



The freaks in Carson McCullers “The Ballad of the Sad Café”

Jisha Headwin

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of English

Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu, India

Dr.S P.Shanthi

Assistant Professor, Department of English

Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu, India

Carson McCullers' fiction is populated by freaks that resist the inconvenience of "typical" classes of sexual orientation. Drawn specifically from her Georgia origin, McCullers' characters, as well, are predominantly "freaks" figures—estranged and veering off—overcharged with a basic contortion that is illustrative of the strangeness unconventional to the writer and her composition. The term "freak" is a voluntary sign of nonconformity for some, and an intolerable slur for others. In either case, "freak" can be understood as a social construction, a configuration of bodily forms and behaviours. Indeed, a significant number of McCullers' female characters distinguish themselves as freaks because of their inability to perform expected gender roles or successfully don the required accoutrements of femininity. Gleeson-White insists that "McCullers's freaks are not exclusively symbolic of the alienating and sexually indifferent human condition. Rather, they intimately engage issues of subjectivity in the material realms of gender and sexuality" (48). McCullers deliberately utilizes the expressions "freaks" and "queer," with an effort to portray the characters along with gender orientation or identity axis. Adequately, these terms do not indicate any preset identity, yet a wide restriction to regularizing practices and social qualifications. The work of Rachel Adams is particularly illuminating as she argues the importance of the freak in her book *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination*.

She recognizes that "freak is not an inherent quality but an identity realized through gesture, costume, and staging" (6). Although often treated as a form of amusement, freak shows performed important cultural work by allowing ordinary people to confront, and master the most extreme and terrifying forms of otherness they could imagine (2). Freaks are a figure for the complex and shifting dynamic of identification, the problems of self and other. Freak is also a performative identity that varies depending on the particularities of cultural and historical context (4).

Freakishness appears through the nearness of a sudden or conflicting body; when a body goes amiss from "typical" materiality through an imperfection, incapacity, or disliked variety or when it doesn't adjust to practices steady with social desires, the body becomes freakish. In "The Ballad of the Sad Café", the last of her middle works, Carson McCullers investigates how physical freakishness is a social development which subordinate upon social meanings of "the freak." Her novella then confounds the idea of abnormality to show how it is increased by deviations from gender and sexual standards, how the characterized "freaks" is then

distanced by society, lastly how society drives the freaks to strike back against other freaks as violent sign of an anticipated self-hatred and longing for social acknowledgment. McCullers developed a subject of how the body impacts the psyche and controls connections with others. One of the most essential elements of the body, in any case, is the way it cooperates with the political state. America in the middle of the late 1940s and mid 1950s, during which McCullers composed and distributed “The Ballad of the Sad Café”, had turned out to be exceptionally politicized with expanded patriotism after World War II and just before the official Cold War: “To criticize U.S. policies or expose its faults was considered ‘un-American’” (Eaklor 86). The era is marked by a paranoid fascination with, and desire to eradicate, all classes deemed a threat to America’s success, leading to the name “Lavender Scare” to designate panic over sexual minorities alongside the term “Red Scare” to designate fear of the Soviet Union (72). American society during this time returned to the Victorian ideals of gender as Eaklor explains: Gender distinctions, never deeply submerged, resurfaced with full force and combined with both consumerism and a revived “separate sphere” ideology: males produce and consume or decide on expensive items, females consume that needed within the home as part of their role in maintaining the perfect family. (79)

The state requested that the body execute as its physical nature planned: a male body must carry on as a man ought to and a female body must act as a lady ought to enforce order and control. At the point when body capacities outside societal desires, rendering it lost or dislodged in the regulating sign or signifier relationship, it gets to be incomprehensible, and therefore contemptible. Sexual and sex freaks amid this time denoted a classification of the miserable, and Boyd takes note of the significance of the physical body in comprehension the destiny of the degraded: “It has no effect if these bodies die or if nobody laments them in light of the fact that, as Butler clarifies, servile bodies – bodies transgressive of fringes and limits – don’t make a difference” (136). Boyd is right in guaranteeing that bodies can die; in any case, what she doesn’t represent is the need of abject bodies in the setting of “normal” classifications. McCullers recognizes the requirement for the miserable’s nearness to regulate society’s own limits.

