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The Grotesque Self:
Finding Identity through the Grotesque in the Works of Carson McCullers

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The University of Tennessee Chattanooga
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Introduction

In the beginning of the introductory volume to his celebrated work *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault states, “For a long time, the story goes, we supported a Victorian regime, and we continue to be dominated by it even today” (3). Nowhere is this support and dominance more evident in American society than in the American South. Historically speaking, the South has maintained rigid, phallogentric constructions of gender, which have manifested themselves in several aspects of the southern individual’s actions, sense of self, and appearance. While much of southern culture has been centered on this rigid identity, the southern gothic literary tradition strays from this rigidity, especially in its depiction of female characters. Their grotesque bodies, actions, and self-conceptions allow them to deviate and break away from the social norm, granting them the ability to form a unique identity, though it often comes at the cost of harsh patriarchal discipline.

This discipline, especially for the white southern woman, comes about because any deviation from the norm challenges the hierarchy of a society. In the South, the image of the white woman was nearly exclusively used to justify its patriarchal regime. Though a woman’s place may also have been the same in Victorian England, the American South takes the woman a step further by placing her at the core of its belief system. As Anne Goodwyn Jones points out in her book *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936*, “southern womanhood was born in the imaginations of slaveholding men. Thus southern womanhood was linked directly to fundamental southern questions of race, class, and sex...” (8). This imagined womanhood allows “southern womanhood ... to justify the perpetuation of hegemony of the male sex, the upper and middle class, and the white race” (10). Having the image of a woman so

closely tied to the ideology of the South made it sacred. Anyone who transgressed against it was seen as a blasphemer and was punished as such. Due to its strong influence over southern culture as a whole, white southern womanhood was central to the societal mechanism that allowed for such a rigid hierarchy in the South to be prevalent for so long.

Male-imagined white womanhood is easily observable in racial attitudes of the South. The pure, fragile white woman was seen as needing protection from the African-American male, who was, in turn, seen as sexually uncontrollable and violent. This belief essentially created the southern rape complex, which caused a great number of lynchings to happen throughout the South. As W.J. Cash points out in his book *The Mind of the South*, the great majority of lynching victims were completely innocent of any sexual transgression against white women; however, “any assertion of any kind on the part of the Negro constituted in a perfectly real manner an attack on the Southern woman” (116). Through this, southern white men “justified- and sincerely justified- violence toward the Negro as demanded in the defense of woman” (117). The view of the white woman also negatively affected the African American woman. The conception of the white woman as a pure entity ultimately distanced her from sexual desire. This allowed the white man to conceive of the “inferior” woman, the African-American woman, as being much more sexually driven, which caused sexual abuse among African American women to rampant. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown points out in his celebrated book *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, “he [the white man] splits the sexual and affectional impulses in his relations with women. Sex becomes associated with an inferior... But the wife whom he should love and protect... becomes a source of resentment. He blames her [purity] for his confusion and accuses her of coldness” (319). Though the idea of a pure, perfect white wife was used to deflect any

criticism that the white man may be adulterous, it is the same idea that actually accentuated his lecherous acts.

This male-imagined white womanhood was centered on absolute purity, piety, submission, and domesticity. Crafted by men and superimposed on women, this identity was one that “[denied] the self” (8). Due to their perceived fragility, the white southern woman could not become educated, work outside the home, nor could she express herself in any way that seemed “unwomanly.” Though this was the dominant image of the white woman in the antebellum times, it has carried over into modern times and has haunted the woman all along the way. Even after the Civil War and Reconstruction, when women sought liberation through entering the industrial workforce, they were seen at best as “either pseudo-men or as one-dimensional figures, the Proletarian Mother” (Shaheen 98). Due to the specter of antebellum order looming over the heads the woman, it seemed that no matter what she did, the woman would always seem to be “the very embodiment of that order” (Shaheen 86).

However, many southern female writers have come along to challenge this patriarchal order. One of the most effective and unique tactics used by southern female writers is the implementation of the grotesque. Through using this quality, the woman can break the bars that entrap her on top of her caged pedestal and find a place in society separate from man’s imagined woman. Carson McCullers’s androgynous children, Flannery O’Connor’s mutilated bodies, and Eudora Welty’s giant females all embody the grotesque to highlight gender discrepancies and challenge social norms in the South.

To be able to understand how the grotesque has an impact on a character’s identity, one must first properly understand how it functions in literature. The term “grotesque,” like any other literary term, has changed drastically throughout time. Originating from French, “grotesque” is

defined by the Oxford dictionary as “comically or repulsively ugly or distorted”; however, this definition offers very little insight into the concept’s true density. Thomas Mann refers to the grotesque as the most “genuine antibourgeois style” of literature because it “sees life as tragedy-comedy.” William Van O’Connor refers to grotesque works as having “sought to incorporate the antipoetic into the traditionally poetic, the cowardly into the heroic, the ignoble into noble, the realistic into the romantic, the ugly into the beautiful” (Spiegel 426). Though these definitions are broad, they all seem to point toward the same effect: the destruction of societal hierarchies.

A prominent outline of how the grotesque challenges fixed social standards is brought up in Mikhail Bakhtin’s book *Rabelais and His World*, which analyzes the grotesque aspects of Rabelais’s own book, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Bakhtin postulates that the grotesque operates on a much higher scale than originally conceived. He theorizes that the grotesque, especially the grotesque body, “is interwoven not only with the cosmic but also with the social, utopian, and historic theme, and above all with the theme of the change of epochs and the renewal of culture” (325). The grotesque manifests itself most effectively in two ways, through the carnival and the body. For Bakhtin, the carnival is central to the grotesque narrative of a story because “[d]uring carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom” (7). These laws of freedom allow peasants to strut in king’s robes, and kings in rags, men to become pregnant and woman to don the phallus. Essentially, all social codes were overridden, and individuals are able to construct themselves as they please. The only law in the carnival, while it lasts, is absolute freedom. The grotesque body also plays a huge role in dismantling the social hierarchy: “The grotesque body, as we have often stressed, is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed” (317). It is the infinite property of the grotesque body that challenges social hierarchy. Social traditions are fixed systems that are unable, or unwilling, to grow and

change. Due to their finite quality, these systems cannot contain an ever-growing, ever-changing grotesque body. Eventually, the grotesque body will outgrow and break free from the social code.

In his essay “A Theory of the Grotesque in Southern Literature,” Alan Spiegel claims that this quality has nothing to do with the quality of the story, the mood, or the mode of expression. Instead, he states, “The grotesque refers to a type of character [who], always appears in Southern fiction as either a physically or mentally deformed figure” (428). These physically deformed characters include those who are cripples, dwarfs, gargantuans, deaf-mutes, the blind, or the unformed (including the individual whose gender is not easily defined). Those who embody the grotesque mentally typically include the half-wit, the mad-man, the neurotic, and the psychotic (428). This application of it brings itself to the level of the individual. In Southern literature, one should not expect to see a community of grotesque bodies participating in the carnival, but rather a single grotesque individual, or possibly two, engaging in the carnival of Rabelais’s world amongst other individuals who adhere to the norms of society. By understanding that the grotesque exists more in the individual instead of the mood or quality of the environment, one can see how it operates to upend the societal structure in which the character finds him- or herself. This, in turn, allows for a new conception of self to be made that is not entirely regulated by the societal norm. However, this juxtaposition of the grotesque and the normal serves to highlight the social hierarchies and the possible discipline that can be enacted upon an individual who dares to deviate from these hegemonic structures.

Notably, the use of the grotesque has been employed prolifically by Southern female writers. As Patricia Yaeger explains in her book *Dirt and Desire*, “The grotesque is omnipresent in Southern woman’s fiction not as a decorative filigree but as a space of political obsession”

(xiii) because it challenges the limits of what is considered to be normal. Yaeger recognizes that the patriarchal South has laid claim to the female body and mind so it can alter the woman as it pleases: “[F]lesh that has been ruptured or riven by violence, of fractured, excessive bodies [tells] us something that diverse southern cultures don’t want us to say” (xiii). The oppressed body, as well as the oppressed mind, show the reader the dark spots of Southern culture. Through this exposure, those oppressed can call attention to social injustice and attempt to change the body politic by reclaiming a place of agency in society.

Carson McCullers provides a great understanding of the effect that the grotesque has on the woman and her place in Southern society. Though she did not write prolifically, she wrote profoundly. The importance of the grotesque in her works is that it operates on an individual basis, shaping characters’ understanding of themselves, their lives, and their place in society. Through her female characters, she demonstrates how the grotesque shakes the political sphere and demands attention. As Yaeger points out, “Southern women writers use the grotesque to map an array of social crises; the open, wounded, bleeding, excessive, corpulent, maimed, idiotic, or gargantuan body becomes the sign of a permanent emergency within the body politic” (222). Bringing light to this emergency allows the female to gain a sense of agency in society. This grotesqueness cannot be overlooked, and, therefore, the female must be seen and heard. McCullers’s characters show that, though it creates the risk of enacting societal discipline upon the woman, the grotesque empowers her to form-- at least for a time-- a fulfilling, genuine identity, regain agency and operate uniquely within the public sphere. McCullers truly shows the full dimension and power of the female grotesque in her works.

In this thesis, I shall track two of McCullers’s most influential female characters, Mick Kelly in the 1940 novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and Miss. Amelia in the 1951 novella *The*

Ballad of the Sad Café, and how their experiences as grotesques aid them in their fight to break free from the cultural standards of their time and develop a sense of individual identity. To do so, I shall focus on two grotesque qualities present in these female characters, androgyny and gargantuanism.

The first quality addressed is androgyny, the combination of traditionally “masculine” and “feminine” qualities. This quality is considered grotesque because, just like the carnival, it blurs the lines of the dichotomous masculine/feminine identity. As Bakhtin points out, “...one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions... all were considered equal during the carnival” (10). Androgyny takes the grotesque aspect of the carnival a few steps further because it allows for an individual to blur ridged gender distinctions indefinitely. The carnival is a temporary freedom, but androgyny is a lasting one. This refusal to abide by only the conventional role of a female in Southern society allows for them to create a new sense of self and purpose. Androgyny displays a synthesis of the masculine and feminine, and it is this synthesis that liberates the individual from the gender prison.

