Queer Temporalities in Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding*

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ABSTRACT

Traditional interpretation of Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) tends to read it as a typical coming-of-age story; however, a queer-inflected reading will shed light on the hidden aspects of the novel that contain the seeds of imagining alternative forms of attachment, belonging, and intimacy. Employing the concept of "queer temporalities" to read the gender outlaws (adolescent tomboys, sissy men, cross-dressers, homosexuals) and social outcasts (circus freaks, racist victims) in the novel, the paper examines how their backwardness and anachronism expose the arbitrariness of the hegemonic notion of time premised on a homogeneous form of identity or community. I propose to read the novel's preoccupation with alternative temporalities (e.g., the residual, the emergent, the crip, the fantastic, and the virtual) as a critique of the straight time associated with an idealized domesticity, gender normalization, and the American national identity. Frankie's idiosyncratic wedding fantasy, her world-remaking imagination, and the indeterminacy in novelistic closure are shown to be the invocation of a future collectivity, a queer potentiality that registers as the illumination of an alternative horizon of existing and being.

KEYWORDS: queer temporalities, Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*, affect, community, identity

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卡森・麥可考勒絲《婚禮的成員》中的酷兒時間

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摘　　要

過去對麥可考勒絲《婚禮的成員》(1946)的傳統詮釋，多將這本小說讀成一個典型轉大人的故事。然而，酷兒觀點式的歪讀卻可更清楚明白地顯示出小說中所隱含的另類情感、歸屬、與親密形式的想像根源。援用「酷兒時間」來閱讀小說中的性別反叛者（青少年小 T、娘娘腔男性、反串/易裝者、同性戀者）及社會棄兒（馬戲團怪胎、種族歧視的受害者），本文審視這些畸人的落後性及不合時宜，是如何揭露了普世霸權時間的武斷性，而這樣的霸權時間概念，其實是建立在以一種同質形式的認同或共群為前提。小說對另類時間（如殘存的時間、新興的時間、殘障的時間、幻奇的時間、虛擬的時間）的入神關注，應當讀成對直時間的批判，而此直時間乃與某種理想化的家庭生活、性別正典化、及美國國族認同有關聯性。法蘭奇酷異的婚禮幻想、改造世界的想像、以及小說開放性的結尾，皆召喚出一種對未來非正典式集體性的渴望、內蘊某種閃爍另類存有微光的酷兒潛質。

關鍵字：酷兒時間、卡森・麥可考勒絲、《婚禮的成員》、情動、共群、認同

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In Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), a 12-year-old white Southern tomboy named Frankie Addams suddenly falls in love with the idea of her brother's wedding one summer during World War II. For the entirety of the novel, Frankie fantasizes about joining the wedding and even the marriage that follows it. The novel depicts Frankie's desire to fit in with others and her ultimate frustration and failure. At odds with prevalent images of proper femininity, Frankie's tomboyishness marks her as a sort of alien and excludes her from obtaining any membership. Her sense of not belonging to any group or anything causes her a lot of pain that summer: "This was the summer when for a long time she had not been a member. She belonged to no club and was a member of nothing in the world" (461). As a boyish girl who withdraws from the neighborhood's girls' club in which the girls "had parties with boys on Saturday night" (469), Frankie becomes an "unjoined person who hung around in doorways" (461). [3] Her only companions are her feminine, six-year-old cousin, John Henry West, and Berenice Sadie Brown, the black cook and housekeeper who has taken care of Frankie since her mother's death. Lonely and fretful, she dreams of escaping the dreary dullness of the Deep South: "The long and flowering spring was over and the summer in the town was ugly and lonesome and very hot. Every day she wanted more and more to leave the town: to light out for South America or Hollywood or New York City" (482).

At first glance, this may sound like a typical coming-of-age story. Partly biographical, the novel reflects McCullers's gender ambiguity [4] and her childhood desire to escape the constraints of female identity and regional backwardness. As a Southern writer born and raised in Columbus, Georgia, the young McCullers dreamed of escaping her poverty-stricken, sexist, racist hometown. In her fiction, descriptions of small-town Southern life are imbued with boredom, isolation, and provincialism. As she writes in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1943): "The town itself is dreary"; it is "lonesome, sad, and like a

[3] Throughout the novel, "doorways" are always associated with Frankie, who likes to linger in this in-between space with her gloomy face and restless heart. Connecting insides with outsides and possessing no absolute nature in itself, the doorway has a Janus face and evokes a sense of mystery. It indicates the simultaneity of separation and connection rather than a distinct sense of inside and outside. This paradoxical nature of the doorway is linked to both Frankie's gender ambiguity and her temporal status as a teenager who straddles childhood and adulthood.

[4] As Sarah Gleeson-White informs us (citing Virginia Spencer Carr's words in her biography of McCullers, *The Lonely Hunter*), McCullers in fact described herself as an "invert" and thought that she had been "born a man" (2).

place that is far off and estranged from all other places in the world" (397). She yearned for the cold and snow of the North: "I longed especially for New York. The firelight on the walnut folding doors would sadden me, and the tedious sound of the old swan clock. I dreamed of the distant city of skyscrapers and snow" (*Mortgaged* 251).

This desire to escape the racist South is, of course, typical of adolescent angst, but there is something beyond simply the call to normalization here: McCullers's queer texts always contain the seeds of alternative forms of attachment, belonging, and intimacy that we are invited to imagine and that are critical of normative thinking and damaging stereotypes. These hidden aspects of her novels are anything but typical. Therefore, this article will suggest ways of deploying new insights contributed by the queer discourse on temporality, in order that we might go beyond a paradigmatic reading of this novel as a "typical" Bildungsroman and begin to tease out what did not, has not, might not, or has yet to come.

Early criticism of McCullers's novels tends to read them as allegories of everyman.[5] In Hassan and Carpenter's readings, *The Member of the Wedding* is grouped unproblematically with male coming-of-age novels such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*[6] In these conventional readings, queer characters are de-sexed; the spectral haunting of loneliness is interpreted as a quintessentially human condition of which any particular sexual aspect is ignored; the grotesque aspects of her work are purged and normalized, and discussions of their libidinal transgressions and homoerotic possibilities are left out.

