge and the approach of womanhood is entirely positive" (35).

The Member of the Wedding is told from the point of view of Frankie, the main heroine, who is a troubled adolescent. The very first image of her is presented as "someone who hung around in doorways" (*MW*, p.1) hovering between childhood and adulthood. For some critics, it is a mistake to view the novel as simply a *Bildungsroman*, a coming-of-age novel. In her introduction to the novel, the Scottish writer and critic Ali Smith



considers the novel as a “sweet momentary illumination of adolescence before the disillusion of adulthood” (12). In the same vein, Patricia Yaeger regards and puts it, “an economical way of learning about the pangs of growing up” (416). Louis D. Rubin Jr. points out, “McCullers’s fiction, in particular *The Member of the Wedding*, can speak to the adolescent reader in a very intense fashion, for what it conveys is the frustration and pain of being more than a child and yet not an adult, with the agony of self-awareness and sense of isolation thereby involved” (114).

McCullers’s concern is to lay bare Frankie’s frustration with feeling and desire to escape from her present situation. Frankie is described by McCullers’s biographer and critic Oliver Evans as a “gawky twelve-year-old tomboy” (102). Being on the cusp of adolescence, Frankie feels at odds with everything and everyone around her. McCullers vividly points out that her desperation to belong to a peer group stems from her fear of being labelled an outsider—a fear that is heightened due to her sense to belong somewhere. This also intensifies her longing to fit in and leads her to imagine a solution to her loneliness. Yet, Frankie is also anxious about change because she observes that people often shape their behaviours and beliefs to fit in with a group, thus achieving accommodation and compromising their individuality. Throughout the narrative, McCullers reveals



noticeably how Frankie goes through three stages and struggles with different impulses: her sense and self-awareness of alienation, her struggle to belong to a group, her attempt to conform to the cultural ideal of womanhood, and to be free to define herself and express her individuality.

The novel's setting is a town in the Deep South where racial, sexual and political tensions are common and rife. The individuals in this society are often judged according to the groups they belong to and certain groups are marginalized. People also come to an understanding of their identity with reference to where they belong. We witness Frankie move from naivety to realism. This progression in her character can be viewed as a metaphor for the way in which individuals come to adopt the dominant attitudes of their society, taking on conventional opinions about race and gender. McCullers portrays Frankie at a period in her life when her identity is fragile because it is forming and changing. In addition, this is also a time when she lacks a strong sense of belonging to a group or to her wider society. Frankie's desire to develop her identity is inextricably linked to her desire to accommodate and belong, as she observes each making the other possible.

Frankie's evolving self-image is reflected earlier when she begins thinking more about the world, and her place in it, which ultimately creates fear, because "she was afraid of these things



that made her suddenly wonder who she was, and what she was going to be in this world, and why she was standing at that minute, seeing a light, or listening, or staring up into the sky: alone. She was afraid, and there was a *queer tightness* in her chest” (*MW*, p.22, emphasis is mine). It is obvious, then, that her most apparent problem is the feeling of loneliness. Even, we can assume that her deep, unconscious “fear” relates to her sexual identity as a burgeoning young girl, and her place within her society. In short, she is utterly and hopelessly bored with life. Frankie is also angst-filled and wishes to be anywhere except at home and anyone except Frankie Addams. And So,

She walked all around [...] wearing her Mexican hat and the high-laced boots and a cowboy rope tied round her waist, she had gone around pretending to be Mexican. Me no speak English—Adios Buenos Noches—*abla pokie peekie poo*, she had jabbered in mock Mexican [...] when the game was over, and she was home, there would come over her a cheated discontent. (*MW*, p.56)

Thus, Frankie works through her angst by toying with her identity and rushing her maturity. During the “green and crazy summer” of the novel, Frankie sees herself as fragmented and is unable to conform to gender norms. In her desire to “bust free,” Frankie does things and gets herself into real trouble: “She broke the law. And once having been a criminal, she broke the law again, and then again.” She has big plans and yearns “to light out,” for South America or Hollywood or New York City and



never see this town again (p.23). In other words, she is constantly struggling to figure out who she is and where she belongs. Moreover, she needs to be part of a larger group in order to define herself in this time of transition. She also plans and dreams of leaving her town; and her immediate solution to these desires as well as her loneliness, are to leave with her brother and his new wife after their approaching wedding. McCullers hints at Frankie's overwhelming sense of non-belonging, loneliness and social alienation which pervades her life, saying that:

It happened that green and crazy summer when Frankie was twelve years old. This was the summer when for a long time she had not been a member. She belonged to no club and was a member of nothing in the world. Frankie had become an unjoined person who hung around in doorways and she was afraid. (*MW*, p.1)

We get to know that Frankie has been raised in the South, the daughter of a small town jeweller. Frankie's family fractured when her mother died at her birth, so the mother-figure in her life has always been Berenice Sadie brown, a Negress cook and housekeeper. Frankie's father is mostly absent from her life. He is a distant, aloof, uncomprehending and distracted figure, so that his affection for Frankie is never obvious. Thus, Frankie loses that sense of the familial entity, the mentor-figure, or rather the maternal influence which can be a fountain of warmth, guidance and mentorship. She feels sharply disintegrated. So, Frankie



craves not only after recognition, but overt affection as well. Moreover, she wants to be assimilated and touched, but the contact must be genuine. Hence, she wants to find a place to belong and accommodate in order to orient herself in a world that is changing around her.

Though Frankie's playmates are all ages, from very young children to the monkey man downtown, she feels that she is left out. At the first stage, or rather the turning point in her life, Frankie does not belong with children, nor with adult teenagers, nor with adults. Consequently, despite almost constant companionship of some kind, she feels very much alone. In her lonesomeness, she feels dejected and disconnected from everyone and the ones who get together in a clubhouse abutting her backyard may be, as Berenice says, "fully two years older" than Frankie, but she's miserable when they don't elect her into their social club. What heightens her sense of loneliness is that she fears that the older girls "have been spreading all over town that I smell bad. When I had those boils and had to use that black, bitter-smelling ointment, old Helen Fletcher asked what was that funny smell I had. Oh, I could shoot every one of them with a pistol" (P.10).

Katherine Davis claims that Frankie's "bewilderment [about her social ostracism] manifests itself in an extreme paranoia about her body" (40), but when Frankie worries, "I



think they have been spreading it all over town that I smell bad,” we find out that it is not, say, the increased perspiration that comes with puberty that is in question; Frankie continues, “when I had those boils and had to use that black bitter-smelling ointment, old Helen Fletcher asked me what was that funny smell I had” (p.10). Yet, smells and substances do not here indicate adulthood, but actually mark “Frankie’s rejection from the mature social order” (Seymour 62). In fact, her reactions to such rejections also involve imposed and artificial, rather than organic, bodily changes (ibid.). For example, we notice later—in another stage of her journey toward accommodation—that Frankie changes her name and becomes the feminine F. Jasmine who dreams of stardom, wants to wear an orange satin evening dress, and constantly drowns herself with the femininely-named ‘Sweet Serenade’(pp.11,13,46) perfume because the neighborhood children tell her she smells. According to Seymour, “[i]n such moments, we understand that nothing ‘natural’ or ‘internal’ necessarily situates Frankie on the threshold of adulthood. Rather, meaning is imputed to her body by external forces, be they objects or human beings” (62).