My analysis will carefully avoid any essentialism. Therefore, any use of the terms “masculine” and “feminine” are stripped of any connection to the biologically male or female. Rather, these terms are to be seen as modifiers that describe the role that an individual is playing in his or her society. Throughout the essay, “masculine” qualities will often be in the position of privilege, not to suggest that male is any more superior than female, but to show that the actions and qualities these terms are associated with in this essay are from a purely historical stance. Though her book *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* came under heavy fire and criticism for

essentialism, Carolyn Heilbrun points out the qualities historically associated with men and women:

According to conventional view, ‘masculine’ equals forceful, competent, competitive, controlling, vigorous, unsentimental, and occasionally violent; ‘feminine’ equals tender, genteel, intuitive rather than rational, passive, unaggressive, readily given to submission. The ‘masculine’ individual is popularly seen as the maker, the ‘female’ the nourisher. Qualities which the Victorians considered admirable in men they thought perverted in women... (xiv).

Though humans are often divided between these masculine and feminine qualities, they are nothing more than a mere cultural construct, which over time have crystalized just enough to convince people of their timelessness. In her book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler points out that, “the institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from the feminine term” (22-23). This regulation and differentiation often causes one to reject a part of him or herself, and leaves him or her unable to find a true, complete sense of self.

However, by analyzing these terms in the way they are historically inscribed, I hope to properly defend androgyny against the claim that “...androgyny is essentially a masculine ideal and one inappropriate for women wishing to advance themselves or to promote the new discipline of women’s studies in the academy” (Weil 151). These accusations are brought about under the assumption that “women are brought to see their most glorified image as that of a man” because “androgynes are always feminized males, never masculine women” (ibid). By disassociating “masculine” and “feminine” from the male and female, I hope to prove that the point of androgyny is not to make the female into a male, but rather to make her politically powerful. Furthermore, the analysis of McCullers’s grotesque female characters serves to disprove the point that “androgyny is a masculine ideal that says men can be women too and that, therefore, women are superfluous” (Weil 148). By using androgyny to break established gender

constructions, an individual attempts, however successfully, to create a new sense of self that transcends this binary. This allows the characters to form a more genuine sense of self and greater sense of personal fulfillment and power, though it may ultimately lead to alienation by those who continue to conform to a male dominated society.

The next grotesque quality to be assessed is the gargantuan female body, which “becomes a site for mapping social change” (Yaeger 127). The grotesque aspect of gargantuan embodiment gives the female agency to operate uniquely in the public sphere by allowing her to break away from the control of the Southern patriarchy. This is so because the ever-growing giant, or in this case giantess, challenges societal standards. The idea of the giant or giantess pushing societal boundaries is nothing new to literary analysis. As Susan Stewart points out in her book, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, “The giant, from the Leviathan to the sideshow freak, is a mixed category; a violator of boundary and rule; an overabundance of the natural and hence an affront to cultural systems” (73). Bakhtin also expresses the importance of the gargantuan in works of the grotesque. He believes that the giant is the best representations of the grotesque body in its eternal “act of becoming,” and is, therefore, the best manifestation of the grotesque in its goal to undo societal hierarchies. As Yaeger points out, “When the grotesque body marches onto the page, the ideology that controls southern bodies becomes hypervisible in the most unexpected ways” (120). By exposing this control, the female gargantuan is able to become freed from its constraint.

However, the gargantuan is not impervious to societal backlash. From the giant savages of mythic times to the gargantuan sideshow freak of modern times, the large have always been the object of social discipline. Originally, society’s method of taming the gargantuan came through slaughter, but now the discipline is much more of a “Victorian attempt to domesticate

and re-form” the gargantuan (Stewart 125). This discipline sometimes takes the form of the freak-show or some other form of societal display, and is thoroughly laden in the nightmares of McCullers’s giantesses. By taming the giantess through putting her on display, society has essentially disarmed and domesticated or “colonized” the otherwise powerful entity. As Stewart points out, “all colonization involves the taming of the beast by bestial methods and hence both the conversion and projection of the animal and human, difference and identity. On display, the freak represents the naming of the frontier and the assurance that the wilderness, the outside, is now territory” (Stewart 110). This fear of becoming the freak-show is ever-present for the female characters in McCullers’s novels, but this fear does not keep them from their pursuit of free identity.

In this thesis, I hope to show how the grotesque operates within both Mick Kelly and Miss Amelia to grant them unique identities and power within their communities. Though the endings of both of these stories are, in true southern gothic fashion, tragic, they do not disprove any of the prior theories stated. In the moments with the grotesque operating within the two characters, they are able to rise above the oppressive patriarchal southern society that condemns them to a life of submission. Even in their failures, these grotesque characters clearly outline the misogynistic behaviors of said societies by illuminating the archaic discipline enacted upon those who challenge its authority. Their plight proves that something must be done in order to achieve gender equality in the American South. With theory from Bakhtin, Patricia Yaeger, and many others, I strive to provide a clear understanding of how the southern woman’s unique, grotesque body and gender conception allows her to break away from the myth of the southern belle and craft a more fulfilling identity, which is the first movement toward acquiring a powerful position in society.

Chapter 1 of this essay will focus on McCullers's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. This 1940 debut novel is the ultimate portrayal of isolation. Mick Kelly is an adolescent who attempts to reconnect her "inner self" with her public self. In her "inner-world" she possesses an androgyny that gives her greater artistic license to compose music. Her combination of feminine and masculine qualities also allows Mick to dissociate from the identity of the Southern Belle and, through that, reject her place as woman in Southern society. Sadly, though, this "inner-world" is closed off to her toward the end of the novel. Her sexual encounter with Harry Minowitz begins to shut the door to the freedom of her androgynous "inner-world" as it pushes her more firmly into the role of a desired female object. Later, she accepts the clerk's position at Woolworth's ten-cent store in order to help support her family during its financial crisis. She is, therefore, forced to give up her dream of becoming a pianist and must also start dressing and acting like the other girls at Woolworth's. Despite these setbacks, she secretly wishes to save enough money to buy a piano in hopes of reclaiming her repressed androgyny and being able to step into her "inner-room" once again.

The second chapter will focus on McCullers's 1951 novella *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. I will focus my analysis on the overtly-masculine actions of Amelia and her gargantuan body, which affect her conceptions of self and their places in society. Miss Amelia, as a cross-eyed, six-foot-two, gargantuan, shatters the role of the Southern belle, but by the end of the novella is shattered herself. Her pragmatic and overabundant masculinity disables her from ever crafting genuine relationships with others, which is ultimately her downfall. Lymon Willis's deformed, hunchback body and his seemingly homosexual desire for Marvin paints Lymon as a similarly grotesque and tragic character. Both of these characters exhibit the grotesque similarly by challenging gender roles in society; however, their fates are wildly different, with Amelia

becoming a shut-in and Lymon running off with Marvin Macy. In this work, I shall analyze how hermaphroditism causes Amelia's downfall and how the grotesque embodiment of a woman contrasts with the grotesque embodiment of a man in southern society.

Though these characters differ drastically, they both show the full array of how the grotesque operates within an individual. It allows the woman to better develop herself with little of the belittling influence of southern culture. Though, for these two, it comes at the cost of isolation; however, isolation was sad fact for any woman in the south. There is never any room for another at top of the pedestal. Though these two grotesque characters may walk alone, they were at least able to break out of their gilded cages, if only for a short time.

Chapter 1

Androgynous Artistic Freedom of Mick Kelly in Carson McCullers's

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter

"A great mind must be androgynous"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

In her 1940 debut novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, Carson McCullers portrayed the life of isolation that so often occurred in the South. One such character afflicted with this isolation is Mick Kelly. She is one of McCullers's most intricate characters. The semi-autobiographical character displays the role of a young, underprivileged girl in the South during the 1930s. She has great ambition and desire to become a great artist, which will allow her to rise above the social position in which she finds herself in her small Georgia town. The traditional role of the southern woman was not to be driven and adventurous, but rather subservient to the

male and to accept menial labor and domestic duties. Mick is able to escape this limited role through her gargantuan body and by embracing what she sees as her masculine side and becoming an androgynous individual. These grotesque aspects of Mick isolate her from others. She feels as though because of it she is unable to fit into any social group; however, these same grotesque qualities enable her to envision herself going beyond the scope of the oppressed Southern female and foster her ambition and passion toward music to create a fulfilling, artistic identity through the reconciliation of her femininity and masculinity. Sadly, this artistic identity is repressed later in the novel as she is forced to accept the role of the female; however, a shred of her androgynous, artistic identity still remains in the back of her mind and serves as the only hope she has of overcoming her dismal position.

The female in Southern literature is no stranger to criticism, and Mick Kelly is no exception. There is a vast body of work that centers itself on the role of the woman in the South. As Patricia Yaeger explains in her book *Dirt and Desire*, “The grotesque is omnipresent in Southern woman’s fiction not as a decorative filigree but as a space of political obsession” (xiii) because it challenges the limits of what is considered to be normal. Mick Kelly is certainly a character who challenges these limits. The grotesque manifests itself in her gargantuan body and androgynous behavior. In her work, *Strange Bodies: Gender and Identity in the Novels of Carson McCullers*, Sara Gleeson-White offers a great in-depth analysis of these two grotesque elements and how it affects Mick’s position in society and conception of self. Due to the grotesque nature of Mick, Gleeson-White states, “McCullers’s adolescent portraits embody dynamics of possibility and thus challenge any notion of female limits. That is to say, promises of youth do not die out with the adolescent’s entry into adulthood” (28). Though much has been written about how being androgynous and gargantuan has affected Mick’s place in society, very little

has explained how it has affected this artistic license. It is this development of an artistic identity that allows Mick to be able to see herself as an individual who is able to overcome the submissive role of the southern female.

For anything to work efficiently, it must operate as a whole. Humans are no exception to this rule. It is only by reconciling both the masculine and feminine side of an individual that one can achieve the full ability of his or her humanity. This androgynous unification is especially crucial for the artist. In her book *The Modern Androgyne Imagination* Lisa Rado outlines the importance of the androgynous imagination for the modern artist by stating, “[it] offered a solution to male modernists searching for a means to restore their artistic prerogative while it provided female modernists with a way to transform their position from aesthetic objects to active creators” (13). Mick Kelly points out both the significance of unifying the masculine and feminine and the danger of repressing the masculine. It is only in those moments of unification that she is able to fully experience the joy of her artistic identity.

