Introduction: From Antebellum Hoyden to Millennial Girl Power

The Unwritten History (and Hidden History) of Tomboyism in the United States

In the second chapter of *Women and Economics*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman argued, "The most normal girl is the 'tom-boy'—whose numbers increase among us in these wiser days,—a healthy young creature, who is human through and through; not feminine till it is time to be" (29). By the time Gilman penned her famous meditation on gender and capitalism in 1898, tomboyism as both a cultural phenomenon and literary convention had become ubiquitous in the United States. As historian Frances Cogan has illustrated, an alternative and more physically active code of conduct emerged for women during the mid-nineteenth century. Dubbing this phenomenon "Real Womanhood," she argued, "This popular ideal advocated intelligence, physical fitness and health, self-sufficiency, economic self-reliance, and careful marriage . . ." (Cogan 4). Echoing these sentiments, Martha Banta has asserted that these behaviors helped establish a new paradigm of behavior for the American girl by the dawn of the twentieth century: the vigorous, athletic and even muscular "Outdoors Pal."

As tomboys emerged in American culture during the nineteenth century, they also became a fixture in its literature. Joining the ranks of literary icons like the "fallen woman" or the male "rake," boisterous female figures appeared in popular narratives like Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' *Gypsy Breynton* (1866) and Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did* (1872). Most famous among these was Jo March from Louisa May Alcott's 1868 classic *Little Women*. The appeal of this topsy-turvy

tomboy propelled *Little Women* to instant success upon its release and has helped it remain a favorite among young girls today.

As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth, America's interest in and production of tomboys did not abate. Changes in the nation's social, political and even economic climate, in fact, facilitated the expansion of this figure. By the end of the First World War, women were voting, engaging in such formerly masculine activities as smoking and drinking, and even asserting their right to participate in the "male" world of work. Compared with young women only a generation before them, the entire sex had been "tomboy-ified."

As the number of tomboys increased in the early twentieth century, so did the variety of media in which these figures could be found. From the earliest days of commercial motion pictures in the United States, for instance, the tomboy appeared as a distinct screen persona. Films such as Wilfrid North's *Miss Tomboy and Freckles* (1914), Carl Harbaugh's *The Tomboy* (1921) and Edward Ludwig's *Some Tomboy* (1924) featured young women who engaged in such tomboyish actions as playing sports and climbing trees. Similarly, by the 1930s, gender-bending female figures were well-established on the stage, in productions like Charles George's musical *My Tomboy Girl* (1936), as well as in the recording studio, via tunes such as Red Norvo's hit song "Tomboy" (1934).

The outbreak of the Second World War and its accompanying transformation to female gender roles inspired a wave of films that featured gender-bending adult as well as adolescent figures, including George Stevens's *Woman of the Year* (1942), Henry Hathaway's *Home in Indiana* (1944) and Clarence Brown's *National Velvet* (1945). This phenomenon continued into to the postwar era, as tomboyism surfaced in an array of new and often unexpected cultural venues. In the late 1950s, for example, the *Li'l Tomboy* comic book series was launched and a tomboy-themed girlie magazine, humorously titled *International Tomboy: Around the World in 80 Dames*, appeared. During the 1960s, these items were joined by Ezell Helen Ingle's *Snips and Snails: Twelve Piano Solos for Boys and Tomboys*, along with various flavors of carbonated "Tomboy" soda from the Tom Joyce Company in Indianapolis, Indiana. By the end of this decade, tomboyism had become so prominent and pervasive that the mini-book *Kansas Tomboy*—which was a brief biography of aviatrix Amelia Earhart—was featured as a prize in boxes of Cracker Jack.

With the rise of second-wave feminism during the 1970s and early 1980s, gender-bending female figures became even more ubiquitous. The period saw the release of an array of feature-length films like Peter Bogdanovich's *Paper Moon* (1973), Michael Ritchie's *The Bad News Bears* (1976) and Norman Tokar's *Candleshoe* (1978) that each featured a tomboy character. Finally, during the 1990s, the rise of LGBTQ movement and the advent of queer theory gave tomboyism a new gendered look and cultural

life. An array of lesbian-themed novels and films, including Fannie Flagg's best-selling book *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café* (1987) and Maria Maggenti's movie *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (1995), teemed with tomboyish characters.

In spite of both the long history and the strong presence of tomboyism in the United States, comparatively little work has been done on the subject. To date, no full-length study of the issue from a literary, cultural or psychological perspective has been published. Scholars seeking information about tomboys, in fact, will find no listing for the topic in the Library of Congress or, perhaps more shockingly, either *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing* or *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English*. In addition, seminal works on the history of women's gender roles and sexual identities omit tomboyism from their discussions. In *Disorderly Conduct*, for instance, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg discusses the emergence of the New Woman without mentioning her adolescent antecedent, the tomboy. Likewise, Lillian Faderman in *Surpassing the Love of Men* discusses the crystallization of lesbian identity during the early twentieth century without addressing the role that nineteenth-century tomboyism played in this process.

This book offers a long-overdue corrective to this trend. The chapters that follow present the beginnings of a literary and cultural history of tomboyism in the United States. Starting with the figure of the hoyden in the mid-nineteenth century and ending with the emergence of the "Girl Power" movement on the eve of millennium, I uncover the origins of tomboyism, chart its trajectory, and trace the literary and cultural transformations the concept has undergone in the United States. Opening with a discussion of when this code of conduct first made its appearance in the nation's literature and culture, I explore the root of the term "tomboy" and also outline the social, political and even economic circumstances that precipitated the idea's emergence at this particular point in history. Then, in each of the following nine chapters, I focus on a key literary or cinematic work to examine how alterations to women's gender roles, changing cultural conceptions of girlhood and shifts in national childrearing practices influenced the development of tomboyism. During this discussion, I address the eras in which this code of conduct was hailed as a sign of lively girlhood and a precursor to a life as a vigorous and vibrant adult woman; conversely, I explore the historical periods when tomboyism was reviled as a perversion of the physical and psychological traits of femininity and even a menacing index of proto-lesbianism. The final few chapters contemplate the current status of tomboyism in light of the impact of second-wave feminism, the LGBTQ movement and queer theory. Given that young women now commonly participate in many of the same activities as young men, I probe the form, or forms, that tomboyism takes today. Throughout each stage of this process, I expose unknown aspects of a cultural concept and

literary phenomenon with which many may think they are already familiar. 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.

