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THE RETURN OF THE MOTHER-FIGURE IN CARSON MCCULLERS' *THE BALLAD OF THE SAD CAFÉ*

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Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café* is a mysterious novella depicting the clash between masculinity and femininity and their strife for dominance in a southern patriarchal society. In the midst of this quarrel, the arrival of the effeminate Cousin Lymon to the town marks the emergence of a new atmosphere. Since the *Ballad* is similar to many American literary works which delineate the father-figure as either absent or weak, and with reference to Gilles Deleuze's vitalist-inspired philosophy, this article aims to argue that the arrival of Lymon to the town is reminiscent of the return of the mother-figure, which entails creativity and birth. With Lymon's becoming-woman, an immense change pervades the town and Miss Amelia's café; however, as the society of brothers is always under the threat of the return on the part of the father figure, with Marvin Macy's return from the penitentiary, a block of becoming barricades any further flourish of brotherhood, and sanguinity gives its place to annihilation. Here, once the banner of becoming-woman, Lymon grabs this opportunity to conspire with the father-figure in order to break the fixity of the café and guarantee his nomadic flow.

Keywords: Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, the mother-figure, becoming-woman, Gilles Deleuze, the father-figure.

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Introduction

You don't have to be learned, to know or
be familiar with a particular area, but to pick up
this or that in areas which are very different.
(Gilles Deleuze, Dialogues II)

The fiction of Carson McCullers is a tremendous site for the appearance of the most mysterious and enigmatic incidents and characters, and this is quite visible in her novels *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) and *The Member of the Wedding* (1946). What we witness in these two works of fiction is McCullers' attempt at providing us with characters who, apart from their loneliness, isolation, freakishness, and eccentricities, stand up magnificently to the patriarchal society of the American south by energetically breaking down the fixities and norms it required its subjects to submit to. Accordingly, her output includes tomboys, revolutionaries, idealists, and outcasts who more or less attempt to cope with their positions in their societies. In the same vein, McCullers maintains her stance in her last novella *The Ballad of the Sad Café*¹ (1951) which is a magnificent locale for the battle between masculinity and femininity. Here, a proponent of masculine virility, Marvin Macy, who has been brought up unparented, takes an interest in Amelia's manly disposition and decides to ask for her hand. Having ruined many decent girls of the town and failed his ten-day marriage with Amelia, Macy's movement toward ultimate dominance calls for his demolishing of her. Thus, he has to come up with a solution other than love and consummation during a time when Amelia is the most indefatigable. As Broughton asserts, Amelia's wearing of men's clothes or her physical strength do not merely indicate her as a man; Amelia is a man "simply because of her insatiable need to dominate" (2005, p. 27). With Macy's imprisonment, Amelia's dream is fulfilled and her masculine power perseveres, leaving the town with the stability of masculine empowerment. The arrival of Cousin Lymon, however, disarms Amelia, and, with this, the atmosphere of friendship pervades the town as well as her café.

The characters of Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon have been the foci of the readings related to the *Ballad*. Many McCullers scholars, including Carlton and Gleeson-White, have focused on the issues of androgyny, hybridity, gender, and sexuality, especially in Amelia's character. More in relation to our concern, other scholars including Paulson, Broughton, and Fowler have proposed explanations for Lymon's unexpected arrival and the context of the town preceded by his arrival. For instance, Broughton justly describes Macy and his society as "in flight from the femininity" (2005, p. 27) before the arrival of Lymon. Paulson notes that the culture in the *Ballad* is dominated by men and that this has led to "the murder of the feminine" (1996, p. 188). Similarly, Fowler proposes that "a rejection of the feminine, identified with the maternal, characterizes . . . the world of McCullers's *Ballad* before Lymon's arrival" (2010, p. 261). Furthermore, admiring McCullers' prowess, Westling notes

that in the *Ballad* “all the characters who have speaking parts are males, except for Miss Amelia, who never betrays even a hint of conventionally feminine behavior” (2005, p. 48).

With regard to the short introduction provided above, the present article seeks to provide a novel reading of McCullers’ *Ballad*, particularly one which addresses Lymon’s arrival at the town and the flourish which is followed. Considering the available critical views regarding McCullers’ novella, the authors believe that it is possible to take on board some overlooked angles of McCullers’ *Ballad* through the vitalist-inspired philosophy of Gilles Deleuze². Accordingly, it is going to be argued that although the available readings of the story as well as the views on it mostly render the characters of the *Ballad* as hopeless and eccentric, we may focus upon the positive dynamics of the story. Therefore, this article may be in line with Gleeson-White’s line of thought: “McCullers’s freaks are not exclusively symbolic of the alienating . . . human condition” (2003, p. 3). Thus argued, a reconsideration of the story seems urgent; in other words, with regard to Lymon’s physical attributes and his manners, it is going to be argued that his very arrival, aside from putting at stake the norms and fixities of this society, reverberates a new atmosphere which is compatible with renewal related to femininity and motherhood. It is in this way that, before the return of the father figure, Lymon transforms the atmosphere of the café as well as the town and contributes to the creation of the society of brothers. Furthermore, it is going to be asserted that Lymon’s conspiracy with Marvin Macy at the end of the novella is an evidence to his nomadic spirit, as well as his rhizomatic mode of thought and action, in order to establish, break, and move.

