

**Творческие работы победителей Открытого республиканского
конкурса эссе на английском языке “Insightful Writing” для студентов**

Зинченко Алина Сергеевна

ГОУ ВПО «ДОННУ»

Факультет иностранных языков, 4 курс

I have never liked essays that begin with an introduction, where it is written about how interesting the book or story is. However, today I think, it is necessary to start with this. This story is about the depth of human feelings in which you can begin to drown, as if being in the middle of the ocean. Carson McCullers created a work that you need to feel and see something more than just a drunk man in a bar. In my opinion, women write incredibly beautifully about love.

When I read the title of the story “A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud.”, I couldn't even imagine what the story would be about. The events take place in a café where a paper boy turns up late at night and meets an old man. First of all, I would like to speak about this man, he sits in the corner, hunched over a beer mug. He is quite rueful and suddenly he sees a boy, entering the café and it makes him cheer up.

“He had brought his face out of the beer mug and he seemed suddenly very happy.”

Why does some stranger arouse such emotions in him? Perhaps, he reminds him of someone, perhaps because of his small age, he wants to share his experience with him. We can only suppose. Then he calls the boy to him, saying “Son”. For a second, it seems to us that this is a meeting of father and son, but it is not so. We understand it from the reply “Yeah Mister?”. To my mind, we can mention them in such way in our discussion, because it is quite symbolic. These two words reflects their relations. The old man confesses his love to the boy, as to his own son, and shares his experience with him. Nevertheless, the boy treats him just like a stranger.

Besides, I would like to draw your attention to one more important character. It is Leo, who is an owner of a café. It can seem that he is just a minor character but I think otherwise. He does not have many replicas, but he puts emphasis on various details. Let's trace them together.

“Some night you'll go to sleep with your big nose in a mug and drown”

This line is one of my favorites for the whole story. I will explain. For the great majority of people, the beer mug is part of the image of a drunkard, but let's pay attention to its real role in the story. As far as I am concerned, it is a metaphorical detail. For the first time, when our attention is drawn to this mug, it is filled to the brim. The beer here represents his sadness. During the time spent in a café, he sips from a mug only one time, when talks about his grief. This detail shows how much he drowns in his feelings. He no longer drinks from it, because he does not feel better and his sadness does not decrease. Mister is absolutely not a drunkard, and there is even a moment when beer disgusts him.

"The man leaned down and tilted his mug to take a sip of beer. But as he hovered over the mug his nostrils fluttered slightly; he sniffed the staleness of the beer and did not drink."

This paragraph confirms that such image is deceptive.

At this point in my essay, I would like to divide the story into layers. Firstly, it's necessary to state that according to its genre, it is story within the story, so there are two layers, namely, love story of mister and his wife, and the second is his confession in the café. Divided into layers, we can trace internal and external conflicts. External conflict is connected with his wife; we can easily see their confrontation. Man is absolutely happy and radiates love, not noticing that his wife no longer shares his feeling. The love that lights up in 3 days, also

quickly goes out. So she meets another man and leaves her husband. The internal conflict is related to his feelings and fighting with them. He tries not to drown in this sorrow.

"I was a sick mortal. It was like smallpox. I confess, Son, that I boozed. I fornicated. I committed any sin that suddenly appealed to me. I am loath to confess it but I will do so. When I recall that period it is all curdled in my mind, it was so terrible."

Mister admits that he used to suppress pain by various sins, but this day he sits with the mug full of beer and shows no interest to it.

We talk a lot about mister, his feelings and apathy. However, what does make such a hole in his soul? It is definitely love. Only a woman, who has nothing to hold on to, can break men's heart so much, she leaves a bitter aftertaste after her departure, but fills a person with life. I haven't met such women yet, but, however, in books they are one of the most frequent characters. Mister's wife has not so long description in the story, but we can judge by her actions and feeling, which she evokes in her husband, creating her image in our heads.

“When I laid myself down on a bed and tried to think about her my mind became a blank. I couldn’t see her. I would take out her pictures and look. No good. Nothing doing. A blank. Can you imagine it?”