Nevertheless, Frankie desperately needs to think she is more grown up. She tries repeatedly to embrace “traditional femininity” and in her attempt to do so “she performs an exaggerated flamboyant version of it” (Knox 49). Again and



again, McCullers mentions Frankie's unhappiness with herself and the palce around her. She says that: "This was the summer when Frankie was sick and tired of being Frankie. She hated herself..." (p.19-20). This extreme hate, with its basis in her sense of being different, also epitomizes her feeling of loneliness and alienation. Even the Southern climate contributes to Frankie's disconcerted sense of self. In this regard, McCullers writes,

In June the trees were bright dizzy green, but later the leaves darkened, and the town turned black and shrunken under the glare of the sun. The sidewalks of the town were gray in the early morning and at night, but the noon sun put a glaze on them, so that the cement burned and glittered like glass. (*MW*, p.1)

Later, McCullers tells us that the stifling summer heat adds to Frankie's sense of entrapment when she observes that: "the bars of sunlight crossed the back yard like the bars of a bright strange jail" (p.75). Thus, it is Frankie's own self-loathing and desire for change that make her want to get rid of her childhood persona and take on a new adult one. The way that this manifests itself is primarily through the attire she chooses. McCullers describes Frankie's summer attire saying that throughout the summer she goes around "wearing her Mexican hat and the high-laced boots and a cowboy rope tied round her waist." Then, Frankie eschews these clothes in favor of dresses and high-heels. Because Frankie interacts with so few people within the novel,



most of the “norm enforcement” (Knox 49) that is visible comes from within the character herself.

Constante González Groba argues that, “[Frankie] is in the doorway, on the threshold separating her from the freedom of childhood, represented by her seven-year-old cousin John Henry, and the clearly defined sexual world of adults that she is reluctantly being forced to enter” (137). An example of the latter is Frankie’s recent expulsion from her father’s bed. One night, Mr. Addams realizes that Frankie has become too old to be sleeping in his bed, so, all of a sudden, he looks at his daughter, asking her: “who is this great big long-legged twelve-year-old blunderbuss who still wants to sleep with her old Papa”(p. 22). From then on, Frankie no longer sleeps with her father and must sleep alone. This rejection seems to have made a deep impression on her. She does not like to stay at home, and she begins to have a grudge against her father. Anna Young sees that “[S]he has been cast out from the Garden of Eden that was her childhood, and pushed into an adult world that she does not yet fully understand” (48). Therefore, her need to physical comfort is emphasized by the fact that she uses her younger cousin, John Henry, as a sort of surrogate: “She heard him breathe in the darkness, and now she had what she had wanted so many nights that summer; there was somebody sleeping in the bed with her” (p.13). The scene ends with McCullers’ explanation that “for



now, with somebody sleeping in the dark with her, she was not so much afraid” (p.13).

In effect, Frankie begins slowly to see how divided the world is in terms of gender, and how her own gender may limit her options of accommodation. Thus, being a girl excludes her from a war that she daydreams and romanticizes since she makes plans to join the military and go to war. Moreover, in a desperate bid to unite herself with everyone in the world, she also offers to give her blood to the Red Cross. Unfortunately, she realizes that she is not even allowed to donate her blood for soldiers to carry in their veins. Accordingly, she struggles with finding her identity within her community, so she attempts to find her place within a larger sphere—the world. McCullers declares that:

[Frankie] wanted to be a boy and go to the war as a Marine. She thought about flying aeroplanes and winning gold medals for bravery. But she could not join the war, and this made her sometimes feel restless and blue. She decided to donate her blood to the Red Cross; she wanted to donate a quart a week and her blood would be in the veins of Australians and Fighting French and Chinese, all over the whole world, and it would be as if she were close kin to all to all of these people. (*MW*, p. 21)

‘The world’ in this context may be interpreted as “the *male* world, the world of politics and wars, rather than the domestic world of womanhood and femininity” (Matlok-Ziemann 126). While we are not told explicitly that Frankie is excluded from these activities because of her gender—Frankie herself blames



her age, rather than being a girl—we are aware of the fact that “her daydreams of belonging are incompatible with the expectations for girls and women at this time” (Young 49).

In a broader sense, Frankie is being restricted by circumstances that are beyond her control. She sees that she is trapped and unable to move forward for her ambitions. The most prominent symbol of the “*queer tightness*” (MW, pp.22, 23,25)—an expression McCullers frequently uses in the narrative—and constriction that make her life an inferno is the Addams kitchen. There, Frankie spends most of her time in the company of her housekeeper, Berenice, and her cousin, John Henry, and where the novel also opens and closes. The Addams kitchen is “square and grey and quiet” (P.2), “a sad and ugly room” (p.4). This world of the kitchen is “too restricted for Frankie’s dynamic heart, squeezed against the edge of the table” and the only movement she is allowed is “the circular, repetitive, and purposelss running around the kitchen table” (Groba 137). In *Wunderkind: The Reputation of Carson McCullers*, Judith James declares that: “The kitchen is the world of adolescence, of being trapped in the middle space; the outside world is the world of adults” (116). Frankie claims that the kitchen depresses her. Although she seeks it as a refuge when she gets frightened on the streets of town, the kitchen consistently terrifies her. McCullers remarks that:



They sat together in the kitchen, and the kitchen was a sad and ugly room. John Henry had covered the walls with queer, child drawings as far up as his arm would reach. This gave the kitchen a crazy look, like that of a room in the crazy house. And now the old kitchen made Frankie sick. The name for what happened to her Frankie did not know, but she could feel her squeezed heart beating against the table edge. (*MW*, p.4)

Even the Addams' cluttered house contributes to Frankie's feelings of displacement and of not being home. The following lines from McCullers's poem "Saraband" suggest Frankie's subsequent sense of claustrophobia, restlessness, and frustration: "Bewildered by the paradox of all your musts/Turning from horizon to horizon, noonday to dusk" (*Mortgaged Heart* 300). Berenice describes such confinement as being "Caught." When Frankie voices her dreams of travelling the world in search of adventure, or properly to achieve accommodation, Berenice responds: "We all of us somehow caught. We born this way or that way and we don't know why [...] And maybe we wants to widen and bust free. But no matter what we do we still caught" (p.113). Sarah Gleeson-White declares that this all-pervasive atmosphere of claustrophobia manifests itself in the many "captivity tropes, from ostensibly benign places of confinement—a house, a room, a small town—to the more sinister prisons and asylums that features so often in McCullers's fiction"(18). In her feminist approach in *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens*, Louise Westling argues that in the writings of



Welty, Flannery O'Connor, and McCullers, place functions “as an index of feminine identity” to register the “confinement which has been woman’s traditional lot” (178-80). Thus, seemingly trapped in the kitchen or in the small-town streets, we are reminded that Frankie even envies the prisoners in the town jail, for “It was better to be in a jail where you could bang the walls than in a jail you could not see” (*MW*, p.148).

