The Representation of Social and Class Injustice in S. E. Hinton's The Outsiders / Prikaz nejednakosti u društvu i društvenim slojevima u romanu Autsajderi S. E. Hinton

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Abstract

The Outsiders by American writer S. E. Hinton is a cornerstone of young adult literature, revolutionising the depiction of class difference and the way class struggle is represented within young people. The novel showcases a depiction of not only class injustice, but also social injustice as the two class groups are held to different societal standards based solely on their outward appearance. This paper will further explore the manifestation of said class struggle through not only continuous systemic oppression, but also the way poverty and violence are connected throughout the novel and the differences in perception of these two class and social groups as well as the way that gender, masculinity, and femininity are portrayed throughout the novel.

Keywords: greaser, Soc, Ponyboy, Johnny, violence, system, class, Dallas, Cherry

Introduction

This paper will discuss the staple American young adult novel *The Outsiders* (1967) by S. E. Hinton that deals with class struggles and social prejudices among young people in 60's United States. The novel is follows fourteen-year-old Ponyboy Curtis, who is considered a greaser, a kid from the poorer side of town. The class struggles within the novel culminate to an extreme; a murder in self-defence that shatter Ponyboy's view of not only the greaser and Soc conflict, but the system as a whole. This paper aims to analyse the way this class and social prejudices are portrayed through the eyes of a high-schooler and the deadly consequences of systemic inequality.

The paper's first section focuses on the young adult genre as a whole. By establishing the limits and history of young adult literature its aim is to contextualise the novel's place both within literary criticism and the literary canon as well as establish a frame of reference to the protagonist and plot the novel centres around. The second section aims to display the interwovenness of sixties pop-culture with everyday life. It explores the way that a teenage mind uses pop-culture in order to contextualise the world around it and as a form of escapism. The third section deals with the class injustice depicted within *The Outsiders* and is divided into two parts: the first part explores systemic class injustice and the way it manifests throughout the different greaser characters while the second part deals with the connection between poverty and violence in the novel. The fourth section deals with social injustice, most notably the way that the greasers are perceived by the outside world. It also reflects the way that the greasers form their own little community and the importance of a supportive community. The fifth and final section deals with the different ways gender is presented, with

depictions of more traditional and stereotypical gender representation and breakaways from those stereotypes.

1. *The Outsiders* as a Young Adult Novel

Although exploding in popularity today, the Young Adult (YA) genre as is known currently is still a relatively new term when taking into account the literary canon as a whole. Often also described as coming of age stories, YA literature does not have a concise definition, rather it is defined by characteristics that are present within the work itself such as: the protagonist being a teenager who is also central to the plot, dialogue and worldview typical to that of a teenager, and the protagonist having traits such as perceptiveness, maturity, sensitivity, and independence (Herz, Gallo 8).

Still, these generalised characteristics make it difficult to separate YA literature from children's literature and by categorising the two genres as one, there is no distinction between the theoretical issues being raised in YA literature as opposed to children's literature (Hunt 4). Moreover, the difference between young adult and children's literature starts before printing, with the way each genre is marketed. Children's literature is often bought by parents whilst young adults are more often than not allowed to independently choose what to read, creating an environment where paperbacks, series, and well-established authors thrive (Hunt 5). Another external factor that distinguishes YA literature is that censorship is far more rigorous when it comes to young adult literature than children's literature (Hunt 6). Since young adult literature tackles societal taboos more head-on than children's literature, this creates a much harsher reaction from the general public, whilst scholars of young adult

literature often tend to stick to the books they teach, all the while not bothering with a strictly theoretical response or defence (Hunt 6).

Furthermore, due to the nature and lack of theory within YA literature, it is difficult to establish a canon within the genre as the definition of a YA canon can differ based on readability, social implications or even "classic status," creating not one, but many canons within young adult literature (Hunt 7). This instability of a canon sparks the modern debate between scholars who aim to include YA literature within the broader literary canon and those who see a canon composed purely of YA literature (Hunt 8).