While *Tomboys* strives to unveil the previously uncharted literary and cultural history of tomboyism in the United States, it has a second and equally important goal: to expose the hidden history of this code of conduct as a racialized construct. During an era in which the health of middle- and upper-class young white women had become imperiled from equating femininity with frailty, tomboyism emerged as an antidote. Calling for sensible clothing, physical exercise and a wholesome diet, this code of conduct was designed to improve the strength and stamina of the nation's future wives and mothers and, by extension, the offspring that they produced. In this way, tomboyism was more than simply a new childrearing practice or gender expression for the nation's adolescent girls; it was a eugenic practice or, at least, a means to help ensure white racial supremacy. In living this lifestyle, tomboys disrupted the rigid dichotomy separating "good" and "bad" female conduct that Lynne Vallone and other critics have identified as a defining feature of Anglo-American girlhood.[1] From their inception, tomboys demonstrated how unruly female behavior that was formerly seen as socially "bad" could be racially good.

In a compelling paradox, however, this code of conduct that was intended to strengthen white women and, by extension, the white race was consistently yoked with various forms of nonwhiteness. Authors repeatedly described ostensibly Caucasian tomboys with "brown" skin tones and "dark" physical features. Jo March in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, for instance, possesses a "brown" complexion and a "dark mane" of chestnut hair. In addition, because of the proclivity for tomboys to engage in rambunctious outdoor play, writers often linked them with such racially charged traits as being "wild" and "uncivilized." Characters throughout E. D. E. N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*, for instance, call the tomboyish central figure an "impertinent monkey" and even a "ridiculous little ape" (36) because of her gender-bending ways.

Going far beyond the trope of the dark-haired tomboy and her fair and feminine foil, *Tomboys* probes the possible historical, literary and cultural reasons why these ostensibly Caucasian figures are, to echo the title of a book by Werner Sollors, "neither black nor white yet both." Building on the observation that both syllables of the term "tomboy" evoke common racial pejoratives, I demonstrate how these figures do more than simply exist on

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1. For more information on this binary, see Lynne Vallone's *Disciplines of Virtue: Girls' Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995).

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. Drawing on such elements as blackface minstrelsy, modernist white fantasies about primitivism, and the racialized language of white feminism, this volume considers the way in which tomboyishness and blackness mutually construct or at least reinforce each other throughout these periods. White tomboys have long had a reputation for climbing trees and throwing softballs; this book demonstrates that they also have a hidden history—to reference Toni Morrison's well-known concept—of "playing in the dark."

Tomboyism as a Concept and a Cultural Phenomenon in the United States

"'You see . . . That's the surprise. I'm a girl. But now I'm a boy too and I can do anything and anything and anything.'" So remarks the bold and beautiful heroine in Ernest Hemingway's posthumously published novel *The Garden of Eden.* Although the gender-bending Catherine utters these remarks in response to cropping her hair, they could serve as the motto for tomboys in U.S. literature and culture. From their inception, tomboyish characters and their accompanying behaviors have been linked with such elements as social surprise, gender duplicity and unlimited possibility.

Although the rise of feminism and the advent of queer theory make tomboyism seem like a relatively contemporary phenomenon, the concept actually originated in the sixteenth century. Interestingly, the term "tomboy" initially referred to rowdy gentlemen courtiers rather than boisterous young women. The first listing in the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "tomboy" as "A rude, boisterous or forward boy" and gives the following textual example from 1553: "Is all your delite and joy in whiskying and romping abroad like a Tom boy?" (211). Not until several decades later, in the 1570s, did the term shift from characterizing spunky young men to like-minded individuals of the opposite gender. Tomboyism acquired newfound sexual associations and age coordinates when it was applied to boisterous girls instead of boys. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes, unlike the innocently playful connotations the term possessed when it referred to an actual boy, a tomboy now began to signify a "bold and immodest woman" (211). Finally, in the late 1590s and early 1600s, the term underwent a third transformation, morphing into its current usage: "a girl who behaves like a spirited or boisterous boy; a wild romping girl; a hoyden" (*OED* 212).

The etymology of the word "tomboy," however, cannot cease with a mere consideration of the gender-bending origins of the term itself. In addition to an awareness of the way in which tomboys began as literal boys, attention must also be paid to the rich and varied meanings of the term

"tom," for at least some of the multiplicity inherent in the word "tomboy" can be traced to this loaded prefix. Forming a possible explanation for the historical connection of tomboys with immodest women, one of the most common slang meanings for a "tom" is a prostitute (*OED* 207). However, the prefix has also been used to connote everything from male sexual predators (tom cats) and clowns (tomfools) to lesbians (tommy girls) (*OED* 207–210). As Mary Elliott has pointed out, the cultural richness of the prefix "tom" causes tomboyism to have "more complexity . . . than is commonly supposed" (*Closet* 5). Embedded within its reference to boisterous young women, the term fuses "notions of masculinity, promiscuous sexuality, prostitution, and lesbianism together in various configurations" (*Closet* 5).

While tomboyism as both a concept and a cultural phenomenon may date back to the Renaissance Era in England, it did not become prevalent in the United States until nearly three hundred years later. Adolescent girls and adult women who engaged in behavior that could be characterized as tomboyish, however, certainly existed in American literature and culture prior to this period. From the hearty women who traversed the Atlantic for a new life in the colonies during the sixteenth century to those who moved Westward during the early days of the republic, strong, gender-defiant women have been a longstanding hallmark of the United States. Nevertheless, these individuals neither considered themselves nor were labeled by others as "tomboys." The term, along with its underlying premise that physically active women constituted their own distinct category of identity, is simply absent in writings from early America.

If such bold and daring female figures were called anything, in fact, it was "hoyden," a word which is commonly—although somewhat problematically—seen as a synonym or precursor to "tomboy." First appearing in the late sixteenth century, the term shares a similar etymological history: it also initially referred to rambunctious boys and men rather than girls and women. Indeed, the *Oxford English Dictionary* provides the following definition for "hoyden": "A rude, ignorant, or awkward fellow; a clown, boor" (457). By the late seventeenth century, however, this meaning shifted and the word began referring to like-minded members of the opposite sex: "A rude, or ill-bred girl (or woman): a boisterous noisy girl, a romp" (*OED* 457). Unlike a tomboy, a hoyden was more closely associated with breaching bourgeois mores than female gender roles. As the *OED* notes, a hoyden "calls people by their surnames," is "ungainly in her Behaviour" and is "slatternly ignorant" (457). When the concept of "tomboy" made its debut during the mid-nineteenth century, it supplanted "hoyden." After 1876, in fact, the *OED* includes no new definitions of, or textual referents to, this term.

