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# The Narrative Situation in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*

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**Abstract**

*The Ballad of the Sad Café* by Carson McCullers presents a unique narrative situation with a narrator who may be called communal, because he identifies himself with the townspeople, narrates what is known by them, and his knowledge of the events and the characters are limited to the geographical limits of the town. As a balladeer he narrates an event that concerns the townspeople. However, his narration conceals certain aspects of the story from the narratee who is a visitor or a stranger from out of town. What the narration hides is that the owners of the only café at the town, namely Miss Amelia Evans and Cousin Lymon are gay. The narrator does not make any statements as to their sexual identity though such a sexual preference is never tolerated in a conservative Southern town where Amelia lives. In this case, the townspeople and the narrator ignore this idea about Amelia and Lymon, as they have an indispensable importance for people. The narrative act which hides as much as it reveals can be deciphered correctly only when the unique narrative situation is recognized.

**Keywords**

Narrative Theory, Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Gender

## *The Ballad of the Sad Café* Adlı Novellada Anlatı Yapısı

**Öz**

Carson McCullers'ın *Küskün Kahvenin Türküsü* benzersiz bir anlatı yapısına sahiptir. Novellanın anlatıcısını komünal bir anlatıcı olarak adlandırabiliriz çünkü anlatıcı kendisini kasaba halkıyla özdeşleştirmektedir, kasaba halkınca bilinenleri anlatmaktadır ve olaylara ve insanlara dair bilgisi kasabanın hudutlarıyla sınırlıdır. Bir türkü ozanı olarak kasaba halkını ilgilendiren bir öyküyü anlatmaktadır. Ancak, anlatısında olayların baş kahramanları olan Miss Amelia Evans ve Kuzen Lymon'ın eşcinsel olduğunu bir ziyaretçi ya da kasabanın dışından gelmiş bir yabancı olan dinleyiciden gizlemektedir. Anlatıcı karakterlerin cinsel yönelimlerine dair açıklamada bulunmaz. Oysa, Amelia'nın yaşadığına benzer tutucu Güney kasabalarında normlardan sapmalar asla görmezden gelinmez ve hoş görülmez. Bu kez kasaba halkı ve anlatıcı, karakterlerin eşcinsel olmalarını hoş görürler çünkü karakterler, yöredeki tek cafenin sahipleri olarak kasaba için vaz geçilmez bir öneme sahiptirler. *Küskün Kahvenin Türküsü* ancak, bazı gerçekleri hem anlatan hem de saklayan bu benzersiz anlatı durumu çözüldüğünde doğru anlaşılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler**

Anlatı Kuramı, Carson McCullers, *Küskün Kahvenin Türküsü*, Toplumsal Cinsiyet

*The Ballad of the Sad Café* by Carson McCullers, first published in 1951, is the sad story of Miss Amelia Evans who, after her father's death, leads an isolated life in a dreary Southern town by running a store, making the best whiskey in the region and doctoring for free. Her uneventful life is interrupted thrice. In the first incident, a local young man, Marvin Macy, wants to marry her and manages to remain married to her just for ten days. When Amelia refuses to sleep in the same bed as him on the bridal night, a stormy period of ten days starts for the couple. Marvin Macy, who leaves the town swearing that he will someday get even with Amelia after being beaten by her, is forgotten for some time in the narrative.

The second shift in Amelia's life brings her bliss and comfort for

a while. At a quiet night appears a dwarf hunchback, Cousin Lymon, in front of the store to claim kinship with Amelia. While the townspeople expect her to kick him out of the town, she welcomes him into her house and life, and changes the store to a café to entertain Lymon - a treat that will be followed by hundred others over the years to spoil Lymon as she falls in love with him at first sight. Her happiness continues for some years until Marvin Macy comes back to introduce the third catastrophic turn into her life. Her life is destroyed when Lymon falls for Marvin and helps him obliterate everything Amelia values.

