UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM INGLÊS E LITERATURA
CORRESPONDENTE

ESTRANGED LIVES: THE ROMANTIC GROTESQUE IN CARSON McCULLERS' FICTION

por
PAULO ROBERTO QUEIROZ

Dissertação submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina para a obtenção do grau de MESTRE EM LETRAS

FLORIANÓPOLIS
Dezembro/1995

Esta dissertação foi julgada adequada e aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês para a obtenção do grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

Opção Inglês e Literatura Correspondente

Prof. Dr. José Roberto O'Shea

COORDENADOR

Prof. Dr. José Roberto O'Shea

ORIENTADOR

BANCA EXAMINADORA:

Profª Drª Heloisa Toller Gomes

Profª Drª Susana Funck

Prof. Dr. José Roberto O'Shea

Florianópolis, 18 de dezembro de 1995.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I would like to express my gratitude to all professors in the M.A. program in English at UFSC, for their dedication during the course, especially to Prof. José Roberto O'Shea, for his careful advice and support. Special thanks also to Professor Roy Rosenstein, for introducing me to Carson McCullers' works.

I am also very grateful to Professor Robert Kiernan, from Manhattan College, New York, for kindly sending me his own reference guide to Carson McCullers, which was very helpful for my research.

Thanks to Ana, at the Graduate office, for her dedication and encouragement throughout the course, and to Fernando and Rose, for the computer work.

Special thanks to Fabiano, Goreti, Izabel, Murilo, Roberto, and to my mother, Benta Queiroz. They know why.

And I would like to extend my gratitude to all the ones who, in any way, encouraged me and helped me during this work.

Florianóplis, 18 de dezembro de 1995.

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Supervising Professor: Prof. Dr. José Roberto O'Shea

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the present dissertation is to investigate the function of the grotesque in the establishment of atmosphere in two works by Carson McCullers, namely Reflections in a Golden Eye and The Ballad of the Sad Café. In order to do so, a study on the grotesque and on atmosphere is carried out, mostly based on Mikhail Bakhtin's Rabelais and His World which presents the author's concept of the "Romantic grotesque". The hypothesis of the dissertation is that the lack of the regenerative power which is characteristic of the Romantic grotesque is intricately observed in the two novels by McCullers, thus providing them with a somber, gloomy atmosphere. The analyses of the two novels show that the gloomy atmosphere is reinforced by the setting, the characters, their attitudes and their fates.

Number of words: 27 535
Number of pages: 117

RESUMO

O objetivo principal da presente dissertação é é analisar a função do grotesco no estabelecimento da atmosfera em duas obras de Carson McCullers, Reflections in a Golden Eye e The Ballad of the Sad Café. Para tanto, um estudo sobre o grotesco e a atmosfera é realizado, baseado principalmente em Rabelais and His World, de Mikhail Bakhtin, o qual apresenta o conceito de "grotesco Romântico" do autor. A hipótese da dissertação é que a falta do poder regenerativo que é característica do "grotesco Romântico" está, intrincadamente, presente nos dois romances de McCullers, proporcionando-lhes assim uma atmosfera sombria, lúgubre. As análises das duas obras mostram que a atmosfera lúgubre é reforçada pelo cenário, pelos personagens e por suas atitudes e destinos.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

CARSON McCULLERS AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE GROTESQUE

Reading Carson McCullers' biographies and interviews, one perceives that her life was fraught with disappointing personal experiences which were reflected in her literary works. Born Lula Carson Smith in Columbus, Georgia, on 19 February 1917, she was the first of three children. Her mother was Marguerite Waters Smith, "a descendant of Irish settlers in South Carolina before the Revolutionary War", and her father, Lamar, was a jeweler from a small town in Alabama (Carr "Carson McCullers" in Fifty Southern Writers After 1900 302). After the marriage, Lamar managed to open his own jewelry store and was able to provide for his family a life with no financial problems (Carr in The Lonely Hunter 10-11). Lula Carson, or "Sister", as her family used to call her, showed preference for solitary activities; she loved playing and listening to music by herself, reading books, playing with dolls, but sometimes she just stood musing. According to Virginia Spencer Carr in her biography of Carson McCullers, The Lonely Hunter (1985), "Margherite, by her adamant insistence that her daughter was different from everyone else, inadvertently encouraged her child's sense of self-estrangement and isolation" (14). This sense of difference brought to little Lula Carson her first experiences of group rejection. Partly as a consequence of feeling rejected, her infancy was mostly unhappy and

lonely. One way she found to feel a member of a group was attending regularly for seven years her Sunday-school, joining the First Baptist Church in 1925. However, she willfully came a few minutes late at the classes "for she did not like the socializing that preceded the class and the routine preliminaries of getting settled" (Carr 19-20).

At thirteen, having already moved to a new neighborhood in the same city, Lula Carson decided to drop her first name. At this time she had already started to have piano lessons and her union with her second teacher, Mary Tucker, "was a bond entered into with her whole spirit, and for the next four years her piano teacher was the fulcrum of her physical and psychic existence" (Carr 26). Besides, music was a sort of companion for the young Carson Smith, giving her confidence and the means of acclaim (Carr 25). Simultaneously, however, she was used to writing short stories and plays, which she presented to her family and friends at home (Carr in Fifty Southern Writers After 1900 301), and, eventually, she gave up her dream of becoming a concert pianist and turned to literature instead (Carr in The Lonely Hunter 35).

In 1935, at the age of eighteen, Carson left Columbus for New York City with the intention of studying music at Juilliard School of Music and writing at Columbia University. Unfortunately, she lost her tuition money for Juilliard on the New York subway and, supporting herself at temporary jobs such as typing, clerking, dog walking and waiting on tables, she studied writing at Columbia with Whit Burnett - editor of **Story** magazine - and at New

York University, with Sylvia Chatfield Bates (Carr in Fifty Southern Writers After 1900 302).

After one semester in New York, Carson returned to Columbus to spend the summer writing at home and working at a local newspaper as a reporter. During this brief period, she met the man who was going to be her husband. Reeves McCullers, a young soldier from Wetumpka, Alabama, shared with Carson Smith the desire to become a writer. The two of them went to New York City, and she had her first short story, "Wunderkind", published in **Story** magazine, in the fall of 1936. Carson Smith was twenty when she became Mrs. McCullers in the fall of 1937. Reeves, twenty-four at the time, went with his wife to Charlotte, North Carolina, working for eight months as a credit investigator. During this period, Carson McCullers began to work on her first novel, "The Mute", which was going to be retitled, at the insistence of her editor, as The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter. The book was finished after the move to Fayetteville, also in North Carolina, and granted the young writer a contract and $500 as an award for the second place in a literary contest (Carr in Fifty Southern Writers After 1900 302). Published in June 1940, The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter was scarcely reviewed, but enthusiastically criticized.

While still waiting for the publication of her first novel, McCullers finished Reflections in a Golden Eye, which was published in 1941. Many critics took this novel as being highly autobiographical because the estrangement depicted between the couples in the novel was

also apparently taking place in the writer's own life. Reeves' intention to be a writer was one of the main sources for their progressively weary relationship; the couple had planned to take turns writing and working, but in fact Reeves' literary talent was doubtful and he was always going to live under the shadow of his wife. Another autobiographical aspect to appear in Reflections in a Golden Eye was the bisexual attraction, since "both Carson and Reeves were developing bisexually and were shortly to take lovers of their own sex" (Kiernan "Carson McCullers" in American Novelists Since World War II 319). McCullers even dedicated her book to the first woman whom she fell in love with, Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach, a Swiss writer.

A few days after the publication of The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, McCullers and Reeves moved to New York City, deciding never to live in the South again. In September 1940, McCullers separated from Reeves and moved to a house in Brooklyn Heights, to live with George Davis and W. H. Auden, where a number of intellectuals spent some time under the tutelage of Auden. Among them were Gypsy Rose Lee, Paul Bowles, Richard Wright, Benjamin Britten, and Oliver Smith (Carr in Fifty Southern Writers After 1900 303). McCullers was ravished with her stay in that atmosphere, and she had to return South once in a while so as to recover from her ill health. While living in Brooklyn Heights, she continued to work in her new novel, "The Bride and Her Brother", which was going to

receive the definitive title of The Member of the Wedding when published in 1946.

In February 1941, Reflections in a Golden Eye was published, and Reeves, trying to reconcile with Carson, went to New York with her. There she met Elizabeth Ames, executive director of Yaddo Artists' Colony in Saratoga Springs. McCullers was invited to Yaddo, where she continued to work in The Member of the Wedding and wrote The Ballad of the Sad Café, published in 1943 in **Harper's Bazaar**. Meanwhile, she divorced Reeves, but they remained in contact. In this period of McCullers' life, she was supported by grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and the American Academy of Arts and Letters (Carr in Fifty Southern Writers After 1900 303).

By the end of 1942, McCullers returned to Yaddo, but in the beginning of the following year she was back to 7 Middagh Street, in Brooklyn Heights. After a long series of short trips to Columbus, Atlanta, and back to Yaddo, she went to Europe in November. With the death of her father, in August 1944, McCullers, her mother, and her sister moved to Nyack, New York (Carr in The Lonely Hunter 572-573).

Reeves had rejoined the Army in 1942, and when he returned from World War II he and Carson remarried in the Spring of 1945. Soon after the publication of The Member of the Wedding, she met Tennessee Williams, who encouraged her to adapt the new novel for the stage. Reeves and McCullers spent the winter 1946-1947 in Paris, but both were to be brought home on stretchers in December 1947,

Reeves with delirium tremens and Carson with the two first crippling strokes of a long series throughout her life (Carr in Fifty Southern Writers After 1900 304).

The rhythm of McCullers' work was slowed by her illness, and The Member of the Wedding opened only in January 1950 in New York, to an enthusiastic critical response, winning for her the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, the Donaldson Award, and the Gold Medal of the Theatre Club, as the best playwright of the year (Carr in Fifty Southern Writers After 1900 304). The play was sold to Hollywood and McCullers' financial security increased considerably.

From 1950 to 1952, the writer travelled around Europe and bought a home in a village outside Paris (Kiernan in American Novelists Since World War II 322-323). In 1951, an omnibus volume of her work entitled The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Works was published, consolidating McCullers as a prominent writer for both critics and the public (Carr in Fifty Southern Writers After 1900 304).

During the long period of remarriage, McCullers' relationship with Reeves was fraught with separations and reconciliations, and the consequences for both was a compulsion to heavy drinking and suicide attempts. After proposing a double suicide to his wife, Reeves finally killed himself in November 1953, alone in a Paris hotel, while McCullers was in Clayton, Georgia (Carr in Fifty Southern Writers After 1900 304).

Returning to Yaddo for the summer of 1954, McCullers worked in Clock Without Hands and also in her second play, The Square Root of Wonderful. Again slowed by the writer's illness, the play opened on Broadway only in 1957, receiving negative reviews and closing after 45 performances. In fact, the play came to be seen as "an incoherent and fragmented attempt to overcome the psychic scars of her life with Reeves and his suicide, and her grief over the death of her mother, on whom she had been inordinately dependent" (Carr in Fifty Southern Writers After 1900 304).

McCullers' last novel, Clock Without Hands, was completed only in the end of 1960, owing much to Dr. Mary Mercer, to whom the novel is dedicated, a psychiatrist who offered McCullers her friendship and guidance and brought some order to her disordered life. The book received harsh criticism, providing a bitter "end" to McCullers' literary career (Kiernan in American Novelists Since World War II 323).

The remaining years of McCullers' life were marked by physical agony. After a series of strokes and operations, she finally suffered a massive brain hemorrhage on 15 August 1967 and lay comatose for 47 days. She died on September 29, in the Nyack Hospital, at the age of fifty (Carr in The Lonely Hunter 579).

The disappointing experiences of McCullers' life are invariably transformed and transported into her fictional works, with an emphasis, as the author herself often admitted, on the keen sense of spiritual isolation.

Exposed in all of her major characters are the existential dilemma of "the confinement of the soul and the futility and ultimate betrayal of what she saw as the 'human hymn' called hope" (Carr in Fifty Southern Writers After 1900 305). The pessimistic tone and the sense of isolation and frustration is reinforced by the physically deformed or psychologically disturbed characters. McCullers' main concern in her narratives is with the impossibility of healthy and stable human relationships, which entraps the characters in a thwarted existence. Despite the desperation that such narratives may conduct, there is a consolation in "that love, while it lasts, is beneficial to the lover, affording him temporary relief from his solitude" (Evans "The Achievements of Carson McCullers" in Carson McCullers 24). Besides, McCullers believes that to be the lover is better than to be loved, as she suggests in a famous middle-section in The Ballad of the Sad Café:

> ... the state of being beloved is intolerable to many. The beloved fears and hates the lover, and with the best of reasons. For the lover is forever trying to strip bare his beloved. The lover craves any possible relation with the beloved, even if this experience can cause him only pain.(27)

In McCullers' first novel, The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, John Singer, the protagonist, is a deaf mute who manages to become friends with some people in the place where he lives and whose reason for living is Antonapoulos, a feebleminded fat mute. The irony in

Singer's situation is that everyone around him confides in him as someone to share his/her secrets. When Antonapoulos dies in a mental asylum, Singer loses his ability to communicate and commits suicide, leaving all the other characters without their pressure valve. One of the characters who gets attached to Singer is Mick Kelly, an adolescent tomboy who is afraid of becoming a freak because of her advantaged height. According to Kiernan,

> [i]n many ways, of course, Mick Kelly is the young Lula Carson Smith, for Mick, like McCullers, is preoccupied with music, and she learns the same truths about loneliness that McCullers abstracted from her experience at an early age and never substantially altered. (Kiernan in American Novelists Since World War II 318)

The sense of alienation among people is extended in McCullers' second novel, Reflections in a Golden Eye, where the characters are psychologically disturbed. According to Joseph R. Millichap,

> [w]hen viewed as an example of the modern Gothic, McCullers' tale of bizarre sexuality on a peacetime army base demonstrates versatility and artistic daring. [McCullers'] second book seizes many of the grotesque aspects of the modern South and develops them as symbols of a more universal alienation. ("Carson McCullers" in The History of Southern Literature 487)

The protagonist of McCullers' next novel, The Member of the Wedding, is Frankie Addams, an extension of the previous character Mick Kelly. Frankie feels estranged from her family, and in order to try to be part of some definite group, she falls in love with the idea of the "wedding" of her brother. But her illusion of accompanying the newlyweds is broken when she is dragged from their honeymoon car. From this time on, she tries to adapt herself to her reality. As noted by Kiernan,

> Frankie's need to make connections is steadily and intricately elaborated, and allusions to music are used adroitly to bespeak the heart when words fail. The long, disjointed conversations between Berenice, Frankie, and John Henry are reminiscent of the monologues which the grotesques pour into the ear of John Singer in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter. (Kiernan in American Novelists Since World War II 322)

The theme of the futility of love is also explored in The Ballad of the Sad Café. Miss Amelia Evans, a manlike giantess, falls in love with Cousin Lymon, a hunchbacked dwarf who is also a homosexual. However, instead of being reciprocal to her love, Cousin Lymon develops a passion to Miss Amelia's former husband, Marvin Macy, who, in turn, did not have his love corresponded by Miss Amelia. As Millichap states,

> The Ballad of the Sad Café is a more traditional work in the Gothic mode. The

> distancing effect of the balladeer-narrator allows the bizarre characters and strange events to be unified in one of the most intringuing novellas in modern Southern fiction. ("Carson McCullers" in Encyclopedia of Southern Culture 889)

McCullers' next work was The Square Root of Wonderful, a play that deals once more with confounded relationships. The protagonist, Mollie Lovejoy, has married and divorced the same man twice. Philip, the ex-husband, has attempted suicide after the failure of his latest play. Meanwhile, Mollie has fallen in love with another man, John, who is dull but strong and who worships her. John is a contrast to Philip, who has learned to use his weakness to his advantage with women. Just when Mollie and John are about to marry, Philip returns and, after failing to get Mollie's love back, drowns himself. As stated by Kiernan,

> [t]he play is a dramatic failure in almost every way, but it offers fascinating insight into McCullers' need... to defend herself against the charge of callousness and to rationalize the values by which she had refused to grieve for her husband. (Kiernan in American Novelists Since World War II 323)

Clock Without Hands, McCullers' fifth and last novel, is the story of four men living in the South during the 1950's. J. T. Malone is a druggist who is dying of

cancer and realizes that in fact he has never lived; Judge Fox Clane is an eighty-five-year-old former congressman who does not accept the civil rights movement; the judge's grandson, Jester Clane, is a youngster attracted to Sherman Pew, the judge's blue-eyed Negro servant. For Kiernan,

> [o]n a thematic basis it is [McCullers'] most ambitious novel, for all of her familiar concerns are there - the suffering of the freak, the horror of racial and social injustice, the traumas of adolescent loneliness and sexual confusion. But it is really her weakest novel, for it fails to relate its various concerns to one another. (Kiernan in American Novelists Since World War II 324)

Besides the longer fictional works listed above, there were several short stories published through McCullers' life as a writer, mainly in magazines. Some of these short stories, such as "Wunderkind", "The Sojourner", and "A Tree - a Rock - a Cloud", were collected in the compilation The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories (1951). Other short stories, along with essays and poems, were posthumously compiled by McCullers' sister, Margarita G. Smith, in The Mortgaged Heart (1971).

