Feminism, Race, and Sexuality in the Twentieth Century Anglophone Literature

Batković, Tena

Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2023

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:961114

Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet

Sveučilišni diplomski dvopredmetni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i hrvatskog jezika i književnosti – nastavnički smjer

Tena Batković

Feminizam, rasa i seksualnost u anglofonoj književnosti dvadesetog stoljeća

Diplomski rad

Mentorica: prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

Osijek, 2023.

Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet

Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost

Sveučilišni diplomski dvopredmetni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i hrvatskog jezika i književnosti – nastavnički smjer

Tena Batković

Feminizam, rasa i seksualnost u anglofonoj književnosti dvadesetog stoljeća

Diplomski rad

Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti

Znanstveno polje: filologija

Znanstvena grana: anglistika

Mentorica: prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

Osijek, 2023.

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Double Major MA Study Programme in English Language and Literature and Croatian Language and Literature – Teaching Studies

Tena Batković

Feminism, Race, and Sexuality in the Twentieth Century Anglophone Literature

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Biljana Oklopčić, Full Professor

Osijek, 2023

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of English
Double Major MA Study Programme in English Language and Literature and Croatian Language and Literature – Teaching Studies

Tena Batković

Feminism, Race, and Sexuality in the Twentieth Century Anglophone Literature

Master's Thesis

Scientific area: humanities
Scientific filed: philology
Scientific branch: English studies

Supervisor: Dr. Biljana Oklopčić, Full Professor

Osijek, 2023

IZJAVA

Izjavljujem s punom materijalnom i moralnom odgovornošću da sam ovaj rad samostalno napisala te da u njemu nema kopiranih ili prepisanih dijelova teksta tuđih radova, a da nisu označeni kao citati s navođenjem izvora odakle su preneseni.

Svojim vlastoručnim potpisom potvrđujem da sam suglasna da Filozofski fakultet u Osijeku trajno pohrani i javno objavi ovaj moj rad u internetskoj bazi završnih i diplomskih radova knjižnice Filozofskog fakulteta u Osijeku, knjižnice Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku i Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu.

Tena Batković

U Osijeku, 11. 09. 2023.

0122230121

Contents

Introduction 7
1. Feminism 8
2. Feminism in Academia 10
2.1. Feminist Criticism 10
3. Virginia Woolf's Life and Work 13
3.1. *Orlando* 14
3.1.1. Androgyny and Gender Performance 15
3.1.2. Femininity 17
3.1.3. Marriage and Sexuality 19
3.1.4. Race 21
4. Carson McCullers's Life and Work 22
4.1. *The Member of the Wedding* 23
4.1.1. Grotesque 23
4.1.2. Femininity 26
4.1.3. Race in *The Member of the Wedding* 29
5. Alice Walker's Life and Work 31
5.1. *The Color Purple* 33
5.1.1. Community 33
5.1.2. Woman's Identity 35
5.1.3. Sexuality 36
5.1.4. Abuse 38
Conclusion 42
Works Cited 44

Abstract

In today's world, the feminist movement is not just concerned with how gender affects one's position in society. It rather wants to find out how gender, in relation to other social categories such as race and sexuality, affects one's identity and shapes their experiences. In the twentieth century literature, many women writers have explored the question of identity in their works and connected it to the concepts of gender, race, and sexuality. The aim of this thesis is, therefore, to explore how gender, race, and sexuality determine woman's identity in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* and whether identity is depicted as a restricting heteronormative, race-determined concept in these works.

Keywords: feminism, gender, race, sexuality, Virginia Woolf, Carson McCullers, Alice Walker, *The Color Purple, The Member of the Wedding, Orlando*

Introduction

The question of feminism has been one of the most important topics of the twentieth century. At the end of the nineteenth century, women had made significant progress in fighting for their rights, but in the twentieth century the topic of woman's position in society has become one of the most discussed research topics. In discussing women's rights, scholars focus on society as a patriarchal system in which male domination is achieved by oppression of women. In gender studies, scholars have been discussing in which ways women's identities have been regulated. In addition to women studies, studies discussing questions of sexuality and race have become prominent in academia, especially in the later part of the twentieth century. When examining society through the lens of oppressive identities, it has become clear that all these forms of oppression are interwoven and cannot be examined individually. Specifically, not all women suffer just gender oppression, which has been the primary concern of mainstream feminism, so it is important to focus on women as versatile identities and examine in which ways gender, along with sexuality and race, affect women.

The aim of this thesis is to examine in which ways female identities have been created in the novels of the twentieth century female writers such as Virginia Woolf, Carson McCullers and Alice Walker, and in which ways they challenge the patriarchal system. It will be examined how their novels *Orlando*, *The Member of the Wedding*, and *The Color Purple* approach the concept of gender but also sexuality and race in relation to gender, and in which ways they depict woman's struggle with the idealised idea of femininity. The first chapters of the thesis discuss the concept of feminism and its influence on academia, define feminism, race, and sexuality in the realm of literature research, and set the ground for the analysis. The main part of the thesis analyses the concepts of gender, race, and sexuality in the above-mentioned novels. Lastly, the conclusion summarises the research results.

1. Feminism

In its simplest definition, feminism is a movement that wants to achieve equality between men and women in political, social, and economic aspects of life. Linda Kinnahan explains the origins of the word "feminism" by saying that

> the popular use of the term *feministe* beginning in late nineteenth-century France and migrating as *feminist* to England and America by the first decade of the twentieth century signaled a shift from the "Woman Movement" – advocating equality with men within systems organized around and for men – to the "Feminist Movement," which introduced a more radical set of demands to dismantle economic, social, religious, and cultural institutions enforcing women's oppression and inferiority. (55)

The issue of the position of women in society was raised in the nineteenth century to counteract the belief that "women were . . . weak intellectually and physically" (Shihada 121). A woman was deemed an object, a bearer of children, and thought to be intellectually inferior to a man. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a worldwide movement where women in several countries secured their right to vote in elections. After that, the fight for women's rights got more widespread, and what came out of it was a movement that wanted to explain society as a construct made to uplift patriarchal system that was benefiting only the few. Since the need for a movement supporting women's rights was established, there has been a cultural shift that is still present today and that wants to explain not just the inequality between men and women but also the oppressiveness of society.

What developed out of the discourse on feminism was the term "intersectionality" – "a concept that describes the interaction between systems of oppression. The concept grew out of efforts to specify how race and gender relations shaped social and political life" (Weldon 193-94). The concept of intersectionality is "especially valuable for those scholars (such as critical theorists) who aim to critically evaluate social relations, exposing relations of domination, or speaking truth to power" (Weldon 193).

As Laurel Weldon explains, marginalized groups other than white women feel underrepresented in the discourse because they do not only suffer from the consequences of misogyny, but they also suffer the consequences of racism, as, for example, black women: "[b]lack women face many problems as black women, and their unique perspectives, identities, and experiences, cannot be derived from examination of the experiences and position of either

black men or white women" (Weldon 194). What studies of intersectionality want to discuss is how race, class, gender, and sexuality, among other structures, define identities in society; "intersectionality is an aspect of social organization that shapes all of our lives: gender structures shape the lives of both women and men, and everyone has a race/ethnicity" (Weldon 195).

Consequently, one of the main issues feminism as a movement deals with has been the "reconciliation of universalism and difference . . . [as t]he category of women is not chosen by women, it represents the space in patriarchy from which women must speak and which they struggle to redefine" (Goldman, "The Feminist Criticism" 77). In the context of this thesis, intersectionality is important because it explores the way in which feminism, dealing with the question of gender, is connected to sexuality and race, and in which ways it is presented in the works of female writers.

2. Feminism in Academia

The question of feminism has entered academia in the second half of the twentieth century, most notably in the form of gender studies. Some of the most notable philosophers and psychoanalysts whose works have influenced our understanding of gender are Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, and Luce Irigaray among others. This thesis will draw its theoretical support from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*. At the core of Butler's theory is the idea of gender performativity. "Challenging the idea that gender behaviour follows naturally and inevitably from sexual essence, Butler suggests that gender is a series of repeated and stylised acts that create the illusion of a bodily ground" (Love 308). Butler believes that our gender is a social construct that is reaffirmed through repetition of acts. As Halla Beloff explains, "[w]hat must be true is that we are constantly in the business of stating, maintaining, repairing or hiding our social identity. So it follows that we are also constantly in some state of danger. We have to keep up with work on the 'right' self all the time" (58).

2.1. Feminist Criticism

As any kind of literary criticism, feminist criticism follows a certain poetics. For Kinnahan (54), poetics is a connection between poetry and theory; it denotes structures, figures, and operations used in language. She further defines poetics in the context of feminism:

> feminist poetic projects have done cultural work on many levels and through many layers, launching protests and social critiques; recording women's lives and breaking silences; expressing, multiplying, and exploding notions of identity; challenging gender and other normative codes; and seeking to re-signify, reexamine, and revise women's lives, bodies, experiences, and languages as they have been prescribed by male-centered worldviews. (Kinnahan 55)

For decades now, feminist literary criticism attempts to bring to light many works of female writers and to make a canon of female writers that were overlooked and shunned during their lifetime. During the rise of feminist criticism, black feminist criticism and lesbian feminist criticism have also come to prominence.

Black feminist criticism refers to "a body of critical and creative work written by women of African descent in the United States . . . fostered by the Civil Rights Movement and developed in conjunction with the Second Wave of American feminism, which was dominated by white women" (Keizer 154). According to Keizer, it appeared in the late 1960s, and its main concerns were "establishing a sense of continuity between black women's struggles and critical approaches to literature and culture in previous eras and in the present" (154).