Deleuze and literature

Throughout his *oeuvre*, Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) has dealt with many notable works of literature, assuming that literature needs no interpretation or judgment. Assuming such a perspective, rather than reading literature for the sake of hidden meanings, the process in which a literary piece is created and the forces which lead it to a certain goal may become crucial to us. Thus explained, we can see how a character is created and to what extent they conform to the requirements of the society. Deleuze’s interaction with literature starts right here when he maintains in *A Thousand Plateaus* that French literature has always sought “organized voyages” and “salvation only through art,” while it “spends its time plotting points instead of drawing lines” (1987, p. 187). While he contends that the English novel “feels the need to rationalize,” he finds his ideal examples in the American and Russian literature which surpass subjectivity and rationality, with characters who “exist in nothingness, survive only in the void, defy logic and psychology and keep their mystery until the end” (Deleuze, 1998, p. 81). For him, both American novelists and their characters are of significance, and this is evident in his comprehensive analysis of Herman Melville’s short story *Bartleby, the Scrivener* in which he reveals how American literature, especially that of Melville’s,

has created characters who are “without references, without possessions, without properties, without qualities, [and] without particularities.” It is in this way that it leads to the creation of *Bartleby*: “Without past or future, he is instantaneous” (Deleuze, 1998, p. 74).

Deleuze lauds such characters that are never fixed to any systems as they are always on the road toward change, and look for the potentials which are neglected by the majority. He terms the process of grasping these potentials and creation of new possibilities “becoming” which is a fundamental concept in his philosophical *oeuvre*. As Holland stresses, Deleuze’s concept of “becoming” calls to challenge the notions of identity and being, thus insisting that “difference and becoming should have priority over identity and being” (2013, p. 2). Regarding the notion of becoming, Deleuze repeatedly asserts in his works that becoming has nothing to do with imitation or identification. This means that becoming is in fact “to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferentiation where one can no longer be distinguished from *a* woman, *an* animal, or *a* molecule” (Deleuze, 1998, p. 1).

Since Deleuzian philosophy favors becoming over being, it takes a becoming body as always on the move in order to produce new possibilities. Admittedly, this is related to the notion of desire which has its exclusive meaning in Deleuze’s philosophy. As such, one can experiment with anything by becoming, meaning that through seeking new horizons, one can become everything. For Deleuze, Colebrook maintains, each and every becoming “begins with becoming-woman” (2002, p. 135). He believes that even men should become woman; however, attention needs to be paid to the fact that this does not refer to any physical transformation. Instead, by suggesting that becomings are “minoritarian”, Deleuze argues that “[w]omen, regardless of their numbers, are a minority, definable as a state or subset; but they create only by making possible a becoming over which they do not have ownership, into which they themselves must enter; this is a becoming-woman affecting all of humankind, men and women both” (1987, p. 106).

Undoubtedly, the role of paternal function needs more attention in the discussion of becoming woman. In this regard, Deleuze chooses Herman Melville, as a representative of American literature: “many of Melville’s novels begin with paternal images or portraits, and seem to tell the story of an upbringing under a paternal function.” Deleuze maintains that in their stories something mysterious happens, which “abolishes any paternal function” (1998, p. 77), thereby creating subjects who vacillate and are difficult to discern. Similarly, Leverenz argues that American novels “portray fathers who are either weak or dead, and daughters brimming with independent energies” (2003, p. 49). This may bring to mind that the absence of the father-figure is an important factor within American literature and must be accounted for within a literary analysis.

Another question which arises here is related to the originality of these characters. In his discussions regarding the “original” and the “true original” characters, Deleuze suggests that the originals are the remarkable ones with particularities. These characters

are called originals because they are “influenced by their milieu and by each other, so that their actions and reactions are governed by general laws” (1998, p. 82). Thus, this label truly reflects their submissiveness. However, this is not the case with the true originals who have no particularities or specific traits, and in Deleuze’s view, *Bartleby* belongs to this party. In Deleuzian terms, true originals “know something inexpressible, live something unfathomable” while “they escape knowledge” (1998, p. 83). Based on what Deleuze argues, it is understood that the conflict between these two groups is incessant since the originals or the “prophets” deem themselves as vouchsafed with reason and try to rationalize their actions through logic, while the true originals, besides escaping common sense and generalities, constantly change in order to become “indiscernible.”