Mick Kelly is first introduced to the reader by an unnamed narrator when she arrives at Biff Brannon’s New York Café. Mick is standing in the threshold of the door when the narrator states, “A gangling, towheaded youngster, a girl of about twelve, stood looking in the doorway. She was dressed in khaki shorts, a blue shirt, and tennis shoes- so that at first glance she was like a very young boy” (18). Her initial portrait, framed by the doorway, displays Mick as her most unself-conscious, androgynous self. She stands as a 5’6, 103 pound thirteen-year-old girl that suggests androgyny not only by the way she dresses, but also in her bodily stature. By physically embodying androgyny in her considerably large frame, Mick is able to show how the body operates as a site of control. In her book *Dirt and Desire*, Patricia Yaeger claims that the grotesque, gargantuan body “becomes a site for mapping social change” (Yaeger 127). Mick’s

gargantuan, androgynous body is the site of this change that she hopes to accomplish by rejecting the subservient role in society and becoming a famous musician. This claim is extended further by Sara Gleeson-White, who states that the giant, grotesque body “challenges the closed and finished system; the giant grows beyond what is deemed natural and normal and could be said to represent the possibility of a new subjectivity” (58). Mick is the new possibility of the giantess. With her androgynous body and actions, she has the ability transcend the role of a southern woman and map out a new, more fulfilling path for herself by following her artistic passion. Her body is just one signifier of the power she possesses.

It is important for one to see the doorway under which Mick stands as a frame, much like the frame of a portrait that captures a moment rather than the threshold that Mick is crossing into her femininity. Just like the doorframe in Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady*, under which a hopeful, adventurous Isabel Archer is first introduced, this doorway provides a perfect portrait of Mick at her most confident and optimistic. The latter of these contrasting ideas is expanded upon in Constante Gonzalez Gorba’s “Growing Up Female in the Deep South: The Initiation of Mick Kelly in Carson McCullers’s *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*,” which states that the doorway “indicates her troubled state of transition between childhood and the adult world...” (3). This simply cannot be the case, however, because Mick has not begun her transition yet. Though this transition into maturity will eventually happen, at this moment, Mick is still an adolescent who is thriving with all of her androgynous impulses intact. She has not begun her movement toward the feminine, adult world yet, and to state that she has begun her transition at this point would be to compromise all of her further actions throughout the novel. Instead, by viewing the doorway as framing a portrait of Mick, one is able to have a reference back to Mick at her most childlike, androgynous, and powerful.

Immediately after this introduction, Biff asks Mick if she has been to the Girl Scouts. She responds by stating, “No, I don’t belong to them” (18). This is the first indication of isolation caused by her androgyny. She refuses to exclude her masculine side and play the role of the proper little southern girl, which is further demonstrated by her purchasing cigarettes right after this conversation, and she pays the price by being excluded from this group. This is not a drawback for Mick though. Instead of spending all of her time in the Girl Scouts learning how to be a “proper” girl, Mick chooses to strike her own path, which grants her the ability to dream of becoming much more than the submissive southern female. This time alone has fostered her deep passion for music, her ambitious nature, and her thriving “inside-room.” It is easy to infer that if Mick were to spend her time in a group such as the Girl Scouts, then there would be no time for her to furnish her “inside-room” with beautiful portraits of the lands she wishes to see and fill it with the beautiful music she hopes to write. This development of inner-security offers protection for Mick from the oppressive, patriarchal society of the South. It allows for her to escape this society at any time because “[s]he could be in the middle of a house full of people and still feel like she was locked up by herself” (163). When she is in this room, Mick is at the top of the world. Her hopes and dreams of becoming a famous, respected musician lie in this “inside-room,” and grant her the desire to reject a subservient role and climb to the top of the society.

This inner room and idea of an inner self is not something unique only to Mick. Many southern women had to subvert to an internal form of expression due to the oppressive climate of the South. As mentioned in Anne Goodwyn Jones’s *Tomorrow is Another Day*, Southern women trusted that inner self only to diaries, to letters, and conversations with close (usually women) friends, and- casting its voice through yet another mask- to fiction” (24). Mick differs from this description of the inner life of the southern woman in two ways. First, her inner voice is music

and, second, her confidante is a man, John Singer. Her passion for music is extremely appropriate for this androgynous protagonist because music is a non-gendered medium. Her musical tastes also coincide with her androgynous behavior. As reviled later on in the novel, Mick is particularly drawn to and deeply moved by symphonies from Beethoven, a prominent figure of the German Romantic movement. This artistic movement held high regards for androgyny. As A. J. L. Busst outlines in his article “The Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century,” German Romanticism regarded androgyny as “a not only [a] demiurge but also [a] Savior. This is so because, as German Romanticism indicated, “the Redemption consists in the restoration of the unity of the self and non-self” (64). Mick’s androgynous self in her inner room is her salvation from a life of silence and offers her a sense of agency that allows her to leave the low role of a domestic woman and climb to the top of a male-dominated society.

Another important aspect of this inner room as stated earlier is the inclusion of John Singer. On the surface, Singer’s inclusion in her musical inner-room may seem strange because not only is he a man, but he is also a deaf mute. However, Singer represents the total unity of humanity for Mick. As she states after a seemingly spiritual experience listening to Beethoven’s *Eroica*, “When she thought of what she used to imagine was God she could only see Mister Singer with a long, white sheet around him. God was silent-- maybe that was why she was reminded of him” (119-120). This perception of Singer is apparently so because he is representative of the unified human that Mick is trying to achieve through her androgyny. This unification arises through Singer’s possibly homosexual relationship with his fellow mute, Spiro Antonopoulos. As Foucault states in his book *The History of Sexuality*, homosexuality appears as “a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself... a kind of interior androgyny,

a hermaphroditism of the soul” (43). This internal completion of Singer provides Mick with a figure with whom she can share her own inversion of the masculinity and femininity within her.

Having this secure inner room allows for Mick to see herself rise above the level of the woman in the South and reach for a higher level. An instance of this ability to be on the top of the social sphere while in her own world is shown after Mick leaves Biff’s café and climbs to the top of a building under construction. Once Mick reaches the top of the building, “[she] stood up and held herself very straight. She spread out her arms like wings. This was the place everybody wanted to stand. The very top. But not many kids could do it. Most of them were scared, for if you lost your grip and rolled off the edge it would kill you” (34). By risking her well-being by climbing the building, Mick has metaphorically, if only for a moment, climbed to the pinnacle of the social sphere. When Mick stretches out her long back and held her lengthy arms at full span, she is using her body to rewrite the social codes of the South. With her body stretched to its fullest while standing atop a large building, it is easy to see that at this point Mick’s gargantuan body is at its most exaggerated. As Bakhtin points out, the gargantuan body allows for one to “detach [him/herself] from [him/her] body and lead an independent life, for [s/he] hides the rest of [him/her] body, as something secondary” (Bakhtin 317). At this moment, she is no longer to be seen as the feminine, but rather as the incarnation of largeness itself. Through transcending her body, she is no longer to shrink and contort her identity in order inhabit the small position granted to woman. Instead she breaks her gilded cage, frees her gargantuan body, and reaches toward the sky to touch a piece of the top of society. It is as if she is taking a Whitmanian stance while upon this building, and calling out “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / I am large, I contain multitudes.”

In the South, this grand position at the top of the social sphere was primarily reserved for men; but, by donning the traits of the masculine and expanding her already large body, Mick is able to climb the building that most children were scared to climb, reach toward the sky, and imagine herself as unbounded from regional and societal constraints. This liberating act causes much excitement within Mick, and she feels like bursting with passion. The narrator states, “She wanted to sing. All the songs she knew pushed up toward her throat, but there was no sound” (34). Mick realizes that this feeling of power and passion is merely temporary because her position as an adolescent is ending, and her puberty is coming ever closer. Mick fears that her transition into puberty will strip her of her masculinity and cement her into the submissive role of the southern female. Mick knows that the time is coming when patriarchal rules will be placed even more heavily upon her; so, instead of childishly singing on top of the building, Mick methodically ponders as to how she will claim her artistic identity and cement herself at the top of the social sphere when this time comes.

Mick’s masculine act is then accentuated when she lights and smokes a cigarette on the top of the building while contemplating how life will be for her after she dominates society and becomes famous at age seventeen or changes the world with some great invention. This moment of desire and power could not have been achievable if Mick would have rejected who she really is and joined with the Girl Scouts. This area is restricted for them, and only open for those who refuse to be subservient and stand ready to change the world. However, Mick’s feeling of being on top of the world is shattered by her youngest brother crying off in the distance. After her failed attempt to stop Ralph’s crying by telling her other brother, Bubber, how to calm him, Mick is forced to climb down from the top of the building because “Ralph was still hollering and there wouldn’t be any peace for her at all” (36). Having to constantly take care of her younger brothers

fixes her in the feminine role of the one-day housewife and care-giver. Though there are moments when Mick is able to escape the role of the southern female and transcend to the realm of the masculine, the frequent maternal duty she must complete for her brothers foreshadows a dark possibility of a completely feminized Mick, one without ambition and androgyny. If she were to shed the masculine traits of her character, there would be no more climbs, no spreading her arms out like wings, no more standing at the place “where everybody wanted to stand.” Mick would only have a life submission to the male and domestic duties.

Once Mick climbs down from the building, she enters an empty room and proceeds to write upon the walls with chalk. She writes the names of Thomas Edison, Dick Tracy, and Benito Mussolini in big block letters upon the wall. These men all serve as a reflection for how the budding giantess sees herself. Yaeger draws a connection between the giantess and these powerfully influential men by stating, “Traditionally giants... are associated with epics and monuments, with governments as they rise and fall, with the sacerdotal moments of public life” (117). Her stature and masculine desire naturally draw her to these powerful men for inspiration on how she can make history herself. She later adds one final name to the top of her list that truly throbs her artistic heart. This name is “Motsart.” On the wall, there is the inventor, the actor, the leader and, most importantly, the (misspelled) musician. It is easy to infer that all of these men have their own framed portraits in Mick’s “inside-room.” The fact that all of the people she strives to imitate are men speaks volumes of Southern society. The reason that Mick does not look up to any woman is not necessarily because she is a misogynist, but rather because the society has not fostered any chance for the woman to become a powerful, influential individual. Given the patriarchal nature of the South, it is easy to understand why Mick “knows of no

intelligent women who are admired in her world” (Perry 40). She must see herself as at least partially masculine if she is to look up to anybody for inspiration to feed her ambition and hopes.