He doesn't remember how she looks like, but he remembers how he feels thanks to her. He tries to see her image, but all to no avail. Perhaps, it will become a lifeline or destroy him completely. Their passion breaks out suddenly, they get married being familiar with each other for three days. This marriage lasts for almost two years.

The description of the love is expressed here with incredible beauty and abundance of stylistic devices. We can notice it even in three lines:

“And this woman was something like an assembly line for my soul. I run these little pieces of myself through her and I come out complete.”

“Love is a curious thing to begin with. It was a kind of mania.”

Moreover, we need to confess that the favorite stylistic device of Carson McCullers is comparison. She uses it to make us feel the same, that main character feels. This does not just add beauty to speech, but leaves a residue after reading. I need to state that comparison is the most preferable by the author but not the only device. We also can trace the use of antonomasia: *“You draggletailed old Romeo!”* By this line, Leo expresses sarcasm or even a kind of taunt. Here the owner of the café again places accents in the dialogue between the boy and the old man. He emphasizes the pejorative position of the old man by such mockery.

Then, I would like to return to the mystery of the title of this story. To some extent, the mystery of the title is revealed at the end of the story.

“Son, do you know how love should be begun?”

The boy sat small and listening and still. Slowly he shook his head. The old man leaned closer and whispered:

“A tree. A rock. A cloud.”

However, the author does not explain the meaning of these words, so we can just suppose. Perhaps, with these words, the writer wants to say that first you need to love everything around you: trees, rocks, clouds and only then love another person. But what can I say about love in my 20s? It is likely that these three words are not chosen by chance. Mister very often says that love is a science, but I believe that love is work. Maybe these words should be understood in a different way, but I'll tell you how I understand them.

A tree – this is a symbol of life. The life that love gives, it fills to the brim and makes a person kinder. Having fallen in love with a tree, we begin to appreciate life.

A rock is a symbol of something heavy. Falling in love with the stone, we begin to accept all the hardships of life with comprehension. Also, to receive not only the happiness that love gives, but also the disorders that we sometimes find.

A cloud represents inaccessibility, like tender feelings of love, that you always need to reach out, even if it seems something far away.

In conclusion, I would like to say that this is an incredibly beautiful and profound work. This is not a story that you read and forget, you think about it for some time after reading. It leaves a lot unsaid. The author leaves food for the mind in order to draw conclusions from this situation independently. We still don't understand why mister choose this particular boy to talk to. We do not understand why the emphasis is on the fact that exactly twelve years ago the main character meets his wife and this boy is twelve years old. Carson McCullers leaves us alone with our guesses. I will definitely re-read this story in a few years in order to draw conclusions through the prism of a new life experience.

Беляева Ирина Олеговна

ГОУ ВПО «ДОННУ»

Факультет иностранных языков, 4 курс

One of the characteristics of literary works in English is the authors' fondness for writing vivid psychological stories that do not let the reader out of their captivity even after reading. Those stories that are with an impeccable moral lesson at the end for the readers. Carson McCullers' short story 'A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud.' written in 1942 is a masterpiece which can be counted among such works.

The story written by the author is nothing more than the electric tension of lost people who are trying to find each other, and most importantly themselves. Events unfold in the early morning. It seems so early that the night has not yet left its possessions on the deserted streets. From the very first lines, the author says that it is dark and rainy outside, while in the local cafe there is a little light and people preparing to start a new day. Within those walls there is a boy who delivers newspapers, a cafe worker named Leo, a couple of soldiers and other sloggers, and *a man*. The last one from the list does not stand out in any way until he beckons the boy to him with a friendly: 'Son'. A terse conversation begins; a 12-year-old boy who is used to adults chatting with him over a cup of coffee does not understand what this gentleman wants from him. It is also not easy for the reader to predict the course of events, the characters' remarks are short, presenting a conversational style. It is also worth noting that as the dialogue develops (although it is still more of a monologue with insertions of others present in the drinking establishment), the author uses more stylistic devices. So the reader is immersed in the tragic love story of a man from a bar, who was abandoned by his *wife*. Despite the fact that the narrator describes his wife, even shows the little postman her photos, for the reader she is mostly represented by an anaphora. To back up my speculation, I would like to quote the following lines: '*She was my wife <...> She had all home comforts and luxuries. She left me <...>*'. The man from the bar also constantly repeats the pronouns of the first person singular 'I' as opposed to the repetition of 'she', which in my opinion, creates not only a parallel, but also a kind of gap between two people who were once united together. Finally, long reflections on what this unexpected break is worth for him leads the narrator to think that he has created his own basis for all living things, without reference to how a person looks or who they are. The man repeats that he loves a little boy, even though he does not know him, he is not angry at the constant Leo's