Holland believes that Deleuze’s philosophy does not intend to answer the question of “what is it?” or the ones aiming to find the essence of things; rather, he aims to answer open-endedly the question of “what can become of it?” or “how it becomes?” (2013, p. 54). This mode of thought which cares not about ontology and its promotion of identity and being, praises difference over identity and becoming over being. Deleuze embraces a philosophy of becoming which disseminates nomadic thought which does not necessarily refer to any act of movement or physical travelling. Rather, it is a lifestyle which does not rely on any organization. Colebrook believes that while “free [ing our] thought from a fixed point of view or position of judgement, . . . [nomadic thought] allows thought to wander, to move beyond any recognized ground or home, to create new territories” (2002, p. xxii). It is in this way that we can detach ourselves from home and enter new territories by moving and passing from fixities through our thoughts.

Deleuze tends to view life and substances as assemblages and lines which “are distinguished solely by movement and rest, slowness and speed” (1987, p. 254). These lines are anathema to the western thought which relates “expressions and actions to exterior or transcendent ends, instead of evaluating them on a plane of consistency on the basis of their intrinsic value” (1987, p. 22). Accordingly, based on the classifications offered by Lorraine about the “molar,” “molecular,” and “lines of flight” which reside within every assemblage, a literary critic is seemingly obliged to trace the lines and forces within a literary work in order to track the way they move and connect, rather than what they are or what their origins are. As Lorraine explicates, the molar line tends to create “a binary, arborescent system of segments,” while the molecular line tends to be “more fluid although still segmentary”. In the end, the line of flight “ruptures the other two lines” (2005, p. 145). The significant point is that the clash between these lines is continuous and eventually results in constant de and re-territorializations.

The movements and conflicts of the above-mentioned lines are the result of what Deleuze calls “desire.” It should be mentioned again that desire in Deleuzian sense takes a positive meaning. With this regard, Deleuze assumes: “Do you realize how simple a desire is? Sleeping is a desire. Walking is a desire. Listening to music, or

making music, or writing, are desires” (1987, p. 95). With this definition in mind, it is deduced that desire seeks productive energies, flows, fluxes, and dynamics of life. What is quite fascinating is that thinking of this revolutionary desire gives us a new perspective of life and emancipates our thoughts toward becoming-revolutionary. With this outlook in mind, the notion of subject takes on a new meaning in our argument in this article. The state apparatus calls its people well-behaved as long as they are loyal to its hierarchies, rules, and organizations. In this way, the molar subject will obtain unity and identity within the structure of knowledge. Conversely, the subject in Deleuzian realm is always escaping any sort of identity. By deterritorializing the segmented molar lines in their assemblage, Boundas explains that a Deleuzian subject always undergoes change and construction and enters the process of “subjectivation” (2005, p. 268). Subjectivity in Deleuzian sense is the product of “difference, variation and metamorphosis” (1988, p. 106). This subject, an amalgamation of many selves, is the outcome of positive desire production and resists the capitalistic support of isolation at the cost of receiving identity and individuation.

The absent father-figure

Armengol-Carrera has noticed the “limited use American writers seem to have made of fatherhood as a theme in their fictional works” (2008, p. 211). Relating this to our discussion, the elimination of fatherhood in the *Ballad* could be a locale for deep inspection. This depiction of fatherless characters, or those ignored by their fathers, certainly makes their stories more complicated and, at the same time, gives them a sense of novelty and break with tradition. Knowingly, the figure of the father is wont to reinforce the laws and norms, especially if the mother-figure is absent. This element has been formulated by McCullers in her novella *The Member of the Wedding* with Frankie Addams who is fearful of “her father and the law” (McCullers, 1946, p. 26).

With respect to what has been argued thus far, the question is as to how these fatherless characters in the *Ballad* act and how the absence of the father-figure affects them. All the three main characters appear unusual themselves and have unusual upbringings. Amelia has been raised motherless by a solitary father who used to call her “little,” Cousin Lymon comes from nowhere, is a child of divorce, never mentions her father except the mention that he is “the son of Fanny’s third husband” (McCullers, 1951, p. 8), and claims to be a maternal cousin to Miss Amelia, and Marvin Macy has also been abandoned by her parents and fostered by a landlady. Amelia’s stern character makes her avoid direct communication with people, especially with men, and her sole wish is to establish her dominance and power upon people: “She would involve herself in long and bitter litigation over just a trifle” (McCullers, 1951, p. 5). With this regard, Broughton asserts that it is the masculine which Amelia wants to dominate, while it is wrong “to force one’s shape upon matter, whereas it is feminine to be receptive and malleable” (2005, p. 27). Instead of maintaining her own value and honor, Amelia attempts to look masculine, resulting in her feeling of shame at her

encountering with female complaints of her patients. As the narrator informs us Marvin Macy also has done everything in his power in order to exert his virility and power over the town from which Amelia is no exception. It is possible to argue that through their actions, both Amelia and Macy strive to represent the figure of the father. Without reading the novella to the end, one finds that Macy's masculinity outperforms that of Amelia's counterfeit masculinity. Amelia believes that it is through performing masculine behavior that she can achieve dominance, whereas reality proves otherwise. She tries to replicate the father-figure whose return Deleuze states to be a "real danger" to a "society without fathers" (Deleuze, 1998, p. 88). Both Amelia and Macy, who are the descendants of a patriarchal ancestry, strive to follow in the footsteps of their fathers, which not only brings no fertility to the town, but also uproots any possibility for the emergence of feminine creativity. However, the grounds for change are always possible, and this comes up with the arrival of Cousin Lymon.