On the wall opposite to the one listing her heroes, Mick writes “a very bad word”: “PUSSY” (37). This sets this wall in complete contrast from the other. This serves as a harsh reality for Mick. Sara Gleeson-White points out this reality by stating, “This graffiti reveals that Mick is alert to social constructions and perceptions of women as sex objects, whose sole function is a sexual one” (35). By placing this “dirty” word across from the list of influential names, Mick has drawn out the societal dichotomy for the roles of men and woman.

Understanding the vast differences in the way of life is very frightening for Mick. With this understanding, it is very easy to see why Mick fears her developing body and wishes to avoid being chained to the role of the female. However, this inscription is not simply the childish markings of a girl who fears her own development. Though there is an undeniable anxiety behind the inscription, it also serves as a point of inspiration in much the same way as the listed male names on the opposite wall. By writing the word “PUSSY” on the wall, Mick has effectively “androgynized” the building upon which she stands when feeling at her most androgynously empowered. Bringing this balance of masculinity and femininity to the place where Mick feels so powerful is crucial for the development of her artistic identity. As Rado explains, artists of the modernist period often “represent their creative minds as if they are characterized by a balance of sexually charged energies, fueling their artistic impulses with oppositional tensions” (12).

Femininity is just as crucial as masculinity for Mick’s artistic identity to develop. By making this mark on the wall, she has placed her feminine fears beside her masculine inspiration because only by reconciling the two can she hope to claim the unique artistic identity that she desires.

Just as she fears the limiting and objectifying connotations surrounding the word “Pussy,” Mick also fears that her further developing femininity will override her masculinity. She is repulsed by the overwhelming femininity of her sisters. This is not to say that she hates their femininity per se, but rather, she hates the fact that their identity and personality has been reduced to strictly feminine qualities. Mick notes her sisters’ narrow personalities by stating that Etta just “primped all day long” (41) and that “Hazel never had to grab for anything and she was soft” (42). She openly voices her concerns with feminine appearance and behavior when she interacts with them. When Mick is at home, she is constantly berated by her sisters. Etta confronts her about her androgynous appearance when she states, “It makes me sick to see you in those silly boy’s clothes. Somebody ought to clamp down on you, Mick Kelly, and make you behave” (42). Mick’s response is quite hostile and clearly shows how she feels about her place in society as a girl. She states, “I wear shorts because I don’t want to wear your hand-me-downs. I don’t want to be like either of you. And I won’t. That’s why I wear shorts. I’d rather be a boy any day...” (42). This hostility toward and rejection of her exclusively feminine qualities are seen throughout the novel. Though Mick realizes that she cannot, and should not, separate herself from her feminine qualities, she attempts to guard these qualities from others as often as possible. Biff Brannon notices this while Mick was in the café earlier that day. Biff thought, “that in nearly every person there was some special physical part kept always guarded... The kid Mick picked at the front of her blouse to keep the cloth from rubbing the new, tender nipples beginning to come out on her breasts” (29). Her developing breasts signify her transition into womanhood, perpetuating the fear that puberty will cause Mick to lose her masculinity. Due to this fear, it is as if she wishes to place her femininity in the box marked “PRIVATE. KEEP OUT. PRIVATE” (239) that rests underneath her bed and guard it with all of her might. She

warns anyone trying to peer in at her private femininity that she would “kill anybody that tried to mess with [her] private things” (265).

Though it is true that at this point Mick fears her developing femininity and would happily hide from it, she understands that this simply cannot happen. This understanding comes to the surface when she has a discussion with her brother Bill about the “violin” she is making. Ever the crafty musical enthusiast, though with no training, Mick attempts to fashion a violin out of pieces of musical equipment she finds lying about the house and town. She finds a cracked ukulele and strings it with two violin strings, a mandolin string, and guitar string. When she opens her private box in which she keeps the “violin” she notices that it doesn’t even slightly look right. Then she becomes enraged and shouts about how it is all wrong and that she hates it. After this outburst, Bill states to Mick, “I could have told you at first it was crazy to think you could make any violin. That’s one thing you don’t sit down and make- you got to buy them. I thought anybody would know a thing like that. But I figured it wouldn’t hurt if you found out for yourself” (46). This statement causes Mick to resent Bill, but she is not truly angry at him.

When one takes Mick in the proper context of her shifting, fragile gender identity, one can see how she sees herself in the “violin” she is attempting to craft. As Veronica Doubleday points out in her article “Sounds of Power: An Overview of Musical Instruments and Gender,” “Gendered relationships are rarely egalitarian, and in today’s world the realm of musical instruments remains clearly male-dominated” (15). This “violin” serves to get Mick’s foot in the door of the male-dominated profession of music composition. But, there is also a more personal connection Mick shares with this violin. Social anthropologist Alfred Gell’s theory of agency states that “significant objects (such as dolls, cars or works of art) occupy positions as social agents in human culture” (Doubleday qtd Gell 3). This personage granted to Mick’s “violin”

creates a relationship between her and her violin that contests the site of her gender since, in the act of performing, the instrument becomes an extension of the performer. If she can make these pieces of discarded musical equipment into a violin, then, by the same logic, she can transform herself into a masculine individual. When the violin fails and she loses its personage, the relationship is destroyed and she simultaneously realizes that she cannot force masculinity upon herself. She has to accept her femininity; even if she keeps it guarded from others, it will always exist. With this acceptance, Mick is now able to reconcile her feminine and masculine qualities and become the androgyne, which allows for the development of her natural artistic identity.

The beginning of Mick's use of the feminine is located in the first chapter of the second part of the novel. The chapter begins, "This summer was different from any other time Mick could remember. Nothing much happened that she could describe to herself in thoughts or words- but there was a feeling of change" (97). At this point in the novel, her self-conceptualization is certainly more androgynous than strictly feminine, though her repulsion of her female form has resided. This is demonstrated through her daydreams of being the masculine, if not male, figure saving her friend and confidant, John Singer, from drowning while they are ice skating or by imagining that if anyone within a twenty-pound range of her weight were to jump out at her she would "give them a good sock and go right on" (102). Her androgyny also appears in the fact that she received special permission to take mechanical shop instead of the stenographic course "like Hazel and Etta had done" (104).

However, she begins to use her feminine self to fulfill her desire to fit in. In an attempt to be accepted by the high school crowd, Mick decides to throw a prom party at her home. She decides to repress her masculine side by attempting to play the role of a mature, proper southern lady during the party. To begin, Mick decides to drastically change her appearance. She

relinquishes the shorts and tennis shoes and instead picks up a dress and pumps. While looking into the mirror, Mick realizes that she looks absolutely beautiful, but “She didn’t feel like herself at all. She was somebody different from Mick Kelly entirely” (107). Though initially shocking, this feeling did not bring about distress for her. She recognizes the potential acceptance of her feminine side. This is reflected when the narrator states, “She felt so different from the old Mick Kelly that she knew this would be better than anything in her whole life- this party” (107).

However, during the party, Mick becomes too dedicated to playing her feminine role, and it becomes devastating for her. An instance of this comes about when she realizes how much taller she is than all of the boys: “Every kid at the party was a runt beside her, except Harry, who was only a couple inches shorter. No boy wanted to prom with a girl so much taller than him” (111). This anxiety over her height does not appear before this instance in the novel. In fact, it is even celebrated when she used her elongated body to reach toward the sky while on top of her now sacred, “androgynized” building. This anxiety is exacerbated by Harry’s comments on her height. He states to Mick, “Once I saw a lady at the fair who was eight and a half feet tall. But you probably won’t grow that big” (111). This is a subtly sinister remark because it indicts her androgyny, which she was all too happy to embrace earlier in the novel, by invoking a scene of a freak-show where Mick is on display. Her once empowering androgyny is now used to punish her since Mick has relinquished her masculinity and adopted the role of the southern woman for the evening. Then, Harry reaffirms her doubts about herself by saying that she will “probably” not become a giantess. The use of “probably” insists that there still remains a chance that she will become the freak on display to be gazed upon by the masses. Both the freak and the female are treated the same way by this gaze. This gaze implies a form of possession upon the female and allows the grotesque body to become “[a plaything] of men, who discover as a birthright their

privileged ability, their publically bestowed right to reassemble the fragmented body” (Yaeger 218). Earlier she was standing straight and tall on top of a building feeling like the ruler of all below, but now she is ashamed of that same body because it does not fit into the ideal feminine stature and hopes “cigarettes would help stunt the rest of her growth” (111).

Mick does not last long in her attempt to play the role of the perfect southern female. All throughout the party she has exhibited the masculine actions of being controlling and domineering towards her guests, even refusing to let in several lingering children. However, once she returns from her walk with Harry, imbued with a new fear of her body due to her feminine shame, she sees that the very people she wished to keep out have entered her home. At this moment, all power she possibly felt as either the pretty, dressed up feminine or the controlling masculine has been usurped by the party-goers. For her, the party has ended by becoming a big mess of playing children. Once she has this realization, she decided to simply run off. While running, Mick comes across a large ditch. She then attempts to jump into the ditch without any hesitation, which turns out poorly for the flustered girl. The narrator states, “With her tennis shoes she would have landed like a cat- but the pumps made her slip and her stomach hit this pipe. Her breath was stopped. She lay quietly with her eyes closed” (116). This phallic symbol striking her upon the stomach displays the brutal reality for Mick if she chooses to remain playing the role of a woman in Southern society. Gorba states, Mick learns the hard lesson that, with the discarding of her shorts and tennis shoes, she lost the physical freedom of childhood...” (8). Her shorts and tennis shoes have always been representative of her masculinity, and by trading them for pumps, Mick has effectively traded her androgyny for femininity. The only way for Mick to escape this humiliating situation is to once again don her shorts and tennis shoes and refuse to repress her androgyny.

Sadly though, Mick loses a part of herself at the prom party. After returning to her home to change back into her shorts and tennis shoes, the narrator states, “She was too big to wear her shorts any more after this. No more after tonight. Not any more” (116). This is a moment where Mick’s fear of maturity and puberty begins to be realized. However, Mick takes advantage of her final short-clad night. She decides to wander off alone that night. In the dark, she can fully express her masculine side without fear of societal retribution. Eventually, she quenches her musical thirst by wandering off toward her neighbor’s house to listen to the music playing from their radios. The symphony she listens to in the bushes is Beethoven’s *Eroica*. As she sits there and listened to the music Mick is filled with much joy and pain. The narrator states that for Mick, “Wonderful music like this was the worst hurt there could be” (118). This is so not only because music has the power to sway emotion, but also because she realizes that she, as a woman, would most likely never be able to create such a beautiful work of art. The realm of art, especially music composition seems completely barred from her. Not only does she feel that she will never achieve any musical success, but she also must wander into a neighborhood that is not her own if she even wants to hear her such coveted symphonies.

