

Frankie Adams's Sexuality in the Member of the Wedding: Focusing on Musical References

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Abstract : In *The Member of the Wedding*, Carson McCullers starts with the words, "It happened," without telling the reader what happens to a twelve-year-old protagonist, Frankie Adams. The reader feels confused and incomprehensible. However, he or she later realizes that the confusing phrase is connected to the scene where Frankie feels "the thing happened" after listening to the melodic lines of jazz and blues. Yet, the reader cannot really comprehend what happens to Frankie and feels puzzled till the end. And the story ends with Frankie's words, "I am simply mad about . . ." Implying her queer desire for her new friend Mary Littlejohn, McCullers never tells the reader whom Frankie is mad about. Despite McCullers's ambiguous way of depicting Frankie's sexuality, recent critics and reviewers have come to discuss her sexuality as anti-heterosexual because Frankie expresses her hatred for Barney, whom she has had some type of sexual encounter, and feels wrong with her brother Jarvis's wedding. After giving up her sexual desire for Jarvis's bride, Janice, Frankie changes her name to Frances, becomes engrossed with Michelangelo, and enjoys reading Tennyson's poetry with Mary. Michelangelo and Tennyson are well-known homosexual artists, which suggests that Frankie has an anti-heterosexual orientation. As McCullers does not precisely describe Frankie's sexuality, the reader can only assume it by connecting fragmentary descriptions. However, this discussion is more clarified to show Frankie's sexuality because analyzing the musical references of jazz and blues and interpreting them from a musicological viewpoint will illuminate it. In her works, McCullers frequently uses musical references and descriptions, which have a significant and psychological impact on the protagonists and portrays their bodily reactions to the impact to reveal what the reader cannot see on the surface. Thus, in this story, too, Frankie's bodily reaction to music is portrayed to cue her feelings. After seeing the chimney swifts, known as monogamous birds, Frankie feels "a jazz sadness," quivers her nerves and stiffens her heart. After listening to Berenice's "dark jazz voice," Frankie feels dizzy and throws a knife because Berenice's voice jazzes (excites) her heart that beats in her head. Calming herself, she fantasizes that Jarvis, Jarvis's bride, Janice, and herself are members of "the we of me." Then in the evening, listening to the blues and jazz being played by a black horn player somewhere in her neighborhood, Frankie realizes "the thing happened" and discovers "a new feeling." Following the musical references "jazz" and "blues" and examining them from the viewpoint of musicology and terminology leads the reader to explore what "it" is in "it happened" and what her "new feeling" is when "the thing happened" with the blues tune breaking off. Those discussions will illuminate Frankie's sexuality. As McCullers does not clearly name her sexuality, this paper uses the word queer to express Frankie's anti-sexual orientation.

Keywords : jazz and blues, musical references, queer sexuality, "we of me"

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