Some of the most famous black feminists who have contributed to the expansion of black feminist literary criticism are Alice Walker, Barbara Smith, Deborah McDowell, Barbara Christian, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde among others. In their works, they have tried to link "the general concerns of black feminism with the work of literary criticism" (Keizer 156). For example, the link between black feminist literary criticism and psychoanalysis was made by Hortense Spillers, who "sought to determine whether Freudian and Lacanian theories can legitimately and usefully be applied to African American texts and contexts" (Keizer 158). In her work, Spillers connects the psychoanalytic approaches with the experience of slavery and its impact on African American families. bell hooks touches upon the subject of black masculinity and "uses the unconventional black men . . . [she] remembers from her childhood to argue for the alternatives to patriarchal masculinity already embedded within African American culture" (Keizer 159). The contributions to the discussion of black women's sexuality are to be found in the works of Barbara Smith, Audre Lorde, and Evelyn Hammonds who "have been central to the project of reclaiming black female sexuality from its distortion either by denigrating stereotypes or by the code of respectability traditionally imposed by African American middle-class culture" (Keizer 160).

When it comes to the beginnings of lesbian literary criticism, Caroline Gonda explains that "[c]riticism shaped by lesbian and feminist concerns pre-dates the rise of second-wave feminism and lesbian feminism's emergence from it. This earlier criticism is sometimes overlooked because of its origins outside the academy" (170). Defining the place of lesbian feminist literary criticism is, according to Gonda, hard as "[t]he question of lesbian feminist criticism's relationship to other genres and disciplines has been a complex one, made more so by the importance of practitioner critics and by lesbian feminist criticism's ambivalent relation to the academy" (173). Over the decades, lesbian feminist criticism has also been called out for overlooking racial and class differences (Gonda 171).

Not only has lesbian feminist criticism been called out for its faults in representation but lesbians have also faced marginalization in the feminist movement as "women in the

mainstream of feminism worried about the image of feminist activism as dominated by 'man-haters'" (Love 304). "The perceived 'threat' of lesbianism to second-wave feminism is not … [only] explained either by simple homophobia or by strategic worries about mainstream acceptance" (Love 305) but also by the division of sexuality and gender:

> it is essential to separate gender and sexuality analytically to reflect more accurately their separate social existence. . . . lesbian feminist ideology has mostly analysed the oppression of lesbians in terms of the oppression of women. However, lesbians are also oppressed as queers . . . by the operation of sexual, not gender, stratification. (Rubin 178-79)

3. Virginia Woolf's Life and Work

Virginia Woolf is regarded as one of the most important female writers of the twentieth century. She deeply influenced generations of female writers and was a crucial feminist figure. Her father was "encouraging her to roam freely, from an early age, through his extensive library, and later giving her daily supervision in reading" (Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 5). One of the most painful parts of Woolf's early life was the sexual abuse she endured "at the hands of her half-brothers from her mother's first marriage, especially George" (Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 5), which she addressed later in her life. It is important to mention that biographers almost always overlooked the abuse, claiming she was "overreacting."[1]

When it comes to her political work, "Janet Case encouraged Virginia to become more active in the suffrage movement" (Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 12). Even though she was involved in the movement, Goldman notes that "she participated in the constitutional methods of the suffragists, rather than in the extra-legal tactics" and in her famous work *Three Guineas* (1938), she "famously declares 'feminist' a 'vicious', 'corrupt' and 'obsolete' term" (Goldman, "The Feminist Criticism" 69). "During this period … her 'time has been wasted a good deal upon Suffrage'" (Woolf qtd. in Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 12). Her involvement with the feminist movement is quite intricate and has been a topic of many discussions among feminist critics ever since.

Woolf's "aesthetic understanding, and broader philosophy, were in part shaped by, and at first primarily interpreted in terms of, (male) Bloomsbury's dominant aesthetic and philosophical preoccupations" (Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 8). She has been hailed as "an innovator of experimental form, 'impressionism' and stream-of-consciousness" (Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 127). In the 1950s and the 1960s, critics tried to find a "unifying aesthetic mode in Woolf's writing" (Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 129). They were also using existentialism as a means of defining her work, but the "existentialist approach did not foreground Woolf's feminism" (Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 130). In the 1970s and the 1980s, Woolf's works saw a rise in the number of studies, "most notably in relation to feminism" (Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 130). In the 1980s, "Woolf was central to the framing of many of the major theoretical developments in literary critical engagements with feminism, postmodernism, deconstruction and psychoanalysis" (Goldman,

[1] Louise DeSalvo dealt with this topic in her study *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work*.

The Cambridge Introduction 132-33). From the 1990s to today, her works have been examined "in the context of empire, drawing on the influential field of postcolonial studies" (Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 134), with her essays gathering attention of a number of critics. Nevertheless, "Woolf's place in the frames of modernism and feminism remains the dominant concern of Woolf studies" (Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 134).

3.1. *Orlando*

In *Orlando*, one of her best-known novels, Woolf discusses "the gender politics of poetics and artistic subjectivity across the ages" (Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 65) by presenting to her readers a character named Orlando who lives through a few centuries and in that time changes his/her gender. The inspiration for the novel was Vita Sackville-West, Woolf's long-term friend and lover, "the only child of the third Baron Sackville and Victoria Lady Sackville . . . A prolific writer of poetry, fiction, biography and travel books" (Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 19). One of the things many biographers and critics note is that "the development of their close relationship . . . coincided with Woolf's most productive years as a writer" (Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 18-19), and that their close relationship resulted in the novel *Orlando*.

It has already been mentioned that Woolf made a great impact on lesbian literary criticism with her novels and that her sexuality has been described by many biographers: "[t]hese biographers tend to agree that Woolf's love for women was, to varying degrees, central to her feminist, socialist, and pacifist politics, and her writing" (Swanson 185). Woolf's perception of her own sexuality was ambiguous: "[while] Woolf stops short of identifying herself as one of these women, she does not deny her own lesbian desires, . . . [d]escribing her own erotic interests in women as 'a turn towards Sapphism'" (Kaivola qtd. in Swanson 35). Kaivola concludes that Woolf did not hide from her sexual desires, but never identified herself as a lesbian, which can be blamed on the perception of lesbians at that time, which was "a man's soul trapped in a female body" (qtd. in Swanson 189).

3.1.1. Androgyny and Gender Performance

In our culture, every human being falls either into the masculine or feminine category based on their biological sex. This is "in fact an artificial conjunction of cultural constructs which has naturalized itself in order to conceal and hence perpetuate the power relations" (Craps 176). In other words, referring to Butler's theory of gender performativity, Craps asserts that "[t]he presumed continuities between sex, gender and desire are an illusion set up by a power/knowledge regime which serves the interests of heterosexuality and – by casting male/masculine and female/feminine as a hierarchical opposition – masculine hegemony" (176). Craps thus confirms Butler's thesis that sex and gender categories are set in a way that serves the patriarchal system of masculine domination.

In such a system, identities not succumbing to strictly defined rules are called "incoherent," or according to Butler, "gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined" (Butler 23). Craps goes on to claim that Butler defines abjects as those "who form the 'constitutive outside' to the domain of the subject" (Craps 176), and that that 'abject domain' "offers a vantage point from which the heteropatriarchal symbolic can be challenged" (Craps 176). Abjects can simply be defined as identities that do not fall into structured categories and can challenge already existing systems; they are identities whose "gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not 'follow' from either sex or gender" (Butler 24). If this view on gender is applied to a character such as Woolf's Orlando, one can easily define such a character as one who challenges the existing system of gender and masculine hegemony. Woolf herself wrote in one of her letters that *Orlando* would "be great fun to write" (qtd. in Goldman, *The Cambridge Introduction* 65) as as a means of parodying strict gender conventions and expectations imposed on women.

The process by which Orlando turns into a woman occurs in his sleep when the three figures visit him: Lady of Modesty, Lady of Chastity, and Lady of Purity, uttering the following:

> those who prohibit; those who deny; those who reverence without knowing why; those who praise without understanding; the still very numerous . . . tribe of the respectable; who prefer to see not; desire to know not . . . those still worship us, and with reason; for we have given them Wealth, Prosperity, Comfort, Ease. To them we go, you we leave. Come, Sisters, come! This is no place for us here. (Woolf 91)

López García argues that this speech defines femininity as a product of patriarchy to support male domination: "[i]n this 'tribe of the respectable', everyone enjoys a series of privileges in detriment of women's emancipation and independence from constructions of femininity that demand pure, chaste, modest subjects, and do not allow them to act outside of social gender boundaries" (16). This speech can be interpreted as a foreshadowing of what is about to come because right after the three figures leave, the trumpets become much louder and finally exclaim: "'THE TRUTH!' at which Orlando woke. He stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice left but confess—he was a woman" (Woolf 91).

After the transformation, Orlando feels the same, which is confirmed by the narrator: "Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. Their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same" (Woolf 92). In her analysis of *Orlando*, Esther González suggests that Orlando "might, therefore, be the literary representation of Woolf's emerging theory on androgyny. In this case, Orlando's respective portraits as man and woman only illustrate that the androgyne is a man-womanly or a woman-manly. One sex always commands at least physically, in spite of the tight collaboration between both sexes" (78). This interpretation can be supported by the way Orlando switches between masculinity and femininity and finds safe space in androgyny. Even though Orlando initially strives to achieve femininity, s/he realises that it does not come naturally to women and thus switches between masculine and feminine representation of herself.

It is important to note that Orlando also rejects succumbing to either male or female gender: "'Heavens!' she thought, 'what fools they make of us—what fools we are!' And here it would seem from some ambiguity in her terms that she was censuring both sexes equally, as if she belonged to neither; and indeed, for the time being, she seemed to vacillate; she was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each" (Woolf 105). Furthermore, Orlando is not a stranger to switching between genders through clothes. In one instance in the novel, Orlando dresses as a man: "Now she opened a cupboard in which hung still many of the clothes she had worn as a young man of fashion, and from among them she chose a black velvet suit richly trimmed with Venetian lace" (Woolf 143), and meets a lady who invites him/her to her house. While walking with her, the act "roused in Orlando all the feelings which become a man. She looked, she felt, she talked like one. Yet, having been so

lately a woman herself" (Woolf 144). It is obvious that Woolf here creates an androgynous being who is quite comfortable switching between what is considered masculine and feminine, showing that those things do not come naturally to us, but are rather taught through socialising and experience: "[g]ender is shown to be fluid and multiple, irreducible to binary oppositions, which are exposed as unduly regulatory and exclusionary" (Craps 184).