The grotesque aspects found in many of McCullers' characters and settings are not exclusive of her works. In fact, the grotesque is characteristically present in the work of many Southern writers. In the essay "Some Aspects

of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction", Flannery O'Connor, discussing the reasons why the fiction by Southern writers is often called grotesque, presents a kind of writer in whose works "some experiences which we are not accustomed to observe everyday, or which the ordinary man may never experience in his ordinary life" (O'Connor in Mystery and Manners 40) is made alive. For such a writer, "our life is and will remain essentially mysterious" (41) and "what he sees on the surface will be of interest to him only as he can go through it into an experience of mystery itself" (41). Thus, in his use of the concrete in a distorted way, so as to "connect or combine or embody two points", one point the concrete and the other "a point not visible to the naked eye" (42), he will come up with a fiction that "is going to be wild, that [is] going to be violent and comic, because of the discrepancies that it seeks to combine" (43). O'Connor believes that Southern writers "have a penchant for writing about freaks... because [they] are still able to recognize one" (44). McCullers fits very well into O'Connor's definition of such writers.

In "The Russian Realists and Southern Literature", an essay published for the first time in **Decision**, July 1941, and collected afterwards in The Mortgaged Heart, McCullers' herself writes about the genre of writing which was called "Gothic School" by the critics when referring to the literature that was being produced in the U.S. South during the past fifteen years. McCullers does not agree with the phrase "Gothic School", calling it "unfortunate".

She compares the evocation of horror, beauty, and emotional ambivalence in Gothic tales and in Faulkner's work, which can be seen as similar, although evolving from opposite sources. In Gothic literature, the means to achieve the effect is romantic or supernatural, whereas in Faulkner a peculiar and intense realism is used to achieve the same effect. McCullers sees what was being called "Gothic School" much more indebted to Russian writers, who produced their work in similar social conditions as the American Southern writers, since the cheapness of human life was a dominant characteristic both in the South of the United States and in Russia. Dostoyevsky and other Russian realists were criticized for their "cruelty", a critique that has also been made against Southern writers (258). As McCullers calls our attention, Art has portrayed violence since the time of the Greek tragedians. For her, it is not cruelty that is shocking, but the way in which it is presented. Both the Southerners and the Russians make a juxtaposition of the tragic with the humorous, creating a repellent quality to the reader fond of the classical tradition (258). According do McCullers, when something as death happens and the author does not comment the fact or does not show pity and proceeds with the narrative, this attitude seems cynical to the reader, who becomes confused and offended. This juxtaposition of anguish and farce, making the reader experience both feelings at the same time, is what has brought up the accusations of "cruelty" (258-259).

Undoubtedly present in the Southern literary tradition, however, the grotesque, indeed, has always been part of the mystery of human life. The term 'grotesque' originated from the ancient paintings and decorations found in the hidden chambers ("grotte") of Roman ruins. From this origin, the meaning of the word was extended, being applied to characterize artistic representations of human and animal forms often distorted to the point of absurdity, ugliness, or caricature. Thus, grotesque art has the qualities of what is bizarre, unnatural, abnormal, fantastic. In modern literaty criticism, the term is applied to specific kinds of writing, to types of characters, and to certain themes (Holman & Harmon in A Handbook to Literature 219-220). According to Holman & Harmon, "[t]he interest in the 'grotesque' is usually considered an outgrowth of interest in the irrational, distrust of any cosmic order, and frustration at humankind's lot in the universe" (220).

An encompassing analysis of the grotesque is found in Mikhail Bakhtin's Rabelais and His World (first published in 1965; translated into English in 1984). In this book, the Russian scholar analyzes the popular culture of the Middle Age and the Renaissance, with emphasis on the grotesque aspects found in those societies; these aspects are used to analyze Rabelais' fiction. There is much attention to Carnival, mainly to the fact that, through a symbolic destruction of the conventional order, Carnival brings about a renewal, a regeneration of society. Laughter, or the comic aspect

present in Carnival, is in fact an essential element of the grotesque. But, as Bakhtin points out, there is a kind of grotesque in which laughter is cut down, being transformed into irony, sarcasm. This he calls the Romantic grotesque, where the "positive regenerating power is reduced to a minimum" (Rabelais and His World 38). Just like the medieval Carnival, opposed to authority and order, the Romantic grotesque appeared as a reaction against the Enlightenment and its cold rationalism. According to Bakhtin,

> [t]he world of Romantic grotesque is to a certain extent a terrifying world, alien to man. All that is ordinary, commonplace, belonging to everyday life, and recognized by all suddenly becomes meaningless, dubious and hostile. (38-39)

The absence of laughter's regenerating power in the Romantic grotesque creates a bitter, gloomy, somber atmosphere in artistic manifestations.

Always present in literature, the grotesque appears to be highlighted since the beginning of this century due to the situation of modern man. Thus, one is liable to come across a number of modern artists whose works deal with the grotesque. Carson McCullers is one of these artists. Writing about the lonely and alienated, she creates characters who perform extreme, desperate actions. Considering that "[w]henever fictional characters appear who are either physically or spiritually deformed and perform abnormal actions, the work can be called

'grotesque'" (Holman & Harmon 220), if pressed to generalize, one can classify McCullers' works as grotesques.

My purpose with this dissertation is to investigate how the gloomy, somber atmosphere characteristic of Bakhtin's Romantic grotesque is created in Carson McCullers' fiction. In order to do so, I analyze the characters and the setting of Reflections in a Golden Eye (1941) and The Ballad of the Sad Café (1951), the two of her works which best seem to suit my purpose. My hypothesis is that in McCullers' fictional world the regenerative power of the grotesque is absent, creating a somber atmosphere which, in turn, is reinforced especially by the setting and by the freakish characters, and which is typical of what Bakhtin defines as Romantic grotesque. I will proceed with this dissertation by inquiring critically into the grotesque, especially the Romantic grotesque, and following with a discussion of the ways atmosphere can be established in the narrative. I will also apply the concepts of the Romantic grotesque and of development of atmosphere in the two cited works by Carson McCullers.

CHAPTER II

THE GROTESQUE, THE ROMANTIC GROTESQUE, AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ATMOSPHERE

This chapter provides a review of the main studies on the grotesque, emphasizing the dense reading found in Mikhail Bakhtin's Rabelais and His World, especially concerning his concept of the Romantic Grotesque. The establishment of atmosphere in the narrative will also be addressed in order to show how the grotesque can contribute to such process. The books that pertain to the grotesque are introduced in a chronological order, with the exception of the last two, one by Fiedler and the other by Bakhtin, because they are the most relevant to the present study. Concerning the study on the establishment of the atmosphere, however, the books herein discussed do not appear in any chronological order because only two books are used and these are presented as complementing each other.

Wolfgang Kayser's The Grotesque in Art and Literature (first published in 1957; translated into English in 1963) has acquired the status of a 'classic' in the field, presenting a broad, thorough historical view on the grotesque. Yet, the analysis made by the German theorist can be said to be limited mainly because it does not consider the regenerative power of the grotesque presented and developed by Bakhtin.

Initially, Kaiser explains the origin of the term **grotesque,** which reffers to the Italian word for cave - **grotta.** The term was

> coined to designate a certain ornamental style which came to light during late fifteenth-century excavations, first in Rome and then in other parts of Italy as well, and which turned out to constitute a hitherto unknown ancient form of ornamental painting. (19)

From that moment on, **grotesque** started to be applied to designate everything that was considered ugly, unnatural, abnormal, bizarre, just like those ornamental paintings were. The author analyzes the grotesque through pieces of European art, especially German. He demonstrates how the grotesque is incorporated in painting and sculpture, as well as in literature. By depicting what he calls "the essential ingredients of the grotesque - the mixture of heterogeneous elements, the confusion, the fantastic quality, and even a kind of alienation of the world" (51) in a number of works of art of the Romantic period, Kayser shows the importance of the grotesque to Romanticism.

Attempting a definition and a brief historical background to the grotesque, Philip Thomson, in The Grotesque (1972), provides a detailed study on the subject. The subtitles of the chapters themselves display some basic points related to the characteristics of grotesque: "Disharmony", "The Comic and the Terrifying", "Extravagance and Exaggeration", "Abnormality", "The

Absurd", "The Bizarre", "The Macabre", "Aggressiveness and Alienation", "Tension and Unresolvability". After a brief discussion on the grotesque in general, the author is able to get to a basic definition of the grotesque as "the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response" (27). But Thomson also emphasizes the "ambivalently abnormal" present in the grotesque.

Geoffrey Galt Harpham, in his On the Grotesque (1982), poses the difficulty of defining the word **grotesque:**

> Grotesqueries both require and defeat definition: they are neither so regular and rhythmical that they settle easily our categories, nor so unprecedented that we do not recognize them at all. They stand at a margin of consciousness between the known and the unknown, the perceived and the unperceived, calling into question the adequacy of our ways of organizing the world, of dividing the continuum of experience into knowable particles. (3)

The critic proceeds to give a number of examples of works of art which defy any clear classification. Moreover, he says, "[g]rotesque forms place an enormous strain on the marriage of form and content by foregrounding them both, so that they appear not as a partnership, but as a warfare, a struggle" (7). Harpham also provides a brief history of the grotesque and shows the importance of the

concept to literature, by analyzing literary works, such as Wuthering Heights and Death in Venice.

An important element in the grotesque, and which features in many of McCullers' works, is the figure of the freak, studied in detail by Leslie Fiedler in Freaks - Myths and Images of the Secret Self (1978). As the author notes, he could look for a "less tarnished and offensive" (16) term to substitute freaks: "oddities, malformations, abnormalities, anomalies, mutants, mistakes of nature, monsters, monstrosities, sports, 'strange people', 'very especial people', and 'phenomènes'" (16). All of these, however, are used to design people who are different from individuals who, in contrast, consider themselves "normal". As for the origin of the word, "'Freak' is an abbreviation for 'freak of nature', a translation of the Latin *lusus naturae*, a term implying that a two-headed child or a Hermaphrodite is ludicrous as well as anomalous" (19). Freaks are always liable to be a motivation for laughter, but as Fiedler asserts, "the laughter of 'normals' must always have been ambiguous and defensive... If Freaks are, indeed, a joke played by a 'Nature' as bored and as heartless as any small boy or feudal lordling, the joke is on **us**!" (20).

Fiedler identifies an ambiguous feeling motivated by freaks. "The true Freak", he argues,

> stirs both supernatural terror and natural sympathy, since, unlike the fabulous monsters, he is one of us, the human child of human parents, however altered by forces

> we do not quite understand into something mythic and mysterious, as no mere cripple ever is. (24)

What the freaks inspire in us is a challenge to our "conventional boundaries between male and female, sexed and sexless, animal and human, large and small, self and other,... reality and illusion, experience and fantasy, fact and myth" (24). In the subsequent pages of his book, Fiedler deals specifically with different kinds of freaks, such as dwarfs, giants, Hermaphrodites, and Siamese Twins. Thus, Fiedler's notion of the freak will be very helpful for the analysis of McCullers' fiction later in the present dissertation.

Returning to the discussion on the grotesque itself, one of the best studies carried out on the subject is Bakhtin's aforementioned Rabelais and His World, in which the author analyzes Rabelais' fiction in relation to the environment where the latter lived. The Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) had his work published under his own name only in the 1960s and translated into English mainly in the 1970s. According to Adams & Searle, in Critical Theory Since 1965 , Bakhtin was exiled during the 1930s, and, in 1949, the authorities refused to grant him the doctorate for his dissertation on Rabelais. Bakhtin's theory of narrative, which has strongly influenced recent criticism, emphasizes the tendency of the novel toward polyphony and the dialogical. Bakhtin traces these two concepts back into a carnivalistic sense of the world, stressing its joyful relativity, vitality,

and multiple styles in a single work. The carnivalistic "notion of truth is that of something born between people rather than possessed and then expressed by an author" (664). There is a special relation between the author and his characters, his text and truth. For Bakhtin, the individual is always multiple and is governed by the conditions which affect meaning.

For the present research, Bakhtin's Rabelais and His World is the most important study because of the concept of the Romantic Grotesque. Moreover, what is important in Bakhtin's book is not only the analysis of Rabelais' work itself, but also the careful study of popular culture in the Middle Age and the Renaissance, with emphasis on the grotesque.

Bakhtin starts his study by discussing the importance of laughter and what he calls "the culture of folk humor" in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. However, he complains, in the pre-Romantic period and afterwards, a "narrow concept of popular character and of folklore" (4) was sustained. He argues that "[t]here was no room in this concept for the peculiar culture of the marketplace and of folk laughter with all its wealth of manifestations" (4). And he continues:

> The element of laughter was accorded the least place of all in the vast literature devoted to myth, to folk lyrics, and to epics... the peculiar nature of the people's laughter was completely distorted; entirely alien notions and concepts of humor, formed

> within the framework of bourgeois modern culture and aesthetics, were applied to this interpretation (4).

Thus, Bakhtin concludes that the originality of the folk culture in the past has remained relatively unexplored until the time when his book was written.

Bakhtin proceeds with the discussion of the great importance of folk humor in the Renaissance and the Middle Ages. Opposed to the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture there were various humorous forms and manifestations. A number of elements, namely "the comic rites and cults, the clowns and fools, giants, dwarfs, and jugglers, the vast and manifold literature of parody" (4), are cited by the author as part of the important culture of "folk carnival humour".

In order to provide a clearer view of these various popular manifestations, Bakhtin divides folk culture into three distinct forms which are closely related: ritual spectacles (carnival pageants, comic shows of the marketplace), comic verbal compositions (parodies both oral and written, in Latin and in the vernacular) and various genres of billingsgate (curses, oaths, popular blazons).