Disillusioned by her failure to reconcile her masculine and feminine sides, Mick’s feelings encapsulate the idea of androgyny during the latter half of the nineteenth century in France and Germany, home of her beloved composer and the subject of his work. As A.J.L. Busst points, “The desire of those disillusioned with exterior reality can only be contended only by the mind, and consequently that the [androgyne] does not truly exist in reality otherwise than as the creation of the mind, of pure art...” (42). With the fear that her androgyny will never again actualize itself, “Mick began hitting her thigh with her fists. She pounded with all of her might until the tears came down her face. But she could not feel this hard enough” (119). Mick knows

that as only the feminine, her place in southern society is bleak, and because of it she hates her femininity horribly and decides to lash out at it by striking her body until it is bloody and bruised. This moment of Mick grotesquely bludgeoning her body exemplifies Yaeger's theory of the grotesque body: [F]lesh that has been riven by violence, of fractured, excessive bodies [tells] us something that diverse southern cultures don't want us to say" (Yaeger xiii). This body riven with violence tells the reader of the dismal future for women in southern society. It shows the reader the self-hatred experienced by those who are perpetually repressed. Mick's state, unfortunately, continues to deteriorate throughout the rest of the novel.

The next major shift, and doubtlessly the most impactful, occurs when she goes on a bike ride to a creek with her friend Harry. Harry Minowitz is Mick's closest friend, but, ironically, he is the one who most destroys her androgyny and confirms her feminine fears. Harry is a Jewish boy who is heavily fixated on both Nazism and Fascism. He confides his fears in Mick and his hopes to assassinate Hitler, to which she naturally responds, "I'd like to fight the Fascists. I could dress up like a boy and nobody could ever tell. Cut my hair off and all" (245). Though he is quick to stand proudly as who he is, it is undeniable that part of Harry's confidence and masculinity is challenged when he learns that "Nazis made little Jew children get down on their hands and knees and eat grass from the ground" (244). This form of forced submissiveness parallels Freudian castration anxiety for Harry, who strives to be a war hero. Since Harry cannot realistically assassinate Hitler, he must find another way to assert his masculinity, and, with Mick, he does.

Once Mick and Harry arrive at the creek, the friendly scene drastically changes into a premature sexual encounter for Mick. After swimming naked with Harry, Mick and he decides to lie down on the bank before heading back. While lying there, Mick motions that they should start

back because it is getting dark; however, Harry counters this by stating, “No. Let’s lie down. Just for a minute. The narrator describes Mick’s discomfort to the situation by stating, “She sucked her knee and watched him. Her fists were tight and it was like she was tense all over” (273). This image of a tense and closed, contracted body does not convey a sense of consenting action. Soon after, Harry begins to have sex with Mick. In this disturbing scene, she feels as if “her head was broke off from her body and thrown away. And her eyes looked up straight into the sun into the blinding light while she counted something in her mind. And then this was the way” (274). At this moment, Mick has been forced into the role of the female. Unlike before, where she simply chooses to play the role at a party, this time, femininity has been forced onto her by the masculine. The same fear of sexual objectification that causes her to write “PUSSY” on an abandoned has now come to fruition in this act. This fear is further explained by Sara Gleeson-White: “Mick’s loss of virginity, and thus of girlhood, signals the loss of power that is inherent in southern womanhood” (Gleeson-White 38). The scene of Mick’s head rolling around on the ground calls back to theory of female decapitation as the equivalent of male castration anxiety. Through this ushering into womanhood, she feels like she has lost all power.

This sexual encounter causes a major loss for Mick. The narrator states, “Now she could not stay in the inside room. She had to be around someone all the time. Doing something every minute” (305). Her “inside room” being closed off to her is a major blow for Mick. Locked inside is her androgyny and she cannot again reach it because everything for her has changed. As the narrator states, “She felt very old, and it was like something was heavy inside her. She was a grown person now whether she wanted to or not” (276). Unlike the man, who is able to see adulthood as a form of freedom, the woman in the South must accept that her adulthood typically

entailed possession by a man. This shatters her individuality, which is shown by her neediness of others and rote activates when she is alone.

Mick's shattered identity is never given the chance to fully recover. Due to her family's financial crisis, she is forced into taking a job as a clerk at Woolworth's ten-cent store. There, becomes the representation of southern white womanhood. She must drop out of school because as Mick says, "A boy has a better advantage than a girl. I mean a boy can usually get some part-time job that don't take him out of school and leaves him time for other things. But there's no jobs like that for girls. When a girl wants a job she has to quit school and work full time" (246). This is precisely what happens for Mick. She begins dressing in stockings and dresses and wearing earrings. Her change is so apparent that it shatters the eroticized fascination that Biff holds for Mick. At the end of the novel when Biff sees Mick he thinks, "Her rough and childlike ways were almost gone. And instead there was something ladylike and delicate about her that was hard to point out" (357). However, this description of Mick provides her with a little hope. Brannon points out that her femininity is still vague. She has not quite settled into the role of the woman, which is pointed out by Biff's difficulty in finding what is so ladylike about her. Also, the statement that "childlike" ways are "almost" gone offers hope that they may be alive somewhere inside of her, locked in her inside room. Sadly, this job keeps her from entering her inside room. Life as an "adult" leaves her too tired to wish to reenter her once sacred room. Adulthood is devastating for Mick because she loses her individuality and "she has somehow annihilated her artistic identity" (Perry 43). This is the reason why she cannot enter her inside room.

Sadly, this inside room may be locked away forever. Shortly after getting the job at the nickel store, her sole confidant and visitor in her inside room, John Singer, commits suicide.

Singer, distraught over the loss of his best friend and suspected lover, shoots himself in the chest in the room he was renting from the Kelly's. Coming in Singer's room to play the radio and confide in him, Mick finds his bloody body. Unable to cope with the trauma, Mick "run[s] into the dark room and hit[s] herself with her fists" (352). This display of self-violence was also present while she listened to *Eroica* and realized that her perceived androgynous self will not be enough to save her from a life of subservience. As the narrator relays, "There were these two things she could never believe. That Mister Singer had killed himself and was dead. And that she was grown and had to work at Woolworth's" (351). For John Singer to die in such a horrible way certainly pushes Mick into a nihilist mindset. Her dream of androgyny and any other form of self she still had seem useless to the grips of oppression. Singer's death leaves Mick crestfallen and in disbelief.

However, a glimmer of her ambitious behavior seeps through. Her desire to buy a piano and her possession of Singer's radio serve to remind her of the self she once saw herself as being able to be. As the narrator states, "But she did have Mister Singer's radio... And maybe one of these days she might be able to set aside a little for a secondhand piano. Say a buck or two a week. And she wouldn't let anybody touch this private piano but her" (353). This is the final chance she has to reclaim her lost self. If she can reclaim her artistic identity by saving up enough money to purchase a piano, she may be able to unlock her inside-room, reclaim her androgyny, and become the ambitious, socially powerful artist she once saw herself as being capable of achieving. Though she may ask herself, "What the hell good was it. All the plans she had made, and the music" (350), she knows that these plans and the music serve as her only way to escape her dismal life at Woolworth's.

Mick Kelly is truly one of the most dynamic heroines created by Carson McCullers. Her portrayal of this complex not-so-little girl in the deep South pointed out several injustices and anxieties found within the women of the society. From the loss of possession of their own bodies to their minds, these women undergo trial after tribulation; however, Mick shows that she is able, if ever so slightly, to rise above this position and claim independence. As outlined in Rado's book *The Modern Androgyne Imagination*, androgyny is the best tool for one to claim artistic individualism. Men and woman are not intrinsically characteristically different. The main difference between the two are the rigid, culturally-inscribed gender-roles that are placed upon people in society. Mick upends this fiction of gender, and in doing so is able to create, for a time, a fulfilling identity for herself. Sadly, her androgyny is beaten into repression by the society in which she lives. However, there still lives a piece of it inside of her that nothing can kill. This piece is Mick's answer to escaping the oppressive patriarchy. Mick truly is proof that "By nature people are both sexes" (McCullers 132).

Chapter 2

The Fallen Giantess:

Hermaphroditic Failure in Carson McCullers's *Ballad of the Sad Café*

"For Harmony is a symphony, and symphony is an agreement; but an agreement of disagreements while they disagree there cannot be; you cannot harmonize with that which disagrees"

--Plato, Symposium

The Ballad of the Sad Café is a haunting novella, published in 1951 by Carson McCullers at the height of both her career and personal struggles. This short but powerful work outlines McCullers's struggles with her own masculine identity and contrasting southern womanhood by displaying a caustic, dichotomous relationship between masculinity and femininity through the grotesque and hyperbolic representations of her characters. Miss Amelia Evans, the protagonist of this dismal tale, is a rich giantess who outright rejects her own femininity to the point of her own demise. Whereas Mick, from *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, is an adolescent struggling to reconcile her desire for power and personal agency with her societally mandated femininity, Miss Amelia is a mature woman who hardly possesses a shred of femininity at all. Though many postulate that she is the end-point of Mick's journey before being caused to submit to a phallogocentric society, I believe that assumption is wrong because Miss Amelia displays an extremely one-sided, masculine persona, which is the antithesis of Mick's striving for androgyny. Throughout the novella, Miss Amelia demonstrates an absolute denial of her feminine side in favor of the masculine side.

Due to this, it is more appropriate to term Miss Amelia as "hermaphroditic" instead of "androgynous." This term is not to be used in the biological sense, but rather in direct reference to the myth of Hermaphroditus. As Kari Weil presents in her book *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference*, "That myth... presents the union of male and female as forever incomplete, two bodies competing with, rather than complementing [as in the case of androgyny], each other" (9-10). Mick Kelly's story outlines the deplorable treatment of the southern woman and how it is possible to escape through androgyny, but Miss Amelia's story outlines the dangers denying half of the self while living in a one-sided society dominated solely by masculinity. The tragic

outcome of this novella proves that androgyny does not aim to create a woman devoid of femininity (i.e. the hermaphrodite), but really, a well-rounded, whole individual.

