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**STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND:
VERIFYING THE SOUTHERN GOTHIC-GROTESQUE IN
THE SHORT FICTION OF WILLIAM FAULKNER,
CARSON McCULLERS, FLANNERY O'CONNOR AND
EUDORA WELTY**

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Abstract

For many critics, it is an undisputed fact that William Faulkner, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty are the major writers of the Southern Gothic-Grotesque canon. Remarkably, however, few have paused to consider the validity of such a claim. What exactly *is* the Southern Gothic-Grotesque? What are the elements that constitute the genre? Why have Faulkner, McCullers, O'Connor and Welty been identified as its major writers?

A synthesis of the theories of authorities on the Gothic-Grotesque produces criteria which state that works identified as Southern Gothic-Grotesque must display four characteristics: disharmony, as it appears in the form of clashes, conflicts, contrasts and incongruities; prominent physical details; deformed or aberrant characters and a distressed writer who expresses his or her anguish through the aforementioned disharmonies, physical details and abnormal characters. Research on the Gothic-Grotesque also brings to light the idea that the Grotesque assumes certain standards or norms and alienates those who do not conform. Feminists argue that these standards are informed by patriarchal ideals and instituted for the sole purpose of repressing women.

The stories of Faulkner, McCullers and O'Connor consistently demonstrate all four of the characteristics outlined in the synthesised criteria. Most perceptibly, these writers were labelled "grotesque" and marginalised because they did not coincide with the standards of their society. McCullers and O'Connor were at variance with the conventions of Southern femininity and Faulkner, too, found himself unable to act the part of the Southern gentleman. These writers expressed their pain by exacerbating, through their freak characters, the very grotesqueness that caused them to be marginalised in the first place. Welty's story, although it

fails to meet some of the criteria of the Southern Gothic-Grotesque, displays expression of another sort. She draws on the elements of the Gothic-Grotesque to subvert the social order that denies the subjectivity and autonomy of its individuals.

Therefore, by demonstrating, through their stories, that the Southern Gothic-Grotesque is an agent of expression for individuals who find themselves outsiders in the closed and exclusive world of the South, Faulkner, McCullers, O'Connor and Welty justify the intuitive labels of principal Southern Gothic-Grotesque writers.

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