While "tomboy" may have eclipsed "hoyden," it also expanded on it, for this new code of conduct crystallized around a different set of cultural

anxieties and served a vastly different societal purpose. Emerging in the mid-nineteenth century as a product of growing concerns over the deplorable state of health among middle- and upper-class white women, tomboyism was designed as an alternative. Not surprisingly, given this purpose, narratives that were intended for a largely female readership, featured young girls as protagonists and were written by women were among the first to feature tomboys. Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), Elizabeth Stuart's Phelps *Gypsy Breynton* series (1866–1867) and Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did* (1872) form some of the most poignant examples. As tomboyism grew in cultural popularity, gender-bending female figures began to appear in narratives that fell outside of this realm. Soon, tomboys became fixtures in adventure novels about the "Wild West" that were geared for boys. From Prentiss Ingraham's *Crimson Kate, the Girl Trailer* (1881) to Edward Wheeler's Deadwood Dick/Calamity Jane series (1877–1885), a rootin'-tootin' tomboy who roped, rode and 'rangled became a stock character.

Before long, tomboyish figures began to surface in texts that were written for an adult audience. Henry James, with his interest in exploring national social types, for example, depicted tomboyish figures. In his 1878 novel *Watch and Ward*, Hubert Lawrence is dismayed by the gender-bending nature of his cousin's twelve-year-old ward, Nora Lambert. As he candidly tells Roger one evening about the dependent child, "'I can't think of her as a girl . . . she seems to me a boy. She climbs trees, she scales fences, she keeps rabbits, she straddles upon your old mare, bare-backed. I found her this morning wading in the pond up to her knees'" (25).

In light of this increased presence of gender-bending female characters, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are often identified as the heyday of tomboy narratives in the United States. More specifically, both Christian McEwan and Elizabeth Segel have identified the years from the end of the Civil War to the middle of the Depression Era as the "golden era" of literary tomboyism. Commencing with the publication of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *Gypsy Breynton* in 1866 and extending to the appearance of Ruth Sawyer's Newbery Award-winning book *Roller Skates* in 1936, this period includes such classic tomboy narratives as Kate Douglas Wiggin's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903), Carol Ryrie Brink's *Caddie Woodlawn* (1935) and Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* books (1932–1943).

In spite of the seemingly monolithic classification of "tomboy novel," the representation of this code of conduct can vary greatly. Indeed, as Lynne Yamaguchi and Karen Barber have written, the term "tomboy" may connote "a virtually uniform picture of a girl who—by whatever standards society has dictated—acts like a boy," but how one defines a "transgression into boys' territory" differs for every individual (10). "For some girls, it is in excelling in—or even just playing—sports; for others, it's as simple an act as biking to the creek to catch frogs. Still other girls cross the gender line by preferring math to English, science to history, shop to

home ec[onomics]" (Yamaguchi and Barber 10). This detail is especially important when considering tomboys who possess different coordinates of identity: who hail from different historical eras, live in different geographic regions, belong to different racial or ethnic groups or inhabit different socio-economic classes. 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. Given the way in which the construction of tomboyism is contingent upon a complex constellation of factors, the term has encompassed a wide range of sometimes complementary but often competing traits. Indeed, it is precisely the fluidity inherent within this code of conduct that causes tomboyism to have a rich and multivalent history.

These details notwithstanding, in the years since the term "tomboy" made its debut in U.S. literature and culture, a number of common or defining characteristics have emerged. In many ways, in fact, tomboyism "seems to be so familiar a concept in contemporary North American culture that it needs no definition" (Yamaguchi and Barber 10). The traits most Americans are likely to name as constitutive of this code of conduct include a proclivity for outdoor play (especially athletics), a feisty independent spirit, and a tendency to don masculine clothing and adopt a boyish nickname. By the late twentieth century, such elements had become so culturally codified that a group of psychologists articulated what they called a twelve-point "Tomboy Index." In a 1996 article, Shawn Meghan Burn, A. Kathleen O'Neil, and Shirley Nederend deemed the following behaviors unmistakable indicators of tomboyism: (1) preferring shorts and jeans to dresses; (2) preferring traditional boys' toys (e.g., guns, matchbox cars) over girls' toys (e.g., dolls); (3) resembling a boy in appearance; (4) wishing to be a boy; (5) preferring traditionally boys' activities (e.g., climbing trees, playing army) over traditionally girls' activities (e.g., ballet, playing dress-up); (6) having girl friends that are tomboys; (7) participating in traditionally male sports (e.g., football, baseball, basketball) with boys; (8) engaging in loud or boisterous play with others; (9) preferring to play with boys over girls; (10) using traditionally girls' toys in stereotypically boys' activities (e.g., Barbie driving a Tonka truck); (11) engaging in rough and tumble play; and (12) playing with many different peer groups (e.g., tomboys, non-tomboys, boys) (Burn, O'Neil and Nederend 422).

Although these characteristics may encapsulate the general nature of many tomboys, they are by no means exhaustive. To the twelve-point Index devised by Burns et al., the tendency for tomboys to form close relationships with effeminate male characters could be added. More often than

not, a tomboy's closest friend is a "sissy" boy rather than another tough girl. Countless tomboy narratives—written by men and women, featuring both masculine and feminine tomboys and intended for both child and adult audiences—contain this dyad, including Scout and Dill in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), Tommy Shirley and Jay Harper in Willa Cather's "Tommy, the Unsentimental" (1896) and Frankie Addams and her cousin John Henry West in Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* (1946).[2]

While such an intimate relationship between members of the opposite sex—and especially those who are not blood relatives—would likely arouse suspicion for more feminine girls or masculine boys, the union between a tomboy and a sissy generally poses no threat.[3] Since these figures exist outside of conventional gender roles, their relationship also exists outside of conventional sexual ones. As Lee Zevy notes, contrary to the sexually charged prefix "tom," "Tomboys have always been treated as an asexual entity, a time of cuteness" (186). Foreshadowing contemporary queer interpretations of tomboys as proto-lesbians and sissies as proto-gay men, their friendship does not contain an erotic charge. In addition to destabilizing gender codes, therefore, the tomboy/sissy dyad also disrupts heteronormative ones.