Miss Amelia Evans is arguably one of McCullers's most grotesque characters. Like many of her female characters, including Mick, Miss Amelia did not grow up with any close female counterparts. She never even knew her own mother and spent all of her childhood with her father. This motherless childhood and distancing of feminine companions is a reoccurring background for many of McCullers's female characters. This feminine distancing no doubt plays a huge part in shaping Miss Amelia into a purely masculine, hermaphroditic creature. She is a thirty-year-old woman described as being "six feet two inches tall which in itself is not natural for a woman" (14) and having "two gray crossed eyes which are turned inward so sharply that they seem to be changing with each other one long and secret gaze of grief" (4). By her stature and facial features, without even consulting her actions or personality, one can surmise that Miss Amelia is unlike any woman or man before her. Her intimidating stature speaks to her grotesque nature and her abundance of power in her little, unnamed town. As Susan Stewart states, "the giant's consuming image is placed at the center of local civic identity: the hub of the marketplace and its articulation of commodity relations" (80). This control stems from the giant's symbolic representation of "overabundance" and "unlimited consumption" (80). Miss Amelia's power is clearly reflected in the central position of Amelia's house: "The largest building, in the very center of the town, is boarded up completely and leans so far to the right that it seems bound to collapse at any minute" (3), and the qualities of "overabundance" and "unlimited consumption" were certainly present during its time as the café. Though it has become decrepit after the giantess's fall, this towering home was once the "center of local civil identity," upon which the entire story is hinged.

Amelia's large house and large body extend beyond the permissible scope for a woman in the South during the early twentieth century. The miniature woman, truly the antithesis of Miss Amelia, represents the woman conforming to the social. Stewart explains that, "the miniature represents closure, interiority, the domestic, and the overly cultural" (70). Miss Amelia's large body does not allow culturally mandated domesticity to trap her in a cramped, gilded cage. Patricia Yaeger expands upon the idea of how the miniature body represents societal order, even oppression, and how the gargantuan body destroys this order in southern literature: "In depicting the explosive body of the giant woman, [the female writer] is exposing a southern power structure and its pervasive influence-- the ways in which sexual and racial boundaries are enforced by white children as well as white men" (128). In her explanation, the white man, though not necessarily the miniature, ascribes the diminutive status to the contracted woman, and the southern child, another form of the miniature, accepts the "oppressive pleasantries of middle class 'taste'" (135). This assessment is very appropriate when applied to this text, because Cousin Lymon, who is simultaneously a feeble white man and very child-like, is the miniature character in this novella that brings Amelia's gigantic body to the ground. As the narrator states, "No one in the town, not even Miss Amelia, had any idea how old the hunchback was. Some maintained that when he came to the town he was about twelve years old, still a child—others were certain that he was well past forty" (63). His betrayal of Miss Amelia at the end of the novella, fueled by his potential lust for Marvin Macy, displays how male homosexuality is less transgressive than Amelia's gender transgression.

Before this betrayal and fall, Miss Amelia also controls the social sphere in her little town by being the only doctor, or at least the only noteworthy one. Though she is known never to shy away from even the most terrible of diseases, there is one ailment which halts her: "If a patient

came in with a female complaint she could do nothing. Indeed at the mere mention of the words her face would slowly darken with shame, and she would stand there craning her neck against the collar of her shirt, or rubbing her swamp boots together, for all of the world like a great, shamed, dumb-tongued child” (17). Miss Amelia’s inability to help with something as natural and harmless as a menstrual cycle shows the impact of her debilitating masculinity. This shame that comes when she hears of any feminine problems doubtlessly brings a form of self-hatred because, try as she might, she is physically not a man, and must undergo these same feminine problems. This is one of the clearest examples of her hermaphroditic nature causing disharmony and strife within herself. Her menstruation is surely one of the secrets and griefs that her crossed eyes exchange with each other. Menstruation causes Miss Amelia to be hyperconscious of her sex, and her overly masculine mindset makes this weight all the more unbearable. Where Mick’s androgyny allows her, at least for a time, to lack self-consciousness and see herself in her masculine heroes, Miss Amelia’s failure to reconcile her masculine and feminine traits alienates her from herself and fractures her work. Such a visceral reaction shows that she refuses to treat these feminine ailments not out of a hatred for the female per se, but for the hatred of having to be female in such a gender dichotomous town. In response to Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, Kari Weil notes that, “To be conscious of one’s sex, [Woolf] suggests, is a form of repression; it interferes with what she refers to as ‘the unity of the mind’ and consequently with the ‘fullness’ of the work” (146). Miss Amelia’s hermaphroditic mindset causes her to be conscious of her masculinity while it wages war on her occasional feminine impulses. The outcome of this internal war results in shame for her own ministrations, rejection of self, and failure to satisfy all of the duties of a doctor.

Miss Amelia's powerful and domineering personality also coincides with Stewart's description of the giant in relation to the economy of a society. Miss Amelia doubtlessly determines the "articulation of commodity relations" in her town. Not only does her general store allow her to set the commodity relations in this town, but also, especially, her whiskey, which was "the best liquor in the county" (4). This whiskey was quite obviously what the majority of loom and factory workers spent their wages on. It had a mystical quality to it that seemed to open up the world for the drinker. As the narrator states, "He [the drinker] may suffer or he may be spent with joy—but the experience has shown the truth; he has warmed his soul and seen the message hidden there" (10). This mystical revealing of the truth is nothing more than a form of escapism from a society in which one is only worth what he or she produces. The sharp dichotomy between masculinity and femininity and the devaluing of non-pragmatic, feminine qualities attributes to this lack of human value. As the reader is led to understand, Miss Amelia has no interest in people because, "People, unless they are nilly-willy or very sick, cannot be taken into the hands and changed overnight to something more worthwhile and profitable" (5). This estrangement from her fellow man leads to every relationship Miss Amelia has to be one of exploitation, which is rampant throughout the novella and plays a major role in her near demise.

The over-masculine quality of Miss Amelia's pragmatism leads to nothing but contempt for things that are not directly employable. For example, during the first snow that this town receives, nearly everyone in the town wildly enjoys the anomaly, but the ever-analytic Amelia simply draws the shutters and locks her windows. The narrator relays that Miss Amelia did not dislike the snow, but rather that "[i]t was simply that she was unable to form an immediate opinion on this new event, and unless she knew exactly and definitely how she thought of the matter (which was nearly always the case) she preferred to ignore it" (57). Since she could find

no direct use or profit for the snowfall, much like relationships with other people, she shuts herself in her large house and ignores it. In this novella, since masculinity reigns unchecked as the supreme social standard, only the ability to produce a commodity is valued, and humanity is essentially useless: “You know without having to reason about it the price of a bale of cotton or a quart of molasses. But no value has been put on human life; it is given to us free and taken without being paid for. What is it worth?” (54). In this town, the non-industrious aspects of human life-- i.e. the feminine qualities of compassion and sensitivity represented by the poor Morris Feinstein, who is hazed and run out of town-- are completely worthless and are cast to the wayside.

Though she maintains a strictly masculine demeanor throughout the novella, Miss Amelia does attempt to make a slight shift toward the feminine; however, it is a move tainted by the commodification of her relationships. Cousin Lymon serves as good contrast to Miss Amelia’s over-masculine qualities due to the fact that Lymon is “a regular Morris Feinstein” (9). The men outside Amelia’s porch give this title to the hunchback because he begins to cry while introducing himself. As the reader learns, this label gets its name from a Jew of the same name who would cry when called a “Christ-killer.” He was so afflicted by showing his emotion in this town that he had to leave to Society City. The narrator relays that, “if a man were prissy in any way, or if a man ever wept, he was known as a Morris Feinstein” (9) and would ultimately be exiled as well. This horrible backlash for any display of emotion shows the vast gulf between the gender roles in this town and how people find femininity to be useless. Panthea Reid Broughton draws this connection between masculinity and alienation in her article “Rejection of the Feminine in Carson McCullers’ *The Ballad of the Sad Café*”: “The virtues of tenderness and sensitivity are considered to be exclusively feminine and decidedly superfluous and downright

contemptible by a pragmatic and rationalistic society” (5). The only reason Lymon gets away with this behavior is because no one is willing to cross Miss Amelia in order to bring attention to it; however, even his seemingly effeminate behavior is strictly exploitative like the majority of human interaction in this novella, though the reason is more superfluous. The narrator states that though Lymon might be quite the socialite, “[t]he hunchback was a great mischief-maker. He enjoyed any kind of to-do, and without saying a word he could set the people at each other in a way that was miraculous” (39). Even as a foil against the overly masculine Amelia, Cousin Lymon still is not above exploiting his fellow man, even if it is for the childish reward of a spectacle, or simple entertainment.

As previously stated, Cousin Lymon’s relationship does help warm the otherwise irredeemably cold Amelia. It is, after all, his appearance and influence over Amelia that begins the café for which this novella is named. Amelia is so moved by her supposed cousin that after the opening night of the café, “[she] shut the door of her premises, but forgot to bolt it” (23). This slip is drastically out of character for one who previously would not even let another soul drink on her doorstep, much less trust one not to break into her premises. Cousin Lymon’s relationship with Miss Amelia helps to feminize her, and the outcome is beneficial not only for herself, who receives a companion and new revenue for profit, but for the rest of the townspeople, who receive a new sense of comradery and fellowship. Miss Amelia begins to display her femininity not just inwardly with her newfound kindness, but outwardly as well: “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” (24). In the time of the café, which spanned approximately six years, Miss Amelia is able to become, in Kari Weil’s distinction, androgynous instead of hermaphroditic. By accepting aspects of her femininity, Miss Amelia is the happiest,

and most creative she has ever been, for it is noted that she writes a mystery during this time. Amelia's creative and constructive agency of her time, which is absent in a life centered on pragmatism and commodities, is directly connected to her newly found androgyny. Lisa Rado points out that the androgynous mindset "offers the potential for a radical enhancement of artistic authority and power in a world in which traditional methods... have been upset by the breakdown of the binary male/female hierarchy" (19). However, Miss Amelia's exploitative and pragmatic outlook are unrelenting and jeopardize her androgyny and relationship with Cousin Lymon. She never really forges a true connection with the hunchback, but instead attempts to buy his affection with treats and trinkets, which she does to a certain extent: "She spoiled him to a point beyond reason, but nothing seemed to strengthen him; food only made his hump grow larger while the rest of him remained weakly and deformed" (24). Though she may monetarily give all she has, any true connection will remain, just like Lymon himself, weakly and deformed. One central reason as to why she cannot form a true connection is because she refuses to be submissive enough to be vulnerable. The relationship is kept at an arm's length because of her dire need to be the dominant one in any situation. As Constante Gonzalez Groba points out, "As she is incapable of playing a role that implies weakness or submission... [t]he man Amelia can safely love is a dwarfish hunchback Lymon, as he does not pose any threat of domination or sexual possession" (154). However, she not only hopes to withhold sex from this relationship, but deep emotion, too. Her refusal to share her deepest and hardest memories with Lymon proves this theory: "The only part of her life that she did not want Cousin Lymon to share with her was the memory of her ten-day marriage. Marvin Macy was the one subject that was never, at any time discussed between the two of them" (37). She hopes to use Cousin Lymon as emotional support and company, but refuses to submit enough to be vulnerable in front of him. Without

displaying vulnerability, no true connection can be made, and this relationship fails for the same reason her ten-day marriage failed.