Carla L.Verderame declares that “the cluttered room mimics Frankie's cluttered mind. The pictures on the wall reinforce Frankie's confusion” (44). McCullers writes that, “the walls of the kitchen bothered Frankie—the queer drawings of Christmas trees, airplanes, freak soldiers, flowers” (*MW*, p.7). In the same vein, Verderame adds that John Henry's pictures of the freak soldiers on the kitchen walls allow Frankie to imagine herself acting out a very different “script” from the one assigned to her by Southern society. She says:

But the pictures also frighten Frankie because her burgeoning femininity confuses her; she worries that she is a freak like the freak soldiers in John Henry's pictures or those at the fair in town. John Henry's juxtaposition of images of war with images of Christmas trees and flowers, the serene landscape of the old South, reinforces the layering effect that the setting of the kitchen takes on. That is, the beauty and serenity of the Southern landscape camouflages the region's history of racial and gender oppression. (Verderame 44)



Westling also clarifies Frankie's journey toward adulthood through the crazily decorated maze of the Addams' house—especially the kitchen:

Most of *The Member of the Wedding* occurs in the hot, stale kitchen where Berenice guides tomboy Frankie through her transformation into giddy adolescent Frances. The walls are covered with John Henry's grotesque drawings. The same conversations and the same card games are playing maddeningly over and over by the three inhabitants of Frankie's domestic world so that the time passes like a sick dream. This world is a living freak show peopled by a transvestite boy, a black cook with a left eye of bright blue glass, and a gangling tomboy. It is a horrifying prison for Frankie, who moves into a completely new house at the end of the novel, leaving her freakish past behind. Such an escape maybe possible because she submits to conventional demands for femininity. (181)

Thus, Westling addresses Frankie's entrapment and her submission to the imprisonment of her home just as she will submit to the gender conventions of society. Like Ginsberg, Westling concludes that Mick (in McCullers's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*) and Frankie are "ambitious, artistic girls who are disoriented and terrified when they are forced to identify themselves as female at puberty" (114).

Frankie's confusion about her nascent identity also adds to her sense of feeling isolated and lonely. In such a stage in her character development, Frankie experiences a growth spurt that leaves her feeling like a carny freak. Gleeson-White sees that



there is no wonder the young girls “fearfully consider their changing bodies as freakish, for femaleness frequently loses any capacity for alternative conceptualization beyond (male) obscenity.” The adolescents’ fear wrought by the “visibly changing pubertal body” is considered a burdensome for McCullers’s protagonists and resonates much in almost her texts. As a result, the young girls are clearly marked as different—“different from what they once were, and different from the models of ideal womanhood displayed before them, as epitomized by the demure club-house members” (Gleeson-White 15-16). Earlier, Gleeson-White also assumes that ideal femininity is:

a particularly powerful image in McCullers’s novels since the image of the lady was all-pervasive in the South. Even in the New South, the time in which McCullers was writing and her novels are set, the ideal of the worshipful lady prevailed, although such an ideal became more and more transparent with the changing status of women in the 1940s and 1950s. (13)

In the same vein, Westling also examines McCullers' problem of identity construction for females in consideration of the role and treatment of women in that generation, signifying that it is difficult to imagine alternative life-styles for women at that time. She notes that although the mask of the southern belle and “the lady” begins to peel away, there is no alternative model of female identity (37).



In her journey toward accommodation, Frankie attempts to conform to the cultural ideal of womanhood as articulated by Berenice who advises her to “change from being so rough and greedy and big” (*MW*, p.77), and as portrayed in the image of “the club members,” whom Frankie watches from the kitchen window, “passing slowly before the arbor. The long gold sun slanted down on them and made their skin look golden so, and they were dressed in clean, fresh dresses” (p.90). These girls also come to represent the role model, the “ideal femininity” for Frankie to emulate. More significantly, in order to conform, the young girl Frankie must cast off her freakishness by rejecting her boyish demeanor. So in her bid to assume adulthood, Berenice counsels her earlier in the novel to “[g]et clean for a change. Scrub your elbows and fix yourself nice. You will do very well” (p.19). Later, heeding Berenice in her preparations for her date with the soldier, Frankie plans “to take two baths tonight. One long soaking bath and a scrub with a brush. I’m going to try to scrape this brown crust off my elbows. Then let out the dirty water and take a second bath” (p.106). It is this image of femininity, “a type of arrested subjectivity, to which Frankie must aspire. But because she is a tomboy and so resists conforming to the vision, Frankie is unable to join the neighborhood girls’ club” (Westling 17-18).



Frankie's sense of being alienated is also culminated in her sense of being an outsider. McCullers also tells us that: "this summer [Frankie] was grown so tall that she was almost a big freak, and her shoulders were narrow, her legs too long. She wore a pair of blue black shorts [...] Her hair had been cut like a boy's" (p.2). Frankie's hair cut causes her much grief as she attempts to look more feminine. In a later scene, she agonizes over it as she stands in front of the "watery kitchen mirror" (ibid.). She claims, "The big mistake I made was to get this close crew cut. For the wedding I ought to have long bright yellow hair. Don't you think so?" (p.16). Frankie's conflict between who she feels that she should become and the identity that she has taken on through her physical appearance causes her to seek resolution. In her book, *Gender and Class in 20th Century Southern Women's Literature*, Caitlan Sumner tackles the matter from a gender perspective, claiming that:

[Frankie's] resolution comes as a result of a unity between "maleness" and "femaleness," or in other words maintaining the identity of a tomboy. Throughout the novel, Frankie's desire for male and female unity manifests itself in her preoccupation with her brother's wedding. In the first section of the novel, Frankie's brother comes home with his fiancée and announces that there will be a wedding. Berenice initially identifies Frankie's obsession with the wedding as jealousy, but later she claims that Frankie "got a crush/on the *Wedd-ing*" and has "fall[en] in love" with it. The wedding serves as a symbol for a legal joining of male and female. What Frankie



desires is not a legal union of man and woman but a reconciliation with both her male and female impulses and tendencies. (52)

Thus, being discouraged about her developing feminine body and confused about her place in Southern society, Frankie exhibits stereotypically male behavior and adopts traditionally male activities. According to James, "She is a girl unwilling to relinquish the privileges of boys, which growing up female would require her to do. Frankie resists adult sexuality, resists sexual initiation, and resists it actively both physically and mentally" (111). Frankie is described earlier as tall; she dons a crew cut, and "wears blue black shorts and a B.V.D. undervest" (p.2). She also cuts the rough dead skin off the bottom of her feet with a large kitchen knife, and imagines herself a soldier fighting in World War II. Clearly, "Frankie Addams is no Mary Littlejohn; she sharply contrasts the stereotype of a genteel Southern belle" (Verderame 43).