Whilst novels such as *Huckleberry Finn* or *The Catcher in the Rye* are considered staples of young adult literature, S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* and Paul Zindel's *The Pigman* are often considered the founders of modern YA literature (Hunt 4) as they are some of the first books that gained traction for portraying teenagers in a realistic and relatable way that attracted an audience far wider than just young adults. Published first in 1967, Hinton was a teenager herself when she first wrote *The Outsiders*, tackling teenage issues in a way that was relatable to her peers and did not shy away from topics such as violence, class disparity and the social injustices it brings with it.

The novel's protagonist, Ponyboy Curtis comes from the rougher part of town and is labelled as a greaser, a name attributed to those who come from a lower-class background. Terrorised by the Socs (short for "Socials"), children from the richer side of town, the greasers find themselves oppressed not only by the system, but also their own community. The gang war comes to a head after a Soc ends up dead and Ponyboy is forced to flee and reassess his whole worldview. Using this incident as a catalyst, the novel opens up

commentary on the class differences of mid-century America and the way those differences impacted the shaping of one's own identity.

2. 60's Americana and Pop Culture in *The Outsiders*

Whilst never explicitly stated in the book, *The Outsiders* uses pop culture and, for the time, contemporary language that places the time-frame of the novel in the mid 1960's. These aspects are so interwoven within the novel and story itself that it creates a unique and quintessential American aesthetic that is reflected through a young person's perspective.

The decade began with a sort of reinvigoration of political interest in the US as John F. Kennedy won the 1960 election, becoming the youngest elected president and moving past the post-World War II era (Rielly 6). As television rose in popularity and accessibility, Americans across the country followed the Kennedy family with watchful eyes; whether it was the First Lady Jackie Kennedy giving a tour of the White House, presidential debates or even watching the children of the First Family grow up (Rielly 6 – 7). This kind of parasocial relationship between the public and the First Family made tragedies within it even more heart-breaking and grievous, especially after the assassination of John F. Kennedy (Rielly 7). But despite the political scene being more engaging than ever to the American public and monumental conflicts such as the Cold War and Vietnam War, they bare no significance to the world of *The Outsiders* as such topics do not particularly pertain to Ponyboy's day-to-day life.

Instead, the novel utilizes movies, literature, and brands as a way of communication through pop-culture. The novel opens and closes with Ponyboy leaving a movie theatre whilst referencing actor Paul Newman. Using Newman as Ponyboy's role model, "I was wishing I

looked like Paul Newman—he looks tough and I don't—but I guess my own looks aren't so bad" (Hinton 3), Hinton establishes Ponyboy's character within the novel's first paragraph. Starting with his role as "Fast" Eddie Felson in *The Hustler* Newman, along with other actors such as Robert Redford and Warren Beatty, popularised the archetype of the anti-hero (Rielly 188). Anti-heroes of the era were often portrayed as brave and with a strong sense of morality which would "reflect values and patterns of behavior more often associated with villains, or at best with failures" (Rielly 188). All the while anti-hero archetype "tended to be portrayed not as corrupt or ineffectual, but as in some way appealing and admirable, even if ultimately defeated" (Rielly 188).

These characteristics are visible throughout the novel most definitively in the novel's narrator, Ponyboy Curtis, but also the characters of Johnny Cade and Dallas Winston and to some extent, in the greasers as a whole. The greasers themselves are portrayed as outcasts of society and downright dangerous, especially after Johnny kills a Soc in self-defence. But in the end it is the bravery of Johnny, Pony, and Dallas that quickly turns them into local heroes, even if they themselves do not see it like that.

Furthermore, Ponyboy uses popular media not only to contextualise the world around him, but also as a form of escapism. Movies are a central part of Ponyboy's character with the novel starting with him leaving the movie theatre to Ponyboy and his friends' crucial meeting of Soc girls Cherry and Marcia at the drive-in. Moreover, after Ponyboy returns home at the end of the novel, he is disappointed by the fact that his legal hearing did not resemble those he saw on TV: "I don't know what I expected the whole thing to be like—I guess I've been watching too many Perry Mason shows" (Hinton 127). Additionally, Ponyboy describes his brother Soda as "movie-star kind of handsome" (Hinton 7) and eldest brother Darry as Superman-like. But despite seeing his family and friends as larger than life,

once faced with Dallas Winston, Ponyboy understands that those are just idealised versions of them: “But I realized that these three appealed to me because they were like the heroes in the novels I read. Dally was real. I liked my books and clouds and sunsets. Dally was so real he scared me” (Hinton 59).