Virginia Spencer Carr rightly points out that "over the years McCullers' narrator [in *The Ballad*] has evoked more critical discussion than has any other aspect of the tale" (57). That is so because McCullers employs a very sophisticated type of narrator that defies easy categorization. Most critics of the novella agree that the narrator is a character; yet almost each critic further qualifies the narrator in his or her own way. While Carr argues that the narrator is not "a specific character within any scene" (57), John McNally is sure that he lives among other characters of the town (40). Dawson Gallard asserts that the narrator is a member of the community whose reflection and wisdom give the story a "sense of timelessness" (qtd. in James 88). On the other hand, Richard M. Cook draws attention to the "almost childish story-telling language of the narrator" (84). All the mentioned critics seem to agree on the significance of the narrator and have made insightful interpretations but it is still possible to put the narrator and the narrative technique of the novella into a finer and more elaborate perspective. The narration of the novella relies on not only the ballad tradition but also a special kind of relationship between the narrator, major characters and the narratee. The narrator who associates himself with the norms of his society and deserves to be called a communal narrator is normally supposed to expose the incidents in the lives of his characters but he conceals certain attributes of the characters so as to protect them from the narratee, which forms a unique narrative situation.

Evocative of the ballad tradition, the narration gives the impression of being told to an audience rather than written for an audience. Sentences that start with 'and's and 'but's, direct references to the audience, gentle directing imperatives, the employment of 'now' as a transition between paragraphs and different phases of the story and

questions directed at the audience all make us think that the novella is a long conversation between the narrator and the narratee.

*The Ballad* is recounted by a third person semi-omnisicient narrator (whose gender will be discussed later). He is not a monadic and univocal narrator; at times we see him employ different voices projecting different discourses. As it happens in almost all narrations, there is a hierarchy of discourses in *The Ballad* and the discourses at hand are markedly different from each other. According to Mahmoud Salami while authors write their narratives, they endow some discourses with more authority and privilege compared to others. Transitory discourses of the characters constructed through dialogue are not as privileged as authorial narration. In a similar vein, the hierarchy of the narrator is not the same when narrating an event and when commenting on the event through authorial intrusion. The highest point of the hierarchy is manifested when the narrator comments on profound facts of human life (20). Consequently, there is an overt or covert competition of discourses among the characters or between the characters and the narrator. This competition, though not limited to, can best be seen in the 18th or 19th century novels, such as William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair,* Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* in which the obtrusive narrator can build his discourse even to invalidate the discourse of the characters and provide reliability of narration, which altogether illustrates that not all agents in a novel have the same power and authority.

In *The Ballad* there is not a competition for the hierarchy of discourses as there is only one narrator and very little dialogue to enable the characters to build their own discourses. The narrator is not a traditional third person omniscient narrator but he frequently adopts the voice of a wise orator who is learnt in the affairs of the world. At times he goes beyond the diegesis, the sad story of Amelia, Cousin Lymon and Marvin Macy, and opens windows into the complicated nature and fates of human beings; in such cases he places himself at the top of the hierarchy of discourses. When, for example, the townspeople get to believe that Amelia murdered Cousin Lymon just after his appearance, some of them enigmatically gather in front of her house and start to wait. According to the narrator "they themselves did not know what they were waiting for" (112) but he believes he knows the reason and explains it at length:

> in times of tension, when some great action is impending, men gather and wait in this way. And after a time there will come a moment when all together they will act in unison, not from thought or from the will of any one man, but as though their instincts had merged together so that the decision belongs to no single one of them, but to a group as a whole…. And whether the matter will be settled peaceably, or whether the joint action will result in ransacking, violence, and crime, depends on destiny. (112)

In this excerpt the reader hears the unwavering voice of a narrator who has placed himself at the top of the hierarchy of discourses as someone who has insight into the workings of the communities and societies and as someone who has a certain wisdom not granted to the ordinary human beings.

Similarly, the narrator's introduction of Cousin Lymon does not sound earthly and mortal; instead he sounds like a God-like narrator: "There is a type of person who has a quality about him that sets him apart from other and more ordinary human beings. Such a person has an instinct which is usually found only in small children, an instinct to establish immediate and vital contact between himself and all things in the world. Certainly the hunchback was of this type" (115). The famous manifesto of love[1], which is generally associated with McCullers' own understanding of love, or the aphoristic statement that "once you have lived with another, it is a great torture to have to live alone… it is better to take in your mortal enemy than face the terror of living alone" (147) can also be regarded as instances of enunciation where the narrator places himself at the top of the "hierarchy of discourse" in Mahmoud Salami's coinage.

Although the narrator employs different discourses, we should not forget that he is a character in the novel. Even then he does not easily conform to the existing categories of narrator. He is not the Nick Carraway of *The Great Gatsby*, who takes part in the diegesis as a secondary character but he certainly lives in and knows the town as one of the townspeople. There is consensus among critics on the narrator's being a member of the town though some critics do not agree on his gender. Descriptions of the town as "the winters here are short and raw" (102) and "here in this town there was once a café" (103) make it

clear that the point of view of the narrator is located in the town. The scene where Cousin Lymon first appears clarifies the issues of location and the gender of the narrator beyond doubt.