Frankie is also desperate to belong during this period because she faces some fears and unsettling changes. We are shown how she develops a sense of fear towards the freaks at the fairgrounds that probably don't have weddings. She also thinks of ghosts and the inmates of the town prison, and she projects the deepest feelings on them. Thus, due to the fact that she has been growing so tall, Frankie is afraid of becoming an ugly girl "a Freak," since the governing standards demand that women should



be smaller than men and “cute” (*MW*, pp.17-18). She recalls the previous autumn when she and her cousin John Henry went to the local fair and walked through the “House of the Freaks” (p.17). Sumner comments that:

The Freak House is juxtaposed with Frankie’s anxieties of becoming a freak because the Freak House is comprised of people who were unable to fit into a “normative” pattern for human development. Thus, they are forced to exploit their bodies in order to survive in society. (55-56)

Thus, the Freaks further instill anxiety in Frankie, for “it seemed to her that they had looked at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with hers, as though to say: we know you. She was afraid of their long Freak eyes. And all the years she had remembered them, until this day” (*MW*, p.18). Hence, she is unable to identify and occupy the role of ideal womanhood as she conceives it. Thus Frankie, according to Groba, “inevitably associates looks with male approval and the safety of marriage” (137). So, she tells Berenice that she doubts “if they ever get married or go to a wedding [...] Those Freaks” (p.18). Accordingly, Berenice also points out that it is the naturally endowed female, such as “the small and pretty” Janice, who is more likely marriage material (p.27).

In *Understanding Carson McCullers*, Virginia Spencer Carr notes that “[t]hroughout the author’s canon, freakishness is a symbol of a character’s sense of alienation, of his being trapped



within a single identity without the possibility of a meaningful connection with anyone else.” Carr’s is typical of those accounts that claim that the grotesque embraces themes of alienation, loneliness, lack of human communication, and the failure of love (qtd. in Gleeson-White:3). We can conclude, then, that Frankie’s fear of the freaks “is a consequence of her incorporation of commonly held social mores and standards” (Gleeson-White 20).

Unable to realize that the demands of society are not necessarily right, Frankie thinks that it is she who is abnormal. She is, in Groba’s words, “afraid of being marginalized for not fitting into the culturally imposed ideal.” Groba also adds that: “she has internalized the role a female is expected to play in her culture.” Moreover, she is condemned to “the anguish and internal division of ambiguous feelings towards a restrictive role which curtails her freedom and crushes her individuality, a role which frightens her lest she is unable to come up to its expectations” (137). Thus, Sumner affirms that:

Because Frankie is familiar with the fate of freaks, she ventures into a new, uncharted territory—womanhood. She begins to perform womanhood as best she can interpret it. To avoid being a freak, Frankie moves into womanhood—in drag. (57)

Being dissatisfied with her unbearable environment and personal situation, Frankie turns to a world of fantasy. She needs illusions as much as the air she breathes. It is not just the reader



who notices this fantasy, but Berenice also calls Frankie out and says: “You cozen and change things too much in your own mind. And that is a serious fault” (*MW*, p.31). Of course, Frankie does not see her fantasy world as as a fault. Therefore, she finds a means of escape in the imaginary weaving and restructuring of reality. To the unsatisfactory real domestic community of Berenice and John Henry, Frankie opposes an ideal one she builds in her imagination. All of a sudden, her brother Jarvis’s upcoming wedding appears as the magic wand or solution to all her problems. She invests the wedding, which for the realistic Berenice is “just the chance for a pleasure trip, with a variety of meanings which transcend its material reality” (Groba 138). Marriage, for Frankie, is one of the few kinds of belonging she can understand. So, she concentrates all her attention on it as a cure for her frustration and loneliness. According to Sarah N. Koehler, Frankie sees the wedding as “simply a place that will be the catalyst for her escape from a life that frequently leaves her lonely and isolated” (45). Moreover, Frankie also derives from the wedding a new sense of identity and the key that will open the door of access to the world:

At last she knew just who she was and understood where she was going. She loved her brother and the bride and she was a member of the wedding. The three of them would go into the world and they would always be together.



And finally, after the scared spring and the crazy summer, she was no more afraid. (*MW*, p. 43)

In a similar fashion, in her essay “Loneliness... An American Malady,” McCullers explains, retrospectively, that Frankie’s yearning to join the wedding reflects the universal need to belong and accommodate: “After the [child’s] first establishment of identity there comes the imperative need to lose this new-found sense of separateness and to belong to something larger and more powerful than the weak, lonely self” (*Mortgaged Heart* 265). Koehler also declares that, “The anxiety Frankie feels is due to her lack of belonging, both in the place she currently resides and in the unknown future of where she will ultimately reside”(46). To quote Gleeson-White’s words, “becoming a ‘we of me’ carries within it the possibility of new selves and new relationships with other selves” (28).

Completely taken by the idea, the world seems no longer separate from herself and she feels rather connected. She no longer feels confused, instead she is confident and excited about her plans to unify with Jarvis and Janice at their wedding. Moreover, Frankie’s performance of excessive femininity is demonstrated by the name that she refers to herself by. In other words, in her hopes to belong to a “we of me,” Frankie dubs herself F. Jasmine and requests that her friends and family call her so (*MW*, pp.107-08)—a notable change from the gender



ambiguous name of Frankie, an indication of her attempt at becoming. This also marks an important developmental stage in her journey to achieve accommodation and sense of belonging. When the engaged couple leave for Winter Hill after the Friday visit at the opening of the novel, “a part of her [Frankie] was with them, and she could feel this part of her own self going away [...] so that the kitchen frankie was an old hull left there at the table” (p.27). In her mind’s eye, “[F.Jasmine] suddenly saw the three of them—herself, her brother, and the bride—walking beneath a cold Alaskan sky [...] a rope tied the three of them together, and friends from another glacier called in Alaskan their JA names” (p.67). She projects onto them her own desires to belong, travel and be famous, until they come to symbolise everything she wants from life. In Young’s words, Frankie is attempting to “align herself with a symbol of normalcy, belonging and acceptance”(49).