In an interesting but often-overlooked detail, tomboys and sissies may defy the boundaries between heterosexuality and homosexuality, but they often reinforce the ones between masculinity and femininity. Contrary to expectations, these figures frequently police each other's gender transgressions rather than serving as company in which to safely display them. In numerous nineteenth- and twentieth-century narratives, tomboys often help masculinize effeminate boys: they teach their weak counterparts to be adventurous, assert themselves and even fight. By the close of the novel, the previously sissy boy has been transformed by his tomboy friend into a strong and even powerful man. In Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, for

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2. To this list, the following could be added: Becky Sleeper and her brother Teddy in George M. Backer's *Running to Waste: The Story of a Tomboy* (1874), Hellfire Hotchkiss and Thug Carpenter in Mark Twain's "Hellfire Hotchkiss" (written 1897), Charlotte Laborde and Gus Bradley in Kate Chopin's short story "Charlie" (written 1900), Georgiana Isham and a French Baron in Phyllis Duganne and Harriet Gersman's short story "Tomboy!" (1928), Kerry and Mick in Hal Ellson's *Tomboy* (1950), Francie Lou Babcock and Russell Carson in Allyn Allen's *Lone Star Tomboy* (1951) and Gabrielle "Gabby" Lucette and her twin brother Adrian in Barbara Clayton's *Tomboy* (1961).

3. As I will discuss in more detail later, this is only true for pre-pubescent tomboys. Once gender-bending young girls reach puberty, their association with even effeminate males becomes suspect. In Mark Twain's "Hellfire Hotchkiss," for instance, the fifteen-year-old title character's close associations with young men arouse suspicions about her possible promiscuity. As her Aunt Betsy informs her, rumors have started to circulate: "'You always preferred to play with the boys. Well, that's all right, up to a certain limit; but you've gone way beyond the limit. You ought to have stopped long ago—oh, long ago'" (198).

instance, Jo is instrumental in reforming the effete Laurie Laurence into an upstanding citizen, honorable gentleman and good husband for her sister, Amy. Similarly, in Allen Allyn's *Lone Star Tomboy*, Francie Lou Carter tells her effeminate cousin, "'You better stick around me, Russell. I'll show you how to stand up to boys'" (Allen 158). By the end of the novel, the formerly weak boy has become so tough that he has joined a bastion of masculinity: the military academy.

Interestingly, however, this pattern is rarely reversed: sissies hardly ever feminize tomboys. As Mary Elliott has written, "Even when tomboys pair off with reformed male sissies, they are tempered not by these flawed boys but through the historically constant presence of gender and heterosexual pressure" (11). As a result, sissies often drop out of tomboy narratives, becoming "spent characters" who after a certain point "have nothing further to contribute" (Elliott 110).

Coupled with a tomboy's important friendship with a sissy, she is characterized by another key relationship or, rather, the lack thereof: one with her mother. Countless nineteenth- and twentieth-century narratives present tomboy characters who have been orphaned or otherwise lack a maternal influence in their lives. The mothers of Nancy Vawse in Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), Frankie Addams in Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) and "Scout" Finch in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) passed away when they were young.[4] Meanwhile, the mothers of Capitola Black in E. D. E. N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* (1859) and the title character in Kate Douglas Wiggin's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903) were compelled to give up their daughters or send them away. During the latter half of the twentieth century, rising divorce rates, coupled with increasing numbers of women working outside the home, only added to this phenomenon. Now, the mothers of many tomboys were not physically missing but emotionally absent. Throughout Carson McCullers's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), for instance, twelve-year-old Mick Kelly disappears for hours and her mother—who is distracted by the demands of her large family, numerous boarders and disabled husband who is unable to work—does not even seem to notice: "After breakfast, Mick took the kids out and except for meals they were gone for most of the day. A good deal of the time they just roamed the streets . . . end[ing] up in a place they did not recognize" (McCullers *Heart* 82).

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4. Once again, this list is far from exhaustive. To it, the following could be added: Nora Lambert in Henry James's *Watch and Ward* (1878), Nan Prince in Sarah Orne Jewett's *A Country Doctor* (1884), Charlotte Laborde in Kate Chopin's "Charlie" (written 1900), Rena Morgan in Amy E. Blanchard's *A Little Tomboy* (1903), Hila "Hi" Dart in Mary E. Mumford's *A Regular Tomboy* (1913), Antoinette "Tony" Porter in Lilian Garis's *Ted and Tony: Two Girls of Today* (1929) and Sarah Brown in Bryan Forbes's film *International Velvet* (1978).

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. As Louise Westling has argued, "Without mothers, these female protagonists define themselves most comfortably in masculine terms" (155). Provided with only a male role model in the form of their father, they too become masculine. In Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, for instance, the sister of Atticus Finch frequently makes this insinuation in relation to her tomboyish niece, Scout. In the second part of the novel, in fact, she even comes to live with her brother's family, at least in part so that young Jean Louise will have "some feminine influence" (127).

Motherlessness—and the tomboyism that emerges from it—need not be seen in such pathological ways, however. Akin to other characters who are disconnected from family roots (Mark Twain's Huck Finn and Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie come to mind), this phenomenon can be beneficial. In the words of Mary Elliot, "The presence of the orphaned tomboy in the narratives creates an orphaned space in the ideological fabric of the narrative as well, freeing it temporarily from its overarching didactic purpose" (10). Without mothers to indoctrinate them in women's traditional gender roles, they are able to define these elements for themselves.

In spite of the libratory potential and personal benefits of tomboyism, it is not often seen as a lifelong identity. As Sharon O'Brien notes, this code of conduct is most frequently cast as "a very common phase through which little girls would pass on their way to the safe harbor of domestic femininity" ("Tomboyism" 354). Although the nation may value strength, independence and assertiveness in young girls, it does not esteem such qualities in adult women. As a result, within a few decades after the emergence of tomboyism, a new phenomenon was created, commonly dubbed "tomboy taming." Young girls were now expected to slough off tomboyish traits when they reached a specific age or stage of life: usually, the beginning of adolescence or the onset of puberty. In the opening pages of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, for instance, Meg admonishes her tomboyish younger sister: "'You are old enough to leave off boyish tricks and behave better, Josephine. It didn't matter so much when you were a little girl; but now you are so tall, and turn up your hair, you should remember that you are a young lady'" (3). Likewise, in Ruth Langland Holberg's *Tomboy Row* (1952), the father of the title character announces, "'It is high time that a big ten-year-old girl stopped acting like a tomboy'" (34). Finally, in Norma Klein's *Tomboy* (1978), taming is precipitated by the onset of menses. When the central character Antonia "Toe" Henderson thinks about menstruating, she wonders, "How could you be a tomboy at all if you could have a baby?" (34).

As these comments indicate, by far the most compelling reason for young women to abandon tomboyish behavior was pressure to get married and become a mother. Indeed, while tomboy narratives are often seen as

critiquing women's traditional gender roles, many eventually capitulate to them. From Jo March's much-lamented marriage to Professor Bhaer to Laura Ingall's union with Almanzo, numerous narratives conclude with the all-too-familiar trope of wedding bells and baby cries.

