



## The Ballad of the Sad Café

*Carson McCullers*

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In *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, a tale of unrequited love, Miss Amelia, a spirited, unconventional woman, runs a small-town store and, except for a marriage that lasted just ten days, has always lived alone. Then Cousin Lymon appears from nowhere, a little, strutting hunchback who steals Miss Amelia's heart. Together they transform the store into a lively, popular café. But when her rejected husband Marvin Macy returns, the result is a bizarre love triangle that brings with it violence, hatred and betrayal.

Six stories by Carson McCullers also appear in this volume.

## The Ballad of the Sad Café Details

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Author : Carson McCullers

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# From Reader Review The Ballad of the Sad Café for online ebook

## Tahani says

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## Fionnuala says

Note: This review should have been posted under the title The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter.

I will repost if there - but I'll leave it here too in order to retain the comments. In any case, the two books share themes and the titles could easily be inverted. There is a sad café at the centre of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and the book could easily be described as a ballad. In *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, the main character, café owner Amelia Evans, is a lonely and alone person whose heart is desperately hunting for someone, anyone, to love.

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I've been reading Carson McCullers for the last month. I started with this book and then picked up each of her five other books one after the other, leaving myself no time in between to think about what I've read or consider writing a review. Today, I'm glad that I didn't attempt a review of this one because I just came across a piece in the sixth book, *The Mortgaged Heart: Selected Writings*, entitled *Author's Outline of 'The Mute'* (later published as *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*).

McCullers' own words describe her intentions for this book so clearly that I'm going to use them in lieu of a review:

....*The general outline of this work can be expressed very simply. It is the story of five isolated, lonely people in their search for expression and spiritual integration with something greater than themselves. One of these*

five is a deaf man, John Singer - and it is around him that the whole book pivots. Because of their loneliness these other four people see in the mute a certain mystic superiority and he becomes in a sense their ideal. Because of Singer's infirmity his outward character is vague and unlimited. His friends are able to impute to him all the qualities which they would wish for him to have. Each of these four people creates his understanding of the mute from his own desires...In his eternal silence there is something compelling. Each one of these persons makes the mute the repository for his most personal feelings and ideas... This situation between the four people and the mute has an exact parallel in the relation between Singer and his deaf-mute friend, Antonopoulos. Singer is the only person who could attribute to Antonopoulos dignity and a certain wisdom...

About this central idea there is much of the quality of a legend. All the parts dealing directly with Singer are written in the simple style of a parable.

Before the reasons why this situation came about can be fully understood it is necessary to know each of the principal characters in some detail. But the characters cannot be described adequately without the events which happen to them being involved. Nearly all the happenings in the book spring directly from the characters. During the space of this book each person is shown in his strongest and most typical actions. Of course it must be understood that none of these personal characteristics are told in the didactic manner in which they are set down here. They are implied in one successive scene after another - and it is only at the end, when the sum of of these implications is considered, that the real characters are understood in all of their deeper aspects....

Carson McCullers then goes on to describe her plot and characters in great detail before finishing with some notes about time, place and structure. I was very interested to see that she had a musical structure in mind because I'd experienced the book in musical terms even as I was reading it. This is how she describes the structure: *The form is contrapuntal throughout. Like a voice in a fugue each one of the main characters is an entirety in himself - but his personality takes on a new richness when contrasted and woven in with the other characters in the book.*

One of the other interesting things that emerged for me is the amount of material she eventually left out of this novel. Because I've read all of her novels and most of her stories at this point, I realise that she recycled some of those deleted scenes. Characters' names and circumstances have also been recycled which makes reading all of her work together extra rewarding. The reader begins to see the entire cast of characters as part of one big family and all of her themes as being connected. She is always writing, in one way or another, about inner isolation and the battle to overcome it.