Thus, when she realizes earlier that she does not have a group with which to identify; and she is being isolated between childhood and adulthood, Frankie seeks identification. Everything she does and says is directly or indirectly related to her sense of isolation. She has just been an ‘I’ person, though all people belong to a ‘we’ except her. Considering the larger implications of her wish, she reflects upon the forces which motivate her:



She was an *I* person who had to walk around and do things by herself. All other people had a *we* to claim, all others except her. When Berenice said *we*, she meant Honey and Big Mama, her lodge, or her church. The *we* of her father was the store. All members of clubs have a *we* to belong to and to talk about. The soldiers in the army can say *we*, and even the criminals on the chain-gangs. But the old Frankie had had no *we* to claim, unless it would be the terrible summer *we* of her and John Henry and Berenice—and that was the last *we* in the world she wanted. (*MW*, p. 39)

Yet, her positive thinking induces a euphoria which contributes to a rejection of the old feeling that: “the old Frankie had had no *we* to claim [...] Now all this was suddenly over with and changed. There was her brother and the bride, and it was as though when first she saw them something she had known inside of her [...] the hull of the old Frankie left there in the town alone” (pp.39-40).

It seems that being a member of the wedding, Frankie feels that this will connect her irrevocably to her brother and his wife. As typical of many teenagers, she feels that in order to be someone she has to be a part of an intact, existing group, that is, Jarvis and Janice. The teen years are known as a time of soul-searching for a new and grown up identity. In an effort to find this identity, teens seek to join a group. Frankie, too, is desperate for Jarvis and Janice’s adult acceptance. So, she is forced to spend the summer with John Henry, her six year old cousin, and Berenice Brown, her black cook. It is through her interactions



with these two characters that we perceive Frankie's ascent from childhood. Before Jarvis and Janice arrive, Frankie is content to play with John Henry. When she becomes F. Jasmine and an imagined "we" of the couple, she feels too mature to have John Henry sleep over, preferring, instead, to occupy her time explaining her wedding plans to strangers in bars, a behavior she would not have considered doing before gaining this new confidence. For the first time, the young woman enjoys a connection to those around her. "Under the fresh blue early sky the feeling as she walked along was one of newly risen lightness, power, entitlement" (p.50). Thus, the wedding becomes a ritual in itself and she feels as if "the telling of the wedding had an end and a beginning, a shape like a song" (p.57). In retelling her story, F. Jasmine's plans are "reified and her sense of identity is strengthened" (Young 51). In McCullers's words, "The plans about the wedding stiffened and fixed with each new telling and finally came unchangeable. By eleven-thirty she was very tired, and even the tunes dragged with exhaustion; the need to be recognized for her true self was for the time being satisfied" (p.59). In the same context, Sumner also assumes that:

In order to take more control of her life and attempt to move out of the trapped space that she is in, Frankie chooses to tag along with her brother and sister-in-law. She is allowing herself a freedom of choice by deciding her own destiny. As a way to provide closure to the life of "Frankie," F.



Jasmine spends the next day wandering around the town. While on her excursion, she reminisces on the activities that Frankie used to participate in. In doing so, she is trying on her new identity and practicing her performance of womanhood. (60)

Thus, F. Jasmine leaves the house and jaunts the town in search of people to tell about her plans to leave town with the betrothed couple. Whenever the “gladness of the wedding rose up in her,” she feels a “new unnameable connection” (*MW*, p.55). Thus, she feels this strange, unexplainable connection to the people around her. McCullers says that, “It is far easier, it came to her as she remembered Berenice, to convince strangers of the coming to pass of dearest wants than those in your own home kitchen” (p.54). F. Jasmine implies that her friendship with Berenice and John Henry begins to unravel. She believes the two restrict her freedom because they do not allow her to act as she pleases. According to Verderame, “Gradually, [F. Jasmine] separates from the Addams’ household, and from the persona of tomboy Frankie. The inexperienced young woman interprets her street audience’s silence as approval of her, and as verification of her membership in their community” (46).

To emphasize her attempt to reach out belonging, Frankie develops an individual growth throughout her entire narrative. In addition, she wrestles with her desire to belong and her impulse to be free from rules and boundaries. This is manifested most



obviously in the way that she changes her name with each part of the book. Knox points out that:

In part one she goes by Frankie. In part two, she refers to herself and introduces herself as F. Jasmine. In the third and final section of the book, she goes by her full name, Frances. Notably, whenever she reflects on her past self, throughout the novel, she does think of herself as Frankie. In the second section of the book, she does this thinking that “[i]t was the old Frankie of yesterday who had been puzzled, but F. Jasmine did not wonder any more.” She also describes her former self as “the ghost of the old Frankie, dirty and hungry eyed, [who] trudged silently along not far from her.” The names that she assigns herself are an obvious representation of her coming-of-age and trying to embrace a new adult, and traditionally female identity. (48)

Strictly speaking, Frankie’s rejection of her “masculine” name in favor of F. Jasmine Addams, which has “feminine” romantic connotations, is also an obvious indication of her desire to change from child to adult world. In other words, the name shift is supposed to imply a certain cognitive advancement and maturity. Though it is a mere surface change, it also signifies a huge alteration of Frankie’s character. Suddenly, all the loneliness and disconnectedness have vanished and she is an independent, confident young woman. Groba comments that:

But even the new name is indicative of Frankie’s ambivalence, as she follows the largely male convention of using a first and a middle name, and on the visiting cards that she makes for herself she adds *Esq.* to her name. The ambivalent Frankie wants to become a member of a wedding without



the physical sexual union marriage entails, to become an adult without going through the process of restriction required to become a “woman” in her society. (139)

Young argues that “The wedding crush seems to have brought with it a pressure of feminization” (50), perhaps because, as Ellen Matlok-Ziemann suggests, Frankie “is keenly aware of the fact that for a female to be grown up[...] it is necessary to put on femininity” (132). This sense of femininity by Frankie happens earlier on the day when she is supposed to meet her brother’s fiancée for the first time. Berenice describes Frankie’s performance, saying that: “You came down with your organdie dress on and lipstick an inch thick from one ear to the next” (p.26). Throughout the novel, Frankie “periodically acts out her brand of femininity, even at the cost of her own comfort” (Knox 50). When Frankie tries on dresses to wear in her brother’s wedding, McCullers says that: “She walked in the wedding dress, with her hand on her hip. The silver slippers had squeezed her feet so that the toes felt swollen and mashed like ten big sore cauliflowers”(p.89). Sumner declares that:

Frankie is attempting to present herself as a female by dressing in typical 1940’s women’s wear. In this scene, Frankie is also making a statement about her developmental stage. She chooses to adorn herself with copious amounts of makeup, but because Frankie does not have a proper mother figure to assist her with putting her make up on, she is, according to Berenice’s description, clownish. (57)



Yet, the change in Frankie becomes external as well. Her euphoric short journey of exploration through town also announces her fantastic plans for the wedding. She puts on her “most grown and best,” the pink organdy dress, leaving aside the boyish attire that has distinguished her so far. She also puts on lipstick and wears perfume. In addition, Berenice encourages Frankie to develop some feminine wiles:

Now you belong to change from being so rough and greedy and big [...] You ought to fix yourself up nice in your dresses. And speak sweetly and act sly. (*MW*, pp.77-78)

Brabara A. White makes the following comment on Berenice’s words: “In three sentences Berenice has summarized the major traits girls are taught to cultivate in preparation for their relationship with men: “object” orientation (“fix yourself up nice”), passivity and submission (“speak sweetly”), and calculation and trickery (“act sly”). No real mother could do a more thorough job of socialization” (94).

