Carson McCullers' patent "theme of the isolated individual seeking escape from loneliness through love, which had inspired *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, became exceedingly complex by the time she wrote *The Ballad of the Sad Café*.¹

She underscores in this novel the ambiguity of love, its paradoxical attraction and repulsion. Instead of putting an end to loneliness, love, when thwarted, intensifies the individual's isolation; it leads to hatred and destruction. Though an inspiring influence and a pure and lasting force, it is rarely attained. As a result, loneliness assumes the disorder of a chaotic life; order and meaning do not remain even a distant possibility.

However, it is in this novel for the first time that McCullers tried to illustrate the superiority of Agape (communal affection) over Eros (passionate love). "The passionate, individual love — the old Tristan — Isolde love, the Eros love, — is inferior to the love of God, to fellowship, to the love of Agape — The Greek god of the feast, the God of brotherly love — and of man. This is what I tried to show in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* in the strange love of Miss Amelia for the little hunchback, Cousin Lymon."² The novel
demonstrates the destructive nature of Eros in the lives of the three main characters, Miss Amelia Evans, Cousin Lymon and Marvin Macy. Love fails to fructify because love is often mere narcissism. The characters want not so much to love as to be loved. Love requires opening out, being receptive to others. In a manner of speaking, it also implies giving of oneself in a spirit of self-surrender; but as the author shows it, no such giving takes place:

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. So there is only one thing for the lover to do. He must house his love within himself as best he can; he must create for himself a whole new inward world — a world intense and strange, complete in himself ...

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 café symbolically suggests Agape. The Café does provide the townspeople an opportunity, howsoever elusive and short-lived, for joy which springs from the sense of community. The café provides a few moments of satisfaction in the meaningless repetition of their days but this sense of fellowship proves tenuous, it does not endure. The
implication is, that it is in the nature of Eros to frustrate any meaningful relationship between or among the characters who are afflicted with loneliness, fear or guilt. In the words of Oliver Evans, "there is a terrible finality about the vision of life which McCullers projected in The ballad of the Sad Café: an eternal flaw exists in the machinery of love, which alone has the power to liberate man from his fate of spiritual isolation. There is no escape, and no hope of escape — one might as well go and listen to the chain gang."

With a sureness of touch of structural technique, McCullers gave to this narration of the ballad a Gothic setting — the alien elemental world of legend and romance. Like all good ballads, says Lawrence Graver "the story is urgent, atmospheric and primitive, and yet, in its melodramatic swiftness and simplicity, tells us more things memorable about human life than all the devious sophisticated posturings of Reflections in a Golden Eye." In this McCullers shows her understanding that fundamental to the Gothic mode of fiction, is creation of psychic stress in the characters that will distort their perceptions so that they see the normal as through a distorting lens. In The Ballad of the Sad Café McCullers builds on the Gothic principle, that irrational impulses of all sorts distort an individual's perception of
reality. In both Reflections in a Golden Eye and The Ballad of the Sad Café McCullers renders states of "inner turmoil in terms of outward stress or in terms of the terrifying, the macabre, or the bizarre." Another Gothic feature which characterizes The Ballad of the Sad Café is the dramatization of the forces of evil at large in the universe, beyond the control and understanding of the characters. Evil here appears as an unmotivated and irrational phenomenon. What is more important, McCullers probes the psychological effects of these irrational forces on the individual more fully than did the earlier romantic novelists exploring this mode. Like the early Gothic writers McCullers assumes that a close relationship subsists between the irrational and human loneliness. However, what distinguishes McCullers' treatment of the theme is that she also recognizes that the hunger for love and its possible redemptive influence lie as close to the heart of human experience as do irrationality and evil. However, the achievement of a meaningful communion turns out in the novel to be an impossibility. As in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, the principal character in The Ballad of the Sad Café after a brief interval of love expended upon an unresponsive person, remains a lonely hunter.

