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# Scouting for a Tomboy: Gender-Bending Behaviors in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*

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SCOUTING FOR A TOMBOY: GENDER-BENDING BEHAVIORS IN HARPER LEE'S *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

by

LAURA HAKALA

(Under the Direction of Caren Town)

ABSTRACT

In Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Scout Finch challenges gender stereotypes in her determination to remain a tomboy. Scout interacts with five parental characters (Atticus, Calpurnia, Aunt Alexandra, Miss Maudie, and Boo Radley), who offer models for Scout's behaviors. Though primarily unconventional in terms of gender, these parental figures fluctuate between ideals, demonstrating that gender is an unstable standard that alters according to each individual. Lee depicts characters who resist conforming to the paradigms of masculinity and femininity and instead fill middle positions between the stereotypes, as Scout's tomboyism exemplifies. After encountering different models, Scout consistently exhibits these gender-bending inclinations. Scout's exploration of her identity as a tomboy functions as her coming-of-age journey.

INDEX WORDS: Tomboy, Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Young adult literature, Gender stereotypes, Parents, Role models

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this Master's thesis to my family, who endured countless discussions about gender issues when they would have preferred other conversational topics. Thank you for your support, encouragement, and love. Also, I would like to thank my parents for teaching me to cherish unconventional behaviors.

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## CHAPTER 1

## “A RAY OF SUNSHINE IN PANTS”: DEFINING SCOUT’S TOMBOYISM

In Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Aunt Alexandra tells Scout Finch to act like a lady and wear a dress so she can “be a ray of sunshine in [her] father’s lonely life.” Scout does not respond positively: she retorts that she can “be a ray of sunshine in pants just as well” (89). In fact, Scout does not respond positively to anything feminine, preferring reading instead of sewing, playing outside instead of inside, and the nickname “Scout” to the girlish “Jean Louise.” On the other hand, the culture that Lee depicts does not respond positively to Scout’s tomboyish inclinations. Scout lives in Maycomb, Alabama, a rural Southern town, during the Great Depression. In this setting, society dictates strict gender stereotypes, and people rarely cross the barrier between masculinity and femininity. Maycomb is a place where “[l]adies bathed before noon, after their three o’clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum” (11). Scout, however, refuses to be a “soft teacake.” *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a story about a man wrongly accused of rape and a lawyer who confronts racial prejudice, but it also chronicles the journey of a girl who challenges gender stereotypes in her determination to remain a tomboy.

Lee sets this novel during three years of Scout’s childhood in which she encounters everything from a defiant lynch mob to the “foot-washing Baptists,” as well as the town’s “malevolent phantom.” Scout’s coming-of-age tale unfolds as her father, the champion attorney Atticus Finch, defends an innocent black man, Tom Robinson, charged with raping a white woman. Since its publication in 1960, this story has maintained a widespread popularity. As Claudia Johnson writes, “*To Kill a Mockingbird* is one of those books that has reached large numbers of readers and has made significant differences in the lives of individuals and the

culture as a whole” (13). *To Kill a Mockingbird* has never been out of print, probably due to its presence on school reading lists. Furthermore, in 1991, the Book-of-the-Month Club and the Library of Congress’s Center for the Book conducted a survey, in which people only ranked the Bible higher than *To Kill a Mockingbird* as “making a difference” in their lives (14).

Though generations of readers have enjoyed Scout’s story, attorneys, rather than literary critics, have paid more attention to the novel. The first book-length study from a literary perspective, Claudia Johnson’s *To Kill a Mockingbird: Threatening Boundaries*, did not appear until 1994. Prior to Johnson’s book, only six short literary articles existed on *To Kill a Mockingbird*, including one that became the final chapter in Johnson’s study, and no one had written a dissertation on the subject (Johnson 20). However, recent publications suggest that critical trends concerning Harper Lee are changing. Since the 1990s, scholars have steadily produced more articles, and in 2007, Alice Hall Petry edited a collection entitled *On Harper Lee: Essays and Reflections*. Often, these publications discuss Atticus and Tom Robinson’s trial, exploring the book’s racial and ethical themes. A few critics center their arguments on gender issues, the most extended of which include Dean Shackelford’s comparison between Scout’s narrative voice in the novel and in the film, Laura Fine’s discussion of the patriarchy in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and Gary Richards’s assertion that Lee destabilizes heterosexuality. These three scholars provide valuable insights, and I join them in shifting the focus from legal and racial topics to gender.

Though Shackelford, Fine, and Richards all discuss Scout as an unconventional female, I provide more details about the adults that shape Scout’s conceptions of gender. Furthermore, I place Scout within the context of the tomboy’s multifaceted history, which emphasizes her gender-bending behaviors. I will also consider *To Kill a Mockingbird* as adolescent literature, as

opposed to the many scholars, including the aforementioned gender critics, who approach the novel as adult fiction. When published in 1960, *To Kill a Mockingbird* was not originally intended for a young adult audience, but, as Petry notes, it contains the elements of “an ideal teaching text for young people,” including its short length, its uncomplicated style, and its presentation of complex issues “in a nonsensational fashion” (xv). Furthermore, contemporary scholars often regard *To Kill a Mockingbird* as an adolescent text, perhaps because a vast number of high schools place the novel on mandatory reading lists.<sup>1</sup> Viewing the novel as adolescent fiction is useful because Scout’s journey towards understanding her identity as a tomboy aligns with young adult coming-of-age stories. Scout’s struggle between tomboyism and ideals of femininity constitutes a central conflict in the novel, which is, after all, her story and not Atticus’s. For these reasons, *To Kill a Mockingbird’s* gender issues deserve further examination. Trying to live as a tomboy, Scout experiences the opposition that arises when people cross the boundaries of gender stereotypes.

### Scouting for Gender Stereotypes

In Maycomb, stereotypical views concerning masculinity and femininity are prevalent. Scout’s Aunt Alexandra emphasizes these conventions when she suggests that Scout play with small stoves and tea sets, desiring that Scout submit to domesticity (89). While women complete these tasks in the home, men journey outside. Scout expresses her awareness of these codes when she describes the fathers of her classmates: “manliness” entails working labor-intensive jobs, such as driving a dump-truck or farming, as well as engaging in outdoor physical activities, such as hunting and fishing (97-98). Regional stereotypes about gender also influence these standards. Starting on the first page of the novel, Scout establishes her family as Southerners, mentioning several significant aspects of the Southern lifestyle: her family’s pride in their

heritage, their agrarian history on Finch's Landing, and her ancestor's ownership of slaves (9-10). That way of life also draws on the nineteenth-century model of the Southern lady and gentleman. In her book about Southern belles, Kathryn Lee Seidel explains, "Southerners were, in their moral ideals, Victorians who reacted strongly against the corruption of their society" (*Southern Belle* 4). Seidel further describes these figures:

The patriarchal South had made white men the dominant group. . . . Women and blacks, on the other hand, were deemed subordinate in status, role, and temperament; a woman's status depended upon her father or husband, her economic role was that of a marriage alliance-maker before marriage and a homemaker after marriage, her sexual role was that of a chaste maiden or a faithful wife...and her ideal temperament was passive, docile, ignorant, and virtuous. (*Southern Belle* 147)

Though the Old South in the nineteenth-century established these stereotypes, Seidel notes that they continue into the next era, and twentieth-century fiction allows these characters to evolve (*Southern Belle* xii). This evolution appears in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I assert that Lee contrasts the unconventional characters with these stereotypes to illustrate their progression beyond standards. They no longer feel bound to Southern womanhood and manhood.

Further emphasizing the dominance of these standards, gender stereotypes spread beyond Scout's white, middle-class environment. For instance, in the poverty-stricken, working class, Bob Ewell exerts patriarchal authority over his household and forces his daughter Mayella to claim that Tom Robinson raped her. He wields so much power over her that he beats her into submission, giving her an arm full of bruises and a black eye (179). Likewise, other racial classes remain aware of gender stereotypes. Reverend Sykes, a leader in Maycomb's black

community, suggests that ladies are fragile and should be protected from the more lurid aspects of society, the aspects that men can freely discuss. When Jem discusses the alleged rape in Scout's presence, Reverend Sykes remarks, "this ain't a polite thing for little ladies to hear" (221). While it remains unclear if Reverend Sykes refers to ladies in general or just white ladies, this comment still evidences the pervasiveness of stereotypical gender expectations.

These examples also demonstrate the intersection of gender, race, and social classes in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In all of these areas, one group of people tends to privilege themselves over another group; therefore, similarities exist between women and blacks, who white men have subjugated throughout history. Likewise, the upper or middle-class tends to marginalize the lower class. In addition to privileging, barriers have existed between white and black, middle-class and poor, and masculinity and femininity. Lee repeatedly draws connections between these elements to emphasize how a character challenges stereotypes. For instance, Calpurnia's atypical behavior as a black woman accentuates her rejection of standards in general. Often, if a character opposes one set of standards, then they likely resist another set, which typically includes gender. As Claudia Johnson concludes, "It is essentially a tale about a variety of boundaries—those of race, region, time, class, sex, tradition, and code—boundaries that are at times threatening to collapse, that are threatened by circumstances and community members" (31). Since characters simultaneously challenge multiple barriers, this gender analysis will frequently include racial and social issues.

Adding to Johnson's argument, I assert that gender boundaries become unstable as the characters subvert stereotypes. These characters do not divide gender into two opposing binaries; instead, they occupy middle positions between masculinity and femininity, as well as blend their masculine and feminine qualities. Furthermore, I will show how the characters'

behaviors illustrate different types of masculinity and femininity. The female characters do not conform to the same ideal of womanhood, just as the men do not conform to identical standards of masculinity. Scout's tomboyism, however, best exemplifies this fluidity of gender roles, and the behaviors of her parental figures also contribute to this theme.

When considering a character's gender-bending behaviors, it is always useful to consult Judith Butler. Butler asserts, "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (33). Due to these repeated acts, Butler views gender as "a kind of becoming or activity" (112). In other words, gender is more of a verb than a noun (112). Therefore, through their actions, Scout and her parental figures demonstrate this flexible view of gender. Scout is not born with an innate predisposition to be a tomboy; rather, her behaviors define her as a tomboy. As she and her parental figures consistently repeat unconventional behaviors, they present their conceptions of what gender means. Lee ultimately depicts gender as an unstable standard that alters according to each individual, as opposed to the paradigms of stereotypical masculinity and femininity.

#### Scouting for Tomboys Throughout History

Placing Scout within the context of the history of tomboys reveals the unconventional nature of her behaviors, both in comparison with gender stereotypes and also with other more "typical" tomboys. Like gender issues in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, tomboys have also received limited critical attention. Michelle Abate's *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History* (2008) is the first book-length study on the subject, and Abate finds it useful to give information on the origin of the term. In the sixteenth century, society first used the word "tomboy" in reference to "rowdy gentlemen courtiers" (xiii). Then, in the 1590s and early 1600s, the word developed its

modern meaning. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a tomboy of this era as “a girl who behaves like a spirited or boisterous boy; a wild romping girl; a hoyden” (qtd. in Abate xiii).

Abate emphasizes that society’s views about tomboys have changed throughout different eras. For instance, in the mid-nineteenth century, tomboys became more popular in culture and literature for young girls. When society became concerned about the health of middle and upper class white women, the idea of the “tomboy” emerged as a desired health-status for women (xv). Abate derives much of this information from Sharon O’Brien, who examined Victorian advice guides to learn about nineteenth-century health issues. O’Brien reports, “The rowdy tomboy would make a better wife and mother than her prissy, homebound sister, they argued, for participation in boyish sports and games would develop the health, strength, independence, and competence she would later need as a wife and mother” (354). However, upon reaching puberty, girls were expected to submit to stereotypical femininity and confine themselves to the domestic sphere, as well as abandon the desire for physical and intellectual activity (355). Books for girls began to chronicle and reinforce this submission, including Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s *Gypsy Breynton*, and Susan Coolidge’s *What Katy Did*. Elizabeth Segel also studies tomboys during this era, and concerning these three novels, Segel comments, “These books created and defined the tomboy heroine who has persisted as a stock character in American children’s books” (48). From the end of the Civil War to the Depression era, Abate points out that critics characterize these years as the “golden era” of tomboys in literature because the characters were so prominent (xv). Although nineteenth-century culture held somewhat positive views toward tomboys, society still emphasized gender stereotypes in the notion that tomboyism could not continue beyond adolescence.

The twentieth-century brought further shifting attitudes toward tomboys. During the years in which Lee grew up and set her novel, America advocated the home as a woman's domain. Then, once World War II erupted, views changed. As men went to battle, women entered the workforce, assuming positions previously considered to be masculine. Abate refers to Rosie the Riveter as an icon of "tomboyish toughness," asserting that, "[a]midst this new global conflict, tomboyism had the potential to help save the world from the destructive powers of European fascists" (146). However, society's high regard for gender-bending females was temporary: when the war ended, women once again returned to their homes (150). Subsequently, as Abate notes, society felt anxious about the changing roles of women and viewed tomboys as "freakishly queer and queerly freakish" (156).

#### Scouting for a Typical Tomboy

During this "freakish" era, Scout Finch joined the ranks of her tomboy predecessors. As society has both promoted and criticized tomboys throughout history, *To Kill a Mockingbird* also reflects this ambivalence concerning gender-bending females. The novel contains characters who both support and disapprove of Scout's tomboyism. For instance, Aunt Alexandra wants Scout to wear a dress, while Atticus allows her to wear overalls. Moreover, other characters paradoxically condemn feminine mannerisms while simultaneously expecting them. Scout's brother Jem, for instance, frequently teases her for being a girl, but he also commands, "It's time you started bein' a girl and acting right!" (125). Even though she endures these conflicting principles, Scout stays resolute. For example, when Jem criticizes her "girlish" fear of the Radley house, she shows masculine bravery and joins him in sneaking into the Radley yard (59). On the other hand, when he suggests she "take up sewin' or something," Scout replies, "Hell no" (238). Reflecting the twentieth-century's hesitation over the changing roles of women, Jem has



shifting expectations for Scout as a female. Scout, however, remains steadfastly opposed to conventional femininity.

In general, Scout is a tomboy because she prefers masculinity over femininity. Specifying several of these preferences, a psychology study by Shawn Meghan Burn, A. Kathleen O’Neil, and Shirley Nederend assessed childhood tomboyism based on 12 factors, five of which particularly characterize Scout. They discussed women who “preferred shorts/jeans to dresses,” “resembled a boy in appearance,” “preferred traditionally boys’ activities (e.g. climbing trees, playing army) over traditionally girls’ activities (e.g. ballet, playing dressup),” “preferred playing with boys rather than girls,” and “engaged in rough and tumble play” (422). Fulfilling the first two features of this study, Scout’s penchant for boyish attire, even when she is criticized for it, is one of her most defining traits. For instance, the Finches’ curmudgeonly neighbor, Mrs. Dubose, exclaims, “[W]hat are you doing in those overalls? You should be in a dress and camisole, young lady! You’ll grow up waiting on tables if somebody doesn’t change your ways—a Finch waiting on tables at the O.K. Café—hah!” (110). As Mrs. Dubose reinforces stereotypes, she also connects gender to class, intimating that unconventional behaviors will lower Scout to the working class. Aligning tomboys with waitresses, Mrs. Dubose emphasizes the disdainful manner in which Scout’s society views her behaviors, as well as the prejudice that middle-class Maycomb holds towards people of a lower social class. Though Scout feels “terrified,” she does not let Mrs. Dubose’s comment deter her tomboyish behaviors, and she continues to wear overalls throughout the remainder of the novel (110).