Within the carnival festivities and the comic spectacles and rituals related to them, Bakhtin cites the "feast of fools", the "feast of the ass", and a special Easter laughter consecrated by tradition. Moreover, as Bakhtin points out,

> nearly every Church feast had its comic folk aspect... Such, for instance, were the parish feasts, usually marked by fairs and varied open-air amusements, with the participation of giants, dwarfs, monsters, and trained animals. (5)

Besides, some agricultural feasts such as the harvesting of grapes, civil and social ceremonies and rituals, also had a comic aspect. All the forms of protocol and ritual described above

> existed in all the countries of medieval Europe; they were sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials. They offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year. (5-6)

Bakhtin asserts that this double aspect of the world is fundamental to understand the Renaissance itself and points out that it already existed at the early cultural manifestations. There has always been a coupling of serious cults and comic cults, of heroes and their parodies and doublets. According to Bakhtin, the serious and the comic aspects of the world and of the deity seemed

to be equally sacred, or "official" (6). Although in a later period of history this equality was preserved, "in the definitely consolidated state and class structure such an equality of the two aspects became impossible. All the comic forms were transferred... to a nonofficial level" (6). Thus, the comic rites became more complex, acquiring a new meaning; they were now the expression of folk consciousness and culture.

The element of laughter which is fundamental to the comic rituals sets them completely free from any religious dogmatism and any mysticism. The comic rituals do not have the character of magic and prayer either. They have, in fact, a sensuous character and a strong element of play which relates them to some artistic forms. But, as Bakhtin notes, the carnival nucleus does not belong to the sphere of art; carnival is not exactly an artistic form, nor a mere spectacle, because people do not only watch it, but they live it.

As a temporary escape from daily life, carnival celebrated not only utopian freedom and equality, but also a temporary liberation from the established order. Carnival was characterized by the negation of all norms, prohibitions, and ranks. This liberation enabled people to try new human relations. People really came in contact with one another, and created new forms of speech and gesture, liberating themselves, thus, from norms and decency which prevailed at normal times.

Another characteristic of carnival is its communal sense of laughter; carnival laughter

> is not an individual reaction to some isolated 'comic' event... it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone... this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. (11-12)

Bakhtin emphasizes the difference between people's festive laughter and the pure satire of modern times. Where festive laughter is also reflexive, being directed at those who laugh, the satirist's laughter is negative: the satirist "places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it. The wholeness of the world's comic aspect is destroyed, and that which appears comic becomes a private reaction" (12).

Another aspect stressed by Bakhtin which distances medieval carnival from the negative informal parody of modern times is the element of change and renewal, represented by ever changing, playful, or undefined forms. One is dealing here, as the author puts it, with "the peculiar logic of the inside out..., of the turnabout" (11).

Bakhtin introduces the concept of the material bodily principle, i.e., "images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life" (18) as a heritage of the culture of folk humor to the writers of the Renaissance. Indeed, the images of the material bodily principle are the heritage of the peculiar aesthetic concept characteristic of folk humor. Bakhtin stresses the

positive tone that the bodily element has in grotesque realism; it represents something universal, something belonging to all people, not being a private, egotistic element:

> The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable. (19)

Regarding the main themes of the images of bodily life, Bakhtin cites "fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance" (19). The author presents degradation as the essential principle of grotesque realism, i.e., all that is spiritual, abstract, ideal, is transferred to the material level, to the level of body and earth in their physical condition. Bakhtin shows the strong relation between laughter and degradation in that the latter, as used in grotesque realism, means "coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better" (21). Degradation is related to natural events, such as defecation, copulation, pregnancy, and birth. Thus, to degrade an object means to put it in the same level as the reproductive lower stratum, which, paradoxically, is the place where a new life begins. Therefore, medieval parody is quite different from modern

literary parody, which is purely formalist and has only the negative element.

Bakhtin briefly shows how the element of negation inherent to the private sphere of isolated individuals is present in Cervantes' Don Quixote, where the images of the bodily lower stratum lose the positive regenerating force: "Their link with life and with the cosmos is broken, they are narrowed down to naturalistic erotic images" (23). Thus, two contrary aspects, namely, private and communal, lived together in the literature of the Renaissance.

Bakhtin starts then to discuss the grotesque image, which is ambivalent in its reflection of a transformation, a metamorphosis; it encompasses both extremes: death and birth, growth and becoming, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating. The grotesque image, since its most primitive manifestations, has shown a strong relation to cyclical time, to natural and biological life. As an opposition to "classic" aesthetics, "to the classic images of the finished, completed man"(25), grotesque images are ugly, monstrous, hideous. Grotesque images, showing the incompleteness of man's life in its contradictory process, stress the parts of the body such as the mouth, the nose, the genital organs, which, in a way, link the body to the outside world, i.e., "the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world"(26). Moreover, in the grotesque image of the body there is a tendency to show the merging of two bodies in one, one giving birth

and dying, the other being conceived, generated, and born. A new body always emerges from a previous one.

As Bakhtin notes, "the grotesque concept of the body forms the basis of abuses, oaths, and curses" (27). It is linked to all forms of degradation and is quite different from the way those oaths and curses have been used in modern times. In grotesque imagery, there is an ambivalent meaning in that the object to be degraded is sent to the bodily lower stratum, so as to be destroyed. Still, the body of grotesque realism of the Middle Ages was hideous and formless, in contrast to the strictly completed, finished image of the body conceived by the canon of the Renaissance. Indeed, the grotesque image never had a canon, it "is noncanonical by its very nature" (30).

Continuing with his critical history of grotesque, Bakhtin asserts that in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the classical canon dominated all the areas of art, and the grotesque was linked exclusively to folk humor culture, being excluded from "great" literature (33). It was only with Pre-Romanticism and Romanticism that the grotesque genre was revived, although radically transformed: "It became the expression of subjective, individualistic world outlook very different from the carnival folk concept of previous ages, although still containing some carnival elements" (36). One of the varieties of the Romantic grotesque was, of course, the Gothic novel.

Appearing as a consequence of the Enlightenment, the Romantic grotesque rejected all that was finished and completed, the classical elements, the cold rationalism, and the didactic and utilitarian spirit of the Enlighteners (37). As has been argued, the medieval and Renaissance grotesque were closely related to folk culture and belonged to all people. The Romantic genre, in turn, "acquired a private 'chamber' character. It became, as it were, an individual carnival, marked by a vivid sense of isolation" (37). One should note along with Bakhtin that the principle of laughter was the most important transformation that Romantic grotesque imposed. Laughter still remained in the Romantic grotesque, but it was reduced to irony, sarcasm. It was no longer a gleeful element of hilarity, and its positive and regenerating aspect was almost completely forgotten. This transformation led to other important differences, mostly in relation to terror:

> The world of the Romantic grotesque is to a certain extent a terrifying world, alien to man. All that is ordinary, commonplace, belonging to everyday life, and recognized by all suddenly becomes meaningless, dubious and hostile... Something frightening is revealed in that which was habitual and secure. (39)

The expression of fear and the intention to inspire the reader with this fear characteristic of the images of Romantic grotesque are also contrary to the fearless

aspect of folk culture. In a similar manner as the regenerating power of laughter in Romantic grotesque was drastically reduced, the theme of madness, which is inherent to all grotesque forms, changed from the gay parody of official reason of folk culture to a tragic and somber aspect, stressing individual isolation.

Another element which changed in the Romantic grotesque was the theme, or motif, of the mask. In folk culture, the mask was used merely to reject uniformity and conformity; the mask was related to the joy of change, transformation, reincarnation. Once again, in the Romantic grotesque, the mask lost its regenerating and renewing aspect, acquiring a somber tinge, since it was used now to hide something, to keep a secret, to deceive (40). In the Romantic grotesque, the theme of the marionette, for instance, took on an image which was completely unknown in folk culture: "in romanticism the accent is placed on the puppet as the victim of alien inhuman force, which rules over men by turning them into marionettes" (40).

Yet another element which received a different treatment in Romanticism is the devil. Whereas in the popular grotesque the devil, with his ambiguously gay figure, expressed the unnoficial point of view and the material bodily stratum, in the Romantic grotesque it was presented as terrifying, tragic, melancholy, and infernal laughter was consistently somber and sarcastic; the previous comic aspect was now completely gone. Another inversion consecrated by the Romantic grotesque was darkness, in contrast to light, which is typical of the

folk grotesque, where it was used as representative of spring, morning, sunshine.

One of the chief trends in Romanticism is gothic literature, the focus of H. P. Lovecraft's Supernatural Horror in Literature (1945). As is known, Gothic novels emphasize the terrifying aspect of grotesque images; as Bakhtin has pointed out about the Romantic grotesque, evil in these novels appears only with its negative tone, not having the regenerative power of folk culture of the Middle Ages. According to Lovecraft, distinct elements of setting were common to a number of Gothic novels:

> the Gothic castle, with its awesome antiquity, vast distances and ramblings, deserted or ruined wings, damp corridors, unwholesome hidden catacombs, and galaxy of ghosts and appalling legends, as a nucleus of suspense and daemoniac fright. (25)

Thus, setting is crucial to the establishment of the somber atmosphere of the Gothic novel.

Since the study of the establishment of atmosphere is fundamental in this research, it is necessary at this point to address the subject. First of all, a basic definition for atmosphere is provided by Holman & Harmon in A Handbook to Literature (1992). Atmosphere is

> [t]he prevailing TONE OR MOOD of a literary work, particularly - but not exclusively - when that mood is established in part by SETTING or landscape. It is, however, not simply setting but rather an emotional aura

> that helps to establish the reader's expectations and attitudes. Examples are the somber mood established by the DESCRIPTION of the prison door in the opening chapter of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, the brooding sense of fatality engendered by the description of Egdon Heath at the beginning of Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, the sense of "something rotten in the state of Denmark" established by the scene on the battlements at the opening of *Hamlet*, or the opening stanza of Poe's "The Raven". (40)

Edgar Allan Poe is also present in Wayne C. Booth's now classic The Rhetoric of Fiction (1961), as a basis for his study on literary mood. Booth compares two short stories by Poe, "The Premature Burial" (1844) and "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), in order to show two different means of creating atmosphere. The first, which appears in "The Premature Burial", happens when the author addresses the reader directly, immediately, in an attempt to put the reader into a frame of mind before the story begins. To a certain extent, Booth condemns this direct approach, saying that experienced readers are hardly moved by it. The critic explains the flaw of this kind of establishment of atmosphere by the fact that it is an "isolated rethoric" (201), without an acceptable context. Booth quotes some brief passages in Poe's short story so as to illustrate and back up very emphatically his argument.

The second means of creating atmosphere, according to Booth, appears in "The Fall of the House of Usher" and the first characteristic highlighted by the critic is that "indispensable commentary [is] spoken by a character in the story" (201). The main difference detected by Booth between the two means of establishing atmosphere is that in the first one the author himself dominates the rethoric and is completely divorced from the effects of that rethoric, whereas in the second one there is a character who speaks for himself and "who experiences the rethoric in his own person" (202). The central character, then, takes part, along with the reader, in an increasing establishment of atmosphere; i.e., the rethoric becomes functional or intrinsic.

However, there is no prescriptive formula. Booth emphasizes the need not to generalize from his initial comparison. He argues that it is not because there is a character who speaks in a fictional story that the commentary is always effective, and also that the story would not necessarily be improved simply "by revealing more and more of its tone through dramatized detail and less and less through narrative statement" (202). Booth cites two other critics, Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate, who stress the importance of the dramatized detail, and who believe that the narrator should dramatically portray the objects in the story so as to make them a part of the story, visually alive. According to Gordon and Tate, still as cited by Booth, all general commentary unprovided with irony should be eliminated, and the qualities of the

object should be shown to the reader rather than simply told. Booth refutes these assertions in what concerns Poe's morbid horror, for in Poe's kind of fiction, "psychological detail, as conveyed by an emotionally charged adjective, is more effective than mere sensual description in any form" (203).

Booth moves back, then, to the first means of establishing atmosphere and provides a long quotation from the opening to Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno" (1855) to show that many great authors have used that means of creating mood very appropriately. The critic compares Melville's and Poe's passages, and says that in both the authors address the reader directly, rhetorically. However, Booth likes Melville's passage better than Poe's basically because of the way in which Melville's commentary relates to the unique context of the passage. He attacks Poe's commentary as being "too long", wasteful, uneconomical (204) and asserts that it could easily be shortened with no losses to the essential contents, in contrast to Melville's. The critic concludes his study on mood by reafirming that the author may intrude to influence the readers' responses directly, provided his intrusions are pertinent to the context.

At this point, going back to Lovecraft, it will be helpful to consider his assertion that "[a]tmosphere is the all-important thing, for the final criterion of authenticity is not the dovetailing of a plot but the creation of a given sensation" (16). A weird tale must be judged by the emotional level and impact it attains, and

not by the author's intention, or by the simple mechanics of the plot. Being atmosphere, as we have seen, the "emotional aura that helps to establish the reader's expectations and attitudes" (Holman & Harmon 40), writers of Gothic novels depend upon the creation of an atmosphere that will bring to the reader a sense of fear, of intranquility.

In the following chapters of this dissertation I will analyze two works by Carson McCullers--Reflections in a Golden Eye and The Ballad of the Sad Café--with the intention of showing how the gloomy, somber atmosphere that is characteristic of the Romantic grotesque is created and sustained through the absence of the regenerative power of the grotesque.

CHAPTER III

THE FUNCTION OF THE GROTESQUE IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ATMOSPHERE IN REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE

The purpose of the present chapter is to investigate how the somber atmosphere characteristic of Bakhtin's formulation of the Romantic grotesque is created in McCullers' second work, Reflections in a Golden Eye. The analysis provided here aims at showing that the novel's atmosphere does not entail the regenerative power of the grotesque, but a somber mood which is reinforced by the setting, the characters and their attitudes. Initially, the chapter provides an analysis of the novel's main characters, aiming at assessing their distorted personalities and attitudes, to demonstrate the great extent to which such characters contribute to the establishment of a weird, somber atmosphere. Then, the focus falls on the general setting and the weather, showing how both elements also contribute to the establishment of the somber atmosphere found in the novel.

The novel's central themes, i.e., alienation and psychological unrest, are everywhere in McCullers' work. All of the six main characters-- "two officers, a soldier, two women, a Filipino"(7)[1]--are psychologically disturbed. In the thoughts of Major Morris Langdon's wife, Alison, as expressed by the novel's omniscient narrator,

> [e]veryone she had known in the past five years was somehow wrong... [with the exception of her Filipino servant, Anacleto]. Morris Langdon in his blunt way was as stupid and heartless as a man could be. Leonora was nothing but an animal. And thieving Weldon Penderton was at bottom hopelessly corrupt. What a gang! Even she herself she loathed. (79)

To be sure, the plot is full of dissatisfied, somewhat misplaced characters. As Richard M. Cook puts it in his essay "Reflections in a Golden Eye" (in Carson McCullers), in the novel,

> McCullers describes a world where the suffering supposed by isolation is unrelieved by the possibility of human idealism and individual struggle. It is a stark, blank world devoid of love and charm, where life exists on its lowest instinctual level. (69)

Isolation, a characteristic of the Romantic grotesque, is indeed a key theme in the novel. The characters live with, talk, and relate to each other but seem unable to express what they really need to express. They place themselves in separate, isolated worlds, where they suffer and deal with their problems by themselves.

There are clearly two distinct, separate groups of characters. In one group we have the characters who tend to life, to nature, to sex, and to simple things in life:

Leonora Penderton, her lover Major Morris Langdon, and Private Elgee Williams. In the other group, we have rather the opposite, characters who tend to death, to an almost sexless life, to fear--another characteristc of the Romantic grotesque--and to things that distance them from nature: Captain Weldon Penderton, Alison Langdon, and her Filipino servant Anacleto. Alison and Captain Penderton are apparently the most unhappy of the characters, and the Captain, the most complex of them all.

