



Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
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Valdemir Pinto da Silva Junior

Transgression in Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café*

Rio de Janeiro
2007

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

Orientadora: Prof^a. Dra. Maria Conceição Monteiro

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Aos meus pais, Valdemir e Bernadete, ao meu irmão Luiz, a Ana e Júlia, e principalmente a Deus, que tornou toda e qualquer coisa possível.

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*Better to try all things and find all empty, than try nothing and
leave your life a blank¹*

¹ MOERS, 1976, p. 140

RESUMO

SILVA JUNIOR, Valdemir Pinto da. *Transgression in Carson McCullers' The Ballad of the Sad Café*. 2007. 71 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2007.

Este trabalho tem como objetivo principal discutir a obra *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, publicada em 1951, pela escritora norte-americana Carson McCullers, que abordou temas polêmicos, como a sexualidade, papéis sociais e suas respectivas e muitas vezes concomitantes transgressões. Em tal discussão serão analisadas as presenças do Gótico, do Grotesco e de outros elementos literários que se mostram eficazes ao lidarmos com a subversão dos valores patriarcais construídos socialmente. Como pontos cruciais deste trabalho, será traçado um paralelo entre a sociedade vitoriana e a sociedade do Sul norte-americano de meados do século XX, enfocando também a protagonista Miss Amelia Evans, que desafia o modelo da heroína gótica tradicional.

Palavras-chave: Transgressão. Gótico. Feminino. Sul dos EUA. Corpo.

ABSTRACT

This work has as its main objective to analyze the novella *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, published in 1951, by the North American writer Carson McCullers, who approached controversial subjects such as sexuality, social roles and their many times concomitant transgressions. In such discussion the presence of elements of the Gothic, the Grotesque and other literary elements will be analyzed as they prove to be efficient when dealing with the subversion of patriarchal ideals that are socially constructed. As crucial points of this work, a parallel between the Victorian society and the society of the North American South of the first half of XX century will be established, and I will also give special attention to the protagonist Miss Amelia Evans, showing how she defies the traditional gothic heroine model.

Keywords: Transgression. Gothic. Feminine. South of the EUA. Body.

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INTRODUCTION

The South of the United States has presented some outstanding writers, such as William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams. After their generation, many other writers appeared: Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor and others. Carson McCullers was one of these outstanding artists and became specially known for dealing in a unique sensitive manner with human emotions of solitude, search for completion and those people who, somehow, did not fit. Before introducing the way this dissertation is going to be conducted, I consider pertinent to take a glance at the author's biography, so that we are aware of the intensity of her life and her importance for American Literature and Theater.

Carson McCullers was born in Columbus, Georgia, as Lula Carson Smith on February 19, 1917, the first born of Lamar and Marguerite Waters Smith. Though she moved from the South in 1934 and only returned for visits, most of her writing was inspired by her southern heritage. Her mother felt she had given birth to a genius from the time Carson was very young and always remained her greatest supporter and strongest ally. When nine years of age, McCullers began studying piano and practiced six to eight hours daily, planning a career as a concert pianist. In 1930 she changed her name to Carson, and began studying piano with Mary Tucker. Carson graduated from Columbus High School in 1933, and after her piano teacher moved away in the spring of 1934, Carson moved to New York City to study at the Juilliard School of Music.

Shortly after her arrival she lost most of the money her parents had given her, and to support herself worked at various jobs and attended night classes in creative writing at Columbia and New York University. She focused on short stories at first, portraying adolescent anguish and unrequited love. Carson returned to Columbus in mid 1935 where she met Reeves McCullers, a soldier, whom she married in 1937. They were divorced in 1941 but remarried in 1945. Shortly after she left him in 1953 he committed suicide.

Carson experienced success early with the publication of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* in 1940 when she was only twenty-three. Its themes foreshadowed nearly everything else she wrote thereafter, namely spiritual isolation as the human condition in modern times, and her identification with, and compassion for, the underdogs and outcasts of society. *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941) was greeted by mixed reviews and was generally considered not as successful as her first novel. Carson suffered the first of several strokes in 1941, believed to be the result of a misdiagnosed case of rheumatic fever which had damaged her heart when she was fifteen. After receiving a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1942 and a \$1000 grant from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1943, McCullers was able to work on her next novel, *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), which again won high critical acclaim. She adapted the novel for the stage where it became a Broadway hit in 1950, winning the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Donaldson Award. McCullers was awarded a Gold Medal by the Theatre Club, Inc. as the best playwright of the year. *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, often considered her finest work, was published as a novella in 1951. It was adapted by Edward Albee for the Broadway stage in the 1963-1964 season, but had only limited success. Carson's next project, *The Square Root of Wonderful*, was her first attempt to write a play from its inception. The play went on Broadway on October 30, 1957, but received poor reviews and closed after forty-five performances. The play was published in 1958. Because of her despondency over her paralyzing strokes and the play's

failure, McCullers began seeing a psychiatrist who had a very positive effect on her, inspiring her to continue writing. *Clock without Hands*, her final novel, appeared in 1961. Though it made the best-seller lists for five months, it received mixed reviews in the United States and is the only one of her novels not adapted for the screen. In addition to her five novels and two plays, McCullers wrote twenty short stories, over two dozen articles and essays, and some poetry and verse. She received numerous awards for her work throughout the years including the Prize of the Younger Generation in 1965, and the Henry Bellamann Award in 1966 in recognition of her "outstanding contribution to literature." On August 15, 1967 she suffered a stroke and remained in a coma until her death on September 29. Her troubled life, which included disastrous relationships with men and women, her behavior and even appearance (see figure on page 71) can somehow give us a hint why McCullers approached the outcast².

I have chosen to analyze McCullers' novella *The Ballad of the Sad Café* for I consider it immensely rich and, despite the awards received, it is still not fully explored and not fully recognized. I will conduct this dissertation by dividing it into three chapters. In the lines below I will show in a few words the scheme of this work.

In the first chapter, I will describe the historical background for the creation of the novella. I subdivided it into four sections to facilitate the viewing of each social-historical element that will intertwine with each along the discussion. These elements are the American South, the Southern Belle and the Southern Lady, and the Victorian Lady. My intention is to characterize both Southern American and Victorian societies, represented here by these models of feminine behavior, and establish a comparison between them. By doing so, it will be possible to see how much from Victorian society the American South has imported, in terms of behavior and traditional values.

² All biographical information can be found at the websites related in the internet references.

In the second chapter, I will bring the theoretical issues involved in the analysis of the novella. In its three sections, I will respectively talk about the literary Gothic and women, sexuality and transgression, and the Grotesque and abjection. All of them are issues lively present in the novella and they all deal with the construction of social ideals that tend to label as deviant those who do not follow the established order, which is beautifully portrayed by Carson McCullers in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*.

In the third chapter, I will depict the traditional Gothic heroine, which is a recurrent element present in works that deal with the literary Gothic and have a female protagonist. Not only socially do we have models that are naturally followed. However, I will demonstrate the way Carson McCullers created a Gothic heroine that went against the prescribed pattern. This is a new theoretical approach that I present with the purpose of contributing to the literary studies on *The Ballad of the Sad Café*.

CHAPTER 1 – HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. THE SOUTH

The intention of this chapter is to provide a historical, social and literary background of the South of the United States. Since the central literary work of this dissertation was written in the middle of the XX century, the range of this chapter will be from the middle of the XIX century up to the time when *The Ballad of the Sad Café* was written. The difficulty in doing so is that the reality of the South is composed not only of actualities, but also of many myths and legends, as put by Kathryn Seidel: “For the southerner, the tension between nostalgia on the one hand and a guilty sense of failure on the other provoked recognition that the southern past was composed both of actual events and legends” (1985, p.30). However, what initially sounded as a difficulty revealed itself to be an intriguing search for the elements that permeate the mind of southern people and novels, and create models that strongly influenced, especially, women’s lives. Considering the several different aspects of the American South that could be covered and the scope of this dissertation, I have decided to focus on gender-related points. These points will be the Southern Lady and Southern Belle and their social, economical and literary role. I will attempt to show the position of women in southern society and the way these two figures mentioned before have a strong influence on the imaginary of the southern people and, consequently, on the composition of a mythical view of the South by them. Since these two

elements were not originally created in the South, I will also characterize their origins, which traces back to the Victorian Lady, in England.

2. THE VICTORIAN LADY

As it has been said before, the models that were imposed on southern women, such as the Southern Belle, were not created by or exclusive of the South of the United States. The southern society, as a whole, was quite based on the English Victorian society. From that time, the South borrowed some elements such as the gentleman, almost a cavalier, and the pious and subservient lady. These similarities between these two societies are well defined by Seidel: "Southerners were, in their moral ideals, Victorians who reacted strongly against the corruption of their society" (1985, p.4). We will see further, more specifically, the creation of this idealized Victorian Lady and its connection with the necessity of preserving society's standards, as the previous quotation just indicates.

It is rather difficult and not very relevant to define whether the figure of the gentleman was forged prior to the lady's or not. I have decided to show the behavior of the Victorian gentleman first in order to use it as basis for the description of the lady. The aristocratic gentleman was able to live from the money he got from the renting of some properties and some other sources. With this money he could spend a great deal of his time on leisure. However, the middle-class man who intended to achieve the status of gentleman was allowed to do so through business and professional work. As it is possible to observe, men were permitted to climb the social ladder through his work and professional skills or, if they were already gentleman, they were kept in that position because of his properties and his status. What may seem like a fair society in which the

individual was able to improve his social position through work, was not so fair indeed.

