

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the grotesque distortion of the Southern Belle and Southern Lady archetype in the contemporary novel *Sharp Objects* by Gillian Flynn. The novel draws from the literary tradition of Southern grotesque and introduces strong female characters that are judged from the perspective of feminist literary criticism and feminist theory. Furthermore, the novel works within the context of Southern Bell mythology, which functions as a very essential archetype to the culture and mental framework of the American South. Because the setting of the novel is placed within a very specific historical context of the American South region, some historical and sociological traditions, such as patriarchy and plantation system, are explained. Introductory chapter establishes the historical and literary context for the thesis analysis. Southern mentality and its distinctiveness from other American regions, especially from the North, are introduced. Southern social and economic structure is explained through the definition of patriarchy and plantation economy system. The mythology of Southern Belle, Southern Lady and Southern Gentleman is formulated, and this is set within the context of Southern literary tradition. The second chapter sets the novel within the context of feminist literary criticism and chief feminist theories are introduced. These will provide a framework for the analysis of the female characters. As the thesis attempts to provide an interdisciplinary analysis, besides the literary theory, I will also discuss feminist and gender theories, mainly those of Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler. Key terms, such as archetype, stereotype, Southern Gothic and Southern grotesque are explained. The third chapter, the main and most important part of this thesis, analyzes three female and one male character and their grotesque distortion. Considering that *Sharp Objects*, as a contemporary novel, has not yet become part of the literary canon, there are no secondary sources available. Therefore, I conduct my own analysis based on the 'close reading' method. The characters' emphasis on aristocratic appearances and a 'proper Southern' conduct suggest that their self-representation refers to Southern Belle and Southern Lady mythology. Nevertheless, their actual behavior and their deep psychological traumas direct us towards the tradition of the Southern grotesque. A psychological disorder, Munchausen by Proxy is introduced, and I try to explain how it affects one of our main characters. 6 The final chapter tries to conclude and summarize my analysis. It also attempts to place the female characters of *Sharp Objects* within the Southern literary tradition.