According to Cook in the essay cited, Captain Penderton "is quite possibly the most thoroughly isolated character that McCullers ever created" (71). In building up the description of the character who can be taken as the protagonist of the novel, the narrator poses that the Captain's

> personality differed in some respects from the ordinary. Sexually the Captain obtained within himself a delicate balance between the male and female elements, with the susceptibilities of both the sexes and the active powers of neither. (14-15)

He is much of an intellectual or a scholar who speaks three languages and whose head is "filled with statistics and information of scholarly exactitude" (15). The problem with him is that he has a cowardly attitude towards life. Besides, "the Captain never in his life had an idea in his head" (15), for he lacked the courage to fuse two or more facts known to him, thus forming an idea (15).

Furthermore, he "had a sad penchant for becoming enamoured of his wife's lovers" (15).

Concerning Major Langdon, things are even more complicated, since the Captain

> was just as jealous of his wife as he was of her love. In the last year he had come to feel an emotional regard for the Major that was the nearest thing to love that he had ever known. More then anything else he longed to distinguish himself in the eyes of this man. (33)

Another complicating aspect in the Captain's profile is his sexual performance. It is implicit that he is impotent: "when [Leonora] married the Captain she had been a virgin. Four nights after her wedding she was still a virgin, and on the fifth night her status was changed only enough to leave her somewhat puzzled" (20).

In regard to the Captain's balance between life and death, "the scale was heavily weighted to one side--to death. Because of this the Captain was a coward" (15). Now and again, Captain Penderton is depicted as being fearful: "Sometimes when he was by himself he was overcome by a rootless terror" (52); "the Captain looked into the horse's round, purple eyes and saw there a liquid image of his own frightened face" (67). The Captain is also apparently a masochist: "Often in his life he had exacted many strange and secret little penances on himself which he would have found difficult to explain to others" (68). He is clearly

inclined to be a thief: he is "continually resisting an urge to take things he saw in other people's houses" (50). The Captain is an incipient drug addict as well, since he takes Seconal before going to sleep and seems to depend on the effect of the drug: "This quantity of the drug gave him a unique and voluptuous sensation" (54).

Besides all these traits in Captain Penderton's personality, there is still one that is fundamental to the present study, since it sets him against the other group of characters: his relation to nature. As we have seen, the Captain has a distorted relation to life and to sex; that distortion is also directed, as we shall see, to nature. The first incident depicted in the book concerning this distortion is a memory that the Captain has of an evening soon after he had married, when he picked up a kitten out of its sheltered and warm place and squeezed it into a freezing mailbox (16). In fact, as will become clearer afterwards, this attitude reflects Penderton's wish both to control nature and to freeze his own attraction towards life.

Another incident that shows Captain Penderton's wish to control nature encompasses the first climax of the novel, when the Captain tries to ride his wife's horse, Firebird. Although the Captain "always had been afraid of horses" (68) and sits "tense, his jaws hard, and his knees gripping the saddle desperately" (67), he is at first exceedingly satisfied with being able to control the horse, being possessed by "a great feeling of triumph" (69) for his feat. But then, "without warning and with the speed

of a demon, the horse swerved to the left and plunged down the side of the embankment" (69). The Captain loses control over the situation. He even whispers to himself that he is lost. Nature has put him in his own place: "The dazed Captain was in a half-crouching position" (70). But then, at that frenzied moment of utter fear and lack of control, Captain Penderton experiences something completely new:

> And having given up life, the Captain suddenly began to live. A great mad joy surged through him. This emotion... was one that the Captain had never experienced. His eyes were glassy and half-open, as in delirium, but he saw suddenly as he had never seen before... the captain saw as though for the first time in his life.... The Captain knew no terror now; he had soared to the rare level of consciousness where the mystic feels that the earth is he and that he is the earth. Clinging crabwise to the runaway horse, there was a grin of rapture on his bloody mouth. (70-71)

Although the rapture described above may imply that the Captain has finally surrendered to nature so as to get some degree of pleasure, the next scene comes to destroy this impression: after they stop, the Captain dismounts, slowly and methodically ties the horse to a tree, and proceeds "to beat the horse savagely"(71) with a long switch. Captain Penderton is at once showing that he

repels nature and that he is frustrated for not being able to control it.

Captain Penderton's relation to Private Ellgee Williams encompasses and develops the Captain's own psychological traits. But, as this is crucial to the plot of the novel, it will be analyzed below, at the appropriate section. For now let us consider that the exaggerated psychological portrayal enables us to say that the Captain is set in a completely isolated situation. He is really a grotesque, but his extremely complex profile enriches his role in the novel. In fact, he is one of the few characters who will undergo an apparent change during the novel, as we will shall see.

Following with the assessment of the characters belonging to the group that tends to death, we have Alison Langdon. The Major's wife is clearly related to death. She is always depicted as being utterly fragile, debilitated, pale, emaciated, in short, as a constantly sick woman:

> Mrs. Langdon hardly touched her dinner. She was a small, dark, fragile woman... She was very ill and she looked it. Not only was this illness physical, but she had been tortured to the bone by grief and anxiety so that now she was on the verge of actual lunacy. (22)

Twelve pages later we read:

> Her hands were slender to the point of emaciation, with long fragile fingers and delicate branchings of greenish veins from

> the knuckles of the wrist. They were sickly pale... (34)

A few months earlier, Alison has, of course, ghastly "cut off the tender nipples of her breasts with the garden shears" (33), and although later we become aware that this attitude owes much to the loss of her first baby three years before, cutting off her nipples represents not only her rejection of the idea of becoming a mother but also her rejection of sex. According to the Major's mental account, after the baby died, "for twelve solid months Alison had either been in the hospital or prowling around the house like a ghost" (49); and "[h]ow bitter and cold it had left her! And how damned, damned finicky!" (40). So as to reinforce Alison's poor health condition, she is almost always in bed, and she can barely sleep at night. In contrast to Leonora, who "feared neither man, beast, nor the devil" (19), Alison "feared her own self as much as she feared others" (36); this "unreasonable fear" (100) also approaches her to Captain Penderton.

After she learns about her husband's faithlessness, Alison starts a relation with Leonora, "one of those peculiar friendships between the wife who had been betrayed and the object of her husband's love. This morbid, emotional attachment, bastard of shock and jealousy, she knew was unworthy of her" (34-35). In fact, her relations to the more important characters are based on very dubious feelings: "It seemed to her that she... loathed people. Everyone she had known in the past five

years was somehow wrong" (79). Only with Anacleto, her Filipino servant, can she have a stable relationship. Taking into account that Anacleto is always trying to imitate her, it seems that Alison can only deal with people very similar to her. She is the only character who has a friendship outside the main circle of characters; she sometimes meets one Lieutenant Weincheck, and he is depressed, going through health and financial problems, just like Alison. Her health problems are clearly stated in the book, and financially she is always concerned with how she would make a living if she left her husband. Furthermore, the Lieutenant shares Alison's fondness of music; they even " play Mozart sonatas" (38) when Alison visits him.

Both Alison and Anacleto are fond of the arts. It is implicit that once Alison used to sing: "It was said that she once had a beautiful voice, but no one on this post had ever heard her sing" (33-34). And, according to the narrator, "[a]s a painter Anacleto had great talent.... His work was at once primitive and oversophisticated" (85-86). Alison and Anacleto are also very fond of classical music. To emphasize the similarity between Mrs. Langdon and her servant, Anacleto's attempts at imitating her are constantly presented: once, we are told, he spoke to the Major "in a voice that was exactly like Mrs. Langdon's" (41); "[t]heir voices and enunciation were so precisely alike that they seemed to be softly echoing each other" (43). Anacleto himself thinks "the Lord had blundered grossly in the making of everyone except himself and

Madame Alison" (42). Just like Alison, Anacleto is dissatisfied with the other important characters in the book, and concerning Leonora, the Major and the Captain, he "hated [them] with all his heart"(98).

As Mrs. Langdon's death gets closer, she becomes more and more associated with death. After the first heart attack she is "kept permanently in bed" (96). A little before, we were told that

> for a long time she had been obsessed by the sharp, morbid image of [her baby's] little body in the grave. Her horrified broodings on decay and on that tiny skeleton had brought her to such a state that at last... she had had the coffin disinterred. She had taken what was left of the body to the crematorium in Chicago and had scattered the ashes in the snow. (84-85)

This episode brings to our minds what has been said about the grotesque image, where a new body always emerges from a previous one--from death we have a new life; but here, as is the case with the Romantic grotesque, there is no possibility of a regenerative aspect. Life is absolutely over and nothing new will come from the dead body. Alison herself sees that she is coming close to something degrading, and there are times when she allegedly thinks she is crazy: "...it occurred to her that perhaps she was really going out of her mind" (80); now, she was "a young woman with a face already sharp and aged" (81), and her "room was silent as a sepulchre" (83). After being sent

by her husband to a sanatorium, because "he was forced to acknowledge to himself that she was crazy", Alison dies in a hopeless and isolated situation.

In sharp contrast to the three characters described above, we have the other group of characters. First of all, there is Leonora Penderton, or "The Lady", as the soldiers at the stables call her (27). In fact, as Captain Penderton's earnest threat to his wife's life in the end of their first conversation in the novel implies, it seems that Leonora, representing all that is naturally and physically perfect and plenty, personifies all that at once seduces and repels the Captain. She is the "perfect" woman according to a macho code: "her body was magnificent" (18), and she could not grasp things very easily. Indeed, "she was a little feeble-minded" (20) and "could not have multiplied twelve by thirteen under threat of the rack" (21); "she always found it a little difficult to picture a situation that did not actually take place in the room with her" (97). Leonora was the kind of person "who liked to settle down and was adverse to complications" (20). Although she makes love to Major Langdon only two hours after they first meet (49), which might be an indication of lasciviousness, she has remained loyal to him since then, because "[w]ith him she was content" (20); he gave her just what she needed and that had apparently been enough for her.

As an indication of her easy way with things connected to nature, Leonora knows very well how to

control her horse, Firebird. Every morning, there was a brief struggle between the horse and Leonora, but the struggle "had a theatrical, affected air--it was a jocular pantomime performed for their own amusement and the benefit of spectators" (26); during the "show", "Mrs Penderton laughed aloud and spoke to Firebird in a voice that was vibrant with passion and excitement" (26). As the Captain himself says, Leonora "has broken [the horse's] spirit as I knew she would" (67). The horse, in fact, is as magnificent as the Lady:

> At first glance the horse seemed overgrown and too heavy-set for a thoroughbred. His great haunches were broad and fleshy, and his legs were somewhat thick. But he moved with marvellous, fiery grace, and once at Camden he had outraced his own great sire, who was a champion. (25)

Leonora has a special way with men; she is greatly esteemed at the stables (27), and "[w]ith the General, as with all men, she had a flip and affectionate manner, and the General, like most of the officers on the post, fairly ate out of her hand" (63). In contrast to the Captain and Alison, Leonora sleeps soundly every night, and she does not show any fear: she "feared neither man, beast, nor the devil" (19).

In sharp contrast with Alison's feeble body, "there was about [Leonora's] body a subtle quality of vibration, as though on touching her fair flesh one would feel the

slow live coursing of the bright blood beneath" (18). This superior physical aspect makes Leonora treat Alison as though the latter were either an idiot or a child. When addressing Alison, Leonora "worked her mouth exaggeratedly to form the words and spoke in the careful and reasonable voice that one would use when addressing an abject idiot" (36); later, we are told that "[s]he worked her mouth exaggeratedly and spoke in a deliberately encouraging voice as though addressing a small child" (65). Another contrasting trait between the two women is that, contrary to Alison, both "the Major and Leonora... were great eaters" (21).

Tending, as we can see, towards life, sex, and nature, Leonora is also in sharp opposition to the Captain's cold rationality and impersonality. Their relationship is, as would be expected, difficult. Their very first exchange in the novel shows how their relationship is filled with rage on the part of the Captain and indifference on the part of the wife. The Captain is deeply disturbed by the easy way in which his wife takes off her clothes in any part of the house (18), and Leonora calls him "old prissy". In spite of all that, they have maintained the marriage apparently because Leonora does not have the capacity to question and to decide anything for herself, and the Captain could not even think of being left by his wife, "so distressed was he at the thought of being left alone" (52).

There are a number of mutual differences in the other couple of the novel, too, Major Langdon and Alison.

The Major, for example, abhors his wife's fondness of the arts. As Alison enjoys herself watching Anacleto dance to the sound of a Sonata, the Major looks "from one to the other in disgusted disbelief" (45); besides, classical music, the "stuff" , to the Major, is "like swallowing a bunch of angleworms" (76). In relation to Anacleto, he declares that

> it always seemed to me terrible for a grown man twenty-three years old to be dancing around to music and messing with water-colours. In the army they would have run him ragged and he would have been miserable, but even that seems to me better than the other. (112)

In fact, to Major Langdon life is limited to sex and the army; he relates his first intercourse with Leonora to "being out on manoeuvres, shivering all through a cold rainy night in a tent that leaked. And then to get up at dawn and see that rain was over and the sun was out again.... A wonderful feeling--the best in the world!" (49-50). After his wife dies, there are only two things that matter to him: "to be a good animal and to serve [his] country. A healthy body and patriotism" (116). This relation to animals, which also connects him to Leonora, is reinforced by his nick-name among the soldiers at the stables: "The Buffalo" (26); in contrast to the Captain, "[t]he Major was a fine horseman, and, when a young Lieutenant, he had made a rare name for himself on the

polo field" (26-27). The Major is also connected to Leonora because he is a little narrow-minded too: "He always found it difficult to follow up any one line of thought beyond the first, bare exposition" (113). The relationship between the Major and Alison is rather wasted; due to the number of diseases, one following the other, the Major "became exasperated and ended finally by not believing her. He thought it all a hypochondriacal fake that she used in order to shirk her duties--that is, the routine of sports and parties which he thought suitable" (81).

Finally, closing the circle of main characters, we have Private Ellgee Williams, a very intriguing individual whose own name has been changed by a Sergeant when he was enlisted in the army, much to the indifference of the soldier. Contrary to Captain Penderton, who was "brought up by five old-maid aunts" (72), the Private "had been brought up in a household exclusively male" (23). Due to his father's views on women, who "carried in them a deadly and catching disease which made men blind, crippled, and doomed to hell" (23), Private Williams, who is 20 years old, "had never willingly touched, or looked at, or spoken to a female since he was eight" (23). Thus, one can imagine the impression that Leonora's naked body made in the soldier's mind when he accidentally watched her through the front door of the Pendertons'. Indeed, the consequence of that experience is that the soldier becomes a voyeur. He returns a number of times to watch the Pendertons' through a window where he could hardly be detected. And in

some such watchings, he has the courage to go upstairs, after the lights are out, and watch Leonora sleeping. In the first of these occasions, "a look of bliss awakened in his heavy face. The young soldier felt in him a keen, strange sweetness that never before in his life had he known" (55). These feelings are right away related to the habit that the soldier has of going to a lonely place in the forest of the reservation surrounding the army post, where he always

> unsaddled his horse and let him go free. Then he took off his clothes and lay down on a large flat rock in the middle of the field... Sometimes, still naked, he stood on the rock and slipped upon the horse's bare back. (56)

Thus, Private William's vision of Leonora is compared to being in contact with nature and horses. In fact, just like Leonora, the soldier is constantly related to nature and to animals: "In his eyes... there was a mute expression that is found usually in the eyes of animals... he moved with the silence and agility of a wild creature or a thief" (8). From the beginning of the novel Private Williams is associated with animals in the Captain's mind: "Private Williams was associated in the Captain's mind with the stables and his wife's horse, Firebird--an unpleasant association" (14). At times, the word "savage" is used to describe his attitudes: "there was a sensual, savage smile on his lips" (56).