Women's situation was rather different from men's. If a woman belonged to a high social class, it would be impossible to conceive that she might enter any kind of business or professional activity. Maria Conceição Monteiro chooses very well to cite Sarah Ellis, in *The Woman of England* (1839) about this issue:

Gentlemen can work for hours in almost any kind of occupation (...) and, still, keep themselves gentlemen. However, if a woman just touches an article, no matter how delicate it might be, to negotiate, she loses her purity and she is no longer considered a lady³

(2000, p. 19).

But one might ask why women were so differently treated in comparison to men. The point is that at that time society was developing considerably fast and the social demands from the people created the necessity of the existence of a balance between public and private. The place that could be the representative of such a balance, and solidity and moral was the house. Since the house should represent all the values that society felt necessary to be preserved, nothing more logical than electing an element to be guardian of the values. Such an element was the lady. In order to convey an image of reliability, the lady was supposed to have a series of pre-determined characteristics. Some accomplishments such as speaking French, playing the piano, dancing and knitting were part of the ideal lady. In spite of these accomplishments assigned for the lady, she was never meant to be independent or get a deeper professional and intellectual formation, because such characteristics were always reserved for men. As described by Conceição Monteiro: "The educated woman was

³ My translation, as the others present in this paper.

supposed to be supported by her father or her husband. The social rules established this possibility and any other would be discharged” (2000, p. 25).

The only exception was the possibility of the educated woman to become a governess, while the non-educated women could just work in low-rated activities.⁴ These options were far from being liberating ones, though. Another point that was a great concern for all society was related to women’s sexuality. The lady, an angelical being that is so close to perfection and represents morality, could not present any kind of sexual awareness because this would be harming for her, in men’s opinion. Her role in marriage was to take care of the house, her children and husband. Sexual pleasure was not part of her “sacred” routine and she was only meant to give pleasure to her husband and not to have her own. William Acton was a defender of the ideal of the asexualized woman. We can see the summary of his ideas when Conceição Monteiro (2000) cites him: “He believed that, for society’s happiness, women, except for the nymphomaniac and the prostitutes know little or are indifferent to sexual indulgencies. Love for the house, children, husband and domestic duties are the only passions she nurtures.” (2000, p. 20) After having a view of who the Victorian lady was, we will analyze the way this model influenced the creation of two other role models for women: the Southern Belle and the Southern Lady, in the South of the United States.

3. THE SOUTHERN BELLE

The Southern Belle was the unmarried girl who is ready to be courted and who lives in the plantation. Just like the Victorian lady, she belongs to an aristocratic family. In order to achieve the accomplishments necessary to be considered a Southern Belle, many girls had a special

⁴ We will not see more carefully the role of the governess, because this is not the focus of this section.

preparation in schools. Anne Firror Scott accurately describes this preparation and what aspects were focused:

From earliest childhood girls were trained to the ideals of perfection and submission. (...) Boarding schools for young ladies, to which more and more girls were sent as the century wore on, emphasized correct female behavior more than intellectual development. (...) By the time they arrived at their teens most girls had absorbed the injunctions of the myth

(1970, p. 05).

It is very important to notice the use of the word “myth”. The Southern Belle was really a myth because this model was not created as a consequence of the existence of such kind of woman. It was just the other way around. This myth, like many others, was created and perpetuated in order to control women and protect the way of life they lived and thought to be the best one. In this sense, once more, we see similarities between the American South and the Victorian period. Both attempted to preserve their way of life against external influence. In the South’s case, this external influence, or threat, was the North. After the Civil War, which the South lost, all the values that were praised started receiving interference and southerners fought to keep the standard model of society. To perpetuate the myth of the Southern Belle was a central point of resistance. Carol Manning (1993) corroborates this view when she says:

One popular theory held that the Yankee was descended from the English Puritan, a “Saxon” or “Anglo-

Saxon” type, whereas the Southern gentleman was descended from the English Cavalier, a “Norman” type, who bequeathed to the region the manner of the English gentry. (...) The role of the lady was thus viewed not merely as genteel refinement but as integral to the aristocratic social structure. The image of the beautiful, pious and obedient lady of the chivalric tradition popularized in the Scott novels beloved by the South, was appropriated as the fitting model for the mistress of the plantation

(1993, p. 76).

The Belle is the representation of the South itself and its concerns about the subsistence of their ideals. The idealization of home as the representation of morality and decency and the image of the Victorian lady were abetted in the South exactly by their belief in their superiority in relation to the North. They had to persist in the idealization of women to maintain their values of decency and order. Southern women were put under a massacre of impositions from several different sources to keep them inside the model. Anne Firrort Scott portrays the strains imposed on them:

Churches, schools, parents, books, magazines, all promulgated the same message: be a lady and you will be loved and respected and supported. If you defy the pattern and behave in ways considered unladylike you will be unsexed, rejected, unloved, and you will probably starve

(1970, p. 21).

In the last quotation we see the reference to women. The Belles were not ladies yet. But they had as the reason of their lives to become one and serve their husbands. The problem was that all the apparent glamour in being a Belle was broken when she became a Lady. The Cinderella enchantment falls upon her and her situation turns into a rather harsh one. After seeing the Southern Belle and what was demanded from her, we will see how her life changed when she married and became a Southern Lady.

4. THE SOUTHERN LADY

At first, it would be quite natural to conclude that the Southern Lady was a continuation of the Southern Belle. At least, that is what I thought before I got in contact with a deeper study on them. What really happens is that the life of the Belle suffers a great transformation when she gets married. All the frivolity associated to her when she was unmarried gives place to a life of self-sacrifice, hard work, strains and, still, myths. Some characteristics are similar to the Belle's, some are not. We will see what mostly changed and the way the myth continued being used outside the plantation life.

One basic assumption that must be undone is that the Lady had to be occupied only with silly accomplishments such as the Belle's. The Southern Lady was still responsible for amusing her husband, as the Belle already knew she would have to. Besides that, now, she had the responsibility to take care of her children and of her Master's household. This last item was the greatest difference in the Lady's life and consumed her energy. She had many slaves to do several domestic tasks, including the Mammy who helped her raise her children, but she was responsible for supervising all those slaves. Supervising here means much more than just

making sure they were doing their services correctly. The Southern Lady was supposed to visit and assist every sick slave and help them in every possible way. All this responsibility was a heavy burden for most of the Ladies and many felt disillusioned with that life. As we can see, the glamour of the Southern Belle's life almost completely vanished after marriage. One of the few elements that remained from her youth was the myth of the angelical woman that she had to carry on with. Although the Lady had a hard life, full of harsh activities and responsibilities, she was still expected to represent the role of the keeper of morality. "The image of the southern lady, with her cluster of attributes of appearance and purity, belied the reality of her situation" (SEIDEL, 1985, p.7). The Southern Lady found herself in a dazzling position: at the same time that she had to work very hard to supervise the slaves, raise her children and take care of the house, she also had to maintain the image of a weak and dependant woman whose attributes should be all directed to convey the image of placidity, morality and, especially, subservience.

After the period of the plantation life, the Civil War and the World Wars, many aspects of the southern society changed. Industrialization brought great modifications and, along with the wars, made that society start questioning the past and the values they praised so firmly. However, these changes were not able to erase the ideal of a better society in relation to the North and, consequently, of the Southern Lady. Although women's role changed with them entering the job market, the myth was still necessary to keep the aura of superiority that the Southern patriarchal society wished. As women started participating in the economical system, those who claimed for a voice of their own started being a threat, as Seidel states:

The war machine brought industrialization to the South. (...) The southern economic market required workers to produce cotton goods for the war, but because much of the

male labor force was in Europe, a labor shortage developed. Many owners of vast tracts of land, having fewer laborers to work their farms, moved into town. (...) Women began to enter the labor force in factories, offices, and traditionally white male semiprofessional and professional positions. The labor force thus included more blacks, poor whites, and women than ever before, and these groups became part of a growing middle class that challenged the aristocracy for “elite” status in the community. Caste, class, and sex roles, the foundation of the southern “squirearchy”, were upset

(1985, p. 27).

As we can see, the necessity for keeping the myth in order to maintain a “reality” based on myths was very strong in the XIX century, before and after the Civil War, and so it continued being in the XX century, even with the changes brought by war and industrialization. The patriarchal South needs to keep the myth alive and to diminish the gap between reality and myth, as Anne Firrora Scott says:

A society increasingly threatened from the outside has every reason to try to diminish internal threats to its stability. (...) If the distance between the myth and reality became so great that it could not be overlooked, then the situation might be threatening indeed

(1970, p. 21).

After seeing the way the Victorian Lady model has been appropriated by the American Southern society and the reasons why the Southern Belle and Southern Lady are so necessary to be maintained, we will see the way Carson McCullers made use of her literary skills in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* to construct a different view of Southern women and show how restrained they still might be by the myths and the subservience expected from them, a pattern of passive behavior that is perpetuated in many texts. The author bravely did so, although this different construction might be considered a threat. As Linda Tate says:

(...) the human tendency to misread the “Other” is even more damaging for women and especially for southern women. Traditionally expected to refrain from challenging the white southern patriarchy (as white women they were subservient ladies on pedestals, as black women they were to be sexual chattel with no agency or voice), southern women may now construct texts that – if read carefully – show them to be much more assertive, subversive, and radical in their intent
(1994, p. 150).