interruptions, merely continues his way further along the road of love, hiding behind the doors of the café.

Firstly, I consider it necessary to tell a few words not only about the plot, but also about how this story is built. The reader can guess about the place, time and social environment only from small fragments of information inside the stories of the café's narrator, namely, the name of the places he has already visited '*Tulsa, Atlanta, Chicago, Cheehaw, Memphis*' and the position he held: '*I was fifty-one years old and she always said she was thirty. I was a railroad engineer <...>*'. It is noteworthy that the author gives only the most important information with the help of the narration in the 3rd person singular.

Onwards, I think it's important to pay attention to the characters' speech. This is a crude vocabulary reflecting the realities of the lower classes of society working in urban conditions. For example, '*Shut up!*', '*Then was he a dope fiend?*', '*Can you imagine this bozo's mind a blank!*', '*So you have been chasing the floozie for eleven years. You frazzled old rascal!*'. Nevertheless, these are all used in a conversation about a high feeling, about a loved one, about a search. In addition, the author, through the narrator, raises a philosophical question about this search. What is a person really looking for? Not that one who is currently sitting over a cup of coffee, a pint of beer or flipping bacon with a fork. This is a question about a person as a society, namely as a part as a whole, united by a single feeling. And all this is shown through a speech that comes directly from a heart filled with all-consuming love. From this point of view, we can assume that the difference in the language and the message of the sayings connects all the elements into a single-common before the eyes of the reader; the image of a woman is just an excuse to begin to realize yourself while reading. From this point, I will allow myself to move on to some of the conflicts of the work.

Firstly, this is the conflict of the first plan of the description of the characters. Primarily, the social status of every visitor is shown the same; nevertheless, afterwards the author makes remarks. Secondly, the internal conflict of overcoming oneself is depicted. It is described in this work as the loss of one person to know the whole world. For example, '*I am a person who feels many things. All my life one thing after another has impressed me. Moonlight. The leg of a pretty girl. One thing after another. But the point is that when I had enjoyed anything there was a peculiar sensation as though it was laying around loose in me*'. The very tone of the work is calm and reasonable, without unnecessary fuss or sarcasm. It fits perfectly into the canvas of the work where the narrative begins with the words '*It's raining*'.

Characters are not divided into positive or negative, therefore this gives the reader the opportunity to independently reflect in those moments where it is

appropriate. Moreover, they are constantly in motion and advance the plot as they are involved, for example, *'The paper boy tried to signal to Leo. While the man was not looking he screwed up his face'*, *'The café was quiet, the soft rain black and endless in the street outside. Leo pressed down the frying bacon with the prongs of his long fork'*, *'Very slowly he closed his eyelids, and the gesture was like a curtain drawn at the end of a scene in a play'*. This short novel, with its characters, resembles the works of the English writer of Irish descent Iris Murdoch, where ordinary people are faced with a philosophy of life that they had never known before.

The author uses a number of devices while making out the linguistic construction of the work such as metaphor *'then grasped the boy's chin'*, *'rambling voice'*, *'it never crept into my brain'*, repetition *'She left me. I came in one night and the house was empty and she was gone. She left me'*, simile *'The boy wore a helmet such as aviators wear'*, *'there was a peculiar sensation as though it was laying around loose in me'*, synecdoche (the small newspaper peddler acts as *a son*, in a generalized sense, without reference to age), epithets *'answered in a long-drawn way'*, *'your big nose'*, *'some pink strips of bacon'*, *'with delicate gravity'*, *'his pale green eyes'* and oxymoron *'That would be a cute death'*. This helps to make the text attractive for reading while the reader's imagination assimilates stylistic and lexical literary devices. In addition, a special type of symbolism can be noted that the author uses to achieve intellectual tension while reading. For example, 3 key figures previously highlighted in my essay from the text such as a man, a woman (wife) and a son represent a family that correlates with a place where love and harmony of the whole world manifest themselves.