In the words of Paul Engle, "the quality of Mrs. McCullers' art is that, out of the grotesque and the
unreal, she creates the most accurate comments on normal existence. One moves into a level of unreality which is simply an exaggerated form of that level on which we lead our daily lives. In other words, the freaks, the abnormal are used by McCullers as symbols of the normal. Her mutes and her hunchbacks, speak of complexities and frustrations which are so native to man but which are best presented in the form of the grotesque. Inab Hassan has made the point most cogently; he remarks, "the grotesque... is perhaps the true, ironic symbol of man in this century; Flannery O'Connor's Haze Mote in Wise Blood; Carson McCullers' Miss Amelia in The Ballad of the Sad Café; or even Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man in the novel by that name. For in the grotesque, the distortion of physical forms corresponds to that perversion of mental states which is the malady of the age." What makes her presentation convincing is the fact that she sets her freakish characters and incidents firmly in a frame of commonplace facts and details which she enumerates precisely.

Though McCullers situates the story in a Southern mill town, the locale is imaginatively conceived so that it skilfully projects a milieu inhabited by grotesque and improbable characters; where strange and incredible events happen; where the atmosphere created is rather ineffably eerie; there is an indefinable atmosphere between the human and the supernatural. In order to give it the colouring of a ballad
McCullers manipulates action rooted in folk tradition; the narration is direct and swift; and the language stylized and intense, so contrived by the use of archaic words and phrases.

Miss Amelia is sorceress of reputation and is credited with magical powers to heal the sick folk and foretelling the change in the weather. It is she, who gives to *The Ballad of the Sad Café* an eerie tone. Similarly, Lymon accentuates the sinister, as well as the comic tone of the novel. Like a balladier McCullers presents through the skilful narration, a stark vision which betokens a human scene of desolation, where the life in the Café appears in the nature of a momentary oasis. The Café, which is an ideal place for people to get together and embibe an animating sense of community, takes on an ironic aspect in the novel. The forced and uneasy fellowship in the café lacks genuineness, thus making it impossible for those assembled to forge a spontaneous and meaningful fellowship. The momentary atmosphere of liveliness in the Café is only surfacial; no lasting fellowship is achieved. *The Ballad of the Bad Café* has a sad story to unfold. It is not only the main characters who are isolated and grotesque, even the townspeople are lacking in the folk-capacity to strike healthy human fellowship. That is why, it is the sad café as the title spells out.

In her earlier novels McCullers presents love as the only available anodyne to isolation, the only significant
possible means by which any communication both with self and others is forged; in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, however, McCullers closes even this remote possibility. In the beginning of the novel she makes two postulates about love, one, "the value and quality of any love is determined solely by the lover himself... 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." Two, "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."