CHAPTER 2 – THEORETICAL ISSUES IN *THE BALLAD OF THE SAD CAFÉ*

1. WOMEN AND THE GOTHIC

Patterns of behavior have always been imposed on women, but some have not accepted them and have fought to build their own subjectivities, even at the risk of being excluded and scorned at. One of these women, as we have seen so far, was Carson McCullers. In *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1951) she builds the protagonist as a representation of the dissatisfaction of southern women with the obligation to accept the “Southern Lady” stereotype. This section aims at analyzing the transgressing behavior of the protagonist, Miss Amelia, in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, in social, economic and sexual terms. She will be compared to the main male figures: Cousin Lymon and Marvin Macy. I will then examine how the presence of Gothic elements, which represent the transgression of pre-established norms and customs contribute and can be considered essential to the aforementioned work.

At first it is important to explain that I will briefly approach some concepts of the traditional Gothic which will serve as a basis to focus on their relationship with the work analyzed herein. As previously mentioned, the Gothic is a genre which involves the rupture with normalization and brings questioning, even if a disguised way. Questioning, in this case, does not only refer to a historical past which has left open scars, but also to a present which is rigid and oppressive, and in this case, focused on the oppression of women. In *Gothic*, Fred Botting provides a good definition of

the Gothic as he says that Gothic atmospheres indicate the return of the past upon the present in a disturbing way (1996, p.1). Botting also reminds us that the ambivalence and excess of Gothic figures were seen as signs of transgression (1996, p.6). The agents of such transgressions are those elements of society which do not fit the models created by it, and who can be called "The Other", or ex-centrics, a term coined by Linda Hutcheon (1990). Among these ex-centrics there are women, black people, homosexuals and all the others who somehow do not fit the culturally-created models, as the Southern Lady was for southern American women in the first half of the 20th century, the same epoch when McCullers wrote this novella. This and other models are still present many times nowadays. This ideal woman should be loving, kind, beautiful and dependent on her husband. He, on the other hand, should be responsible for providing the household with all the necessary things. As we can see in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, the protagonist does not fit any aspect of the feminine role model expected by society. Opposite to what is pre-established, Miss Amelia is a businesswoman who rules the city with man-like authority and attitude. It's important to point out that, at that time, the job market was already marked by changes, and that women were becoming part of it. However, it was not possible for a woman, especially in the South, to run her own business, without being the shadow of any man, and in addition to that, be the highest power in the entire city. William Chafe explains the job market scenario at the time and the position women held in it:

Throughout the early twentieth century the number of women who held paying jobs continued to increase [...] For the most part, however, these women workers were young, single, and poor, their jobs low paying, sex segregated, and offering little opportunity for advancement. By the end of the 1930's state, local, and national authorities all endorsed discriminatory treatment against married women seeking employment. [...] In effect, a married middle-class white

woman who wished to work was an anomaly, acting in violation of both her social status and the attitudes of the dominant culture

(Chafe, 1988, p.260).

Later in the text, Chafe speaks about the years 1941-1945. In this period, more than six million women, most of them married and over 30 years of age, had their first job. However, an important feature of this growing market was that none of these women earned the same compensation as men. Besides that, very few of them occupied relevant positions which offered big responsibilities. Based on that, how can we explain Miss Amelia's position in society? Carson McCullers clearly shows her dissatisfaction with the limitations imposed on women by biological determinism, resulting in a culture in which it is natural for men to be superior to women. In order to give shape to the transgression occurred in Amelia's case, the author makes use of Gothic elements in the construction of the attitude and the body of the character. Both are completely opposite to what is considered woman-like by society. Having a masculine appearance, she unites her transgression, that is, the social-economic position which made her an ex-centric, to the body which adds a new element to this rupture with the boundaries created by society. Being audacious enough to build her body differently from that of the "Southern Lady", the protagonist defies the dominant culture and chooses her own "condition" in a dialogic way, non-conformant to society. (BEAUVOIR, 1997, p.29). This way, she places her subjectivity over any aesthetic model imposed by society and rejects the submission which is normally attributed to "The Other".

Besides the aforementioned instances of transgression, McCullers gives her protagonist one more spot of resistance to the normalization

which surrounds her. Miss Amelia not only rejects, but abhors any kind of sexual contact with a man. This is made clear at the wedding night, when she cannot stay in the same bedroom with Marvin Macy for more than about half an hour. They separate some days later, after a particular marriage experience which includes an unusual event. One day, Amelia punches her "husband" only because he had approached her from the back and touched her shoulder, in order to call her attention to something (McCULLERS, p.30). The mere threat of any physical contact with a man, out of the scope of a fight, made Amelia completely confused. The Gothic appears here once more, presenting one of its most recurrent themes, taboos. This idea is expressed by David Punter in *The Literature of Terror*, when he explains that Gothic fiction writers usually approach areas of our lives that offend, that are suppressed, those areas that are normally hidden in order to maintain the balance of society, and of ourselves (2004, p.184).

However, such transgressions cannot be accepted passively in a patriarchal society in which women are inferior to men. McCullers has built a protagonist who personifies all the dissatisfaction against a system which is based on constant dichotomy, in which there are always normal and abnormal, good and evil, the standard and the marginal. Society needs to expel the elements which disturb the balance of the dominant culture. In order to do so, it transforms all those who differ from the constructed model into monsters who must be feared and thrown to the borders so that the limits which surround and protect society as it is remain protected. There are two fundamental elements in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*; they represent repression by a patriarchal society which needs to silence the voices which insist on questioning, defying and transgressing the boundaries which keep it under control: Cousin Lymon and Marvin Macy.

Cousin Lymon is the character who triggers a series of changes in Miss Amelia's life. He arrives mysteriously and claims to be Miss Amelia's cousin. This fact is never proved, but he soon wins her confidence and is considered worthy of her protection. . After meeting and falling in love with him, she becomes kinder, changes the structure of her business and makes the place the lively and hospitable Café in the title of the book. Amelia's behavior then becomes more similar to that of any woman. This change evidences that Lymon represents the weakness of the protagonist, since her strength and survival in that society depended on her male-like body and attitude. This way, he brings back from the past the femininity and fragility Amelia had transgressed and rejected, which she considered to be overcome. Cousin Lymon embodies the "strange", which is deeply related to the Gothic, because it is a disturbing element which brings ghosts from the past to the present without providing any explanations about their origin, as debated by Freud (1919).

We can ask ourselves why Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon feel attracted to each other. Both are different from the stereotype: Lymon, a man, is delicate, has a small, fragile body and a frivolous attitude. Amelia, a woman, is muscular, strong and rude. What both have in common are their grotesquely-formed bodies, an indication of their deviation from the norm. They find in each other what they reject in themselves, what caused repulse to them, that is the "abject" (this topic will be further developed in section 3 of this chapter) of their being (KRISTEVA, 1982). This relationship of abjection is connected to the desire within each one of us, but which we insist on repelling. It consists of attraction versus repulsion. Concerning these two characters, there is rejection to masculinity and femininity. Cousin Lymon and Miss Amelia are so complementary that they feel desire for each other. At the same time they also embody what is rejected in their own beings, their abject. Nevertheless, Amelia not has only identified the abject within herself: she has also become an element of abjection to society. By showing her choice of neglecting sexuality, by

refusing to have sexual intercourses with her husband, by being a successful at business, she has become something which cannot be related to any other element in the town. Soon she puts in danger the normality which supported people's lives. For a woman in this society trying to reach accomplishments is already to walk on dangerous grounds, and violating gender prescriptions is to become a freak. The Gothic may represent not only Amelia's dissatisfaction, but the dissatisfaction of society and also the return of a past which comes to demand reparation for what has been done. Later in the novella, the protagonist has to pay for not conforming to the abjection.

It seems everything is in its place: Amelia is in love with Lymon, who has become the center of attention to her and to the café. However, as mentioned before, Amelia can no longer live the way she did. One day, her husband, Marvin Macy, comes back to the city, years after having given up the marriage, left the city humiliated and restarted in the marginality he lived before meeting Amelia. When he comes back, Marvin Macy clearly represents all society which comes to punish Miss Amelia for her transgressions and for defying the dominant culture by negating and going beyond all the social, sexual and economic limits imposed on the southern woman. She should be a "Southern Lady", but she is not. Macy is there to restore the boundaries and "what was repressed thus returns to haunt our heroes with the vivid immediacy of the original moment" (BRUHM, 2002, p.267). Miss Amelia's punishment comes through the object of her desire and love. Cousin Lymon finds in Marvin Macy what he wants: a stronger model of masculinity than in Amelia, who has become weaker and sweeter after falling in love with her cousin:

[...] since first setting eyes on Marvin Macy the hunchback was possessed by an unnatural spirit. Every

minute he wanted to be following along behind this jailbird, and he was full of silly schemes to attract attention to himself. Still Marvin Macy either treated him hatefully or failed to notice him at all

(1998, p. 49,50).

As time goes by, Amelia tries to accept the situation the way it is for fear of losing Lymon. However, soon comes the day when Marvin tries to destroy Amelia, that is, the day in which society punishes her for her outraging life. Lymon takes Macy to live with him in Amelia's house, but she does not complain about it. As expected, though, the ex-couple faces several moments of clash, but the ultimate fight finally happens one day. Mysteriously, nothing is clearly combined between the two parts involved, but several signs indicate the day has arrived. They are in the Center of the Café, which is already cleared, without tables and chairs, so that both have more space to fight, now, for the last time. The fight develops in a balanced way, once Amelia and Macy are equally big and strong. There is a moment when Amelia is about to win the fight, and also to validate her transgression in that society against which she fights, when she is finally punished for threatening the standards. Indeed, what really hurts her is that this punishment comes exactly from Lymon, her beloved one.