However, recent analyses of McCullers's works have begun to pay attention to their queer themes. Sarah Gleeson-White, for example, draws on Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque to illuminate the more subversive potential of McCullers's gender deviants. Rachel Adams contextualizes McCullers's fiction within the history of the American sideshow, and examines her

[5] For example, in his introduction of *Modern Critical Views: Carson McCullers* (1986), Harold Bloom regards Wordsworth's "poignant Margaret" in *The Ruined Cottage* as the "authentic literary ancestor" of McCullers's lonely heroines, thereby ignoring the queerness of her characters (2). Oliver Evans argues that McCullers's themes of identity and loneliness are tinged with existentialism and represent "the situation of most men" (30). Similarly, Klaus Lubbers writes that "the overall theme of Carson McCullers's books is that of man's problematic and painful existence with various veerings from its proper course" (51).

[6] See Ihab Hassan's "The Character of Post-War Fiction in America" and Frederic I Carpenter's "The Adolescent in American Fiction."

fictional representations of the freak show that "negotiate the relationship of individual nonconformity to a social context intent on discriminating between normality and deviance" (18). Yet while these readings clearly modify earlier ones that ignored gender and sexuality, they do not pay enough attention to the "temporal" dimension of McCullers's fiction. In her article "Somatic Syntax: Replotting the Developmental Narrative in Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding*," Nicole Seymour does engage with temporality. However, her focus is on the imbrication of narrative and sexuality.

Building on these critics' queer insights, my discussion of *The Member of the Wedding* relies on recent theoretical works on queer futurity and queer temporalities to explore the idiosyncratic temporalities that permeate the novel in various ways. In fact, this novel speaks of multiple temporalities and is concerned with how "sideways" moments might generate new possibilities.[7] I propose to read its preoccupation with alternative temporalities (e.g., the residual, the anachronistic, the crip, the emergent, the fantastic, and the virtual) as a critique of the straight or linear time associated with an idealized domesticity, gender normalization, and the American national identity. Frankie's subversive tendency to identify with freaks and criminals, her "crip affiliation"[8] with physical anomaly, her rejection of the forward-moving timeline, the wild fantasies of a queer world-making, and the indeterminacy in novelistic closure enact a future vision that "dwells in the region of the not-yet, a place where entrance and, above all, final content are marked by an enduring indeterminacy."[9] At the same time, the temporal is inextricably tied to the affective, given that the sense of "backward feelings" tends to mark the affective disconnection of being queer in straight time.[10]

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[7] See Kathryn Bond Stockton's *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (2009) for her definition of the term "growing sideways" as ways of growing that defy the usual sense of growing "up."

[8] The term "crip affiliation" comes from Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (16). In this thought-provoking book, she proposes to build a coalition between queer theory and disability studies; to "twist 'queer' into encompassing 'crip' and to highlight the risks of such twisted inclusion" (16). As she writes: "What is needed . . . are critical attempts to trace the ways in which compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness and compulsory heterosexuality intertwine in the service of normativity; to examine how terms such as 'defective,' 'deviant,' and 'sick' have been used to justify discrimination against people whose bodies, minds, desires, and practices differ from the unmarked norm" (17).

[9] These lines originally derive from Ernst Bloch's "Can Hope Be Disappointed?" and are cited by José Esteban Muñoz in his *Cruising Utopia* (3).

[10] I take the phrase "backward feelings" from Heather Love's *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. For Love, "backwardness" is a "queer historical structure of feeling" that encompasses emotions such as "shyness, ambivalence, failure, melancholia, loneliness, regression,

Thus, the universally recognized theme of loneliness in McCullers's works is very queer; her characters' inability to "fit in" is ultimately tied to temporality. In the following section, I will give an overview of the scholarship on queer temporalities. Deploying a temporal framework, the essay will then unpack the multiple temporalities to be found within *The Member of the Wedding* and examine the "backward" impulses and troublesome temporality experienced by the novel's strange characters.

I. The Temporal Turn in Queer Studies

In recent studies in gender and sexuality, queer theorists have begun to rethink the concept of "time" and to explore its constitutive role in our gender identity, erotic relations, and corporeal experiences of difference. This "turn toward time" was most obvious when the *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* (2007) devoted a special issue to "queer temporalities" in which intertwinings among sexuality, gender, and time were discussed, and different temporal practices were investigated and reconsidered in erotic terms. As a critical inquiry, queer theory in its earlier stages paid more attention to spatial terms, such as the trope of the closet, borders, margins, crossings, transgressions, landscape, and so forth.[11] However, this emphasis on space has blinded us to the hegemony of a state-sanctioned timeline, a heteronormative time that is linear, future-oriented, and heteroreproductive. This normative timeline regulates people, bestows privileges, and upholds prohibitions; it turns mere existence into a form of subjugation in a process Elizabeth Freeman refers to as "chrononormativity," in which "naked flesh is bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation" (Freeman, *Time Binds* 3). A queer critique of history and temporality not only points out the privileging of a heteronormative timeline, which has come to be known as "straight time" (Roy xiv), but it also urges us to excavate other forms of temporalities or anachronisms that are bound up with deviance and resistance.

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victimhood, heartbreak, antimodernism, immaturity, self-hatred, despair, shame" (146). The roots of "backward feelings" can be understood as stemming from the hostility of the outside world and its temporality. Ostracized from the safety net of a heterosexual family and heteronormative timeline and tradition, queers inevitably experience a sense of alienation and disenfranchisement. As Love claims, in heterosexist accounts of homosexuality, same-sex love has been historically portrayed as impossible and doomed. This queer historical experience of failed love "has given queers special insight into love's failures and impossibilities (as well as, of course, wild hopes for its future)" (23).

[11] See Elizabeth Freeman's detailed account of the past focus on space in her note 5 to introduction of *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, 179.