Another prominent aspect of pop culture featured in *The Outsiders* are brands and franchises that were interwoven into everyday life. Characters are often described as drinking Coke or Pepsi and eating at Dairy Queen, a fast-food chain restaurant. Capitalism and consumerism are a vital part of the novel, often also a distinctive factor that separates the greasers from the Socs.

3. Class division *The Outsiders*

3.1. Systemic Class Struggles

The economic boom from the 1950's continued well into the next decade as the United States stopped relying on industrial manufacturing and switched to a business and service-based economy which saw not only a higher degree of urbanisation, but also a rise in in salaries for the majority of Americans (Rielly 4). But not all parts of the country developed at the same rate. While states like California, Texas, and Florida flourished, the states of the South and Appalachia were dominated in poverty (Wood 353).

Hinton juxtaposes the greasers and Socs as two ends of the class spectrum; the Socs representing the rich kids from Tulsa's West Side whilst the greasers represented the working-class population of the East Side. As Ponyboy introduces the two socio-economic groups, the hypocrisy of the system is immediately pointed out, noting that the Socs get preferential treatment over the greasers: "We're poorer than the Socs and the middle class. I reckon we're wilder, too. Not like the Socs, who jump greasers and wreck houses and throw beer blasts for kicks, and get editorials in the paper for being a public disgrace one day and an asset to society the next" (Hinton 4). Moreover, "Ponyboy does not like it when Socs assault him, but he does not question why they do so because he does not see the underlying classism at work in his thinking. It is just 'the way things are'" (Beals 6). This notion is deeply embedded into Ponyboy's thinking to the point he does not question it; he simply accepts it as an indisputable fact and that there is no possible way the system could change further connects to the perception that if someone was born a greaser, there would be no opportunity to move away from being working class. This is most evident within the character of Ponyboy's eldest brother Darry, who at twenty is raising both Sodapop and Ponyboy while

working two physically demanding jobs just to stay afloat. A sense of guilt follows Ponyboy, feeling as if he is the one holding Darry back from living a fulfilling life, stating how "he was captain of the football team and he had been voted Boy of the Year. But we just didn't have the money for him to go to college, even with the athletic scholarship he won. And now he didn't have time between two jobs to even think about college" (Hinton 14). Ponyboy's guilt is further exacerbated by the fact that he seen by not only his brothers, but the whole gang as the one that will make it out of the East Side and make something of himself. Despite the fact that Darry chose to stay, he keeps pushing Ponyboy to have good grades so he could get into a good school and not only survive, but live. Darry is also not the only breadwinner in the Curtis household; Sodapop, at sixteen dropped out of high school because he did not see himself as smart enough and opted to work at a gas station in order to help his family make ends meet.

Ponyboy's own view of classism over the course of the novel as he "gradually comes to understand that he is not merely unfortunate, but oppressed by a classist society" (Beals 7). His first somewhat positive interaction with a Soc is with Cherry Valance at the drive-in, who tries to convince him that "things are rough all over" (Hinton 29) and that Socs face different kind of hardships, furthermore claiming that "it's not money, it's feeling—you don't feel anything and we feel too violently" (Hinton 31) is what truly separates the greasers from the Socs. Cherry and the motif of sunsets follow Ponyboy as a way of differentiating group stereotypes from the individual, making the act of watching something as accessible as sunsets, provide a context where class does not matter (Beals 8). Despite the fact that it was her boyfriend Bob that got killed, Cherry still tries to help Ponyboy, taking his side in court even after Ponyboy calls her "a traitor to your own kind" (Hinton 98), seeing Ponyboy not as a greaser, but an individual worth fighting for. But after the deaths of Johnny and Dallas,

Ponyboy realises that what was happening to greasers is "too vast a problem to be just a personal thing. There should be some help, someone should tell them before it was too late. Someone should tell their side of the story, and maybe people would understand then and wouldn't be so quick to judge a boy by the amount of hair oil he wore" (Hinton 136).