If a tomboyish character was too young for wedlock or the author did not wish to engage in a conventional marriage plot, another popular method for eliminating gender-bending behavior was a life-threatening illness or injury. Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did* (1872) largely established the paradigm. In the opening chapters of the novel, twelve-year-old Katy Carr "tore her dress every day, hated sewing, and didn't care a button about being 'good'" (9). But, as Elizabeth Segel notes, the punishment for her gender disobedience "is an injury to her back that keeps her bedridden and in pain for four years" ("Tomboy" 54). Katy's invalidism provides instruction in "'God's School,' the School of Pain, with its lessons of Patience, Cheerfulness, and Making the Best of Things" (Coolidge 54). By the time her injury heals, the young girl has sloughed off her tomboyish independence.

A final common paradigm for tomboy taming, especially in narratives written for children, was the relocation of a gender-bending character to a strict boarding school or the home of urban relatives. In Allyn Allen's *Lone Star Tomboy*, Francie Lou is taken away from the family's ranch and sent to live with relatives in San Antonio, where she quickly discovers that city children behave quite differently: "The girls walked more quietly, talking in much softer voices. And Francie Lou made up her mind to be like them, and not ever to forget and shout and yell like she and [her brother] Grayson did outdoors at the ranch. She did not want the people here to call her a tomboy" (153). Laura Ingalls has a similar experience while attending the town school in the sixth book of the *Little House* series, *The Long Winter* (1940). When the active tomboy leaps up to catch a ball at recess, the other children ridicule her gender inappropriate action. Laura, who was formerly so proud of her strength and agility, now ruminates: "She did not know why she had done such a thing and she was *ashamed, fearful of what these girls might think of her*" [my italics] (78).

The process of taming tomboys, however, is not a universal or inevitable phenomenon. Some gender-bending female characters not only retain their tomboyishness but see it as an important facet of their adult personality. In Miriam Parker Betts's *Tomboy Teacher*, for instance, Nancy Adams asserts that her gender-bending ways make her a better educator: "'I romp with my pupils; and I despise paper work. I can't get it done because I stop to bother about each child, as more than a mere name on a card'" (Betts 47–48). Similarly, in Ruth Langland Holberg's *Tomboy Row* (1952), the parents of the title character, Rowena "Row" Carey, abandon their crusade to feminize their gender-bending daughter once they realize the healthful benefits of her active lifestyle. When Rowena attempts to please her parents

by giving up baseball and starting ballet lessons, her physician father is appalled by the slim, pale and frail appearance of these more feminine girls: "'Listen, honey. Maybe you have to play ball and do all the things I have been trying to make you stop doing. Your form of activity is better for you than dancing. I can see now'" (146).

Anxiety about the persistence of childhood tomboyism into adulthood, however, was not limited to concerns over women's future reproductive health or feminine gender identity. The advent of sexology and growing popularity of Freudian theory during the late nineteenth century introduced worries about the sexuality of such girls. Many began to worry that it was only a matter of time until tomboyish figures who were dressing and romping like boys would begin loving and even lusting like them. As a result, tomboyism went from being seen as an effective preparatory stage for marriage and motherhood to a potential breeding ground for lesbianism. Indeed, as Judith Halberstam argues, "There is always the dread possibility . . . that the tomboy will not grow out of her butch stage and will never become a member of the wedding" ("Bondage" 175).

Willa Cather's short story "Tommy, the Unsentimental" (1896) presents one of the earliest but also most vivid illustrations of such fears. Near the middle of the narrative, the title character who looked "scarcely girlish" and "had the lank figure of an active half-grown lad" (473), brings home "a girl she had grown fond of at school, a faint, white, languid bit of a thing, who used violet perfumes and carried a sunshade" (476). Echoing the growing link between tomboyism and lesbianism during this era, a group of men in town remark, "[I]t was a bad sign when a rebellious girl like Tommy took to being sweet and gentle to one of her own sex, the worst sign in the world" (476).

The rise of the LGBTQ movement and the emergence of queer theory during the second half of the twentieth century strengthened this connection. In pulp novels from the 1950s and early 1960s, for instance, any female character who was even remotely tomboyish was also, ultimately, a lesbian. In Vin Packer's *Spring Fire* (1952), for instance, central character Susan Mitchell—who falls in love with her sorority sister soon after arriving at college—is such a talented athlete that some of her classmates characterize her as a "muscle-bound Amazon" who is "built like a barn" (4, 58). Similarly, in Paula Christian's *The Other Side of Desire* (1965), Carrie Anderson—a suburban housewife who becomes involved with another woman—has a penchant for wearing "boy's shirts and slacks" (17). Finally, in Patricia Highsmith's *The Price of Salt* (1952), the sexually aggressive Abby is described as behaving "like a tomboy" when she was young (173).

By the 1990s, the association of tomboyism with lesbianism had become so pervasive that many began to see this code of conduct as a firm indicator of, or at least an adolescent precursor to, homosexuality. An anthology

edited by Lynne Yamaguchi and Karen Barber and released by the lesbian press Allyson Books, for instance, bore the suggestive title, *Tomboys!: Tales of Dyke Derring-Do* (1995). Echoing this matter-of-fact association of tomboyism with lesbianism, an array of films were released in the 1990s that featured a lesbian main character who possessed an unmistakably tomboyish identity. Through figures such as Randall "Randy" Dean in Maria Maggenti's film, *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (1995), and the tough title character of Rachel Talalay's *Tank Girl* (1995), tomboyism and lesbianism became strongly aligned if not practically synonymous.

Although tomboyism was created in the mid-nineteenth century by white women for white women as a means to bolster and strengthen whiteness, this gradually changed. In the same way that tomboyish young women can be found in nearly every period, genre and phase of U.S. literature and culture, so too can they be located in nearly all of the nation's racial and ethnic groups. As *Completely Queer: The Gay and Lesbian Encyclopedia* asserts, "Tomboy identities cross racial, ethnic, class and regional lines with only slight variation" (Hogan and Hudson 543). In fact, the first full-length novel published by an African American woman, Harriet Wilson's 1859 *Our Nig*, showcases a tomboyish heroine who plays school pranks, daringly walks across rooftops and even cuts her hair short. In addition, Sui Sin Far's collection of Chinese American folktales, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912), contains several narratives that showcase gender-defiant female characters. In "The Smuggling to Tie Co.," for instance, a young girl dresses as a boy in order to make a border crossing. Similarly, in "Tian Shan's Kindred Spirit," a brave young woman is disguised as a man so she can be smuggled into China. Finally, Zitkala-Sa's *American Indian Stories* (1921) contains several tales that operate along the lines of tomboyishness. Most famous among these perhaps is the appropriately named "A Warrior's Daughter," in which a brave young woman infiltrates an enemy camp to rescue her beloved.