The marriage between Miss Amelia and Marvin Macy is truly one of the strangest scenes in this novella, but it is certainly one of the most telling. The narrator displays Marvin Macy as the archetypal figure of the overly-manly man. It is noted that he enjoys mutilating animals for fun and that he carried a preserved ear from a man he killed in a razor fight. His relationships are exploitative as well, as it is stated he was handsome and admired by several women, but “[t]hese gentle young girls he degraded and shamed” (27). Though the narrator does not state whether or not any of the women consented to Marvin’s sexual advancement, it is quite obvious that consent would mean little if nothing to him. He is also given a demonic connotation due to the fact that “he never sweated, not even in August, and that surely was a sign worth pondering over” (51). This demonic and hyperbolic representation of the manly-man shows how unchecked masculinity can lead to an abundance of destruction and decay. However, through all of these many faults, Marvin Macy does seem to genuinely fall in love with Miss Amelia, which softens him to a great extent. It is never revealed what attracts Marvin to Amelia, but his domineering actions suggest that it may be the challenge of conquering the most prominent woman in the town. To possess Amelia would be the ultimate expression of power and masculinity for Marvin. Regardless of the origin of his love, it does seem to be very genuine and passionate. Unfortunately, though, in this horrid town, his love comes at a terrible price of absolute submission for Miss Amelia. As it is noted by the narrator, “the value and quality of any love is determined solely by the lover himself” (26). Due to this, the lover/beloved binary operates much in the same way as the masculine/feminine binary operates in this novella, with the former being highly privileged to the latter. Though this may be arguably prescriptive of love in a general

sense, it is undeniably so in this town full of oppression and exploitation. It is perfectly understandable that the people in this town, especially someone as masculine and dominant as Miss Amelia “wants to be the lover. And the curt truth is that, in a deep secret way, the state of being loved is intolerable...” (26).

Surprisingly, Miss Amelia decides to marry Marvin Macy. Her reason is definitely one of pragmatism, a pragmatism that erodes the marriage, but one that ultimately ends up serving her very well materially. Her masculinity is displayed in the absurd scene of the wedding’s pronouncement and recessional. At the altar, Miss Amelia is dressed in “her dead mother’s bridal gown which was of yellow satin and at least twelve inches too short for her” (30). This wedding dress is the only remnant of her mother’s life told within the story, and the fact that it is a foot too short for the towering Miss Amelia shows she has outgrown the position her mother inhabited in southern society. Miss Amelia is clearly agitated and uncomfortable during the ceremony. One of the main reasons for this discomfort is the fact that she has traded her securing overalls for a ridiculously short dress. Just as Mick gave up her boy-shorts and tennis shoes for proper feminine wear, Miss Amelia has had to abandon her masculine signifiers for a traditionally feminine garment. This forced feminization does not last long for Miss Amelia, and the compensation for having to endure it is foreshadowed when the narrator states, “Miss Amelia hurried out of the church, not taking the arm of her husband, but walking at least two paces in front of him” (30). Miss Amelia not only breaks from the traditional recessional, but also inverts it by leading her husband out of the ceremony.

It should come as no surprise that after such an untraditional ceremony, an untraditional marriage should soon follow. As soon as the marriage ceremony is over, Miss Amelia leads Marvin Macy back to her home and along the way she spoke only of business. In fact, it is noted

that, “she treated her groom in exactly the same manner she would have used with some customer who had come into the store to buy paint from her” (30). It is apparent in situations like this that that very same masculinity makes her unable to make any genuine connection with her fellow man to the point that her own husband and a stranger wanting to buy goods are indistinguishable. The failure to achieve union is presented with even more force when Miss Amelia not only refuses to consummate her marriage, but also even resents Marvin Macy for attempting it.

Miss Amelia takes things to an even more depraved level when she begins to treat the marriage as nothing more than a business transaction itself. In a pathetic attempt to persuade Miss Amelia into physically embracing him, Marvin Macy brings her several gifts, which are almost certainly stolen, and he signs over all of his property to her. In response to this, the narrator states that Miss Amelia merely “judged shrewdly for a moment the sum of [the presents’] value- then she put them in the counter out for sale” (31) and “studied the [deed to Marvin’s land] to make sure there was no possibility of trick and filed it soberly in the drawer of her desk” (32). Devoid of any sympathy or gratitude, Miss Amelia then continues to spurn her devastated lover. This, in turn, causes Marvin Macy to become a pathetic sight. There is no doubt that his relationship with Miss Amelia has feminized him to the point of absolute submission. When masculinity and femininity are present in their most extreme form, regardless of the sex of the individual, it can lead to dehumanization. As Panthea Reid Broughton points out about this toxic marriage, “[Marvin Macy’s] unhealthy behavior, whether aggressively masculine or servilely feminine, results from a social ethos which has destroyed a human sense of balance” (6). This sense of balance is the illusive dream achievable through androgyny as Weil and Rado

see it, but Amelia's marriage shows that when there is no union between humans, nor between masculinity and femininity, all balance is lost and destruction shortly follows.

After six years of happily running the café, Miss Amelia receives word from Henry Macy that his brother Marvin is to return to the little unnamed town soon. Without surprise, upon Marvin's arrival, Miss Amelia's domination over her little town begins to be challenged. Soon before Marvin returned to the town, Miss Amelia slaughters a hog in anticipation of the arriving cold season. Due to her great influence, much of the town also slaughters their pigs for barbequing and preserving; however, Marvin's hellish nature brings with him an unseasonable heat that bares down on this town worse than the heat of August. As the narrator states, "After a few days there was everywhere the smell of slowly spoiling meat, and an atmosphere of dreary waste" (51). Macy claim further responsibility for the disruptive and uncanny weather when he essentially claims that the first snowfall to ever happen in this little town belongs to him. As the narrator relates, "Marvin Macy laid claim to the snowfall. He said that he knew snow, had seen it in Atlanta, and from the way he walked about the town that day it was as though he owned every flake" (57). Macy's supposed domination over the natural world is the greatest challenge for Miss Amelia's unnatural physical power and social persuasion. It threatens to capture Amelia and place her in her more "natural," submissive role of the woman in southern society. Amelia, without surprise, is more than willing to fight to retain her position, and sets the date for this clash of the titans on February 2nd, Groundhog Day. Unfortunately, the fact that "the ground hog had seen his shadow and there was to be bad weather ahead" (63), foreshadows Amelia's demise.

Not long after the pig incident, Marvin begins to cause trouble at Miss Amelia's café, trouble especially concerning Cousin Lymon. Absolutely infatuated with his criminal back story

and the fact that he has been to Atlanta, Lymon develops an arguably homosexual desire for Marvin Macy. Cousin Lymon would often exaggerate his deformed and grotesque appearance in order to garner pity or sympathy from the people around him. The narrator gives the reader a surreal description of this action: “Cousin Lymon had a very peculiar accomplishment, which he used whenever he wished to ingratiate himself with someone. He would stand very still, and with just a little concentration, he could wiggle his large pale ears with marvelous quickness and ease” (45). Lymon uses this tactic coupled with a “trotlike dance” (46) in order to gain the affection, or at least curiosity of Marvin Macy as he has so many others. However, his freak-show performance backfires when Macy, unamused, strikes the hunchback on the side of the head. As Carmen Skaggs points out in her article “A House of Freaks: Performance and the Grotesque in McCullers’s *The Ballad of the Sad Café*,” “By playing the role of the unlovable, Cousin Lymon garners the affection of not only Amelia but of the entire community. Ironically, however, he craves the one relationship in which he is treated as monstrous rather than human. He becomes a victim of the success of his own performance” (135). This tactic fails to sway Macy because he, as the archetypal masculine man, has no sympathy to give Lymon for his freakish nature. For Macy, Lymon remains only a “runt” and “Brokeback” (45) until he realizes that he can use this little deformed man to help exact his revenge on Amelia.

Lymon’s infatuation with Macy completes the destructive love triangle at the center of the story and further proves the narrator’s claim that “everyone wants to be a lover” (23). However, this love triangle is built upon exploitation of the beloved. Lymon wants Macy for the sake of what he believes to be endless entertainment, Miss Amelia wants Lymon for pet-like companionship, and Marvin Macy wants to dominate Miss Amelia to reestablish his lost

masculinity. All of these relationships are built around selfish aims that show that “the lover is forever trying to strip bare his beloved” (24).

Unable to stand the malignant relationship forming between Lymon and Macy, Miss Amelia quickly begins to undermine it and push Macy out of her little town once and for all. One surprising tactic that Amelia uses to provoke Macy is flaunting her femininity, or at least what little of it she has. As the narrator relays, “For some reason, after the day of Marvin Macy’s arrival, she put aside her overalls and wore always the red dress she had before this time reserved for Sundays, funerals, and sessions of court” (52). This move heavy-handedly shoves Miss Amelia’s femininity in Marvin Macy’s face, a femininity that he was never able to dominate, in order to demoralize and humiliate Macy. As Sarah Gleeson-White states, “It is, ironically, her femininity that is a mask to be worn or taken off at will” (72). Since Miss Amelia’s femininity is nothing more than a mask, her flaunting fails to cause any reaction in the returned Macy because the femininity she conjures up is disingenuous and predicated solely on the domination of Macy. Broughton discusses this feminine failure by stating it shows that, “Miss Amelia is then no more capable of manifesting a healthy femininity than Marvin Macy is” (41). Due to her femininity being only a façade intent on destruction, this act is no more androgynous than Macy’s initial submission to Amelia.