The other two most prominent greasers that showcase systemic failure when it comes to impoverished and working-class youth are the characters of Johnny Cade and Dallas Winston. Johnny is the most timid member of the greasers, described as a "dark puppy that has been kicked too many times and is lost in a crowd of strangers" (Hinton 10) who seemingly does not seem to fit in with the group. Coming from a household with an abusive father and a neglectful alcoholic mother, Johnny tries to keep to himself and avoid trouble as much as possible. And yet, Johnny seems to be the that suffers the most from the Socs' violent tendencies. After the Johnny kills a Soc in self-defence, he and Ponyboy seek help from Dallas and eventually run away, aware that if they stay, they would not be treated kindly by the system: "If Johnny got caught, they'd give him the electric chair, and if they caught me, I'd be sent to a reformatory" (Hinton 51). Despite that possibility, Johnny wants to turn himself in and believes in the smallest of chances that the system might stand by his side: "'I ain't got no record with the fuzz and it was self-defense. Ponyboy and Cherry can testify to that. And I don't aim to stay in that church all my life'" (Hinton 67). Public opinion shifts once Johnny, Ponyboy, and Dallas save children from the burning church, but Johnny ends up paralysed with severe burns and Ponyboy realises that Johnny would never escape the system: "Even if Johnny did live he'd be crippled and never play football or help us out in a rumble again. He'd have to stay in that house he hated, where he wasn't wanted, and things could never be like they used to be" (Hinton 79). Ultimately, Johnny dies near the end of the

novel and it did not matter how much he tried to lay low or simply believe in a fair system, it was not enough for him to survive it.

In contrast, Dallas Winston is a greaser that deliberately goes against the law. Dallas spent three years in the rougher parts of New York and was drawn towards the violent side of the conflict, described as "tougher than the rest of us—tougher, colder meaner. The shade of difference that separates a greaser from a hood wasn't present in Dally" (Hinton 10) stating that Dallas did not fight or steal out of necessity, but rather for personal enjoyment. Since coming back to Oklahoma, Dallas put his focus on the Socs since there were no gangs like in the big city, but the bitterness towards the Socs was different since, as Ponyboy notes, "you can't win against them no matter how hard you try, because they've got all the breaks and even whipping them isn't going to change that fact" (Hinton 10). The Socs stand at the top of the class hierarchy and whilst violence brought them temporarily to an equal level, outside of it they still remain on top.

Paradoxically, Johnny and Dallas are the greasers with the closest non-familial bond, sharing a mutual respect for each other even though they deal with class inequality in different ways. Dallas is the first and only person Johnny and Ponyboy go to after the murder, seemingly unfazed by the situation: "He didn't bat an eye when Johnny told him what had happened, only grinned and said 'Good for you' when Johnny told him how he had knifed the Soc" (Hinton 46). He is the one that tells them about the church in Windrixville and even passes on a letter from Soda to Ponyboy. As Johnny starts getting more anxious about staying in hiding, Dallas tries to convince him not to turn himself in as he knows that a boy like Johnny would not fare well in prison, that Johnny would end up just as jaded as him: "'you get hardened in jail. I don't want that to happen to you. Like it happened to me…'" (Hinton 69). But in spite of his jadedness and at times outright cruelty, Dallas follows Johnny and

Ponyboy into the burning church and helps save those kids. That action shows Dallas's willingness to change, but that sliver of change gets trampled once Johnny dies. Seeing that someone like Johnny, someone who tried his best to do everything by the book, who had hopes for the system, die, Dallas sees it as a nail in his own coffin, that if there was no hope for Johnny then there would never be any hope for him. This leads to Dallas robbing a store with an unloaded gun and using the system's hypocrisy as a suicide tool, knowing full well that the only way the police would stop him would be deadly.