Besides this proximity to nature and animality, another aspect that connects Private Williams to Leonora is his fearless character: "during the dark vigils in The Lady's room, the soldier had no fear" (91), even when he is about to be shot by the Captain, "there was no fear in his face" (125).

As we can see, the weird psychological traits of the characters are in themselves important elements in the building of the somber, mysterious atmosphere characteristic of the Romantic grotesque. The reader does not know what to expect from such an odd group of people. Indeed, in Reflections in a Golden Eye, McCullers deals with the grotesque in a rather subtle way. Beneath the cloak of normality, behind the mask of order implied by a military post, the author depicts, by means of the oddities of her characters, a reality that defies any conventionally established order.

The stratagem of putting the characters within such a constricting environment as the army post is further enriched by the uniforms that soldiers and officers are obliged to wear. Uniforms and rigid hierarchical norms are representative of a standardization of human life under a strict set of rules; everything and everbody involved in military life must be maintained under such a neat condition that that life seems to run a smooth course. Yet, McCullers shows that one can witness the most bizarre, unexpected happenings and attitudes even--or particularly--in the apparently most ordered and disciplined places.

At times, McCullers uses grotesque images quite openly, and once, even the word grotesque itself; while speaking to Alison about a certain painting of his, Anacleto tries to describe it in the following terms: "A peacock of a sort of ghastly green. With one immense golden eye. And in it these reflections of something tiny and - 'Grotesque', she finished for him" (87). Obviously, this passage relates itself to the title of the novel, and in a certain way explains it. In fact, what we see in the book is a sort of a reflection of grotesque characters, as if they were in front of a distorting mirror.

There are many other occasions when grotesque images are openly used; to begin with, the reader is impressed by the number of times the narrator speaks of the characters' eyes. This detail, together with the abundant use of words such as nose, ears, fingers, reminds us of the fact that grotesque images stress the parts of the body which link the body to the outside world; through these parts, the world enters the body or emerges out of it.

Another passage in which one of these grotesque images is emphasized is when the narrator explains the Captain's nickname among the soldiers at the stables, Captain Flap-Fanny: "[p]erhaps [the Captain] would not have ridden at all if he could have seen himself from the rear. His buttocks spread and jounced flabbily in the saddle" (27). Another occasion when the Captain is described in a somewhat grotesque manner is after he beats Leonora's horse: "Out in the forest there, the Captain looked like a

broken doll that had been thrown away. He was sobbing aloud" (72). As the critic Richard Cook poses, "Penderton has moments when he sees how fraudulent [his] identity is and how restrictive and inhuman its dimensions", such as when he rebels "against the major's complacent clichés on the advantages of conforming"(72):

> [w]ith gruesome vividness the Captain suddenly looked into his soul and saw himself. For once he did not see himself as others saw him; there came to him a distorted doll-like image, mean of countenance and grotesque in form. The Captain dwelt on this vision without compassion. He accepted it with neither alteration nor excuse. (112-113)

No other character in the novel, with the exception of Alison Langdon, shows such sharp self-consciousness.

Being an important element of the grotesque, the figure of the freak is also present in Reflections in a Golden Eye, especially in the image of Alison's baby. After thirty-three hours of suffering, Alison gives birth to Catherine, and then "they found the baby's index and third fingers were grown together, and the Major's only thought was that if he had to touch that baby he would shudder all over" (40). Catherine brings nothing but discomfort to the family, especially to the Major, who avoided Alison's room and who "could feel nothing except relief" (40) with the baby's death, almost a year later.

Still another element which can be seen as a characteristic of the grotesque present in the novel is the theme of madness. But then, just as in the Romantic grotesque, madness loses the aspect of the gay parody of "official" reason and acquires a tragic and somber aspect, stressing individual suffering and isolation, as it happens in Alison's case. Although at times she herself, as we have already seen, considers that she is going out of her mind, it is her husband who "decides" that she is completely crazy, based on her reports on something that has really happened; i.e., she has actually seen Private Williams in Leonora's bedroom. This tragic misunderstanding sets Alison in an extremely isolated situation. In the sanatorium, she is accompanied by Anacleto, but the servant is merely her shadow, as it were.

As has been suggested in the previous chapter, the mask in folk culture was affirmatively related to change, to transformation and reincarnation, rejecting uniformity and conformity. In the Romantic grotesque, on the other hand, the mask acquired a somber tinge, being used to hide something, to deceive, to keep a secret. This is exactly what happens in McCullers' novel in relation to Captain Penderton and both his uniform and his high rank. Indeed, as Cook puts it, the Captain's rank and uniform "have provided him with a mask of impersonality and an official government-approved identity" (72). The mask of the uniform is used by the Captain to hide his apparent sexual impotence, his cowardice, and his fearful nature. Private

Williams' relation to uniforms and ranks is also revealing. His own body is seen to defy uniformity: once, the Captain

> had meant to reprimand the soldier for a violation of the regulations concerning the uniform. As he approached, it had seemed to him that Private Williams had buttoned his coat improperly. At first glance the soldier always looked as though he were only in partial uniform, or had neglected some necessary part of his attire... The impression of civilian carelessness was due to the very body of the soldier himself. (119)

In sharp contrast to the Captain, who "always wore uniform when away from the post" (14), the soldier regularly rides his horse naked in the woods surrounding the post (56). Concerning the ranks in the army, Private Williams' attitude reflects the same impersonality described by Cook: "he did not look on [the officers] as being human"; they belonged to a "vague category" (121).

The strange relationship between Captain Penderton and Private Williams pervades the whole novel and is responsible for some strange, disturbing moments that reinforce the somber atmosphere of McCullers' novel. Whereas Major Langdon and Leonora change particularly in their physical aspects, and Alison just goes further in her way to decrepitude, the Captain and the soldier show some sort of change throughout the novel. In the Captain's

case, this change is mostly due to his relation with the soldier.

The soldier's change, as it seems, is highly due to the vision of Leonora's naked body right in the second scene of the first chapter. Thus, throughout the novel, a number of new experiences take place in the soldier's life and "a change was noticed in Private Williams" (29) right in the beginning of the second chapter: he acquired a "new habit of suddenly stopping and looking for a long time into space" (29). While watching Leonora sleeping in her room for the first time, the soldier "felt in him a keen, strange sweetness that never before in his life had he known" (55). Afterwards, during a period when he does not go to the Pendertons' at night, the soldier tasted alcohol for the first time, and "[t]hree men, all old-timers, were surprised when Private Williams left his table to sit with them for a while" (89). Even though he does not speak to the men, his attitude represents another change in his ways. One of the final evidences of the change in the soldier's behavior is the fight he picks at the latrine of the barracks. We are told that

> [t]his was not the first fight that Private Williams had provoked. During the past two weeks he had stayed in the barracks every night, and stirred up much trouble. This was a new side of his personality that his barrack mates had not suspected. (120-121)

Finally, the soldier also changes in what concerns fear. During the first three chapters, the soldier is depicted

as being fearless; then, in the last chapter, we are told that when he was seen by Alison in Leonora's room "a great fright had come in him--but this terror had been more physical than mental, more unconscious than understood... he had run desperately, silently, although he did not realize exactly what it was he feared" (122). The only exception to his previous fearless characters was women; due to his father's account of women, as we have seen, Private Williams feared the "deadly and catching disease" (23) caused by them. But now, "he had touched the Lady and he was afraid of this sickness no more" (122).

Differently from the soldier, Captain Penderton does not change right from the beginning of the novel. In fact, the Captain is afraid of any change: "he could not think of any likely change without dread" (33). But then, at times he takes some unusual measures, such as when one afternoon he orders Private Williams to saddle Leonora's horse: "This order was unusual. Captain Penderton had ridden Firebird only three times before, and on each of these occasions his wife had been with him" (66-67). In fact, this attitude reflects, as we have seen, the Captain's wish to defy nature, in an attempt to show to himself that he can control it. And this same wish is what we witness in the beginning of the novel; Captain Penderton can only think of exploiting and of trying to hurt Private Williams. First, the soldier is chosen for a "one full day's work" (9) at the Pendertons', clearing a part of the woods behind the Penderton's house. Then, that night, after the soldier's job was done, the Captain

"indulged in a brief, peevish daydream--he imagined a fantastic situation in which he caught the soldier transgressing in some way and was instrumental in having him court-martialled" (14). Representing nature or life itself, the soldier becomes the one subject of hatred for "[t]he unhappy Captain [who] had no one to hate and for the past months... had been miserable" (50):

> A rage came in him. He felt a rush of hatred for the soldier that was as exorbitant as the joy he had experienced on runaway Firebird. All the humiliations, the envies, and the fears of his life found vent in this great anger... His mind swarmed with a dozen cunning schemes by which he could make the soldier suffer. In his heart the Captain knew that this hatred, passionate as love, would be with him all the remaining days of his life. (74)

But then, the Captain's feelings for the soldier make him inadvertently follow the young man whenever possible; and the soldier himself "began to perceive that the Captain was following him" (91). In fact, right after the incident with Leonora's horse, Captain Penderton's feelings towards the soldier become quite ambiguous: "The Captain was overcome by a feeling that both repelled and fascinated him--it was as though he and the young soldier were wrestling together naked, body to body, in a fight to death" (77). From then on, the Captain repeats Private Williams' attitude of watching Leonora, and starts

watching the soldier. From this moment up to the end of the novel, these two characters will not speak to each other; only once will the Captain call Private Williams, but he will turn away and remain silent (119).

Captain Penderton forms "the habit of walking each afternoon before the quadrangle where Private Williams was quartered", with the intention of watching the soldier. In contrast to the times when, while ordering the soldier, the Captain "did not look at the young soldier and his voice was high-pitched and arrogant" (66), now Captain Penderton cannot find his voice to talk to the soldier and "always [looks] full into the soldier's face" (109).

During the development of the odd relationship described so far, the reader witnesses a great change in Captain Penderton's way of thinking. In the beginning of the novel, "[h]e looked on all soldiers with bored contempt. To him officers and men might belong to the same biological genus, but they were of an altogether different species" (14). Also, being

> Keenly ambitious, he had often amused himself by anticipating his promotions far in advance... Sometimes he had even whispered the words 'Major-General Penderton' aloud to himself--and it seemed to him he should have been born to the title, so well did the sound of it fit with his name. (108)

Now, after a few weeks, in a complete reversion, the Captain whispers to himself the words "Private Weldon Penderton":

> And these words, with the associations they engendered, aroused in the Captain a perverse feeling of relief and satisfaction. Instead of dreaming of honour and rank, he now experienced a subtle pleasure in imagining himself as an enlisted man. (109)

In fact, all the walkings and drivings by the stables and mainly the barracks "in the hope of meeting Private Williams" (94) enable the Captain plainly to see his own utter loneliness:

> As he thought of the two thousand men living together in this great quadrangle, he felt suddenly alone. He sat in the dark car and as he stared at the lighted, crowded rooms inside, as he heard the sounds of shouts and ringing voices, the tears came to his glassy eyes. A bitter loneliness gnawed in him. (95)

The Captain's craving for a contact with the soldier is so tantalizing that he ceases "to attribute his feeling for Private Williams to hate... he was conscious only of the irresistible yearning to break down the barrier between them" (118). But that barrier the Captain is incapable of destroying; a contact with the soldier would represent a contact with life itself, with all the passions this implies, with the possibility of being a

member in a community, of really sharing life with others. Alone in his ascetic isolation, the Captain envisions such a marvelous possibility for his life if he can only make contact with the soldier, that he even has "an unexplainable attack of amnesia.... In his mind he could see Private Williams very clearly--that was all" (118).

But then, the soldier innocently shows the Captain that that contact is impossible. Instead of responding in any way to the Captain's mute attempts at contact, the soldier himself has the craving for his visual contacts with Leonora. And for the seventh time he goes upstairs at the Penderton's to watch her. The problem is that this time the Captain sees him coming. Finally, as he had once left Leonora's horse "changed from a thoroughbread to a plug fit for the plough" (73), now Captain Penderton must degrade the soldier in a more definite way. And his way of doing so is firing two bullets through the soldier's chest. Further emphasizing the incompatible differences between the two characters, we have a final description: "In his queer, coarse wrapper [the Captain] resembled a broken and dissipated monk. Even in death the body of the soldier still had the look of warm, animal comfort" (125).

Eventually, what happens to Captain Penderton, to the extent to which he is unable to establish contact with the soldier and consequently with all he represents, draws him definitely close to Philip Thomson's basic definition of the grotesque: "the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response" (The Grotesque 27); i.e., the Captain does not accomplish his wish to break out of his

intellectual, ascetic world into the world of the senses represented by Private Williams.

Concerning the establishment of atmosphere in McCullers' novel, we see that the development of the characters and their attitudes are themselves essential elements in printing the work's atmosphere with a somber, tragic aspect. Arguably, the main climax of the novel is left to the very last scene, in which Captain Penderton kills Private Williams, and which enhances the suspense and the tension of the reader.

Being fundamental to the establishment of the somber atmosphere of the Gothic novel, which, as we have seen, is one of the expressions of the Romantic grotesque, setting takes on a particular aspect in McCullers' Reflections in a Golden Eye, thus enabling us to consider the work a modern example of the Gothic novel. Surely, mutatus mutandis, one can relate the isolation provided by the army post to that provided by the terrifying castle, the typical environment of gothic literature. Besides the monotony so greatly emphasized in the beginning of the novel, the army post and its surroundings are vast and filled with possible hiding places; where else could Private Williams ride horses in the nude without being detected? Although the extreme dullness of the post, where "[t]hings happen... over and over again" (7) following a rigid pattern makes the reader tend to expect a description of dull lives throughout the book, it is also a peculiar, uncommon place, a place where a great number of diverse types of individuals must live under the same

norms. According to Richard Cook, the "physical layout of the post reflects its mechanical, inhuman spirit... In such an environment... all human expression takes on the stamp of a general impersonality" (70).

Moreover, the distance taken by the narrator more than reinforces the characters' loneliness, it sets them in an aloof position, as if they were just being painted, or as if they were reflections upon a mirror. This aloofness, together with the cold and paralyzed aspect the mirror implies, can be connected with the relationship between Captain Penderton and Private Williams. The Captain desperately tries to come in contact with the soldier, first only with the intention of somehow hurting him, but afterwards to do something which he does not know exactly. But the soldier seems always aloof, a reflection in a mirror, impossible to be touched. Private Williams is untouched by the Captain's attempts at contacting him. As a matter of fact, the reader, consciously or not, sides him/herself with the soldier, since the reader is taken at times by the realization that he/she is playing the soldier's role, as it were, a voyeur. We are reminded that it is through the soldier's vigils at the Penderton's that the reader witnesses what happens with the most important characters. Thus, the reader watches along with the soldier, partaking his private reactions to what he sees.

In the first chapters of the novel, the general description of the weather suggests a quiet and monotonous atmosphere, thus reinforcing the dull aspect of the setting. It is autumn and nights are cold, with mild

winds. At night, "[t]he sky glitter[s] with icy stars" (22). The days are invariably sunny. The weather seems to reflect the apparent normalcy of the army post life, where nothing unusual happens openly. The first time that the soldier goes to Leonora's bedroom, the night is starry and a "[g]reen shadowy moonlight filled the room" (55); the second time, "the moonlight was clear and silver in the room" (87). It is as though the soldier's attitude of watching Leonora was helped by the weather; it is a natural happening, at least for the innocent soldier.

The weather also accompanies Private Williams when he starts to show a more conspicuous change. It is November then,

> and for two days a high wind had blown. Overnight the young maples along the sidewalks were stripped of their leaves... and the sky was filled with white changing clouds. The next day there was a cold rain.... In the early morning there was frost on the dead grass. (90)

As a general atmosphere of uneasiness appears in the novel, being the soldier caught in Leonora's room by Alison, the winter progresses and the days grow short (109).