Similarly, Stokes argues that Orlando "valorizes an androgynous blending of gender and sexual differences, it refuses an outright deconstruction of those differences, thereby leaving them ontologically intact" (350). To conclude, even though Woolf presents her idea of androgyny and plays with the identities of masculine and feminine, she does not destroy the culturally given stereotypes of masculine and feminine behaviour, but rather plays into them. Her character switches between masculine and feminine given by the cultural rules.

3.1.2. Femininity

One of the first things that should be pointed out when discussing *Orlando* is the relationship between the narrator, or biographer, and the main character. In describing the work of a biographer, he states that it is "to plod, without looking to right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth . . . till we fall plump into the grave and write finis on the tombstone above our heads" (Woolf 42). Yet, when Orlando's gender change occurs, the biographer expresses difficulty in describing him:

> and we must snatch space to remark how discomposing it is for her biographer that this culmination to which the whole book moved, this peroration with which the book was to end, should be dashed from us on a laugh casually like this; but the truth is that when we write of a woman, everything is out of place—culminations and perorations; the accent never falls where it does with a man. (Woolf 209)

Craps views this as Woolf's purposeful attempt to make a parody of traditional, masculine narration, saying that "[t]o the dismay of the biographer, who wants everything to be predictable and in its place, woman refuses to be contained and tied down by his masculinist narrative paradigm" (178). It can also be argued that Woolf here depicts Orlando as unpredictable, which can be connected to the stereotype of women being labelled as emotional, as opposed to men who are logical. In describing Orlando, the narrator frequently adds comments such as "here another self came in ... (she was sunk in gloom: tears actually shaped

themselves and she had long given over crying). Trees, she said. (Here another self came in.)" (Woolf 120). After following Orlando for some time, the narrator then expresses his frustration at her behaviour and exclaims that it is "out of place" (Woolf 208).

The most peculiar thing about Orlando is that her appearance has been in focus since the first sentence of the novel: "He—for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it" (Woolf 7), and just after her transition, she was described as a mix of womanly and manly traits: "Orlando stood stark naked. No human being, since the world began, has ever looked more ravishing. His form combined in one the strength of a man and a woman's grace" (Woolf 91). In further analysis, it will be shown how Orlando tries to adapt to the concept of femininity, how Woolf herself plays with the concept of femininity, and how "[i]t is nevertheless the idea of femininity, and not femininity itself that Woolf mocks and nullifies" (González 83).

After her transition, the narrator makes it clear that "in future we must, for convention's sake, say 'her' for 'his,' and 'she' for 'he'" (Woolf 92) because "Orlando herself showed no surprise at it" (Woolf 92). She then gets dressed, "stuck a pair of pistols in her belt" (Woolf 93) and leaves with gipsies. Even though a woman, Orlando lives among gipsies without exhibiting the expected feminine behaviour; a stir in their relationship occurs when Orlando seeks privileges she enjoyed in her previous life. She tries to explain their differences "by saying that she came of an ancient and civilized race, whereas these gipsies were an ignorant people, not much better than savages" (Woolf 97). Yet, only in her "civilized race" did she have to learn how to act in a feminine way, which leads to the conclusion that femininity is a social construct that is taught. Orlando does not strive to adapt to femininity before going back to England, she is aware of her change, but it does not make her act or behave differently until she is forced to do so.

Orlando thus "finds herself abruptly faced with the task of coming to terms with her new sex. Her feminine clothing now pressurizes her to conform to social expectations of gendered behaviour" (Craps 180). Before going on a boat back to England, she "bought herself a complete outfit of such clothes as women then wore, and it was in the dress of a young Englishwoman" (Woolf 102). On the boat, she realises that "[i]f the sight of my ankles means death to an honest fellow … I must, in all humanity, keep them covered" (Woolf 105). She realises that women learn how to act in a feminine way: "for women are not (judging by my own short experience of the sex) obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature. They can only attain these graces, without which they may enjoy none of the delights of life,

by the most tedious discipline" (Woolf 104). Orlando understands that clothes are an important factor in gender identity, but lacks understanding that gender-specific behaviour has to be learned.

Orlando's learning to act in a feminine way reaffirms the idea that our identity is maintained and not natural to us:

> [b]ecause Orlando has to work at establishing her credentials as a woman in a relatively self-conscious way, whereas "normal" women – or men, for that matter – are under the illusion that they are just doing what comes naturally, she brings to the surface many of the tacit understandings that guide the creation and maintenance of our binary gender system. (Craps 182)

3.1.3. Marriage and Sexuality

Another important issue that *Orlando* focuses on is sexuality. Even though Craps notes that this novel is thought to be "a kind of lesbian-feminist manifesto" (185), Orlando feels under pressure to succumb to traditional heteronormative ideals of what women need to achieve – to find themselves a husband and give birth to children, which directly affects her sexual desires. In the novel, Orlando notes that

> "Everyone is mated except myself," she mused, as she trailed disconsolately across the courtyard. There were the rooks; Canute and Pippin even – transitory as their alliances were, still each this evening seemed to have a partner. "Whereas, I, who am mistress of it all," Orlando thought, glancing as she passed at the innumerable emblazoned windows of the hall, "am single, am mateless, am alone." Such thoughts have never entered her head before. Now they bore her down unescapably. (Woolf 164)

Orlando's sudden desire to get married is, for sure, Woolf's satirical comment on the Victorian ideals imposed on women as Orlando still feels the same attraction for women: "And as all Orlando's loves had been women, … though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved" (Woolf 107), which shows that "[h]er longing for a husband is cast as unhealthy . . . By thus presenting heterosexuality – rather than homosexuality – as deviant and pathological sexual behaviour, Orlando undermines the dominant sexuality's claim to naturalness and normativity" (Craps 185). Her desire for a husband is presented to be abnormal, which directly

contradicts the Victorian ideals. Drawing on Esther González's idea that Woolf parodies femininity in this novel, it can also be concluded that she parodies heterosexual desires and the foundation of marriage.

Despite her preferences, Orlando gets married to Shelmerdine. With her marriage to Shelmerdine, "she has conformed just enough to slip by unnoticed in the age" (Craps 185). Similarly, Jaime Hovey argues that "her public heterosexual commitment to Shelmerdine solidly establishes her national and class legitimacy and helps restore her status" (400). By obliging to be a part of patriarchal system, Orlando secures herself freedom to write freely about her love for other women, which is most evident in the fact that her love for Sasha still stays with her even as she turns into a woman: "and if the consciousness of being of the same sex had any effect at all, it was to quicken and deepen those feelings which she had had as a man" (Woolf 61).

Orlando's homoerotic love is possible, as the narrator discloses, because men believe women cannot feel affection or desire for their own sex:

> All they desire is—but hist again—is that not a man's step on the stair? All they desire, we were about to say when the gentleman took the very words out of our mouths. Women have no desires, says this gentleman, coming into Nell's parlour; only affectations. . . . women are incapable of any feeling of affection for their own sex and hold each other in the greatest aversion. (Woolf 146)

Orlando can therefore enjoy writing sapphic poems and love other women due to men's inability to admit women can feel affection/desire for other women: "Orlando professed great enjoyment in the society of her own sex, and leave it to the gentlemen to prove, as they are very fond of doing, that this is impossible" (Woolf 147). Lesbianism is here presented as being repressed by the system of patriarchy and, what is more, female homoerotic desires are deemed impossible as women "can find nothing to say to each other" (Woolf 146).

3.1.4. Race

The question of race in Virginia Woolf's works has long been a topic of debate among the scholars. While she managed to dwell on the topics such as androgyny and misogyny, her lack of understanding of the concept of race has been reflected in her work. Karen Kaivola points this up: "[w]hile Orlando turns out to be neither unambiguously male, heterosexual, or civilized, his/her race remains relatively pure" (253). Kaivola (253) also draws attention to the fact that Woolf uses the images that do not make the reader question Orlando's racial identity, such as "a brow like the swelling of a marble dome pressed between the two blank medallions which were his temples" (Woolf 8). Even though presenting an ambiguous image of Orladno in terms of gender and sexuality, Woolf never leaves Orlando's race open for questioning.

Woolf, nevertheless, includes the references to black women in the conversation between Orlando and Shermaldine:

> how he went to the top of the mast in a gale; there reflected on the destiny of man, came down again, had a whisky and soda, went on shore, was trapped by a black woman, repented, reasoned it out; … All this and a thousand other things she understood him to say, and so when she replied, "Yes, negresses are seductive, aren't they?" he, having told her that the supply of biscuits now gave out, he was surprised and delighted to find how well she had taken his meaning. (Woolf 171-72).

In their conversation, Hovey argues, "Orlando and Shelmerdine's snappy repartee masks their discussion of sexual tastes as a conversation about travel adventures" (401), but the references to black women, "a racially and nationally colonized figure appropriated to mark the closeting of their queerness, signifies sexual perversity and ambivalent gender identification" (401). As Kaivola explains, the sentence "negresses are seductive" (Woolf 172) serves "as a metaphor for their own 'deviant' sexual proclivities" (253).[2] While Woolf uses images to convey whiteness of Orlando, she also uses colonial ideologies to show how stigmatized homosexual desires were in society back then, comparing queerness with harmful stereotypes about black people's sexualities.

[2] In one of the next chapters, the view that black people have often been labelled as 'hypersexual' will be analysed in greater detail. Woolf here applies "deviant" sexuality of black people as a "code" for white sexuality: "Orlando and Shelmerdine agree to closet their sexuality, to kiss their unacceptable sexual objects . . . in the dark" (Hovey 402).