3.2. Poverty and Violence

Since violence was, and still is, an ever-present occurrence, a disconnect forms between the human ability to rationalise that violence and the social reality as then violence seeps into the norm (Franzak, Noll 2). Cruelty and violence among young adults happen on a daily basis and whilst at times it can be subtle or even unintentional, at others it can be very deliberate on both a physical and psychological level (Morgan 2). Because of that, young adult literature, especially that "with believable teenage characters can help the young see cruelty as selfish, stupid, or vicious. These novels, in turn, may help readers to become aware of and control their own cruel impulses" (Morgan 2), adding a pedagogical layer to the representation of violence.

As *The Outsiders* centres around the conflict between the Socs and greasers, violence is deeply woven into the story, opening with Ponyboy getting jumped and threatened with a knife by a group of Socs. The main plot escalates after Ponyboy and Johnny get jumped and he murders a Soc out of self-defence and one of the peak moments of the novel is the rumble between the greasers and Socs. Franzak and Noll define three different levels of violence that occur within young adult literature: "individual, institutional, and structural-cultural" (3), with all three being present within *The Outsiders*. Individual violence, defined as "individuals

doing harm to others" (Franzak, Noll 3), is most present through Dallas, who regularly seeks out fights and boasts about them: "'Me and Shepard had a run-in and I cracked some ribs. (…) Ol' Tim sure can pack a punch. He won't be able to see outta one eye for a week'" (Hinton 47). The Socs throughout the novel are always depicted as an entity, even while fighting. As the final rumble approaches Ponyboy notes that in fights, the Socs were always organised and have an established leader whilst the greasers are "just buddies who stuck together—each man was his own leader" (Hinton 105), which often helped the greasers. Meanwhile, institutional violence, defined as "that which is perpetuated by social institutions like schools and the criminal justice system" (Franzak, Noll 3) looms over Ponyboy's head as a constant threat. Even before Johnny kills Bob, the only reason Ponyboy is able to live with his brothers and not a group home is because Darry had to abandon his plans for college in order to work. After the rumble, Ponyboy believes that the thin ice had cracked and that the institutions will not allow his life to get better and that they would separate him from his only family: "'Darry, I'm not ever going to be able to make up the school I've missed. And I've still got to go to court and talk to the police about Bob's getting killed. And now with Dally…'—I took a deep breath— 'Darry, do you think they'll split us up? Put me in a home or something?'" (Hinton 119). To which Darry can only reply: "'I don't know, baby. I just don't know'" (Hinton 119) as they have time and time again been betrayed by the system that there is no sure answer to Ponyboy's question. In the end, Ponyboy does not end up separated from his brothers, but he still ends up falling behind in school, especially English class. Despite failing the class, "taking into consideration the circumstances" (Hinton 129), Ponyboy's teacher decides to allow him to pass the class by writing an essay about his own experiences that encompass the theme of the semester. Throughout the interaction, Ponyboy's internal monologue is ironic in tone, showcasing that his teacher cannot understand what

exactly happened to Ponyboy and that Mr. Syme is simply insensitively trying to push the school's standards (Beals 11).

Furthermore, structural-cultural violence, which "is represented in world views, or ways of thinking, that accept violence as a natural part of life" (Franzak, Noll 3), is a persistent occurrence throughout the novel. The Socs are on top of the social hierarchy and despite the fact that they are often more cruel, more brutal than the greasers, they stay on top through violence because "by keeping the greasers in constant fear of potentially deadly force, the hierarchy of Socs over greasers is maintained, and greasers participate in this enforcement by embodying the role of victim: by slouching, assuming fault or guilt where there is none, and, in the case of Dally, using the police as a suicide weapon" (Beals 15 – 16). Even after the greasers win the final rumble and the deaths of Johnny and Dallas, not much changes when it comes to the social structures, just the fact that they would not enter greaser territory. At school, Ponyboy is approached by a group of Socs that try to uphold that notion of fear, but he does not feel angry or scared. The Socs twist the story in a way that makes Ponyboy the danger, all the while threatening him: "'You're the guy that killed Bob Sheldon,' one of them said. 'And he was a friend of ours. We don't like nobody killing our friends, especially greasers.'" (Hinton 129). Meanwhile Ponyboy, who is at this point aware of the class difference and that he has to be proactive to fight it, throws that fear back at them, threatening the Socs with a bottle, slowly slipping into the same jadedness that Dallas had. This instance shows that not only does Ponyboy have to fight class injustice individually, but also violently in order for there to be any change.