Finally, the weather also reflects Private Williams' uneasy attitudes in his last day of life: "The weather on [that] afternoon was extraordinary. There were dour storm clouds in the sky, but down near the horizon the heavens were still clear and the sun shone with gentle

radiance" (118-119). While the soldier is fighting in the barracks, "a slow, drizzling winter rain" (119) is pouring outside. After the rain stops, at midnight, the soldier goes out to his last watching of Leonora. As there is no moon that night, things happen in a quite unusual way: the soldier walks "much faster than usual. Once he lost himself, and when at last he reached the Captain's house he had an accident... he had fallen into a recently dug hole" (123). Everything seems to foretell the tragic end of the novel.

Concerning the other characters of the novel, there are only two whose cases are very illustrative in their relation to the weather and, to a minor degree, to setting: Captain Penderton and Alison Langdon. The afternoon when the Captain rides Firebird is fine and sunny and "[n]ot a cloud could be seen in the wide blue sky". Thus, the weather is as indifferent as the soldier in relation to the Captain's dangerous ride. And when the incident is over, and the Captain is back at the stables, the night is "mild, bright, and the moon [is] in its third quarter" (76). The weather does not reflect any of the Captain's tormented feelings, as if not caring for that cold, impersonal man. The tranquillity of that night is also not in accordance with Alison's suffering. Her

> silent room seemed to her full of jarring sounds. Water dripped into the bowl of the lavatory in the bathroom. The clock on the mantelpiece... ticked with a rusty sound... A great turmoil was going on inside her. Her

> heart seemed to be vaulting--it would beat rapidly like the footsteps of someone running, leap up, and then thud with a violence that shocked her all over. (81-82)

Alison is the disturbing element in the still and silent environment, and also in the fair and cold night. And then, as a climax to this tense scene, her heart stops beating: "The room was silent as a sepulchre... She was terrified, but when she tried to call out and break this silence, no sound would come" (83). Thus, both Captain Penderton and Alison, with their tendency to ascetism and death, as discussed earlier in this chapter, never seem to be in accord either with the environment or with the weather. Indeed, at the end of the novel, when the Captain is already deeply changed, he is exceedingly irritated with his own house:

> The room had an air of flossiness that the Captain abhorred. The lace curtains looked cheap and rather dingy, and on the mantelpiece there was a heterogeneous collection of ornaments and gewgaws... All of the furniture was slightly rickety from too much moving, and the feminine, cluttered impression made by the room as a whole so exasperated the Captain that he stayed out of it as much as possible. (116-117)

This clumsy scenery is contrasted to the environment of the barracks, and now the Captain longs to live among the soldiers. The barracks, with "neat cots placed in a row,

the bare floors, and stark curtainless windows" (117), are as ascetic and austere as the Captain himself.

With so many elements characteristic of the Romantic grotesque, it becomes possible now to consider McCullers' second novel as genuinely containing the typical devices which that literary subgenre qualifies. In an apparently monotonous and ordered setting such as the army post, McCullers has constructed a world that, mainly due to the atmosphere created as of the characters' disturbed psychological traits, defies ordinary, common, everyday life.

NOTE

[1]The edition used in this dissertation is the 1988 Penguin Books, listed under bibliography below.

CHAPTER IV

THE FUNCTION OF THE GROTESQUE IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ATMOSPHERE IN THE BALLAD OF THE SAD CAFÉ

The purpose of the present chapter is to investigate how the somber atmosphere characteristic of Bakhtin's Romantic grotesque is developed in McCullers' The Ballad of the Sad Café. Once again, the atmosphere of McCullers' story does not entail the regenerative power of the grotesque, being replaced, instead, by a somber mood which is typically reinforced by the setting, the characters, their attitudes and their fates. Thus, the present chapter is divided in two parts, the first providing an analysis of the main characters of the novella, showing how their odd personalities, attitudes and relationships contribute to the establishment of the work's somber atmosphere. The second part provides an analysis of the setting and the weather, in an attempt to show how both elements relate themselves to the novella as a whole, also contributing to the establishment of atmosphere.

McCullers has been highly praised for The Ballad of the Sad Café, a novella that has been considered by many critics as her best work. Oliver Evans, for instance, in "The Achievement of Carson McCullers" (in Carson McCullers), states that it was in that book "that the related themes of spiritual isolation and the nature and function of love received their fullest and most mature

treatment" (24). Klaus Lubbers, in "The Necessary Order" (in Carson McCullers), also praises the book for its "philosophy of love that has slowly evolved through [McCullers'] earlier works and has now reached a point of completeness" (45). Finally, Mary Ann Dazey, in "Two Voices of the Single Narrator in The Ballad of the Safe Café" (in Carson McCullers), asserts that the book is, today, "ranked along with The Member of the Wedding as her most successful work"(117).

The major themes in such a successful book are very familiar to McCullers' readers: unrequited love and isolation. Just as in Reflections in a Golden Eye, the main characters in the story are psychologically disturbed and two of them--namely, Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon--present traits that clearly characterize them as grotesques.

Differently from Reflections in a Golden Eye, where we have a clear division of the characters in two general groups, in The Ballad of the Sad Café the three main characters--Miss Amelia Evans, the hunchbacked dwarf Cousin Lymon, and Marvin Macy--are so inextricably connected that most of their attitudes throughout the novella can only be accounted for in a triangular relation. Although there are important individual personality traits which seem to have been formed since the characters were children and which accompany them throughout their lives, the changes they go through in the novella are mainly due to their reactions to one another's arrivals and attitudes.

The town itself plays an important role in the novella, but since it appears mostly as a background element to reinforce the work's unity, it will be studied separately. Thus, with the purpose of clarifying the events that give shape to the characters' lives, the analysis of the characters will follow a scheme similar to that provided by Klaus Lubbers in his cited essay. Lubbers proposes that

> the tale falls into three parts of equal length: there is (1) the arrival of the hunchback, his unexpectedly kind reception by Amelia, the town's rumors about the odd couple, and the transformation of Amelia's store into a café; (2) a middle section dealing with the growth of the café, the nature of love and, in retrospect, with Amelia's grotesque marriage; (3) the return of Marvin Macy, the hunchback's attachment to him, the increasing tension between the antagonists and the climactic wrestling match between Amelia and Marvin. (46)

Although Lubber's quote refers primarily to the novella's structure, we can see how this very structure is determined by important events in the lives of the main characters. Thus, it is impossible to analyze the characters without connecting them mutually, following the three relationships that take place in the novella: the attachment between Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon; the

attachment between Cousin Lymon and Marvin Macy; and the antagonism between Marvin Macy and Miss Amelia.

The love triangle described above is complicated by the fact that in each attempt at a more stable relationship the beloved does not share the same feelings as the lover. In fact, in one of the most famous passages in all her ficton, McCullers uses her narrator to expound with great sensitivity the differences between the lover and the beloved. Ultimately, both lover and beloved suffer from the experience of love: the lover

> feels in his soul that his love is a solitary thing. He comes to know a new, strange loneliness and it is this knowledge which makes him suffer... he must create for himself a whole new inward world - a world intense and strange, complete in himself. (26)[1]

However, even with all the loneliness implicit in the lover's situation, the narrator sustains that

> ... most of us would rather love than be loved. Almost everyone wants to be the lover. And the curt truth is that, in a deep secret way, the state of being beloved is intolerable to many. The beloved fears and hates the lover, and with the best of reasons. For the lover is forever trying to strip bare his beloved. The lover craves any possible relation with the beloved, even if

> this experience can cause him only pain. (27)

And pain, brought about by unrequited love, is the core of The Ballad of the Sad Café. The passage quoted above comes right before the detailed description of Miss Amelia's ten-day marriage to Marvin Macy. In the first relationship of the novella, chronologically speaking, Marvin Macy is the lover. The utter humiliation that he suffers from Amelia's unresponse to his love is what causes him to threaten her in a good-bye letter: "he swore that in his life he would get even with her" (33). And, definitely, this is what he has actually done by the end of the novella.

Besides the isolation and unhappiness caused by the impossibility of getting involved in a stable and healthy relationship, the characters are rendered even more spiritually isolated and incomplete because of their distorted physical characteristics and personalities. In the cases of Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon, the distortion reaches the point of grotesque characteristics. Physically, Miss Amelia is

> a dark, tall woman with bones and muscles like a man. Her hair was cut short and brushed back from the forehead, and there was about her sunburned face a tense, haggard quality. She might have been a handsome woman if, even then, she was not slightly cross-eyed.(4)

According to Richard Gray, in his essay "Moods and Absences" (in Carson McCullers), with this description of Miss Amelia, "McCullers effectively transforms [her] into a freak" (81); emphasis is given to her "physical defects and her masculinity (or, rather, her sexual ambivalence)" (81).

In fact, the masculinity implicit in her physical aspect is also found in her personality and manners. She has been

> raised motherless by her father who was a solitary man, [and] early in youth she had grown to be six feet two inches tall which in itself is not natural for a woman, and... her ways and habits were too peculiar ever to reason about. (14)

Indeed, Miss Amelia is described not only as a solitary woman, but she is also a self-sufficient woman who "cared nothing for the love of men" (4). She is also skilled in ordinarily masculine trades: "With all things which could be made by the hands Miss Amelia prospered.... She built the brick privy behind her store in only two weeks and was skilled in carpentering" (5). She plays a powerful role in the town; according to Lawrence Graver, in "Penumbral Insistence: McCullers' Early Novels" (in Carson McCullers), "[s]ince her liquors relieve melancholy, her foods hunger, and her folk remedies pain, this perverse cross between Ceres, Bacchus, and the neighborhood medicine man is the one indispensable person in town" (63). Concerning her skill in doctoring, she is considered a good doctor and "no

disease was so terrible but what she would undertake to cure it" (17). Yet, there is one remarkable exception to this ability of hers:

> If a patient came 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... like a great, shamed, dumb-tongued child. (17)

Her ignorance in relation to sex is reinforced by the outcome of her ten-day marriage to Marvin Macy. She simply cannot play the habitual and expected role of the woman in the wedding night and rejects Marvin Macy's attempt at taking her to bed: "A groom is in a sorry fix when he is unable to bring his well-beloved bride to bed with him" (31).[2]

Miss Amelia's masculinity is so evident throughout the novella that Louise Westling has based her essay "Carson McCullers' Amazon Nightmare" (in Carson McCullers) entirely on the assumption that "[t]he real force of The Ballad of the Sad Café lies in its depiction of a masculine amazon whose transgression of conventional sexual boundaries brings catastrophic male retribution" (116). According to Westling, Miss Amelia's masculine features and rejection of everything female stand for her "impulse to appropriate male power and thus escape the culturally inferior role of woman" (110).

To emphasize Miss Amelia's utter loneliness before Cousin Lymon's arrival, we are told that "[s]he ate her

Sunday dinners by herself... and she claimed kin with no one" (7). So, it is strange that when the hunchback appears, she accepts him almost immediately. In fact, with the hunchback's arrival, Miss Amelia starts doing odd things right away, and her behavior progressively changes.

The first "rare thing" (9) she does is to offer the hunchbacked stranger a drink from her own bottle, minutes after he has arrived: "Miss Amelia could seldom be persuaded to sell her liquor on credit, and for her to give so much as a drop away free was almost unknown" (9). Soon after, however, she even invites him to eat with her, another rare attitude: "Only a few times in her life had Miss Amelia invited anyone to eat with her, unless she were planning to trick them in some way, or make money out of them" (11). Finally, as clear indication that something very strange is happening, she invites Lymon to follow her upstairs to "the three rooms where Miss Amelia had lived during all her life.... Few people had even seen these rooms" (12). So, right from the first contact, Miss Amelia plays to Cousin Lymon the role of the protectress.

If Miss Amelia is changed right after the hunchback's arrival, so is the hunchback changed a couple of days later. When he is finally seen by some people in the community, instead of the

> pitiful and dirty little chatterer, alone and beggared in this world... he had greatly changed. For one thing he was clean beyond words. He still wore his little coat, but it was brushed off and neatly mended. Beneath

> this was a fresh red and black checkered shirt belonging to Miss Amelia... his shoes were of a special kind, being queerly shaped, laced up over the ankles, and newly cleaned and polished with wax. (18)

Before addressing the main changes of behavior in the town as a whole and in Miss Amelia in particular due to Cousin Lymon's arrival, it is appropriate to attempt a fuller description of this odd character. The first thing that stands out is his resemblance to a child or an animal. The first time he appears in the novella, the hunchback is mistaken for an animal--"'A calf got loose'" (6)--and a child--"'It's somebody's youngun'" (6). Soon after, while he is trying to convince Miss Amelia of their kinship, "[h]is hands were like dirty sparrow claws" (8). Much later on in the narrative, while calling out Marvin Macy, "[h]is voice was just like the voices of children" (56).

In fact, Cousin Lymon Willis is one of the most ambiguous characters in McCullers' fiction. Concerning his age, for instance, nobody can be sure whether he is young or old:

> There was something childish about his satisfaction with his painting. And in this respect a curious fact should be mentioned. No one in the town, not even Miss Amelia, had any idea how old the hunchback was. Some maintained that when he came to town he was about twelve years old, still a child--

> others were certain that he was well past forty. His eyes were blue and steady as a child's but there were lavender crêpy shadows beneath these blue eyes that hinted of age. It was impossible to guess his age by his hunched queer body. And even his teeth gave no clue--they were all still in his head (two were broken from cracking a pecan), but he had stained them with so much sweet snuff that it was impossible to decide whether they were old teeth or young teeth. When questioned directly about his age the hunchback professed to know absolutely nothing--he had no idea how long he had been on the earth, whether for ten years or a hundred! So his age remained a puzzle. (64)

This long block quotation is indispensable because it shows how the hunchback is grotesquely ambiguous, with his characteristics of both a very young man and an old one at the same time.

According to Westling in the cited essay, "Cousin Lymon is reminiscent of the figures of mysterious stranger and elf" (113). He is a freak indeed: besides being a hunchback,

> [he] was scarcely more than four feet tall.... His crooked little legs seemed too thin to carry the weight of his great warped chest and the hump that sat on his shoulders. He had a very large head, with

> deep-set blue eyes and a sharp little mouth. (6-7)

As a habit, "[h]e did not wear trousers such as ordinary men are meant to wear, but a pair of tight-fitting little knee-length breeches" (18). He is described as a very special character, who brings a comfortable sense of joy and intimacy mingled with a bewilderment due to his peculiar traits: "an air of intimacy... and a vague festivity" (19) fills the room minutes after the hunchback's appearance. In the narrator's account,

> [t]here is a type of person who has a quality about him that sets him apart from other and more ordinary human beings. Such a person has an instinct which is usually found only in small children, an instinct to establish immediate and vital contact between himself and all things in the world. Certainly the hunchback was of this type. (20)

Besides the mixed reactions he raises in the townspeople and in the reader, other elements characterize Cousin Lymon as being extremely grotesque. When he reappears two days after his arrival, his garments are extravagant. Besides his mended coat, Miss Amelia's red and black checkered shirt, his knee-length breeches, his black stockings, and his queerly shaped shoes, "he wore a shawl of lime-green wool, the fringes of which almost touched the floor"(18). When he watches the group of people gathered in Miss Amelia's store, "[he] regarded each person

steadily at his own eye-level, which was about belt line for an ordinary man. Then with shrewd deliberation he examined each man's lower regions" (18), which reminds us of Bakhtin's material bodily principle with its emphasis on the bodily lower stratum. Thus, the hunchbacked dwarf would represent in the scene described above the element that emphasizes degradation, by disregarding the spiritual, elevated aspect of the human being and focusing on its bodily, material level.