But at that instant, just as the fight was won, a cry sounded in the café that caused a shrill bright shiver to run down the spine. And what took place has been a mystery ever since. The whole town was there to testify what happened, but here were those who doubted their own eyesight. For the counter on which Cousin Lymon stood was at least twelve feet from the fighters in the centre of the café. Yet at the instant Miss Amelia grasped the throat of Marvin Macy the hunchback sprang forward and sailed through the air as though he had

grown hawk wings. He landed on the broad back of Miss Amelia and clutched at her neck with his clawed little fingers.

(1998, p.64,65).

We have, in this moment, as in the mysterious appearance of Lymon saying that he was Amelia's relative, the Fantastic, which is directly related to the Gothic. On the Fantastic, Todorov develops the idea that in a world much like ours, an event takes place and it can not be explained by the laws of this same familiar world (TODOROV, 1970, p. 30). After her defeat, Amelia's belongings are destroyed and usurped by Marvin Macy and Lymon, who flee together right after. After this event, Amelia gives up the Café, and is no longer that strong woman who used to rule city before the arrival of Cousin Lymon. Her once big muscles become only a memory which is no longer visible in her thin and weak body.

Carson McCullers tried to demonstrate her dissatisfaction with the limits imposed by society to the woman in the South, and built Miss Amelia as a representation of what was considered a transgression at the time: a successful woman in business, behaving like a man, who lived the way she wanted and whose attitude broke all boundaries of gender. Unfortunately, Mc Cullers also had to show that this kind of attitude is received and punished. Naturally, the Gothic has a fundamental role in her book. It is a genre which questions and subverts the existing norms, norms which have brought very serious consequences to many women in the beginning of the 20th century and still do the same today. We hopefully expect that this and other works come to show and change this truth.

2. TRANGRESSION AND SEXUALITY

Society in general tends to create behavior patterns in order to maintain its balance and avoid great transformations. These models are found in several fields, such as sexuality and economy. The aim of this section is to show that the character of Miss Amelia in “The Ballad of the Sad Café” challenges and transgresses the models of love relationships in a normative male-sex-centered society. Besides that, I will also aim at establishing a connection between the construction of her body to her struggle for the position she has in her town and the consequences of her subversive behavior.

We realize that in our present time we live in a society where love relationships are governed by the idea of sex-centrism. Moreover, our society preaches that the role model to be followed is a relationship in which two elements of opposite genders behave according to the gender prescribed for each and have a “healthy” sexual life. Agreeing that our society is still like this, although it has evolved a lot in the last decades, we should also agree that in the first half of the twentieth century these issues were much more troublesome. It was then that “The Ballad of the Sad Café” was written by Carson McCullers in the South of the United States. Miss Amelia, the protagonist of the novella, was a dark, tall and strong woman who ruled her town and had a strong male behavior. In terms of sexual behavior, more specifically, she married once, which led her to the obligation of playing her sexual role. There is no description of sexual intercourse in the text, but we conclude from Miss Amelia’s reaction that she felt completely uncomfortable with whatever happened in her honeymoon. Here is a short passage from the book in which their honeymoon is summarized:

The bride and the groom ate a grand supper prepared by Jeff, the old Negro who cooked for Miss Amelia. The bride took second servings of everything, but the groom picked with his food. Then the bride went about her ordinary business – reading the newspaper, finishing an inventory of the stock in the store, and so forth. The groom hung about in the doorway with a loose, foolish, blissful face and was not noticed. At eleven o'clock the bride took a lamp and went upstairs. The groom followed close behind her. So far all had gone decently enough, but what followed after was unholy. Within half an hour Miss Amelia had stomped down the stairs in breeches and a khaki jacket. Her face had darkened so that it looked quite black

(1998, p. 28).

This led, some time later, together with total lack of affinity with her husband, to the failure of the relationship. Miss Amelia did not feel herself able to perform the role all society and, especially, her husband expected from her. A possibility that I raise is that for a moment she interacted with society unaware of the fact that she would have to play a role she was not used and prepared to and she could not pretend to be an insider. It would be much less dangerous if she did that. However Miss Amelia had her own subjectivity and she was not considered an insider for that. And who decides who the insider is and who the outsider is? Many people are taught to recognize these two groups since their childhood and this differentiation becomes so natural that one might think there is no mechanism behind it. But there is a huge social-policing mechanism veiled under this process. Jamake Highwater defines it accurately:

We often take for granted the notion that some people are insiders, while others are outsiders. But such a notion is a social contrivance, that, like virtually every public construct, is a legacy of a primordial and tribal mentality.(...) the walls that separate insiders from outsiders is not born of human nature but methodically built, brick by brick, by tribal convention. The “wall” (...) is mechanistic process – a barrier meticulously constructed by erratic community decrees as a means of identifying those who are part of the group and those who are not

(1997, p.5).

Miss Amelia did not isolate herself or conformed to the norms because of the pressure made by society. By doing so she became a threat to it, as claimed by Jamake Highwaters when citing James Baldwin: “The victim who is able to articulate the situation of the victim has ceased to be a victim – he or she has become a threat” (1997, p.6). In order to crystallize the exemplification of Miss Amelia’s behavior, we shall analyze her love relationship with Cousin Lymon. She fell in love with a dwarf who was delicate and had preferences considered by common sense as being female, such as gossiping, hanging around chatting and talking about silly subjects. Here we have a total inversion of roles: the biological woman, Amelia, is strong, assertive and runs the town and her business, while the biological man, Lymon, is weak, delicate and spends the whole day on leisure. We have the deconstruction of the ideal of love relationship. Not only are the roles subverted and, in this case inverted, but sex is assigned with a minor role. Miss Amelia does not submit to the importance of sex as prescribed by society, in which a woman was supposed to search for a stronger virile male element, and the consequent female receptiveness to this male element expected from her, as Ann Oakley states: “The female’s

sexuality is supposed to lie in her receptiveness and this is not just a matter of her open vagina: it extends to the whole structure of feminine personality as dependent, passive, unaggressive and submissive.” (1972, p.36). By subverting the sex role, McCullers shows that if you give sex, as it is prescribed, the position of centrality when building your situation, you are providing society with ways of normalizing you. When studying transgenders, for instance, you see that people have subjectivities that surpass their sexual orientation. As Eliane Borges Berutti says when citing Jay Prosser: ⁵“(…) the term “*transgender*” fits the gender category, it is a description of sexual identity” (BERUTTI, 2002, p.111). I do not mean to say that one must erase sexuality, but I mean to say that the author shows that love goes far beyond sexual intercourse. Consequently, she, through Miss Amelia, subverts the whole social structure so much preserved and worshiped by our normative society, because the sexual can not be thought without the social, as we will see in more details in the next lines.

But, what does it mean to say that sexual transgression is linked to the social one? In order to try to explain this statement I will show the relation between the body and the social. More than often the body is seen as limited to the biological, which is linked to sexual role. Since birth, boys and girls are expected to have a specific behavior and to acknowledge established positions. At least, in some cases, these patterns are broken, still in childhood, such as in the case of Tomboys. And when we deal with adulthood, these and all other alternative bodies become unacceptable, they become freaks. Our patriarchal society and its power create these models and use them to control not only the sexual behavior but, first and foremost, the social structure that lies hidden behind the sexuality issue. As Michel Foucault depicted in *Microfísica do Poder* : ⁶“(…) sexuality is not fundamentally what power is afraid of; but that, undoubtedly, and foremost, is what power is exercised through” (2005, p. 236). As it was said before, we can not affirm that Miss Amelia, in *The*

⁵ My translation.

⁶ My translation.

Ballad of the Sad Café, has completely denied sex, but we may state that she assigned to it a lower position in terms of importance. Agreeing that she did that, we may now focus on the major way she subverted gender notions and maintained her leading position in town. The way she did that was through her gender expression. Gender expression is not linked to sexuality *per se*. It is, in fact, linked to the way one behaves, the way one acts in terms of talking, dressing and other practical aspects. In one of the previous paragraphs we had a bird's eye view of Miss Amelia's. Now it is demanding that we have a small summary made from excerpts from the novella to see the way she behaved, to see her gender expression:

She was a dark, tall woman with bones and muscles like a man. Her hair was cut short and brushed back from the forehead, and there was about her sunburned face a tense, haggard quality. She might have been a handsome woman if, even then, she was not slightly cross-eyed. (...) Miss Amelia ate slowly and with the relish of a farm hand. She ate with both elbows on the table, bent over the plate, her knees spread wide apart and her feet braced on the rungs of the chair

(1998, p.2;9).

