Abstract

"if, even then, she was not slightly cross-eyed ..."

The Grotesque, Gender, and the Body in Carson McCullers's

The Ballad of the Sad Café

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Many southern women writers describe how white women rebel against rigidly defined roles of white southern femininity. Carson McCullers's Amelia in The Ballad of the Sad Café not only rebels against these roles but does so in such a distinct manner that she appears grotesque. I will analyze how McCullers appropriates the grotesque both to criticize and to open up possibilities of transcending existing gender norms. Furthermore, I will employ the concepts developed by Simone de Beauvoir in my analysis. As Toril Moi points out in What Is A Woman? Beauvoir focuses in her theory on the bodily subject in a dialectical relationship with others and emphasizes the contextual body which is a sensual, social, historical, and individual body - in a specific context. In her view the body is neither just pre-social nor socially constructed. Central in her argument is that "lived experiences" of a person - the bodily subject - are the knowledge one obtains and are mediated through reflections about what has happened. "Lived experiences" influence and are influenced by the way the person is seen in society and how the person reacts to that image. It is a process of making and being made. The concept of the bodily subject in a dialectical relationship with society will help me illuminate Amelia's transition from being a grotesquely masculine woman to becoming one of many "dim faces, known in dreams - sexless and white."