4. Carson McCullers's Life and Work

Another woman writer whose work will be analysed in this thesis is Carson McCullers. The chapters to follow will focus on the grotesque and the masquerade, tomboys, and the idealised femininity, as well as the sexuality of female adolescents in the American South in her novel *The Member of the Wedding.*

Carson McCullers was born in 1917 in Georgia, in the American South. Since young age, she was perceived as "an odd, lonely girl of uncommon talents" (Graver 5). She moved to New York to study at Juilliard but was forced to abandon college and work, yet still managed to "register for creative writing courses at Columbia and New York University" (Graver 6). Unfortunately, due to the long battle with "pneumonia, heart disease, and a savage series of paralytic strokes" (Graver 6), she died at the age of 50, but left literary work in which she created the characters that can be classified as "freaks, [as] characters constrained by corporeal anomalies that defy the imposition of normative categories of identity" (Adams 18).

To understand her characters, it is important to grasp who exactly Carson McCullers was. Many biographers and critics point out her affinity for women even though she was married to Reeves McCullers her whole life. Biographers have never been sure if she was homosexual or bisexual, yet growing up as a possibly queer person in the American South left a deep mark on her, resulting in her flight from the South. Her escape to New York marked a new beginning for McCullers: "[h]aving moved to New York, she discovered a new society that allowed her to pursue any type of relationship she desired. Finding a community that embraced homosexuality helped McCullers reexamine her notions about the South's rigidity and repressiveness" (McKinnie and Dews 94). McCullers's feeling of being misplaced in the South is best explained in Viriginia Spencer Carr's biography of McCullers: "When Carson was younger, some of the girls gathered in little clumps of femininity and threw rocks at her when she walked nearby, snickering loud asides and tossing within hearing distance such descriptive labels as 'weird,' 'freakish-looking,' and 'queer'" (Spencer Carr qtd. in McKinnie and Dews 93).

Throughout her work, she has created the characters who are labelled as "freaks," "queers,"[3] even "grotesque." To understand her incessant need to portray her characters in that

[3] The word queer had negative connotations in the South: queerness signalled difference in a derogatory way, with the underlying implication that that which was most queer-the nastiest difference-was sexual deviance" (Free 427).

way, one only has to look into her life experiences. Even though she left the South at young age, the ideals it pushed onto her in those first 18 years of her life haunted McCullers in her later life, which was reflected in her literary work. McCullers uses literature as a means of dealing with Southern ideals and creates peculiar characters who are dealing with the sense of loneliness and the lack of understanding.

4.1. *The Member of the Wedding*

As already noted, McCullers' fiction is filled with peculiar characters who defy Southern ideas of femininity and masculinity. One of the terms that critics use while discussing her work is "grotesque." This term will, in our analysis, be explored through the character of Frankie Adams, a young twelve-year-old girl who lives in the American South, much like McCullers did. Her mother died while she was still an infant and she is being raised by her father, a local jeweller, and Berenice, their housekeeper. The story revolves around Frankie's desire to adapt and fit into with other kids of her age because "Frankie feels lonely, isolated, and excluded" (Johnson 11).

4.1.1. Grotesque

This chapter will first attempt to define the term "grotesque" in the context of McCullers's work. Gleeson-White argues that "McCullers's fiction embraces so-called grotesques: a dwarf and a giant; tomboys, cross-dressers, and homosexuals; deaf-mutes and cripples. It is this collection of outsiders—physical and psychological misfits that invites the classification of McCullers as a writer of the southern grotesque" ("Introduction" 2) and concludes that her characters have become the "symbols of existential angst" ("Introduction" 3). McCullers uses grotesque to depict everything that goes out of the idea of "normal": one's physical appearance, sexuality, disability and, in her own words, "a bold and outwardly callous juxtaposition of the tragic with the humorous, the immense with the trivial, the sacred with the bawdy, the whole soul of a man with a materialistic detail" (McCullers qtd. in Gleeson-White, *Strange Bodies* 5).

McCullers's idea of grotesque is embodied in the figure of a freak, the freak being, according to Gleeson-White, a "sensitive youth", more specifically a female sensitive youth

such as Frankie Adams. Early critics failed to recognise this grotesqueness/freakishness as a specifically female experience; for them the novel was "a story about being human, that is, male, rather than specifically female" (Johnson 10). What is more, McCullers connects the idea of freakishness to Frankie's adolescent body: "not only is she female, but she is in that liminal state between childhood and adulthood and . . . between femininity and masculinity" (Gleeson-White, *Strange Bodies* 12). Rachel Adams furthers this idea by observing that "freaks" and "queers" are closely related terms:

> [t]he queer refers loosely to acts and desires that confound the notion of a normative heterosexuality as well as to the homosexuality that is its abject byproduct. Freaks are beings who make those queer tendencies visible on the body's surfaces. Freaks and queers suffer because they cannot be assimilated into the dominant social order, yet their presence highlights the excesses, contradictions, and incoherencies at the very heart of that order. (17)

In the novel, McCullers puts Frankie in the realm of freaks by making her compare herself to the literal freaks in the carnival: the Giant and the Half-Man Half-Woman: "[t]he Giant was more than eight feet high, with huge loose hands and hang-jaw face. . . . Half-Man Half-Woman, a morphydite and a miracle of science. This freak was divided completely in half – the left side was a man and the right side a woman" (McCullers 17-18). Even though Frankie feels connected to them: "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" (McCullers 18), she still longs for being "normal" and thus asks Berenice to affirm her normalcy: "'Do you think I will grow into a Freak?' Frankie whispered. 'You?' said Berenice again. 'Why, certainly not, I trust Jesus'" (McCullers 18-19). The roots of Frankie's anxiety can be looked for in her adolescence as her gaze at "the androgynous Half-Man Half-Woman also conjures up the unease of the adolescent confronted with a strange, emerging sexuality and changing body, as well as the problems of correct gender identification and behavior" (Gleeson-White, "Revisiting the Southern Grotesque" 64).

Another problem Frankie faces is her height, which connects her to the other Freak at the show, the Giant: "This August she was twelve and five-sixths years old. She was five feet five and three quarter inches tall, and she wore a number seven shoe. In the past year she had grown four inches, or at least that was what she judged" (McCullers 16). In Frankie's eyes, "a female giant is grotesquely inappropriate simply by virtue of her immensity, which signals desires and aspirations inappropriate to typical codes of feminine behavior" (Adams 23). The

freakishness of her height is confirmed by the other children in the novel: "Already the hateful little summer children hollered to her: 'Is it cold up there?'" (McCullers 16). Frankie goes to predict how tall she would get if she continues to grow that fast and concludes: "And what would be a lady who is over nine feet high? She would be a Freak" (McCullers 16-17).

McCullers's idea of freakishness/grotesqueness can be tied to Bakhtin's idea of the grotesque body, which is "a body of excess, and so it queries borders and neat categories. Perhaps most importantly, it is a body in flux, in a constant process of reformation and reemergence: it is becoming" (qtd. in Gleeson-White, "Revisiting the Southern Grotesque" 59). For Bakhtin, the body is everchanging, always in a process of transforming, and "transgressive because it challenges normative forms of representation and behavior; it disturbs because it loves the abject and will not rest; it is always in a state of becoming. The carnivalesque grotesque, then, is a strategy of resistance" (qtd. in Gleeson-White, "Revisiting the Southern Grotesque" 59). His idea of the grotesque body directly challenges the normative idea of the body, the classical ideal. The way Gleeson-White connects the representation of bodies in the works of these two is through challenging the normative ideas of bodies: "McCullers shares Bakhtin's preoccupation with the body, in her ubiquitous descriptions of disease and death, deformity and disability, strange physical desires, and even stranger gender configurations" (Gleeson-White, "Revisiting the Southern Grotesque" 60). They both go against the idea of the body being a stable identity and present the ideas of bodies outside of the prescribed ideal.

Frankie's freakishness/grotesqueness is also brought into being through her sexual identity. Even though her sexual identity remains unclear in the novel, it is something Frankie struggles with in the novel, which only accelerates her feeling of anxiety as she "does not yet fully understand human sexuality" (Johnson 16). In a few instances, McCullers shows Frankie's lack of understanding of physical relationships. When talking about boys, Berenice tells Frankie that she needs to "begin thinking . . . [about] a beau" (McCullers 77). Frankie's reaction to Berenice's suggestion is: "I don't want any beau. What would I do with one?" (McCullers 77). When asked on a date, she thought that "[t]he very word, *date*, was a grown word used by older girls" (McCullers 69).

For Frankie, heterosexual ideas seem strange and queer. When she remembers the "queer sin" (McCullers 23) she did with Barney, she gets angered, and when talking to Berenice about how she should find a boy for herself, she just asks why she even needs one. Rachel Adams asserts that "[f]or Frankie, the queer is often associated with unpleasant, tentative forays into the world of heterosexual romance" (26). On the other hand, Frankie's fear of being a

sexual freak stems from her lack of knowledge about homosexuality: “Young Frankie's lack of knowledge about the existence of homosexuality contributes to her confusion, isolation, and perception of herself as grotesque” (Free 438).