The implication of the first postulate is that every lover knows in his soul that love is a solitary thing, that it has to feed on itself. And that this love requires that the lover must be prepared to pursue his lonely hunt interminably, which makes the meaning of the second postulate clear. The beloved not only denies any positive response but fears and hates the lover, making it impossible for any meaningful communication between the two to take place. The lover is bound to remain tragically alone, never attaining what could be an idyll. That is how the treatment of love in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* takes on the form of a parable on human predicament.
Cousin Lymon, for instance, is outlandish enough for any one's taste — he is a dwarf, he is hunchback, he is tubercular, he is homosexual, and it stands to reason that Amelia's association with him could only end in frustration. Nonetheless, Amelia is earnestly in love with him and despite the fact that Lymon is full of spite and hatred, she continues to long for his association. This constitutes, "one of the saddest and most grotesque situations in modern fiction." And, of course, it constitutes the melancholy burden of The Ballad of the Sad Café: Reciprocal relationship is not possible. As Oliver Evans remarks, "there is dreadful justice in the fact that in the past she has herself treated Marvin Macy in the same way and for the same reason." In Miss Amelia's love there is a strong element of pity. Maybe, because her own abnormality affords her special insight into his predicament. Herself a freak, she feels for him the same kind of affinity that Singer feels for Antonapoulos and that Biff, to a lesser degree, feels for Mick in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter. The same mixture of love and pity is also found in the relationship between Anacleto and Mrs. Langdon in Reflections in a Golden Eye, and between Martin Meadows and Emily in the short story 'A Domestic Dilemma'. However, the beloved dwarf returns her pity with spite and hatred. In McCullers' earlier novels escape from the boredom of loneliness was held out as a possibility, but here in The Ballad of the Sad Café, "the
obstacle is much more serious, so serious as to be infact insurmountable: the beloved hates the lover. This, according to Mrs. McCullers in The Ballad of the Sad Café, is the terrible law of nature that has sentenced man to a life of perpetual solitary confinement. There is no longer even a possibility of escape." McCullers climaxes Lymon's hatred of Miss Amelia in the fighting scene between Miss Amelia and Marvin Macy. Through an adroit use of imagistic language with its symbolic overtones, McCullers transforms the spiteful Lymon into a deadly bird of prey, "Yet at the instant Miss Amelia grasped the throat of Marvin Macy the hunchback sprang forward and sailed through the air as though he had grown hawk wings. He landed on the broad strong back of Miss Amelia and clutched at her neck with his clawed little fingers." The irony lies in the fact that Amelia meets the same fate at the hands of Lymon which she had meted out to Marvin Macy after her marriage with him. Once Marvin Macy, the handsome crook, had nourished a deep and intense love for Miss Amelia, and as a consequence, he had been reformed. But Miss Amelia married him not for love but only for mere companionship. The marriage which lasted only ten days proved to be a total disaster, for on their wedding night itself she repelled Marvin furiously when he tried to make love to her and spent the whole night down in the kitchen, poking up the fire, drinking coffee, smoking her father's pipe and reading
the Farmers Almanac. She finally turned him off the premises altogether; Marvin left the town, became a hardened criminal and at last landed in a penitentiary. She had defied the law of nature and is now visited by nemesis.

However, McCullers does seem to suggest that though it be doomed to failure, the impulse to love is a salutary impulse. The one-sided love, if it is intense, does have a chastening effect on the lover, it refines and sometimes even reforms him. Just as in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, Singer's one-sided love for Antonapoulos achieved for him a modicum of poise and wisdom, in The Ballad of the Sad Café Marvin Macy's love for Miss Amelia in the early part of the story has a brief refining influence on his character; and Miss Amelia's love for Cousin Lymon almost transforms her whole personality. No doubt the changes that come to her personality and behaviour are not lasting but they are valuable while they endure. In the words of Oliver Evans, "some joy exists even in the midst of pain, though it is adulterated by the knowledge that it cannot last (one is reminded of Keats's 'Ode on Melancholy': 'Aye, in the very temple of Delight/Veiled Melancholy has her sovran shrine). The lover realizes this intuitively, with the result that even such temporary escape as he contrives for himself must be imperfect: 'And somehow every lover knows this. He feels in his soul that his love is a solitary thing'. Love paroles man, and the tragedy is that he must return to his cell through no defection of his own."
With an accurate sense of control, proportion and objectivity McCullers wrote what can be conceded as one of the saddest stories in any language — a perfect parable on love. *The Ballad of the Sad Café* began to take shape while McCullers was working at *The Member of the Wedding*. Leaving *The Member of the Wedding* unfinished McCullers went to Yaddo and the new story, a novella was ready in six weeks time. The story like the ballad turned out to be both real as well as universal. It was an area suited to her talents; the alien elemental world of legend and romance. Right at the beginning she strikes a lonesome tone of boredom, "the town is lonesome, sad, and like a place that is far off and estranged from all other places in the world." The town is imaginatively conceived and the characters who inhabit it are in tune with the setting — grotesque and lonely characters. We are introduced to Miss Amelia Evans, a female giant possessing awesome powers. She is a woman with "a face like the terrible dim faces known in dreams — sexless and white, with two grey crossed eyes which are turned inward so sharply that they seem to be exchanging with each other one long and secret gaze of grief." She lives all alone in the largest building in the very centre of the town. This lonely house had not always been so silent; it had originally been a kind of general store controlled by Miss Amelia herself. Evidently McCullers imaginatively conceived this scenario in
order to give an eerie and abnormal orientation to her character. It is not without reason that the villagers believe in her miraculous capacity to cure all diseases, thereby making her appear as a woman out of the ordinary. And she does administer home made magical potions to the sick. In other words, McCullers gives to her character the colouring of strangeness peculiar to romance and ballad literature. Miss Amelia's lonesome existence and irascible temper makes her incapable of striking a healthy human relationship with others. She lives a lonely life, cut off as it were, from the mainstream of the town. Only love, intimate, fullsome love relationship could restore balance and normalcy to her character. Living in this big house, she is more like a fairy-tale-figure quarantined in a castle. She needs a knight-figure to rescue her from this life of boredom and lonesome strangeness.