Contemporary writers of color, especially women writers, continue this tradition. Numerous novels released in recent years by African American, Latino/a and Asian American authors contain gender-rebellious female figures that can be placed on the spectrum of tomboyish behavior. Of these, the central characters in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1975), Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* (1982) and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984) are perhaps the most well known. In the same ways that factors such as geographic region, historical time period and socio-economic class impact the construction of this code of conduct, so does racial and ethnic identity. Together with being excluded from prevailing definitions of (white) womanhood by their racial and cultural heritage, these gender-bending female figures are being reared in environments that contain differing conceptions of femininity and masculinity. In

Jamaica Kincaid's well-known narrative "Girl," for instance, the speaker's directives about women's proper conduct include instructions about "how to catch a fish," "how to bully a man," and "how to spit up in the air if you feel like it" (29), activities that would all be considered tomboyish for their Anglo-American counterparts, especially from the middle and upper classes. In this way, nonwhite and especially non-Western gender-bending figures exemplify the way in which tomboyism is culturally situated, culturally specific and—perhaps most importantly—culturally relative.

In recent years, tomboyism has undergone a conceptual crisis and even critical reconfiguration. By the latter decades of the twentieth century, the rise of the second-wave feminist movement and accompanying expansion of women's gender roles caused many to wonder if it was an antiquated category. In Norma Klein's 1978 novel *Tomboy*, for instance, the mother of Antonia "Toe" Henderson argues that the concept of tomboyism assumes "'there's a certain way girls should act and a certain way boys should act. That's so old-fashioned!'" (16). For these reasons, she asserts, "'there's no such thing as a tomboy'" (16). As these comments suggest, the gradual erosion of essentialist views of gender called into question both the contemporary importance and even modern-day relevance of the term "tomboy." Given that it is now routine for girls to wear pants, play sports and have short hair, it would seem that nearly all contemporary young women could be placed on the spectrum of tomboyishness. As Judith Halberstam has observed, "it has become almost commonplace nowadays for at least middle-class parents to point to their frisky girl children and remark proudly upon their tomboy natures" ("Bondage" 159).

Although this "normalization" of tomboyism is a seemingly positive and even beneficial phenomenon, it has had several harmful effects. Rather than helping to remove the taboos associated with gender-defiant behavior, deeming a certain form of tomboyishness more "natural" or "normative" causes alternative forms to face increased stigmatization. When such behavior becomes associated with what Halberstam dubs "preadult female masculinity" ("Bondage" 160), societal tolerance for it changes. The moment that gender rebellious girls insist on wearing only boy's clothes, adopting a boy's identity, or refusing to relinquish their tomboyism at puberty, they are punished and—with the advent of Gender Identity Disorder—even pathologized. In the wake of GID, such girls became subjected not simply to peer ridicule or parental disapproval, but to gender reorientation counseling, aversion therapy and even institutionalization.

In spite of this often negative reconceptualization, tomboyism continues to be both a powerful concept and a pervasive cultural phenomenon in the United States. Although modified by the impact of feminism and the advent of queer theory, tomboys have not disappeared from American literature and culture, and it does not appear that they will do so any time soon. Gender-bending female figures have been the subject of songs by

an eclectic collection of musical groups, including The Beach Boys, who recorded a single titled "Hey Little Tomboy" for their 1978 *M.I.U. Album*; Crosby, Stills and Nash, whose "Tomboy" appeared on their 1990 *Live It Up* compilation; and folk singer Tret Fure, whose story song "Tomboy Girl" appeared on her 1999 *Radio Quiet* album with Cris Williamson. As the millennium approached, the popular and material representation of tomboyism became even more diverse. From the debut of Tomboy Red lager beer by a microbrewery in Detroit to the unveiling of the "Pretty Tomboy" online clothing store, this code of conduct was no longer simply a literary trope or form of childrearing. It had become a national brand name, recognizable icon and even marketable commodity.

Coupled with maintaining a strong presence in U.S. culture, tomboyism remains a fixture in its literature as well. Gender-bending female characters continue to be featured in an array of recent children's novels, such as Jerry Spinelli's *Who Put that Hair in my Toothbrush?* (1984), Cynthia Voight's *Jackaroo* (1985) and Pam Muñoz Ryan's *Riding Freedom* (1998). Similarly, the burgeoning field of lesbian-themed literature and film, including such classic literary works as Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973) and Fannie Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café* (1987), along with 1990s cinematic releases like Marita Giovanni's *Bar Girls* (1995) or the Wachowski Brothers' *Bound* (1996), showcase gender-bending young women who can be placed on the spectrum of tomboyishness.

Tomboyism and Shifting Racial Identities

Tomboys are commonly seen as figures who critique women's gender roles, but a closer examination of their presentation in American literature and culture suggests another possibility. Especially in works created by white female authors or intended for a largely white female audience, the ambiguity of the tomboy's gender mirrors the ambiguity of her purported Caucasian identity.

As Richard Dyer has aptly observed, "Race . . . is never not a factor, never not in play" in the United States (1). Although the importance of race may remain a constant in the United States, the same cannot be said for the way in which it is determined or defined. Anne McClintock has written that in the last decades of the nineteenth century alone "the term 'race' was used in shifting and unstable ways, sometimes as synonymous with 'species,' sometimes with 'culture,' sometimes with 'nation,' sometimes to denote biological ethnicity or sub-groups within national groupings" (52). Moreover, Michael Omi and Howard A. Winant have discussed how the classifying criteria for race grew increasingly more complex as the twentieth century progressed. As an ideological concept that is contingent on specific times, places and situations, it has never had a stable definition or universal meaning.

In the same way that the criteria used to determine race has changed over time, so too has the racial status of various demographic groups. Individuals who are classified under a certain racial category in one historical era may find themselves categorized differently during a later period. Although numerous examples of such shifts or what Susan Gubar has termed "racechanges" permeate U.S. history, the most pertinent to the chapters that follow are those that concern Caucasians. Perry Curtis and, more recently, Matthew Jacobson have discussed that groups like the Irish and the Jews, who were commonly designated as racial and ethnic Others, experienced a change in their racial classification and gained Caucasian status.[5]

While building on the fractures, fissures and instabilities within whiteness that are highlighted by racechanges among the Irish and the Jews, this volume is concerned with the opposite phenomenon. Rather than charting the process by which a formerly nonwhite group was able to become white over time, the chapters that follow examine the way in which previously Caucasian individuals became associated with various elements of nonwhiteness. Characterized with "brown" skin tones, associated with "dark" features and affiliated with other nonwhite racial and ethnic minorities, these figures were not only distanced from, but even seemed to have disavowed, their purported racial heritage.