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## **Maria Bikaki says**

Ε?μαι σ?γουρη ?τι το αδικ? αλλ? πραγματικ? δεν τρ?βηξε η μετ?φραση του σπουδα?ου κατα τ' ?λλα Μ?νη Κουμανταρ?α. Δεν κατ?φερα να βρω ρυθμ? με τ?ποτα

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## **Trevor says**

There are seven stories in this volume – of them I would guess that in six month time I will remember only two. Those are the title story and the story called *The Sojourner*. And to celebrate, those are the only stories I'll talk about here except to say that one of the problems I found with the other stories was that they lacked a real sense of place.

McCullers's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* has been one of the most remarkable books I've read all year – perhaps it will become one of my favourite American novels ever. A bit early to tell just yet. I know, that is a big statement, but I have thought back on it repeatedly since reading it and I've found myself reminded of it repeatedly in unexpected ways. Perhaps the idea we are so achingly close to seeing a Black American president of the US has been one of the catalysts reminding me of that book – but on other, simpler, more human scales I find instances in my own life bringing it back to me time and again. It is a remarkably beautiful book of a complexity and subtlety that is hard to credit to someone of McCullers' age when she wrote it.

She was only in her early thirties when she wrote the long short story or short novella, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. I have a horrible sense that anything I will say about this story will spoil it for you if you intend to read it – and I think you should intend to read it. Bitter is a lovely word to describe this story – I mean, that back of mouth taste that lingers long after the food that caused it is gone. Bitter, sad and all too human.

I've never been to the United States and so it is axiomatic that I've never been to the Southern States either. Yet, this has such a strong evocation of the world that I imagine must have been that world that I feel I know it almost intimately. I can smell it, I can hear its twang and feel the warmth of its long summer nights.

Even so, this is not simply a book about capturing the atmosphere of the South, no matter how successfully this has been done – nonetheless, as I said before, when McCullers does do this she does something remarkably special and important. This story is also a treatise on the nature of love.

She takes an idea from *Of Human Bondage* (another of those life altering novels I've read this year) and plays with it. The idea is that in any relationship there is one who loves and another who is loved. This played out in a remarkable love triangle in this story. The phrase 'love is blind' comes to mind – but all the better to highlight the themes at work here. Love is not only blind, but inscrutable with as much power to destroy as to create – love is both Vishnu and Shiva.

This is a fable, many of the elements to this story are amusingly larger than life – one character is even able to wiggle his ears in a fascinating way – but the story itself is quite confronting in what it has to say about the nature of love. So, before I say too much and spoil this for you, I had better stop. Although, before I do stop I should say that it is terribly interesting that this story is not told from the perspective of any of the major characters, but from the perspective of one of the town's people. This is told from the perspective of someone who does not know 'the whole truth' and this adds wonderfully to a story where one's sympathies are constantly under attack – even though we tend to come down on the side of Miss Amelia right to the end. And now I really do need to shut up before I say something you really will regret...

*The Ballad of the Sad Café* is by far the longest story in the collection – in comparison the other story I liked so very much was only around 12 pages long - *The Sojourner*. A simple story really, about a man returning to Europe after attending the funeral of his father and spotting his ex-wife walking down the street in front of him and, on a whim, deciding to contact her. I had expected this to be a story of recriminations, and in a sense it was – but not of the kind I had expected. I guess it stands in contrast to the title story in that, if anything, the 'lesson' of this story is that there is never too much love in one's life and the real loss one has in life is the lost opportunities we accumulate too readily where we miss the chance to show how much we really do love.

Much of this – these lessons – is only hinted at in the story. They are shown in gentle acts of kindness and the lessons are shown to have been learnt in much the same way.

Many of the other stories in this collection were more ‘stories’ – and they were not as good as a consequence – but these two stories were special.

What is also interesting is that in so many of these stories – and note that I’ve also considered them less than successful, but not solely for this reason – the narrator or the main character from whom we witness the action of the story – is almost invariably male. The only story here told from the perspective of a female character was *Wunderkind* and that was written when McCullers was 17 years old.