Cousin Lymon is first seen on a soft April evening. A group of men, Stumpy MacPhail, the Rainey twins and Henry Macy, to be exact, and Miss Amelia have been drinking on the porch outside her shop when one of the twins "looking down the empty road" says "I see something coming" (104). Because it is dark and the coming figure is far away, they can only speculate that it is a loose calf or "somebody's younggun" (104). When the figure is close enough to be seen, they see he is a little hunchback. The narration of the event can be compared to a movie shot in which the camera is fixed on the porch and is shooting a blurred figure in the dark empty road. Rather than zooming in on the coming person, the lens is kept stable, which altogether means that the narrator is supposed to be on the porch with the others and we see the road from his point of view.

Seymour Chatman indicates that there is a certain ambiguity about the notion of point of view. He argues that it does not refer to one thing alone and adds that the term signifies at least three different senses. Point of view can be *perceptual* in which case the location of the narrator matters and narration is influenced by the narrator's area of accessibility. It can be *conceptual* as well, which means point of view includes the world view of the narrator. Finally, we can distinguish the narrator's *interest* point of view which relates to his/her "general interest, profit, welfare, well-being, etc." (165). The first two aspects of point of view are pertinent to a correct perception of *The Ballad*.

As it has been argued above, the perceptual point of view, in other words, the physical point of view is fixed in the town which is verified by Lymon's arrival scene or the narrator's familiarity with the vicinity. A further point of analysis on the issue might be Marvin Macy. The narrator of the work knows about Marvin Macy's childhood and how he fell in love with Amelia and how frustrated and angry he got after he was thrown out of the bridal bed. However, Lymon's past is not known by the narrator. In spite of all his airs of omniscience, the narrator does not even know how old Lymon is because he is not originally from the town and no one in the town knows his age. Similarly, the narrator has no definite idea as to where Marvin Macy and Lymon went after devastating Amelia because the narrator does not have the power to go

with them; he only conveys to us some rumors heard in the streets of the town after their disappearance.

It seems that the narrator is at ease with the people of the town when it comes to expressing the unvoiced or unobservable reactions and thoughts of the townspeople. Yet for people and events he is not familiar with, most of his comments that go beyond the narration of events are introduced by or coupled with expressions conveying a process of reasoning or deduction. To cite one such incident, when Lymon appears in front of the porch to tell his story to the people present, Henry Macy, the good-hearted brother, leaves the porch earlier than the others because

> the hunchback's situation had touched his heart. *Therefore* he did not want to wait and watch Miss Amelia chase this newcomer off her property and run him out of town. The hunchback stood with his bag open on the bottom step; he sniffed his nose, and his mouth quivered. *Perhaps* he began to feel his dismal predicament. *Maybe* he realized what a miserable thing it was to be a stranger in the town with a suitcase full of junk, and claiming kin with Miss Amelia. *At any rate* he sat down on the steps and suddenly began to cry." (106, emphases added)

The narrator's stance for Henry Macy, the town dweller, and Lymon, the outsider, change greatly: Macy's motivations are known to him and he simply uses *therefore* which expresses certainty. Expressions used for Lymon's motivations express uncertainty; he makes deductions and not very firm ones. His narration, which does not go beyond the accounts of ordinary limited narrators, is limited to descriptions or possible interpretations of visible action. Curiously enough, he adopts the same cautious stance when he writes about Amelia. She, "for some strange reason, seems unaware" (111) of the rumors on her killing Lymon. The narrator does not know why Amelia accepted to marry Marvin Macy. She starts to wear her red dress only "…[f]or some reason" (141) after Marvin Macy's arrival. Consequently, not only is the narrator's point of view located in the town, but his knowledge is limited with what is known to the townspeople. The rest seems to be his reasoning and neither his knowledge nor his reasoning is reliable.

On the night the café was opened, the narrator reports, there were some women in the café and "they had twists of licorice, a Nehi or even a swallow of the whiskey" (117). The emphasis on the whiskey reveals that it is not customary for the women of the town to drink whiskey, at least in public; thus they can get only a swallow of it in the festive air of this unexpected gathering. However, the narrator is very familiar with Amelia's famous whiskey and he was on the porch with the rest of the people witnessing Lymon's arrival. Therefore, the teller of the story must be male with a man's *conceptual point of view* if we use the terminology of Chatman.