“The Ballad of the Sad Café”, is driven by a focal figure, Miss Amelia Evans, who rapidly finds centre of the town, functioning in an unexpected role of doctor, lawyer, shop owner, liquor maker, and philanthropist, only when it comes to doctoring. She is extremely tall, “with bones and muscles like a man” and short hair, making her a nearly “handsome woman” despite the fact that she is cross-eyed (*Ballad* 4). Taking into account the portrayal, one would classify her as a freak, given the sexual orientation twisting, manly nature of a female character in a Southern town in the mid-twentieth century. Including a physical imperfection, being cross-eyed toward, townspeople respect her with esteem and regard; most of them either purchase their supplies and sustenance at her shop, drink alcohol from her cafe or visit her as their town specialist. She appears to be an integral part of the community socially as well, for the story starts with several men drinking with her on her porch stairs (*Ballad* 6). Occasionally, a townspeople comments on her “queer marriage,” “queer-eyed” appearance, or need of gender reform, but at the beginning of *Ballad*, she appears to be one of the townsfolk (*Ballad* 5, 28, 30) Miss Amelia’s influence in the community, in fact, is substantiated by the presence of Cousin Lymon, the hunchback. Lymon, to whom the text often refers as “hunchback,” is “scarcely more than four feet tall” with “crooked little legs,” a “great warped chest and the hump that sat on his shoulders” (6-7). In spite of the fact that his nearness stuns the men, Miss Amelia chooses to take him into her home. Over the next few days the townsfolk speculate that she must have robbed and killed him, until they realize that Miss Amelia actually cares about Cousin Lymon. When he is set up as a perpetual apparatus of Miss Amelia’s life, her energy and impact turn out to be clear:

In all these years no one had so much as touched a hair of Cousin Lymon’s head, although many had the itch to do so. If anyone even spoke crossly to the hunchback, Miss Amelia would cut off this rash mortal’s credit and find ways of making things go hard for him a long time afterward. (50)

Since she, holding power in the town, embraces him as a privileged townspeople, he is not named as a freak, uncovering the grouping itself to be a class characterized by people with significant influence for this situation, another generally sorted “freak”.

Miss Amelia’s external freakishness— her muscled, her crossed eyes, her rippled arms, and her short hair – are outside appearances reflecting and cooperating with a social, internal feelings of freakishness. Cousin Lymon’s outside freakishness too mirrors his very own. He frequently pits friends against each other with a sadistic schadenfreude (*Ballad* 40). He, too exude freakishness, his sinister desire to destroy people, sexual ambiguity as he later becomes infatuated with Marvin Macy, Miss Amelia’s ex-husband, and he follows Marvin at his heels for days: “For since first setting eyes on Marvin Macy the hunchback was possessed by an unnatural spirit” (*Ballad* 52). Louis D. Rubin, in “Carson McCullers: The Aesthetics of Pain,” substantiates the assertion that the physical manifests the internal sense of freakishness for “their physical grotesquery merely makes visible and identifiable their isolation and anguish” (118). Literally, then physical freakishness serves to uncover an internal experience of freakishness to the peruses and to alternate characters of the content. The relationship between the body and the psyche, in any case, does not stop there. Not just does their outer freakishness speak to an internal strangeness Miss Amelia’s inside manliness abrogating her supposed “natural

" femininity and Cousin Lymon's contemptible nature, yet it creates and imitate every character's feeling of internal freakishness that Marvin Macy turns into the third freak of the novel. Marvin Macy, in view of appearance, ought to be the finest character in the novel: For Marvin Macy was the handsomest man in this locale—being six feet one inch tall, hard-ripped, and with moderate dark eyes and wavy hair. Generally as Miss Amelia's conduct does not coordinate her body as society which holds her to female norms, Marvin Macy's conduct does not correspond with his appearance in public which anticipates that his great looking body will mirror an ethical soul, making him a "freak" in the public arena. The bodies of Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon are socially recorded in particular courses due to their freakishness, bringing about repeated outlandishness and an enhanced clash with "normal" society.

Miss Amelia, as beforehand showed, is freakish by the way her conduct clashes with her socially developed female sex; nonetheless, by grasping this irregularity or inward manliness, Miss Amelia makes her body taking into account social standards of manliness. She develops her muscles, cuts her hair short, wears masculine clothes, and forms homosocial bonds with other men by drinking with them on the porch steps. Before the culminating fight with Marvin Macy, she constructs a punching bag, depicting active inscription on the body (*Ballad* 61). All through the content, she over and over discovers solace in chronically feeling the muscles of her arm; the way she has shaped her body as though checking social requests of ladylike delicacy uncovers the individual significance of her body's activities upon society and society's actions upon her body. Cousin Lymon, as well, convolutes limits amongs body and psyche, as his physical freakishness reproduces freakishness.