4.1.2. Femininity

In *The Member of the Wedding*, McCullers challenges the codes of traditional femininity through Frankie’s tomboyism, which is usually defined as “an extended childhood period of female masculinity” (Halberstam 5) and can be tolerated “only within a narrative of blossoming womanhood; within such a narrative, tomboyism represents a resistance to adulthood itself rather than to adult femininity” (Halberstam 6). At the beginning of the novel, Frankie’s tomboyism is accentuated by her appearance: “She wore a pair of black shorts, a B.V.D. undervest, and she was barefoot. Her hair had been cut like a boy’s” (McCullers 2). Even her behaviour can occasionally be classified as tomboyish. For example, she wants to “throw a knife between his [Barney’s] eyes” (McCullers 78) and remembers when she “took the pistol from her father’s bureau drawer and carried it all over the town and shot up cartridges in a vacant lot” (McCullers 23). McCullers’ tomboys, Frankie included,:

> think that the female body is a burden . . . In order to get rid of their dissatisfaction, they wear T-shirts, shorts and shoes, join in the violent sports just like boys, and actively get close to the boys' behaviors. They do not like their own female characters, so they often show their own special characteristics through different experiences from other women. (Lanlan and Zhiqiang 201)

Frankie’s tomboyism is not only presented through her clothes and behaviour but also through her attitude towards other young girls. While observing other young girls with her cousin John Henry, Frankie feels excluded: “There was in the neighbourhood a clubhouse, and Frankie was not a member. The members of the club were girls who were thirteen and fourteen and even fifteen year old. They had parties with boys on Saturday night. Frankie knew all of the club members” (McCullers 10) and harbours negative feelings towards them: after John Henry suggests that they might invite her, she exclaims that she could “shoot every one of them with a pistol” (McCullers 10). Frankie also feels like she does not belong anywhere, that she is isolated and alone: “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” (McCullers 1). This

isolation can be ascribed to her tomboyish appearance and behaviour, which proves that one must conform to societal rules in order to be accepted. Even though she was a member of their group before, she is now not accepted by other adolescents due to her tomboy image, which further confirms Halberstam's claim that tomboys are only tolerated until the adolescent age.

Frankie also desires to perform masculine jobs: "She wanted to be a boy and got to the war as a Marine. She thought about flying aeroplanes and winning gold medals for bravery" (McCullers 21). Her desire stems from her understanding that, "as a female, she does not possess the freedoms that males have, that she cannot possibly do the things men can do" (Johnson 15). McCullers's tomboy characters understand the burden of the female body and use their tomboyism as a means of achieving freedom that is granted to other gender, the one they are not a part of.

After Frankie discovers that her tomboyish image also brings feelings of loneliness and rejection, she starts masquerading to fit in: "[a]s it turns out, their hopes and dreams of new ways of becoming, outside rigid boundaries of identity, are all but stamped out when the tomboys are forced to renounce their masculinity and take up their positions as women" (Gleeson-White, *Strange Bodies* 71). Frankie is also aware that her tomboyish image is a phase she will have to outgrow if she wants to fit in. As a result, the reader finds Frankie slowly conforming to heteronormative ideals of femininity despite her sexual otherness, which reflects Judith Butler's view of gender as performance and a social construct established through repetition. Frankie's behaviour also reflects Riviere's idea of masquerade where "femininity is assumed, like masquerade, to deflect attention from the woman's desire for power through its opposite: constructing a very feminine, nonthreatening image of herself – a fetish of the castrated woman" (qtd. in Tseëlon 10). Riviere's idea revolves around women performing femininity to hide their desire for power, which is deemed to be a decidedly masculine trait. Frankie rejects her tomboyish image, which allowed her freedom, and conforms to femininity as a social construct that will grant her acceptance into society.

As already noted, Frankie's issues come from her loneliness, due to her tomboy image that does not allow her to fit in with the rest of the girls her age. In Frankie's mind, femininity will grant her social acceptance and help her finally become a part or a member of any group: "Four girls were crossing the backyard. . . . F. Jasmine stood motionless. In the old days that summer she would have waited in the hope that they might call her and tell her she had been elected to the club . . . But now she watched them quietly, without jealousy" (McCullers 90).

Even though the group she formed with Janice and Jarvis was an illusion, it gave Frankie a sense of peace.

One of the most obvious examples of Frankie's attempts to achieve femininity is the change of her name from Frankie to F. Jasmine to Frances, the purpose of which is to "herald her metamorphosis into a young woman whose grace and maturity will replace the old Frankie's tomboy lifestyle" (Adams 25). When it comes to Frankie's attempts to display more feminine traits, Gleeson-White, Adams, and Johnson all agree that Frankie fails at displaying femininity and turns it into parody: "even if unwittingly . . . [she] makes a mockery of ideal womanhood" (Gleeson-White *Strange Bodies* 15). Another example of her femininity being performed in the wrong way occurs when F. Jasmine buys a dress for her brother's weeding:

> "Now tell me your honest opinion' F. Jasmine said. But Berenice looked at the orange satin evening dress and shook her head and did not comment. . . .
>
> "I thought you was going to get a pink dress?" . . .
>
> "What is wrong with this dress? Don't you like it Berenice?"
>
> "No" said Berenice. "It don't do." (McCullers 84)

Berenice disapproves of her dress because she "fully comprehends the social implications of wearing such a lurid color of orange to a wedding, especially for a 12-year-old girl" (Johnson 17). She is also well accustomed to performing femininity and understands social cues that go along with it, but F. Jasmine is still unfamiliar with them: "You had all your hair shaved off like a convict, and now you tie a silver ribbon around this head without any hair. It just looks peculiar" (McCullers 84). As Rachel Adams points out, "[i]nstead of transforming Frankie into a woman, the gown highlights the discrepancy between the body's awkward suspension between youth and adulthood, and the garment's unfulfilled promise of glamour and sophistication" (25).

F. Jasmine's new identity is even shown as dangerous for her. While being in town, she meets a soldier and agrees to go on a date with him even though "[t]here was uneasy doubt that she could not quite place or name" (McCullers 65). After they meet again, he leads her to his room and when F. Jasmine realises he wants to sleep with her, she escapes. Even though F. Jasmine is more feminine version of the old Frankie, she is still unaware of all the dangers she can encounter: "F. Jasmine does wish to date the soldier because it makes her feel older than she really is . . . Old Frankie would not have placed herself in such a perilous position, but

feminized F. Jasmine, following the cultural dictates of the feminine, feels obligated to ignore her intuition" (Johnson 21).

Just like other female tomboys McCullers has created, Frankie serves as some sort of antithesis to the image of the Southern lady. Yet, the Southern lady more often than not "functions as a role model for the recalcitrant young tomboys" (Gleeson-White, *Strange Bodies* 84), Frankie being no exception to the rule. In Frankie's case, Janice, her brother's wife, and the girls from the club embody the ideal of the Southern lady. They are the representation of femininity performed in the right, desirable way. Yet, what many scholars emphasize when reading McCullers's work is that "the icon of the Southern Lady . . . [is] a goliath that needed to be destroyed for truly modern women to gain social acceptance" (Fallon 114). McCullers's characters try to adapt to the ideal womanhood but fail in achieving it, showing how absurd this idea is: "[t]he vision of the Southern Lady as an icon of purity, virtue, beauty, grace, fragility, and obedience reduces womanhood to a tragic-comic role of empty idol, a pretty puppet, that denies women complexity in their emotional and intellectual lives and denies them power over their own lives" (Fallon 114).

4.1.3. Race in *The Member of the Wedding*

Finally, this thesis will reflect on the role of race in McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding.* To do this, McCullers' fiction will be contextualized within the racial structure of the American South as the region where she was born and raised.

After the slavery was abolished, Southerners "fought tooth and nail to maintain their superiority" (González Groba 120). Since it was illegal to have slaves, the whites "devised new laws and institutions to limit the freedom of former slaves" (González Groba 120). Over the next few decades, white people in the South were trying to rewrite the history and justify their acts of violence: "[i]t was a history that for a whole century justified white supremacy, racial segregation, disfranchisement, lynching and the denial of all economic and civil rights" (González Groba 120). Whiteness was held to such standard, explains González Groba, that white people could be poor and hungry, but at least they had the "South's most precious possession: whiteness" (González Groba 120).

In her fiction, McCullers "offers important insights about the ways in which sex, gender, and racial relations are interconnected without collapsing the distinctions among them" (Adams

22). *The Member of the Wedding* offers those insights through the character of Berenice. She is a black woman in her mid-thirties, who was already married four times. Ever since Frankie's mother died, when Frankie was just born (McCullers 47), she is the one who has been raising Frankie.

Through Berenice, McCullers shows that different structures of discrimination coexist in the American South as well as that one cannot see them as equally dangerous. In the conversation with Frankie, Berenice claims that "we are all somehow caught. We born this way or that way and we don't know why. But we caught anyhow . . . I'm caught worse than you is. . . . Because I'm black. . . . But they done drawn completely extra bounds around all colored people" (McCullers 113-14). McCullers here points out that race is "the visible signifier of difference in spite of her characters' attempts to alter or conceal bodily attributes that make them the targets of discrimination and abuse" (Adams 30). While Frankie can perform femininity and other white people can hide their sexuality, Berenice cannot hide her race; she must deal with discrimination without having the right to choose. Berenice also points out a distinction between the position of white and black women in the American South. While "Frankie sees her mentor through the prism of white society's gaze, Berenice, however, persistently attempts to compel Frankie to view her as an individual outside of the socially enforced constructs of self and other" (Abernathy 100).

At the end of the novel, their relationship falls apart. Frankie wants to feel like a part of a group but since she does not fit anywhere, she looks for comfort in Berenice. Frankie tries to see her struggle through the eyes of other oppressed group, but Berenice understands clearly that their experiences cannot be shared. McCullers here shows that Frankie stops associating herself with Berenice and proves how easily she can remove herself from the struggles of black people even though, throughout the novel, she was trying to explain her own alienation through Berenice's experiences.

5. Alice Walker's Life and Work

The last woman writer that will be analysed in this thesis is Alice Walker, one of the most important black women writers of the twentieth century. As Melanie L. Harris asserts, "[t]he life of Alice Walker is more than a collection of historical events and memories. It is, rather, a rich orchestra of people, movements, morals, values, personal achievements, and societal transformations that have shaped the personhood and life orientation of this well-known author" (15).

