*One Night Two Souls Went Walking*,by Ellen Cooney rev. by Amelia Aguilera

Coffee House Press

Ellen Cooney, writer of ten published novels, writes for the New Yorker, New England Review, Ontario Review, and other well-known journals. Some of her other works include *The Mountaintop School for Dogs* and *A Private Hotel For Gentle Ladies.* One of her most recent novels is *One Night Two Souls Went Walking* focusing on a young woman with a soothing voice and comforting presence who is destined to serve as a chaplain working the night shifts at a hospital. She spends most of her late nights tending to a variety of patients who need someone to answer questions, to listen to them, or to simply just be there at the time they need someone most, as they near the end of their lives. With the use of an atmosphere of wonder and tenderness, each chapter dives into a different experience with each patient and how that has influenced the chaplain’s perspective on her own life, the supernatural, and the big question: What comes after our life on Earth?

Ellen Cooney succeeds in providing an in-depth point of view from the chaplain as she writes descriptively and with an impactful tone evident in each chapter. The characters in the novel are well written and realistic contributing to the distinction between each patient, yet briefly connecting them with human emotions such as fear and vulnerability. Through that action, Cooney demonstrates how we as humans can be similar to one another. This also gives opportunity for the reader to have the ability to relate with a certain patient and their story. The patients that the chaplain encounters are the heart of the story and the focus of the protagonists’ thoughts. The young chaplain describes one of her fifty-year-old patients as

“The type of customer who’d come into the bays in spite of the sign that said you couldn’t. He would look at a wrench in the hand of a mechanic and tell the mechanic he was holding it wrong. He would order an expensive oil that was only expensive because of the brand name, then he’d watch it go in like he suspected they’d switch in a cheap one.” (35)

Another close patient to the protagonist is a quiet librarian with a fear of submarines. The chaplain is quick to notice how this librarian presents herself to others when the librarian calls the chaplain “Minister Girl” and commands her to “go find an empty bed and lie down” (45). The chaplain observes this woman closely, past her thick front that the librarian puts in front of herself as she claims “I saw that under her glaring, she was feeling something else. A fragility was all over her, new to me” (47).

The use of spiritual overtones in the novel challenges the reader’s pre-existing beliefs regarding life and death, leading the reader to question what kind of life they want to have lived and leave behind. For example, Cooney writes with heavy imagination a spiritual journey that can be described as an “oob” or an out of body experience as the chaplain describes a patient’s experience while under anesthesia:

“There came to him an excitement, a rush of desire, a whole new level of exultation. He didn’t know how he knew this, but he knew that the cloud was a passage into infinity. What he might see when he entered it, what he might find out, he didn’t consider. He was still too earthbound, but he knew it was going to be far beyond anything imaginable.” (39)

The author’s use of word choice and a tone of wonder is essential to the emotions that the writer wants the audience to feel and the overall experience of going to another place just by reading words on a page. The heavy topics addressed in the novel are balanced with light, kindhearted moments that Ellen Cooney creates within humorous character interactions and the protagonist’s likeable humor. Beautifully and simply crafted, *One Night Two Souls Went Walking* is a place to go for souls, lost and found who want to experience something “far beyond imaginable.”