Another scene in which Cousin Lymon is described in an extremely grotesque manner is when he tries to call Marvin Macy's attention; as a way of ingratiating himself with someone, "he could wiggle his large pale ears with marvelous quickness and ease" (49), but now, as he sees that his attempts are getting him nowhere, he "added new efforts of persuasion. He fluttered his eyelids, so that they were like pale, trapped moths in his sockets. He scraped his feet around on the ground, waved his hands about, and finally began doing a little trotlike dance... he resembled the child of a swamphaunt" (49-50).

These extremely odd descriptions closely connect Cousin Lymon to Miss Amelia. As we have seen, Miss Amelia is also definitely a grotesque character. At times, both characters are depicted as forming only one entity: "The hunchback hovered so close behind her that the swinging light made on the staircase wall one great, twisted shadow of the two of them" (12); and, "...see Miss Amelia bend down to let Cousin Lymon scramble on her back--and see her wading forward with the hunchback settled on her

shoulders, clinging to her ears or to her broad forehead" (25). Thus, such unity is reflected in their relationship, which turns out to be very strong, and which brings about many changes in Miss Amelia's behavior.

For the first time in her life, Miss Amelia is faced with the possibility of taking care of a human being who is apparently completely alone in the world, "come from God knows where" (12). In this relationship, the traditional sexual roles are inverted: here, it is the woman who takes the initiative of providing for the male, working hard to furnish the house with everything needed and also playing the role of the protector. Indeed, most of the times, Cousin Lymon is depicted as being a mischievous boy whose general physical condition can only raise pity. According to the narrator, he is

> 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. ...He was present at... every other fight... since he had come into town.... (39-40)

Concerning his health, Cousin Lymon is now and again in need of close attention; once, he has "a summer quinsy" (40) and everybody in town, including Miss Amelia, suspects that he is consumptive: "there was some reason to suspect that Cousin Lymon was consumptive. The brightness of his gray eyes, his insistence, his talkativeness, and his cough--these were all signs" (56). However, Miss Amelia's careful treatment does not seem to improve his

condition: "She spoiled him to a point beyond reason, but nothing seemed to strengthen him; food only made his hump and his head grow larger while the rest of him remained weakly and deformed" (24). His hump and his head growing larger is definitely another example of a grotesque image. This fact can be taken as representative of the abnormal nature of that relationship: the more Miss Amelia plays her unnatural masculine role, the more deformed gets the hunchback.

The fact is that Cousin Lymon brings about a number of changes both in Miss Amelia and in the people in the town. He reminds us of the element of change and renewal characteristic of the medieval carnival, according to Bakhtin. The first hint that Miss Amelia's store is going through a transformation is that the night Cousin Lymon reappears with his new image, Miss Amelia breaks an old rule for the first time: she allows liquor to be opened and drunk by anyone--"Always before, it was necessary to go around to the dark back yard, and there she would hand out your bottle through the kitchen door. There was no feeling of joy in the transaction" (21). As the narrator puts it, "[m]ore than that she... opened two boxes of crackers so that they were there hospitably in a platter on the counter and anyone who wished could take one free" (22).

To be sure, this is the way in which the café was inaugurated; from then on, people would happily gather, drink, talk, and, at midnight, "[e]veryone said good-bye to everyone else in a friendly fashion" (23). The change in Miss Amelia's behavior is noticed by many people: "There

was in her expression pain, perplexity, and uncertain joy. Her lips were not so firmly set as usual, and she swallowed often.... Her look that night... was the lonesome look of the lover" (23). So, both Miss Amelia and the people in the town have good reasons to be much happier than they have ever been. Miss Amelia even forgets to bolt the front door of her premises that evening, an indication that she is not so worried with her possessions as she used to be, and also that there is literally an easy way in, an open entrance to anyone who wants to get in the café.

During the account of what happens in the story within four years, we are told of the simultaneous improvements at the café--there is even a mechanical piano now--and at Miss Amelia's new life itself:

> Her manners... and her way of life were greatly changed... she was not so quick to cheat her fellow man (sic) and to exact cruel payments. Because the hunchback was so extremely sociable, she even went about a little--to revivals, to funerals, and so forth.... The café itself proved profitable and was the only place of pleasure for many miles around. (24)

As a matter of fact, all the changes that take place in the café are due to Miss Amelia's love for Cousin Lymon. She has never been in love before, and the new experience completely transforms both Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon. As Lawrence Graver asserts in the essay

cited above, "[a]s lover, she becomes softened, graceful, communicative, eager to extend the rewards of companionship to others; he, the beloved, becomes proud, perky, aristocratic" (64). Indeed, from a beggared and dirty man who carried a bag "full of all manner of junk--ragged clothes and odd rubbish..." (8), the hunchback is greatly changed, and in four years' time, "[he] owned almost everything on the premises" (37). Besides giving him a lot of presents so as to pamper him, Miss Amelia also places her trust in Cousin Lymon, "in the most delicate and vital matters.... He alone had access to her bank-book and the key to the cabinet of curios" (37).

Suddenly, the hunchback starts getting bored and complaining about trivial things such as grits (37). He is bored because "[t]here was not much going on" (41) and apparently wishes that someone came to change that situation: "The hunchback stood leaning against the banister of the porch, looking down the empty road as though hoping that someone would come along" (41-42). In contrast to the hunchback's dissatisfaction and boredom, Miss Amelia is described as being satisfied: "There was a softness about her gray, queer eyes and she was smiling gently to herself" (41); and, a page later, "Miss Amelia... was satisfied with herself" (42). From these small differences, their relationship starts to degenerate months after Cousin Lymon first hears about Marvin Macy; it is now "six years after the time when Cousin Lymon came first to the town" (38). The first sign is rather abrupt;

one moment the couple is always together-- "Cousin Lymon was with her always" (45)--the next moment, he refuses seven times to go with her to Cheehaw, so as not to miss the commotion caused by the first frost (46). What happens during Miss Amelia's absence is precisely the event that completely reverts the tale and brings about the end of Miss Amelia's happy situation and, eventually, of her life, to be sure: Marvin Macy's comeback.

Marvin Macy is "a tall man, with brown curly hair, and slow-moving, deep-blue eyes. His lips were red and he smiled the lazy, half-mouthed smile of the braggart" (47). In his youth, he was "the handsomest man in this region--being six feet one inch tall, hard-muscled.... He was well off, made good wages, and had a gold watch" (27). Nevertheless, he is an evil character. Graver, in his essay, notes that "[h]andsome, mercurial, vicious, and cunning, Macy had been a most notable young scoundrel, the demon lover of every 'soft-eyed' young girl in town" (64). Being a fortunate man who needs "to bow and scrape to no one" (27) and who always gets what he wants, he is "the beloved of many females in this region" (28), whom he "degraded and shamed" (28). His bad reputation is mainly due to the fact that, as a boy, he had carried about with him for years "the dried and salted ear of a man he had killed in a razor fight." We are told that "[h]e had chopped off the tails of squirrels in the pinewoods just to please his fancy, and... he carried forbidden marijuana

weed to tempt those who were discouraged and drawn toward death" (27-28).

It is also true that Marvin Macy had a terrible childhood being one of seven unwanted children, whose parents used to spank them as a habit and who were finally abandoned and "left to the mercies of the town" (28). Marvin and Henry Macy were taken up by a stepmother, and while Henry grew to be the kindest and gentlest man in town, Marvin "grew to be bold and fearless and cruel. His heart turned tough as the horns of Satan" (29).

Amazingly enough, however, Marvin Macy's character is reversed by the love he feels for Miss Amelia. Just as we have seen Miss Amelia change out of love, so in Marvin Macy's case the change is very similar:

> He reformed himself completely. He was good to his brother and foster mother, and he saved his wages and learned thrift. Moreover, he reached out toward God. No longer did he lie around on the floor.. all day Sunday, singing and playing his guitar. (29)

Nobody knows the reason why Miss Amelia decides to marry Marvin Macy. After the wedding, she does not seem to care much for him and "treated [him] in exactly the same manner she would have used with some customer" (30). And the wedding night is disastrous: Miss Amelia is infuriated with Marvin Macy's attempts at taking her to bed, and she stays the whole night downstairs reading by the fire. This is only the first of a series of humiliations that she

impinges upon Marvin Macy, who eventually leaves town swearing revenge (33). As might be expected, Marvin Macy recovers his evil character afterwards, becoming "a criminal whose picture and whose name were in all the papers in the state" (33).

Then, when he returns to town after being let out of the penitentiary on parole, Marvin Macy brings with him quite the opposite kind of changes from those brought by Cousin Lymon. Instead of the air of intimacy and gaiety provided by the hunchback, the rascal brings turmoil and destruction. He is now described in a grotesque manner, as if he was a devil; Miss Amelia refers to him as having cloven hoofs: "'He will never set his split hoof on my premises'" (44). Besides, his now too famous evil character is "not measured only by the actual sins he had committed... there was about him a secret meanness that clung to him almost like a smell. Another thing--he never sweated" (52). Even the way he sings brings a reaction as ambiguous as any grotesque element: "everything he sang both lured and exasperated" (62). More than that, according to the town, "he must have learned the method of laying charms. Otherwise how could his effect on Cousin Lymon be explained?" (52).

Indeed, Cousin Lymon's reaction to Marvin Macy's arrival is very peculiar. Even before seeing the man, the hunchback is tormented by his mere name: "[t]he name Marvin Macy was unknown to him, but it tantalized him... the hunchback took a great interest in robbers and crimes of

all varieties" (43-44). The first time they meet--and Cousin Lymon is the first person in town to see the newcomer--the two are described as having something in common, and the hunchback starts to follow Marvin Macy, at first from a distance:

> [Cousin Lymon] and the man stared at each other, and it was not the look of two strangers meeting for the first time and swiftly summing up each other. It was a peculiar stare they exchanged between them, like the look of two criminals who recognize each other... [the hunchback] watched the man go down the road, and after a few moments he began to follow along carefully, keeping many paces away. (47)

Soon afterwards, resembling Captain Penderton as he follows Private Elgee Williams, Cousin Lymon is seen following Marvin Macy everywhere: "when Marvin Macy came out for the day, [the hunchback] would trail him about the town, and sometimes they would be gone for hours together out in the swamp" (56). The fact is that the hunchback is completely fascinated by Marvin Macy; a little before the grotesque scene already described, when Cousin Lymon furiously wiggles his ears in order to call Macy's attention, we notice how the hunchback "did not take his eyes from the face of Marvin Macy" (48).

Miss Amelia's reaction to Cousin Lymon's efforts at getting any bit of attention from Marvin Macy is worth evaluating. The first time she meets Macy, she is more

concerned with the hunchback's freakish gestures, gazing at him with "sick amazement" (49) than with Macy's comeback. When Macy gives a cuff on the side of Lymon's head, everyone in the café expects a violent reaction from Miss Amelia, but she simply does nothing. She just stares at the two men as if she is in a trance, "her face... tense with reckoning some inward pain" (50-51). After that, Miss Amelia changes again: the night after Marvin Macy's comeback, she does not open the café, as though in an attempt to decide what to do. Also, "[f]or 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 the court" (53). As she sees her beloved Cousin Lymon following Marvin Macy about the town, she seems lost, not knowing what to do: she "seemed to have lost her will; for the first time in her life she hesitated as to just what course to pursue" (53-54).

Her first attempts at doing something to hurt Marvin Macy completely fail: "she set a terrible trap for him out in the swamp that surely would have killed him if he had got caught. She let Cousin Lymon invite him to Sunday dinner, and then tried to trip him up as he went down the steps" (54). Once, her plan even reverses upon herself: she tries to poison Marvin Macy "but there was a mistake, the plates were confused, and it was she herself who got the poisoned dish" (57). Then, at last, as "everything she tried to do against Marvin Macy rebounded

on herself" (60), she decides to start preparing herself for a decisive fight: she makes a punching bag and "[boxes] with it out in her yard every morning" (61).

Simultaneously, Cousin Lymon's behavior toward Miss Amelia changes, and they start to disagree in many subjects. While one of the reasons the hunchback admires Marvin Macy is because the latter has been to Atlanta, Miss Amelia despises anyone "who had made the trip to Atlanta or traveled fifty miles from home to see the ocean" (53). Their attitudes toward the strange snowfall is similarly opposed: while Miss Amelia ignores it and completely shuts herself in her premises, "Cousin Lymon, on the contrary, chased around in the wildest excitement, and when Miss Amelia turned her back to dish him some breakfast he slipped out of the door" (58).

While Miss Amelia begins "a great campaign of pleasure for Cousin Lymon--making exhausting trips to various spectacles being held in distant places" (54), the hunchback sometimes "followed in Miss Amelia's footsteps--but these days it was only in order to imitate her awkward long-legged walk; he crossed his eyes and aped her gestures in a way that made her appear to be a freak" (62). The response produced by the people who see Cousin Lymon aping Miss Amelia tells us that the hunchback is no longer a joyful person and also reminds us of the absence of the regenerative laughter in the Romantic grotesque: "There was something so terrible about this that even the silliest customers of the café... did not laugh" (62).

The truth is that Cousin Lymon sides with Marvin Macy in relation to the imminent fight. And even when the hunchback brings Macy to live with them, in Miss Amelia's premises, Miss Amelia still tries to protect her beloved, giving him her own bed (60). Miss Amelia cannot do anything against the hunchback's will because she is afraid of being left alone: "she did not put Marvin Macy off the premises, as she was afraid that she would be left alone" (60). The situation is rather odd because the one she protects has already sided with her own enemy. If we bring back to mind Westling's feminist reading of the story, we are reminded that, according to her, what is at stake here is not Cousin Lymon's love or custody, but "whether a woman can deny her sex and dominate men with a strength analogous to their own" (115). In fact, the answer to Westling's proposition is no, a woman cannot deny her sex and all the implications of it; and for that matter, the fight is already won even before starting, because men's traditional community, such as the one portrayed in the novella, will not allow their power to be endangered by a woman. Thus, initially the fight is somewhat balanced--there is "no sign of weakening on either side" (66)--and Miss Amelia shows that she is stronger and is evidently winning-- "At last she had him down, and straddled; her strong big hands were on his throat" (67). But just then, Marvin Macy's revenge is enacted when Miss Amelia's beloved, the hunchback himself, enters the fight and helps Marvin Macy to win the contest. It is as though, to continue with the implications of Westling's reading,

men will maintain their power at any cost, even through cheating and injustice. Before leaving the town, and to render Miss Amelia's destruction complete, Marvin Macy and Cousin Lymon steal a number of objects from Miss Amelia's premises and wreck the still; in short, they do "everything ruinous they could think of" (69).

Concerning Miss Amelia, after the disastrous fight, she changes once again, negatively this time: she rises the price of everything in the café to one dollar so that nobody wants to buy there anymore; she also changes "very queerly as a doctor" (69); and she also degrades herself physically:

> Miss Amelia let her hair grow ragged, and it was turning gray. Her face lengthened, and the great muscles of her body shrank until she was thin as old maids are thin when they go crazy. And those gray eyes--slowly day by day they were more crossed, and it was as though they sought each other out to exchange a little glance of grief and lonely recognition. She was not pleasant to listen to; her tongue had sharpened terribly. (70)

Miss Amelia's fate reminds us once again of the Romantic grotesque, in which degradation does not entail the regenerative power which the grotesque used to have in medieval carnival. Another aspect of Miss Amelia's fate that is characteristic of the Romantic grotesque is her eventual utter isolation: four years after Cousin Lymon's departure, she "hired a Cheehaw carpenter and had him board

up the premises, and there in those closed rooms she has remained ever since" (70).