Instead of making a direct connection between her gender expression and her sexual orientation, I will establish a connection between the former and her social position in town. At that time, a woman was not expected neither to run any kind of business nor run a whole town. Women were already being inserted in the job market, but society was restrictive in relation to how far a woman could get. In spite of the fact that Miss Amelia showed a masculine gender expression in a society that

would not allow such a behavior, she was able to build her own situation and achieve the position she had. She found a way to fight against the restraints society imposed on women: sticking to her subjectivity. Only through this behavior she was able to articulate a different situation. Besides acting in a more masculine way than it was expected from her, she also owned the café and “operated a still three miles back in the swamp. (...) With all things which could be made by the hands Miss Amelia prospered”. (McCULLERS, p.02). As it would not be expected from a woman, “the only use that Miss Amelia had for other people was to make money out of them. And in this she succeeded. Mortgages on crops and property, a sawmill, money in the bank – she was the richest woman for miles around” (McCULLERS, p. 03). We can see that Miss Amelia, for reasons we are not proposing to discuss at this moment, presents a masculine gender expression and she can maintain her social position in town exactly because she did not give in to society’s demands and stuck to her individuality. Instead of submitting to the dichotomy men/women in which each side receives a series of brands such as fragile/strong, passive/active and others, Miss Amelia acknowledged diverse characteristics and roles, and constructed her body and situation. She did not take into account the values through which women are normally judged, the male ones, and gave room to her specificities. As Denise Riley claims when citing Elizabeth Gross, “[t]he social and patriarchal disavowal of the specificity of women’s bodies is a function, not only of discriminatory social practices, but, more insidiously, of the phallogentrism invested in the régimes of knowledge – science, philosophy, the arts – which function only because and with the effect of the submersion of women under male categories, values and norms” (1999, p. 220-221). So far, this may seem quite simple to be understood and the discussion could have an end just now. However, Miss Amelia’s behavior is much more complex than it may seem and her situation, much more difficult. During the narrative one can realize that after meeting Cousin Lymon and falling in love with him, Miss Amelia starts behaving in a more feminine way than she used to. The

effect of love on her was one that made her, to a certain extent, become more opened to sociability in that oppressive patriarchal society. This change in behavior can be clearly seen in the following passage from the novella:

Outwardly she did not seem changed at all. But there were many who noticed her face. She watched all that went on, but most of the time her eyes were fastened lonesomely on the hunchback. (...) Miss Amelia was the same in appearance. During the week she still wore swamp boots and overalls, but on Sunday she put on a dark red dress that hung on her in a most peculiar fashion. Her manners, however, and her way of life were greatly changed. She still loved a fierce lawsuit, but she was not so quick to cheat her fellow man and to exact cruel payments. Because the hunchback was so extremely sociable she even went about a little (...)

(1998, p. 20, 21).

After Miss Amelia fell in love with Cousin Lymon she began to live a constant shift of gender expression. When she wanted to show her affection for him she assumed a more female expression. At the same time she maintained her masculine expression, which was prevailing. I compare her situation to the Postcolonial concept of “diaspora”. Bill Ashcroft defines diaspora as being “the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions” (2000, p. 68). We can see that diaspora involves geographical relocation of peoples. In Miss Amelia’s case I propose that she is involved in a diasporic movement, but not in the

geographical sense. The process in which she is involved is a “psychological diaspora”. Miss Amelia built a fluent subjectivity in which she moved from one kind of gender expression into another one. And she did so because, although patriarchal society did not allow her to live her situation, she was a complex being that could not conform to the simplification of biological determinism. Instead of moving from her homeland into a new geographical region, Miss Amelia had to move into her different gender expressions in order to create alternative modes of living that might satisfy her necessities as a complex human being, as all human beings are in fact. The problem is that her female gender expression weakens her before society and she ends up suffering the consequences for having subverted the norms. Since Miss Amelia is in a normative society, she suffered harsh consequences for her attempt to build her own subjectivity, despite all the models they tried to impose on her. By trying to be a subject in a non-conformist manner, she became an object. As it is affirmed by Judith Butler:

The object designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject’s domain; (...) the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside, which is, after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation”

(BUTLER, 1993, p. 3).

(As I said before the Abjection issue will be more carefully treated in the following section, in which it will be dialoguing with other concepts and ideas.)

In the previous paragraph, we have the presence of an element that represents one of the greatest threats to women's subjectivity affirmation and, consequently, to Miss Amelia: biological determinism. This has been one of the most recurrent "explanations" to the fact that a natural inferiority must be assigned to women. In some discussions concerning sexuality, women and social roles, it is quite common to have some people arguing that women are fragile, submissive and etc. because they were born women and that is enough as an argument. This kind of argument reduces women's subjectivity to the biological and overlooks all the social interactions that occur between women, and people in general, and the world. There is an animalization of the discussion, instead of an intelligent analysis of the elements involved in one's subjectivity formation, as Stevi Jackson affirms to happen in relation to sexuality, in this case:

The argument that specific forms of human behaviour, especially sexual behaviour are 'natural' is often based on comparisons with animals, particularly other primates. As a species we do share some characteristics and fundamental needs with other mammals, but to apply evidence from animal observation directly to human behaviour is to ignore crucial differences. For human beings exist in a social environment structured through language and symbols, and this plays a much more [powerful] influen[ce]. (...) [I]t is this very social environment and its crucial role that is likely to be forgotten in discussions of the sexual

(1996, p.63).

Biological determinism is an instrument used to build an artificial stratification of human beings that surpasses the anatomic study of the human body. It intoxicates the social structure of our society and creates invisible, but present walls around specific groups, such as women, black people and others. Once classified, one is not much likely to maintain an own situation and subjectivity, unless this person decides to fight and stand the consequences. And these consequences will come, as they came for Miss Amelia.

Miss Amelia was a transgressor in almost every possible way. She had a body construction that already indicated she was different from the myth of the Southern Lady, who was supposed to be delicate and dependent of male protection; she refused to keep her marriage with Marvin Macy, in which she would have to play the role of a normative wife; and she also took a socio-economic position that was expected to be taken by a white male. She ended up being caught in the middle of her psychological diasporic movement. But even then she did not give up moving into a new situation. Her body changes drastically, from a strong to a weak one, after being defeated and she isolates herself in her house. This can be seen as a sign of failure, but it can be also seen as a new diasporic movement into a new situation which may allow her to go on.

We have seen that Miss Amelia's character is an androgynous one who lives a constant shift of gender expression: from a masculine into a feminine one and the other way around. And what is the definition for androgyny? The most ordinary is the one that considers that an androgynous person is a man that acts like a woman or a woman that acts like a man and whose respective physical characteristics lead to a misreading of their genders. Another reading of the androgynous being, and less simplistic too, is the one that defines it as being a person who

presents both female and male characteristics creating a balance that disables others to provide gender labels. In some cultures and societies this kind of element was very much praised as a type of deity. However, due to the circumstances, such as the place she lived and the type of society she was inserted in, this shift was considered rather grotesque by the people in the “dreary town”. By presenting such a grotesque body, McCullers, who had an androgynous appearance herself (see figure on page 71) refuses to submit to prescribed patterns of femininity. Therefore, the author of the novella breaks with traditional conception of the angel of the house, the beautiful woman, modeling a new female tradition by appropriating the grotesque to protest against prevailing gender norms. So, we observe that Miss Amelia rebels against prescribed roles of white Southern femininity like the Southern Lady, for instance.

3. THE GROTESQUE AND ABJECTION

We are now able to speak of an accomplishment for women in the field of philosophical aesthetics, especially since this word identifies precisely what aesthetic thought has always denied them. We are well aware that Western philosophy has been notoriously gender-biased, despite claims of universality in its premises and propositions. That bias has prompted the exclusion of women from the arena of theoretical discourse, and from the possibilities of creative mastery and the ascendancy that the aesthetic savors. We have only recently begun to interrogate the biases of philosophical aesthetics, by explaining the relations among art, gender, and culture; complicating received constructions of the viewing subject; offering more egalitarian aesthetic criteria; attempting to revise and adapt the categories of the beautiful, the

sublime, and the grotesque; and elaborating the repression of the female body.

It is a recurrent observation that woman has been excluded from spheres of intellectual and artistic productivity based upon the understanding of her body as an obstacle to reason and morality, faculties required for philosophic-artistic competence. The view that feminine flesh defies order and reason has early expression in Aristotle's pronouncement that because woman is of the flesh, she has no association with the activity of the mind. Repeated with some variation many times again, principally by Darwin and Freud, this view finds its way into modern aesthetic theory through some philosophers like Kant and Schopenhauer in particular, who focus directly on the relationship of women's fleshliness to their intellectual and moral inferiority. Feminist interventions rest on the perception that traditional aesthetics repudiates a female or feminine of its own construction, and seek the reconstruction of the female body as an aesthetic force. Mary Russo, whom I approach deeper below, rehabilitates the female body in the service of a feminist aesthetic. In her work, the abject woman becomes a subversive element of female liberation: she speaks an alternative, disruptive language, immersing herself in the significances of the flesh, becoming monstrous as she defies the symbolic order. The abject woman abandons her oppressive confinement to the category of the beautiful, reforms her association with the grotesque, and contests her expulsion from the sublime.

At this point, it is extremely important for the understanding of the affirmations in relation to the beautiful and the sublime and its associations with society's attitude towards women, that we explore both concepts. The first study of the value of the sublime is the treatise ascribed to Longinus: *On the Sublime*. For Longinus, artistic genius was the skill of metaphor. Prior to the eighteenth century sublime was a rhetoric term predominantly relevant to literary criticism. Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant both investigated the subject. However, the focus will be on the work of the

former, for I consider it to be the most relevant for the purpose of this section. First, we will see the definition of each one of the terms, the beautiful and the sublime, and, then, the relations we can establish with society and *The Ballad of the Sad Café*.