In addition to boyish attire, Scout demonstrates several other aspects of Burn, O’Neil, and Nederend’s study. Scout frequently plays with her brother and enjoys his boyish hobbies: rolling in a tire, shooting air rifles, joining him in his tree house, and building a snowman. They also

engage in gender-neutral activities, such as acting out dramatic incidents in Boo Radley's life. As the youngest, Scout plays the female supporting roles, but she only does so "reluctantly" (46). Never once does she don a string of pearls or a fancy hat to perform these parts. Incidentally, Jem stars as Miss Stephanie Crawford, the town gossip, demonstrating that Lee does not relegate all women to minor roles. Next, Scout has no female friends: she only plays with Jem and Dill. In fact, all of the children that Scout interacts with are male—Walter Cunningham, Cecil Jacobs, Little Chuck Little. Finally, Scout involves herself in more "rough and tumble play" than the boys. She is notorious for initiating schoolyard brawls. For example, when her teacher unfairly punishes her for discussing Walter Cunningham's poverty, Scout later reacts by "rubbing his [Walter's] nose in the dirt" (20). Walter does not deserve blame for this incident, but Scout fights him to release her frustrations with her teacher. Acting more conventionally feminine than Scout, Walter submits to her strength, failing to return her punches. As these examples illustrate, Scout displays a significant preference for masculine behaviors.

#### Scouting for an Atypical Tomboy

Although these masculine attributes appear common for tomboys, and Segel classifies the tomboy as a "stock character" (48), Scout demonstrates the complexity of the term. She both resembles and resists being a typical tomboy. However, defining a "typical" tomboy often proves difficult because not all tomboys possess the same traits. As Abate writes, "Indeed, tomboyism is commonly considered a monolithic phenomenon—with individuals making frequent reference to 'the tomboy' as if this figure were both singular and static—but I demonstrate how it is an unstable and dynamic one, changing with the political, social, and economic events of its historical era" (xii). Abate uses three examples to illustrate this point:

For instance, wearing bloomers may have been the epitome of tomboyish daring during the nineteenth century, but that is no longer the case today. Similarly, working outside the home is often seen as the apogee of tomboyish independence for wealthy women, but it is a basic fact of life for their working class counterparts. Finally, plowing the fields, baling hay or herding livestock might seem acutely tomboyish for many urban girls, but it constitutes a common chore for those who live on a farm or ranch. (xvi)

Essentially, one must examine a character's environment, as well as a character's response to that environment, to determine the exact features that define her tomboyism. Thus, I regard the Southern setting, as well as Scout's position in the middle class, as significant when assessing her gender-bending behaviors.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, especially, Lee demonstrates the influence of region and social class on gender roles. For example, although gender stereotypes are present in all social classes, one would not expect Mayella Ewell and Scout to exhibit identical behaviors. As Atticus explains, Scout is a member of the "common folk" (37). The Finches live in town, are educated, and work respectable professions. The Ewells, on the other hand, live like "pigs" (204). Uneducated and unemployed, they live in the country beside the town dump (37). Though never physically described, Mayella's appearance is probably similar to her brother Burris's, who Scout labels "the filthiest human" she has ever seen: "His neck was dark gray, the backs of his hands were rusty, and his fingernails were black deep into the quick" (33). While dirtiness is normal and expected for Mayella, however, this feature identifies middle-class Scout as a tomboy. Society expects Scout, more than Mayella, to uphold stereotypes because of her position in the middle-class. When Scout appears "mud-splashed" and "covered with sand"

before the Maycomb society ladies, Aunt Alexandra is dissatisfied because she believes a genteel lady should always remain clean (142). Alexandra also condemns Scout because a lady should not play in the dirt but rather amuse herself with tea sets and small stoves (89). For Scout, dirtiness is an effect of her tomboyish behaviors, as she can *choose* to be unclean. Living in the economic conditions she does, Mayella does not have that same choice.

According to Charles Shields, author of the unauthorized biography *Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee*, Scout's tomboyish behaviors mirror those of Lee's. During her childhood, Nelle, as her family and friends called her, was "the roughhousing boss of the playground who scampered up trees" (39). Once, when several older classmates attacked her friend Truman Capote, she fought off the boys and saved him (31). A "female Huck Finn," she spent her time with Capote reading detective novels and crafting stories on their typewriter (34). In *A Bridge of Childhood: Truman Capote's Southern Years*, Marianne Moates provides a similar description: Lee "had short, cropped hair, wore coveralls, went barefoot, and could talk mean like a boy" (28). Lee's tomboyism continued into high school. After noticing a group of boys playing football, she joined them, insisting that they increase the intensity of the game from touch to tackle (Shields 62). Her behaviors made such an impact on Capote that he later modeled Idabel Tompkins, the wild tomboy in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, on her. These parallels between Lee and Scout—her fictional counterpart—evidence the autobiographical nature of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

In another instance of art imitating life, Lee models Scout's friendship with Dill on her relationship with Truman Capote. She and Capote bonded during their childhood in Monroeville, Alabama and remained lifelong friends. Charles Ray Skinner, a friend of Lee's brother, describes their camaraderie: "Nelle was too rough for the girls, and Truman was scared

of the boys, so he just tagged on to her and she was his protector” (qtd. in Shields 34). Also reflecting this friendship, Capote’s *Other Voices, Other Rooms* presents Idabel Tompkins and Joel Knox. A common thread between these friendships is the combination of a tomboy and an effeminate male. According to Abate, tomboys frequently have “sissy” friends (xvii). Dill is certainly a sissy boy: he’s small for his age; he is the winner of a “Beautiful Child” contest; and he wears “blue linen shorts that buttoned to his shirt,” as opposed to the overalls that Jem wears (13-14). As much as athletic Jem represents masculine stereotypes, Dill defies them. Because Dill does not play baseball, his father even comments, “You’re not a boy” (154).

Abate also observes that these tomboy/sissy friendships often hold no “erotic charge” (xvii), which is consistent with Scout and Dill’s bond. Though they pretend to one day marry, it is only a game. Also, Abate notices that these relationships reinforce gender stereotypes: “Contrary to expectations, these figures frequently police each other’s gender transgressions rather than serving as company in which to safely display them” (xvii). For example, in *Little Women*, Jo helps Laurie lose his feminine traits (Abate xviii). Lee defies this pattern because Scout does not transform Dill. In fact, Jem does more to masculinize Dill, such as teaching him to swim while Scout remains at home (252). Abate also notes that sissies do not reverse the tomboys’ efforts and help her become more feminine (xviii). This holds true for *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Scout and Dill accept each other completely. They never criticize each other’s gender-related traits or suggest a different way to behave, evidencing the novel’s tolerance of gender-bending traits—for both boys and girls.

Frequently, Scout exhibits the tomboy characteristics that Abate discusses, but she does so in her own way. For instance, Abate reports that tomboys typically do not have mothers (xix). Indeed, Scout’s mother dies from a heart attack when Scout is two-years-old (Lee 12). Scout

compares to other motherless tomboys in both children's literature, such as Katy Carr in *What Katy Did*, and adult fiction, such as Frankie Addams in Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding*. For some mothers, they remain alive but absent, unable to affect their daughter's conceptions of gender. In Cynthia Voigt's *Homecoming*, Dicey Tillerman's mother abandons her and her siblings. Similarly, in Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy*, Harriet's mother remains detached from her child's life, similar to many mothers in children's and adolescent literature. Though these tomboys interact with other women, Scout differs from these characters because she has multiple female role models that fill the void of her biological mother's absence, primarily Calpurnia, Aunt Alexandra, and Miss Maudie. She also gains "maternal" guidance from men, such as her father and Boo Radley.

In addition to having mother figures, Scout differs from the typical tomboy when she refuses to be tamed, which is a common conclusion to stories about gender-bending females. Historically, this plot was common in nineteenth-century books for girls, but it still surfaces in twentieth-century fiction. Often, as Abate notes, a girl changes her behavior in preparation for marriage (xix). In *Little Women*, for instance, Jo quells her temper and abandons her boyish demeanor when she marries Professor Bhaer. Furthermore, as she becomes a wife and mother, her plan to "write books, and get rich and famous," which is unorthodox for a Victorian female, now seems "selfish, lonely and cold" (Alcott 118, 379). If the tomboy is too young to marry, like Scout, then she typically endures a "life-threatening illness or injury" or moves to "a strict boarding school or the home of urban relatives" (Abate xx). Tomboy taming also occurs in adult fiction: in the final section of *The Member of the Wedding*, Frankie Addams changes her name to the more feminine Frances, replaces her track shorts with a dress, and acquires a female friend,

Mary Littlejohn (McCullers 118, 129). For these girls, tomboyism is a temporary detour on the path to womanhood.

Scout experiences none of these repressive conclusions. When the novel ends, Scout is still only nine years old. She never faces the difficult choices of adolescence. Some critics suggest otherwise, predicting that she ultimately becomes a conventional woman. Dean Shackelford, for instance, claims that the adult narrator “has presumably now assumed the feminine name Jean Louise for good” (111.). Likewise, Kathryn Lee Seidel makes a clear distinction between Scout, the tomboy child, and Jean Louise, the adult lady, referring to Scout as if she were two separate entities (“Growing Up” 79-80). I find these assertions problematic for several reasons. First, Lee never indicates that Scout changes her name when she ages. Second, even if she changes her name, nothing indicates that she completely abandons her tomboyism. There is no way to know what happens after the novel ends. Since Scout tells her story as an adult, readers can infer some general information: she finds importance in reflecting on her past, and she mentions that she has discussed her childhood with Jem, which suggests that she retains a close relationship with her brother (9). However, the specific details of her adult life remain a mystery. She never reveals if she dates, marries, has children, obtains a career, or becomes a 1950s housewife. Because Scout focuses on herself as a child, readers must direct their attentions likewise. During the ages of six to nine, from the first page of the novel to the last page, Scout remains the same tomboy. After encountering feminine conventions, she remains unsatisfied, and she makes a conscious decision to retain her gender-bending traits.

Though Scout typically rejects feminine standards, a few instances in the novel appear to suggest otherwise. Abate places *To Kill a Mockingbird* among the Cold War’s conservative trend to feminize tomboys. She compares Scout to Nancy Drew. In the original Nancy Drew

series of the 1930s, Nancy “is an autonomous and adventurous figure who is capable, confident, and courageous” (167). However, the revised editions from the late 1950s present a contrasting portrait of Nancy: she loses her athleticism, and she heavily relies on her father and other male police officers (168). For this reason, Abate believes that Scout exhibits tomboyish behaviors but also wears a dress, wants a baton, and pretends to have a courtship with Dill (169). I do not view these tendencies as undermining Scout’s tomboyism. (I will analyze the dress scene in Chapter III.) As for the baton, she desires one “bedecked with sequins and tinsel” so she can “grow up and twirl with the Maycomb County High School band” (109). Since Scout only mentions this ambition once, it must not be a strong desire or she would reference it more often. Also, as Gary Richards aptly notices, Scout has “scant success”: when she tosses a stick in the air, she only “almost” catches it (123). She has far more success completing masculine activities, such as punching Walter Cunningham.

Finally, her courtship with Dill is a game, similar to the dramas they perform in the Finches’ front yard. Like the baton twirling, this endeavor also proves unsuccessful. Scout explains that Dill “had asked me earlier in the summer to marry him, then he promptly forgot about it. He staked me out, marked as his property, said I was the only girl he would ever love, then he neglected me. I beat him up twice but it did no good, he only grew closer to Jem” (48). Dill’s “neglect,” coupled with Scout’s insertion of fighting, creates an unconventional romance. Always intending to marry Scout, Dill never actually completes his plan, once imitating adult behaviors and blaming a lack of finances (126). Dill’s disregard for their courtship may hint towards his sexual orientation as homosexual, especially since Lee models him on Truman Capote, who was openly gay. Also, in not allowing the marriage to come to fruition, Lee resists presenting a more feminine side of Scout. Furthermore, this quote reflects the patriarchal



society's view of women as men's "property;" however, Lee mocks this notion when Scout exerts physical power over Dill, as if he belongs to her. Ultimately, her tomboyish tendencies are far more consistent than her feminine ones, even though her femininity may occasionally surface.

### Scouting for Conventions in Adolescent Literature

As Scout learns about gender issues, she experiences the coming-of-age journey common to adolescent fiction. Writing about female development, Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland assert, "With few exceptions, the relationship between the individual and society, as it is represented in the novel, is marked by clashes of unique human possibility with the restraints of social convention" (6). This assessment applies to Scout: she encounters these "clashes" as she tries to remain a tomboy in a world that advocates stereotypical femininity. Abel, Hirsch, and Langland specifically contend that female development differs from male development. Women face more tension as they must come to terms with both masculine and feminine standards (11). Lee represents this conflict by contrasting Jem's development into a stereotypical male adolescent with Scout's gender-bending behaviors. Lee emphasizes the opposition that Scout encounters.

In viewing Scout's development as a tomboy in opposition to societal structures, I find it useful to consider Roberta Trites' power/repression model. Trites asserts that power unites the variety of books that compose the genre of young adult literature (7). As teenage characters negotiate power structures, they feel repressed. In turn, this repression inspires them to rebel against societal institutions in order to gain power (54). Though only a child, Scout experiences this dynamic. Gender conventions try to repress her tomboyish desires, but she rebels and gains a sense of her identity, which empowers her. Trites also includes parents as part of an

adolescent's power structure (55). In some respects, though, Lee diverges from Trites's model concerning Atticus and Scout's other parental figures. With the exception of Aunt Alexandra, Scout's mentors encourage her gender-bending behaviors. They may repress her in other aspects, such as Atticus' insistence that Scout attend school (37), but concerning gender, they allow her to gain power by subverting expectations.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, five parental characters assist with Scout's development: Atticus, Calpurnia, Aunt Alexandra, Miss Maudie, and Boo Radley. Incidentally, though not Scout's biological mother, these characters still function in maternal roles. As Nancy Chodorow asserts, "Being a mother, then, is not only bearing a child—it is being a person who socializes and nurtures. It is being a primary parent or caretaker" (11). Furthermore, Chodorow views "mothering" as a verb instead of a noun; therefore, "[w]e can talk about a man 'mothering' a child, if he is this child's primary nurturing figure, or is acting in a nurturant manner" (11). These five characters act nurturing when they offer Scout guidance about the world, growing up, and femininity. Even Aunt Alexandra offers assistance with becoming a conventional female, although Scout rejects that aid. Thus, Chodorow's ideas about nonbiological mothers as nurturers illuminates Atticus, Calpurnia, Aunt Alexandra, Miss Maudie, and Boo Radley as parental figures; however, most of the novel resists Chodorow's conclusions.