In conclusion, I would like to express my respect for the author and the work in general, because the story really interested me from the first minutes of reading. I believe that the topic of moral development of the individual through the philosophical paradigm is important at any time. *'A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud.'* is valuable because it gives a new spectrum of emotions and food for thought after reading. I highly appreciate the organizers' desire to give the participants a perfect opportunity to express ideas.

Кудрявцева Марина Андреевна

ФГБОУ ВО «Тверской государственный университет»

Факультет иностранных языков и

международной коммуникации, 4 курс

“A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud.” reads the mysterious title of one of the numerous short-stories penned by Carson McCullers, a prominent female American novelist of the 20th century. Such a title leaves the reader in the dark from the very beginning and at once makes them want to know more: Is this a story about nature? Or is it an allegory? Or, perhaps, it is something entirely, altogether different. This essay will discuss in detail a great many aspects of the short story that make it exactly what it is, compelling and inspiring.

The story is told from the point of view of a third-person omniscient narrator and is set in a streetcar cafe of an unspecified American town. Upon finishing his morning route, a 12 year old paperboy walks into the cafe to buy himself a cup of coffee. Inside there were a couple of soldiers, three spinners from the cotton mill, Leo, the owner, and an old man sitting by himself. When the boy is finished with his coffee and is about to leave the place, he hears the old man calling him so he has no other choice but to come up to him. To the boy’s astonishment, the first thing the man tells him is “I love you”, which makes other men in the cafe laugh. The boy is confused and does not know what to do, but, after a while, he gives up trying to escape and sits down next to the old man, who, as we later find out, wants to share with him his tragic love story and his philosophy of life. While Leo ridicules and mocks whatever the man is saying, he is determined to finish his story and asks the boy to disregard Leo’s spiteful remarks. The culmination of the story happens when the man finally reveals the central formula of his “science” — “A tree. A rock. A cloud.”, the three things love should be begun with. According to the old man’s philosophy, only upon mastering the art of loving these things should a man allow himself to fall in love with a woman, the climax of the love hierarchy. He then proceeds to walk out of the cafe, and before he does he tells the boy once again that he loves him. Apparently now the boy is even more confused than before so he asks Leo if the man is intoxicated, which Leo, having worked in the cafe long enough to tell the difference, denies. However, when asked if the man is crazy, he, for some reason, does not answer. The denouement presents a scene, in which the boy, completely puzzled and perplexed, says what he thought to be the safest thing to say: “He sure has done a lot of traveling.”

There are three major characters and a number of minor characters. The minor characters are the men who do not take active part in the conversation and serve as a background. The major ones are the little paperboy, the old man and Leo, the cafe owner. The old man is the one, around whom the entire narrative revolves, which is why it would be reasonable to describe him and his role in it first. The man is portrayed as “long and pale, with a big nose and faded orange hair”. As he tells his story, he reveals that he used to be a railroad engineer and was married to a woman who one day left him for another man. He did not realize that the luxurious and comfortable lifestyle he provided her with was not enough for her. When she ran away, the man was utterly devastated and tried his best to find her, but all was in vain. Four years he spent grieving when suddenly something incredible dawned upon him. It was his formula — “A tree. A rock. A cloud.” Since then, he committed himself to loving everything that would come his way. It is safe to say that the fact that he chose the little boy as his audience might indicate that he, like many other elderly people, was lonely and needed company. Besides, the boy was the only one in that cafe who was this young and inexperienced and would not dare to make fun of him.