The conceptual point of view of the narrator is closely associated with the ballad form. Traditionally folk ballads are anonymous and resist ownership since, even if the ballads rely on actual events, they are transmitted from one balladeer to another orally. During each transmission some elements of the ballad change in line with the balladeer's personal taste. Literary ballads with identifiable poets, too, lack personal involvement with the event narrated. As J. A. Cuddon indicates the balladeer draws "his materials from community life, from local and national history, from legend and folklore" (72).

The balladeer's distance to his subject matter forms a sharp contrast between the ballad and the lyric, a form of poetry closely associated with Romanticism and the gothic. M. H. Abrams defines the lyric as a "fairly short poem, consisting of the utterance by a single speaker, who expresses a state of mind or a process of thought and feeling" adding that the speaking agent does not necessarily have to be the poet himself (146). Cuddon, in his definition of the lyric, also emphasizes that it is the expression of a single speaker (372). In "Lyric Voice and the Voyeuristic Desire" Fahri Öz writes an extensive definition of the lyric and summarizes the Bakhtian notion of this genre: "It is a discourse that is detached, isolated and solipsistic. Extremely personal and subjective, the lyric is unitary and monologic, allowing no other voice than that of the poet" (427). Öz goes on to argue that particularly the modern lyricist has a voyeuristic desire which includes observing people secretly, enjoying that act of transgression and, above all, claiming some sort of ownership on the object of scrutiny and desire (2011).

The dichotomy between the lyric and the ballad has a key importance in understanding the unique narrative situation employed

in *The Ballad*. The distanced stance of the balladeer, in contrast with the subjectivity of the lyric voice, reveals a lot about the narrator of the novella. As it is presented by the narrator, Amelia's story with touches of legend and folklore is drawn from community life. Furthermore, in spite of the omniscient outlook the narrator adopts at times, he evades making definite judgments on important issues and acts like a communal narrator rather than one conveying a personal, subjective, unitary and monologic discourse. His discourse, which is away from the enunciation of a lyricist and close to that of a balladeer, is pervaded with town talk, with what people think on matters of the story. For instance, on Lymon's brief appearance and getting lost, he says "the rumor [was] so terrible that the town and all the country about were stunned by it" (110). Then he asserts that the person starting the rumor "is a man of not much account - sallow, shambling, and with no teeth in his head" (110). Instead of stating that the rumor is groundless and dismissing it all at once, he presents both sides of the issue so as to project the collective mind of the town.

In a similar case, "Mrs. McPhail and her cronies" start another rumor, namely Amelia and Lymon "were living in sin" (119), committing incest. The narrator is quick to compensate for the rumor with other views from the town: "The good people thought that if these two [Amelia and Lymon] had found some satisfaction of the flesh between themselves, then it was a matter concerning them and God alone. All sensible people agreed in their opinion about this conjucture - and their answer was a plain, flat *no*" (119-120). The narrator displays his evasive approach on Marvin Macy as well. After praising his good looks, his steady income and his gold watch, he projects another aspect of him only to counter-balance it soon:

> … Marvin Macy was a fortunate fellow… But from a more serious and thoughtful viewpoint Marvin Macy was not a person to be envied, for he was an evil character. His reputation was as bad, if not worse, than that of any young man in the country… Yet in spite of his well-known reputation he was the beloved of many females in this region - of those who were discouraged. (121)

It seems the narrator maintains a balanced manner of narration in which he conveys the ideas belonging to different segments of the

society. Rather than subscribing to one point of view or interpretation over the others as a lyricist would do, he relates what people in the town as a group think. He avoids employing an individual point of view and acts as a communal narrator[2]. Perhaps for this reason Carr compares his function to that of the chorus in Greek drama (57). Therefore, the narrator is not a lyricist who interprets the events in his own subjectivity but a balladeer who tells about a communal event by acting as a spokesperson of the community.

The communal narrator evokes the narrator of "A Rose for Emily" by William Faulkner, who almost reads out the verdict of the town on Emily's creepy case, or the persona of "Richard Cory" by Edwin Arlington Robinson. He also evokes the reluctant narrator Julian Barnes utilizes in *Flaubert's Parrot*. The reluctant narrator, according to David Leon Higdon, denotes a narrator "who is reliable in strict terms, indeed often quite learned and perceptive, but who has seen, experienced or caused something so traumatic that he must approach the telling of it through indirections, masks and substitutions" (174). The narrator of *The Ballad* is not a "flesh and bone" character who is actively involved in Amelia's sad story as a primary or secondary character. In that case, what might his traumatic experience be?