Chodorow ultimately argues that women act as mothers, which in turn "produce[s] daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother" (7). This cyclical pattern, which Chodorow terms the "reproduction of mothering," creates the "sexual and familial division of labor": it produces females who develop the stereotypical desire to nurture and care for children and males who do not parent (209). According to this cycle, girls do not maintain control over their future: they will inevitably become mothers. *To Kill a Mockingbird* resists this essentialist

conclusion, however. Because Scout demonstrates personal agency in her decision to be a tomboy, she aligns more closely with Judith Butler's theories about gender fluidity and performativity. Though Scout has parental figures, they do not force her to follow a certain path in life. Just as a writer includes stage directions in a play, suggesting a guide for an actor's performance, Scout's parental figures offer her a model for unconventional gender roles. Ultimately, though, an actor must decide for himself how to deliver a scene, which Scout similarly concludes about her own tomboyism.

In addition, because of the prominence of these parental characters, Lee diverges from trends in adolescent fiction. According to Kenneth L. Donelson and Alleen Pace Nilsen, who compile the characteristics of the "best of modern young adult literature" (28), absent parents are a feature of this genre. Donelson and Nilsen write, "With formula fiction for young readers, one of the first things an author does is to figure out how to get rid of the parents so that the young person is free to take credit for his or her accomplishments" (29). Scout, however, does not make her accomplishments alone; her parental figures offer support, encouragement, and love. For the most part, Scout develops healthy relationships with her parental figures, and as Donelson and Nilsen note, teenagers and parents rarely share "good relationships" in adolescent fiction (124). Even though Aunt Alexandra offers criticism, she is still more present than Scout desires, and she prepares Scout for a world that opposes gender-bending behaviors.

The parental characters are strong role models because they personally subvert expectations and present Scout with models of gender-bending behaviors. I will examine Atticus, Calpurnia, Aunt Alexandra, Miss Maudie, and Boo Radley because these characters influence Scout's tomboyism more heavily than any other character in the novel. Chapter II discusses Atticus as an unconventional Southern man in both his own behaviors and in his

encouragement of Scout's tomboyism. Also, his behaviors resemble some feminine stereotypes. Scout then uses her father as a model for "bending the law" of gender expectations. Chapter III presents an analysis of Scout's three mother figures—Calpurnia, Aunt Alexandra, and Miss Maudie. These women both reinforce and reject conventions, and their movement across gender divides encourages Scout's divergence from feminine standards. Ultimately, Scout identifies with Miss Maudie, who becomes a stronger model for womanhood than Calpurnia or Aunt Alexandra. Last, Chapter IV examines Boo Radley. Boo's reclusive refusal to take part in society establishes him as the most peculiar and unconventional character in the entire novel. Though she does not directly imitate his behaviors, Scout learns an important lesson: Boo proves that a person can resist conformity and still find happiness.

Through these characters, Lee presents the novel's theme of deviating from gender expectations. As Laura Fine writes, "Harper Lee fills her novel with examples of acceptable breakings of boundaries, codes, or laws, and these violations set the stage for Scout's own boundary breaking" ("Structuring" 64). Not only do the characters differ from stereotypes, but the structure of the novel also differs from features common to adolescent fiction, even though contemporary scholars place the novel within that genre. Within the pattern for tomboys, Scout diverges from several of those standards. Also, parents are not background characters; they serve a significant role. The following chapters will examine their influence on Scout, revealing how they guide her to be "a ray of sunshine in pants" (89).

## CHAPTER 2

## BENDING THE LAW: ATTICUS'S PATERNAL INFLUENCE ON SCOUT

Critics have called him everything from “Christ-like” and “Olympian” to “racist” and “elitist” (Petry xxv; Freedman 21). No matter the qualities attributed to him, Atticus Finch is the most critically examined character in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and scholars often give him a larger-than-life status. Surprisingly, attorneys have analyzed Atticus more often than literary scholars, and Alice Hall Petry terms him “a folk hero in legal circles” since he seems to represent an ideal of morality and social justice much needed by lawyers (xxiii). However, I would like to shift the focus away from a legal perspective and turn to a gender analysis, even though I will still reference some legal topics as they influence gender. After all, as Miss Maudie notes, “Atticus Finch is the same in his house as he is on the public streets” (53). Critics have also heavily explored the novel’s racial elements, which interact with gender as well. As Claudia Johnson explains, “In the novel, the limitations of gender run parallel to the more obvious theme of the limitations of race” (101). Therefore, I will emphasize the racial and legal issues as they impact Lee’s construction of Atticus as an unconventional man in terms of gender expectations.

When examining Atticus’ masculinity, it is necessary to consider Southern conceptions of gender because in Lee’s novel, *Southern* manhood is the only type of manhood examined. Maycomb regards gender stereotypes as seriously as they view the code that a black man should not have relations with a white woman, and these unwritten laws form the foundation of their culture. From this perspective, Atticus is particularly atypical. In some instances, he completely subverts expectations by acting stereotypically feminine, but in other instances, he only bends conventions by demonstrating features that differ from the dominant male traits in his community. As a male “mother,” for example, Atticus is not completely unconventional—after

all, he hires Calpurnia to cook and clean—but he is not completely conventional either. His few feminine traits combine with his masculine traits, raising questions about the notion that people must conform to one standard or the other. While Atticus reveals the gray areas of racial concerns, he also exposes the gray areas of gender issues, both through his own behaviors and through his acceptance of Scout's tomboyism.

Though a successful lawyer, Atticus functions in this novel primarily as Scout and Jem's father, and he is an important role model for his daughter. As Michelle Ware says, “[Scout] has no memory of her mother, so she looks to Jem and Atticus as her guides to appropriate behavior” (286). While Scout has several parental guides, Atticus is the most significant mentor because he is her only biological parent, and she spends the majority of her time with him. Also, Scout strongly admires her father's gender-bending preferences. Dean Shackelford makes a similar observation: “Exactly why Scout identifies with Atticus so much may have as much to do with his own individuality and inner strength as the fact that he is a single parent and father” (109). Because of his own unconventional behaviors, both as a man and as a father, Atticus serves as a model for Scout's tomboyism.

In his family life, Atticus particularly challenges societal expectations. Breaking the “tradition of living on the land” at the family plantation, Atticus leaves to study law and then resides in Maycomb (10). Then, elevating his career over his personal life, he waits to marry until he reaches middle-age. After his wife suffers a heart attack and dies, he never remarries (12). These decisions seem unusual because a conventional lifestyle entails having a nuclear family. Historically, as Kathryn Lee Seidel points out, courtship played a large part in the Southern lifestyle; therefore, a man worked to attain a family from a young age. Also, a gentleman was charged with “protecting” his belle (*Southern Belle* 5-6). Without a wife,

however, Atticus cannot fulfill that task. The Finches's neighbor, Mrs. Dubose, reflects these conventional views when she pities Atticus, believing that Jem and Scout need a stepmother. She maintains that a woman could tame their "wild" ways (108). Atticus clearly feels capable of raising his children alone, though. As Shackelford maintains, he has an androgynous nature because he functions as mother and father (108). As a father, he disciplines the children. For example, he makes Jem read to Mrs. Dubose everyday as punishment for destroying her camellia bush with Scout's baton (115). As a mother, he nurtures them. When Scout worries that Mrs. Dubose will shoot Jem with a Confederate pistol, she climbs into Atticus' lap. Although she is "mighty big to be rocked," he still wraps his arms around her and comforts her (113). Also accentuating his androgyny, Atticus never shows interest in the opposite sex—or in sex at all. A newspaper cartoon depicts him "diligently writing on a slate while some frivolous-looking girls yelled, 'Yoo-hoo!' at him" (126). While an accurate representation of Atticus's diminished interests, this cartoon also reveals Maycomb's propensity to ridicule those with unconventional behaviors.

Besides providing an unconventional family structure, Atticus is also an atypical parent. The children call him by his first name, and he exposes them to issues that some would consider beyond their maturity level. For instance, when Scout asks about the meaning of rape, he honestly (and legalistically) describes it as "carnal knowledge of a female by force and without consent" (145). He doesn't believe in shielding his children from the world, even if they learn information that some might regard as inappropriate for children. In his open discussions with Scout and Jem, he always speaks with the same vocabulary he would use during an adult conversation. Often, as in the previous situation, he resorts to legal language. For instance, when Atticus rejects the instructions of Scout's teacher, who insists that Scout no longer read at

home, he tells Scout to keep this decision a secret. Atticus says, “I’m afraid our activities would be received with considerable disapprobation by the more learned authorities” (38). Though Scout requests a “translation” (38), Atticus first challenges her to converse more professionally and intelligently. His language inserts a level of equality into his relationship with Scout; he refuses to talk down to her and emphasize his authority as an adult, unlike patriarchal fathers who constantly maintain dominion.

Atticus’ explanation about reading reveals another unconventional attribute: he encourages rebellion against unfair institutions. Much to Scout’s dismay, her teacher Miss Caroline claims that Atticus teaches her to read incorrectly, disregarding his status as one of the most intelligent men in Maycomb (24). Atticus, however, still reads to her every night. He maintains that Scout can act as she pleases, as long as she doesn’t tell Miss Caroline. Atticus concludes, “Sometimes it’s better to bend the law a little in special cases” (37). As an attorney, Atticus’s job entails upholding the law, yet he advocates breaking regulations when the law is wrong. He teaches Scout that some issues, such as the right to an education, transcend the law. Disregarding the stereotype of an obedient female, he encourages a girl—not a boy—to revolt against these rules.

Though gender conventions are not official laws, Atticus also finds these regulations worthy of “bending.” As Scout explains, her father differs from the other men in Maycomb:

Our father didn’t do anything. He worked in an office, not in a drugstore. Atticus did not drive a dump-truck for the county, he was not the sheriff, he did not farm, work in a garage, or do anything that could possibly arouse the admiration of anyone . . . . He did not do the things our schoolmates’ fathers did: he never went



hunting, he did not play poker or fish or drink or smoke. He sat in the livingroom and read. (97-98)

Atticus's love for reading is a significant gender-bending trait in the South. As Scout indicates, the typical man works a labor-intensive job, suggesting that these lower class men outnumber the professional members of society. Atticus is in the minority because he has more leisure time to read, as well as the necessary education. Even if the average farmer or garbage-truck driver is literate, he would probably not read "Bills To Be Enacted into Laws" or "the diaries of Lorenzo Dow," as Atticus does (24). Instead of engaging in aggressive activities, he prefers this passive pursuit of knowledge, and passivity is a stereotypically feminine behavior. On the contrary, other men in Maycomb spend their time playing football, including men in Atticus's social class, such as Cecil Jacobs's father, who lives on the same street as the Finches (41). When the fathers of "everybody in town" participate in the Methodist v. Baptist football game, Atticus sits on the sidelines with the women and children (100). In Maycomb, scoring touchdowns secures respect, not handling difficult court cases. Jem, in particular, expresses this stereotypical mindset: he "gloomily" mopes when Atticus refuses to participate in the football game (100). Because of his passive preference for reading, Atticus bends these gender "laws."

Even Scout recognizes feminine traits in her father: she remarks that his "feeble" age of fifty—older than the fathers of her classmates—detracts from his "manliness" (97). In this environment, masculinity constitutes youthful strength and vigor, which Atticus notably lacks. Ironically, Scout initially regards Atticus's "unmanly" characteristics with disappointment instead of admiration. Even though she wants to remain different from other girls, she still wants her father to embrace conventions. For instance, at school, Scout feels left out of discussions about her classmates' fathers and their abilities (97). However, I do not think her disappointment

undermines her desire to subvert gender stereotypes. She prefers “manly” features, so perhaps she wants a “manly” father with whom she can more directly identify. Perhaps she, like Jem, wants to share aggressive activities, such as football, with her father.

Moreover, her comment about Atticus’s “manliness” occurs in the novel’s first section. As with all typical coming-of-age stories, Scout’s opinions change as the novel progresses and she learns about life. The more she views her father’s and her own gender transgressions, the more she comes to value them. In the end, Scout and Atticus may have contrasting personality traits, such as his passivity versus her aggression, but she ultimately identifies with his decision to “bend” gender conventions. She realizes that Atticus’s unconventionalities are worthy of “admiration.” Like Miss Maudie, Heck Tate, and several other prominent town members, Scout respects her father’s effort to defend Tom Robinson, as evidenced when she attacks her classmates for insulting him (82). His uniqueness becomes an asset rather than a liability. If he drove a dump-truck or farmed or was a typical man, then he might be the type of father to force his daughter to wear dresses or he might treat his daughter like Bob Ewell treats Mayella. As implied during Tom Robinson’s trial, Bob Ewell beats Mayella and possibly rapes her (194, 206). Though hideous, their relationship aligns with conventions more than Scout and Atticus’s relationship. Bob Ewell physically exerts a patriarchal force over Mayella, but Atticus “never [lays] a hand” on Scout (96). Perhaps because of his education, Atticus is more open-minded regarding women and children. Without a father who spends his time reading, Scout might be a different girl. Atticus allows Scout the freedom to exhibit the traits she desires.

Since Atticus privileges literacy, he instills these values in his daughter, teaching Scout to read at an early age. As a result, Scout views this skill as highly necessary: “Until I feared I would lose it, I never loved to read. One does not love breathing” (24). Because reading is a

passive behavior, one could argue that Atticus encourages stereotypically feminine mannerisms, but Lee presents literacy as unconventional for Scout. Just as literacy separates Atticus from the men in Maycomb, it also separates Scout from her first grade classmates, who “print” instead of “write” (25). Scout can read far above her age level, commonly reviewing newspapers and legal reports with her father (24). Historically, men of their social class acquire more education than women, but Scout is on the path to surpassing the educational level of everyone in her class, including the boys.

Though Atticus differs significantly from the fathers of Scout’s peers, he occasionally appears conventional. For example, he heroically wields a gun and slays a mad dog. However, instead of using this scene to accentuate Atticus’s masculinity, Lee demonstrates the opposite. Atticus chooses *not* to hunt like a stereotypical Southern man. As Scout and Jem learn, Atticus may be “the deadest shot in Maycomb County,” but he abstains from the sport because “God had given him an unfair advantage over most living things” (106-107). Atticus does not feel the need to exert power over animals simply because he is capable of that authority. He treats his children likewise: though capable of forcing Scout to wear a dress, he never once opposes her overalls. Atticus’s desire for less power separates him from the patriarchal men who inhabit his community.

While I view Atticus as decidedly unconventional, some critics disagree. In particular, Laura Fine asserts that Atticus exhibits “the traditional masculine qualities of heroic individualism, bravery, and an unshrinking knowledge of and dedication to social justice and morality” (“Gender Conflicts” 125). Atticus does seem to possess these features—but only in the view of modern-day readers. From a historical perspective and from the view of the majority of the novel’s characters, a white, Southern male defending a black man and favoring a black

man's word over a white woman's word is abnormal. As Alice Hall Petry observes, "It is perhaps impossible for students and scholars born after around 1955 to appreciate what a groundbreaking, even *shocking* book *To Kill a Mockingbird* seemed in the early 1960s . . . . No one could believe that a white attorney would risk his life—yes, and his children's lives—to defend a black man, even if that man were unquestionably innocent" (xxiii). In the context of the novel, the Maycomb community does not consider Atticus heroic or brave. In fact, they view him as upsetting the social order. "Order" in pre-Civil Rights Alabama involved the persecution of African Americans, which Atticus attempts to prevent. For these reasons, children tease Scout at school and people stare at her in town. As Scout informs Atticus, "most folks seem to think they're right and you're wrong" (114). Even his own family views his actions negatively: Aunt Alexandra tells her grandson Francis that Atticus is "ruinin' the family" (91). Through the course of the novel, Lee tries to subvert this antiquated perception, but nevertheless, Atticus's involvement in Tom Robinson's trial only further separates him from the men in his community. As Dean Shackelford concludes, "Atticus is far from a stereotypical Southern male" (109).