Now, I’m not saying woman can’t write convincingly from a male perspective, (how hard can it be to write from the perspective of someone who thinks about sex every 15 minutes?) but in some of the stories I felt seeing the story from the woman’s perspective may have been a much more interesting vantage point.

I'm going to end with a quote from *Sad Café* that could have come straight from *Of Human Bondage*: --

*It is for this reason 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 loved is intolerable to many. The beloved fears and hates the lover, and with the best of reasons. For the lover is for ever trying to strip bare his beloved. The lover craves any possible relation with the beloved, even if this experience can cause him only pain.*

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## ????? ?????????? says

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## Mariel says

She felt that the marrows of her bones were hollow and there was no blood left in her. Her heart that had been springing against her chest all afternoon felt suddenly dead. She saw it gray and limp and shriveled at the edges like an oyster.

His face seemed to throb out in space before her, come closer with the lurching motion in the veins of his temples. In retreat, she looked down at the piano. Her lips shook like jelly and a surge of noiseless tears made the white keys blur in a watery line. 'I can't,' she whispered. 'I don't know why, but I just can't- can't any more.'

I felt like telling myself about The Ballad of the Sad Cafe before I had continued it to the end of story life. The kind of telling to yourself to love a little more, get closer, as if it knew you too. I don't know, I really didn't want to move inside myself to get there. What I wanted was for someone to come get me. The telling to yourself is necessary to feel known, I feel, and I'm afraid is true.

Carson McCullers I have known to hold up to me what I am feeling when I feel like there is no hope of anything ever coming to get me. Since I was fourteen and read The Member of the Wedding for the first time. My rawest, at a total loss to myself times I refer to myself as my "The Member of the Wedding times". You can't be pretty, you can't come along, you will be left behind, you can't bring yourself either. No, you don't even remember how to ask anymore. My enduring spiteful ghost is "The Heart is the Lonely Hunter times". No music in my head, and even Aesop Rock couldn't touch my grotesque spiritual flesh. It would be an unsentenced prison. My "The Member of the Wedding times" terrify me because I feel that the worst thing that could ever happen to me is The Heart is a Lonely Hunter. It is the next page. There's nothing your head to tell yourself. Ever again. That she wrote these books and understood me helped me because it earwormed me and told me all about them and I didn't have to be me alone. Okay, so favorite books I am afraid to "have" again in case they don't work anymore. Time traveled and someone stopped the butterflies wings in flight. Still, there's something to be said for what has always been there for you. Nothing does it better for me than music I had when I was young. Last summer I read McCuller's Clock Without Hands and I didn't feel it at all. I was worried to turn to her again but it just worked out that way. I found myself reading her short stories with my mouth full of words I wanted her to tell me instead of me telling me.

Life could become one long dim scramble just to get the things needed to keep alive. And the confusing point is this: All useful things have a price, and are bought only with money, as that is the way the world is run. You know without having to reason about it the price of a bale of cotton, or a quart of molasses. But no value has been put on human life; it is given to us free and taken without being paid for. What is it worth? If you look around, at times the value may seem to be little or nothing at all. Often after you have sweated and tried and things are not better for you, there comes a feeling deep down in the soul that you are not worth much.

McCullers writes with a fairytale logic. I love fairy tales when they are over. Not the defeat, though. The fairy dust that hovers over everything else, like a promise of the wolf down the road or the witch in the oven, unsettled. Things will happen. Stories written like fairytales I have a problem with. This is this is this is that. They pretty much bore the crap out of me, not to mention that gilded cage of boredom that I call to myself "Trapped in a fabric store with my mother when I was young and I couldn't leave for HOURS". Someone is in your head telling you THIS will happen. It's not dust it has a whole gingerbread shape with a door and windows and a fence. I didn't get into the idea of the sad cafe at all. There are doors and windows and the premises belong to someone. Come here and don't belong to you. That's why they like this cafe. The outside belongs to someone but she doesn't call it hers. Call it something and call it a fairy tale. No, don't tell it like that! Miss Amelia has a hard stone face. Miss Amelia wins because she has money and she can say no like she means it. Miss Amelia could have won forever if she always said no. Read my lips they are the same page and they go nowhere and tell you nothing ever. Her so-called cousin Lyman the hunchbacked little man comes to town and causes trouble by looking from one towns person to the other. His page says something that causes excitement and unease. I didn't feel his mischief, really. I liked the townspeople that gave the benefit of the doubt. They didn't want to whisper words of something awful that could have happened. They would have helped if they could. These were walls made of moveable dust and I could live there. The Hunchback started to look like a monster in my mind. Like they weren't real people. I had his look in my mind that he could have done a pathetic whine to get under your skin. He is actually envious of Miss Amelia's first ten day wed groom. The kind of guy that inexplicably changes his tiger stripes to love the