In that afternoon, for the first time, F. Jasmine encourages Berenice to talk about love. McCullers says:

It was the first time ever they had talked about love, with F. Jasmine included in the conversation as a person who understood and had worthwhile opinions. The old Frankie had laughed at love, maintained it was a big fake, and did not believe in it [...] The old Frankie had never admitted love. Yet here F. Jasmine was sitting at the table with her knees crossed, and now and then she patted her bare foot on the floor in an accustomed way,



and nodded at what Berenice was saying [...] She and Berenice were two grown people smoking at the dinner table. (*MW*, pp. 94-95)

It is as if Frankie were beginning to feel the “unconscious urge to conform to the ideal of womanhood imposed by her culture” (Groba 140). As Frankie has no mother, and her father is absorbed in his job, Berenice acts not only as a stand-in but also functions as her major socializing force. With her four marriages, Berenice is “the best representative of a society which does not allow women any other destiny apart from marriage.” She also relates Frankie’s preoccupation with her brother’s wedding to her concern with her role as a woman, and her advice is most traditional and “sensible” (*ibid.*).

Almost as important as her feelings of loneliness, Frankie has an intense desire to be known—a desire to find herself. She finds a sense of belonging in her brother and his fiancée. As she develops into womanhood, Frankie voices these desires when she dreams initially of the threesome of herself, her older brother, and his bride in an imagined, adventure-filled communal future: “*They are the we of me*” (*MW*, p.40), she says. Moreover, she pictures them all alphabetically globe-trotting together through Alaska, Africa, Burma (pp.66-67). In *Carson McCullers in the Twenty-First Century*, both Graham-Bertolini and Kayser emphasize that:



For Frankie's desire to become a member of her brother's wedding is not the ludicrous or desperate fantasy of an anxious tomboy who fears to be left out, who is stuck in confining and bewildering gender expectations, who cannot fulfill her dreams within the constricting sociocultural context of the postwar South. Instead, it is the the actualization of a creative involution, a becoming: "The world seemed no longer separate from herself and [...] all at once she felt included." (123-24)

Only then, when Frankie realizes that she is a member at last, a member of the wedding, does it serve as an important catharsis and a marker for her future character development. Thus, she can say that at last she is a part of the world. The prospect of joining the "we of me" of the wedding means that "F. Jasmine felt connected with all she saw, and it was as a sudden member that on this Saturday she went around the town. She walked the streets entitled as a queen and mingled everywhere [...] the world seemd no longer separate from herself and when all at once she felt included" (*MW*, p.44). And the "we of me" makes Frankie feel an "unnamable connection," with unknown passersby in the street and "there was another sense of recognition," a feeling that brings with it "a newly risen lightness, power, entitlement"(p.55, 50). According to Edward Richard Barkowsky, "No longer will she be an insignificant and lonely individual, but she will be able to say that she is a part of the *we* of life, the society of individuals who belong to each other and who are accepted and understood" (15).



When F. Jasmine tells her plans to Berenice, the housekeeper immediately warns her that Jarvis and Janice will not accept her to live with them. In this regard, Elizabeth Eleen Cary declares that “The purpose of her advice to Frankie is not to give her a hope of belonging, but rather to prepare her to accept a lonely future” (64). Moreover, Berenice even tries to introduce gentle fun at Frankie’s crush on the wedding and tries to persuade her to find a beau instead, urging her to “[r]emember Noah and the ark,” implying that “two by two” (p.73) is the way things work. F. Jasmine ignores Berenice’s warning that “you just laying yourself this fancy trap to catch yourself in trouble” (p.102). She feels so confident and cocky that she refuses to believe that her plan is absurd and preposterous: “They will take me. You wait and see. And when they don’t, I will shoot myself with Papa’s pistol. But they will take me. And we’re never coming back to this part of the country again” (ibid.). Berenice also replies: “What makes you think they want to take you along with them? Two is company and three is a crowd. And that is the main thing about a wedding. Two is company and three is a crowd”(p.73). Without actually mentioning sex, Berenice does her best to explain to F. Jasmine the laws of nature. Yet, F. Jasmine is clearly still too ignorant and unprepared for such information. In her book *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History*, Michelle Ann Abate remarks that “Frankie’s wish can best



be characterized as queer” (161). Hence, Sumner suggests that “since the wedding represents a unity of gender for Frankie, Berenice’s statement reminds readers of the presence of a strict gender binary” (61).

In *The Female Gothic*, Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith see that “[Frankie’s] queer desire to be the third term in the signal heterosexual moment of coupling is her own answer to the sense of subjective loss that accompanies her entry into full social identity.” In the scene where Frankie resolves to “go with them” and become a part of their wedding, another “fetish is laid, seemingly incidentally, alongside the heterosexual fetish of the wedding” (139-140). According to McCullers, “it was the sad horn of some coloured boy” (*MW*, p.41) which elicited in Frankie, in Wallace’s and Smith’s words “the first recognition of loss and desire” (*ibid.*). The horn is “low and dark and sad” then “a wild jazz spangle”(p.41) which transfixes her. When the music stops abruptly Frankie is stunned: “The tune was left broken, unfinished. And the drawn tightness she could no longer stand. She felt she must do something wild and sudden that never had been done before” (p.41). It is this “revelatory moment of loss” that leads her to the decision that she is “going off with the two of them to whatever place they will ever go.” Her decision also causes “her heart [to divide] like two wings” and she says she’s “never seen a night so beautiful” (p.43).



Later, still in her imagination, Frankie is obsessed more and more with her brother and his bride-to-be, saying that: And we will meet them. Everybody. We will just walk up to people and know them right away. We will be walking down a dark road and see a lighted house and knock on the door and strangers will rush to meet us and say: Come in! Come in! We will know decorated aviators and New York people and movie stars. We will have thousands of friends, thousands and thousands and thousands of friends. We will belong to so many clubs that we can't even keep track of all of them. We will be members of the whole world. Boyoman! Manoboy! (*MW*, p. 112)

This scene represents the struggle, and the change that takes place in Frankie's journey as she searches for an identity and belonging. Abate says that: "[f]rom their inception, tomboy characters and their accompanying behaviors have been linked with such elements as social surprise, gender duplicity, and unlimited possibility" (xiii). This is, to an extent, true of Frankie Addams. It is Abate's contention that Frankie Addams "becomes a symbol of the gendered, raced and sexualized anxieties that have emerged from the flux and instability of the war years" (155).

