

ROOM TO READ April report by Tamara Bibby

***The member of the wedding* by Carson McCullers**

The main characters are Frankie/ F. Jasmine and Frances (the same person during the three 'phases' of the protagonist's teenage development the story covers); Berenice and John Henry, her companions along the way.

Context and Plot: The book is set in a very small town located in a poor area of rural America during WW2. The story covers three short episodes: the run up to Frankie's brother's wedding, its immediate aftermath and a few weeks later.

Nothing much actually happens; long days drag by. Initial reluctance on the part of Frankie to accept the forthcoming marriage are swept aside by F. Jasmine's excitement. Her desire to leave her home town, her excitement at the thought of a place (Winter Hill) which she assumes to be everything the home town is not (cold, northern, different), the terrible journey which heads south and the wedding where she is just another guest and not welcome to join the honeymooning couple. Her rage and upset and the unwanted journey home to a life that will carry on. Things will be both the same and different. The book explores Frankie's internal worlds and her fantasies.

It is an interesting (or very dull – depending on your ability to tolerate the writing) exploration of being a teenager, loneliness, alienation and disappointment.

Literary style: The writing is slow – she conveys the sense of oppressive heat and long empty days well. An English teacher from the group would have liked to take a couple of pages into school for analysis. But the style split the group: it was either very beautiful or self-indulgent.

Discussion: This was a book no one much wanted to recommend to another group. It is very much of its time but – the right person would enjoy it. The language itself and the lack of narrative drive were problems for all of the readers except the person who had recommended it in the first place and still likes it. It takes time and effort to read a book that slow; perhaps more time and effort that we give easily to literature anymore.

Ratings on a scale of 1-5: 3/2/2/5/0

Next meetings:

19 June *The Cut Out Girl* Bart Van Es

17 July *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont* Elizabeth Taylor

No meeting in August

18 September *Unsheltered* Barbara Kingsolver