Furthermore, Fine accurately observes that the novel contains bravery, but Lee portrays this trait in an unconventional manner. First, bravery is not a specifically masculine characteristic. After all, Mrs. Dubose is "the bravest person" Atticus knows because she overcomes a morphine addiction and dies "beholden to nothing and nobody" (121). Second, courage is not, as Atticus reminds the children, "a man with a gun in his hand" (121). Maycomb regards bravery in this manner: for instance, Miss Maudie and Heck Tate praise Atticus for shooting the mad dog (105-106). Atticus, however, teaches his children that courage entails moral strength rather than physical power: "it's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what" (121). In this explanation, Atticus

indirectly refers to his defense of Tom Robinson, acknowledging that he, too, possesses bravery, but he aligns himself with Mrs. Dubose instead of with male valor, as represented by the gun. After Scout learns this lesson, she demonstrates this new type of bravery when she—not Atticus—stops the lynch mob from attacking Tom Robinson (164-165). Without her, they could have severely injured Atticus in their efforts to reach Tom. In this scene, Scout exhibits more power than her father. Though Atticus initially asks that the children return home, he does not insist on retaining the control just because he is a man or he is an adult. Realizing that Scout's words are more effective than his, he lets her assume this authority.

In addition to his behaviors, Atticus subverts gender conventions because of his innovative ideas about women. Atticus believes that women should have opportunities, as he demonstrates when he teaches *both* Jem and Scout to read. Laura Fine disagrees, maintaining that fathers in *To Kill a Mockingbird* “represent the oppressive patriarchal structure” (“Gender Conflicts” 123). Atticus delivers one statement that suggests this mindset: when he explains why women cannot serve on juries, he remarks, “I guess it’s to protect our frail ladies from sordid cases like Tom’s. Besides . . . I doubt if we’d ever get a complete case tried—the ladies’d be interrupting to ask questions” (234). Though this statement seems suspect, I believe that Atticus speaks with a note of sarcasm, especially since he grins after expressing it. The grin suggests that he mocks the idea that women are “frail” and should be “protected” from society’s evils. While Scout agrees with her father, commenting, “Perhaps our forefathers were wise” (234), she only makes this remark after imagining Mrs. Dubose on a jury. Scout’s response indicates that stereotypical women—such as Aunt Alexandra and her hypocritical missionary society—would impede legal proceedings. Perhaps unconventional women with more of an unbiased mind, like Scout, would benefit juries.

Fine, however, argues that Scout's rage against "fathers as guards of patriarchy lurks beneath the surface of the text and finds form in her violent projections against other fathers, bad and good" ("Gender Conflicts" 124). Her rage is then "enacted" by Boo Radley, who stabs his father with a pair of scissors and kills Bob Ewell. Fine groups Atticus with Mr. Radley, who keeps his son locked inside the home, and Bob Ewell, who may have raped his daughter (124). However, Atticus doesn't actually resemble these men because he is not oppressive. Unlike Mr. Radley, he lets Scout run wild through the neighborhood streets, and unlike Bob Ewell, he "never [lays] a hand" on Scout (96). Furthermore, Atticus allows his daughter the freedom to be a tomboy.

Contrary to Fine, I contend that Scout does not feel rage against her father because he is not patriarchal. In the scenes where she feels dissatisfied with her father, Scout's emotions never reach the level of rage. For example, when Scout expresses her displeasure over school, she does not yell or use harsh words. She merely states that she does not want to attend the first grade anymore, and then she calmly states the reasons why (36-37). While she complains, Atticus waits in "amiable silence" (36), indicating that he approaches this disagreement with tranquility rather than aggressive, physical force. In a subsequent scene, when Scout's unhappiness about school drives her to curse, Atticus again responds passively and ignores her (87). Uncle Jack, on the other hand, delivers a stern lecture and threatens to "lick" Scout for using profanity (93). In response, Scout shows true rage when she screams, "I'll never speak to you again as long as I live! I hate you an' despise you an' hope you die tomorrow!" (93). This rage manifests itself in a physical action when she slams the door to her room (93). Frequently, Scout's temper flares but never against her father. For example, feeling significantly angrier towards Aunt Alexandra, Scout starts to attack her when Alexandra insults her tomboyishness.

She explains, “I don’t know what I would have done, but Jem stopped me” (238). Scout loves her father because he completely embraces her gender-bending behaviors. Never once does he tell her to wear a dress or act like a lady. On the contrary, he defends her when his sister protests Scout’s propensity to wear overalls. As Scout comments, the incident “was the only time I ever heard Atticus speak sharply to anyone” (89). He feels so insistent on Scout remaining a tomboy that his normally calm composure falters. With the exception of this incident, Atticus’s interactions with his daughter emphasize his lack of masculine aggression, which contributes to his unconventional demeanor.

Critics also condemn Atticus for his involvement in directing his children’s careers. For example, Monroe Freedman believes that Atticus reinforces gender stereotypes because he encourages Jem—and not Scout—to be a lawyer (21). However, Jem is four years older than Scout and closer to adulthood. Perhaps when Scout reaches Jem’s age, Atticus will also guide her towards a legal profession. More importantly, he speaks to Scout in the same manner that he speaks to Jem. By using legal language, he does not shield her from the world of law. For example, he makes a compromise with her about attending school (38), and he explains “at length” about Walter Cunningham’s entailment (165). Scout then uses this knowledge to deter the lynch mob, speaking with the same eloquence her father uses when he delivers his closing address in court. Moreover, Lee’s personal life suggests that she supports the idea of female lawyers. According to Charles Shields, the author of Lee’s biography, Lee enrolled in law school because her father wanted her to become a lawyer. Though she dropped out after several semesters, she left to pursue a writing career, not because she wasn’t capable of the work (100, 109). Also, before retiring, her sister Alice served their community as a well-respected attorney with a “booming” practice (101). Since *To Kill a Mockingbird* contains so many

autobiographical qualities, it seems logical that Lee would embrace female attorneys in reality and in the novel.

Also, contrary to Freedman's argument, I assert that Atticus treats his children equally concerning gender. For instance, refusing to give Scout a different Christmas present because of her femininity, he purchases an air-rifle for both children (87). This rifle indicates that he encourages masculine behaviors in his daughter. Additionally, Atticus does not teach his children to assume gender stereotypes. Aunt Alexandra wants him to impress upon Scout and Jem their stature as "the product of several generations' gentle breeding," so they will "behave like the little lady and gentleman" of their social class (143). However, after a tense and awkward attempt, Atticus ultimately tells his children to forget everything he previously said (144). He doesn't want them to live according to society's expectations.

Though Atticus accepts Scout's tomboyish behaviors, there are some tendencies that he discourages, such as her proclivity for fighting. Scout explains, "Atticus had promised me he would wear me out if he ever heard of me fighting anymore" (82). However, he does not forbid fighting because it is anti-feminine but because Scout is "far too old and too big for such childish things" (82). He views physical violence as an immature way to handle a situation, for men or women. Treating his children equally, Atticus also disapproves of Jem's violent behaviors. When Jem mutilates Mrs. Dubose's camellia bushes, Atticus sends him to apologize and sentences him to a month of reading to Mrs. Dubose after school (113-114). Again, Atticus does not discourage Jem's aggression due to its masculinity; destroying "a sick old lady['s]" flowers is simply rude (113). Scout, though, does not abide by Atticus's rule, and she attacks Cecil Jacobs, who insults Atticus (82). Lee does not mention if Atticus learns of this incident, but even



if he does, he never “wear[s]” her out. He opposes Scout’s aggression, but he does nothing forceful to stop it, which reinforces his feminine passivity and allows her assertiveness to persist.

Once, when faced with the disapproval of Aunt Alexandra, Scout explains, “I asked him if I was a problem and he said not much of one, at most one that he could always figure out, and not to worry my head a second about botherin’ him” (239). With this statement, Atticus expresses his acceptance of his daughter’s tomboyism. Though he doesn’t win the trial or make any groundbreaking efforts to end racism or earn the overwhelming respect of Maycomb, he still earns the admiration of his daughter. To Scout, he remains a hero because he challenges stereotypical gender expectations, and Scout learns that she can do likewise. As a result, she cherishes her ability to read; she courageously and powerfully uses her voice to stop a lynch mob; and she disregards her aunt’s criticisms. Atticus once states, “[B]efore I can live with other folks I’ve got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn’t abide by majority rule is a person’s conscience” (114). This comment refers to his decision to defend Tom Robinson, but it doubly applies to the values Atticus instills in Scout concerning gender. Scout must live her life the way she wants, not how Aunt Alexandra or Mrs. Dubose or Jem or her teachers want. She may face condemnation, but she will remain a tomboy in order to fulfill her personal desires. She imitates her father, who “bends the law” of conventional masculinity in order to live with himself.

## CHAPTER 3

## THE (NOT SO) MOTHERLESS CHILD

Life as a single father is challenging, especially with children as rambunctious as Scout and Jem. Reflecting on Atticus's failed conversation about proper behaviors, Scout remarks, "I know now what he was trying to do, but Atticus was only a man. It takes a woman to do that kind of work" (145). As an adult, Scout realizes that maternal influences are sometimes necessary. Even though Atticus tries to act as a male mother, he cannot complete the job on his own. Scout's mother, however, died when she was two-years-old (12). Critics often propose that tomboys develop their gender-bending behaviors due to a lack of a mother. Using Scout as her primary example, Michelle Abate observes, "Whether the absence of a mother stems from a physical or psychological source, it is seen as the cause or impetus for tomboyism in many narratives" (xix). Likewise, in her analysis of tomboys in the works of Carson McCullers, Louise Westling writes, "Without mothers, these feminine protagonists define themselves most comfortably in masculine terms" (155). Even Aunt Alexandra reaches this conclusion, intruding upon the Finches halfway through the novel to exert upon Scout "some feminine influence" (137). With an older brother, a caring uncle, and a devoted father, masculinity seems like a strong component to Scout's life. However, Scout is not entirely bereft of feminine influences.

The novel contains a variety of women exposing Scout to different ideas of femininity, including Mrs. Dubose, Mayella Ewell, Miss Stephanie Crawford, Helen Robinson, Scout's teachers, and the Missionary Society members. Nevertheless, three characters are particularly significant because they function as Scout's mother figures: Calpurnia, Aunt Alexandra, and Miss Maudie. Despite their importance, critics often present limited examinations of these women. For instance, Dean Shackelford titles his article, "The Female Voice in *To Kill a*

*Mockingbird: Narrative Strategies in Film and Novel.*” While Shackelford provides an engaging analysis of Scout’s voice, he primarily focuses on Atticus’s influence on Scout, provides a brief discussion on Aunt Alexandra, and only makes a passing reference to Miss Maudie and Calpurnia. These female voices deserve an analysis because they impact Scout’s tomboyism.

Though they did not give birth to Scout, Calpurnia, Aunt Alexandra, and Miss Maudie still serve as mother figures. They demonstrate Nancy Chodorow’s assertions that nonbiological mothers can “parent just as adequately as biological mothers” (29). Calpurnia, Aunt Alexandra, and Miss Maudie all nurture and care for Scout. Part of that nurturing entails presenting Scout with a variety of ideas about femininity. Like Atticus, they show how gender stereotypes are unstable standards. As each of these women both reject and reinforce conventions, their inconsistencies allow Scout to question femininity and ultimately embrace tomboyism.

#### The “Double Life”

Though not blood related, Calpurnia unquestionably belongs in the Finch family. As the housekeeper, Calpurnia presents the stereotype of a woman working in domesticity. However, Calpurnia is more than a cook or a maid. As Michelle Ware points out, Calpurnia resembles the Mammy figure, but “Lee’s characterization extends beyond that limited portrayal” (287). Calpurnia offers a constant presence, providing for Jem and Scout, who she labels “my children” (128). As with many parent/child bonds, Scout is not always happy about Calpurnia’s presence. Scout explains,

She was always ordering me out of the kitchen, asking me why I couldn’t behave as well as Jem when she knew he was older, and calling me home when I wasn’t ready to come. Our battles were epic and one-sided. Calpurnia always won, mainly because Atticus always took her side. She had been with us ever since

Jem was born, and I had felt her tyrannical presence as long as I could remember.

(12)

This quote aligns Calpurnia with Atticus in a parental manner. As Kathryn Lee Seidel observes, Atticus and Calpurnia resemble “a husband-wife team presenting a united front” because “Calpurnia treats Scout well and defends her father as her father defends Calpurnia” (“Growing” 87). Calpurnia seems “tyrannical” because she demonstrates complete control over Scout, and Scout’s protests often amount to nothing. In effect, she acts more patriarchal than Atticus does. For instance, when Scout insults Walter Cunningham at the dinner table, Calpurnia sends her to the kitchen to finish her meal alone. Atticus patiently listens to Scout’s complaints, but Calpurnia interrupts her protests and gives her a “stinging smack” (31). Of all her parental figures, Calpurnia is the only one who reprimands with physical force. Since black women held a lower position than white women during this era, Calpurnia challenges both gender and racial codes with this stereotypically masculine power.

Calpurnia’s efforts to discipline Scout reveal her paternal attributes, but she also displays a mother’s nurturing qualities. After Scout experiences a harrowing first day at school, Calpurnia makes special crackling bread, kisses Scout, and admits that she misses Scout during the school day (35). No matter how ugly Scout speaks to her, Calpurnia will always care for her. She only admonishes Scout to make Scout a better person, as any good parent would treat his or her child. These interactions demonstrate the love-hate nature of their relationship, a trait that parent/child bonds typically exhibit. Scout often responds to Calpurnia’s “tyrannical” admonishments with anger, once threatening to drown herself in order to “fix” Calpurnia (31). Even though Scout feels angry, her drastic remark reveals her understanding of how deeply Calpurnia loves her. This particular threat is the ultimate punishment because Scout knows that

her own death would devastate Calpurnia. Love and hatred mingle, and Scout occasionally seeks comfort from Calpurnia, as a child would regard her mother. When Jem teases her, Scout immediately runs to Calpurnia, who welcomes Scout into the kitchen (125). In this scene, Scout begins to view Calpurnia as a model of femininity. Scout comments, “[B]y watching her I began to think there was some skill involved in being a girl” (125). This interaction is one of the rare instances that Scout views femininity in a positive perspective, as opposed to the negativity she associates with other women, especially Aunt Alexandra. Calpurnia’s femininity combines with her masculine authority to demonstrate the fluctuating nature of gender standards. This fluctuation sets a precedent for Scout’s tomboyism.