In fact, Frankie's preoccupation with her brother's wedding marks her own sense of herself as an outsider and, in McCullers words, a "member of nothing in the world." Thus, we notice that how her feeling of being forlorn and lonely make her decide to be "the member of the wedding" (p.43). In other words,



Frankie believes that she be an integral part of her brother's new family and becomes infatuated with the idea that she leaves Georgia and live with Jarvis and Janice in Winter Hill.

To free herself from the claustrophobic house, F. Jasmine roams the streets of town telling people about her brother's forthcoming wedding. On observing the lights and sounds of the evening, Frankie stops in the Blue Moon, a shabby Café, to keep her date with the soldier she once met. She muses about her plans and marvels that the rules that once would have kept her out of such a place mean nothing to her anymore. McCullers describes the change from the street to the inside of the Blue Moon as "like the change that comes on leaving the open fairway and entering a booth" (p.127).

The soldier is seen through F. Jasmine's romantic eyes as a friendly traveller and a means of connection with the world. Though she wants a confidant for her dreams about the wedding, he proves that he is only after sex. Unwittingly, she leads the soldier to treat her as a female stereotype. Thus, when the soldier treats her to a liquor, she attempts to look and act like a grown girl. She is ashamed to refuse, and then he invites her up to his room. Though reluctant and unable to communicate properly with him, she feels she cannot refuse, so she follows him into the motel room. There she undergoes what is perhaps her most frightening experience because of her complete inability to



understand it. The ‘date’ goes disastrously wrong when the red-haired soldier attempts to rape her. She discerns intensely the foreboding silence, like the calm before the storm: “A few times before she had known such silence—once in the Sears and Roebuck store the moment she suddenly became a thief, and again that April afternoon in the MacKeans’ garage”(p.129-130). The attempted rape, in Verderame’s own words, “justifiably shakes F. Jasmine’s new found confidence, resurrects her confusion about sexuality, and sends her back home” (46). For her, his unwelcome advance is “like a minute in the fair Crazy-House, or real Milledgeville,” which leaves “disgust in her mouth” (pp.130,132). The potential rape is foiled when Frankie knocks him out with a glass pitcher and runs home. Actually, this incident does not only reveal Frankie’s innocence and curiosity, but marks an important moment in F. Jasmine’s development in character as well. The terror of the incident can only be described in the following climactic passage of the novel:

The next minute was like a minute in the fair Crazy-House, or real Milledgeville. Already F. Jasmine had started for the door, for she could no longer stand the silence. But as she passed the soldier, he grasped her skirt and, limpened by fright, she was pulled down beside him on the bed. The next minute happened, but it was too crazy to be realized. She felt his arms around her and smelled his sweaty shirt. He was not rough, but it was crazier than if he had been rough—and in a second she was paralyzed by horror. She could not push away, but she bit down with all her might upon



what must have been the crazy soldier's tongue—so that he screamed out and she was free. Then he was coming toward her with an amazed pained face, and her hand reached the glass pitcher and brought it down upon his head. (*MW*, p.130)

Though she does not seem to understand the nature of what happened, she begins to piece the incidents together. Now she links all her past quasi-encounters with sex and develops more a big picture. She also begins to see reality a bit more clearly, rather than elaborate fantasy. Yet, unable still to accept the thought of sex, she labels it with the word “crazy.” Barbara A. White observes that fear of and resistance to sex is very frequent in novels of female adolescence, the reason being that for adolescent heroines sex implies domination by a man, and it is that loss of autonomy that they fear most strongly (103). In this respect, Anthony Giddens declares that:

Growing up in a cultural environment in which male sexual initiation is associated with the acquisition of power, whereas for a girl sexual intercourse entails a loss of individual choice, it is only logical that female adolescents like Mick and Frankie are reluctant to give up their “masculine” clothes and tomboy-ish ways. (51)

After having had to defend herself against the red-haired soldier, F. Jasmine returns from town desperately agitated and shaken. Moreover, her anxiety increases when her long-awaited trip to Winter Hill curiously takes her deeper into the Southern region: “They were supposed to be traveling north, but it seemed



to her rather that the bus was going south instead. The sky turned burning pale and the day blazed [...] And mile by mile the country-side became more southern” (*MW*, p.134). Though there is no scene devoted to the wedding; instead, the story picks up in the third section during the bus ride home. During this time, we are told that:

The wedding was like a dream, for all that came about occurred in a world beyond her power; from the moment when, sedate and proper, she shook hands with the grown people until the time, the wrecked wedding over, when she watched the car with the two of them driving away from her, and, flinging herself down in the sizzling dust, she cried out for the last time: ‘Take me! Take me!’—from the beginning to the end the wedding was unmanaged as a nightmare. (p.135)

Now, feelings of defeat dominate F. Jasmine's story that she learns Janice and Jarvis have no place for her. Her private universe crumbles when she faces the unpleasant reality that she cannot really be a part of her brother's wedding. Therefore, F. Jasmine’s imaginative world shatters as a result of her inability to communicate with the bride and groom and make them understand the importance of her dream. When she tries to remain in the car with them after the ceremony, F. Jasmine tragically realizes her incapacity for communication: “ [...] her tongue was heavy in her mouth and dumb [...] You are the we of me, her heart was saying, but she could only say aloud: ‘Take me!’” (*MW*, pp.137-38). In a pathetic scene, we see her



sorrowfully sit and cry in the dust of the empty road after the bride and groom have gone.

Thus, being unable to strike out on her own, and rejected by her brother and sister-in-law, she rides the bus back to town with her family and Berenice, “and now direction made no difference to her; she did not care” (p.136). At this third and last developmental stage, still lacking a group, still not a member, the personae of Frankie and F. Jasmine has once again changed. After “they put old Frankie out of the wedding,” as John Henry so eagerly notes, F. Jasmine is referred to by her proper, given name, the more adult ‘Frances’ (p.136). Now, “She wanted the whole world to die [...] She was sitting next to Berenice, back with the colored people, and when she thought of it she used the mean word she had never used before, nigger—for now she hated everyone and wanted only to spite and shame” (p.135). Verderame comments on her status, saying that “Frances’ unforgivable, vicious remark verifies the striking change in her character. The young girl who once shared Berenice's view of the world now turns against her. Frances insulates herself from her previous status as Other by rejecting her youthful idealism and attacking Berenice” (48). Yet, McCullers points out that: “They thought it was finished, but she would show them. The wedding had not included her, but she would still go into the world” (p.140). Despite being angry that Janice and Jarvis do not accept



her, Frances becomes fiercely determined to venture into a world bigger than the wedding—the Addams’ house, or her Southern town.