Burke, in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), establishes the difference between the two concepts especially in relation to the effect each one of them produces on the person who looks at them. The beautiful produces an effect linked to love, passion or any kind of feeling similar to them (2004, p. 128). These beautiful bodies have a set of qualities that mesmerizes one who stares at them and produce a pleasant moment of contemplation. However, Edmund Burke somehow surprises the reader when he desattaches the conceptualizing of the beautiful from the idea of perfection, fitness and proportion. He considers that it is plausible to affirm that not all proportional bodies are beautiful in consequence of this first characteristic and the same works for fitness. In relation to perfection, he considers that people are told that they should love perfection, while, on the other hand, no one needs to tell another that he/she should love a fine woman. I agree with him in relation to the affirmation that says that people are taught to love perfection, but I question if this mechanism is not applied to all the characteristics he describes as present in beautiful body and which we are about to enumerate in the next lines. The author characterizes the beautiful with qualities such as being small, smooth, delicate and elegant. Curiously, these characteristics are the same that are applied to the Southern Belle, as we have already seen in the previous chapter. Consequently, it is not strange to see that Burke links the beautiful to the female and its "nature", establishing a condition of delicacy and fragility for both the beautiful and women, as we can see in the excerpt from Burke's work below:

An air of robustness and strength is very prejudicial to beauty. An appearance of delicacy, and even of fragility, is almost essential to it. (...) The beauty of women is considerably owing to their weakness, or delicacy, and is even enhanced by their timidity, a quality of mind analogous to it

(2004, p. 150).

In contrast to the beautiful, the sublime, according to the English philosopher, is a body that produces an effect of astonishment and somehow terrifies the one who is looking at it. And Burke further explains that “[a]stonishment (...) is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence and respect” (2004, p.101). The sublime brings with it a feeling of greatness and power. Speaking of greatness, Burke affirms that the sublime is usually presented in great dimensions, exception made to those that, although with modest dimensions, convey an image of danger, a fearful image. In relation to power, and consequently to the conceptualization of the masculine as being superior, the author establishes a clear relation between the effects that the sublime produces and the position of superiority held by it. He defends that the horror brought by its sight gives the sublime body a position that allows it to exercise power over those who stare at it. That is the reason for the philosopher to connect it to the position of men in relation to women and to affirm that this relation is inevitable, as he states in the following passage:

I know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power. [...] And indeed the ideas of pain and above all of death, are so very affecting, that whilst, we remain in the presence of whatever is supposed to have the power of

inflicting either, it is impossible to be perfectly free from terror. [...] But pain is always inflicted by a power in some way superior, because we never submit to pain willingly. So that strength, violence, pain and terror, are ideas that rush upon the mind together

(2004, p. 102).

Through the beautiful and sublime's characteristics that have been shown above, it is possible to notice that both of them are society's mechanism to establish boundaries and maintain gender division steady. It is established that the masculine occupies a position of superiority that produces admiration and fear, a powerful position. On the other hand, women are thrown into an atmosphere of weakness and subservience and are still led to believe that this enhances their beauty and makes them more feminine. Besides that, they are still taught to consider as a universal truth the idea that men are superior, even if Society and the world change drastically along with the job market. Burke describes accurately this mechanism through which this created superiority of the sublime defines itself as eternal, a social construct that endures the passing of time:

Another source of the sublime, is infinity; [...] Infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime. There are scarce any things which can become the objects of our senses that are really, and in their own nature infinite. But the eye not being able to perceive the bounds of many things, they seem to be infinite, and they produce the same effects as if they were really so. [...] Whenever we

repeat any idea frequently, the mind by a sort mechanism repeats it along after the first cause has ceased to operate

(2004, p. 115).

If a woman attempts to cross the boundaries that keep the beautiful apart from the sublime, if a woman breaks the ties that tell her to be weak, delicate and inferior, if one of these women tries to gain power or simply presents a body that somehow possess the greatness of a sublime one, this individual will automatically be labeled as grotesque and society will consider that she must be taken back to her place or, if the first option does not work, she must be expelled, she must be abjected. And each period and each society redefines what the beautiful is, making the suitable changes, if necessary, and continues pumping energy into the machine that controls individuals and keeps the balance of the establishment. Women have been assigned to the category of the beautiful precisely because that category is bound up with mutability. The beautiful serves as a suitable repository for this source of consternation in the aesthetic. Foucault perceived this process in relation to sexuality, and his theory fits any kind of transgression as well:

The play of limits and transgression seems to be regulated by a simple obstinacy: transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line that closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration, and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable

(2000, p. 70).

Because the history of attitudes toward woman's body has long been structured with reference to the traditional aesthetics of the beautiful and the grotesque, which women can represent, and the sublime, which they cannot, feminists have been motivated to reconsider these categories. Simone de Beauvoir makes an effort in this direction when she proposes that woman can signify in drastically opposite ways because she is passive, rather than active like men. Men are defined through their acts, she proposes, while women, inactive, are defined mainly by the ideas of men. Thus, the female body is sometimes figured as compensatory to a woman's intellectual weakness, other times as a token of the corruption that confronts the aesthetic ideal. For Simone de Beauvoir, woman's body is the repository both of men's fears and his desires, of his repulsions and his dreams (*Second Sex*, 1997, p.139-198). The psychological ambivalence Simone de Beauvoir describes informs the cultural identification of the female body with the beautiful and the grotesque, and as an obstacle to the sublime.

Mary Russo's *The Female Grotesque* also relates grotesque and abject in the development of a new aesthetic. Emphasizing "grotesque performance" for women, Russo admires Amelia Earhart's⁷ aerobatic stunting for its refusal of conventional femininity. The history of literary and artistic representation, as well as the history of public and political discourses, reflects and reinforces the idea that women keep themselves small and unseen, that they neither take up too much space in the world, nor make spectacles of themselves. As a subversive alternative, Russo prefers that women make themselves prodigious and visible, that they seek majesty, and so disrupt ancient definitions of the ideal woman as restrained and diminutive. A grotesque performer like Earhart practices

⁷ Amelia Mary Earhart (24 July 1897 – missing 2 July 1937, declared deceased 5 January 1939) was a noted American aviation pioneer and women's rights advocate. Earhart was the first woman to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross, which she was awarded as the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic.

philobatism, or the will to be suspended in mid-air, defying her groundedness within and through traditional femininity. The grotesque performer, because ugly and aberrant according to conventional culture, refuses the imperative that she stay beautiful and domesticated, and seeks the heights of self-fashioning with reference to a body that does not obey prescribed limits. For Russo, Earhart's stunting is both a model of female exceptionalism, and an instance of woman as sideshow object, simultaneously demonstrating and reproving her cultural status as a monstrous body. In *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Miss Amelia acts exactly through the same pattern of groundedness-defying. Living in her small Southern town, she would be theoretically limited by her body, in the sense that she was a woman whose body was excessively strong to comport a female character, becoming even monstrous inside the aesthetic system created in and by Society. Although she had received the status of monstrous, she refused, like Earhart, to be locked inside a domesticating process in which she would be expected to achieve the level of grace that would be responsible for reinserting her into the "acceptable" pattern of femininity, assigning her with, in the case of the American South, the role of the Southern Lady.

Noting that the grotesque body is always a social body, Russo reinforces the identification of the grotesque, noted by Bakhtin, with the lower bodily stratum and its associations with degradation, filth, death, and rebirth. She argues that traditional aesthetics has devalued the grotesque body, preferring the classical body, which is transcendent and monumental, closed and static, self-contained, symmetrical, and sleek, identified with the 'high' or official culture of the Renaissance and later, with the rationalism, individualism, and normalizing aspirations of the bourgeoisie. By contrast, she identifies the grotesque body, open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing, with the social rebirth and reformation called for by the non-official 'low' culture or the carnivalesque. Russo suggests that the ideals upon which Western subjectivity has relied for the construction of its values and knowledge

(normalcy, purity, transcendence) constructs itself in opposition to the qualities with which the grotesque is associated: the abnormal or perverse, the filthy or tainted, and the earthly or grounded. The grotesque is also the Freudian uncanny, because Western subjectivity refuses through its ideals precisely what cannot be refused: the mortal corporality that incites human fears (Russo, p. 8-10).

Speaking of carnivalesque, it is interesting to observe how transgressive carnival is. It is the time when all the norms that guide and maintain society throughout the year are suspended, subverted. It is a time that celebrates temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the constructed order. During it, we have the suspension of all kinds of ranking, and norms; everything is possible and opened. Carnival is the real celebration of change and renewal. This carnivalesque atmosphere is one that permits people to behave, at least for some time, the way they really feel like being, and not the way they have been taught to. In *The Ballad of the Sad Café* it is possible to notice this phenomenon and identify the changes provoked by the carnivalesque mood created exactly by Miss Amelia, the greatest deifier of the plot. Amelia created a place where people did not have to treat each other with the animosity they used to, a place where all people were equally treated and where Amelia herself did not act aggressively towards her town's dwellers. And this place was the Café that gives title to the novella. When people were in the Café, all the social organization was put aside and everyone just wanted to enjoy the drink, the music and the fact that they were not facing the harsh and dead scenery of the "dreary town". In that carnivalesque Café, Amelia could show people that the fact that she was not a femininity role model, according to society's standards, did not mean she lacked goodness, kindness and all sorts of positives her own way. The problem was that she lived in a society that marginalized those whose subjectivity went against the establishment that made them be seen as deviating and threatening.