The paperboy is described as “an undersized boy of about twelve, with one shoulder drawn higher than the other because of the weight of the paper sack. His face was shallow, freckled, and his eyes were round child eyes.” The boy seems to be very concerned with what other men in the cafe think of him, as every now and again during his interaction with the old man he keeps glancing at them for approval and cues as to how he should behave. However, we do realize that it is exactly what any little boy would do in such circumstances and do not hold it against him. The boy is merely a reflection of the society he lives in, therefore his reaction to the old man’s words represents just how readily society jumps to conclusions and labels someone as insane or not able to think clearly once it is exposed to something that either does not correspond to widely accepted truths, or simply makes no sense to it. Through this character we see how deep-rooted and firmly fixed some of the prejudices and stereotypes within our society are since, by some, they are adopted at such a tender age. It is the boy’s response that also makes evident the strong link between ignorance and narrow-mindedness.

Last but not least is Leo. Even though he does not have much to say, he is still of great importance to the story and its message. At the very beginning the author introduces us to him as the “bitter and stingy” cafe owner, and all through the story we witness proof of this interpretation of his personality. He has “a gray face, with slitted eyes, and a pinched nose saddled by faint blue shadows.” As the story proceeds, the narrator also points out that “the better Leo knew his customers, the stingier he treated them”, upon which he or she adds the following remark: “He nibbled his own bun as though he grudged it to himself.” This tragic

detail alone makes the reader feel sorry for the character. Besides, as mentioned earlier, Leo makes all sorts of callous and derisive comments directed at the old man, who is simply trying to share his story and wisdom with the boy. His speech is characterized by emotionally charged language: for instance, he refers to the old man's ex-wife as "floozy" and repeatedly screams out the words "Shut up!". For all that, his intense and sometimes totally unexpected and seemingly inexplicable reactions indicate that he, in fact, deeply cares about the subject of discussion. Perhaps, at some point of his life, Leo, just like the old man, has been betrayed and traumatized, but, unfortunately, has not found a way to cope yet, so he chooses to be protective of himself, careful not to ever let his guard down. In other words, he is unable to let go of his cynical outlook on life because his cynicism is the only thing that keeps him more or less sane.

Thus, two conflicts can be distinguished: one — between the individual (representing the new and unconventional) and society (representing the old and conventional) and the other — between Leo (the cynic) and the old man (the romantic).

To convey the mood of the story, the author uses imagery, in particular — visual and auditory imagery. "It was raining that morning, and still very dark" is the opening sentence, which right from the start creates certain images in the reader's mind. Throughout the story it keeps raining, and in the quiet cafe we can distinctly hear the soft pitter-patter of the "black and endless" rain on the windows and the sound of the clock ticking on the wall. This kind of imagery adds "volume" to the story, or, put differently, it provides a realistic touch.

It is worthy of note that here the rain also has a symbolic nature. In literature, rain is frequently associated with either unhappiness and melancholy or some ominous foreboding, but this short story is one of those instances where the rain represents a pause in the action. It forced the characters to retreat indoors, where, left alone with their thoughts, they can dedicate their time to introspection. Apart from that, rain is almost always an indicator of something important, even crucial, happening. In this case, the importance of the situation lies in the old man sharing a valuable lesson with the little boy, who, one day, might look back on it and finally grasp its true meaning and live a happy, fulfilled life.

Taking into account everything that has been said so far, it would pose no difficulty for us to determine the theme and the main idea of the story. Its theme could, undoubtedly, be defined as "love", or to be more precise, as what the Greek would call *agape*, i.e. "the highest form of love, charity" that goes beyond just the emotions to the extent of seeking the best for others. That is exactly the kind of love the old man is in favor of. In order to love a person, you should first learn to love a tree, a tangible living organism; then a rock, a tangible object; and, finally,

a cloud, a mass of watery vapor, neither a living organism nor a tangible object. As for the main idea of the story, it fully corresponds to the man's theory about love that is, first of all, much more than providing someone with material possessions, that should be a mindful and conscious feeling, and that is something one can and should be infinitely generous with.

In conclusion, having read "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud.", one could say with conviction that this short story can be rightfully called a hidden gem of 20th century American literature. Thanks to Carson McCullers's literary craftsmanship, it has the potential to show young people around the globe a unique philosophical take on love in its purest form