ForeWord Reviews

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Illumination and Night Glare: The Unfinished Autobiography of Carson McCullers
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After Carson McCullers died, her literary executors sought to find a suitable editor and publisher for McCullers' autobiography. It took them thirty years to find someone sensitive enough to handle the honest, compelling memoir by the author of the seminal works The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, The Member of the Wedding, Reflections in a Golden Eye and The Ballad of the Sad Café. Given the scope of the project and the precision with which Dews faithfully adheres to McCullers? notes, it was worth the wait.

One of the most gifted writers of her generation, McCullers lived a life filled alternately with sadness and triumph. Her own terms for this rollercoaster effect are conveyed in the title of the work, expressing the joy she found at the "illumination" of new ideas and epiphanies about her writing and the depression she suffered from the "night glare" of a troubled marriage, unrequited loves and a series of crippling strokes brought on by alcoholism, a lifelong smoking habit and a misdiagnosed childhood case of rheumatic fever. Her illness was so profound that most of this autobiography was told to secretaries and friends during the last year of her life when McCullers was literally on her deathbed. It's a testament to the writer's feisty nature that her recollections are suffused with good humor, thoughtfulness and piquant memories of being friends with Gypsy Rose Lee, John Huston, Marilyn Monroe and Isak Dinesen, among others.

Included in the book are an outline of The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, which sheds new light on McCullers' most famous work, and never before published letters between the author and her husband during WW II, which not only illuminate their relationship, but also serve as a universal for every husband and wife who were separated by that war. For anyone who has come to enjoy the graceful and down-to-earth writing of McCullers, this book will be indispensable.

Elizabeth Millard