For Russo (1995), the female grotesque and the abject woman are related, since the maternal body has long been associated with the grotesque. The grotto-esque cave, she notes, may be compared to the cavernous anatomical female body. She makes this connection through Bakhtin's "senile, pregnant hag," and through "a vein of nonacademic "cultural feminism" that valorizes the earth mother, the witch, the crone, and the vampire, arguing that these figures "posit a natural connection between the female body (itself naturalized) and the 'primal' elements, especially the earth (RUSSO, p.13). In addition, she maintains that the locating of the grotesque in art "as superficial and to the margins" suggests a certain construction of the feminine as equally devalued. The maternal partakes of the uncanny to the extent that it threatens always to monstrously reproduce, to double as conjoined self and other; the phallic imagination, too, operates, at different stages, both within and away from the maternal body to the extent that subjectivity is formed through the simultaneous love and repudiation of the mother. Russo recognizes that "it is an easy and perilous slide from these archaic tropes to misogyny [since] all the detritus of the body that is separated out and placed with terror and revulsion (mostly) on the side of the feminine--are down there in that cave of abjection". However, she would exploit the association in the direction of a liberation strategy: the woman as "monstrous" defier of social norms (RUSSO, p 13-30).

Russo does not conceive of an aerobat who lifts more than one foot off the ground at a time. Noting that the normal is not the same as the ordinary, Russo tells us that the ordinary can itself be disruptive: an ordinary feminism locates the grotesque in between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Because withering, decaying, ill bodies, and body waste are customarily kept out of sight, a display of these normal phenomena and substances is in this context extra-ordinary; Russo cites May Stevens' exhibition, *Ordinary/ Extraordinary* (RUSSO, p. 78-79), which depicts once notable women now aged in hospitals and nursing homes, and she displays a Cindy Sherman photograph that depicts expelled body contents

such as vomit or saliva. The sublime "mother" seeks an appropriate aggression, one that abandons the reproductive woman of the masculinist imagination (who is mute, passive, and prostrate), but does not abandon her own body. One might think, in paradoxical terms, that women should not try to transcend their bodies through emphasis on the sublime, but instead access the sublime through bodies that bespeak limitation and trial. The maternal sublime is a communal poetic - dividing itself from a past sublime that valued individualism, in favor rather of solidarity among women, and among humanity. There is an aesthetic recognizing that actual childbirth is not necessarily a euphoric experience for all women at all times, that birthing women do experience agony and tragedy, that some do not welcome their pregnancies, and that modern technologies oftentimes rob women of some experiential aspect of giving birth. Additionally, it would be crucial not to define women by their reproductivity, not to make inferior the childless or non-maternal woman, since in a sense, all women are defined, culturally speaking, as potentially grotesque in body; and all persons, to the extent that they are mortal, are tied up with cycles of birth and death.

However, in continuing to press for an abject-grotesque aesthetic, we must at least note the traditional tendency for the grotesque to abandon the ordinary-material. Its representations have often included a fetishistic excess and distortion that is either well beyond the normal, or which defines the normality of the body in terms of the psychological horror with which this body is typically met. Russo's *The Female Grotesque* continues this tradition with pictures of physical freaks--conjoined twins and human-animal hybrids--whose bodies fall beyond the pale of normality, but whose defining as grotesques may remind us how phobic we are in the presence of bodies that do not obey our aesthetic preferences and conventions, in the presence of the ordinary that we must, as Russo understands, render extra-ordinary in an act of dissociation.

In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Kristeva emphasizes the sheer physical repulsion that attends abjection. The abject body excretes bodily fluids and substances as waste product. We disavow (abject) our excretory bodies because they signify mortality. Discarded flesh and fluid posit the convergence between the living body that I am and the dead one that I must one day become. We sicken when confronted by the decay that our bodies at once contain, and try to expel. While abjection is a form of body repudiation, it is also a critique of such repudiation. Faced with the inseparability of body and waste, abjection finds no objects whose repudiation can permanently save it. The wasting body is an incessant reminder that the subject abides under his own radical splitting, into disruption, psychic disturbance, the dissolution of boundaries, limits, identity, and flesh. Flesh is never so much delivered of its waste as it remains immersed in it. Because the corpse is the waste from which the subject cannot in the end separate, she/he lives in a constant state of failed aversion from her/his own atrophy. One is painfully aware of the presence of disorder, filth, and difference that resides within one's own body, and is discharged of illusions of self-purity. Interiorized abjection then, distinct from the projected abjection that sponsors the othering of woman, is the unhappy recognition that no one can abject the abject.

In *The Ballad of the Sad Café* the grotesque, as it is often used, has a highly transgressive purpose. At the same time readers are presented to Amelia's body construction, they are led to face the type of construction that disrupts and challenges the socially-created conception of acceptability. One main point of discussion lies on a frequently posed question about who is in charge of choosing and defining the way one's body should be built. As far as we are concerned, what one does with his/her body and/or sexual preferences only directly affects that very person and, logically, it should only be this person's responsibility and concern. However, society has previously decided, since society exists as our basic institution I believe, that such an issue must be treated on public basis. Instead of keeping the decision of making your own body and life in

order to satisfy your personal demands, society has imposed that this does not belong to the individual, but that it does belong, indeed, to the collectivity. Exactly as it happens in relation to Law, if you are encompassed by Private Law, you can do everything that is not forbidden. On the other hand, if you are encompassed by Public Law, you can do just what you are allowed to do. This happens because if you are dealing with something that belongs to the individual, there are few restrictions, created in order to preserve the rights of your peers. In the Public sphere, since you are dealing with something that belongs to society, to the collectivity, you undergo a huge number of restrictions so that you are not able to jeopardize a concept, an ideal that has been constructed by and belongs to a group. Anyone who challenges these ideals are not simply opting for a path or another, this individual is making use of and changing something that belongs to the group and this group can not and will not permit such a dare that may threat order.

CHAPTER 3 - A NEW APPROACH TO THE READING OF *THE BALLAD OF THE SAD CAFÉ*: THE CHALLENGE OF THE TRADITIONAL GOTHIC HEROINE MODEL

There is a fact that can not be denied: women have been suffering all kinds of oppression one can imagine. Since we live in a patriarchal society, such oppression can be seen throughout several centuries and in several different ways as well. However, women have not been mere spectators of such a terrible process. Many of them fought to have their voices heard against it and some accomplished to do so. Maybe the best means to express dissatisfaction has been literature. Inside literature, it is possible to find an element that serves perfectly those writers who wish to rebel against the norms: Gothic. However, even inside Gothic it is possible to identify some models that are challenged. The Gothic heroine model is the one we are going to work with in the next lines. In order to show the challenging of the model cited above, I decided to use the example of Miss Amelia, the female protagonist of the book *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, by Carson McCullers. McCullers faced, as a woman of the South of the United States in the first half of the 20th century, many challenges and portrayed them in her work and, consequently, in the character of Miss Amelia. First, we will see the characteristics of the Gothic heroine model. After that, we will see the reasons why Miss Amelia could be considered a Gothic heroine and how far she goes in challenging the limits of this model. Finally, we will see the consequences of her behavior.

First of all, it is extremely important that we analyze some of the characteristics of the Gothic heroine by contrasting her to the male protagonist. In order to do this, we will see the view of some of the most important critics, leaving further comments on Miss Amelia to another moment. The Gothic heroine is a woman who suffers strong oppression from male characters and tries to find a way to escape that situation.

However, her relation with the world is different from the male's. As William Patrick Day very well explains, the male characters "seek to dominate their world, rather than accommodate themselves into it as the female" (DAY: 1985, 17). From this excerpt we already note the idea of female passivity, which is central in the contrast between female and male characters in Gothic fiction. The heroine is also closely linked to the image of the house. Since she is inserted in a patriarchal society, she is imprisoned in a domestic role with no defense against the male villain. Maggie Kilgour describes this situation with accuracy:

The female gothic itself is not a ratification but an expose of domesticity and the family, through the technique of estrangement or romantic defamiliarisation: by cloaking familiar images of domesticity in gothic forms, it enables us to see that the home is a prison, in which the helpless female is at mercy of ominous authorities

(KILGOUR: 1995, 9).

One last characteristic addressed to the Gothic heroine is that she should be respectable and virtuous. The problem hidden in this point is that these "qualities" demanded from these female characters tied their hands whenever they thought about rebelling and breaking the rules. If they did that, they would be seen as deviant and, therefore, not respectful, as described by WilliamPatrick Day: "The heroine accepts domination, accepts the position of masochistic, because the assertion of her identity, tied up as it is with the qualities of passivity and respectability, demands she accepts this role" (DAY: 1985, 19). The problem is clear: whenever models are established for people to follow, you are, in fact, trying to put limits that maintain the society the way it is. To disturb this imposed

balance means that you are terrifying, menacing and no longer welcome, according to Fred Botting: “The construction of revolutionary excesses as a terrifying monster served to define the threat and thus contain and legitimate its exclusion” (1996, p.7).