The knight-figure does appear in the form of Marvin Macy, animated and inspired by love. Although his early youth was shady — he had murdered a man and had carried with him the dried and salted ear of the dead man; he had degraded and shamed many tender and sweet young girls; he turned the corner at the age of twenty-two. It is the sudden spurt of love that transformed the character of Marvin Macy as McCullers puts it, "Then finally, at the age of twenty-two, this Marvin
Macy chose Miss Amelia. That solitary, gangling, queer-eyed girl was the one he longed for. Nor did he want her because of her money, but solely out of love. It is a tribute to McCullers' artistic skill that she explains how Marvin Macy's heart, because of the cruel circumstances of his birth and childhood, had "turned tough as the horns of Satan" until the time, when he loved Miss Amelia. He was one of the seven unwanted children and as such had received no love and affection at all. "The heart of such a child as McCullers puts it may fester and swell until it is a misery to carry within the body, easily chafed and hurt by the most ordinary things." By introducing the element of transformation through love, in the character of Marvin Macy, McCullers wishes to emphasize the primacy of love in building a balanced and healthy character and personality. But there are always two to a love relationship; it can not be a one way traffic. Though even one-sided love, if intense, can exercise a chastening influence on a person. Marvin Macy, the loom-fixer, emerges from the limbo of childhood misery into a young man flushed with longing love for Miss Amelia. Miss Amelia could not look for a better match, the townspeople also hope that just as love had reformed Marvin Macy, it might also reform his bride "At least, they counted on the marriage to tone down Miss Amelia's temper, to put a bit of bride-fat on her, and to change her at last into a calculable woman." This is what actually happens in fairy tale and romance literature.
but McCullers gives it an ironic orientation, in order to underscore the illusory nature of such facile conclusions. She knows that in actual living an intimate love relationship is hard to come by. In this particular instance, the intense love passion of Marvin Macy fails to evoke a matching response from Amelia. Their marriage proves a fiasco, she refuses to consummate sex with him. The bridal pair fell out, Miss Amelia hated him so that while he was trying to enter into a dialogue with her, "she had swung once with her fist and hit his face so hard that he was thrown back against the wall and one of his front teeth was broken." This reversal of the role of a fairy-tale character by McCullers is full of suggestive implications. The obvious one is that love relationship is not so easy to forge as it is made out to appear in a fairy-tale, but more importantly as McCullers herself puts it, "But though the outward facts of this love are indeed sad and ridiculous, it must be remembered that the real story was that which took place in the soul of the lover himself... the memory of his (Marvin Macy's) passion and his crimes, and the thought of him trapped in his cell in the penitentiary, was like a troubling undertone beneath the happy love of Miss Amelia and the gaiety of the café." Another implication which Miss Amelia does not seem to realize at the moment is that the consequences of her denial of Macy's true love constitutes the defiance of the law of nature which will ultimately recoil on her. This is what gives to McCullers' thematic concern of love a universal stance. It falls into
focus towards the end of the novel, when the hunchback does not respond to her love overtures and instead is gravitationally attracted towards Marvin Macy.

