

**“Small-Town Lesbos” Swimming: Water, Intersectionality, and Queer Southern Adolescence in *Finding H.F.*
and *Ramona Blue***

Southern literature has a long history of exploring queerness in relation to children and adolescents, archetypically in what Kristen Proehl terms the “tomboy/sissy dyad[s]” of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Member of the Wedding*. This interest in queer adolescence extends to contemporary young adult literature set in the South, which often explores the fraught tension between queerness and Southernness, as characters struggle to reconcile the facets of their identity set in opposition by culturally ingrained homophobia. For the eponymous protagonists of *Finding H.F.* (Julia Watts, 2001) and *Ramona Blue* (Julie Murphy, 2017), water provides literal and metaphoric paths to an intersectional understanding of themselves as queer Southern women.

Both *Finding H.F.* and *Ramona Blue* utilize water as setting, plot device, and metaphor to further the characters' exploration and development of their identities. For Ramona, competitive swimming presents a previously unimagined opportunity to attend college and invest in her future, while the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina represent the devastation of her family in early childhood. For H.F., swimming in the ocean for the first time catalyzes a new understanding of her queer identity within her family's religion, one in which she can be “naked and...not ashamed” (Watts 127), while the hidden Appalachian waterfall she visits reflects the secrecy surrounding her sexuality.

This paper will draw on recent critical work applying the concepts of intersectionality to literary criticism, particularly Laura Jiménez's call to “read...specifically for the interconnected and additive ways identities can be represented in children's literature” (108). In doing so, it will add a facet, regional identity, to the identities previously explored by queer children's literature scholarship, while remaining grounded in the history of Southern literary criticism and its interest in queer adolescence. Ultimately, this paper seeks to explore the complex ways these novels construct characters who are both queer and Southern (and white and female and young and working-class) through their multi-valent relationships to water.

Works Cited:

Jiménez, Laura M. “My Gay Agenda: Embodying Intersectionality in Children's Literature Scholarship.” *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2017, pp. 104-112.

Proehl, Kristen B. “Sympathetic Alliances: Tomboys, Sissy Boys, and Queer Friendship in *The Member of the Wedding* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*.” *ANQ*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2013, pp. 128-133.

Watts, Julia. *Finding H.F.* Tallahassee, FL: Bella Books, 2001.