As Derrida asserts in "Structure, Sign and Play," "language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique" (113-14), state-sponsored ideas such as identity, modernity, teleology, and futurity are all subject to an internal alienation and haunted by a logic of spectrality. This logic of spectrality is a force of destabilization that is always already on the move in "things themselves." As Valerie Rohy succinctly writes: "Anachronism is not merely the necessary other of straight time; it is always inside normative temporality" (xv). In other words, unruly temporalities lurk in the seemingly homogeneous, unified, and goal-oriented outlook of the heteronormative timeline; they are internal to and constitutive of the dominant notion of linear temporality that masks its fragility in a series of institutional normalization, naturalizes its arbitrariness, and makes us blind to the ways we might intervene in the temporal enactment of domination and subjugation.

What needs to be remembered is that the concept of time is not always bound up with the singular narrative of linear progress. In fact, the standardization of time, now considered common knowledge whose constructed nature goes unquestioned, is a recent phenomenon related to the restructuring of time in capitalist modernity. In 1903, Georg Simmel links the precision "brought about through the general diffusion of pocket watches" to the need for precision demanded by a money economy. Capitalist modernity should be viewed as a temporal demand for "punctuality, calculability, and exactness" in order to organize various activities and relationships into a depersonalized time schedule that facilitates the functioning of a monetary exchange economy (328). Simmel also brings this preoccupation with "exactness" to bear upon the acceleration of events specific to urban life, which requires a tightly fixed framework of time to manage the complications and the heightened tempo of metropolitan life. This rise of standard time destroys the uniqueness of the local and integrates multiple times into an inexorable and irreversible linearity.

Despite this overwhelming force of what David Harvey terms "time-space compression" (*The Condition of Postmodernity* 284-307), there are people who live according to a multiplicity of times and rhythms; compression does not sweep the globe in an equal measure. While some places are indeed dominated by the ideology of speeding-up, there are some spots that are still haunted by a premodern mode of life and imagination. For instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty attempts to bring the times of gods into the time

of history; thus, there are still some "super-human" presences (be it superstition, mythology, nonsecular activity) lingering in this disenchanted world. How to give these anachronistic residues an agency, instead of dismissing them as insignificant and trivial, is also the concern of many queer scholars who intervene in several fields, such as subaltern studies, critical race theory, affect studies, disability studies, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis.[12]

Therefore, a broad range of temporal anomalies, such as backwardness, delay, immaturity, inconsequentiality, deviation, stasis, paralysis, immobility, and regression, becomes a new interest for queer critics with an eye on sexuality and temporality. These terms are not sexually or racially innocent given the fact that nineteenth-century sexologists and scientific racists established the normalcy of the white, heterosexual timeline and viewed temporal aberrations as social or even moral failures. In this evolutionary timeline of development, queers were characterized as victims of "arrested development" and labeled as "inverts" or "deviants" while people of color were judged as uncivilized, backward, or "primitive." Time becomes a technique of governance that ensures the relationship among past, present, and future can only exist in a singular mode that valorizes white dominance and heterosexual reproduction.

This linear temporal drive has permeated the dominant discourse of modernity, nationalism, progressivism, and neo-liberal capitalism to become a hegemonic interpellation that compels all people to subscribe to the future-oriented ideology of happiness and optimism. This "compulsory happiness," to use Heather Love's famous term, entails the privileging of heterosexual modes of life, as expressed in the all-too-familiar affirmation of romantic love and the fantasy of the "happily ever after" manifested in marriage and domestic bliss. The forward-moving progression of "adolescence-early adulthood-marriage-reproduction-childrearing-retirement-death" (Halberstam, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities" 182) becomes a social/moral/sexual

[12] For example, Valerie Rohy's *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality* not only engages with the recent focus on queer time but it also employs psychoanalysis, critical race theory, and deconstruction to examine the intricate connections between race and sexuality. Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* is an original work that brings together queer theory, disability studies, feminist theory, and temporality. Other significant books that use interdisciplinary approaches in their investigations of concepts of time and untimeliness include Elizabeth's Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*; Judith Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*; and Annamarie Jagose's *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence*.

prescription of normalcy that ultimately proscribes alternative timelines. In this limited notion of time buttressed by heteronormative ideology, queers can only be represented in negative terms.

In fact, a queer critique of heteronormative temporality helps us to illuminate the ways in which promissory forms of happiness have been inextricably bound up with the dominant timeline of futurity. In this reductively sketched outlook of temporality, heterosexuality monopolizes the promise of love and optimism. This phenomenon explains the reason why, together with the new focus on queer temporality, recent queer scholarship informed by affect studies has been taking issue with the seemingly unquestioned consensus that happiness or positive thinking is an unconditional good. This wave of critiquing the ideology of happiness is shown in books such as Barbara Ehrenreich's *Bright-Sided: How Positive Thinking is Undermining America*; Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness*; Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*; Heather Love's *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*; Judith Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*; and Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism.* Queer theory's "temporal turn" is also a "negative turn" that gestures toward a critique of uncritical optimism, given the fact that a heteronormative regime dictates that heterosexuality is the only style of life that can produce success, happiness, and fulfillment. Negative affects, such as shame, loss, disappointment, injury, and despair, are reconceptualized and redefined in an inspiring way. In his provocative book, Edelman even suggests that queer theory must be hopeless, must say no to the future, and must embrace the death drive (2004). This queer affirmation of negativity refuses to orientate our affective relation to the future, the figure of the child, or other tropes of reproduction.