winner who wins if they always said no. If it was a fairytale without an ending, anyway. Her legs were closed and on them he was walked out the door. So the hunchback was envious because he had been to the prison in Atlanta. It may or may not have been the prison that I got lost and wound up by the front gates. It was in a residential neighborhood (quite a poor one). I couldn't stop thinking about if the inmates could see into the lit up windows of the houses below. The aching envy for those rooms, those lights that could not go away. What kind of a hunchback envies the inmate unless it is a getting the worst of it over with, if your conviction was a humorless gallows. He follows in Miss Amelia's footsteps. Maybe his conviction was a permanent no. I didn't feel him in my steps. I started to feel the story in the spaces of the couple of townsfolk who wanted something better. But the monster whine and shut up doors were louder than the cafe and I wonder why that is the setting when I can't see that as what they wanted. It's the no, right? I start to tell myself about what Miss Amelia could have wanted when her lips said maybe yes, for a time, to the hunchback and Marvin Macy.

My favorite stories were Wunderkind and Madame Zilensky and the King of Finland. I loved this from 'Finland':

Her eyes were wide open, doomed, and proud. And Mr. Brook felt suddenly like a murderer. A great commotion of feelings- understanding, remorse, and unreasonable love- made him cover his face with his hands. He could not speak until this agitation in his insides quieted down, and then he said very faintly, 'Yes. Of course. The king of Finland. And was he nice?'

Madame Zilensky tells lies. Preposterous lies that have no gain apparent to the naked eye. So he strips her bare. The leftovers are a dying. They weren't lies. (I always favored George Costanza's lying seminar. "It's not a lie- if YOU believe it.") Mr. Brook imagines their music teacher pouring her life into her symphonies, with nothing to spare. She imagined other lives. Two eyes like feet on different sides of true and false. She can live both at the same time. It is almost true. Pushing one back over the line would kill her. An out of soul with nowhere to return. I don't know but I really loved that he saw her dying and tried to pull back. I loved the instant regret even more than I loved those couple of townspeople who couldn't try to imagine Miss Amelia was a murderess.

The man said slowly. 'I love you.'

All along the counter the men laughed. The boy, who had scowled and sidled away, did not know what to do. He looked over the counter at Leo, and Leo watched him with a weary, brittle jeer. The boy tried to laugh also. But the man was serious and sad.

'A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud' is another cafe. The old man has lost his love, a woman he called Dodo. She completed him and every thing anyone ever said about love that you didn't feel because you didn't know them. An abstraction, a tree's shadow on your shade that looks like something else. A cloud as a bunny rabbit, maybe, or a stone's thrown in a blank pool. "I love you," he'd tell you and you would sit in the cafe, maybe, and feel helpless and someone else would tell him to shut up already. He is lost without something. I thought about my brother hating his bar-tending job after the recession started dipping harder and harder. Everyone cries into their drinks and you have to look at them, have to say something. He tells you he loves you and what does he want back? You can't give it to him.