McCullers makes a gender balancing act orientation exercise in "The Ballad of the Sad Cafe", and gives Miss Amelia a chance to show womanliness in significant moments. Miss Amelia wears overalls every day of the week except for Sundays (McCullers 17), when she dons a red dress and work s in the cafe. However, wearing the dress does not turn her into a lady, as McCullers notes when Miss Amelia warms herself immodestly in front of a fire for all to see. McCullers writes,

There was not a grain of modesty about Miss Amelia, and she frequently seemed to forget altogether that there were men in the room. Now as she stood warming herself, her red dress was pulled up quite high in t he back so that a piece of her strong, hairy thigh could be seen by anyone who cared to look at it" (44).

The dress serves as an image of controlled femininity for Miss Amelia, a symbol of power. Despite the fact that the dress itself is feminine like, her conduct and state of mind are still firmly manly, as confirm through her immodest lifting of her skirt to demonstrate her thigh. Gleeson-White notes that this is Miss Amelia's attempt to make a bold statement with her body and writes that, "Once more, Amelia turns her nose up at those who hope she will become a 'calculable woman' and she does this, ironically, by becoming what woman is expected to be: feminine. The tableau of Miss Amelia in a dress, then, makes a mockery of so-called natural gender categories" (51-52). The main other event when Miss Amelia wears a dress is on her wedding day, incidentally when Marvin Macy makes his unwelcome return back to town, Miss Amelia wears the red dress upon his visit to the café. McCullers puts this in the content as another image of sex insubordination blended with ladylike appearance. The dress, in each of these cases, may at first put Miss Amelia in a generally female, subservient part as an entirely, sharp looking wife . . Instead, Miss Amelia shirks Marvin Macy's affections on their wedding night (22), and serves him with a clenched jaw during his return to her cafe (39).In these scenes, McCullers gives all the ability to her grotesque lady as she tries to shows Miss Amelia moving smoothly between her manly and female qualities and holding the high ground the whole time. In her own particular life, it is misty whether McCullers ever fit in with femininity and at the same time retained agency; surely, it is conceivable that through her fiction, she anticipated her yearning to retained agency and be dealt with as an equivalent paying little heed to what gender she chose to perform.

The body is further reconfigured and reinterpreted by society through a procedure of discontinuity, whereby sectioning the body uncovers a social downgrading of the individual in his or her respectability and an accentuation upon individual body parts. . The classification of sex is a result of fragmentation, as society privileges "some parts and functions while resolutely minimizing or leaving un- or underrepresented other parts and functions" (Grosz 192). The attention on the genital alone, while overlooking the inconceivable likenesses of other body parts between the sexes, assigns subjects into classes in view of fragmentation. Miss Amelia experiences such fragmentation, as her genital marks her permanently as female regardless of being manlier in general appearance, conduct, and occupation. Cousin Lymon, as well, experiences such fracture, as his hunchback turns into his sole personality in the account. By turning out to be essentially "the hunchback or brokeback" as Marvin Macy calls him, his personality is decreased to a body part.

The freakishness of Miss Amelia, Cousin Lymon, and Marvin Macy is exacerbated by an "unnatural" love triangle. Miss Amelia falls in love with Cousin Lymon, who falls in love with Marvin Macy, who was once in love with Miss Amelia. The triangulation alone is abnormal, however the issue gets to be freakish a result of the irregular coupling. . Cousin Lymon's feelings for

Marvin Macy, a creature (“hunchback”) in love with a man, are expectedly interpreted as freakish: “For since first setting eyes on Marvin Macy the hunchback was possessed by an unnatural spirit” (*Ballad* 52).

In McCullers's fiction, freak shows fail to cement the distinction between deviance and normality, instead calling the viewers' own normality into question through their identification with the bodies onstage, which reminds them of their own lonely, uncomfortable experiences of embodiment. Rather than depicting the sideshow as the exclusive domain of freaks, McCullers suggests that each of her characters is, in some sense, a freak who cannot conform to normative standards of comportment and physical appearance. Thus the sensation of being “caught” that so many of her characters experience are not derived from their status as outsiders but from the fact that they inhabit a repressive social order unable to recognize the queerness at its centre. *The Ballad of the Sad Café* – she untangles and dismantles dominant discourses that mandate obligatory heterosexuality, allowing readers to see the social forces that foreclose our identities and desires while regulating and disciplining bodies.

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