Calpurnia influences Scout because her behaviors exemplify bending the rules of society. For instance, when Calpurnia chastises Scout for criticizing Walter Cunningham’s poverty, she echoes Atticus’s views about equality: “Don’t matter who they are, anybody sets foot in this house’s yo’ comp’ny, and don’t you let me catch you remarkin’ on their ways like you was so high and mighty!” (31). Calpurnia’s beliefs differ from those of the majority of people, both black and white. Maycomb enforces strict barriers between social classes, but Calpurnia encourages Scout to treat everyone with kindness. Despite her patriarchal reprimand in this scene, Calpurnia combines gender standards by evoking the tradition of mothers instilling moral lessons in their children. According to Chodorow, mothers have functioned as “nurturant moral models” ever since the Victorian era (5). Calpurnia is effective as this model because Scout later refers to her ideology of equality. Ignoring social barriers, Scout wants to invite Walter to play at her house. Even when Aunt Alexandra refutes this request because of the class differences, Scout emphasizes their similarities: both she and the Cunninghams enjoy “fiddlin’ and things like that” (236). Scout’s unprejudiced view towards social classes accentuates the overarching

theme of equality. If one can treat a poor child and middle-class child the same, then perhaps one can apply the same lesson to a man and a woman.

Calpurnia sees beyond social barriers because she is an unconventional black woman in pre-Civil Rights Alabama. Like Atticus and Scout, her education level separates her from her peers. Scout observes, “When in tranquility, her grammar was as good as anybody’s in Maycomb. Atticus said Calpurnia had more education than most colored folks” (31). In fact, out of the entire black community in Maycomb, Calpurnia is one of only four literate people (134). Not only does Calpurnia teach the Finch children to read and write, exposing them to a primer at a young age, but she also instills literacy in her son Zeebo. Calpurnia further emphasizes the value of education when she explains her methods of teaching Zeebo: “There wasn’t a school even when he was a boy. I made him learn, though....I made him get a page of the Bible every day, and there was a book Miss Buford taught me out of” (135). The lack of a school for black children indicates the efforts of whites to keep blacks uneducated during this era, but Calpurnia does not let this discrimination stop her. She finds a way to educate herself and her son, refusing to mold to society’s standards. She also overcomes the historical gender stereotype that men should remain more educated than women. She probably can read far better than Bob Ewell, who does not even send his children to school (195).

Calpurnia’s journey beyond conventional boundaries becomes further apparent when she takes Jem and Scout to her home community, the First Purchase African M.E. Church, where she is an outsider due to her association with the Finches. During this scene, Scout notices that Calpurnia leads “a modest double life”: she speaks “nigger-talk” at the church but grammatically correct English with the Finches (136). Calpurnia recognizes the differences between the two groups, but she can navigate between them. As Laura Fine writes, “She manages to fit in with

both blacks and white by withholding the part of her identity each group might find offensive. Lee's point here is that Calpurnia is fully cognizant that crossing boundaries involves subtlety and subterfuge" ("Structuring" 66-67). Moreover, Natalie Hess examines this scene, asserting that Calpurnia's "insider/outsider status" demonstrates code-switching (9). Hess writes,

Code switchers, by their very definition, exist between spheres of reference and move between structures. The marker of their conversions, modulations, transitions, and variations is code switched language. In literature such linguistic cavorting on the part of even a minor character may well underpin an entire set of thematic intentions. (6)

Adding to Hess's analysis, I propose that Calpurnia's transitions between black English and standard English illustrate Lee's overall theme of crossing boundaries and displaying fluid behaviors. Hess also concludes that this code-switching behavior makes Calpurnia a liminal figure—one who inhabits "a state of eruption in which new forms and categories emerge" (6). Calpurnia is a new form of a black woman: an educated black woman who defies both racial and gender stereotypes.

Like Calpurnia, Scout also moves between blacks and whites. According to Michelle Abate, tomboys "do more than simply exist on the boundaries between male and female, adult and child, heterosexual and homosexual, masculine and feminine; they also occupy a liminal position between blackness and whiteness" (xii-xiii). Authors visually represent this liminal position by giving tomboys dark features, such as Jo March's dark hair or Laura Ingalls's tanned skin (xii, xxvi). While Scout's hair color and skin tones remain unknown, Lee does show her crossing racial boundaries through her interactions with the black community. When Scout and Jem attend church with Calpurnia, the shocked reactions of the other church members reveal the

unconventionality in white children associating with blacks. One woman, Lula, exclaims, “You ain’t got no business bringin’ white chillum here” (129). Scout does not let these barriers stop her, though. She wants to visit Calpurnia’s home (146), and she sits in the “Colored balcony” during Tom Robinson’s trial (175). She feels a connection to the blacks because they, like her, are less powerful than the white males who dominate Maycomb’s society.

Scout’s disregard for racial boundaries evidences her willingness to defy conventions. Maycomb society dictates the inappropriateness of worshipping God on the bench beside a person with a different skin, just as they dislike a girl running around in overalls. Calpurnia teaches Scout that one does not have to submit to these rules. Furthermore, by emphasizing Calpurnia’s power over Scout, Lee suggests that blacks and women are capable of exerting authority. Subjugated figures can obtain control over their lives and their personal choices. Just as Calpurnia can attain an education, Scout can be a tomboy, even when her overbearing aunt asserts otherwise.

#### The Southern Belle

Fortunately for Scout, Calpurnia never wages battle over the issue of Scout’s tomboyism; Aunt Alexandra is another case altogether. As much as Scout occasionally dislikes Calpurnia, Scout’s feelings for Aunt Alexandra inhabit a deeper level of detestation. Scout’s relationship with Aunt Alexandra resembles the power/repression dynamic presented by Roberta Trites. As Trites points out, “The conflict with parent-as-authority-figures seems to be one of the most pervasive patterns in adolescent literature” (54). Although Calpurnia exerts patriarchal authority over Scout, she does not demonstrate Trites’s model because Scout rarely rebels against her and Calpurnia does not specifically oppose Scout’s tomboyism. Aunt Alexandra, on the other hand,



tries to repress Scout's gender-bending inclinations, but Scout revolts and becomes more tomboyish.

Primarily, Scout rebels because Alexandra wants her to become a genteel Southern belle. As Scout explains,

Aunt Alexandra was fanatical on the subject of my attire. I could not possibly hope to be a lady if I wore breeches; when I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I wasn't supposed to be doing things that required pants. Aunt Alexandra's vision of my deportment involved playing with small stoves, tea sets, and wearing the Add-A-Pearl necklace she gave me when I was born; furthermore, I should be a ray of sunshine in my father's lonely life. I suggested that one could be a ray of sunshine in pants just as well, but Auntie said that one had to behave like a sunbeam, that I was born good but had grown progressively worse every year. She hurt my feelings and set my teeth permanently on edge, but when I asked Atticus about it, he said there were already enough sunbeams in the family and to go on about my business, he didn't mind me much the way I was. (89)

This passage reveals several significant aspects of the Finch family. First, Alexandra's conceptions of femininity emphasize clothing and behaviors that utilize feminine items, such as jewelry, stoves, and tea sets. This quote also expresses the ongoing argument between Scout and Aunt Alexandra over her desire to wear pants. Second, Alexandra views Scout's purpose as being "a ray of sunshine" for Atticus (89). By defining Scout in terms of her father, Alexandra uses a patriarchal assessment. Ironically, Scout already serves as "a ray of sunshine" in Atticus's life, which is not entirely lonely because a prosperous legal career, two busy children, and a

nagging sister consume his time. Third, Alexandra only believes that Scout can warrant worth in her father's life if she conforms to gender stereotypes and wears dresses. However, Alexandra again misjudges the situation. For Atticus, Scout is "a ray of sunshine" *because* she wears pants and is unique. Finally, this excerpt evidences Scout's core belief about her character: she wants to find alternate ways to live life. Since she opposes dresses, she will "be a ray of sunshine in pants just as well" (89).

Due to Alexandra's concerns about Scout's tomboyism, she leaves her family and moves to Maycomb to exert "some feminine influence" on Scout (137). In response, Scout wonders why Calpurnia cannot serve that purpose, revealing her preference for Calpurnia over her aunt, but Alexandra is determined to impact Scout's life whether Scout wants her to or not. Deliberately using Scout's feminine name, Alexandra expresses the two issues with which she will assist: "It won't be many years, Jean Louise, before you become interested in clothes and boys" (137). Incidentally, a woman's appearance and her marriage prospects constitute the two main features of a southern belle's life. According to Kathryn Lee Seidel's *The Southern Belle in the American Novel*, the American south "produces a woman whose appearance is emphasized from babyhood, to the detriment of her intellect, personality, and talents" (xv). Rebelling against this notion, Scout thinks, "I would never be interested in clothes" (138). Alexandra personally focuses on appearance by wearing a corset to obtain an hourglass shape. Scout only responds negatively to this behavior: she views Alexandra's body as "formidable" and equates Alexandra's irritable mood with the uncomfortable corset (138). For Scout, wearing a corset would be equivalent to confining one's body in a prison.

In addition to emphasizing her appearance, Seidel explains that society expected an antebellum belle "to stay at home until such time as a suitable—that is, lucrative—marriage was

arranged for her” (6). She would then participate in the courting process and become “a hard-working matron” assisting her husband on his plantation (6). While plantations no longer exist in the twentieth century, this ideal still pertains to *To Kill a Mockingbird* because Alexandra wants to mold Scout into this antiquated figure. Seidel believes that the “remnants of plantation life” are still popular in modern times (xii). In addition, Seidel observes that the fathers of modern belles are lawyers “whose task is to preserve legal tradition” (157). However, by leaving Scout a child, Lee avoids the conventional plot of a belle flirting, courting, and ultimately marrying. Even Scout distances herself from these elements, commenting, “[I]t would be many years before I would be interested in boys” (138). Sexual “interests” are not a significant part of this narrative, and Scout never again mentions them. Detailing Lee’s subversion of form, Seidel applies her theories of southern belles to *To Kill a Mockingbird* in a separate article, asserting,

In a conventional novel of the belle, Scout would focus on her appearance and practice flirtation with Atticus as a rehearsal for the cultivation of some young fellow as a potential mate.

Lee rejects this paradigm, but is fully aware of it as she writes. In this novel the person who is most like the southern belle is Mayella, whom Lee dissects with damning precision. In contrast, Lee examines how Scout as a southern girl can become fully human and not a Mayella or one of the many versions of southern women we meet in the novel. (“Growing” 81)

As a child, Scout never concerns herself with these issues. Lee does not force Scout to age and to choose whether to submit to conventional standards of dating and marrying. Nevertheless, Alexandra still lectures Scout about appropriate suitors, ruling out the “trashy” Cunninghams because “Finch women aren’t interested in that sort of people” (237). Alexandra regards a

feminine education so highly that she does not lose any time trying to impress these standards upon her six-year-old niece.

Hypocritically, as much as Alexandra tries to adapt Scout into a lady, Alexandra does not always adopt this same value system. For instance, she is not a model wife and ignores her husband Jimmy. Scout comments, “I never saw any reason to take notice of him. Neither did Aunt Alexandra” (85). Progressing further away from patriarchal submission, Alexandra leaves her husband and moves in with her brother’s family. Even though she attempts to prepare Scout for a future husband, she functions without one, and the novel never again mentions Jimmy. Furthermore, Alexandra not only dominates her own marriage, choosing when to stay and when to leave, but she also attempts to rule the Finch household. She causes Atticus—the most level-headed, rational character—to feel angry: as Scout explains, “the only time I ever heard Atticus speak sharply to anyone was when I once heard him say, ‘Sister I do the best I can with them!’ It had something to do with my going around in overalls” (89).

Also, Alexandra tries to control Atticus, who, according to stereotypes, should hold power over her. Atticus explains her presence by saying, “We felt it was time you children needed—well, it’s like this Scout . . . . Your aunt’s doing me a favor as well as you all” (139). The fact that Atticus—the lawyer who excels at elocution—stumbles over his words and cannot fully express himself indicates his unease with his sister’s visit. Scout perceptively notices his discomfort and concludes, “I had an idea, however, that Aunt Alexandra’s appearance on the scene was not so much Atticus’s doing as hers. Aunt had a way of declaring *What Is Best For The Family*” (139). Atticus clearly feels ambivalent about Alexandra’s presence, but her authority prevents him from protesting or asking her to leave. Consequently, her attempts to dominate the household create tension, but Atticus does overcome her authority in several

circumstances. For instance, Alexandra allows the children to attend Tom Robinson's trial only because Atticus grants them permission (220). Alexandra's inconsistent behavior, wavering between dominating and submitting, call her notions of femininity into question. Why should Scout show interest in boys if Alexandra does not show interest in her own husband? Why should Scout define herself in terms of her father if Alexandra acts so independent? Paradoxically, by trying to exert a "feminine influence" on Scout, Alexandra encourages Scout to be less feminine and more tomboyish.

Adding to her inconsistencies, Alexandra encourages gender-bending behaviors in her grandson Francis. She plans to teach Francis to cook because, as Francis explains, "Grandma says all men should learn to cook, that men oughta be careful with their wives and wait on 'em when they don't feel good" (90). This statement contradicts the patriarchal notion that wives should serve their husbands. Ironically, Scout responds to his statement in a conventional manner by laughing and replying, "I don't want Dill waitin' on me....I'd rather wait on him" (90). Scout's reaction indicates that she understands the standards of her society. While she seems to contradict her steadfast tomboyism, Scout's comment may suggest that she wants to maintain the control in her "relationship" with Dill, just as her aunt controls her own marriage. Furthermore, perhaps she wavers between tomboyism and femininity because her aunt—her model for femininity—does the same.

Scout also quiets her tomboy tendencies during the Missionary Society tea party. Concerning conceptions of gender, this social gathering is one of the most significant scenes in the entire novel. Scout adopts the appearance of a lady, consenting to wearing a dress and a petticoat, and she offers to help Calpurnia prepare refreshments (241). Furthermore, when Alexandra's friends inquire whether Scout desires to become a lawyer, Scout replies, "Nome,

just a lady” (243). This comment seems to indicate that Scout acquiesces to Alexandra’s code, as critics often interpret this scene. Eric Sundquist contends that Scout “learn[s] to be a lady” (197). Likewise, Shackelford contends that Scout’s hatred for Alexandra lessens “as she begins to accept certain aspects of being a Southern female” (110).

However, I assert that Scout does not accept Southern femininity; she merely learns to tolerate it. When Scout says, “Nome, just a lady,” (243), I can’t help but imagine her smirking, much like Atticus’s grin when he comments that ladies are too “frail” to serve on juries (234). Perhaps she simply tells the Missionary Society what they want to hear and replies in this manner to avoid later conflict with her aunt. Because the entire novel celebrates Scout’s tomboyishness, I do not believe Scout submits to femininity as easily as the Missionary Society believes. In fact, previously in the novel, her uncle Jack asks if she “wants to grow up to be a lady,” and Scout replies, “not particularly” (87). Therefore, instead of submitting to Aunt Alexandra’s femininity, Scout looks to Miss Maudie as a possible model.