'Wunkderkind' reminded me a little of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. When she cries over her father giving her an egg to eat. The out of life feeling when you don't want to eat anything. She imagines hiding the sounds of the chocolate bar wrapping during the school day. I have forgotten to eat most days of this week myself. I know the feeling. It's a disquieted gut feeling and what you are hungry for isn't food. The unhealthy stomach travels to the other bones in a school sing song ballad. She's a musical prodigy, or at least they always say she is, or she just thinks they said it about her. The echo is around like food you can't eat and you are always hungry. The hunger extends and nothing fills and she runs out into the street in the wrong direction. Home is probably going to be the wrong kind of food too.

Last year I read that McCullers waited on the doorstep of Djuna Barnes (I loved *Nightwood* too). She did not shout down from her window, the door did not open for her. Take me with you didn't happen, I guess. I know it didn't but I can't hear the words past what I call waiting for hours for something good to happen time moves too damned slowly when it never does happen. I wanted to say something to her in the past. Something like "No, don't do that! Don't wait for her! Get up!" I don't like anyone not reaching out to her. This has stayed in my mind whenever I think of McCullers... I wonder if anyone ever wanted to be Carson McCullers (probably over the literary acclaim and all of the depressing "She wrote that when she was 23!" hand clapping applause that doesn't take you by the hand to lead you anywhere). I have this feeling about these stories of people wanting to be someone else. I wonder if anyone ever wanted to be me. My nemesis the turtle said he wouldn't wish me on his worst enemy because I can't eat anything that tastes good. Turtle is so right. I like the tastes of words on the tongue, telling about stuff. What am I eating, though? I want to talk about love like about what the old man looked like when he was talking about love to that young boy. Wish for something better for Miss Amelia. Say you don't have to be a Wunderkind. It's not going to be "The Heart is a Lonely Hunter Times" if you don't feel the music like you really, really mean it as you play. There's something else you can pick up. For her I see her watching her teacher. He spontaneously crouches beside her, outside of the unnatural lights, inside his own space. It's because she doesn't have hers. She's trying to be a Wunderkind, in his. I don't want anyone to want to be someone else and at the same time I feel this ache inside like that's all I really want is to be someone else. These stories make me think of that feeling more than anything else so I'm caught between wanting to talk about them to me and be them and wanting them to talk to me like I'm me. It's an almost. Short stories end and go on without you too soon. Maybe that's it.

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## **Barry Pierce says**

In this collection of short stories, Carson McCullers shows that not only can she break you with her prose but she can do it with only a couple of short pages. The main story, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, is quintessentially McCullers. Set in the South with a cast melancholy characters. Can you get more McCullers!? The prose is dripping with sand and dust. Even though this story takes up roughly half of the whole book, it wasn't my favourite in the collection. I loved *Madame Zilensky and the King of Finland*. It's a fun little story imbued Chekhovian humour and with a title like that, I'd be surprised if it didn't inspire Wes Anderson at some point in his career. This collection is very good. Most of the latter stories break with your preconceived image of McCullers' plots. They show a precise humour and an eye for the inane. McCullers was a Gothic chameleon.

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## **?ntellecta says**

The short stories are very woodcut-like, the plot is too simple and overall the whole story is too parabolic. Maybe this novella is a classic book, but it's one of those, which you are excited about to read and in the end you are relieved to put it away. I expected a great plot but I waited unavailingly, because the storyline didn't had any ups and downs and consequently was there no tension at all. If I skipped some pages by mistake, it wouldn't have mattered, because I wouldn't have missed anything at all.

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### **Luis says**

Para mí leer este relato fue una bocanada de aire fresco, algo distinto a mis actuales lecturas. La historia no llegaba a convencerme hasta que llegue al capítulo seis, donde se explica el comportamiento de Amelia y se habla del amor, y con frases como:

Con mucha frecuencia, el amado no es más que un estímulo para el amor acumulado durante años en el corazón del amante. No hay amante que no se dé cuenta de esto, con mayor o menor claridad; en el fondo, sabe que su amor es un amor solitario.

Me conquistó, y de ahí no pare hasta el final de la historia.