Although what I am calling this "hidden history" of white tomboyism has not been discussed before, it does not constitute the first time that Caucasian figures have been presented in ways that place them in dialogue with nonwhite minority groups. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an array of ostensibly white men and especially women had a contested connection with their purported racial identity. As Sander Gilman has discussed, for instance, Victorian England forged an array of connections between white prostitutes and Sartje Baartman, the so-called Hottentot Venus. Although these figures had radically different racial, national and cultural identities, both were seen as possessing the same primitivistic sexual urges and atavistic genitalia.[6] Anne McClintock has documented a similar event involving white female coal miners during the nineteenth century. Because of their "primitive" association with dirt

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5. See Perry Curtis's *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1971) and Matthew Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998).

6. In the words of Sander Gilman, with her enlarged buttocks and unique genitalia, "the female Hottentot came to represent the black female *in nuce*, and the [white] prostitute to represent the sexualized [white] woman" ("Bodies" 225). Given that "the anomalies of the prostitute's labia [were] seen as atavistic throwbacks to the Hottentot," a kinship was established whereby the "perception of the prostitute in the late nineteenth century merged with the perception of the black" ("Bodies" 245, 248).

and their "barbaric" participation in mannish labor, these women were thought to have a tenuous link with both whiteness and white womanhood.[7] These examples provide a backdrop against which to consider the racialization of white American tomboys, while they also place this process within a broader historical context. The racialization of white tomboys is far from an anomalous occurrence; it participates in a larger Western phenomenon.

One possible root for the racialization of white tomboyism can be traced to historical origins of this code of conduct itself. From its inception, tomboyism was interested in redefining not only conventional female gender roles but conventional notions of whiteness in the United States. Implicit in the effort of tomboyism to bolster the health of white women was its effort to have adolescent girls and young women embrace new forms of whiteness. As historians such as Lois Banner have noted, fair skin was prized among middle- and upper-class Anglo-American women for generations. Ladies wanted to look not simply white but almost ghost-like in appearance. Those who possessed naturally fair skin assiduously protected it with parasols and long sleeves. Meanwhile, those with tones that were dark or ruddy employed artificial methods to lighten their complexions. From applying talcum powder to taking doses of arsenic, women in Europe and the United States stopped at nothing—even when it involved risking their lives—to obtain this fair shade (Banner 35).

Although whitening the skin ostensibly showcased a bourgeois class position, it could also be seen as showcasing a certain level of racial purity. Together with demonstrating that they did not have to work outdoors, these white women were demonstrating that they lacked any trace of racial mixing. From both a literal and a figurative perspective, they were "Fair Maidens."

Tomboyism radically changed this phenomenon. Adopting a more natural lifestyle and unadulterated appearance, gender-bending young girls not only avoided the use of harmful cosmetics that artificially lightened their skin but also played outdoors. As a result, these figures often had tanned cheeks and ruddy complexions. Even a cursory examination of tomboyish characters reveals the widespread predominance of this phenomenon. Compared to their more fair and feminine counterparts, tomboys were often described as having dark white and even nonwhite features. Beginning with the second book in the *Little House* series, Laura is repeatedly admonished by her sisters and especially her mother for not

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7. As Anne McClintock has written, "In newspapers, government reports, personal accounts and journals, the pit miners were everywhere represented as a 'race' apart, figured as racial outcasts, historically abandoned, isolated and primitive" (*Imperial* 115). Indeed, "One witness described them as 'weird, swarthy creatures, figures of women, half-clad in men's and half clad in women's attire'" (McClintock *Imperial* 116).

wearing a bonnet and allowing her skin to tan brown. Likewise, in Kate Douglas Wiggin's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903), the tomboyish title character's face and neck are described as "brown and thin" (6). Finally, in the first scene of Caroline Snedeker's *Downright Dencey* (1927), the heroine is called "Nigger-face!" and a "Portugee girl!" because of her dark complexion (5, 7).

Tomboys redefined acceptable notions of whiteness as they redefined acceptable notions of female behavior for middle- and upper-class white women. After generations of Caucasian women lightening their skin, this new code of conduct was not predicated on the glorification of height-ened states of whiteness. Tomboyism demonstrated that young girls could remain within the bounds of upper- and middle-class white womanhood even if they had browned skins and dark features. Frances Cogan has remarked that by the mid-nineteenth century the tanned complexion of a middle- or upper-class white girl did not "call into question the mother's sense of *female propriety*; or of spoiling her by *indulgence*" [italics in orig-inal] (39). In an illuminating example of this shift in attitude, physician Dr. Dio Lewis asserted in 1871, "The fragile, pale young woman with a lisp is thought, by many silly people, to be more a *lady*, than another with ruddy cheeks, and vigorous health" [italics in original] (6667). While this increased coloration of course did not transform Caucasian girls into black ones, it did broaden prevailing conceptions of "shades" of whiteness. With their crimson cheeks and ruddy complexions, tomboyish figures possessed what may be characterized as the dark glow of white tomboy health.

In the chapters that follow, I explore the way in which the nonwhiteness of ostensibly white tomboys is not merely "skin deep." In addition to being associated with nonwhite or, at least, dark white skin tones, these gender-bending female figures are connected with an array of stereotypes about racial Otherness in general and blackness in particular. Possessing behav-ioral tendencies, physical characteristics and narrative roles that place them in dialogue with what Toni Morrison would characterize as "American Africanism," these ostensibly white figures seem to distance themselves from, and often even disavow, their Caucasian identities.

In probing these and other issues, I rely heavily on what Frantz Fanon has characterized as the "epidermal schema" of racial difference. Although an individual's racial heritage is determined by a large constellation of factors—from nationality and economic status to geographic region and historical era—it has often been cast as a biological classification in the West. Indeed, Fanon has written in *Black Skin, White Masks* that "cultural logic presupposed a biological foundation of race visibly evident in physical features such as facial structures, hair color and texture, and skin color" (112). For these reasons, while the precise definition of race may change in the United States, Richard Dyer observes that one element remains constant: "concepts of race are always concepts of the body" (*White* 20).