Recently, disability scholars have joined this queer investigation of time, temporality, and futurity. In *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Alison Kafer coins the phrase "crip time" to call for an engagement with queer approaches to temporality. In her first chapter, "Time for Disability Studies and a Future for Crips," she provides an extensive overview of and a critical engagement with queer temporality, from Lee Edelman to Judith Halberstam, explaining how these theories rely on tropes of illness and disability to define queer time and yet thoughtlessly dispense with them. In response, Kafer provides her own

elaboration of crip time and demands a mutual engagement within an interdisciplinary context. She writes:

> What can disability studies take from queer work on critical futurity and, simultaneously, how might attention to disability expand existing approaches to queer temporality? How might our understandings of queer futurity shift when read through the experiences of disabled people, or when interpreted as part of a critique of compulsory able-bodiedness or able-mindedness? What does it do to queer time to place it alongside crip time, or queer futurity alongside crip futurity? Can we crip queer time? (27)

These meditations, provocatively poised at the intersections of queer, feminist, disability, and critical futurity, also profoundly inform and expand my exploration of queer temporalities in McCullers's work.

II. Gender Trouble as Temporality Trouble

If we redefine Judith Butler's idea of "gender trouble" in a temporal framework, the queer experiences of marginalization and disavowal are in fact temporality trouble.[13] Encounters with the heteroreproductive timeline traumatize many of McCullers's adolescent girls who are unwilling to move into Southern womanhood. In her short story "Like That," the narrator, a 13-year-old tomboy who used to have a close relationship with her older sister, resents her older sister's coming of age and thinks that her growing-up changes everything. She speaks painfully of her discovery that "Sis started with what every big girl has each month, and of course I found out and was scared to death" (54). When her sister undergoes another initiation—sex—and comes home with sad looks and silent weeping, the child is deeply troubled. Unwilling to leave childhood, she rides her bike, skates, plays basketball, and

[13] An attentiveness to the temporal underpinnings of Butler's idea of "gender trouble" may help us explore the social patterning of time according to dominant modes of power and the potential alliance between asynchronic temporalities and queer sexual/social practices. Gender identity, as famously defined by Butler, is "the stylized repetition of acts *through time* and not a seemingly seamless identity" (*Gender Trouble* 179, emphasis mine). Her idea of gender performativity exposes the illusion of an abiding gendered self by emphasizing the constituted nature of gender enacted/instituted through social temporality and opens up possibilities for drag and parodic resignification.

goes to school football games. She refuses to take part in girly activities with her female peers when they "all got quiet in the gym basement and then started telling certain things—about being married and all," vows never to wear lipstick and stockings—not "for a hundred dollars"—and declares that "I'd never be like Sis is now . . . I just wouldn't, that's all. I don't want to grow up—if it's like that" (56-57).

This hostility to conventional womanhood appears in many of McCullers's adolescent characters, as evinced by the character of Mick Kelly in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding*, and Amelia in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. These androgynous girls wear their hair short, dress as boys, and are reluctant to perform expected gender roles or to obey the heterosexual reproductive imperative of patriarchy. The sartorial style of Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding* is described in the following way: "She wore a pair of blue track shorts, a B.V.D undervest, and she was bare-footed. Her hair had been cut like a boy's" (462). Expected to enter into the stage of puberty that heralds the transformation into Southern womanhood, Frankie experiences her mutating body not as a joy but as a horrifying distress.

Within the framework of social psychology and behavioral science, tomboyhood is often considered as a transitory or short phase in a young girl's social development. In order to attain a properly gendered subjectivity, a girl must renounce her female masculinity and evolve into womanhood. If normative gender identity is thus naturalized as telos-driven and futuristic, Frankie's reluctance to partake in this linear chronology denaturalizes the idea that a gendered selfhood must erase the passage of time, its polymorphous or ambisexual (pre)history, and move forward to achieve the final goal of heterosexual reproduction. She prolongs tomboyism into adolescence and refuses the idea that androgyny exists only for a short time; unlike her female peers, she has no interest in boys or the idea of femininity or motherhood. Indifferent to the injunction on girls to be nice and docile, she curses, takes the pistol from her father's drawer, angrily threatens Berenice with a knife, and steals a three-way knife from a department store. By the end of the novel, Frankie has never accomplished the requirements of the heteronormative timeline. Her temporal perversion is an anti-progressive dawdling that protests against the straightjacket (pun intended) of chrononormativity. This extension of tomboyism into adulthood is a kind of "temporal drag"; it signifies a

disruptive anachronism that interrupts what might otherwise be a seamless, point-by-point schema of chronological order and socialization.[14]

III. Freak Time, Crip Time

This temporal phenomenon of anachronism is also shown in Frankie's obsession with freaks, objects that present a grotesque pull backwards and an obstacle to evolutionary progress. In fact, Frankie's identification with freaks comes from her increased height: "This summer she was grown so tall that she was almost a big freak" (462). Already "five feet five and three quarter inches tall" this summer, Frankie is comparatively taller than her peers. She is distressed when those "hateful little summer children" yell to her—"Is it cold up there?"—and surmises that if she cannot "stop herself," following this growth rate, she will "grow to be over nine feet tall" when she hits her 18th birthday. Filled with anxiety and despair, she says: "What would be a lady who is over nine feet high? She would be a Freak" (475).

Freaks are liminal figures, because, according to Elizabeth Grosz, they represent an "intolerable ambiguity" whose existence defies "the structure of binary oppositions that govern our basic concepts and modes of self-definition" (57). The figures of the monkey girl, the bearded lady, or conjoined twins are objects of simultaneous horror and fascination because they confront us with their confusion of the fundamental distinctions between human and animal, man and woman, self and other. Frankie's gender trouble makes her a freak as well since, like freaks, she unsettles the boundary that normally divides the subject from all ambiguities. Every October, a traveling circus with freak shows comes to the town. When Frankie enters the Freak Pavilion, she is disconcerted by the freaks, for "it seemed to her that they had looked at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with hers, as though to say: we know you" (477). Sensing her association with freaks, Frankie asks anxiously: "Do you think I will grow into a Freak?" (477). Instead of drawing a firm line asserting her normality and distinguishing her difference from the unfortunate beings ("The Giant; the Fat Lady; the Midget; the Wild Nigger; the Pin Head; the Alligator Boy; the Half-Man Half-

[14] The term "temporal drag" comes from Elizabeth Freeman, who teases out the temporal dimension in the word "drag," which not only means sartorial transvestism but also has temporal associations with "retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past upon the present" ("Packing History" 728).