Alice Walker was born in Eatonton, Georgia, in 1944. Just like Carson McCullers, living in the American South left an impact on Walker's life, but unlike McCullers Walker was a victim of the South's obsession with white supremacy as she lived in the South in the Jim Crow era, "a new system of white supremacist control in the southern states. Taking its name from a black-face minstrel character, Jim Crow" and "a politically strategic construction that reinforced the power of white patriarchy" (Brown and Webb 180). Public life was designed to keep black and white people separated in every aspect: "[t]hey were born in separate hospitals, lived in separate neighbourhoods, were educated in separate schools, worshipped in separate churches, ate in separate restaurants, used separate water fountains, and were buried in separate cemeteries" (Brown and Webb 192). Inspired by her family's history and the history of black people, in particular black women, Alice Walker has created a literary legacy in which she explores the themes of feminism, racism, and sexuality, among others.

In her theoretical writings, Alice Walker develops the term "womanism." In her *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), Walker defines this term in the following ways:

> Womanist 1. From womanish. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious. 2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually, and/or

> nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink and yellow and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time." 3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless. 4. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender. (qtd. in Harris 3-4)

It is important not to confuse Walker's idea of womanism with womanist theology, which was developed by black women scholars who have called for deeper exploration of feminist issues in relation to race: "they insisted that feminist theological critique did not go far enough" (Harris 2). In short, womanist theology "examines ways in which systems of patriarchy, imbalanced power, and normative ethical codes based on the logic of domination are used to oppress women of African descent and their communities" (Harris 51).

What both terms/movements have in common is a mission to uncover the lives of black women and give their stories a voice as they are united by the shared dissatisfaction with the way feminism was centring around white women and not including the issue of racism as a factor in oppression. In Walker's definition, there is "a theoretical framework from which they could develop race-class-gender analysis and shape it into a primary method for religious thought" (Harris 4), even though they find Walker's disinterest in God and her embracing of lesbianism problematic (Harris 5-6).

In addition to the disinterest in God and the focus on lesbianism, Walker's womanism is defined by wholeness as a principle of healing: "wholeness appears as a major value in Walker's writings about environmental justice, female genital mutilation, the civil rights movement, the embrace and expression of women's sexualities, and celebration of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered communities" (Harris 68). It also includes men in its definition: "womanism appears to provide an avenue to foster stronger relationships between black women and black men" (Collins 11), which black feminism essentially does not: "Many black women view feminism that at best, is exclusively for women" (Collins 11). Womanism as defined by Alice Walker is a movement that seeks to unite all black people while also focusing on women's experiences.

5.1. *The Color Purple*

In her most known work, Alice Walker tells the story of Celie, a black woman, whose life is presented in the form of letters she writes to God. Walker received the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for this novel. Since its publication, the novel has caused controversy because of its portrayal of women abuse and lesbian love. In this novel, Walker focuses on the lives of women and their experiences by showing how women build communities, explore their sexualities, and survive in the world where their gender and race put them in vulnerable positions.

5.1.1. Community

The concept of community has been an integral part of both Walker's work and her life. To address this concept, Walker has developed a six-step approach to ethical issues in order to "ascertain values and moral lessons" in her fictional and theoretical works (Harris 91). While doing this, she drew inspiration from her own life. For example, she remembers how her mother was denied food given by the government but was saved by her community: "After being denied governmental assistance and food, Mrs. Minnie Lou Walker was forced to 'make a way out of no way' to care for herself and feed her family" (Harris 92). Her mother managed to feed her family by depending on the community around her.

In *The Color Purple*, Walker builds a community amongst women in which they, with each other's help, succeed in overcoming difficulties they face. Unlike male communities that are set "out to conquer the world and leave their imprint on it in a significant way" (Keating 102), female communities "center around the home" (Keating 102). In the novel, Celie builds community with Sofia, Shug, and Squeak. Initially, Celie was trapped in marriage with an abusive husband, but throughout the novel the reader sees how, with the help of other women, she becomes an independent individual who turns her creativity into the source of income: "[i]n the beginning expressing her talent in this way serves almost as an escape from her downtrodden, painful, dull, daily existence but, in the end, it becomes her salvation, giving meaning to her life and enabling her to become a fulfilled, independent women" (Keating 107). The communal spirit permeates Shug and Celie's relationship, which is indicated in the reasons why Shug brought Celie with herself to Memphis: "You not my maid. I didn't bring you to Memphis to be that. I brought you here to love you and help you get on your feet" (Walker 103). Shug understands what financial freedom means, and makes sure other women experience

it. Not only does Shug help Celie but she also gives support to Squeak who too makes her living by singing: "[s]he finally working steady, singing at two or three clubs round town. Folks love her a lot" (Walker 106). Shug thus "never indulgences only in her own freedom. She helps Celie, Sofia, and Mary alike to go beyond the narrow confinements of their families to enter into a broader world where they can flourish without impediments" (Biswas 5).

The first woman Celie creates a bond with is Sofia, Harpo's wife. Two women build a relationship through quilt-making: "Then us both laugh so hard us flop down on the step. Let's make quilt pieces out of these messed up curtains, she say" (Walker 32). Quilt-making first creates sisterhood but later this craft is used as a way of women making themselves financially independent: "Celie literally discovers and defines herself through her at home clothesmaking industry … the quiltmaking of Celie, Sofia, and Corinne draws the women together in a common enterprise and community" (Dunn and Morris 29). After Sofia, it is Shug who bonds with Celie over quilt-making: "Me and Sofia work on the quilt. Got it frame up on the porch. Shug Avery donate her old yellow dress for scrap, and I work in a piece every chance I get" (Walker 41).

Their strong female community persists despite men pitting women against each other. Albert, usually referred to in the novel as just Mr., tries to bring Celie down by pitting her against Shug: "You'll be back, he say. Nothing up North for nobody like you. Shug got talent, he say. She can sing" (Walker 102). Yet, Shug and Celie leave him, create their own community, and Albert eventually expresses how lost he feels without Celie, or a person he can control in general: "I tried to do something bout my children after you left me. But by that time it was too late" (Walker 129) and joins Celie in making clothes: "Mr. _____ is busy patterning a shirt for folks to wear with my pants" (Walker 130). Making clothes is presented in the novel as a form of creating community, not just among women, but also with men. At the end of the novel, Celie creates a community around herself in which men and women live and work together as a whole: "The weather cool for the last of June, and sitting on the porch with Albert and Shug feel real pleasant. Next week be the fourth of July and us plan a big family reunion outdoors here at my house" (Walker 131). The idea of wholeness "clearly appears as a primary moral goal in her writings. The moral connotation or ethical implication in Walker's work often encourages communities to create wholeness even in the midst of facing multiple oppressions" (Harris 68-9).

5.1.2. Woman's Identity

In addition to the importance of the community and female bonding, the novel also addresses the need for the redefinition of the image of black women as in "Walker's stories the theme of re-constructing identity is more prominent than anything else" (Biswas 2). Specifically, *The Color Purple* depicts both the image of black women and their untold stories Walker feels obligated to tell (Harris 62). In depicting Celie's life story, Walker shows the ways in which black women have been held down, but also offers a story of black women rising above the injustice, and in that process, creating a community in which they heal. It is important to note that, when talking about black women, it is not just gender, but also the aspect of race that needs to be examined when discussing the question of their oppression.

The starting point in Alice Walker's intent to reconstruct the image of black women is her awareness that "one's identity is much molded by one's race, sex, class, ethnicity, and other socio-cultural axes. In this process of identity formation, Black women become constructed through certain sets of stereotypes" (Biswas 1). The stereotypes define how people perceive others and in which ways they make opinions of them. In this system of prescribed identities, black women are portrayed negatively in several categories, one of them being their sexuality. Black female sexuality is constructed both "as 'deviant', . . . abnormal and pathologized" (Biswas 3) as well as a closely monitored aspect of woman's identity whose sole purpose is to continue family's lineage.

Following this premise, Walker presents Celie and Shug Avery as the binary opposites whose characterization has been based on the patriarchal premises of Western culture. In Western culture, "[t]he 'virgin/whore' or 'angel/evil' dichotomy . . . brings in a striking strategy of present sexism which categorizes women along negative and positive poles and drives them to adhere to 'norms'" (Biswas 4). This view is, for example, embodied in the character of Albert's father who, after Albert brought Shug to his house, comments that "all her children got different daddys. It all just too trifling and confuse" (Walker 39) and pursues this view further by saying: "Celie, he say, you have my sympathy. Not many women let they husband whore lay up in they house" (Walker 39). In this context, Celie serves as an example of an obedient woman who is desirable as a wife because of her subservience and housekeeping skills. It is interesting that Albert's father does not direct those words to Celie but to his son, thus confirming the misogynistic views in which a woman is seen as an object and must prove her usefulness. Furthermore, Tobias, Albert's brother, comments that Celie is "[a]lways busy,

always busy, he say. I wish Margaret was more like you. Save me a bundle of money" (Walker 28); similarly, Albert' sister emphasizes that Celie is a "[g]ood housekeeper, good with children, good cook. Brother couldn't have done better if he tried" (Walker 20) while simultaneously putting down Shug Avery: "Say she wearing dresses all up her leg and headpieces with little balls and tassles hanging down, look like window dressing" (Walker 20).

Even though not an obedient wife, Shug is the one men desire. When she is back in town, Albert "dress all up in front the glass, look at himself, then undress and dress all over again. He slick back his hair with pomade, then wash it out again. He been spitting on his shoes and hitting it with a quick rag" (Walker 23). Her desirability is connected to her being perceived as hypersexual in terms of the Jezebel myth: "Though Shug never exposes herself as a fetish or sex object, her society men talk over her gestures, posture, costumes, sex-appeal, perfumes, and body shape. . . . She is considered as a 'jezebel', providing scopophilic pleasure to the viewers" (Biswas 3).

Moreover, Shug does not let her motherhood interfere with her career as she is "a single mother whose children are left under her mother's care while she attends to her career in roads and concert halls. All these non-conformist behaviors earn her the label 'hypersexual'" (Biswas 3). With Shug, Walker argues against the existing stereotypes of black women by reimagining those images: "Shug repairs the manipulative image by exploring the power of music. Aware of the magical power of art in denouncing certain constrictions, she brings out the hidden genius of many other women to free them from the negative images" (Biswas 5). Shug's blues singer career is a deliberate choice by Walker as Bessie Smith had immense influence on her (Miquel-Baldellou 74) when creating the character of Shug Avery.