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### **Bilal Y. says**

Bir novella ve yedi öyküden oluşuyor kitap. Ama bence novella Küskün Kahvenin Türküsü di?er öyküleri dö?er. KKT'nün Miss Amelie'si sar???n, uzun boylu, so?uk karakter tipi. Sayfalar boyunca, tamam onun a??k olmas?n? beklemiyorduk ama en az?ndan onda insan sevgisi oldu?una dair k?r?nt?lar olabilece?ini umut ettik, sab?rla bekledik.

Amelie, cüce ve kambur kuzen Lymon ile eski koca William Macy ile birlikte s?rad??? bir üçlüydü. Bir satranç oyununu and?ran üçlü ara?ndaki ili?ki biz okurlar? gerebiliyor. Acaba hikaye bir korku filmine dönü?ebilir mi, gibi bir beklentiye dönü?ebilir sonras?nda. Okur k?sm? geriledursun, hikayenin üçlü d???ndaki di?er sakinleri için her ?ey mizah konusu. Özellikle sonlardaki horoz dövü?ü pek e?lendirdi ahaliyi..

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### **Abailart says**

I've just read this again after more than half a lifetime. The town hasn't changed. The intense feelings and moods are as I remember; the grotesqueries, the eroticism which is inverted into a thrilling sense of dread are the same. The book is the stuff of dreams. It's wetly lyrical, swamp stinking and dry, horrible and very, very funny. Biting in its demolition of cherished character types, a distorting mirror of the absurd upon the southern mythologies. The cafe, of course, is sad because it's character-ised by sad people whose idea of happiness is sad. I have this weird idea that McCullers and Strindberg both worked from a palimpsestic Borgesian prototype to produce the Ballad and Miss Julie. The novel does encourage weird ideas.

It's written precisely. It is essential to hear every comma. The *glissando* of relationships (between words, characters, times) are accompanied by *pizzicato*. The whole rolls seamlessly and beautifully along, yes, like a

piece of music. In a story accompanying the *Ballad* (there are six others), *The Sojourner*, we have this:

**She began with a Bach prelude and fugue. The prelude was as gaily iridescent as a prism in a morning-room. The first voice of the fugue, an announcement pure and solitary, was repeated intermingling with a second voice, and again repeated within an elaborated frame, the multiple music, horizontal and serene, flowed with unhurried majesty. The principal melody was woven with two other voices, embellished with countless ingenuities – now dominant, again submerged, it had the sublimity of a single thing that does not fear surrender to the whole. Towards the end, the density of the material gathered for the last enriched insistence on the dominant first motif and with a chorded final statement the figure ended.**

That would seem to me a refraction of the musical sense of composition in McCullers' writing. Then, too, because she writes of dreariness, ennui, alienation, the shabby violences between people (too, the mysterious love that rises in the mysterious counterpoint that can only be experienced in the reading, not the writing about), that sense of the existential dilemma of being oneself and not absorbed by the collective, the community, the other (or the weary narratives of the past, dead as the tumbling down ruin): this most beautiful of the chain gang, black and white chained together:

**One dark voice will start a phrase, half-sung, and like a question. And after a moment another voice will join in, soon the whole gang will be singing. The voices are dark in the golden glare, the music intricately blended, both somber and joyful. The music will swell until at last it seems that the music 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. Then slowly the music will sink down until at last there remains one lonely voice, then a great hoarse breath, the sun, the sound of the picks in the silence.**

**And what kind of gang is this that can make such music?**

**Just twelve mortal men, seven of them black and five of them white boys from this county. Just twelve mortal men who are together.**

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## **Algernon says**

*The town itself is dreary; not much is there except the cotton mill, the two-room houses where workers live, a few peach trees, a church with two colored windows, and a miserable main street only a hundred yards long. On Saturdays the tenants from the near-by farms come in for a day of talk and trade. Otherwise the town is lonesome, sad, and like a place that is far off and estranged from all the other places in the world.*

I picked the book mostly based on the title. McCullers seems to have a knack for capturing the imagination with only a couple of words (The Heart is a Lonely Hunter and Reflections in a Golden Eye are calling to me, too). The promise of an atmospheric and melancholic tale is fulfilled right from the first line that I quoted above.