#### The “Chameleon Lady”

Critics rarely discuss Miss Maudie, and if they mention her, they only make a brief reference. For instance, Shackelford notes that she is one of the few “pleasant” female characters (110). Fine refers to Miss Maudie as “the only woman with sense besides Calpurnia in the whole book” (“Structuring” 65). Ware classifies her as “a strong potential role model for Scout” (287). However, she is more significant and complex than these succinct labels suggest. Scout shares a closer relationship with Miss Maudie than she does with the other neighborhood women. When Jem and Dill reject Scout from their schemes, she visits Maudie, and Scout begins to regard their relationship as “friendship.” Scout even spends time with her at the risk of her brother calling her a “g-irl,” a label she detests (48-49), and a special bond develops.

As the novel progresses, I contend that Miss Maudie becomes more than just a role model or a friend. Functioning as a maternal figure, she offers comfort when Scout's brother abandons her, provides advice about Atticus's trial, and discusses other complex issues, such as Boo Radley's seclusion. Although Scout mentions that Miss Maudie "was not at all interested in our private lives" (52), which suggests a bond too distant for a parent, this comment only indicates that Miss Maudie does not pry into information Scout does not want to divulge. She respects Scout and treats her in a mature manner. Furthermore, Miss Maudie provides a model of a woman who proudly displays gender-bending behaviors.

While she belongs to the same social circle as Aunt Alexandra, Miss Maudie is quite a different female. A widower, Miss Maudie is independent and she stays unmarried, much like a female equivalent to Atticus. She displays tomboyish qualities, donning overalls to complete yard work and preferring to remain outside. As Scout explains, "Miss Maudie hated her house: time spent indoors was time wasted" (49). Like Scout, Maudie endures condemnation for these unladylike tendencies: the "foot-washing Baptists" claim she will go to hell for working in her garden (51). Scout clearly disagrees with the Baptists, indicating that she respects Maudie for challenging expectations. Scout concludes, "That ain't right, Miss Maudie. You're the best lady I know" (52). As this comment indicates, Scout reveres Maudie more than the other women she encounters, including her other mother figures.

Further violating gender norms, Maudie is very outspoken, even when her comments seem too scandalous for a genteel lady to voice. For instance, Maudie tells Scout, "Stephanie Crawford even told me once she woke up in the middle of the night and found him [Boo Radley] looking in the window at her. I said what did you do, Stephanie, move over in the bed and make room for him? That shut her up a while" (53). Scout agrees that Maudie's words can silence

anybody, illustrating that Maudie uses speech to wield power over other adults. This is a trait that Lee normally attributes to males, such as Atticus, Heck Tate, and the other men involved in the court system. Consequently, Scout observes this behavior and mimics it. The morning after Miss Maudie relays the story about Boo Radley and Stephanie Crawford, Scout confronts Jem and Dill, declaring, "This yard's as much mine as it is yours, Jem Finch. I got just as much right to play in it as you have" (53). Like Miss Maudie's words, Scout's pronouncement silences the argument about her presence, and the boys include her in their schemes again.

As with Calpurnia and Aunt Alexandra, however, Maudie does not entirely reject conventions. Scout refers to her as "a chameleon lady who worked in her flower beds in an old straw hat and men's coveralls, but after her five o'clock bath she would appear on the porch and reign over the street in magisterial beauty" (49). Both masculinity and femininity fit into Maudie's world. She loves the outdoors, but she will return inside to fulfill social obligations and attend the Missionary Society meeting. Gary Richards views her feminine appearance as a "deliberately staged" performance (134). Using Judith Butler's theories about gender performativity, Richards writes, "Unlike Alexandra, Miss Maudie is not overtly distraught about the transgressive performances of gender and indeed has constructed a public identity contingent upon adroit manipulations of such performances" (132). Thus, like Calpurnia's fluctuation between racial barriers, Miss Maudie crosses gender boundaries, appealing to Maycomb's society when necessary but also indulging her gender-bending desires in other instances. She chooses to have both masculine and feminine traits.

Though feminine at times, Maudie behaves differently from the other women in Maycomb, which becomes evident at the Missionary Society meeting. They condemn Atticus for defending a black man, but Maudie admires his efforts and supports Tom Robinson. She



comments, “[A]s I waited I thought, Atticus Finch won’t win, he can’t win, but he’s the only man in these parts who can keep a jury out so long in a case like that. And I thought to myself, well, we’re making a step—it’s just a baby-step, but it’s a step” (228). As Richards observes, “With the exception of Atticus, Miss Maudie emerges—even if problematically—as the novel’s most racially enlightened white character” (134). This feature also becomes apparent during the Missionary Society meeting when she refuses to participate in the hypocritical conversation. Then, as the ladies gossip about “the good but misguided people” in Maycomb (245), a phrase that could classify themselves, Maudie interrupts the conversation with a derogatory comment and ends the dialogue. Interestingly, Aunt Alexandra gives Maudie a grateful look, suggesting that Alexandra may also slightly deviate from the community she supports (245). While at the meeting, Maudie wears a dress and performs the role of a stereotypical woman, but her sharp tongue betrays her unconventional inclinations.

Similar to Maudie, Scout crosses gender boundaries, wearing a dress to the meeting but also remaining different: she wears her britches under the dress. Lee repeatedly aligns Scout and Miss Maudie at this meeting. Instead of helping Calpurnia in the kitchen or assisting Alexandra with the serving, Scout sits next to Maudie. Moreover, unlike the other women, Maudie does not laugh when Scout announces that she still wears her pants. Maudie does not demean Scout by finding her comment endearing or amusing; Maudie simply accepts her. Then, providing comfort and support, Maudie squeezes her hand when Miss Stephanie rudely tells Scout to wear dresses more frequently (242). By allowing such a respectable character to condone Scout’s tomboyism, Lee demonstrates the novel’s theme of tolerating those who deviate from gender standards.

### The Tomboy

After viewing these three models, Scout must decide what type of woman she wants to be. Will she become a lady, as she informs the Missionary Society? She certainly entertains the notion: “There was no doubt about it, I must soon enter this world, where on its surface fragrant ladies rocked slowly, fanned gently, and drank cool water” (246). But Scout is intuitive because she realizes that the Missionary Society’s world is only the surface. She may don a dress on the outside, but she still wears pants under the petticoat ruffles (242). On the inside, she remains a tomboy. Essentially, the dress is a costume, no more important than the ham outfit she wears in her school pageant (266). Richards asserts that Miss Maudie wears her dress in a gender performance, and I believe that Scout does the same.

When Scout wears her pants under her dress, she demonstrates Judith Butler’s theory about the separation between gender identity and gender performance. In her discussion of cross-dressing and drag, Butler identifies three elements of an individual: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance (137). Butler writes, “If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance” (137). In other words, the gender depicted in a performance differs from the gender with which an individual identifies. For Scout, her anatomical sex is female, and her gender identity is masculine. During the missionary society meeting, her gender performance is female, but she still retains her gender identity, which Lee deftly illustrates by placing pants under the dress. Butler continues, “[A]cts, gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the

obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (136). Therefore, in order to appease the Missionary Society, Scout creates the “illusion” that her “gender core” is feminine. According to Butler, this illusion is “a strategy of survival” (139). Since strategies are premeditated plans with an expected outcome, Scout knowingly wears the dress to survive her aunt’s party. Like Calpurnia, she leads a “double life,” appealing to the audience before which she appears.

Underneath the surface, however, Scout reveals her true inclinations and consistently sides with masculine tendencies. Scout explains,

But I was more at home in my father’s world. People like Mr. Heck Tate did not trap you with innocent questions to make fun of you; even Jem was not highly critical unless you said something stupid. Ladies seemed to live in faint horror of men, seemed unwilling to approve wholeheartedly of them. But I liked them. There was something about them, no matter how much they cussed and drank and gambled and chewed; no matter how undetectable they were, there was something about them that I instinctively liked . . . they weren’t—

"Hypocrites, Mrs. Perkins, born hypocrites," Mrs. Merriweather was saying.  
(246-247)

Male behaviors that women deem unsavory, such as cursing, appeal to Scout. In fact, she often uses profanity throughout the novel. However, in Scout’s view, hypocrisy is a far worse crime than gambling and drinking. Men do not have complicated layers, purporting one image but actually being a different type of person. Scout’s appreciation for this type of a world suggests that Scout would prefer to live in a society where she does not have to give gender performances.

Nevertheless, that type of a world does not exist in Maycomb, Alabama in the 1930s. At times, Scout must bend her tomboyish preferences and tolerate being a lady, just as Miss Maudie

demonstrates. At the culmination of the Missionary Society meeting, Scout and her maternal figures share a significant moment in the kitchen when Atticus informs them of Tom Robinson's death. In the seriousness of the moment, the women forget their differences and unite in mourning. Miss Maudie emerges as the most authoritative woman in the group: she orders Scout to stop shaking and commands Alexandra to return to the meeting. Then, almost as one, these two women graciously begin serving their guests, and modeling them, Scout starts offering cookies (250-251). Scout concludes, "After all, if Aunty could be a lady at a time like this, so could I" (251). Lee complicates definitions of womanhood by presenting this alternate type of lady. The lady to whom Scout refers is not one who sits in the Finches' living room and gossips; in this moment, Alexandra, Miss Maudie, and Scout are ladies because they control their emotions, overcoming grief and shock to complete the task at hand. They are ladies like Mrs. Dubose, who exhibits bravery and composure during trying situations (121). Lee shows that womanhood is not monolithic and encompasses multiple aspects, including tomboyism. All ladies do not have to share the same characteristics. Furthermore, a lady can move from one type of womanhood to another, as Scout's mother figures illustrate. After all, Scout is only a lady "at a time like this" (251).

As the novel concludes, Lee leaves the reader with one final scene that celebrates Scout's tomboyism in conjunction with her mothers. After Bob Ewell attacks Scout and Jem, Scout returns home in her undergarments, and Alexandra brings her overalls to wear (278). This detail seems lost among the worry over Jem's injuries and the terror of the assault, but it significantly links Scout's gender journey with the overarching plot of the novel concerning Tom Robinson, Bob Ewell, and Boo Radley. Alexandra's brief gesture speaks volumes about Scout's relationship with her aunt. Scout believes that Alexandra brings her overalls as a result of

distraction, which is a logical explanation. However, Alexandra spends an entire novel ostracizing boyish attire. For Alexandra, dresses are normal. Therefore, wouldn't she instinctively reach for a dress rather than overalls? Instead, she immediately considers what Scout would prefer, and she does not argue the point. Finally joining Calpurnia and Maudie's mindset, Alexandra tolerates the tomboy.

Alexandra's acceptance is another example of her inconsistent behaviors, but Lee uses these inconsistencies to show the fluid nature of gender roles. Through these mother figures, who present a variety of personalities and behaviors, *To Kill a Mockingbird* demonstrates that notions of femininity are not static and uniform; an educated black woman, a southern belle, a "chameleon lady," and a tomboy can all coexist. They even have the freedom to fluctuate between conforming to and defying conventions. In the end, Scout's interactions with these women lead her to embrace her tomboy qualities. Calpurnia crosses racial and social boundaries, illuminating the feasibility of defying conventions. Miss Maudie inspires Scout to assume power and wear overalls. Scout's hatred for femininity motivates her to act contrary to Alexandra's attempted restrictions. Alexandra's inconsistencies also undermine strict notions of femininity. Though Scout interacts with each woman differently, they all function as her mother because they assist her in recognizing her identity as a tomboy. Collectively, they fill the void left when Scout's mother died, providing her with the maternal influence that Atticus cannot give, no matter how unconventionally masculine he may appear.

## CHAPTER 4

*GO SET A WATCHMAN: BOO RADLEY'S IMPACT ON SCOUT'S TOMBOYISM*

As Scout races to answer Calpurnia's beckoning calls, retreats outside to escape Aunt Alexandra's criticisms, and runs across the street to visit Miss Maudie, Boo Radley pushes aside his curtain, peers through his window, and watches her. Scout encounters Boo far less than she interacts with her mother figures, but he still significantly impacts her conceptions of gender and tomboyism. She does not engage in conversations with him, but his quiet presence speaks louder than Aunt Alexandra's lectures or Miss Stephanie Crawford's gossip. Due to the rampant and often ridiculous rumors, it is difficult to compose an accurate portrait of Arthur Radley, known as Boo by the Finch children. Does he truly have the power to freeze azalea bushes by breathing on them (15)? Does he really spy on Miss Stephanie in the middle of the night (52)? As Dill claims, has Boo been "shut up for a hundred years with nothin' but cats to eat" (54)? Initially, in Scout's imaginative mind, all of these attributes seem possible, and she fears him. However, as she obtains privileged knowledge about Boo's true personality, her fear transforms into intrigue. Though this captivation, Scout allows Boo to influence her.

Boo is a mysterious character. While several scenes allude to his presence, Scout only directly encounters him once at the end of the novel. He also remains elusive in criticism, meeting the same fate as the mother figures: the scholarly examinations of Atticus tower over the other characters, such as the women and Boo. Articles often devote a couple sentences or paragraphs to Boo, comparing him to Tom Robinson or noting that he represents the mockingbird it would be "a sin to kill" (98). Offering the most extended analysis, Claudia Johnson discusses Boo throughout *To Kill a Mockingbird: Threatening Boundaries*. Also, Gary Richards analyzes Boo as a representation of closeted homosexuals (146-157). Like Johnson and

Richards, I find great interest in Boo, and I believe his impact on Scout warrants further examination. He does not force his ideas upon Scout or expect anything from her; he merely exists for Scout to observe from a distance, presenting another model of ways to bend conventions. As Scout learns more about Boo and his peculiarities, their similarities become apparent. Lee frequently aligns Scout and Boo's experiences and behaviors, connecting their positions as outsiders.

Also, Lee presents Boo as a parental figure, specifically a mother because he demonstrates several nurturing qualities. In several instances, he offers maternal care, and throughout the novel, he provides a model for unconventional behaviors. Unlike the other parental characters, Scout does not directly imitate her behaviors on Boo's mannerisms, but, rather, she obtains ideas about gender subversions from him. Reinforcing the opinions presented by Atticus, Calpurnia, and Miss Maudie, Boo demonstrates that people can resist conforming to society's expectations. One may face punishment for that resistance, but one can also find happiness in this decision. This lesson encourages Scout to embrace her tomboyism.

Like so many characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Boo exists outside the bounds of societal conventions. In fact, he progresses farther beyond these boundaries, mainly because of his seclusion. Except for a few instances, Boo does not emerge from his home. As Johnson notes, Boo represents the Other: "The Other—any entity, markedly different from the sheltered self—can conceivably take many forms. In its most extreme manifestation, it is a literal alien from outer space" (73). Though Boo does not come from outer space, the town still attributes to him an otherworldly aura: he is called a ghost (18), a "hain't" (30), and a "malevolent phantom" (15). Through Boo, Johnson adds, "The theme of the Other is especially strong in a community that is described as being homogeneous to the point of intermarriage, for the dark Unlike is more

pronounced than usual in a town where most of the people in ‘acceptable’ society are virtually alike” (73). Boo’s deviations, therefore, appear much more noticeable in Maycomb than they would in a large city with a diverse population.