5.1.3. Sexuality

Shug Avery also serves as a character with whom Alice Walker opens discussion about many topics concerning black woman's identity, black women's sexuality included. So far, with each topic covered in this thesis, Walker's idea of independent black women is interwoven into each of them. Her idea of presenting a new black woman identity outside of the discourse of Western academia involves the idea of black woman's sexuality being free of heterosexual system, this being achieved through the idea of lesbian love in which women learn to love each other and themselves. The controversy that Walker's depiction of lesbian relationship caused

can be attributed to the view that "woman-to-woman loving relationship [is seen] as a threat to the social system of heteropatriarchy that functions in black communities and helps support sexist hierarchies and other forms of the logic of domination" (Harris 79).

From the very beginning of the novel, it is obvious that Celie feels much safer around women: "I don't even look at mens. That's the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I'm not scared of them" (Walker 12). Celie's initial preference for women can be explained by her fear of her father who continuously rapes her but as the novel progresses, it is clear that Celie only likes women. When Celie first sees Shug, she exclaims: "Shug Avery was a woman. The most beautiful woman I ever saw. . . . I ast her to give me the picture. An all night long I stare at it. An now when I dream, I dream of Shug Avery" (Walker 13). After Shug was brought into her home, Celie feels no jealousy towards her, only admiration: "First time I got the full sight of Shug Avery long black body . . . I thought I had turned into a man" (Walker 36). At the end of the novel, Celie confirms that she was never sexually attracted to men: "men look like frogs to me. No matter how you kiss 'em, as far as I'm concern, frogs is what they stay" (Walker 119).

The Color Purple also challenges the wide-spread belief that black women cannot explore their sexualities because of the fear of being labelled as "deviant" (C. Lewis 160) and hypersexual. The roots of this fear are to be found in black women's double oppression: they have to fight not only harmful stereotypes in heteronormative relationships but also the stigma of being a lesbian. A number of black women scholars have challenged this belief:

> [Lorde] asks that black lesbians in particular liberate themselves from the operating presumption that their silence on issues of same-sex desire can protect black people in general from heterosexist and/or racist judgment. Her suggestion that, had she been mute, she "would still have suffered" resounds because (black) women are violated in patriarchal cultures regardless of their sexual experience, expression, clothing, make-up, or any other defining feature of propriety. (Lorde qtd. in C. Lewis 161).

Adopting this view, Walker presents lesbian love as a way how women learn to love themselves: "Shug's love for Celie teaches the latter how to appreciate love and be herself. What the novel implies is that how the erotic love of women could help changing their lives. Celie becomes herself when she accepts the lesbian love and abandons all social constrictions which come along with enforced normalcy" (Biswas 4). This occurs, for example, when Shug goes to perform again after being sick and Celie thinks: "I hate the way I look, I hate the way I'm dress. Nothing but churchgoing clothes in my chifferobe" (Walker 47), but right after that,

when Shug dedicates a song to Celie, Celie feels self-appreciation for the first time: “I look at her and I hum along a little with the tune. First time somebody made something and name it after me” (Walker 47). Later in the novel, Celie reciprocates by using her talent to make clothes for Shug: “Then finally one day I made the perfect pair of pants. For my sugar, naturally” (Walker 104). Lesbian love gives Celie confidence to learn how to accept and love herself. The non-conformity to the patriarchal system allows her to become an independent woman who is finally at peace with herself, and as Christopher S. Lewis points out: “[t]ogether, Celie and Shug demonstrate a model of sexual vulnerability and mutual dependence that has them working together consensually toward self-love rather than relating hierarchically” (163).

5.1.4. Abuse

Another aspect of gender oppression presented in the novel is the abuse women suffer at the hands of their husbands and fathers. This, alongside lesbian love, has caused controversy and backlash towards Walker when the novel was published. Walker’s main concern has been to show men’s inability to acknowledge that black women suffer from sexism in their own community: “many were not able to see how sexism oppresses black women . . . Walker points out the problematic nature of how deeply entrenched sexist and patriarchal ideas operate in black communities among black women and black men, thus reinforcing an ignorance and a silencing of black women’s experiences and voices” (Harris 78).

Walker addresses physical and sexual violence black women have been subjected to through Celie. At the beginning of the novel, Celie is repeatedly raped by her stepfather: “When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it” (Walker 8). After she marries Albert, he abuses her for years: “He beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don’t never hardly beat them. He say, Celie, git the belt. . . . It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That’s how come I know trees fear man” (Walker 22). Celie’s abused and traumatized body stands for all the abused and traumatized women’s bodies that “are seen as nothing more than punching bags for someone else’s emotional trauma and lack of self-control, their personhood rendered invisible and their beings ripped open by abuse” (Harris 79). Thus, when Celie says that she “look at women, tho, cause I’m not scared of them” (Walker 12), this only confirms that she “in a rightfully traumatized state, no longer trusts men” (J. Lewis 27).

What Jessica Lewis also points out is that "[p]rocessing a traumatic event is incredibly difficult; confusion surfaces as the human mind tries to understand what has happened in a logical way, but realistically there is no logical or rational explanation for why such awful violence and suffering occurs" (28). When Celie says that "I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how come I know trees fear man" (Walker 22), this shows that she cannot logically process the abuse and trauma she experiences. Only when talking to Shug does she seem to finally comprehend what has happened to her: "I start to cry too. I cry and cry and cry. Seem like it all come back to me, laying there in Shug arms. How it hurt and how much I was surprise. How it stung while I finish trimming his hair. How the blood drip down my leg and mess up my stocking. How he don't never look at me straight after that" (Walker 65). Celie's low self-esteem was an easy target for Albert's emotional abuse, but after accepting her trauma with Shug's help, Celie shows resistance by fighting the degrading terms that Albert uses to keep her under his control. At the end of the novel, Celie sees fear in Albert's eyes (Walker 108) and that realization confirms that the dynamics between them has changed. Celie's independency is confirmed through Albert's behaviour as now he treats her as his equal.

Another character through which Walker addresses the topic of family abuse is Sofia. Unlike Celie who is passive, Sofia fights against male dominance. At the beginning of the novel, we see through Harpo's example how patriarchal values are learned. When Harpo asks his father why he beats Celie, Albert says: "Cause she my wife. Plus, she stubborn. All women good for—he don't finish" (Walker 22). Harpo follows in his father's misogynistic steps by saying: "Women work, he say. What? she say. Women work. I'm a man" (Walker 20). Harpo expects his wife to be as obedient as Celie by saying: "I want her to do what I say, like you do for Pa. . . . When Pa tell you to do something, you do it, he say. When he say not to, you don't. You don't do what he say, he beat you" (Walker 43), but Sofia fights back: "But not Sofia. She do what she want, don't pay me no mind at all. I try to beat her, she black my eyes" (Walker 43). Walker thus uses Harpo to show that patriarchal values have been passed down: "Harpo is symbolic of how gender and racial stereotypes are maintained over multiple generations. He demonstrates how patriarchal society passes down gender and race derived expectations to their sons, sustaining the cycle of discrimination, oppression, and abuse" (J. Lewis 34).

Sofia shows defiance against the patriarchal idea of dominant men, which she experienced in her childhood: "All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men" (Walker 31). She never allows Harpo to abuse her, and always defends herself: "But Harpo and

Sofia. They fighting like two mens" (Walker 30) With Sofia and Harpo, Walker presents the reversed gender roles in marriage that go against the patriarchal male-dominated ideal. Sofia is not described as a weak and frail woman, as desirable women in the patriarchal system are, but rather as resilient and strong willed.

What breaks Sofia is the system of racial segregation going beyond her community: "[a]ny behaviour that could be construed as a breach of racial etiquette – disagreeing with the opinion of a white person, or daring to look him straight in the eye – risked violent retaliation" (Brown and Webb 196). Sofia breaks racial etiquette by declining mayor's offer to be a maid in their family and gets slapped (Walker 53) to which she responds in the following way: "Sofia knock the man down. The polices come, start slinging the children off the mayor, bang they heads together. Sofia really start to fight. They drag her to the ground" (Walker 53). Through Sofia, Walker shows that outside of black community black woman is still the most oppressed identity. After this incident, Sofia is taken to jail: "When I see Sofia I don't know why she still alive. They crack her skull, they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side. They blind her in one eye. She swole from head to foot. Her tongue the size of my arm, it stick out tween her teef like a piece of rubber. She can't talk" (Walker 53-54).

Walker also uses Sofia to discuss one of the identities black women performed in a white household – the mammy figure: "Despite Sofia's 'clean' appearance, fine looking children, and nice wristwatch, her identity as an African American woman dictates her potential; she is seen as capable of only being a White family's maid" (J. Lewis 35). The mammy stereotype is "one of the most pervasive images of Black women" (West 459) in American culture and literature: a loyal and sacrificing black woman who was giving all of her time to serve write family she was working for. Walker subverts this idea by showing Sofia's dynamics with white kids in the family she works in: "Little girl pipe up. Billy do it his own self, she say. Trying to kick Sofia leg. The little girl dote on Sofia, always stick up for her. Sofia never notice, she as deef to the little girl as she is to her brother" (Walker 60). Walker exposes the glamorised image of the mammy stereotype as a harmful stereotype imposed on black women and shows the reality of black women working for white families: "They got me in a little storeroom up under the house, hardly bigger than Odessa's porch, and just about as warm in the winter time. I'm at they beck and call all night and all day. They won't let me see my children. They won't let me see no mens. Well, after five years they let me see you once a year. I'm a slave, she say. What would you call it?" (Walker 61).