For Robert N. Rechnitz the narrator adopts a child-like stance to imply that he is writing about such shattering issues that he has to hide behind a curtain of childish innocence. "The style then becomes a kind of buffer to fend off what would otherwise be unbearable" (qtd in James 87). Rechnitz is right in dubbing *The Ballad* one of the saddest stories penned and it is difficult to tell such a story without indirection. Yet, the reluctance of the narrator stems from a graver reason. Living in the town, the narrator is sure to know that both Amelia and Lymon are queer but he never uses the term queer in a context evocative of sexuality or gender. In such a short novella the word queer is used seven times and in each case it is related to either Amelia or Lymon but not a single word is uttered on their real sexual identities. Such a big source of gossip and street talk is completely overlooked in the narration while it is not possible for the townspeople not to gossip about their sexuality because this is against the nature of the town.

The townspeople are not particularly bad although they feel a "special satisfaction … when someone has been thoroughly done in by some scandalous and terrible means" (125). The very same people take

care of the Macy brothers when the parents left them but the very same people "laughed a long time over [the] grotesque affair" (126) between Amelia and Macy although they knew about all the sad details, because young boys are in the habit of watching married couples through the windows and reporting what they see to others. This is a town burning for gossips and rumors even if they come from a half-insane man.

Besides, there is a strict code of behavior in the town. The time and place of the narrative are not specified but the town looks like an ordinary town where men are expected to be tough and macho whereas women are assigned the traditional role of protective and docile mothers. Any kind of infringement is beyond tolerance for the townspeople as it is illustrated at the very beginning of the novella. As soon as Lymon starts to cry in front of the store, he is called a Finestein. As Panthea Reid Broughton states

> In this town if a man shows his feelings he is labeled a 'Finestein;' Finestein, we are told, was a little Jew sensitive enough to cry whenever people called him a Christ-killer and foolish enough to live in this town… The reference to Finestein is important because it reveals the town's concept of sexual roles. … to be sensitive, to weep, is to be effeminate. The human virtues of tenderness and sensitivity are considered to be exclusively feminine and decidedly superfluous and downright contemptible by a pragmatic and rationalistic society. The human psyche has then been split, 'cracked,' if you will, into qualities which are feminine and contemptible on the one hand and masculine and admirable on the other. (38)

In this town where women cannot drink whiskey in public, there is a certain denigration of women; it is then impossible for the townspeople and the narrator to acknowledge and accept any forms of sexual deviance.

However, it is beyond doubt and impossible for the townspeople and the narrator not to realize that Amelia and Lymon do not conform to the gender and sexual roles attributed to them. Amelia is described at the very beginning like a man: "She was a dark, tall woman with bones and muscles like a man. Her hair was cut short and brushed back from

the forehead, and there was about her sunburned face a tense, haggard quality… Miss Amelia cared nothing for the love of men and was a solitary person" (103). She is always dressed in overalls and gum boots except for her marriage ceremony; even then she feels uncomfortable wearing something without pockets. She is in the trade of business, a department not really accessible to women of the time. She is good at anything, as the narrator says, she can do with her hands - carpentering and building. Besides she is a very skilled and bold doctor:

> In the face of the most dangerous and extraordinary treatment she did not hesitate, and no disease was so terrible but what she would undertake to cure it. In this there was one exception. If a patient came with a female complaint she could do nothing. Indeed at the mere mention of the words her face would slowly darken with shame, and she would stand there craning her neck against the collar of her shirt, or rubbing her swamp boots together, for all the world like a great, shamed, dumb-tongued child. (113)

Her avoidance of anything associated with femininity is apparent in all aspects of her life, from clothing to behavior, decoration of her room to occupation. Her mysterious ten-day marriage turns into a disaster for her when the couple retires into the bedroom. The narrator does not make any explanations about it but most probably the sexual advances of Marvin Macy infuriate and scare her beyond measure. Consequently, she cannot function as a woman either in her private or public life. Actually that is why the townspeople were surprised when she accepts Marvin's marriage proposal in the first place and that is why the town laughs "a long time over this grotesque affair" (126).