Because racial traits are written on the body in the form of real (or imagined) facial features, physical characteristics and especially skin coloration, the concept is rooted in corporeality.

Tomboyism is also a distinct bodily identity. Together with being linked to corporeal traits like short hair, it is also predicated on such bodily acts as tree-climbing. Contemplating how the body-based realms of gender and race mutually construct and even reinforce each other, my discussion frequently pivots around questions of embodiment and disembodiment. Especially in light of the original eugenic purpose and hegemonic aim of tomboyism, this project may be primarily concerned with the co-joined bodies of the white tomboy and the nonwhite minority in the United States, but it is also interested in what this phenomenon has to say about the national body politic. Each of the following chapters considers the way in which strengthening the physical health of the nation's middle- and upper-class white women through tomboyism helped to strengthen the racial health of its Anglo-American ruling class.

Methodology and Organization

Even though this book spans nearly 150 years of American literary and cultural history, its discussion about the nonwhiteness associated with purportedly white tomboys operates within an admittedly limited framework. As Lisa Lowe and Philip Deloria, among others have illustrated, the historical periods under consideration were a time of rich racial and ethnic pluralism. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, American Indians, Asian Americans and Latina/o Americans constituted an important facet of the nation's demographic composition, and they also played a crucial role in national attitudes about race.

My decision to focus on white tomboys who acquire suggestions of nonwhiteness through their connections with African American signifiers, therefore, is two-fold. In addition to giving the project a more manageable scope, my focus also reflects the era's pre-occupation with the black-white color line. As both Werner Sollors and Siobhan Somerville have asserted, it is difficult to underestimate the cultural anxiety about and accompanying fixation on African Americans in the United States. From the importation of the first African slaves, debates have raged over the place of blacks in white American culture. Various efforts to draw and redraw the distinctions between these groups brought to the forefront the diacritical nature of blackness and whiteness. Examining the way in which white tomboys who wore masculine breeches were able to breach the color line, *Tomboys* joins as well as disjoins this debate. With racialized white tomboys transgressing contemporary conceptions of black/white, male/female and heterosexual/homosexual, these figures occupy an important but often overlooked nexus of race, gender and sexuality.

On the subject of methodology, I want to say a word about my emphasis on literary and cinematic works largely by, about and for middle- and upper-class white women. As mentioned before, tomboyism was created by whites to bolster the health of white women and, by extension, the white race. Thus, this code of conduct made its initial debut and long-standing cultural home in works designed for this demographic group. Given this history, it seems fitting and even somewhat necessary that my discussion be primarily located in works by, or at least for, middle- and upper-class white women. Each chapter seeks to unpack the process by which white female figures constructed libratory narratives for white tomboys that paradoxically drew on racist stereotypes about nonwhite peoples and cultures.

The limited scope of my investigation, however, ought not to imply that female gender rebellion that draws on signifiers of race and ethnicity which exist outside of the black/white divide does not merit attention. The frequency with which adolescent tomboys are characterized as metaphoric "wild Indians" throughout children's literature, for instance, constitutes just one instance of the need for such work. Thus, while my project spotlights a specific type of tomboy character created during a specific historical era, it is my hope that it will open up a larger dialogue about the ways in which white women's gender rebellion is often predicated on forms of racial and ethnic nonwhiteness in the United States.

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Having provided this general overview of tomboyism, the following chapters explore it with increased depth, detail and complexity. Chapter One, on E. D. E. N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* (1859), explores the moment when national childrearing practices shifted from promoting female invalidism to advocating female athleticism. At the same time, it demonstrates that in addition to the oft-mentioned feminist influence on tomboys, these figures had their root in such burlesque theatrical modes as blackface. Chapter Two, on Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), examines how the female gender incivilities precipitated by the Civil War catapulted tomboyism from a fledging cultural practice into a widespread national phenomenon, while it simultaneously details the way in which the tomboyish civil war over middle- and upper-class white womanhood was not entirely divorced from the national one over black slavery. Chapter Three, on Sarah Orne Jewett's *A Country Doctor* (1884), examines the process by which the tomboy matured into the New Woman and the debates that erupted over extending tomboyish behaviors into adulthood. In doing so, it reveals that much of the social as well as scientific language used to denounce white tomboyish gender difference during the postbellum period was patterned after that which had been used to police black racial difference during the antebellum era.

Chapter Four, on Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), examines how lingering fears over the mannish woman and female invert caused tomboys to be reinvented as exercise enthusiasts during the Progressive Era, and the way in which the eugenic benefits of "getting physical" were closely aligned with prevailing white fantasies about the rejuvenative powers of "going primitive." Chapter Five, on Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Antonia* (1918), examines this code of conduct as an agent of acculturation, assimilation and even Americanization for newly arrived immigrants. More specifically, it investigates the process by which formerly nonwhite immigrants were able to become white in the context of the frontier and the role that tomboyism played in this process. Chapter Six, on Victor Fleming's *Hula* (1927), explores the tomboyish roots of the Twenties flapper and how this predominantly white figure was linked with the "wild," "uncivilized" ways of nonwhite tribal peoples.

Chapter Seven, on Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), probes the widespread proliferation of, and accompanying paranoia about, tomboyish figures during the Second World War, and the way in which figures like Frankie Addams became a symbol for the era's gendered, raced and sexualized concerns about the crumbling wartime distinctions between normality and abnormality, ordinary and freakishness, moderation and excess. Chapter Eight, on Ann Bannon's *Women in the Shadows* (1959), considers how postwar emphasis on redomestication caused tomboyism to become yoked with a butch form of lesbianism, and how this process participated in the white envy for black culture during the 1950s. Chapter Nine, on Peter Bogdanovich's *Paper Moon* (1973), explores the way in which the rebirth of white feminism during the 1970s and early 1980s catapulted tomboyism from the margins into the mainstream of American culture once again, and the way in which this cinematic forum allowed white tomboys to "fade to black." Finally, the Epilogue addresses how the rise of queer theory, the emergence of whiteness studies and the re-engineering of white feminism during the 1990s precipitated a time of both tomboyish boom and bust.

In the opening pages of *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Mikhail Bakhtin observes, "the most interesting and productive life takes place on the boundaries" (2). Tomboy characters in general and racialized white tomboys in particular participate in this phenomenon. Existing on the boundaries between male/female, black/white, adult/child, heterosexual/homosexual, savage/civilized, different/same and drag/passing, these figures dismantle cultural binaries while they participate in them. Accordingly, this book places itself on the interstices between high and low culture, printed and visual texts as well as narratives written for children and those written for adults to investigate this previously unexplored facet of U.S. literature and culture.