4. Social Inequality

As previously stated, the biggest difference between Socs and greasers is their class status and as an appendage to that, the way that greasers are perceived socially, not just by the Socs, but within their own group. When Ponyboy first meets Cherry—and by extension Marcia—they immediately question why Ponyboy is "running around with trash like that for" (Hinton 20) and Cherry pities him once Ponyboy says that he sticks with Dallas because he is a greaser like him. Cherry, who is a Soc that does not like being labelled a Soc, cannot fathom why Ponyboy would be around someone just because they are from the same social group. Furthermore, Marcia serves as the typical Soc girl that Cherry has the privilege to deviate from: "I realized then that Marcia and Cherry weren't anything alike. Cherry had said she wouldn't drink Dally's Coke if she was starving, and she meant it. It was the principle of the thing. But Marcia saw no reason to throw away a perfectly good, free Coke" (Hinton 25). Cherry showcases that despite their organisation, the Socs are still very individualistic, having the freedom of distancing herself from the Soc label without much consequence.

To contrast, the greasers for Ponyboy do not only represent protection from the Socs's violent tendencies, but also family. Even before his parents died, Ponyboy grew up around the rest of the greasers and trusted them as much as he did his own blood brothers and sometimes even more. The greasers represent a community, always helping each other no matter what, whether that is something as mundane as Two-Bit accompanying Ponyboy and Johnny to the drive-in or Dallas hiding Ponyboy and Johnny away. Moreover, the Curtis house is especially seen as a safe haven as their "front door is always unlocked in case one of the boys needs a place to lay over and cool off" (Hinton 81) as most of the greaser boys have a strained to non-existent relationship with their parents. The greasers support each other, sending out the message "that while it is often hard or even impossible to 'pull oneself up by

one's bootstraps,' it may be much more possible to do so if someone else is tugging on them as well, or holding one up, providing balance and support during the struggle" (Darragh, Hill 78) and showing the importance of an accepting and supportive community.

Despite the fact that the greasers only act violently out of self-defence, they are still seen as lesser and more dangerous by the outside world when contrasted to the Socs: "We look hoody and they look decent. It could be just the other way around—half of the hoods I know are pretty decent guys underneath all that grease, and from what I've heard, a lot of Socs are just cold-blooded mean—but people usually go by looks" (Hinton 107). In fact, the only time within the novel that Ponyboy is seen as something beyond his greaser label is after the fire when one of the teachers thinks of him, Johnny and Dallas as heroes. Even after finding out what they had done, he sided with Ponyboy, showing a sliver of Johnny's dream of "someplace without greasers or Socs, with just people. Plain ordinary people" (Hinton 38) where such labels do not determine what kind of person someone is.

5. Depiction of Gender

5.1. The Greasers and Masculinity

Male characters and male identity throughout the young adult genre are more often than not quite limited and do not necessarily reflect what a male reading audience is looking for (Garcia 83). Garcia also notes that the there are three main reasons to this limitation: the first being the fact that the majority of young adult literature is written by women, coupled with the facts that books catered towards a young adult male audience are mostly trope-ridden, centring around violence, sports or are categorised into genre fiction, sometimes even skipping the YA label altogether (83 – 84).

Despite S. E. Hinton being a teenage girl at the time *The Outsiders* was written, her novel features almost exclusively male characters. And yet, each character is fleshed out in a way that showcases the different ways masculinity manifests. Darry as the eldest brother and caregiver, is shown as closed off, "always rough without meaning to be" (Hinton 6), an idolised version of what Ponyboy thinks a man should be like if only he had the resources. Meanwhile, Dallas portrays the toxic side of masculinity, not only by using his aggression and size for intimidation, but it is also seen in the way he treats Cherry. Upon arriving to the drive-in, the boys sit behind the Soc girls and Dallas manages to "beat his own record for saying something dirty" (Hinton 18), which delves into further harassment and only stops when Cherry pushes back multiple times. When faced with something as traumatic as watching one of his closest friends dying a painful death in front of him, Dallas's initial reaction is denial and once Johnny's death sinks in, his first instinct is violence, "slamming one fist against the wall, hammering it to make it obey his will" (Hinton 113) and when that does not work, he runs.