The return of the mother-figure

Apart from denigration of psychoanalysis, Deleuze allocates abundant argument to the concept of father as the sign of knowledge and power. His association of the father with "foreignness" and mother with "life" (Deleuze, 1998, p. 17) is close to what we witness in McCullers' *Ballad*. The hunchback Lymon's arrival to the town is a turning point in the story, and his claim that he is a maternal cousin to Amelia never surprises her, since "she claimed kin with no one" (McCullers, 1951, p. 7). In fact, Lymon's temperament conjures the image of mother, which is plainly related to themes of creation and birth. Amelia brags of her father's possessions and smokes with his pipe, while Lymon emphasizes his mother and reveres her picture. The fact is that Lymon is not back in order to trace back an ancestry; instead, he is back in order to shed a new light on the lackluster mindsets of the people including Amelia and Macy in a society in which femininity is being strangled. A "brokeback" as Macy calls him, Lymon resembles an old mother whose broken back evokes a long history of suppression and binarity. As opposed to Fowler who ascribes the role of father to Lymon³ (2010, p. 267), it is argued here that his return exemplifies the return of the mother-figure, which entails femininity and womanhood,⁴ and this gives the tidings that the mother-figure is back. Also, it will be argued that his conspiracy with Macy at the end of the story comes as a result of the stagnancy that pervades the atmosphere of the café.

As it was discussed, within the Deleuzian realm, becoming-woman is the starting point for any kind of becoming. Everybody should become a woman, and women themselves are also included in this process. Through this process, people liberate themselves from the molar binaries of the past and future which tend to restrict feminine energies and potential and ascribe false identities to them. Thus argued, it is no surprise that Lymon's arrival at the town marks the return of the mother-figure and reestablishment of feminine traits, as Fowler stresses: "This rigid cultural repression of the feminine is relaxed, however, when Lymon appears, and Miss Amelia takes him

in" (2010, p. 261). His coming provides the town, especially Miss Amelia's café, with an atmosphere of change and reformation. Having Amelia's fierce personality in their minds, the people of the town are astonished to see that not only does she keep the hunchback in her premises, but she takes him into her confidence and spoils him like a child.

The feminine behavior of Lymon brings him so close to the boundaries of womanhood; his arrival to a town which is viewed by Westling as "a world devoid of feminine qualities" (2005, p. 48), his long-winded and complicated introduction, and his crying all bring to mind feminine behavior. His curiosity and meddling in affairs also make him a busybody who can easily connect or disconnect people in various situations: "He nosed around everywhere, knew the intimate business of everybody, and trespassed every waking hour" (McCullers, 1951, p. 39). The fact is that Lymon's feminine behavior has nothing to do with matters of bisexuality or hermaphroditism. In our reading, we do not take him for any metaphor or symbol related to womanhood, since he is a real man with feminine attributes which drag him so close to the thresholds of femininity. In Deleuzian terms, Lymon's behavior and betrayal help him possess the intensities of womanhood which result in a new appearance. Accordingly, we witness how Lymon's indiscernibility and in-betweenness prepare his milieu with new possibilities and energies which result in amelioration of Amelia and coming-togetherness of people in the café. Now it should be mentioned that Lymon's becoming is not limited to becoming-woman, because this hunchback has the talent to exactly act like a child. As we read in the novella, he "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" (McCullers, 1951, p. 20). Such a figure is always becoming and changing in different milieus while deterritorializing and reterritorializing the molar and molecular lines.

One of Lymon's characteristics distinguishing him from masculinity is his mischief-making, nosiness, or chattering which further reinforce his becoming-woman. The general view about these traits is mostly negative and derogatory since molar identities regard feminine chattering, gossip, or small talk as mean, petty, nasty, and feminized. However, these traits are mere embodiments of feminine nature since, as Jones argues, feminine small talk indicates their "intimate conversations, friendship pacts, secret alliances and petty victories" (qtd. in Stivale, 2005, p. 104). This is exactly what we see in the character of Lymon whose presence in the café instigates change and vitality. Aside from his feminine chattering and gossip, he has the potentiality to create a new atmosphere with new energies, and this fact is confirmed by the narrator who states that besides his nosiness and mischief-making, "it was the hunchback who was most responsible for the popularity of the café" (McCullers, 1951, p. 39). In the Deleuzian realm, this feminine naughtiness intensifies the immanence of everyday life by keeping out its particularities and clichés. These traits might be called illogical or abnormal, but deep down we see how they demolish hierarchies, especially those of burgeon matters of propriety and decorum. It is Lymon's becoming-feminine which

has created molecular lines within the assemblage of the café. His pettiness has resulted in the flourish of the café while it has made it an entirely unpredictable and indiscernible atmosphere, and this is evident in the words of the narrator:

When he walked into the room there was always a quick feeling of tension, because with this busybody about there was never any telling what might descend on you, or what might suddenly be brought to happen in the room. (McCullers, 1951, p. 39)

In Deleuzian terms, the intensities created in this atmosphere are the results of Lymon's becoming-woman, which constantly creates new connections and desires through a movement devoid of pre-established plans. Within the café, different lines, be they molar or molecular, reside together and might de- or re-territorialize one another. Amelia's molar rigidity is deterritorialized by Lymon's molecular gossip, and this results in the reestablishment of free and new energies in the café: "Her manners, however, and her way of life were greatly changed. She still loved a fierce lawsuit, but she was not so quick to cheat her fellow man and to exact cruel payments" (McCullers, 1951, p. 24). The reverse is also possible at the end of the novella, when under some circumstances, Lymon's molecularity reterritorializes itself in his conspiracy with Macy.

The love and attention that Amelia lavishes on Lymon is not an ordinary one since everybody in the town is familiar with Amelia's standards towards men, and this leads to their wondering how she lets the hunchback in. As the narrator informs us, the people of the town deem the relationship of Amelia and Lymon to be sinful, a view which is the result of their molarity and short-sidedness. They seem not to be cognizant of the fact that Lymon's establishment in Amelia's premises is a way more than matters of kinship or pursuit of pleasure, and this ignorance regarding their mysterious relationship leads to a chain of rumors floating the town. With the hunchback's physical impotence and his feminine sensitivity and Amelia's strict behavior and her misandry, deeming their relationship as being encouraged by motives of pleasure or consummation is out of the question.

For Deleuze, the notion of pleasure denotes seeking of physical gratification, which is considered as reterritorialization, while his conception of desire, as opposed to that of psychoanalysis which deems it to be externally organized and a signifier of lack, is a positive and productive flow of forces which are able to connect bodies. According to Ross's suggestion that "Deleuze tries to de-sexualize and de-individualize desire" (2005, p. 64), we find that sexuality is solely one flow among other flows within an assemblage and that it is not the basis for interpreting one's disposition. With this view, we see how the relationship of Amelia and Lymon transcends mere sensualities, and it can be argued that her letting the hunchback in or their withdrawal to her room cannot be construed as perversity. It is this very seclusion which prepares the grounds for the flourish of the café and the spiritual prosperity of the people. As opposed to sexual

intercourse which only reterritorializes the pleasure, the sexless and imperceptible relationship of Amelia and Lymon deterritorializes or destructs the false views of people and creates a new form of energy which is unprecedented in the café.

McCullers' fiction offers new insights and complexities related to the problems of sexuality and gender which in fact go beyond the scope of southern fiction and the limitations it used to exert upon its writers. One notable example which is related to this issue is discernible in her short story *Court in the West Eighties* (1998). As Bell argues, in this short story McCullers presents us with a novel view toward a long-standing perception which "renders man as subject and woman as object of his viewing pleasures" (Bell, 2015, p. 195). What catches our attention in this short story is the female narrator's directly observing her neighbor and her deriving satisfaction from it. Accordingly, this short story envisages an inversion within the western culture and its "sexist male visual practices through presentation of a female voyeur who not only watches the man but objectifies him" (Bell, 2015, p. 200). Juxtaposing the above argument with the context of the *Ballad*, we witness another form of inversion within feminine and masculine relationships presented in this novella. With the return of the mother-figure and Lymon's becoming-woman, a drastic change comes to Amelia, and she is attracted to Lymon to the point which is inconceivable. The people of the town crack the rumor that Amelia has murdered the hunchback; however, it is a great surprise for them to find Amelia serving food for him, rubbing liquor on his body, carrying him on her shoulder, and excessively adoring him. This behavior of hers is more or less similar to that of a courtly lover, with the difference that here the cruel lady has been substituted by the feminine Lymon and the lover with the masculine Amelia. It is probable with this case that we do not see much of the harshness and cruelty which is common in courtly love, but regarding the transformation lines, we find that these lines are not dissimilar to those found in courtly love. Here the masculine Amelia strives to do anything that makes her worthy to the feminine Lymon who is sexless and unfeeling toward her. It should be also mentioned that our concern is not the carnal and physical attraction, either homosexual or heterosexual; rather, what matters is the molar and molecular lines shared by the two lovers. In the same vein, the narrator of the story states that a lover "can be man, woman, child, or indeed any human creature on this earth" (McCullers, 1998, p. 26). Thus explained, McCullers' *Ballad* also exemplifies another form of inversion which leads to the creation of novelty.