Lymon is akin to Amelia in his rejection of the socially assigned masculine identity. His first appearance in the novel is downright gothic, a hunchback dwarf carrying an old suitcase in the dark of the night. His second appearance is unquestionably queer:

> Beneath … [his coat] was a fresh red and black checkered shirt belonging to Miss Amelia. He did not wear trousers such as ordinary men are meant to wear, but a pair of tight-fitting little knee-length breeches. On his skinny legs he wore black stockings, and his shoes

> were of a special kind, being queerly shaped, laced up over the ankles, and newly cleaned and polished with wax. Around his neck, so that his large, pale ears were almost completely covered, he wore a shawl of lime-green wool, the fringes of which almost touched the floor. (114)

His almost transvestite appearance is just a small token of more characteristics that cannot be associated with traditional Southern masculinity. He loves being the center of attention and gets a nasty pleasure from setting up fights between people. In addition to being a dwarf and a hunchback, he is sickly. He has a great fear of death and needs the company of Amelia when he cannot sleep. Actually he follows her wherever she goes, but if the ground is wet or boggy, Amelia carries him on her back while "the hunchback settled on her shoulders, clinging to her ears or to her broad forehead" (119). Above all, he falls for Marvin Macy as soon as they meet, and this time he follows Marvin Macy everywhere trying to allure him.

When the townspeople see Lymon in the daylight in his peculiar clothing, "the men looked up and then stood with dumb shock" (113) at first. Then "it took some moments for the men in the store to regain their ease" (114); and finally "the group still clustered around, feeling somewhat gawky and bewildered. This sensation never quite wore off " (115). The sensation that never dissipated must be the recognition of his queerness because it is not subtle enough to escape ordinary observation.

Rachel Adams rightly points out that McCullers' fiction is frequently peopled by queers and freaks:

> As McCullers uses these terms, their function depends not upon correspondence to any fixed identity but upon their opposition to normative behaviors and social distinctions. The queer refers loosely to acts and desires that confound the notion of a normative heterosexuality as well as to the homosexuality…. Freaks are beings who make those queer tendencies visible on the body's surfaces. Freaks and queers suffer because they cannot be assimilated into the dominant social order, yet their presence highlights the excesses, contradictions, and incoherences at the very heart of that order. (552)

Amelia and Lymon are not only queer but also freaks in the eyes of the society. Coupled with their sexual deviance, their extraordinary look actually renders their assimilation into the society impossible. Even if they can hide their sexual orientation and identities, their grotesque looks make them easy pickings for the townspeople in a setting where any form of deviance is immediately punished through gossip, laughter and derision. Yet, the townspeople do not even gossip about their queerness and they have a good reason, in their own right, not to.

In spite of their unusual gender identities and grotesque appearance, Amelia and Lymon have an indispensable importance for the townspeople, and this influences the enunciation of the communal narrator and contributes to the unprecedented narrative situation of the novella. Amelia is rich, perhaps the richest person in the town. Her legendary whiskey, her healing skills and her physical power, which make people bet on her rather than Marvin Macy in the fight, increase her credibility in the society. People have fun in her café and consult her on when to slaughter the hog to make sausage and barbecue. Consequently, Amelia, at best, is someone the townspeople need and respect and, at worst, someone they fear. Though Lymon is a slacker and not more than a spoiled child, his importance is not less than Amelia's. As the narrator confesses, "the hunchback was a great mischiefmaker… He nosed around everywhere, knew the intimate business of everybody, and trespassed every waking hour. Yet, queerly enough, in spite of this it was the hunchback who was most responsible for the great popularity of the café. Things were never so gay as when he was around" (130-131). He is in fact the reason the café was opened in the first place.

The existence of the café and its meaning for the townspeople is the key to understanding the importance attached to Amelia and Lymon. It is one of the most vital elements of the story as the title, too, suggests. It is not just a place people spend time but also a place where they feel "a certain pride" according to the narrator:

> …it was not only the warmth, the decorations, and the brightness, that made the café what it was. There is a deeper reason why the café was so precious to this town. And this deeper reason has to do with a certain pride that had not hitherto been known in these parts.

> To understand this new pride the cheapness of human life must be kept in mind. There were always plenty of people clustered around a mill - but it was seldom that every family had enough meal, garments and fat back to go the rounds. 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…. 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? … 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. (142)

The café makes things better for the townspeople; through it they realize that they are worth a lot. As the narrator announces "the new pride that the café brought to this town had an effect on almost everyone, even the children" (142). It works against the way the world is run; there is something everyone can afford in the café. People wash before they go there, clean their feet politely outside the café and sit at the tables with pride: "There, for a few hours at least, the deep bitter knowing that you are not worth much in this world could be laid low" (143). Such a place makes people even forget that the owners are a disgrace to the town.