The hunchback dwarf, Cousin Lymon Willis, claiming to be a distant relative — his mother Fanny being half sister to Amelia's mother and he being the son of Fanny through her third husband — visits Amelia and becomes the object of her love. The tubercular and sexually inverted hunchback evokes in Miss Amelia the same intense love that she had evoked in the heart of Marvin Macy. On his arrival at the store, she does not open the store the first day and the townspeople do not catch any glimpse of this strange visitor of Miss Amelia, giving rise to a strong rumor that the hunchback has been done away by Miss Amelia for something that he had in his suitcase. The townspeople who come to investigate this 'death' the next night are shocked to find him alive, cleaned beyond words and decked in "a shawl of lime-green wool, the fringes of which almost touched the floor." Motivated by the utterly new emotion of love that is stirring in her, Miss Amelia invites the crowd that has gathered on the porch to come in the store and with a break from her customary routine lets them drink liquor while sitting in the store itself. Amused by the social chat of the dwarf, and encouraged by the congenial atmosphere of the store, the crowd stays on till midnight and this marks the beginning of the café. For six years all goes well for Miss Amelia.
Changed by love, her whole personality undergoes a radical transformation and she even become sociable — going to revivals, to funerals and so forth and the café, she runs changes too; getting warmer and throbbing with life. Then Marvin Macy returns home and Miss Amelia is perturbed. She is not sure how her life will now be affected with the arrival of Macy. Her intuitive alarm is not false, for the moment Lymon sets his eyes on Marvin Macy he is fascinated by him and becomes his slave following Marvin Macy like a dog wiggling "his large pale ears with marvelous quickness and ease." In order to attract Macy's attention, "He fluttered his eyelids, so that they were like pale, trapped moths in his sockets. He scraped his feet around on the ground, waved his hands about, and finally began doing a trotlike dance," but Marvin Macy shows nothing but contempt for him. The love Lymon has for Marvin Macy becomes an instrument for revenge upon Miss Amelia, for the latter. Night after night the hunchback treats Marvin to her best liquor in the café and finally invites him to live upstairs, giving Marvin his bed room and making Miss Amelia to vacate her room for Lymon. Miss Amelia, unable to bear the thought of being away from Lymon accepts everything meekly, even though she hates the sight of Marvin Macy. Cousin Lymon realizing her emotional dependance on him and her love for him, exploits it to the utmost. He mocks her publicly by imitating her walk while Marvin looks on approvingly. Miss Amelia resorts to various unsuccessful means (setting a lethal trap for him in the swamp, poisoning his food) to get rid of Marvin, while the hatred
between the two keeps on increasing, leading to a grim fight that ultimately takes place on the Ground Hog Day. The whole town, aware of the tension that has been building between Miss Amelia and Marvin Macy is a witness to the fight. Miss Amelia is the obvious winner, but just when she has thrown Marvin down and is about to throttle him, Lymon sails through the air and landing on Miss Amelia's back forces her to let go Marvin:

Yet at the instant Miss Amelia grasped the throat of Marvin Macy the hunchback sprang forward and sailed through the air as though he had grown hawk wings. He landed on the broad strong back of Miss Amelia and clutched at her neck with his clawed little fingers... Miss Amelia was beaten before the crowd could come to their senses. Because of the hunchback the fight was won by Marvin Macy, and at the end Miss Amelia lay sprawled on the floor, her arms flung outward and motionless. Marvin Macy stood over her, his face somewhat popeyed, but smiling his old half-mouthed smile.

After the fight is over and Miss Amelia defeated, Lymon and Marvin disappear but not before they have wrecked the café, destroyed the still by running the cooler and the condenser, burnt the shack itself, and stolen her personal belongings. They even leave a dish of Miss Amelia's favorite food seasoned with plenty of poison on the café counter hoping to kill her. Miss Amelia, left alone and lonely waits for three years for Lymon to return, turning slowly into a gray-haired, thin, bitter and sharp tongued maid and with her eyes reflecting
the loneliness within her: "And those gray eyes — slowly day by day they were more crossed, and it was as though they sought each other out to exchange a little glance of grief and lonely recognition." In the fourth year she hires a carpenter and closes the premises to become a complete recluse. The Ballad of the Sad Café ends on the same sad, lonely note with which it had started, "yes, says McCullers the town is dreary. On August afternoons the road is empty, white with dust, and the sky above is bright as glass. Nothing moves — there are no children's voices, only the hum of the mill.... The soul rots with boredom. You might as well go and listen to the chain gang." 

III

The Ballad of the Sad Café is an artfully patterned parable on love: it dramatizes the wayward nature of human passion and the irreconcilable devonism inherent in every love relationship. In this peculiarly devised pattern every lover longs to break free from the constrictive prison of the ego and connect with another person, in this he becomes the archetypal figure of a dreamer romantic idealist, a questor, but since he is given to image building he easily becomes a subject to rebuff and betrayal by the beloved. As described by
William Butler Yeats in his poem 'Prayer for My Daughter', how sometimes beautiful women eat a 'crazy salad with their meat' in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* McCullers shows how each one of the main characters does eat a crazy salad. The result is that love, instead of fructifying into a meaningful relationship, leads the lover to dark despair. Each one of the characters is thrown back to exacerbating loneliness and destruction. Love, in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* embarks the characters on a familiar journey of initiation, raising a spark of hope founded on misplaced idealism and ending in the despair of disillusionment.

The symbolic manipulation of the theme lends to the story richness of texture and invests it with universal suggestive implications. The epilogue significantly titled 'The Twelve Mortal Men' is richly symbolic. The song of the chain gang is centrally relevant to *The Ballad of the Sad Café*: The work of the twelve mortal men is hard work, and there is no escape from it as they are chained at the ankle. But while they work, they sing; the singing implies their sense of community, their attempt to dissolve their individual identities. This music is significant also, because it provides them an escape from the boredom of hard work to which they are fated. It signifies a momentary triumph over their fate. At the level of paradox and irony it signifies what Thomas Hardy has metaphorically described in his novel.
The Mayor of Casterbridge, 'happiness is an occasional episode in the general drama of pain'. These twelve mortal men, seven of them black and five of them white boys, represent as it were all mankind. They are prisoners of life because they cannot escape the fate of spiritual isolation and yet their singing together helps them overcome their fate. This is a remarkable evocative imaging of human togetherness with which to hound back the hands of fate.

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 sound 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.

But this music is both somber and joyful - that is like love that is mixed with despair. The song of the chain gang, graphically articulates the symbolic meaning of The Ballad of the Sad Café. The Café like-wise serves as a microcosm where an elemental allegorical drama of love and hate is enacted and like the music of the chain-gang, it is meant to serve as a place of good cheer for the townspeople, a kind of bulwark against the inscrutable hostile forces of the irrational
operative in the life of man.

For the atmosphere of a proper café implies these qualities: fellowship, the satisfactions of the belly, and a certain gaiety and grace of behaviour. This had never been told to the gathering in Miss Amelia's store that night but they knew it of themselves, although never, of course, until that time had there been a Café in the town.