As a whole, the Radleys differ from their “homogenous” neighbors in appearance, temperament, and habit. Scout explains,

The shutters and doors of the Radley house were closed on Sundays, another thing alien to Maycomb’s ways: closed doors meant illness and cold weather only. Of all days Sunday was the day for formal afternoon visiting: ladies wore corsets, men wore coats, children wore shoes. But to climb the Radley front steps and call, ‘He-y,’ of a Sunday afternoon was something their neighbors never did. (15-16)

Besides discouraging visiting, the Radleys fail to participate in other town activities, such as attending church or joining a missionary circle (15). Rejecting all notions of Southern hospitality, the Radleys choose to remain separate. By keeping their shutters and doors closed, they undergo a kind of self-inflicted imprisonment, suspended only when Mr. Radley purchases supplies in town, Mrs. Radley waters her flowers, or their son Nathan visits (18). Mr. Radley furthers his family’s alienation when he refuses to reply to Scout and Jem’s greeting whenever he passes them on the sidewalk (18). While the Radleys in general rarely emerge from their seclusion, creating a sense of suspicion in Maycomb, Boo differs even more from his parents and brother because he almost never surfaces. Consequently, the town spreads rumors about the family, and a great fear develops. For instance, children believe that pecans from Radley trees will kill them (15). Adults also regard them negatively. Calpurnia, who normally treats all



people with a level of respect, spits on the ground in disgust when Mr. Radley dies, remarking, “There goes the meanest man God ever blew breath into” (18).

Mr. Radley is especially “mean” in his treatment of his son, Boo. Long before Scout, Jem, and Dill entice Boo to “come out,” Boo leads a public life. During his adolescence, he forms a gang with several of the Cunninghams from Old Sarum, but Mr. Radley is displeased with his son’s association with the “wrong crowd” (16). A generation later, Aunt Alexandra echoes Mr. Radley’s sentiments, revealing why Boo’s involvement in the gang causes his father’s disapproval. As Aunt Alexandra tells Scout, the Cunninghams are “trash” and “not our kind of folks” (236-237). Since the Radleys live in town, on the same street as the Finches, the Cunninghams also fall below Boo’s social class. Lee never explains why or how this gang forms, but it demonstrates that Boo defies Maycomb’s unwritten code of associating with people in similar social classes. Incidentally, Scout’s behaviors mirror Boo’s, and she also receives condemnation. When she desires a friendship with Walter Cunningham, Aunt Alexandra does not permit her to invite him to dinner or to play (236). Aunt Alexandra and Mr. Radley remain entrenched in traditional caste systems. After all, Miss Maudie divulges that Mr. Radley is a “foot-washing Baptist,” part of the same group that thinks “women are a sin by definition” (51-52). Thus, one can assume that Mr. Radley supports stereotypical views concerning gender, in addition to his prejudice towards lower social classes. Once again, Lee presents another character that discriminates based on both gender and class.

Just as Scout argues with Aunt Alexandra over these issues, Boo also rebels against his father by joining the gang. However, even when trying to live in society, Boo’s unconventional behaviors create discord. While in the gang, Boo challenges the laws of Maycomb by loitering, visiting the local “gambling hell,” and drinking whiskey. Most notoriously, the gang eludes

arrest and locks a police officer in prison. As a result, Boo becomes branded as a juvenile delinquent. The town charges the boys with several misdemeanors and sends them to the state industrial school. Boo, however, faces a different punishment: his father imprisons him inside his home (16). Perhaps Mr. Radley feels that he is better equipped to handle his son's problems or perhaps Boo is above a detention center for lower class delinquents. Nevertheless, Boo's separation establishes his isolation and sets a precedent for his gender-bending behaviors: he always remains different from other men.

In his adulthood, Boo retains his reputation as a criminal. The town often blames him for "stealthy small crimes," even when his innocence is obvious. For instance, "Once the town was terrorized by a series of morbid nocturnal events: people's chickens and household pets were found mutilated; although the culprit was Crazy Addie, who eventually drowned himself in Barker's Eddy, people still looked at the Radley Place, unwilling to discard their initial suspicions" (15). Since Boo never emerges from his home, people never gain an accurate portrait of his personality, and they assume the worst about him. Due to these false allegations, Johnson notices similarities between Boo and the "classic witch": "For centuries, whole communities persecuted supposed witches as demonic Others in the same way that much of Maycomb and the novel's three children project witchhood onto Arthur Radley" (75). Though they never burn him at the stake, people like Miss Stephanie Crawford destroy Boo by spreading rumors. These rumors isolate Boo even further: because of fear, people like Cecil Jacobs walk a mile out of the way to avoid the Radley house (41). Boo does not actually do anything to be branded as a "witch," demonstrating that society labels him as more bizarre and unconventional than he may actually be. Scout, however, understands that appearances can be deceiving. Simply because one is an outsider, it doesn't mean they intend to cause mayhem and terror.

Though Scout is never attributed with committing a crime, she also faces false accusations. Mrs. Dubose charges Scout and Jem with skipping school (on a Saturday) and breaking Miss Maudie's scuppernon arbor (110). Maycomb's citizens consistently place blame on people who seem a little different, and this blame links Scout and Boo even further. They live in a culture that does not embrace their unconventional behaviors.

Though Boo remains innocent of most offenses, he actually commits one crime. While "cutting some items from *The Maycomb Tribune* to paste in his scrapbook," Boo stabs his father in the leg with scissors. Since Scout and Jem hear this story from Miss Stephanie, it probably contains embellishments, but an incident clearly occurs because Mr. Radley "ran screaming into the street that Arthur was killing them all," and the sheriff locks Boo in the courthouse basement (17). Thus, Boo "comes out" of his isolation only to face this further imprisonment. This incident reveals numerous aspects of Boo's mysterious and unconventional character. Laura Fine points out the childish nature of Boo working on his scrapbook ("Structuring" 73). A grown man completing childish activities may indicate a mental illness, but it may also hint at Boo's artistic abilities, which Lee later exposes in his gifts to the children. In addition, Gary Richards asserts that this incident "hint[s] at Lee's appropriation of an unresolved Freudian Oedipal conflict" (151). Though Richards's reading seems possible, I contend that Boo stabs his father due to rage that he can no longer restrain. Ever since the gang incident, Boo resents his father for imprisoning him in their home. Even Atticus, who normally refuses to partake in gossip and speculation, believes that Mr. Radley turns his son into a "ghost" (18).

Using scissors, a female instrument, Lee connects Boo to a history of mad females in literature and culture, who endured similar situations. As Kathryn Lee Seidel observes, "The mysterious Boo is the novel's madperson in the attic, the projection of Scout's own fears and a

victim of town codes that, having been carried out literally, have led to the isolation and confinement of this youthful transgressor” (“Growing” 88). I agree with Seidel that Boo functions as a “mad double” for Scout’s rage against society, but I also believe that his “mad” act expresses his own rage against the patriarchy. He exhibits similarities with the “madwoman in the attic” ideal. According to Elaine Showalter, during the Victorian era, “mad” women developed hysteria to protest their marginalized positions and their lack of power (61). These women felt so unhappy that they committed drastic actions, such as infanticide or suicide (58). Boo Radley echoes these actions by stabbing his father. His “madness” also demonstrates the American South’s preoccupation with Victorian ideals. In *The Southern Belle in the American Novel*, Seidel reports, “Southerners were, in their moral ideals, Victorians who reacted strongly against the corruption of their society . . . . The Victorian counter to the corruption of the materialistic, industrialized world was the home” (4). When Boo causes trouble with his gang, Mr. Radley views the home as the solution. Furthermore, after Boo attacks his father, the town suggests that his father commit him to an insane asylum. Instead, Mr. Radley once again places Boo inside their home (17). Lee aligns Boo with women who feel powerless against the patriarchy. As Carolyn Jones concludes, Boo is “one of the least powerful members of Maycomb society” (61). Scout also experiences Boo’s lack of power. As a woman, Scout potentially faces confinement within the home, but by making her a tomboy, Lee enables her to escape from those strictures.

As these connections to women’s disempowerment illustrate, Boo is not a conventional male. According to Scout, men in Maycomb typically drive dump-trucks, work in a garage, play football, hunt, fish, drink, and smoke (97-98). Scout presents these attributes to show how her father differs from other men, but Boo also noticeably does not “do anything” (97). Just as

Atticus's defining feature entails sitting and reading, one can assume that Boo also spends the majority of his time sitting since he never leaves his home. At least Atticus has a career; it is not clear if Boo completes any type of work or if he is capable of work. In addition, Boo diverges even further from masculine stereotypes because he has sewing skills. When Jem returns to retrieve his pants after his nighttime flight from the Radley's yard, he notices that Boo—although he does not realize it is Boo at the time—has repaired the hole from where the pants ripped on a fence. Jem tells Scout, "They'd been sewed up. Not like a lady sewed 'em, like somethin' I'd try to do. All crooked" (66). Interestingly, Lee does not depict Boo with completely conventionally feminine traits since his sewing skills are not perfect. Instead, he presents elements of both masculinity and femininity, as does Scout and her other parental figures. Also, by fixing the pants, Boo must know the children hid in his yard, and he must have guessed that Jem would return for his pants. Boo knows more about them than they realize. The children spy on Boo, but he also spies on them.

Watching is a significant theme in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. According to Charles Shields, Lee originally titled the novel *Go Set a Watchman*, referring to the scene where Atticus guards Tom Robinson's jail cell (114). Boo also functions as a watchman over Jem and Scout, and this tendency demonstrates his parental attributes. Similar to Atticus protecting Tom Robinson, Boo keeps harm from befalling Scout and Jem. He overcomes his shyness and his anti-social desires, so that he can kill Bob Ewell, who attacks the children when they walk home from a pageant. Frequently, Lee hints that Boo secretly observes their antics. When Dill dares Jem to touch the Radley house, Scout notices movement in the window shutter (21). Also, when rolling in a tire, Scout accidentally enters the Radley yard, and she hears laughing (48). The laughter contradicts Atticus's insistence that the children offend Boo. Boo finds great interest in the children, and he

always remains present, both for the good and bad times. These consistent references to watching suggest that Boo is the unknown audience for their dramas. Like Atticus, who stands on the sidewalk and observes their game, and Miss Maudie, who stares with “her hedge clippers poised in mid-air” (47), Boo probably peeks out from behind his curtain and laughs when Jem pretends to stab Dill’s leg.

Boo joins the other parental figures in watching because he also functions similarly. As Amy Lawrence writes, “the major potential mother figure besides Atticus is, oddly enough, Boo. Unlike father figures who attack children or pass judgment, Boo does motherly things—making toys, sewing Jem’s trousers, watching over the children, protecting them from harm” (183). Although Lawrence makes this comment in reference to the film’s depiction of Boo, it also describes his character in the book. Boo’s watching particularly reflects his nurturing, motherly instincts. For example, when Scout stands outside in the middle of the night, observing a fire devour Miss Maudie’s house, Boo takes care of her. He braves the world outside his home to place a blanket around Scout’s shoulders (79).

Perhaps because Boo enjoys watching Scout and Jem, he leaves them a series of gifts in a tree. Although Miss Stephanie’s gossip often obscures Boo’s personality, these gifts reveal his true character. For instance, Boo constructs soap doll replicas of Scout and Jem. Boo has spent a large amount of time observing the children since the dolls are “almost perfect miniatures” (67). Moreover, the dolls link Boo to conventionally feminine items. Other men with carving skills do not fashion dolls. Mr. Avery, for instance, makes toothpicks, which are notably phallic (68). Another gift, the spelling medal, aligns him with Scout. Like Scout, who can read “most of *My First Reader* and the stock-market quotations from *The Mobile Register*” before her illiterate class, Boo once excelled in school (23, 68). For Boo, the ability to spell is a gender-

bending trait because men traditionally dominate in science and mathematics, while females excel in the language arts. As Atticus demonstrates, Maycomb regards a love for words as an unconventionally masculine trait.

These gifts establish a connection between the children and Boo. Discussing this bond, John Carlos Rowe traces the importance of gift giving throughout the novel, referring to Boo's gifts as "primitive fetishes, which substitute their own forms for Boo's expression of interest in and affection for the two children" (9). Furthermore, when Jem and Scout remove the items from the tree, they validate the bond because "[t]o accept a gift involves as much responsibility as to make a gift" (6). While Rowe fails to consider that Jem and Scout do not know the identity of the giver, his assertions still illuminate the special link established by the gift exchange. This link is important because, as Rowe asserts, the real gift is not the actual item being exchanged but language: "the giver and receiver enter into a social contract primarily as a consequence of their agreement to communicate with each other" (6-7). Though Boo does not literally talk to Scout until the end of the novel, the gifts demonstrate that he does communicate with her throughout the duration of the story. He may not verbally convey messages, but he still shows that he cares for the Finch children. As a parent would pass down prized possessions to his child, Boo gives Scout and Jem these gifts. This interaction creates the bond that will ultimately allow Scout to regard Boo as a model for gender-bending behaviors.

Scout does not realize that Boo is the one who provides these gifts until the final pages of the novel, but long before her awareness, Scout begins to lose her fear of Boo. Partly due to Jem and Dill's obsessive desire to make Boo "come out," Scout paradoxically feels drawn to this ghostly man. The children's intrigue most prominently manifests itself in their reenactments of Radley legends, including the incident when Boo stabs his father. These imitations demonstrate

a desire on some level to be like him. Laura Fine views these dramas in psychoanalytical terms, asserting that Boo functions as a “projected double” for Scout (“Structuring” 73). Fine writes, “In acting out Boo’s life, Scout is able to fantasize about being unfairly punished for minor transgressions and then enacting revenge against the father, the patriarchy, the transmitter of constricting rules, as represented by Mr. Radley” (“Structuring” 74). Although Fine fails to mention that Scout does not play the role of Boo in their dramas and therefore does not physically “act out” this rage, she astutely points out that Scout identifies with Boo. Scout views him as another outcast, like herself, who unfairly endures restrictions. Similar to Mr. Radley belittling Boo, Jem relegates Scout to the minor role of Mrs. Radley, who barely completes any tasks in the play (46). Outside of the game, Boo’s father imprisons him, just as the “starched walls of a pink cotton penitentiary” threaten to confine Scout (147). Boo revolts by stabbing his father, while Scout revolts by wearing overalls, fighting, and engaging in a plethora of gender-bending behaviors. Though Scout does not directly imitate his behaviors as she does with Atticus, Calpurnia, or Miss Maudie, he indirectly influences her. He proves that one can succeed in rejecting conventions, even if that rejection comes at the high cost of injuring a family member and facing further confinement.