At this stage of her journey toward accommodation, Frances, though heartbroken, realizes the foolishness of thinking to go with the bride and groom. She says to Berenice, “I never meant to go with them! It was all just a joke. They said they were going to invite me to a visit when they get settled, but I wouldn’t go. Not for a million dollars” (p.139). While trying to console Frances and comfort her, Berenice offers to throw her a party:

Soon as you get settled in school and have a chance to make these friends, I think it would be a good idea to have a party. A lovely bridge party in the living room, with potato salad and those little olive sandwiches your Aunt Pet had for a club meeting you were so carried away about—the round-shaped kind with the tiny round hole in the middle and the olive showing. A lovely bridge party with delicious refreshments. How would you like that? (*MW*, p.139)

Back home after the fiasco at the wedding, Frances plans to leave the town and leaves a note to her father. She tells him that it is inevitable to leave because she cannot stand that existence and that her life becomes a burden. She also asks him not to try to capture her. Yet, it is worth noting that Frances’ thwarted final attempt at escape marks her transformation into a young Southern woman. In this regard, Verderame asserts that: “The failed effort to leave town for good verifies the restrictions



Southern society imposes on women. Frances complies with the men who call her father and take her home; she abides by their traditional system. Despite her quick wit and sharp mind, Frances lacks the skills to run away” (48). Consequently, McCullers illustrates that, “All at once, alone there in the night empty street, [Frances] realized that she did not know how. It is easy to talk about hopping a freight train, but how did bums and people really do it?”(MW, p.143). Thus, lacking the guide or, in other words, the female role model, one can argue, serves to make Frances exasperatedly observe that: “If there was only somebody to tell her what to do and where to go and how to get there!” (p.144). Verderame goes on to clarify that “Frances entertained the romantic notion of forging into the world on her own, but she failed. Instead, Frances retreats to the safety of home”(48). For now, Frances admits significantly her self-withdrawal to her respective world that “she was too scared to go into the world alone” (p.146). Accordingly, in Verderame’s words:

At the end of the novel, the portrait of Frances on the cool November afternoon fixes her firmly into a static position in her small Georgia town and severs the possibility of exploring the dynamic qualities of her character that we witness during the summer. Frankie's utter isolation and sheer terror motivate her to seek membership in a traditional community, that, like the cold, inhibits growth. In Frances, the southern story welcomes a new member who submits to its constraints. (48)



In *Tomorrow is Another Day*, Anne Jones describes the prominent symbol of the southern lady, that which Frances becomes: “[T]he southern lady is at the core of a region’s self-definition; the identity of the South is contingent in part upon the persistence of its tradition of the lady”(4). “Constantly chaperoned, economically dependent, denied development” (22), Jones explains the ornamental function of women in the South. Despite describing Southern women of an earlier time than McCullers’, Jones’s claims remain true for women in McCullers’ South. For Frances Addams, Verderame argues that:

[T]he Southern way of life means an end to staring at the freaks in the Freak Pavilion at the fair and an end to bludgeoning red-headed soldiers at the Blue Moon Café in town. Southern belles study books of art and poetry; they discuss Michelangelo and Tennyson. While Frances' life will not rival Frankie's adventures, never again will Frances be “a member of nothing in the world” because a Southern lady's life provides membership to a group. The coterie of Southern women that Frances joins is an established one that guarantees her clout, comfort, and company. (44)

In fact, the South that McCullers portrays forces her to remove Berenice and John Henry, from Frances world at the end of the novel to verify her maturation into a traditional Southern girl. Frances comes to understand that she can only grow and mature by coming into contact with others. Her new friend, Mary Littlejohn, personifies the Southern lady and escorts the Southern story into Frances’ life. The Southern story requires that Frances



befriend “a compliant young woman who personifies the South and its values [...] Mary introduces Frances to a world that dismisses the oppression and chaos that Frances’ housekeeper and cousin represent” (Verderame 44). But Frances meets Mary after her thirteenth birthday, well past “that green and crazy summer when Frankie was twelve years old.” Frankie's experiences during that summer reveal the traumatic period that defines her early adolescence and invites a life of conformity and accommodation.

By remaining in the limited sphere of her town, and by rejecting her transgressive behavior, Frances is afforded the safety and accommodation that Frankie sought before. “[P]rotection [is] afforded those women within privileged races and classes who do not transgress a limited sphere of movement” (Martin and Mohanty 196). Accordingly, Verderame explains that:

Though confining, Frances accepts the protection of the Southern woman’s story rather than construct a story of her own. Frances will live out her life in the South and maintain its values and traditions. While Frances waits anxiously to depart for a new house, she finds solace in her friend-ship with Mary Littlejohn. The queer drawings on the kitchen walls disappear under a new coat of paint. Berenice’s and John Henry’s stories collapse making room for Mary Littlejohn’s story, and Frances’ place in it. The hot summer ends. A cool autumn promises Frances the relief that she sought from the



sticky summer heat. But we are ever mindful of the compromises she makes to greet the new season. (48)

We can say that Frankie's new friendship is shown to be a positive development. She ultimately gains more from feeling that she belongs than she does from retaining the freedom to act however she wants. At the novel's end, Frankie is more mature and less morose—we see this in the “instant shock of happiness” she feels in the final line. The final line of the novel also shows expressively Mary Littlejohn quite literally breaking the silence of the Addams house: “the hush was shattered when, with an instant shock of happiness, [Frankie] heard the ringing of the bell” (*MW*, p.153). As Melissa Free suggests Mary Littlejohn certainly seems to be “shatter[ing] the silence of Frankie's former loneliness” (443).

To sum up, McCullers's Frankie went through three different stages in her life as a burgeoning young girl: from Frankie, to F. Jasmine and to Frances at the end. These stages marked the development of her impulsive journey to achieve maturity and accommodation. Significantly, due to pubertal changes, Frankie's sense of alienation, of not belonging to any group, that she was disconnected to the whole world around her, caused her a lot of pain. Such incidents, in addition to the patriarchal hegemony and the prevailing social norms which were imposed upon her, all played as catalysts to let her out of



the cocoon and seek different identities throughout the text. Hence, she planned to create an atmosphere to get out of that dreary dullness. Accordingly, she fantasied about taking part in her brother's wedding at winter Hill, believing that this experience would unite her with her brother and his bride.

The study made clear how Frankie's dreams were related to recognition and belonging. She wanted to be seen and, more importantly, wanted to be heard—not within the confines of a one-on-one relationship, but on a grand scale. Mary Littlejohn seemed to be functioning as a stage in which Frankie (Frances at the end) could further develop her sense of self. This particular friendship also helped Frances survive the disappointment of the wedding and move on. Finally, the confident Frances was able not only to assert herself in the traditionally racist and patriarchal Southern world, but also to plan a future for herself, by herself, which included becoming a great writer. McCullers's world and her prolific literary output will certainly remain a fertile soil yet to be ploughed.



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