With this novel, Alice Walker depicts the reality of black women lives in the twentieth century United States. Through her characters, Walker touches on the issues such as abuse, misogyny, and lesbian love and how they affect black woman's identity. Guided by her definition of womanism, Walker depicts how the wholeness of the community and the sisterhood amongst women helps black women explore their identities and become independent.

Conclusion

If society is a system consisting of different categories (such as gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, religious views, etc.), the very idea of categorization presupposes the existence of divisions according to the level of privilege people in a particular category possess. The aim of this thesis was thus to show how the levels of gender, sex, and race privilege affect women and how women consequently struggle to form their identities in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Despite oppression and segregation the women characters in these novels endure, the analysis showed that they possess multidimensional identities that challenge, subvert, and transgress the prescribed gender, sex, and race roles imposed on them by the patriarchal society which they live in.

The chapter on Woolf's *Orlando* discussed her ideas of idealised femininity and androgyny. Woolf presents femininity as the oppressive ideal which her character escapes from into androgyny. Similarly, marriage is shown as the unnatural yet widely accepted patriarchal foundation that gives her character freedom to write about her love for women, which can be connected to Woolf's real life. Woolf further connects homosexuality with the race in the form of "deviant" sexuality. She uses a harmful stereotype of "deviant" sexuality, which is historically ascribed to black women, to explain Orlando's attraction to women as something that is abominable.

McCullers also mocks femininity as a concept that is taught and maintained. In *The Member of the Wedding*, she presents femininity as an oppressive ideal that is harmful to women as it defines them as "freaks" if they do not conform to the prescribed rules, which they eventually do. She also looks at the aspect of race and how white women and black women have different experiences in the system of oppression where race presents the important factor in the oppression of black women. McCullers shows how white women want to see themselves in the eyes of other oppressed groups, but lack understanding to realise that other groups are affected differently in the system of oppression.

Lastly, Walker's *The Color Purple* showcases the importance of race in the struggles of black women against oppression. The concept of femininity is here presented from the point of view of black women who are thought to be hypersexual as their sexualities are branded as "deviant," which puts black lesbian women in even more harmful position in society as even in

heterosexual relationships they have harmful stereotypes attached to them. Walker also subverts the racist rhetoric of the stereotypes such as Jezebel and mammy. Through her idea of womanism, Walker shows that black women achieve independence through community and sisterhood.

Works Cited

Abernathy, Jeff. "Divided Hearts: Carson McCullers and Harper Lee Explore Racial Uncertainty." *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Carson McCullers,* edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, pp. 99-116.

Adams, Rachel. "'A Mixture of Delicious and Freak': The Queer Fiction of Carson McCullers." *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Carson McCullers*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, pp. 17-44.

Beloff, Halla. "Lesbian Masks: Beauty and Other Negotiations." *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, and Marginality*, edited by E. Tseëlon, Routledge, 2001, pp. 54-72.

Biswas, Banani. "Deconstruction of the Racist-Sexist Stereotypes in Alice Walker's Novels." *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, Elsevier, 2021, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590291121000887. Accessed 23 June 2023.

Brown, David, and Clive Webb. *Race in the American South from Slavery to Civil Rights*. Edinburgh UP, 2007.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1999.

Collins, Patricia H. "What's in a Name?" *The Black Scholar*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1996, pp. 9–17, doi:10.1080/00064246.1996.11430765. Accessed 23 June 2023.

Craps, Stef. "How to Do Things with Gender: Transgenderism in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*." *Image into Identity: Constructing and Assigning Identity in a Culture of Modernity*, edited by Michael Wintle, Rodopi, 2006, pp. 175–90.

Dunn, Margaret M., and Ann R. Morris. "Narrative Quilts and Quilted Narratives: The Art of Faith Ringgold and Alice Walker." *Explorations in Ethnic Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1992, pp. 27–32. doi:10.1525/ees.1992.15.1.27. Accessed 24 June 2023.

Fallon, April. "The Grotesque as Feminist Revision of the 'Southern Lady' in Carson McCullers's and Flannery O'Connor's Fiction." *The Journal of Kentucky Studies*, vol. 23, 2006, pp. 113-21. http://hdl.handle.net/11216/1215. Accessed 19 June 2023.

Free, Melissa. "Relegation and Rebellion: The Queer, The Grotesque, and the Silent in the Fiction of Carson McCullers." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2008, pp. 426–46. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/29533895. Accessed 19 June 2023.

Gleeson-White, Sarah. "Revisiting the Southern Grotesque: Mikhail Bakhtin and the Case of Carson McCullers." *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Carson McCullers*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, pp. 57-72.

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

Goldman, Jane. *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf*. Cambridge UP, 2006.

Goldman, Jane. "The Feminist Criticism of Virginia Woolf." *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, edited by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 66–84.

Gonda, Caroline. "Lesbian Feminist Criticism." *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, edited by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 169–86.

González, Esther S. "'What Phantasmagoria the Mind Is': Reading Virginia Woolf's Parody of Gender." *Atlantis*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2004, pp. 75–86. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41055162. Accessed 12 June 2023.

González Groba, Constante. "Carson McCullers and Lillian Smith: The Intersections of Gender and Race in the Jim Crow South." *Journal of English Studies*, vol. 5, no. 5, 2008, pp. 119–38. doi:10.18172/jes.124. Accessed 20 June 2023.

Graver, Lawrence. *Carson McCullers: University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers*. U of Minnesota P, 1969.

Halberstam, Jack. *Female Masculinity*. Duke UP, 2019.

Harris, Melanie L. *Gifts of Virtue, Alice Walker, and Womanist Ethics*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Hovey, Jaime. "'Kissing a Negress in the Dark': Englishness as a Masquerade in Woolf's *Orlando*." *PMLA*, vol. 112, no. 3, 1997, pp. 393–404. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/462948. Accessed 12 June 2023.

Johnson, Margaret. “Identity and the Female Body: Carson McCullers’s Frankie Addams.” *Body Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2019, pp. 9-25. https://bodystudiesjournal.org/frankie-addams/. Accessed 19 June 2023.

Kaivola, Karen. “Revisiting Woolf's Representations of Androgyny.” *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature,* vol. 18, no. 2, 1999, pp. 235–61, *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/464448. Accessed 11 June 2023.

Keating, Gail. “Alice Walker: In Praise of Maternal Heritage.” In *Bloom’s Modern Critical Views: Alice Walker,* edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2007, pp. 101-14.

Keizer, Arlene R. “Black Feminist Criticism.” *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism.*, edited by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 154–68.

Kinnahan, Linda A. “Feminist Poetics: First-Wave Feminism, Theory, and Modernist Women Poets.” *Literature and the Development of Feminist Theory*, edited by Robin Truth Goodman, Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 54-68.

Lanlan, Cai, and Zhuang Zhiqiang. “Carson McCullers’s Androgynous Image Inquiry.” *4th International Conference on Literature, Linguistics and Arts (ICLLA 2017)*, 2017, pp. 200–04. doi:10.25236/iclla.2017.47. Accessed 19 June 2023.

Lewis, Christopher S. “Cultivating Black Lesbian Shamelessness: Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*.” *Rocky Mountain Review*, vol. 66, 2012, pp. 158-75. doi:10.1353/rmr.2012.0027. Accessed 23 June 2023.

Lewis, Jessica. “Gender, Race, and Violence: A Critical Examination of Trauma in *The Color Purple*.” *Sacred Heart University Scholar*, vol. 1, no. 1., 2017, pp. 24-38. http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/shuscholar/vol1/iss1/4/. Accessed 24 June 2023.

López García, Ángela. “From Man to Woman to a New Understanding of Gender: Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* and Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve*.” *Meridian*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2019, pp. 15-23.

Love, Heather. “Feminist Criticism and Queer Theory.” *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, edited by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 301–21.

McCullers, Carson. *The Member of The Wedding*. Bantam Books, 1946.

McKinnie, Betty E., and Carlos L. Dews. "The Delayed Entrance of Lily Mae Jenkins: Queer Identity, Gender Ambiguity, and Southern Ambivalence in Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding*." *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Carson McCullers*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, pp. 87-98.

Miquel-Baldellou, Marta. "The Beloved Purple of their Eyes: Inheriting Bessie Smith's Politics of Sexuality." *Journal of English and American Studies*, vol. 36, 2007, pp. 67-88.

Rubin, Gayle S. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of Politics of Sexuality." *Culture, Society and Sexuality*, 2nd ed., edited by Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton, Routledge, 2007, pp. 150-88. doi:10.4324/9780203966105-21. Accessed 20 June 2023.

Shihada, Isam M. "A Feminist Perspective of Virginia Woolf's Selected Novels *Ms. Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse*." *SSRN*, 2005, pp. 120-47. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2645411. Accessed 20 June 2023.

Stokes, Peter. "Consuming Desires: Performing Gender in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, Neil Jordan's *Crying Game* and Sally Potter's *Orlando*." *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1998, pp. 347–60.

Swanson, Diana L. "Lesbian Approaches." *Palgrave Advances in Virginia Woolf Studies*, edited by Anna Snaith, Macmillan, 2007, pp. 184-208.

Tseëlon, Efrat. "Introduction: Masquerade and Identities." *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on Gender, Sexuality and Marginality*, edited by Efrat Tseëlon, Routledge, 2003, pp. 1-17.

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple.* Open Road Integrated Media, 2011. https://s3.amazonaws.com/scschoolfiles/112/the-color-purple-alice-walker.pdf. Accessed 20 May 2023.

Weldon, Laurel S. "Intersectionality." *Politics, Gender, and Concepts: Theory and Methodology*, edited by Gary Goertz and Amy G. Mazur, Cambridge UP, 2008, pp. 193–218. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511755910.002. Accessed 14 June 2023.

West, Carolyn M. "Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel: Historical Images of Black Women and Their Implications for Psychotherapy." *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1995, pp. 458–66, doi:10.1037/0033-3204.32.3.458. Accessed 23 June 2023.

Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando*. Alma Classics, 2014.