Woman") who pose their physical oddities in front of her, Frankie feels their secret alliance, and she is horrified.[15]

Freaks remind Frankie of her own loneliness, fear, and agonizing experiences of exclusion. If heterosexuality is rooted in a logic of succession and success, freaks' resistance to the normative idea of human development represent a perversion of temporality, a sentiment that is shared by Frankie. In her observation of the freaks, Frankie wonders if they "ever get married or go to a wedding" (477). Freaks never get married and neither will she. Marriage, which symbolizes an idealized domesticity rooted in straight time, excludes both freaks and Frankie, who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging.

In *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues that in the modern era, bodily anomaly is the bearer of disempowerment, pathology, and stigma whereas freaks, in premodern narratives, are endowed with wonder and eminence. The freak shows in *The Member of the Wedding* represent this temporal straddling of the traditional enchantment of bodily difference as awesome spectacle and the modern disenchantment of the pre-Enlightenment body as medical specimen. Other than Frankie, John Henry is obsessed with freaks. He likes to put on Berenice's hat and tries to walk in her high-heeled shoes. Another time he tries on Frankie's dress and "the pink hat with the plume," and he is described as resembling "a little old woman dwarf" (570), literally a freak himself. Identifying with the freakish little Pin Head he sees at the sideshow, John Henry marvels at her grotesque beauty: "The little Pin Head skipped and giggled and sassed around, with a shrunken head no larger than an orange, which was shaved except for one lock tied with a pink bow at the top" (476). I consider this fascination with freaks as lingering in an outmoded temporality in which bodily differences are markers of exceptionality to be admired and honored.

The body's transition from awesome spectacle to medical specimen is further validated by eugenics. In the modern discourse of eugenics, illness, "defect," and disability are understood as fundamentally damaging to the

[15] Besides freaks, Frankie is also obsessed with those criminals who are locked up in the jail of Sugarville and worries about becoming one of them: "Often some criminals would be hanging to the bars; it seemed to her that their eyes, like the long eyes of the Freaks at the fair, had called to her as though to say: We know you" (571). Like Frankie, freaks and criminals are "nonmembers" and social outcasts.

forward-looking teleology of national progress and must be "cured" by modern medical treatment. As Alison Kafer, a disability scholar who reconceptualizes disability in temporal terms, puts it, disabled people, like queers, "were—and often are—figured as threats to futurity" (31). Like freaks, disabled people are cast as out of time and experience temporality problems because they do not fit in with the dominant temporality of "compulsory able-bodiedness."[16] In *The Member of the Wedding*, Berenice is not only black and female, but also disabled—literally half-blind. Her left eye is a prosthesis that "stared out fixed and wild from her quiet, colored face" (463). Situated within "crip temporality," Berenice defies able-bodied temporality that categorizes her as deficient and ugly. Resisting the arc of progress and priding herself on her grotesque beauty, Berenice "always spoke of herself as though she was somebody very beautiful" (534). Described as a "strange queen" whose story-telling skill is as marvelous as "unwinding a bolt of cloth of gold" (551), Berenice flaunts her difference to refute the fantasy of sameness implicit in the notion of compulsory able-bodiedness. Her wound seems to function as an ennobling mark rather than a sign of a stigmatized abnormality like those of the modern "cripple." Besides Berenice, in the black neighborhood of Sugarville, there is a black woman named "Big Mama" who is also disabled and yet ennobled. Infected with skin discoloration that renders the left side of her face and neck white, Big Mama is old and bedridden. However, she is endowed with "second-sight," which allows her to see ghosts and future things. In her portrayals of freakish and disabled bodies, McCullers enables us to envision alternative temporalities that might de-link bodily anomaly to pathology and to imagine other trajectories to futurity beyond "curative" ones.[17]

Unlike Berenice and Big Mama who are endowed with "crip pride," Honey Brown, Berenice's foster brother with whom Frankie has an emotional affinity, does not fare well in his double identity as a crip and a queer. As Kafer reminds us, crip and queer, in a world in which "compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness and compulsory heterosexuality intertwine in the

[16] As Robert McRuer writes: "the system of compulsory able-bodiedness, which in a sense produces disability, is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness: that, in fact, compulsory heterosexuality is contingent on compulsory able-bodiedness, and vice versa" (*Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* 2).

[17] Alison Kafer distinguishes crip time from curative time, within which "the only appropriate disabled mind/body is one cured or moving toward cure" (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 28).

service of normativity," are easily converged (17). In *The Member of the Wedding*, Honey Brown is a black homosexual whose queerness is curiously conflated with disability. Described by the clairvoyant Big Mama as "a boy God had not finished," Honey Brown is left deformed because "The Creator had withdrawn His hand from him too soon" (576). His queerness is thus interchangeable with the physically impaired, because both categories (queer and crip) are denied a future in a society predicated on the ideology of the "normate." [18] Rejected by the Army (493) and suffering from racial discrimination and injustice, Honey Brown is destined for no future. As the narrator tells us: "Made crazy one night by a marihuana cigarette, by something called smoke or snow, he broke into the drugstore of the white man who had been selling them to him, desperate for more" (603). In the end, he was locked in the jail with a sentence of eight years. In sum, temporality is crucial when we explore McCullers's gallery of freaks, queers, and crips, who work as counter-narratives to destabilize the normative temporality that is always already white, male, heterosexual, and nondisabled.

IV. The Emergent and the Fantastic: Frankie's Queer Threesome and World-Making Imagination

In her temporal reconceptualization of Raymond Williams's "structures of feeling," Elizabeth Freeman identifies two temporal trajectories—the "residual" and the "emergent." The first one correlates with "the lingering remnants of outmoded production processes" whereas the latter is defined as "the semi-intelligible signs of a production process that has not yet come to dominate" ("Introduction" 162-63). Freak shows and Big Mama's fortune-telling can be thought of correlating with the "residual" because these activities represent vestiges of premodern cultural forms. In this section, I want to argue that the "emergent" can be shown in Frankie's threesome fantasy and world-making imagination. In opposition to Williams's "dominant" culture and its hegemonic temporality, Frankie's "the we of me" fantasy has radically anticipatory gestures that have not yet reified into prevailing cultural forms like marriage, identity or community.