Further considerations regarding the characters' relation to the establishment of atmosphere in the novella are necessary. It was argued early in this chapter that the people in the town appear as a background element reinforcing the unity of the novella. To a certain extent, the people in the town function in the novella as a modern-day chorus to the happenings in Miss Amelia's café. The townspeople are treated by the narrator as being a unified whole, as an entity, where everybody thinks and behaves much in the same way, working as a unified group and definitely taking part in the narrative. Concerning the hunchback's arrival, for example, "the town, knowing Miss Amelia, decided that surely she had put him out of the house after feeding him" (13), and afterwards, the rumor that Miss Amelia has murdered the hunchback is known throughout the town within an hour (14).

At times, the people in the town are described as being very similar among themselves whenever there is a gathering event: "At that moment the eight men looked very much alike" (17); soon later, the narrator warns us to "think of [the eight men] as a whole" (20). The town is generally described as very warm and concerned with their fellow men: "this is not a town to let white orphans perish in the road before your eyes" (28). The people in the town are also concerned with Miss Amelia. At important times, they even side with her in relation to Marvin Macy: just as Miss Amelia would feel, "[n]ot a living soul in all the

town was glad to see him" (51); and after the disastrous outcome of the decisive fight, people show some concern toward her: "The people would have helped her if they had known how" (69). Most importantly, however, is the sense of pride and dignity that the town conferred to Miss Amelia's café:

> Almost everyone... came to the café at least once during the week.... They washed before coming to Miss Amelia's, and scraped their feet very politely on the threshold as they entered the café. There, for a few hours at least, the deep bitter knowing that you are not worth much in this world could be laid low. (55)

Thus, the people in the town provide the café with its human warmth. And finally, Marvin Macy's revenge upon Miss Amelia, as we can see, brings misfortune to the town as a whole, since the townspeople lose the only happy place in town and also Miss Amelia's home-made whisky.

The analysis developed so far of the characters and their attitudes and fates shows us that they help to imprint the atmosphere of the novella with a somber, tragic aspect. Yet, differently from Reflections in a Golden Eye, in which the reader's response is of a more reflective nature, what gives The Ballad of the Sad Café a sad and anguished tone is that the reader sympathizes with Miss Amelia and is made to watch her suffer immensely in the end. Besides, as Lubbers asserts in his essay cited above, "the reflective asides and the frequent addresses to

the reader... establish a feeling of intimacy between him and the narrator". Thus, the resulting tone is not as impersonal and cold as in McCullers' second novel, but rather intimate and warm.

The setting in The Ballad of the Sad Café also helps to create the somber atmosphere characteristic of the Romantic grotesque. Similarly to what happens in Reflections in a Golden Eye, in which the army post is a monotonous and isolated place, so is the strange town depicted in the beginning of The Ballad of the Sad Café. In this nameless town, "there is nothing whatsoever to do... absolutely nothing to do" (3-4). Lonesome and sad, the town is quite isolated, "like a place that is far off and estranged from all other places in the world" (3). The dreary aspect of Miss Amelia's life and fate seems to pervade the town itself, and the words that open the book --"The town itself is dreary" (3)--return by the end in a melancholy reiteration: "Yes, the town is dreary" (70). The monotony described at the beginning of the book returns at its end, emphasizing the gloomy atmosphere of the story that has just been told: "On August afternoons the road is empty, white with dust, and the sky above is bright as glass. Nothing moves.... There is absolutely nothing to do in the town.... The soul rots with boredom" (70-71). The repetition, not only of ideas but of words and phrases as well, reinforces the sense of unity in the novella and also creates a sense of a perfectly closed circle, as if the main characters were imprisoned in their dreary fates.

As a matter of fact, the same effect of boredom is raised by the epilogue, the only part of the book which has a title: "The Twelve Mortal Men". According to Lubbers,

> The epilogue returns to the same atmosphere of dreariness and boredom. Yet there is something that is alive near the town, the chain gang made up of 'twelve mortal men'. In their song, both somber and joyful, which rouses ecstasy and fright in the listener, we hear the music of mankind imprisoned in its suffering, working and enduring. (48)

The epilogue seems to resound the whole sad story that has been told. Music is the only relief for the chain gang and it can be compared, with its positive tone, to the love that Miss Amelia has felt for Cousin Lymon and which has provided the town, however temporarily, with its only happy place. In this place, the café, people have gathered and at least for a while have been able to forget their loneliness and sadness. So, just as the café is the result of a single force--love--so the music of the chain gang starts with only one dark voice which is soon accompanied by the whole gang. The music takes on a magical aspect and "at last it seems that the sound does not come from the twelve men on the gang, but from the earth itself, or the wide sky. It is music that causes the heart to broaden and the listener to grow cold with ecstasy and fright" (71). After that, the music slowly sinks and, at last, only one voice remains. So much the same with the story: after all the happiness provided by Miss Amelia's café, the place is

finally destroyed and Miss Amelia is left completely alone, a sad and dismayed remembrance of the old days.

Regarding the importance of the weather in the establishment of the atmosphere, Graver notes that "the climactic events of the plot often have their effective climatic correspondences" (62). Indeed, the night when the hunchback arrives is pleasant, "a soft quiet evening in April" (5), and the trees are blossoming: "The moon made dim, twisted shadows of the blossoming peach trees.... In the air the odor of blossoms and sweet spring grass mingled with the warm, sour smell of the near-by lagoon" (6). It is a time of good expectations: "The crops that spring promised well" (5). So, at first, the hunchback's arrival seems to be accompanied by good weather. But soon the night changes and "the moon was clouded over so that the night was cold and dark" (10-11). The next morning is "serene, with a sunrise of warm purple mixed with rose.... The day soon grew hot and the sky was a rich, midday blue" (12-13). But then, the day after, the weather changes again and it rains in the afternoon: "The rain that afternoon had chilled the air, so that the evening was bleak and gloomy as in wintertime. There were no stars in the sky, and a light, icy drizzle had set in" (15).

This latter change in weather is accompanied by the rumor spread over the town that Miss Amelia has murdered the hunchback, so that "[t]he bleak night, after the gruesome talk of the day, put a fear in some people, and they stayed home close to the fire" (15). Thus, the weather

here reinforces the tense and somber tone imprinted by the "fierce and sickly tale the town built up that day" (14). The general earlier changes in weather accompany the changes in Miss Amelia's attitudes after the hunchback's arrival. The weather also reinforces the narrator's intention of showing how the café at the night of its casual inauguration is the most pleasant place around: "the night was gloomy as in wintertime, and to have sat around the property outside would have made a sorry celebration. But inside there was company and a genial warmth" (22).

Another point at which the weather plays an important role is in Marvin Macy's comeback. The scene of the night when Henry Macy talks about Marvin's being out of the penitentiary is introduced by the description of the weather: "It was August and the sky had burned above the town like a sheet of flame all day. Now the green twilight was near and there was a feeling of repose" (38). During this scene, the weather also reinforces the hunchback's boredom, being appropriately monotonous and exasperating: "Cousin Lymon was bored that evening.... The moonlight brightened the dusty road, and the dwarfed peach trees were black and motionless: there was no breeze. The drowsy buzz of swamp mosquitoes was like an echo of the silent night" (41). The tension and excitement brought by Henry Macy's news come to break the outside atmosphere of stagnancy.

So as to emphasize the radical changes that are soon going to take place with Marvin Macy's arrival, the weather and the atmosphere are described as being very

productive: "That autumn was a happy time. The crops around the countryside were good.... After the long hot summer the first cool days had a clean bright sweetness. Goldenrod grew along the dusty roads, and the sugar cane was ripe and purple" (44). Also accompanying the routine of the town, the atmosphere is one of stillness: "There is no stillness like the quiet of the first cold nights in the fall" (45).

The day Miss Amelia kills a hog to make a barbecue, chitterlins, and sausage is the day the weather changes: "The first cold spell came at last. When Miss Amelia awoke... there were frost flowers on the windowpanes, and rime had silvered the patches of grass in the yard.... The air was cold and sharp, the sky pale green and cloudless" (45-46). Coincidentally, this is the day Marvin Macy comes back. Some of the images used to describe the atmosphere in the twilight remind us of hell, being thus related to Marvin Macy's satanic aspect:

> It had grown late. The red winter sun was setting, and to the west the sky was deep gold and crimson. Ragged chimney swifts flew to their nests.... Now and then there was the smell of smoke, and the warm rich odor of the barbecue slowly cooking in the pit behind the café. (48)

Significantly, the first bad fortune brought by Marvin Macy is related to a change in weather: "Marvin Macy brought with him bad fortune, right from the first, as could be expected. The next day the weather turned

suddenly, and it became hot" (51). And that change in weather is related to degradation: "Even in the early morning there was a sticky sultriness in the atmosphere, the wind carried the rotten smell of the swamp" (51). Worse than that, because of the weather

> much damage was done. For nearly everyone in the country who owned a hog copied Miss Amelia and slaughtered the day before.... After a few days there was everywhere the smell of slowly spoiling meat, and an atmosphere of dreary waste. (51-52)

Worse yet, the change in weather becomes related to death when some people die because they have eaten infected pork roast. In short, "[it] was a time of waste and confusion" (52).

When the weather changes again, it is only to bring further strange outcomes. At first, the cold winter time is used by the narrator as a contrast to the warmth of the café, thus reinforcing the image of the café as a place of pleasure: "the peach trees were scrawny and bare. In the dark, silent nights of winter-time the café was the warm center point of the town" (54). But then, one day in January, an extraordinary thing happens and "the whole world... altogether changed" (57). It snows at night so that "[by] dawn the ground was covered, and the strange snow banked the ruby windows of the church, and whitened the roofs of the houses. The snow gave the town a drawn, bleak look... and somehow everything was dark and shrunken" (57-58). The snow is an utterly peculiar event not only

because it has never snowed in the town but also because "[t]he snow was not white, as Northerners pictured it to be; in the snow there were soft colors of blue and silver" (58). It is as though the weather were somehow contributing to the recent odd events in town. Moreover, the weather seems to reflect the physical balance between the contenders in the final fight: "The weather was favorable, being neither rainy nor sunny, and with a neutral temperature" (63).

Just as has been argued about Reflections in a Golden Eye, The Ballad of the Sad Café is another work by McCullers that, due to its many elements which are characteristic of the Romantic grotesque, can be considered a genuine example of that subgenre. The dreary and weird aspects of the characters and their attitudes, as we have seen, imprint a somber atmosphere onto the novella. Yet, just as was the case with McCullers' second work, the reader is again taken to look at him/herself under a new light: according to Gray, Miss Amelia's "lonesomeness is intended eventually to figure our own. Like an image seen in a carnival mirror, she is meant to offer us an exaggerated, comically distorted, and yet somehow sadly accurate reflection of ourselves" (82).

NOTES

[1]The edition used in this dissertation is the 1971 Bantam Books, listed under bibliography below.

[2]This attitude relates Miss Amelia to Captain Penderton in Reflections in a Golden Eye. Just as Miss Amelia is unable to play the "feminine role" in her wedding night, we are reminded of how Captain Penderton is also unable to play the habitual and expected "role of the man" during his honeymoon.

CHAPTER V - CONCLUSION

Reading and analyzing Reflections in a Golden Eye and The Ballad of the Sad Café has enabled me to perceive the dense atmosphere of anguish which, in fact, is characteristic of all McCullers's works. Such atmosphere is established and sustained due to the presence of certain elements which defy the ordinary, the common, the "normal" way of life. These somber and strange elements are directly related to the main characters of the two works. In fact, not only their odd physical and psychological traits, but also their attitudes, their interrelations, and their responses to the major events of the plots are the most important factors which imprint the two works with a rather strange, disturbing atmosphere.

Thus, the somber atmosphere, as discussed and illustrated in the two previous chapters, has enabled me to attest that the hypothesis proposed in the first chapter--that in McCullers' fictional world the regenerative power of the grotesque is absent, and that the absence of regeneration creates a somber atmosphere--is duly demonstrated. The importance of the setting in the development of the atmosphere, as stated in the proposal of the hypothesis, was also addressed in the two previous chapters.

In order to test my hypothesis, at first I presented a detailed introduction to the grotesque and to the Romantic grotesque, so as to provide a background

against which to compare McCullers' fiction, and to verify the extent to which the author's works fit with the general description of that specific literary subgenre, especially with what Bakhtin calls the Romantic grotesque. Besides, the establishment of atmosphere in the narrative was also addressed, so as to verify if, and how, McCullers' works comply with the rather somber tone, characteristic of the gothic novel.

Then, the concepts studied in the second chapter were applied to the two works by McCullers--Reflections in a Golden Eye and The Ballad of the Sad Café. The relationship between the various elements characteristic of the grotesque, mainly of the Romantic grotesque, and the relevant elements present in the two works proved to be very strong. In both works, the first element characteristic of the Romantic grotesque that strikes the reader is the characters' isolation. For the reasons expounded, each main character leads a somewhat distressed life, isolated in each one's own world. The most telling examples are Captain Penderton, Alison Langdon and Private Williams, in Reflections in a Golden Eye, and Miss Amelia in The Ballad of the Sad Café.

As we have seen, there are further characteristics of the Romantic grotesque in both works. In Reflections in a Golden Eye, besides the characters' odd psychological traits, we have the presence of the freak (Alison's slightly deformed dead baby), madness, the mask, and the isolated environment. All of these can be seen as being used by McCullers as a means to emphasize the absence of

the regenerative power characteristic of the grotesque, thus imparting the novella with rather negative aspects. In fact, the overall tone of the book tends to death, to destruction, to complete waste, to sterile life, as attested by the conclusion, with the Captain's killing of the soldier. All that the soldier represents--life, sex, nature--is destroyed by the Captain's incapacity of merging himself with that vivid side of life.

Likewise, in The Ballad of the Sad Café, we have seen that characteristics of the Romantic grotesque are present: the physical oddity of two of the main characters--Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon, the latter clearly a freak--, isolating circumstances and environment, and degrading elements--mainly in Miss Amelia's eventual, utterly desolate situation--are the most conspicuous examples. Once again, just as in Reflections in a Golden Eye, the overall tone tends to degradation, to waste, to sterile lives, negative aspects which characterize the novella as a genuine example of the Romantic grotesque, since the regenerative power usually implicit in the grotesque is here completely absent.

Siding for a moment with Louise Westling in her feminist reading, besides the obvious similarities between McCullers' own difficult situations in life and those of some of her characters, what seems to base The Ballad of the Sad Café is an acute criticism on women's situation within a world predominantly ruled by males. And for that matter, the novella also addresses the risks which a member of a minority group runs while attempting to change

places and become a member of the hegemonic group which has always pressed him/her down. Miss Amelia has the physical power of a man and is accepted by her community only as long as she is useful to people. The townspeople, in fact, want her to marry and become less unfamiliar (30). And when she questions and jeopardizes men's status by having a strange relationship in which she plays the man's role, she has to be brought down and punished. In her strange and manlike attitude, Miss Amelia cannot find a stable place and relationship, cannot adapt to the ordinary social environment and ends up utterly alone.

Miss Amelia's eventual misplacement is a condition which is also suffered by Captain Penderton in Reflections in a Golden Eye, as he reaches a point at which he cannot accept that Private Williams relates, in however distorted ways, to the Captain's wife, instead of relating to the Captain himself. In fact, the Captain cannot manage to relate to anyone in a healthy or harmless way. He cannot find an exit to his ascetic, cold world, and he cannot relate to the sensuous, vivid world represented by the soldier. In the long run, what Carson McCullers definitely does is to expose to the readers the sense of inedequacy inherent to her characters, in that the characters are invariably presented as mostly sad, disturbed, incomplete beings, unable to lead a satisfying life. Even when they find someone to try to share their lives with, that experience turns out to be tragically sad, in the end, rendering an even more isolated situation. Thus presenting her characters, McCullers seems to attempt to pose the

question in the readers' mind of how inadequate they are themselves.

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