The story that gives the title to this book is by far the best of the collection, as well as the longest - taking up half of the page count. The others leave an impression of exercises in style or unfinished sketches compared

to the attention to detail and to the careful characterization of the longer novella. **The Jockey** and **A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud** made me think McCullers was trying to imitate Hemingway. Their styles are different, but both show a predilection for writing about the misfits, the defeated and the other people living on the fringes of society, about broken relationships and the inability of couples to communicate with each other. The stories are quite painful in their raw display of hurt. Reading through the biography of the author, they appear to have a strong autobiographical component. **Wunderkind** and **Madame Zilensky** are set in the music world, one about the pressures to succeed heaped upon the very young artists, the other about the artistic temperament that instead of adapting itself to the outside world, prefers to playact on an invented stage peopled with imaginary people. **The Sojourner** is about broken marriages and people without roots and **A Domestic Dilemma** is about alcohol dependance and denial.

I'm not sure why her style is called Gothic, but the Southern qualification is justified both for the main novella in this collection and for the rest of the short stories, even those where the Southern characters live in exile in New York or in Paris. They all carry with them the nostalgia of the home counties, the lassitude induced by the harsh climate, the hard-edged, no-nonsense practicality coupled with a sense of belonging to a tight community and a fragility of emotion that often results in broken spirits given to alcoholism or violence or solitude. I could easily make the connection to the works of William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams, with Carson McCullers having a gentler voice and a more direct, more clear prose style.

Coming back to the main course, the subject of unrequited love is explored through the stories of three people forming the points of a triangle of longing and despair. We know from the start that this will not be a happy story : the opening scene presents the aftermath of the tempestuous events that turned the only cafe in town into a ghost house. But for a while there was a glimmer of happiness and contentment. The trouble with love, and I kind of agree with McCullers here, is that loving and being loved are not quite the same thing:

*Love is a joint experience between two persons - but the fact that it is a joint experience does not mean that it is a similar experience to the two people involved. There are the lover and the beloved, but these two come from different countries. Often the beloved is only a stimulus for all the stored-up love which has lain quiet within the lover for a long time hitherto. And somehow every lover knows this. He feels in his soul that his love is a solitary thing.*

Miss Amelia is a formidable woman, six foot tall and eminently capable of taking care of her own affairs, holding the general store, owning the cotton mill and supplying the town's moonshine from her own still in the swamp. People are generally afraid of her and her temper ( *It was said that if Miss Amelia so much as stumbled over a rock in the road, she would glance around instinctively as though looking for something to sue about.* ) After a failed marriage to the Marvin Macy, a cruel and amoral man who turned to crime after being rejected, Miss Amelia takes in a stranger who claims he is her distant cousin. Under his influence, the elderly spinster mellows down and starts receiving the people of the town in her house of an evening, serving food and drinks and opening a very succesful cafe. That is, until Macy gets out of jail and comes back to stir up trouble in town.

*The people in this town were then unused to gathering together for the sake of pleasure. They met to work in the mill. Or on Sunday there would be an all-day camp meeting - and though that is pleasure, the intention of the whole affair is to sharpen your view of Hell and put into you a keen fear of the Lord Almighty.*

Setting aside for now a discussion about this particular Southern flavor of Christianity that prefers to stress punishment instead of compassion, I will refer to the fact that all three protagonists are orphans, trying to stumble ahead on their own in the jungle of human emotions, and how all three are gauche and awkward in putting their feelings in words, preferring to let the fists decide issues of the heart and by this destroying the

very thing they were trying to salvage. Time and time again, McCullers returns to the theme of loneliness, of isolation, and I can't help feeling sad about the kind of experiences that led her to such a bleak outlook on life at such a young age.

*Once you have lived with another, it is a great torture to have to live alone.*

Recommended for all lovers of Southern authors.