[18] According to Thomson, the term normate "names the veiled subject position of cultural self, the figure outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate's boundaries" (*Extraordinary Bodies* 8).

In April, Frankie reads the war news in the paper, thinks about "the world" (479), and dreams of running away from home. Her dream of adventure, which is denied to her because of her gender, is powerfully expressed in this passage: "She wanted to be a boy and go to the war as a Marine. She thought about flying aeroplanes and winning gold medals for bravery. But she could not join the war, and this made her sometimes feel restless and blue" (480).

What is even queerer is that, later, her desire for the greater freedom and mobility enjoyed by boys is channeled into her epiphany of joining her brother, Jarvice, and his bride, Janice, in their heterosexual coupledom. A sudden manifestation of great importance ("They are the we of me"), this epiphany speeds up her decision: "she loved her brother and the bride and she was a member of the wedding. The three of them would go into the world and they would always be together." Finally, having a "we" to claim and to belong to, she is "no more afraid" (501).

Instead of craving a boyfriend or husband, McCullers chooses to have Frankie fall in love with the wedding itself. As Berenice teases, "Frankie got a crush!/Frankie got a crush!/Frankie got a crush!/On the *Wedd-ing*!" (491). This queer desire to be not a "bride" but a "member" challenges the traditional idea of heterosexual matrimony. As Gary Richards argues, Frankie's threesome fantasy involves three sexually transgressive elements: first, it makes allowance for a forbidden lesbian relationship between her and Janice. Second, it constitutes an incest between Frankie and Jarvis. Third, it introduces the lack of monogamy for all three persons (*Lovers and Beloved* 188). Frankie believes that the wedding can liberate her from the stifling South, take her with the newlyweds to Alaska and the rest of the world, and make the three of them a vital part of the World War II effort:

> "Boyoman! Manoboy!" she said. "When we leave Winter Hill we're going to more places than you ever thought about or even know existed. Just where we will go first I don't know, and it don't matter. Because after we go to that place we're going on to another. We mean to keep moving, the three of us. Here today and gone tomorrow. Alaska, China, Iceland, South America. Traveling on trains. Letting her rip on motorcycles. Flying around all over the world in aeroplanes. Here today and

> gone tomorrow. All over the world. It's the damn truth. Boyoman!" (565)

However, Berenice rejects this idea of the threesome: "What makes you think they want to take you along with them? Two is company and three is a crowd. And that is the main thing about a wedding. Two is company and three is a crowd" (529). In other words, coupledom and threesome suggest different regimes; the former entails state-sanctioned heterosexual monogamy and gender normativity while the latter connotes transgression and perversion. Frankie's version of the wedding, "the we of me," needs to be examined further because it is not simply a universal need to belong. If heterosexual couplehood suggests the singular narrative of identity and property ownership, Frankie's "the we of me" fantasy is of a different story. Instead of being predicated on stable identity and homogeneity, it, on the contrary, suggests an expansive possibility of multiple and unpredictable affinities that is unimaginable within the traditional ideology of a heteronormative nuclear family. It is an invocation of a future collectivity, a queerness that registers as the illumination of an anticipatory mode of existence that deviates from dominant practices and thoughts.

As the issue of gay marriage becomes a global topic, some queer theorists have claimed that marriage should not be a goal in gay politics and this campaign for marriage is doing more harm than good. They argue that the operation of a marriage equality movement takes a tremendous amount of money and attention away from far more pressing issues of queer economic and social justice. Historically, capitalism and the state are queers' enemies; however, the movement and the marketing of gay marriage have incorporated queers into an uncritical embracing of capitalist and institutional values and made the norms of the so-called "respectable" straight culture (i.e., white, middle-class, property-owning, monogamous, coupled) into the standards by which queers should be measured. In *The Trouble with Normal*, Michael Warner criticizes this aspiration to conformity and argues that the cultural constructions of the normal are based on the logic of exclusion and superiority. "Marriage, in short, discriminates" (82). It is a narrow inclusion that obtains its sanctity by rewarding those inside it and disciplining those outside it, such as "adulterers, prostitutes, divorcees, the promiscuous, single people, unwed parents" (89).

In *The Member of the Wedding*, Frankie does not view marriage as a narrow inclusion defined by heterosexual matrimony; her association of the wedding with the world suggests that she is more interested in an expansive vision of alliance rather than an inclusive marital relationship based on procreation, domestic enclosure, private property, and inheritance. Her desire to be related to "everybody" is shown in her enthusiasm for donating blood to the Red Cross: "She wanted to donate a quart a week and her blood would be in the veins of Australians and Fighting French and Chinese, all over the whole world, and it would be as though she were close kin to all of these people" (480). After she has the epiphany of going away with the newlyweds, she feels the unexplainable connection between herself and other total strangers. This "connection" is granted by her wedding fantasies: "We will have thousands of friends, thousands and thousands and thousands of friends. We will belong to so many clubs that we can't even keep track of all of them. We will be members of the whole world" (566). Beyond couplehood, Frankie's wedding fantasy is distinctly queer because it is not a desire for unity, purity, or wholeness but instead embodies openness to unassimilated otherness without suppressing or subsuming the differences. It can be considered as an example of a utopian desire inspired by queer relationality, a way of "being and connecting that have not yet arrived or never will" (Freeman, "Introduction" 159).