While Boo initially faces a forced imprisonment in the home, eventually his imprisonment is self-imposed. After all, his father’s death should grant him freedom. Although his brother may serve as another patriarchal enforcer (19), Lee offers another explanation. Essentially, Boo prefers isolation. This preference further separates him from societal standards; most people prefer interacting with others. He is capable of leaving the house, illustrated when he places the items in the tree and retrieves Jem’s pants, but he does not emerge often because he desires seclusion. Initially, Scout does not understand why Boo stays inside because. She



maintains that “there’s just one kind of folks. Folks” (240). This comment reflects the views of her society: people typically conform to one standard. However, Jem makes a more accurate observation, expressing the message Scout will ultimately acquire:

That’s what I thought, too . . . when I was your age. If there’s just one kind of folks, why can’t they get along with each other? If they’re all alike, why do they go out of their way to despise each other? Scout, I think I’m beginning to understand something. I think I’m beginning to understand why Boo Radley’s stayed shut up in his house all this time . . . it’s because he *wants* to stay inside.  
(240)

Jem astutely concludes that Boo stays inside because his preferences differ from the preferences of others. Lee does not explain why he develops this inclination, but knowing why is not important. What is important is his choice to conduct his life as he chooses, even if that involves diverging from conventional habits. This is the central message that Scout learns from Boo: no two people should have to follow the same path. He is a model because he illuminates this notion, which allows for people to have gender-bending behaviors when others exhibit conventional traits.

After Jem delivers this statement, Scout endures the ill-fated Missionary Society meeting. Clearly, in a world where some women wear corsets and others wear overalls, more than “one kind of folks” has to exist. Subsequently, Scout develops a new, mature perspective concerning Boo Radley: “I sometimes felt a twinge of remorse, when passing by the old [Radley] place, at ever having taken part in what must have been sheer torment to Arthur Radley—what reasonable recluse wants children peeping through his shutters, delivering greetings on the end of a fishing pole, wandering in his collards at night?” (255). In this passage, Scout refers to Boo by his given

name “Arthur,” acknowledging that he is a person and not a “malevolent phantom” or a “hain’t.” She still desires to see him, but she understands that she must respect Boo’s wishes. Her wish to have a conversation with him is “only a fantasy” (256).

Ultimately, though, Scout’s fantasy becomes a reality, and Boo’s penchant for watching them saves their lives. When Bob Ewell attacks Scout and Jem, Boo kills Ewell, and Scout finally meets her guardian. Incidentally, when sitting next to him on her porch, just as she sits beside her own father, Scout refers to him as “Mr. Arthur” again (286). The “Mr.” indicates a Southern title of respect, and Scout’s use of his first name, rather than “Mr. Radley” reveals a level of personal familiarity. Furthermore, Rowe points out that the name Arthur evokes the “aura of Arthurian legend surrounding this southern knight-errant” (15). Again, Lee blurs the line between gender paradigms by invoking the masculine archetype of King Arthur. Though his unconventional traits appear more frequently, Boo possesses some masculine bravery and heroism.

Although Boo kills Bob Ewell in self defense, Boo now commits a real felony, ironically living up to his reputation as a killer. However, Atticus, Heck Tate, and Scout all determine that the real crime would be exposing Boo Radley to society and indicting him with this deed. Instead, they report that Bob Ewell accidentally killed himself. In another one of Atticus’s “special cases” of “bend[ing] the law” (37), they disconnect Boo from the rules of society, reinforcing the idea that more than “one kind of folks” exist. If everyone were the same, then they would all be subject to the same laws, and “bending” would not occur. Moreover, if one can bend the official laws, then one can bend unofficial codes, including gender stereotypes, as Lee’s characters demonstrate.

In the attack scene, Fine again views Boo as a projection of Scout's "outsider status" ("Structuring" 74). Suggesting that this "outsider status" also includes homosexual desires, Fine asserts, "[S]he may be projecting through Boo a realization that, just as he can never fit into 'normal' life in Maycomb, neither can she. If Scout tried to lead a lesbian lifestyle, she would be shunned or even attacked, while if she pretended to lead a 'straight' life, she would be miserable. On some level, she must identify with Boo" ("Structuring" 74). I agree with Fine that Scout identifies with Boo as an outsider; however, I hesitate to label Scout a lesbian, primarily because the adult narrator indicates otherwise. When Aunt Alexandra lectures Scout about marriage, Scout comments, "[I]t would be many years before I would be interested in boys" (138), implying that she has heterosexual preferences as an adult. Though many tomboys develop lesbian desires, gender transgressions do not automatically denote homosexuality.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, recalling the assertions I made in Chapter I about tomboy taming, I maintain that Lee purposely ends the novel with Scout as a nine-year-old child. If Scout's future sexuality were important to the story, than Lee would have brought Scout into adolescence or adulthood and definitively addressed these issues. But there is no way to know what happens after the novel ends, and speculating about her future detracts from the information that Lee actually provides in the text. Just as Boo remains elusive to Scout, Scout's future remains elusive to her readers.

Though heterosexual, Scout still shares connections to the homosexual experience because she is an outsider. Gary Richards reaches a similar conclusion concerning Boo: "[B]ecause Lee surrounds Boo with so many of the silences and absences that structure the frequent closetedness of same-sex desire, she invites readers to speculate that Boo's reclusiveness is comparable to closeted sexuality and thus explore what bearing this literal representation of closetedness might have on an understanding of the figurative" (146). Richards

adds, “To assert that Lee’s representation invites such a reading is not, however, to argue that Boo is gay” (147). One can apply the same reading to Scout. Scout does not fit in, especially in overtly feminine settings, such as the Missionary Society tea party, just as lesbians may not feel that they belong in a predominantly heterosexual society.

As the novel ends, Scout and Boo share one final moment, and she escorts him home. Taking her father’s advice, Scout “stand[s] in his shoes and walk[s] around in them” (294), and she sees the world from Boo’s perspective. She realizes that Boo has always watched her, and she refers to herself and Jem as “Boo’s children” (294). These interactions demonstrate Scout’s growing respect for Boo, as well as her conclusions about unconventional behaviors. In seeing herself as “Boo’s child,” she acknowledges that he is a maternal figure. For these reasons, I agree with Carolyn Jones, who terms this scene “Scout’s rite of passage in the novel” (61). Jones adds, “Scout looks in the face of the phantom and into Arthur Radley’s human heart and realizes that her life and Boo’s have been and are interrelated: that she is Boo’s child as well as Atticus’s, nurtured and protected by both to this moment” (62). Although the rest of Maycomb may fear him, Scout will not conform to their beliefs. Instead, she creates her own opinions, realizing that Boo is not “malevolent,” but he is “real nice” like the ghost in the story Atticus reads to her (295). Similar to a ghost, Boo’s presence is not always obvious, but he is always there, watching behind his window.

While completing her maturation, Scout now regards Boo as a watchful parent and a gender-bending model. By refusing to come out when everyone, including Scout, finds this tendency peculiar, Boo illustrates that people can rebel against society’s expectations. Through these characters, Lee presents the view that everyone can follow their own path in life, as further demonstrated in an exchange between Scout and Miss Maudie. When Boo’s seclusion perplexes

Scout, Miss Maudie asks, “Wouldn’t you stay in the house if you didn’t want to come out?”

Scout then replies, “Yessum, but I’d wanta come out” (51). Scout disagrees with Boo’s personal choices; however, her preferences can differ. As Boo teaches her, people should have the freedom to conduct their lives as they please. Just because society deems it unnatural to stay inside, that does not mean Boo should submit and emerge into the sunlight. Likewise, society deems it unnatural for Scout to wear overalls and play in the dirt, but she does not have to accede either.

As Scout grows from fearing and ridiculing Boo to accepting and respecting him, she begins to value her own deviations from standards. This is a central journey of the novel: Boo illuminates and reinforces Scout’s appreciation of her tomboyishness. Scout learns this lesson during the final pages of the novel because it is the natural conclusion to her growth process as a tomboy. By viewing how Boo fits into the world (or, rather, refuses to fit into the world), she starts to understand her place in society. She realizes that people do not perfectly “fit” into society, but they can still lead a happy life, as long as they remain true to their personal desires. Those desires can involve anything from being a recluse to being a tomboy.

## CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSION

In the three years that *To Kill a Mockingbird* depicts, Scout's exploration of tomboyism represents an exploration of her identity. Adolescent protagonists commonly undertake this quest. As Patty Campbell writes, "[T]he central theme of most YA fiction is...finding the answer to the question 'Who am I and what am I going to do about it?'" (485). Throughout the novel, Scout asks herself this question. Will she remain a tomboy or will she adapt to conventions? Scout's five parental figures guide her towards finding an answer. As they challenge gender expectations, they offer models for Scout's own behaviors. As her biological father, Atticus is her primary influence, and he bends the "law" concerning masculine conventions. He has feminine attributes, such as his passivity, and he demonstrates tendencies that differ from the Southern men in his community. Furthermore, by embracing her gender-bending behaviors, Atticus encourages her tomboyism.

Next, Scout benefits from maternal guidance. Calpurnia functions as a liminal figure, crossing racial divides, and Scout applies Calpurnia's teachings to her own movement across gender barriers. Aunt Alexandra offers conventional femininity, and her criticisms motivate Scout to rebel against those standards. Furthermore, Alexandra's inconsistencies allow Scout to question her code. Underneath the mask of her petticoat ruffles, Alexandra is an independent, powerful woman who voices her opinions even when they contradict the head of the household, Atticus. A "chameleon lady," Miss Maudie introduces the option of gender performances. She often wears overalls, but she also knows how to use a dress to her advantage. Ultimately, Scout views Miss Maudie as a feasible model to follow, and she presents her own gender performance at the Missionary Society meeting.

Last, by refusing to “come out,” Boo Radley resists societal and gender expectations. He faces similar patriarchal repressions as Scout, and Scout’s gender-bending traits often mirror his, illustrating the bond they share. As another mother figure who watches and protects her, Boo proves to Scout that one can reject stereotypes and still find contentment.

Ultimately, though, Scout chooses her own path. At nine-years-old, she will probably face many twists and turns throughout the continuation of her youth, but she understands her core identity as a tomboy. Her development resembles Roberta Trites’s assessment about adolescent growth in literature of the current era: “In modernism, maturity often takes the form of a conscious rejection of society; separation, rather than transcendence, serves as the mark as the mature modernist” (18). As Scout embraces her tomboyism, she diverges from societal expectations. She becomes an outsider, like Boo Radley. However, Lee does not present outsiders in a negative light. Instead, Lee depicts them as figures deserving admiration; they have the courage to resist conformity.

Further celebrating Scout’s tomboyism, Lee does not show Scout aging and becoming tamed, a fate that so many of Scout’s literary counterparts experience. In keeping her a child, Lee leaves Scout’s future largely ambiguous. She frees Scout from the constraints of inevitable female issues, such as puberty, dating, or marrying. While the adult narrator briefly indicates her interest in boys, Lee does not explore Scout’s sexuality or depict her acting upon these interests, as many tamed tomboys experience. Moreover, heterosexuality does not equal conventional femininity. Even in Scout’s “marriage” with Dill, she exerts dominion over him and beats him (48). Ultimately, the reader never learns if Scout marries, has children, or becomes a housewife. She could obtain a career, choosing to remain unmarried and independent. She could still be a

tomboy as an adult, wearing pants instead of dresses and insisting that people call her “Scout” instead of “Jean Louise.” A number of possibilities await her.

If Scout had discussed remaining a tomboy throughout adolescence and adulthood, her story may have contained significant conflict and strife, as Lee personally experienced. For Lee’s biography, Charles Shields contacted people who attended college with Lee, and they discuss her tomboyish habits and appearance, which “rankled” them. Shields explains, “Nelle Lee was different, and not in a fun or delightful way, but in a manner that ignored convention, which could be interpreted as a kind of backhanded insult to everything these young ladies stood for” (77). These girls felt appalled when Lee cursed, smoked a pipe, or wore “jeans or white Bermuda shorts” instead of skirts or nice slacks (76). Consequently, Lee remained an outsider. Perhaps for these reasons, knowing what an adolescent tomboy endures, Lee allows Scout to stay a child.

This type of open-ending is a common feature of adolescent literature. As Richard Peck writes, “The last page of every YA novel should say not ‘The End’ but ‘The Beginning’” (qtd. in Campbell 486). After Atticus tucks Scout into bed on the final page of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Scout will awake the next morning ready to begin a new adventure. The readers do not know what that new adventure will entail, but the readers do not need to know. All that is important is the completion of her current journey to embrace tomboyism.

By establishing Scout as a tomboy with an ambiguous future, Lee opens the door for tomboys in contemporary young adult fiction to also resist becoming tamed. Many authors no longer change their protagonists’ behaviors when those girls reach adolescence. For example, in Cynthia Voigt’s *Homecoming* (1981) and its many sequels, Dicey Tillerman consistently refuses to submit to feminine conventions throughout her teenage years. In Mildred Taylor’s *The Road*



*to Memphis* (1990), Cassie Logan pursues a career as a lawyer. Incidentally, like Scout, Cassie also shares a close bond with her parents. Adult fiction also exhibits these gender-bending females. In Fannie Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café* (1987), Idgie Threadgoode remains tomboyish throughout her adulthood and into her elderly years. In Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina* (1992), Bone Boatwright identifies with her uncles and yearns for the freedoms of masculinity. Like Lee, Allison allows Bone the freedom to remain a young girl. Though Idgie and Bone are both lesbians, they remain connected to heterosexual Scout because they do not become tamed. Perhaps because Scout sets this precedent, these authors allow their tomboy protagonists to deter even further from the bounds of feminine stereotypes and explore their sexuality. As these books evidence, contemporary girls have more options than their nineteenth and early-twentieth-century predecessors. They can be "a ray of sunshine" in pants, dresses, skirts, shorts, or whatever clothing item they desire.

Harper Lee, after all, demonstrates the freedoms of modern females. She never married, never had children, and never acquired the life of a conventional woman. Instead of relying on a husband or a father, she supports herself by her own efforts: she lives off the money generated by *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Though she only wrote this one novel, it offers a powerful message about gender stereotypes. As Scout embraces her tomboyish traits, she demonstrates how the paradigms of masculinity and femininity are open to fluctuation. In a world that seems filled with restrictions, Scout and her parental figures cross gender boundaries and choose to exhibit whatever behaviors they desire. Scout can run down the sidewalk in her overalls, knowing that her parental figures will always support her gender-bending decisions.

## NOTES

1. In their textbook on young adult literature, Donelson and Nilsen categorize *To Kill a Mockingbird* as an “adult book that set the stage for contemporary YA novels” (72). However, *To Kill a Mockingbird* may not have been intended as an adolescent text because publishers did not widely market books specifically to teenagers until after its publication date. According to Roberta Trites, young adult literature was not considered a “distinct literary genre” until the end of the 1960s, and, although critics disagree about the first book marketed to young adults, some critics believe that S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* (1967) holds that position (9).

2. Fine joins many gender theorists and critics who contend that tomboyish behaviors in childhood indicate lesbianism in adulthood. Michelle Abate presents the history of this belief, noting that it first developed in the late nineteenth-century. Sexologists, particularly Richard von Krafft-Ebing, claimed that women who act like men would ultimately develop the same sexual desires as men (52). In the postwar era, during the rise of the homosexual movement, tomboys became further linked with lesbians. In 1967, Harvey E. Kaye’s presentation at the Society of Medical Psychoanalysts reported that adult lesbians typically viewed themselves as tomboys during their childhoods. Abate places *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the group of literature that reflects these ideas (166-167).

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