In contrast, both Ponyboy and Johnny break away from the expected norm, showing not just more emotion, but also vulnerability than the other greasers. The greasers were raised to be toughened and to not show any of that vulnerability, but Ponyboy openly struggled with it, especially after seeing Johnny in the hospital: "A pain was growing in my throat and I wanted to cry, but greasers don't cry in front of strangers. Some of us never cry at all" (Hinton 79). Still, Ponyboy does show his emotions juxtaposed against Dallas and his closed off exterior. Moreover, Ponyboy and Johnny also show kindness towards Cherry and Marcia, going against their expectations of greasers. In fact, it is that kindness and vulnerability that ends up helping Ponyboy as Cherry later testifies against her own group in court in order to prove his innocence.

5.2. Cherry and Femininity

Cherry Valance is the only female character that has any type of prominence throughout the novel. She is the girlfriend of Bob, the Soc that gets killed, but she still does not want Ponyboy to suffer. Although she is described as the type of girl whose "idea of a good time was probably high-class, and probably expensive" (Hinton 23) she breaks away from the traditional female characterisation as she proves to be assertive and stand up for herself and her beliefs. And yet, despite that assertiveness, her character still revolves around a boy, specifically Bob, and her love towards him, leaning into the expectation of being in a relationship with a good standing boy within her social and class group: "I know I'm too young to be in love and all that, but Bob wasn't just any boy. He had something that made people follow him, something that marked him different, maybe a little better, than the crowd" (Hinton 98).

As the novel's is narrated through the mind of a fourteen-year-old boy, there is a distinct was that female characters are described as. While the portrayals female beauty standards or even attraction might not have intentions of being limiting, they can still have that effect (Garcia 79) and that is visible within the descriptions of female characters within *The Outsiders*. When first introduced, Cherry and Marcia are described as "tuff-looking girls —dressed sharp and really good-looking" (Hinton 18) noticing not only their physical beauty, but also their class status just by the way they were dressed. The Soc status and femininity are linked together as they are seen as desirable, while greaser girls are seen as the opposite, described as "though, loud girls who wore too much eye makeup and giggled and swore too much" (Hinton 13). The only greaser girls are either merely mentioned, like Soda's girlfriend Sandy or Dally's past girlfriends, or grouped together and there is no female greaser that even

speaks in the novel. The most developed female greaser is Sandy, but still she is painted in a negative light as she leaves for Florida, breaking Soda's heart in the process. Ponyboy's bias is obvious, from referring to Cherry and Marcia as broads, to not liking greaser girls, and it is this bias that shows that despite being written by a female writer, misogynistic undertones are still present throughout the novel.

Conclusion

Despite being published in the sixties, the themes of *The Outsiders* still resonate today. Although today young adult novels dealing with topics such as poverty or injustice are on the rise, *The Outsiders* was one of the first of its kind to provide an accessible and relatable outlook to class injustice to a younger, more easily influenced audience. Dealing with classism through the eyes of a teenager, the novel showcases the deep-rootedness of injustice, how it goes beyond what car someone owns or how much grease they put in their hair. The novel shows the harsh reality of growing up in an impoverished community, the sacrifices one makes in order to survive, the naivety of trusting the system and the jadedness that mirrors it. Gang violence is utilised to emphasise the cruelness of classism and the way that the working class has to fight in order to keep living. The greasers are often discriminated against simply by their looks, a visual representation of the class difference manifesting as social injustice.

Furthermore, a spectrum of masculinity is showcased, with Darry and Dallas representing a more traditional, aggressive depiction of masculinity while Johnny and Ponyboy both lean into their emotions and show vulnerability. Femininity, meanwhile, is contrasted between the Soc girls and greaser girls as the Soc girls are shown in a positive light and traditionally feminine while greaser girls are showcased as loud and rude, while not even appearing in the novel and only shown in a negative light. While Ponyboy and Cherry might see the same sunset at the end of the day, the key difference between them, between the greasers and Socs, is that they have to fight two very different fights in order to get the chance to see that sunset.

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