Recent debates about the issue of identity politics have centered on an investigation of its limitations and urged us to be cautious about terms such as community, unity, or identity. In *Against the Romance of Community*, Miranda Joseph offers a critique of community, which is "almost always invoked as an unequivocal good, an indicator of a high quality of life, a life of human understanding, caring, selflessness, belonging" (vii). It is undeniable that the invocation of community has contributed to the success of many anticolonial movements and has been pervasively adopted by numerous minority movements based on equality across class, gender, and race. However, as Joseph argues, this presumption of community-as-unity also produces resistance and dissent. What is the nature of the "we" in the invocation of community? How do "we" relate to each other in a project that is assumed to work toward the "common good"? Supplemented by Derrida's concept of *différance*, Joseph challenges the notions of transparent communication and pure presence central to many celebratory discourses of

community. Judith Butler, in *Giving an Account of Oneself,* also questions the ideal of community-as-identity and asserts that "the demand for self-identity or, more particularly, for complete coherence" evinces a "certain ethical violence, which demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and requires that others do the same" (42).

These theoretical interrogations against community-as-identity help us to rethink Frankie's "we of me" fantasy in a bold new way. Her dream of "togetherness" is radical because it is not based on the model of the organic family and its heterosexualized Oedipal project. It involves a structure of feeling that correlates with the "emergent" since this radically anticipatory stance includes opening up to all sorts of possible new relations and involves a constant transformation and permanent revolution. Such fantasy extends into the territory of futurity and fuels a potentially transformative political imagination.

In "Racism as Universalism," Etienne Balibar claims that the term community is double-edged and even dangerous because its deployment tends to facilitate a diverse range of oppressions that include racism and sexism: "Racism and sexism . . . produce *ideals* of humanity, *types of ideal humanity* if you like, which one cannot but call universal" (192). In *The Member of the Wedding,* this ideal humanity is exposed as a lie that is essentially racist and sexist. McCullers's critique of sexism and racism is best illustrated in the kitchen scene in which its three occupants (Frankie, her little six-year-old cousin John Henry, and Berenice) make comments about God, complain that God is not doing His job, and envision how they would improve the world if they were the Creator. Berenice imagines a world free of war and racism: "There would be no separate colored people in the world, but all human beings would be light brown color with blue eyes and black hair. There would be no colored people and no white people to make the colored people feel cheap and sorry all through their lives" (546).

Frankie's fantasy of remaking the world reveals her gender anxiety and implicitly criticizes the law of gender binaries: "[Frankie] planned it so that people could instantly change back and forth from boys to girls, whichever way they felt like and wanted" (547). When it is John Henry's turn to play Holy Lord God, he offers that "people ought to be half boy and half girl, and when the old Frankie threatened to take him to the Fair and sell him to the Freak Pavilion, he would only close his eyes and smile" (547).

The Member of the Wedding has demonstrated that resistance to heteronormative temporality can allow for the imagination of nonstandard utopias and alternative possibilities of becoming. As I have argued, intimate relationships longed for by the novel's characters seldom take the form imposed by traditional heterosexual marriage. The intimacies shared by Frankie, Berenice, and John Henry in the kitchen and Frankie's seemingly eccentric "we of me" fantasy bespeak a form of nonstandard intimacy that goes beyond heterosexuality in which "a coupling supported by shared property is the only sign of real belonging and the only publicly recognized context for intimacy" (Warner, *The Trouble with Normal* 106). Although Frankie's idiosyncratic wedding fantasy turns out to be an "unmanaged nightmare" (588) because the newlyweds refuse to take her away and violently exclude her from their honeymoon getaway car, it is undeniable that her fantasy allows for a glimpse of alternative ways of being and knowing in the world.

V. Ghostly Temporalities and Queer Futurity

After the wedding, John Henry dies a horrible death from meningitis, Honey Brown is arrested, Berenice is forced to quit her job because Frankie and her father decide to move to the new suburb of town, and Frankie herself is restored to her legal name and becomes "Frances." In this light, commentators tend to interpret the novel's ending as Frankie's final submission to the heteronormative timeline. As Sarah Gleeson-White writes, "Having strongly hinted at other possible subjectivities," Frankie is "forced to surrender to the confines of conformity, to a restricted identity," as she takes up "the appropriate socially assigned roles of womanliness" (33). Even Halberstam, a queer scholar who promotes the idea of female masculinity, reads the novel as tomboy Frankie's "losing battle against womanhood." ("Oh Bondage Up Yours!" 194). I think these readings are insufficient because they kill off the queer potentiality that has been liberated by Frankie's series of adventures and wayward fantasies. Rather than reading the novel's ending as a total failure of achieving a better world, I would argue that it is precisely because of its failure that an imagination of utopia can be so seductive and desirable. If in reality, utopia tends to reify and gets incorporated into the triumphant, progressive narrative of coherence and identity, queer utopia with

its unruly, inarticulate desires can only exist in a negative term in order to gesture toward an expanded and as-yet-unmapped field of affective relations.

In fact, some residual traces of queer temporality still haunt the story and remain persistently; they become a sort of "queer spectrality" that defies total rationalization or reductionism.[19] In a "golden morning of the most butterflies, the clearest sky," John Henry dies. However, rather than exorcising his ghost, McCullers highlights its haunting presence. As she writes, John Henry's spirit can be felt in the house in a "solemn, hovering, and ghost-gray" form (605). When Frances feels his ghost, "there would come a hush—a hush quivered by voiceless words" (601). Linked with the excess of the old Frankie's crazy summertime, rebellion, queer secrets, and wild fantasies, John Henry's specters can never be conjured away. They signify anachronistic moments that disturb the euphoric and seemingly self-sufficient straight time. In this light, the novel is far from docile, as some commentators claim.