After seeing the basic characteristics of the Gothic heroine, we will now proceed to the analysis of Miss Amelia and what exactly puts her in the position of a Gothic heroine, even though she is not a conventional one. The major feature that enables Miss Amelia to be considered a Gothic heroine is that she is a woman that suffers oppression from the society in which she lives, the Southern society of the United States, and does not conform to the boundaries imposed on her. In that society, women were supposed to follow the model of the “Southern belle”. These “Southern belles” should be beautiful and young. Besides that, they should be discrete and also know how to talk very well and run the house majestically. As a Gothic heroine, Miss Amelia did not accept that role model and decided to build her own situation. Just to exemplify the way Miss Amelia did not fit the “Southern belle” model we will see how the only three good people of the town, according to the book, saw her:

These good people judged Miss Amelia in a different way from what the others judged her. When a person is a contrary in every single respect as she was and when the sins of a person have amounted to such a point that they can hardly be remembered all at once – then this person plainly requires a special judgment. They remembered that Miss Amelia had been born dark and somewhat queer of face, raised motherless by her father who was a solitary man, that early in youth she had grown to be six feet tall which in itself is not natural for a woman, and that her ways and habits of life were too peculiar ever to reason about

(1998, p.12).

As we can see, Miss Amelia is far from being beautiful and angelical. Even those people who were good towards her, judged her as somebody out of place that deserved nothing but their pity. With this brief description it is possible to notice she fits the role of Gothic heroine, since she is a woman who does not conform to impositions and wants to build her own situation.

After placing in the Gothic heroine position, we will move into the text of *The Ballad of the Sad Café* to gather examples of Miss Amelia's behavior that can show us how far she goes in challenging the Gothic heroine model already mentioned and described above. The first characteristic to be approached will be the so many times evoked female passivity. As we saw before, the central point of difference between the female and the male Gothic protagonists is the way they face oppression. It is said that women do not act, they just passively resist and try to find a place to settle that does not disturb people. Miss Amelia does not fit in this category of women, because she is an active person. She rules the town where she lives and runs her business just like it would be expected from a man to do. However, there is a moment in which she has a passive attitude. This moment takes place when she accepts to marry Marvin Macy. In that moment she is ready to fit the category of the traditional Gothic heroine and get married. If she kept herself married the society would see her as a normal element. They "had seen what this love had done to Marvin Macy and hoped that it might also reform his bride" (McCULLERS, p.28). But after realizing that she would have to follow the complete role of the tamed woman, she broke the boundaries of the traditional Gothic heroine and not only did she resist, she also acted. Here we have passage that describes Amelia and Macy's honeymoon:

The bride and the groom ate a grand supper prepared by Jeff, the old Negro who cooked for Miss Amelia. The bride took second servings of everything, but she picked with his food. Then the bride went about her ordinary business – reading the newspaper, finishing an inventory of the stock in the store, and so forth. The groom hung about in the doorway with a loose, foolish, blissful face and was not noticed. At eleven o'clock the bride took a lamp and went upstairs. The groom followed close behind her. So far all had gone decently enough, but what followed after was unholy. Within half an hour Miss Amelia had stomped down the stairs in breeches and a khaki jacket. Her face had darkened so that it looked quite black

(1998, p. 28).

After a moment of accommodation and passivity, Miss Amelia challenged all the social codes and refused to play the role of the good wife. In her honeymoon she only refused imposition, but later on she acted indeed:

Towards evening he came in drunk, went up to Miss Amelia with wet eyes, and put his hand on her shoulder. He was trying to tell her something, but before he could open his mouth she had swung once with her fist and hit his face so hard that he was thrown back against the wall and one of his front teeth was broken

(1998, p. 30).

Since we have seen that Miss Amelia did not let herself be confined to the limits of the passive Gothic heroine, we will now analyze how she also transgresses the domestic imprisonment in which the female protagonists are placed. In relation to the women of her time, Miss Amelia was quite ahead of them in terms of economic roles. At that time women were already inserting themselves in the market. However, especially in the South, women were not supposed to run any kind of business of their own. To be the ruler of a whole town was simply impossible to be even imagined. As I said before, in the beginning of the twentieth century the female labor force was composed of young, single and poor women who had little chance of making a career. With World War II, more than 6 million women had their first job, most of them were married and above thirty-years-old. But it is important to highlight that none of them received a higher salary than men and none occupied high executive responsibility (CHAFE, 1988, p. 260-261).

In the following passage we will have an exact idea of Miss Amelia's economic and social status in her town that went against any domestic imprisonment:

Miss Amelia was rich. In addition to the store she operated a still three miles back in the swamp. (...) With all things which could be made by the hands Miss Amelia prospered. She sold chitterlings and sausage in the town near-by. On fine autumn days she ground sorghum, and the syrup from her vats was dark golden and delicately flavoured. She built the brick privy behind her store in only two weeks and was skilled in carpentering. It was only with people that Miss Amelia was not at ease. (...) [T]he only use that Miss Amelia had for other people was to make

money out of them. And in this she succeeded. Mortgages on crops and property, a sawmill, money in the bank – she was the richest women for miles around

(1998, p.2-3).

The last characteristic of the traditional Gothic heroine that was mentioned above was the fact they are meant to be a model of virtue. After acknowledging Miss Amelia's position in her town and her attitude towards society's expectation from her as a woman, it is crystal clear that those did not belong to her. She was not a pleasant neighbor, in fact, she "would involve herself in long and bitter litigation over just a trifle" (1998, p. 3) and was far from being the "good wife and housekeeper". In relation to her manners, she badly knew how to behave at the table according to the standards: "Miss Amelia ate slowly and with the relish of a farm hand. She ate with both elbows on the table, bent over the plate, her knees spread apart and her feet braced on the rungs of the chair" (1998, p.9).

After seeing that Miss Amelia really dared and challenged the limits of the traditional Gothic heroine, that is already a transgressive figure in literature. Nevertheless, she lived in a patriarchal society that does not permit that those who do not fit it and disturb its balance keep being part of it. Amelia had to pay the price for her attempt to build her situation the way she wanted in a society filled with intolerance. After falling in love with the mysterious Cousin Lymon and losing him to her ex-husband that returned to get even with her, this represents a recurrent Gothic element: the return of pasts upon present. According to David Punter, the past is menacing and "the borderland attitude of the Gothic to the past is a compound of repulsion and attraction, fear of both the violence of the past and its power

over the present” (1996, p. 192) Amelia engages a final battle with the Macy. This battle represents, in fact, the fight of the Other (Amelia) against an oppressive and excluding society (Macy). Unfortunately she lost the battle and, once more, society excludes what is different in order to keep the boundaries that keep it together the way it is. Fred Botting summarizes brilliantly what happens to Amelia as a consequence of her transgression:

Gothic terrors activate the sense of the unknown that threatens all the order that supports the current values. The terrors and horrors of transgression in Gothic writing become a powerful means to reassert the values of society, virtue and propriety: transgression, by crossing the social and aesthetic limits, serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity, restoring or defining limits

(1996, p. 7).

In my view, the construction of a character such as Miss Amelia is extremely important not only to show dissatisfaction with a society that oppresses women, but also for people to realize that even when they are transgressing and challenging, sometimes this Western culture of judging and limiting permeates the process. When defining that the traditional Gothic heroine has certain characteristics, one must be attentive not to establish a model for future readers and writers and observe that all rules have exceptions, for everybody's luck. Usually, the exceptions bring the changes we need, although we are unaware of this necessity many times.

CONCLUSION

In this work I try to show the several boundaries that Carson McCullers broke through the character of Miss Amelia and her attitude towards the social and the sexual with the construction of an alternative situation. McCullers herself knew what it felt like being somehow different from what would be expected from a woman in her context. Besides that, her extraordinary literary talent and sensitivity, created a marvelous piece of writing in which, probably even unconsciously sometimes, she enriched Southern writing, dealing with the Gothic, the Grotesque, the Carnavalesque, Abjection, and social and sexual themes in a poetic manner.

The Grotesque, the Gothic and Abjection in literature, and also in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, have the power to expose these people that present some characteristic, consciously chosen or not, that goes against the prevailing standards. We could see that both Southern American and Victorian societies had many similarities, since the former borrowed many characteristics and values from the latter, and both created mechanisms to control and oppress certain elements. These elements are somehow exaggerated, deformed or simply too different not to be noticed and watched closely. Amelia Evans is one of those for her body is grotesquely built with her huge muscles and strong thighs and her unconventional behavior. Despite the fact that it is HER body that we are talking about, Miss Amelia could not live her option freely. The “dreary town”, that is to say society itself, suppressed her personal option. It is possible to observe throughout the novella that the male citizens (the ones that have voice) frequently criticize her behavior, as if she were stealing something from them. Maybe, according to what has been discussed above, they felt Amelia did not have the right to act differently and/or be different from

what they had already established as being the best, I mean, the only option, because this prerogative was not hers.

McCullers brightly contrasted the muteness of the female characters to Amelia's challenging and assertive manners. We may even say that both the author and the protagonist used language to go against the "natural" inferiority that is usually attributed to the female in the binary opposition man/woman (HOWARD, 1994, p. 54) and to show from the position of the Other that they are also human beings that fall in love, have and want to build their own situation, their own way. And the more important women become, the more successful they, or any group or individual that does not conform to being marginalized, more aggression they will suffer (BEAUVOIR, 1997, p. 23). The author of the novella used the Gothic to protest against the traditional conception of the angel of the house, the beautiful woman, modeling a new female tradition and rebelling against the socially built roles of white Southern femininity, and even challenged a Gothic concept, challenging the Gothic heroine model.

What I deeply expect from this and other similar works, from all Literature and the academic world that revolves around it, is that it becomes possible for, at least, most people to find in the artistic pieces, such as *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, a moment of pleasure and delight together with a renewed and more sensitive ability to see the Other, as if he/she was looking at him/herself.

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APPENDIX :



ⁱ <http://web.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap10/mccullers.html>