When flaunting her femininity fails to entice Macy, Miss Amelia resorts to more direct and pragmatic tactics such as poisoning and physical violence. However, it should be noted that “Miss Amelia tried to poison Marvin Macy—but there was a mistake, the plates were confused, and it was herself who got the poisoned dish” (56). This move and the subsequent self-poisoning, shows that Miss Amelia’s violently masculine solution for toxic masculinity is destined to backfire. But, this does not stop her from moving forward with her violent plans to deal with

Marvin Macy. Not too long after the dinner incident, Marvin Macy, with the help of Cousin Lymon, invades Miss Amelia's home. Macy takes over Lymon's room, and Lymon, who becomes sick, takes over Amelia's room. This leaves Amelia to sleep on the couch, which was "much too short for her, her feet lapped often the edges and often she rolled onto the floor" (59). Much like the wedding dress that stopped at her knees, having to sleep in a retracted space because a man took over her room is something that Miss Amelia has simply grown too large to accept. This is the final disrespect that Miss Amelia allows Macy to commit, and shortly thereafter, Amelia strings up a punching bag to train for the ensuing fight.

Everyone in the town senses the growing tension and impending fight between Miss Amelia and Marvin Macy. Even without words, they know that the fight is to take place at seven o'clock in the afternoon. It is revealed that everyone in the town bets on Miss Amelia winning this fight, even though Marvin is the more physically capable. However, the townspeople know that Miss Amelia has a horrifyingly grotesque power that she uses to tear down her opponents: "she could demoralize her enemy by making terrifying faces and fierce noises, so that even the spectators were sometimes cowed" (60). This representation makes Amelia resemble one of the most grotesque figures in all of literature, the Gorgon. It seems that Miss Amelia's horrifying visage too has the power to turn a man to stone.

Miss Amelia knows that the outcome of this fight will ultimately decide who has the power in this town. With this in mind, Miss Amelia casts what little femininity she has left by "chang[ing] her red dress for her old overalls, and they were rolled up to her knees" (65). The fight begins viciously with both contenders simultaneously landing blows to the other's chin. After approximately thirty minutes of boxing, Macy and Miss Amelia begin to grapple to grapple with each other, and the narrator relays that "the real fight was now begun. Wrestling is the

natural way of fighting in this country—as boxing is too quick and requires much thinking and concentration” (66). This style of fighting seems most appropriate for the stronger Amelia. Whereas boxing is a sport nearly exclusively connected to the male, wrestling is deeply tied to the female. In Greek mythology, it Palaestra, a woman, who is credited with the creation of the art of wrestling. It is noted by Philostratus in his *Imagines*, that, “The figure of Palaestra, if it be compared with a boy will be that of a girl; but if it be taken for a girl, it will seem to be a boy. For her hair is too short even to be twisted in a know; the eye might be that of either sex; and the brow indicates disdain for both lovers and wrestlers” (263-265). In both body and mind, Amelia bears a striking resemblance to the goddess of wrestling who also “cares for nothing feminine” (265). Amelia, with the fighting spirit of Palaestra and the frightful visage of a Gorgon, is sure to beat the slippery Marvin Macy. However, after she pins him and wraps her hands around his neck, the one she loves most betrays her: “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 strong back of Miss Amelia and clutched her neck with his clawed little fingers” (67). Amelia’s downfall is ultimately her failure to forge any true relationship with the hunchback. Her overabundant masculinity allowed her to get the upper hand in her fight with Macy, but her lack of femininity kept her from establishing anything more than a surface relationship with Lymon, which allows him to betray her. This betrayal allows Macy to overpower Miss Amelia and beat her back into the same form of sickly, submissive femininity in which he found himself during their ten-day marriage.

The tragic outcome of the fight leaves nothing but desperation and destruction in its tracks. Macy and Lymon completely destroy the café and Miss Amelia’s home before they both skip town together; however, a deep relation between them also never truly occurs. It is rumored

that not long after their getaway, Marvin Macy sold the poor hunchback to a freak show. This action would only seem too appropriate for the inhumane Macy and symbolize the ultimate exploitation of one's fellow man, but this is never verified. It is also implied that Cousin Lymon did not meet a good end out on the road with Macy. Toward the end of the novella, the narrator implies that Lymon is sick with consumption, and the brutish Macy would surely not make any concessions for the sick hunchback. So, Lymon is at best either the accessory to crimes committed by Macy, or in a freak show, or, at worst, simply dead. The only thing that is confirmed by the conclusion of this story is that Miss Amelia is nothing more than a broken human. It would not be appropriate to call her a broken woman at this point, because she seems to be denied any form of gender or sexuality at all. The narrator relays this broken, genderless Amelia by describing her appearance years after the fight: "It is a face like the terrible dim faces known in dreams—sexless and white" (1). Where before the fight Miss Amelia had a powerful, monstrous face of a Gorgon that would strike fear into the heart of her opponents, her face is now nothing but blank canvas pulled over bone. The denial of her personhood in this scene speaks to Amelia's failed androgyny. As Sarah Gleason-White states, "Amelia's androgyny means that she is in excess of any exclusive gendered subjectivity, yet in her 'barrenness' she suggests a lack of what it takes to be a woman. She both exceeds and falls short" (112). In a world where masculinity reigns mercilessly unchecked over femininity, where there is no reconciliation between the two, but an outright rejection of the latter, and where the masculine lover is able to "strip bare" the beloved for his or her own pleasure, the only outcome for the female is to be denied a self and boarded up in an empty, crumbling house.

McCullers's depiction of the nearly exclusively masculine Amelia may initially draw parallels to Mick Kelly, but, as this analysis has shown, these two characters diverge greatly.

One can doubtlessly claim that through Amelia's solitary masculinity, she was able to have absolute domain over her town, if even for a short time; however, though this may be right, her very same empowering hermaphroditism creates virtually no internal balance or union with herself and with her fellow man. This balance is seen repeatedly in Mick's androgynous state and exists strongly until it is tragically stripped away from her. This novella shows that masculine power without internal, feminine balance and union will inevitably lead to destruction. The answer for the southern female is not the abandonment of feminine virtues for the "stronger" male ones, but rather a proper, androgynous harmony between the two.

Conclusion

True to the southern gothic form, Carson McCullers ends both *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Ballad of the Sad Café* in dismay and isolation. Not only are these works reflective of the jarring genre, but they are also reflective of McCullers's own life of disappointment and isolation. Plagued by alcoholism, depression, and suicidal tendencies, McCullers could not even find solace in her literary accomplishments. Ironically enough, her literary success brought about the same isolation that she attempted to explore and overcome in her writings. This isolation was most exemplified by her relationship with her first husband Reeves McCullers. As Virginia Spencer Carr explains, "In spite of Reeves's pride over his wife's accomplishments, it was recognition such as this that contributed to their tenuous marital relationship... Reeves, the writer, was dead—and had been—once he consented to move into the shadow of his wife's genius" (295). Not long after "Reeves, the writer," died, Reeves, the man, also passed. He reportedly committed suicide after consuming a fifth of alcohol and sleeping

pills in his Paris hotel room. Though Carson McCullers pursued several homosexual relationships, both before and after her husband's death, it is clear that her relationship with Reeve's was, if not the only, the romantically required one. Her literary success, mired in disappointment and isolation, draws a close parallel with the grotesque successes and failures of her female characters who attempt to break social norms.

Though McCullers's transgressive female characters share dismal fates, their accomplishments as grotesques are not in vain. Their actions as androgynes and gargantuans doubtlessly allow them to escape the constraints of the southern patriarchy, even if only for a time. Both of these characters show that their time out of the gilded cage is the most rewarding and allows for the most personal growth and development. The grotesque is a striking solution to the long-lasting problem of the male-imagined white woman in southern culture. By so deliberately transgressing against social norms, the grotesque offers the greatest hopes to break the bars of the gilded cage.

Both Mick Kelly's and Miss Amelia Evan's senses of self were not denied, but rather they took on a more fulfilling and significant form. Mick's androgyny allowed her to construct a beautiful inner self, one that unified her masculine and feminine traits into artistic transcendence. The grotesque aspect of androgyny shows the southern woman is not condemned to the socially inscribed position of gender and allows her to transcend this so restrictive binary. Miss Amelia's gargantuanism allowed her to be the center of control for economic and social relations in her community. Her large, ever growing body is the greatest physical manifestation of one growing too large to fit into the contracted role of southern womanhood. Her body displays one that fights until the death to refrain from domestication.

It is ironic that the liberating power of each character is what is the missing piece that causes the other's downfall. Mick possess androgynous tranquility, but lacks the economic and social dominance of the giantess, which could have saved her from both the sexual experience with Harry and the job at Woolworth's ten-cent store that beats her into the contracted position of the southern woman. Through her fully-developed gargantuanism, Miss Amelia possess the physical and economic power to ward off what condemns Mick, but lacks the inner tranquility that enables one to have unity with other, which opens the door for her betrayal and isolation. A synthesis of these two grotesque characters would surely be the leader of challenging the status quo.

Even in their failures, these grotesque characters display the barbarity shown to those who go against the social code. By making this discipline hypervisible, a critical eye can be turned to assess the effect the social conventions and their enforcement has on the individual. In the caste system-like system of the South, the grotesque clearly outlines how the individual, especially the female, is crammed into a role that denies any true agency. Though the norm and its punishment work hard to ensure that no transgression will progress, the grotesque body has always found a way to chip away at normativity and call attention to its injustices.

It is undeniable that McCullers knew of the power of the grotesque and was able to use it in a highly effective way. She truly answered the call set forth by Hélène Cixous that "[w]oman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away from as violently as from their bodies" (875). Through their grotesque natures, McCullers's heroines, who are both driven away from their bodies and identities, have and will inspire future writers and readers to challenge societal norms in the hope of progress. Though only the issue of gender is addressed throughout this essay, the works of Zora Neale Hurston,

Flannery O'Connor, and southern female writers show that the grotesque fights against a myriad of social injustices present in the American South. Punishment of those who transgress against the social code still strongly exists, but the legacy of the grotesque is still very much alive in literature, bringing attention to and hope to overcome discrepancies in class, gender, and race alike.

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