The relationship of Amelia and Lymon is extraordinarily bizarre in that their love is not directed toward any sexual acts or consummation, or maybe we witness a kind of postponement on the part of the feminine Lymon. Although Whatling views the individual dynamics of this inversion of male and female roles as "abnormal" (Whatling, 2005, p. 99), this pseudo-courtly love, along with its mystery and complexity, shows a scene of novelty which breaks with tradition. It can also be a significant source for the spiritual growth of people as Deleuze contends that abandoning external pleasure or its postponement is constructive, while it helps one

reach “an achieved state in which desire no longer lacks anything but fills itself and constructs its own field of immanence” (Deleuze, 1987, p. 156). People’s pre-shaped codes regard the relationship of Lymon and Amelia as containing some sexual acts, but this lack of sexual attraction adds up more to the mystery of their relationship and creation of indiscernibility. Lymon and Amelia’s definition of desire is to live together and to create a new kind of happiness, which not only entails no lack or perversity, but also promotes breaking fixations and structures. In this mode, McCullers has created characters who challenge the norms of a southern society. Lymon’s entering the scene and his becoming-woman, along with a creation of an immensely complex relationship which is beyond matters of kinship, partnership, or conjugality, leads to his indiscernibility or unpredictability.

Society of brothers restored

The Ballad of the Sad Café is a work of literature which depicts the shaking of the norms within a totally transcendental and structured culture. It is plain that in this southern town, a person like Amelia is easily spurned, but McCullers has shown how such a manly and strong woman can win the respect of a patriarchal society. More importantly, McCullers’ invention of the hunchback Lymon, whose presence wins the respect of the town and Amelia as well, is extraordinary. Inferring from Deleuze’s discussions, it can be argued that Lymon’s arrival as the figure of mother and his becoming-woman is a restoration of the “society of brothers” (Deleuze, 1998, p. 85). With regard to this, it can be argued that Lymon has arrived in order to create a new form of fraternity which does not require the presence of the father; instead, his arrival has led to the spiritual growth of the town, which upholds friendship among its members and the café. It is through this very friendship and fraternity that the need for the presence of the father-figure is ruled out.

Lymon’s return prepares a ground for the society to start changing through becoming-woman, which results in resisting the false oppressions of the past. If this process goes well, then the members of the society will never talk of fatherhood and the negative remains of the father-figure. As we see in the *Ballad*, with the arrival of Lymon, sisterhood and brotherhood pervade the town, and this creates an atmosphere in which not only drinking liquor causes no “rambunctiousness, indecent giggles, or misbehavior whatsoever” (McCullers, 1951, p. 22), but also the old, greedy rich rascal of the town behaves himself in the café. Now, with regard to Lymon’s becoming-woman which brings change to Amelia as well as the people of the town, it is worth considering McCullers’ essay *The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing* (1985). Here, she aims to delineate the fact that “passionate, Eros love – is inferior to the love of God, to fellowship, to the love of Agape” (McCullers, 1985, p. 281). With this in mind, McCullers’ argument comes closer to Deleuze’s: When man is liberated from the father-function, when a new birth is given to the “man without particularities,” then we have a reunion of this original man with humanity. As a result, we have a society in

which “alliance replaces filiation and the blood pact replaces consanguinity” (Deleuze, 1998, p. 84). This mode of life becomes a passion in Deleuzian thought, and it is way deeper than love. When a community of brothers and sisters becomes indiscernible and annihilates the false fixities, it will experience the love of Agape, the communal love, or the fraternal love.

Nonetheless, regarding the aforementioned concepts and arguments, we cannot generalize about the fact that fraternity is always at hand and possible. The society of brothers has its own shortcomings, and Deleuze warns us against them: “The society of brothers is very dejected, unstable, and dangerous. It must prepare the way for the rediscovery of an equivalent to paternal authority” (1983, p. 80). A society which has abandoned the figure of father as the authority, knowledge, or center is always under the threat of his diabolical return. With the return of the father, the possibility for becoming is blocked, and “the sons without fathers start dying off again” (Deleuze, 1998, p. 88). While Amelia’s café is unprecedentedly experiencing its best times of affiliation of diverse attitudes, a block of becoming emerges. With Lymon’s becoming-woman, the grounds for a widespread and continual becoming would have become possible in the town. However, with the return of the father-figure, the molar lines overpower the molecular ones. Macy’s return from penitentiary may be regarded as the return of the father-figure which results in reterritorialization of the patriarchal regime. As Gleeson-White writes, “Macy resembles the hyper-masculine image of the cowboy ‘in a red shirt, and a wide belt of tooled leather; he carried a tin suitcase and a guitar’” (2003, p. 81). The return of the father-figure is in fact the return of the patriarchal mode of thought which had long paralyzed the process of becoming in the town. As we witness in the story, the café owes its flourish to the becoming-woman of Lymon who by creating molar lines has prompted a new atmosphere of change, fraternity, and friendship. However, as it is seen, this fraternity gives in to the threat of the reterritorializing regimes.