If the triumph of heterosexuality is always expected in classical narrative form, McCullers resists this reorientation toward compliant forms of femininity. Toward the end of the novel, Frances does not outgrow her tomboyism and successfully transition into a woman who desires a man and wants to be a mommy. Instead, she finds a new friendship with Mary Littlejohn, whose name suggests androgyny in its combination of the feminine Mary and the masculine, butch "little" John. McCullers writes: "Mary collected pictures of great masters and pasted them in an art book. They read poets like Tennyson together; and Mary was going to be a great painter and Frances a great poet . . . When Frances was sixteen and Mary eighteen, they were going around the world together" (602). In her dream of a future with Mary, Frances still craves freedom and mobility traditionally enjoyed by boys. Marriage and motherhood, the so-called appropriate female aspiration, are not

[19] This reference to spectrality is, of course, derived from Derrida's articulation in *Specters of Marx* that the specter always returns and always promises the future. In fact, Derrida and queer theory are not strange bedfellows. As Michael O'Rourke points out in "Queer Theory's Loss and the Work of Mourning Jacques Derrida," several foundational texts in queer studies are "haunted by traces of Derridean ideas" (*Rhizomes* n. pag.). Derrida's hauntological discourse creates an ethical imperative to attend to the "remainder" abjected by the tyranny of chrononormativity. As O'Rourke argues, Derrida's concept of time is not only structured by an assurance of responsibility to the specters of abjection, but it is also animated by "a passion for the impossible" or the "justice to-come." Judith Butler's queer theory (especially her recent work on the human, livability, and bare life) comes very close to this Derridean notion of "Levinasian-messianic time" that both acknowledges our debt to the dead and opens up the future to what O'Rourke calls the "undecidable, unanticipatable, aporetic, incalculable, im-possible" (n. pag.).

her life options. Some critics, ignoring the lesbian overtone of their relationship, insist that Frances finally accepts normalization because, visiting the fair with Mary, she "did not enter the Freak Pavilion, as Mrs. Littlejohn said that it was morbid to gaze at freaks" (604).[20] Contrary to this conservative interpretation, Rachel Adams argues that, instead of reading the young women's decision as a docile obedience to Mrs. Littlejohn's authority, a more emancipatory reading might be to interpret it as a recognition that "the world itself is suffused with freaks, that they no longer need the Freak Pavilion to reassure themselves of their own normality" (109). Indeed, a reading centered on indeterminacy and open-endedness proves to be more faithful to the queer spirit of the novel.

Expecting Mary's arrival at five o'clock, Frances "was making the sandwiches, cutting them into fancy shapes and taking great pain" (602). The novel closes with the narrator's announcement of Mary's arrival: "Dark, when it came, would come on quickly, as it does in wintertime. 'I am simply mad about—' But the sentence was left unfinished for the hush was shattered when, with an instant shock of happiness, she heard the ringing of the bell" (605). We can easily presume that, enamored with her new friend, Frances is eager to tell Berenice about her strong feeling for Mary ("I am simply mad about Mary"). However, McCullers intentionally leaves it blank, opening up several possibilities beyond the singular answer that she is "simply" mad about Mary. The unfinished sentence serves to emphasize a potentiality that is involved in continuous and ever-creating becomings, a queer futurity that resists homogeneous identity categories and totalizing explanatory narratives. In her 1996 introduction to *Queer Theory*, Annamarie Jagose defines queer as "a zone of possibilities" that is "always inflected by a sense of potentiality that it cannot yet quite articulate" (131). Similarly, David M. Halperin argues that queer "describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance" (*Saint Foucault* 62). This technique of relating queerness with possibilities or alternative futurity is also shown in *The Member of the Wedding*, in which McCullers chooses to end her novel in a suspended state of expectancy without leaving a definite image of any future or an assured success. Unlike

[20] For example, Keith E. Byerman reads the novel's conclusion as the outlaw daughter's ultimate submission to the Law of the Father: "Imprisonment, not freedom or self-creation, is to be her reality. And her father, as guardian of the jail, is the embodiment of the Law" (29). Katherine Dalsimer also reads the story as a triumph of socialization and gender normalization.

the linear narrative of progress or transcendence, this queer futurity would be willing to be haunted by negative affects, such as loss, disappointment, shame, and failure, and even make them central, as manifested by the novel's preoccupation with freaks, crips, tomboys, racist victims, social outcasts, cross-dressers, and homosexuals.[21] As Freeman reminds us in her essay "Packing History, Count(er) Generations," the past moments of injury can never be overcome; they continue to structure our present: "If identity is always in temporal drag, constituted and haunted by the failed love-project that precedes it, perhaps the shared culture-making projects we call 'movements' might do well to feel the tug backwards as a potentially transformative part of movement itself" (743). *The Member of the Wedding* shares the same "backward" sentiment and makes it essential to a remaking of alternative utopias that have a place in transformative politics, as shown in the subsequent civil rights movement that peaked in the 1960s.

[21] I am fully aware of the significant differences of history, experience, and embodiment across the marginalized subjects (freaks, crips, tomboys, sissies, racist victims, cross-dressers, homosexuals, etc.) that I examine in this essay. Yet my concern is not to dissect or parse the possible conflicts and incongruities among them, but to explore their curious tendency of categorical overlappings and, to use Cathy J. Cohen's words, to try to "move . . . toward a transformational coalition politics among marginalized subjects" (47). Heather Love's recent work on the Stigma Archives suggests that we go beyond the focus on the local and the specific and come up with new reading methods deploying a general category capable of capturing the significant differences across different identity groups who experience marginalized relation to power. Drawing on the Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman (and his 1963 book, *Stigma: On the Management of Spoiled Identity*), Love uses the concept of stigma to draw attention to the marginalized subjects' shared experience of social exclusion and calls for a "coalitional politics" that aims to create a space in opposition to dominant norms. See her discussion of marginal identities and their shared consciousness in "The Case for Comparison: Stigma between Disability and Sexuality," one of her three lectures delivered at National Central University in Taiwan in 2010. Her advocacy of a coalitional politics that links different identity groups has been echoed by a number of scholars who work on questions of black, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and disabled identities. This developing field of interdisciplinary studies intends to unite different marginalized groups, looks for coalition possibilities, and exchange productive dialogues. Their goal is to make a coalition against what Michael Warner terms the "regimes of the normal" (*Fear of a Queer Planet* xiii). This goal, I believe, is also an important part of McCullers's creative agenda when she invests so much affection in depicting those marginalized subjects and their shared experience of oppression in her fictional archives of stigma.

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