The Café is the one place where people could acquire a sense of togetherness but paradoxically this also proves illusory and elusive, as McCullers indicates. It is a tragic viewing of life, where all attempts at forging love relationships end in a fiasco and nothingness. The absurdity of love lies in the unbridgeable gulf in the insatiable hunger to connect with the other and the impossibility of achieving any meaningful communication. As Oliver Evans puts it, "the café in Mrs. McCullers novella serves, in this respect, exactly the same function that it does in Hemingway's well known short story, 'A Clean Well-Lighted Place', as a fortress against loneliness and disorder, symbolized in both stories by the darkness outside."

As symbolically suggestive of Agape, the café in The Ballad of the Sad Café assumes an added significance. The failure of Eros is at times more than compensated by the fulfilment of Agape, because on failure in personal love-
relationship one can find consolation and comfort in forging communal fellowship with others like the gangmen do when they sing. That is how an individual can sublimate his Eros and achieve a partial triumph over his individual fate. But in the story even the Café fails to materialize this. The tragedy of The Ballad of the Sad Café lies in this that the café does not become the focal point of communal harmony.

Of the minor symbols, the most striking is the acorn which Miss Amelia picked up on the day her father died. Significantly she has kept it together with her kidney stones, in a glass door cabinet, "the large acorn, was precious to her — but when she looked at it her face was always saddened and perplexed." The acorn like the egg in Sherwood Anderson's famous story symbolizes the vital principle, the source of all life and vivacity. The reason why Miss Amelia keeps it in a glass door cabinet is evocatively suggestive of her denial of the vital principle as Oliver Evans puts it, "her sadness and perplexity are caused by the realization of her failure to accept the vital principle and the moment is analogous to that in Anderson's story, in which the lunchroom proprietor, unable to perform the trick of forcing the egg through the neck of a bottle (symbolizing his inability to master life), throws it angrily at his customer and goes upstairs to weep in his wife's lap." Similarly,
in *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* Miss Amelia refuses to consummate sex with Marvin Macy after her marriage. This is indicative of her deeply ingrained though irrational fright of life's vital need. Her unnatural fixation with the hunchback is another pointer in this direction. She wants love relationship and yet when the opportunity offers itself, she spurns it; scoffing at the substance she chases the shadow. The reader knows that the hunchback is incapable of gratifying her desire and yet she fondly does all she can to woo him. For this transgression of the natural urge she is met with nemesis. Denial of the vital principle leads but to lonesomeness and tragedy. On the fateful day of the fight between Miss Amelia and Marvin Macy, McCullers in order to give the story the authentic atmosphere of the macabre happening, manipulates certain elements of the supernatural with symbolic overtones. "A hawk with a bloody breast flew over the town and circled twice around the property of Miss Amelia.... It was plain from her white stiff face what a torment it was for her to be lying still and doing nothing, but she lay there quiet as a corpse with her eyes closed and her hands crossed on her chest." Evidently, these ominous portents signify a tragic end. However, it is in *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* "that Mrs. McCullers' achievement is seen at its most intense... it is condensed and brilliant writing, which carries the reader along so easily on the wave of the story that he may not at first be aware how completely he has been saturated with symbolism."
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Margaret B. McDowell, *Carson McCullers*, p. 70.


4 Oliver Evans, *Carson McCullers — Her Life and Work*, p. 143.


6 Margaret B. McDowell, *op.cit.*, p. 72.


10 Ibid., p. 27.

11 Oliver Evans, *op.cit.*, p. 130.

12 Ibid., p. 131.
13. Ibid.
17. Ibid., pp. 3-4.
18. Ibid., p. 28.
19. Ibid., p. 29.
20. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 32.
23. Ibid., p. 34.
24. Ibid., p. 18.
25. Ibid., p. 49.
26. Ibid., pp. 49-50.
27. Ibid., p. 68.
28. Ibid., p. 70.
29. Ibid., pp. 70-71.
30 Ibid., pp.71-72.
31 Ibid., p.23.
32 Oliver Evans, op.cit., p.134.
33 Carson McCullers, The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories, p. 36.
34 Oliver Evans, op.cit., p.135.
35 Carson McCullers, The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories, p.63.