It is in the midst of this unprecedented flourish that Macy is freed from the penitentiary and returns to the city. The buoyancy of the café certainly makes it more difficult for Macy to seek revenge for his unconsummated marriage to Amelia; therefore, he finds a way in order to commit his crime and that is through entering and intermingling with the community of brothers: “Every night Marvin Macy came to the café and settled himself at the best and largest table” (McCullers, 1951, p. 56). Here, again it is the power of masculinity or the father-function which takes its toll on becoming. It was this paternal authority which made Melville’s *Bartleby* let himself die in a prison and in this case, Lymon and Amelia are no exception. From the very moment Lymon and Macy encounter and stare at each other, they share a specific look: “it was not the look of two strangers meeting for the first time” (McCullers, 1951, p. 46). This shows that the mother-figure is painfully familiar with the father who has been long engaged in suppression of fluidity and becoming.

With Macy’s return, soon the café is closed, and misfortune and violence pervade the town. The truth is that the lines of deterritorialization do not always succeed and are

reterritorialized within some circumstances. At times, the molecular becoming must surrender and give way to molar lines. Therefore, we see that Macy's position takes the upper hand and fascinates the feminine Lymon, and this leads to his conspiracy with Macy in repudiating Amelia. What grasps our attention is that it is the feminine Lymon himself that prepares the ground for the fight between Amelia and Macy while he stands watching. With Lymon's complicity with Macy and their occupation of the café, masculinity is restored again; this very fight becomes the fight between two powers to prove their masculinity and maintain their authority. It is surprising that the molarity of Macy is so overwhelming that Lymon, once the banner of becoming-woman, becomes an important element in the succession of the father-figure. That Lymon awaits an opportunity to shatter the stagnation fixated on his life is quite credible: "The hunchback stood leaning against the banister of the porch, looking down the empty road as though hoping that someone would come along" (McCullers, 1951, p. 41). For him, who is wont to be on the road, it is necessary to grab any opportunity in order to maintain his fluidity. Here, Gleeson-White's comment on McCullers' fiction may be quite creditable: "McCullers provides a portrait of human activity considered as an unfolding of possibility, even if at times such a process may be painful and subject to compromise" (2003, p. 121). Accordingly, what is quite ingenuous on the part of Lymon is that he finds the situation ripe to curry favor and finally form a pact with the father-figure in order to shatter the fixedness which pervades the café years after his arrival:

Cousin Lymon had a very peculiar accomplishment, which he used whenever he wished to ingratiate himself with someone... This trick he always used when he wanted to get something special out of Miss Amelia, and to her it was irresistible... but it was not Miss Amelia at whom he was looking this time. The hunchback was smiling at Marvin Macy with an entreaty that was near to desperation. (McCullers, 1951, p. 49)

Lymon is a character who experiences becoming, and he who steps on this road does not care what comes up at the end and only looks for the thresholds and lines of indiscernibility. What is of importance for him is to betray and depart from fixities. In Deleuzian philosophy, a "body without organs" never belongs to any particular system and is constantly escaping. This is also the case with Lymon who finds out that his establishment in the community has turned into stability and stagnation. Thus, through becoming-woman he turns into a nomadic subject who defies being and does not care about his past and future, because he is not looking for any origins or memories; what matters for him is to be innuendo of identity. For instance, at his arrival to the town, Lymon is asked about where he comes from, to which he responds: "I was travelling" (McCullers, 1951, p. 8). Thus, we can say that he is a true original, because he has no particularity, no determinate form or image, no place of birth, and no certain age. For

sure, this mode of thought requires an escape which is of course positive. Lymon might flee the town, but this is a flight from a fixed situation which is falling into a decline. This mode of escape does not signify lack of will or renunciation of action, but as Deleuze quotes from George Jackson: "I may be running, but I'm looking for a gun as I go" (1987, p. 204). This search for weapon may take one to any place, and Lymon, who has no past or future, keeps moving on this road without seeking any destination or salvation in order to revitalize his continuity and flow.

Conclusion

The Ballad of the Sad Cafe is a mysterious and enigmatic novella in which Carson McCullers depicts the playground for the battle between the figures of father and mother and their strife for dominance. With the arrival of Cousin Lymon in the town, the people experience a great change to which even the manly Miss Amelia surrenders. Both Lymon's physique and behavior bring to mind the image of mother which entails creation, birth, and fraternity. This novella is another example in the canon of American literature in which the father-figure is absent. Now, Lymon's feminine traits including gossip, chitchat, and mischief-making and the flourish that he bestows on the town and the café exemplify a return of the mother-figure and his coming to the threshold of femininity. In this way, Lymon the man experiments with becoming-woman and femininity, which is not influenced by the principles of patriarchy.