The communal narrator who represents the town, too, had a deep respect for Amelia; never once does he mention her with any label other than Miss Amelia. When Lymon calls her Amelia for the first time, he is shocked: "…since what time had anyone presumed to address Miss Amelia by her bare name, without a title of respect? - Certainly not her bridegroom and her husband of ten days. In fact, not since the death of her father… had anyone dared to address her in such a familiar way" (116-117). Addressing her without a formal tag, let alone with a derogatory remark, is beyond the understanding of the narrator. It is obvious that the narrator is not alone in paying her respect. That is why the townspeople did not gossip about her marriage although she had not yet acquired a different sort of respect as the owner of the café.

The respect the townspeople have for Amelia and Lymon and the importance they grant the café with should be considered in

close connection with the narrative situation since they have a great influence on the narration. The narrator, who speaks for the town, is a self-conscious narrator in Wayne Booth's terminology. Such narrators are aware that they are in the process of writing a literary work (155). The narrator of *The Ballad* reveals his self-consciousness in his attempt to organize his narrative through expressions such as "now time must pass" (118), "Now some explanation is due for all this behavior" (119) or "it has been mentioned before that Miss Amelia was once married" (120). Besides, direct references to the audience make us feel that the narrator is speaking to a definite person, a specific narratee.

Genette emphasizes that the narratee cannot be equated with the reader or even the implied reader just as the narrator cannot be equated with the author. The narratee is the person the narrator is in contact with and, therefore, s/he exists nowhere but in the diegetic level. Genette also distinguishes between intradiegetic and extradiegetic narratees[3]. Intradiegetic narratees are somehow identified in the narrative through "'second-person' marks" or direct references like "Madam" or "Sir Critik" as Sterne does. Even if the narrator does not call any attention to extradiegetic narratees, they certainly exist beneath the surface of the narrative (Genette 259-260).

In narratives with a palpable narratee as *The Ballad*, we can view the narrative as a lengthy discourse between the narrator and the narratee. For that reason Gerald Prince tends to see the narratee as a channel of transmission of information between the reader and the narrator (241). This, however, creates a distance between the narrator and the reader as the narratee is always between the two (Genette 260). Because the narratee is a diegetic entity, s/he can have certain influences on the narrator's articulation and the narrative ends up being written according to the possible reactions of the narratee. Thus, intradiegetic or otherwise, the characteristics of the narratee, turn out to be important.

Prince rightly argues that we cannot categorise the narratees according to their personality, belief system or social status (235) but we can find out about the narratee through the signals implanted for her/him in the text. These signals might include direct references, use of indefinite pronouns like "we" and "one", negative answers given to the narratee, use of comparisons and analogies (which imply that both the narrator and the narratee are familiar with the references of

comparisons and analogies) and overjustifications (232-233). Studying these signals help us depict the relationship between the narrator and the narratee and the narratee's impact on the narration. As for *The Ballad*, if not the personality but the relationship between the narratee and the narrator determine the nature of the narrative to a considerable extent.

The narratee of the novella intensifies the self-consciousness of the narrator because he is a stranger, at least someone who is not familiar with the town. The narratee might be a tourist, visitor or someone going through the town by chance. That is why the narrator describes the town at length with its past and its present, with its people and their various ideas on matters of importance. In this sense, the remark directed at the narratee - "you might as well walk down to the Forks Falls and listen to the chain-gang" (103) - is not simply a rhetorical statement but an actual recommendation.

John McNally, having a different interpretation of the narrative situation, argues that the narrator is bored of living in the town where there is nothing to do so he just recollects the good old days: "…in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*… we overhear the internal monologue of a character whose haunting recollections enable him to overcome his own ennui and to resist the atrophying pressures of the familiar world" (43). Though an interesting one, this interpretation of McNally does not explain the narrator's avoidance of the issue of queerness. Interior monologues are expected to be direct and uncensored ideas of a character simply by virtue of being unvoiced thoughts that are conveyed to no one other than the beholder. In such a narrative situation the narrator has no self-consciousness at all and is at liberty to address forbidden and repressed issues. However, the existence of a stranger, someone from out of town, makes the narrator of the novella censor certain parts of the story, because he is embarrassed to reveal the secret of the town to strangers.

The narrator's evasion of the topic of sexual infringement cannot be attributed to the ignorance or neglect on the side of the narrator. As argued before it is an issue that cannot escape from the attention or appetite of the townspeople, which leaves the issue to be nothing but a conscious choice of the narrator and the people of the town. Thus, *The Ballad* relies as much on what is told as what is left out, on paralipsis: "the omission of some important action or thought of the focal hero,

which neither the hero nor the narrator can be ignorant of but which the narrator chooses to conceal from the reader" (Genette 196). Sexual identity is a phenomenon that determines one's life to great extent. When it takes the form of deviance from the social norm, it acquires an even greater importance and is turned into a matter of shame in conservative societies such as the southern town where Amelia and Lymon live. Deviants are oppressed, derided, and made fun of in such settings. In *The Ballad*, due to people's respect for Amelia and Lymon, it is confronted with silence, evasion and equivocation due to their importance for not only the narrator but the whole town itself.

*The Ballad* presents a unique narrative situation, which is heavily influenced by the relationship between the narrator and the narratee. Going back to the definition of the lyric, Abrams notes that "many lyric speakers are represented as musing in solitude" (146), a privilege the balladeer, particularly the one in *The Ballad* cannot afford. Direct references to the narratee and the narrator's efforts to organize his narrative demonstrate that the narrator is not "musing in solitude" but telling a story to someone. The narrative situation that is endowed with a conspicuous narratee, who is a stranger, creates a distance between the communal narrator and the story he relates: he cannot muse to himself but consider the presence and the possible reactions of the narratee. Moreover, he has to defend his characters from the narratee, which further distances him from speaking his mind freely. The balladeer is telling the story of Amelia and Cousin Lymon whose queerness is normally a matter to be derided by the townspeople. However, it is kept as a secret by the communal narrator as a token of people's respect for Amelia and Lymon. Consequently, the narrator, paradoxically, both reveals and hides at the same time, and it is this dual task, which endows *The Ballad* with a unique narrative situation.

## Notes

[i] McCullers' extended statement on the nature of love is perhaps more famous than *The Ballad* itself and it says a lot about Amelia's treatment of Lymon and Marvin Macy's treatment of Amelia. For that reason an excerpt of the manifesto is quoted here:

> …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. He comes to know a new, strange loneliness and it is this knowledge which makes him suffer…. Let it be added here that this lover about whom we speak need not be a young man saving for a wedding ring - this lover can be man, woman, child, or indeed any human creature on this earth.
>
> Now, the bellowed can also be of any description. The most outlandish people can be the stimulus for love…. The preacher may love a fallen woman. The beloved may be treacherous, greasy headed, and given to evil habits. Yes, and the lover may see this as clearly as anyone else - but that does not affect the evolution of his love one whit… the value and the quality of any love is determined solely by the lover himself.
>
> 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 beloved is intolerable to many. The beloved fears and hates the lover, and with the best of reasons. For the lover is forever trying to strip bare his beloved. The lover craves any possible relation with the beloved, even if this experience can cause him only pain. (120)

[ii] By communal narrator I suggest a narrator that acts within the worldview of the community he takes part. For the sake of clarity communal narrator can be contrasted with Monica Fludernik's we-

narrator. By we-narrators Fludernik refers to diegetic narrators or reflectors that use the pronoun *we* in the enactment of the narration. She states that novels conveyed entirely with the pronoun *we* are rare and "…[i]n most cases the *we* text represents an extended first-person narrative, for instance rendering the experience of childhood… or of town/village life, and it therefore includes the first-person narrator in a larger community of playmates or village folk" (224). Fludernik's definition emphasizes the narrator's direct and considerable participation in the diegesis whereas, at least as much as *The Ballad* is concerned, the communal narrator's role is more narration than participation in the event. Besides, Fludernik's definition does not imply any association between the Weltanschauung of the narrator and his/her community whereas the term communal narrator requires such a collaboration.

[iii] Narratee is a relatively new notion in the narrative theory and it lacks semantic consistency. What Genette calls intradiegetic narratee, Gerald Prince calls character-narratee (1996). For a similar distinction James Phelan (1989) is content to use the terms of narrative audience and authorial audience proposed by Peter Rabinowitz (1977). Because the authorial audience understanding of Rabinowitz and Phelan includes both the implied reader and the narratee, the term intradiegetic narratee will be employed in this paper.

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