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## Lucas Sierra says

Y allí, por lo menos durante unas horas, podía uno olvidar aquel sentimiento hondo y amargo de no valer para gran cosa en este mundo. (70-71)

Hace algunos años, en el 2014 si no estoy mal, una compañera de la universidad habló de Carson McCullers. La mencionó de paso en una clase de escritura creativa. No recuerdo exactamente lo que dijo... de hecho, no recuerdo en absoluto lo que dijo. Pero recuerdo, eso sí, la frustración en los gestos cuando intentaba darnos a entender cuál era el encanto de la norteamericana. Reconocí allí la imposibilidad de poner en palabras una experiencia profunda, como escalar un monte colosal o sobrevivir en medio del mar en la soledad de un trozo de madera.

Eso fue, durante largo tiempo, McCullers para mí: la intuición de una fuerza capaz de causar cambios hondos en el lector, de enfrentarlo con un desafío del cual saldría vivo, sí, pero sin las palabras para describirlo. Busqué, sin mucho éxito, algo de la autora, y ante la abulia de las librerías fue quedando en la lista de pospuestos. El año pasado, para suerte nuestra, la devoradora fábrica editorial decidió dedicarle unas ediciones conmemorativas muy hermosas. Las compré todas, así es el punk.

Empecé a leer *El aliento del cielo*, y entre cuento y cuento sentí la imperiosa necesidad de leer la tan mencionada balada del café triste. Muchos de los cuentos compilados en este libro los había leído ya en el otro, así que demoré horas en terminarlo. Horas intensas, horas donde pude olvidar aquel sentimiento hondo y amargo de no valer para gran cosa en este mundo.

Lo que ya había descubierto de McCullers relampaguea a lo largo de *La balada del café triste*, sus estrategias narrativas asimilan la ternura con una sencillez descarnada y, si se cae en su influjo, convierten al lector en cómplice de confesiones frágiles. Leerla es asistir a la más íntima parcela de los corazones de sus personajes, y eso, en lo personal, me parece una de las magias antiguas más sagradas del ejercicio literario.

No voy a dar detalles de los cuentos compilados aquí (creo que sería redundar), optaré por un sólo comentario general cuya contundencia debería bastar, y que no sé que tanto se encuentre influido por el prólogo que Rodrigo Fresán hace a *El aliento del cielo*: hay en McCullers una devoción profunda hacia el amor, y consigue narrarla con tal dignidad que honra la dificultad de su tema.

Leyéndola he descubierto que la quiero, que es de esos autores que abrazaré el resto de mi vida. He ganado mucho al leerla, le devuelvo -torpemente- algo al recomendarles hacerlo.

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### (Comentario al terminar el libro

Quiero mucho a McCullers. No es un juicio estético, ni de calidad literaria. Es emocional, absolutamente emocional. Siento al leerla toda la fuerza de una ternura destrozada, del amoroso fracaso en que consiste la vida. Y ese *siento* nubla mi criterio, y quizás eso es suficiente. No sé. Disfruté muchísimo esta lectura. Me reconfortó.

Más adelante reseñaré en forma.)

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### Abeer Saleh says

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### Radwa Abdelbasset says

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## Ahmed Oraby says

[illegible][illegible]

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## Teresa Proença says



e, por amor ao anão, torna-se uma mulher diferente.

Marvin Macy, um homem bonito, conflituoso e sem escrúpulos que se transforma num homem bom ao apaixonar-se por Miss Amélia, com a qual está casado durante dez dias.

Pelos olhos da população, são-nos mostradas as metamorfoses no carácter das três personagens, envolvidas num triângulo de amor, em círculo, no qual ninguém é amado por quem ama.

É extraordinário como Carson McCullers consegue em tão poucas páginas, e de forma tão bela, dizer tanto:

Sobre o poder redentor, e também destruidor, do amor;

Sobre a irracionalidade do amor, que nos leva a amar até quem é improvável amarmos;

Sobre a importância para o ser humano de amar, sendo irrelevante se é amado ou não.

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