What we witness through the relationship of Amelia and Lymon and their private affairs in her premises proves that they are not in pursuit of physical pleasure due to Amelia's hatred of men and Lymon's impotence. Since mere sexual pleasure breeds only reterritorializations, the pseudo-courtly love of Amelia and Lymon is not about sensual pleasure. In fact, they create a new form of relationship which is unrivaled in the town and leads to the creation of new energies and intensities. Lymon's becoming-woman leads to his indiscernibility, but this does not linger much after the arrival of Marvin Macy who represents the figure of father. Based on Deleuze's ideas, the society of brothers is always under the threat of a return on the part of the father-figure who tends to restore the patriarchal system. With Macy's return, a block of becoming appears and the creative atmosphere of the café gives place to destruction. However, Lymon considers this situation as an opportunity to break the fixation his stay has brought to the café after years of staying to conspire with the father-figure and set food on the road of nomadic life once again.

Finally, the depiction of such complexity and intricacy regarding the characters in the *Ballad* reveals the proficiency on the part of Carson McCullers who aside from her personal grotesqueness, has successfully created a fictional work which goes beyond matters of normalcy, logic, and reason while promoting a profound sense of life, continuity, and vitality.

Notes

1. McCullers wrote the *Ballad* in six months in 1943 and published it in *Harper's Bazaar*, while she interrupted the writing of *The Member of the Wedding* (1943). *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Works* was published by *Mariner Books* in 1951.

2. Deleuze's ruminations on philosophy have led to the coinage of a vast number of concepts of which only few have been chosen for our purpose in this article. So needless to say, this limited introduction to his philosophy cannot do merit to all aspects of his thought.

3. It should be mentioned that Fowler herself is critical of the *Ballad's* culture which tends to reject femininity before the arrival of Lymon. However, she maintains through her Lacanian perspective that in his conspiracy with Macy at the end of the novella, Lymon assumes the role of father to symbolically copulate with the mother (Amelia) and to disempower her (2010, p. 267).

4. Our article on the *Ballad* is by no means directed toward any endeavor for women rights. Our concern here is to trace the lines, either molar or molecular, and analyze how a literary piece might lead to break of fixities, without being subjected to the images offered by women or men studies.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflict of interests in this research.

Ethical standards

The author affirms this research does not involve human subjects.

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ՄՈՐ ԿԵՐՊԱՐԻ ՎԵՐԱԴԱՐՁԸ ՔԱՐՍՈՆ ՄԱՔՔԱԼԵՐՍԻ
«ՏԽՈՒՐ ՍՐՃԱՐԱՆԻ ԲԱԼԼԱԴԸ» ՆՈՎԵԼՈՒՄ

Մոհամմադ Հոսեյն Մահդավի Նեջհադ
Ղիասուդդին Ալիզադե
Օմիդ Ամանի

Կարսոն Մաքքալերսի «Տխուր սրճարանի բալլադը» առեղծվածային նովել է, որում պատկերված է առնականության և կանացիության բախումը և հարավային նահապետական հասարակության մեջ այդ երկու սեռերի պայքարը գերակայության համար: Քաղաք է ժամանում կնամարդի Ջարմիկ Լայմոնը, ինչը նոր հնչեղություն է հաղորդում այս հակամարտությանը: Ինչպես մի շարք ամերիկյան գրական ստեղծագործություններում «Բալլադ»-ում նույնպես հոր/տղամարդու կերպարը ուրվագծվում է որպես բացակայող կամ թույլ: Սույն հոդվածում, ելակետային համարելով Ժիլ Դրյոզի կենսաբանական գաղափարներով ոգեշնչված փիլիսոփայությունը, նպատակ ունենք պնդելու, որ Լայմոնի ժամանումը քաղաք հիշեցնում է մոր/կնոջ կերպարի վերադարձ, ինչն էլ իր հերթին ենթադրում է ստեղծագործություն և ծնունդ: Լայմոնի կնաբարո կերպարի զարգացմանը զուգահեռ հսկայական փոփոխություն է ներթափանցում քաղաք և օրիորդ Ամելիայի սրճարանը: Սակայն, քանի որ եղբայրների հասարակությունը միշտ գտնվում է հոր/տղամարդու կերպարի վերադարձի սպառնալիքի տակ, Մարվին Մեյսիի վերադարձը բանտից մի յուրատեսակ պատնեշ է դառնում եղբայրության հետագա բարգավաճման համար, և լավատեսությունն ու հույսը իրենց տեղը զիջում են կործանմանը: Ահա այստեղ է, որ նախկինում կանացիության ջատագով և նաև այն կրող Լայմոնը, առիթից օգտվելով դավադրություն է ծրագրում հոր/տղամարդու կերպարի հետ և քանդում սրճարանը, այսպիսով հաստատելով քոչվորի իր էությունը:

Բանալի բառեր՝ Կարսոն Մաքքալերս, «Տխուր սրճարանի բալլադը», մոր/կնոջ կերպար, Ժիլ Դրյոզ, հոր/տղամարդու կերպար: