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Love in Major Novels of Carson McCullers

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LOVE IN MAJOR NOVELS OF CARSON McCULLERS

BY

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This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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INTRODUCTION

Carson McCullers' literary career began formally in 1936 when her short story, "Wunderkind," appeared in Story magazine.[1] The publication of The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter in 1940, when the author was twenty-three, brought her immediate acclaim. Less well received was Reflections in a Golden Eye (1941), which the author wrote in two months. Other major published works are The Ballad of the Sad Cafe (1943), The Member of the Wedding (1946), and Clock Without Hands (1961). Her work also includes a play, The Square Root of Wonderful, short stories, essays, and poetry.

Mrs. McCullers was not a prolific writer; this was largely due to the fact that she was hindered throughout much of her life by serious illnesses. When she was fifteen, doctors misdiagnosed rheumatic fever as "pneumonia with complications."[2] Her heart was severely damaged by this illness; consequently, she suffered strokes which resulted in blindness in one eye, complete paralysis of her left side, and complications therefrom. Her final stroke in 1967 left her comatose for forty-seven days until her death on September 29, 1967, at age fifty. Her doctors believed that had her early illness been correctly diagnosed, her life-style could have been changed and the crippling strokes avoided. Ironically, Mrs. McCullers' death is generally attributed to the misdiagnosis, and little mention is made of her smoking between two and three packages of cigarettes daily or of her drinking. For much of her adult life, she often drank all day long.

Columbus, Georgia, was Carson McCullers' home until 1934, when the author was seventeen. Though she felt she had "'no roots'"[3] in the South, most of her fiction is set in the South. Critical of the Southern settings common to McCullers' fiction, Delma Eugene Presley, in "Carson McCullers and the South," said McCullers "could not recover the South in her fiction, because she left it before she really understood it."[4] Presley noted a "deeply embedded ambivalence about the land of her youth" in McCullers' fiction.[5] Indeed, Mrs. McCullers did not like the South. In a letter to Vincent Adams, written in the winter of 1938 from Fayetteville, North Carolina, Carson's husband Reeves reported: "'I have to keep Carson tied by a leg to the bedpost at times to keep her from going mad as she hates the South so.'"[6] Reeves' exaggeration was accurate. Mrs. McCullers felt frustrated and stagnated by the South, and she feared the repercussions of these feelings. Mrs. McCullers, Presley pointed out, "built her life on the hope that, somehow, Paris or New York would reach down and rescue her."[7] When Mrs. McCullers left Georgia for New York in 1934, she never returned on a permanent basis. Her temporary stays were for two purposes: to be nursed back to health by her mother, and to, as McCullers said, "'renew her sense of horror.'"[8]

Many critics share the view that Mrs. McCullers belongs to what is commonly referred to as the "Southern school" of writers. Frank Baldanza admits McCullers to this school along with Faulkner, Capote, Welty, and Flannery O'Connor, and notes similarities among

the writers based on Baldanza's notion that the novels and stories of these writers are "parables on the nature of love."[9] Alfred Kazin in Bright Book of Life, also notes a kind of Southern fiction of which McCullers is an example. "This sometimes overpowering Southern voice" he says, "is absorbed into the logic of the story itself, in which the prose is entirely close-knit and serviceable, without a breath of fine writing and critical rhetoric."[10] Based on the reputation of the few Southern writers I named, Kazin's observation is obviously debatable.

Critics generally agree that Carson McCullers' fiction is concerned with the search for love and with man's individual isolation. Not surprisingly, approaches in analyzing McCullers' tenets vary greatly. Barbara C. Gannon and C. M. Smith, for example, observe that because McCullers had extensive musical training, her fiction has the same mechanical structure as musical scores. The Ballad of the Sad Cafe reads as a ballad, according to Gannon, and Smith analyzes characters in and the structure of The Heart is a Lonely Hunter according to what she sees as its fugue-like composition.[11]

Freudian analyses of McCullers' fiction, particularly Robert S. Phillips' "Painful Love: Carson McCullers' Parable," are frequently implausible. In his study of The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, Phillips suggests that the novel represents a flight from sexuality, in particular, flight of the female from the phallus. Phillips sees this as a recurring theme in McCullers' fiction based on the number of motherless children who appear in McCullers' works. The flight

of which Phillips speaks is a result of the rival, or the mother, having been removed from the Oedipal triangle.[12] Phillips also sees two of McCullers' major characters, Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon, as homosexual. Phillips may be groping when he proffers the notion that because Miss Amelia is tall she symbolizes the phallus, and because Cousin Lymon is short and has a rounded, hunched back, he symbolizes female genitalia.[13]

Louise Westling, in "Carson McCullers' Amazon Nightmare" also observes Freudian symbolism in The Ballad. Westling sees Miss Amelia's peculiarities as representing Carson McCullers' ambivalence about her own female identity,[14] and when The Ballad is compared to Isak Dinesen's, "The Monkey," McCullers' complete rejection of heterosexual union, according to Westling, becomes evident.[15]

Fortunately, few critics concern themselves with Freudian criticism. Rather, the sociological and political, religious, and moral implications of McCullers' fiction take precedence.

Oliver Evans does not consider McCullers a political writer, although he sees the theme of social justice enter importantly into two of her novels: The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter and Clock Without Hands.[16]

Evans also reads The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter as an allegory.[17] McCullers herself referred to Heart as a parable; she called it "'an ironic parable of Fascism.'"[18] This enigmatic description has baffled many critics, and it was never satisfactorily explained or interpreted by Mrs. McCullers. Nancy B. Rich attempted to clarify

the issue in "The 'Ironic Parable of Fascism' in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter." Rich maintains that as a parable, the theme of the novel is "an affirmation of the democratic process, but its implications are the universal problems of illusion versus reality and the nature of man himself."[19] As the basis for her thesis, Rich cites McCullers' outline to The Mute (McCullers' original title for The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter), and McCullers' references to a "wasteful, short-sighted society," and an "unnatural social condition."[20] Rich also offers the loose notion that "the parable so deeply explores the human condition that it anticipates by implication such events of the next thirty years as Jewish integration, civil rights demonstrations, black integration, the 'flower child' phenomenon, governmental capitulation, and women's liberation."[21]

Mrs. McCullers certainly was not unconcerned with the political issues of her day. As Rich points out, The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter has numerous references to political issues. Leslie Fiedler calls Heart "the last of the 'proletarian novels,' a true Depression book."[22] It may well be. The governing theme in McCullers' fiction is not, however, political.

Chester Eisinger addresses what is at the heart of Mrs. McCullers' novels. What interests the author, he states, is her people, not society. He further contends that "Isolation is of the soul, not of the small southern town. The failure of love is the failure of communion, not of labor unions or Negro-white relations."[23] Although Eisinger believes McCullers "condemns her characters to failure" in

love,[24] it must be remembered that in order for love to fail, love or the potential for love must first exist.

Inherent in McCullers' fiction is the search for love. The term "love" in this study will be used broadly to encompass spiritual communion or fulfillment, symbolizing what McCullers called "man's revolt against his own inner isolation."[25] The revolt is the search for communion or fulfillment which permeates the corpus of McCullers' fiction.

In her outline of The Mute, McCullers introduced five counter themes. Two of these, relevant to the search for relationships are: "(1) There is a deep need in man to express himself by creating some unifying principle or God. A personal God created by a man is a reflection of himself and in substance this God is most often inferior to his creator. (2) In a disorganized society these individual Gods or principles are likely to be chimerical and fantastic."[26] These counter themes may be applied to McCullers' characters in that in the need to express themselves through love, chimera distorts that love. In this case, though love may be temporarily recognizable, the potential for failure is great. Thus Rich's contention that "the universal problems of illusion versus reality and the nature of man himself" are implied becomes evident.

In essence, Carson McCullers' fiction is concerned most with the search for relationships and the success or failure of relationships based upon illusion and reality. In my analysis of this aspect of three of McCullers' novels, Mrs. McCullers' history will

be outlined in Chapter 1 to more fully illustrate the moral implications of her fiction.

NOTES

Introduction

[1] Virginia Spencer Carr, The Lonely Hunter (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975), p. 570.

[2] Carr, p. 28.

[3] Delma Eugene Presley, "Carson McCullers and the South," Georgia Review, 28 (Spring 1974), 32.

[4] Presley, p. 31.

[5] Presley, p. 19.

[6] Presley, p. 23.

[7] Presley, p. 32.

[8] Carr, p. 313.

[9] Frank Baldanza, "Plato in Dixie," Georgia Review (Summer 1958), 151.

[10] Alfred Kazin, Bright Book of Life (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), p. 46.

[11] Barbara C. Gannon, "McCullers' Ballad of the Sad Cafe," The Explicator, 41, No. 1 (Fall 1982), 59-60; C. M. Smith, "Voice in a Fugue: Characters and Musical Structures in Carson McCullers' The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter," Modern Fiction Studies, 25 (Summer 1979), 258-63.

[12] Robert S. Phillips, "Painful Love: Carson McCullers' Parable," Southwest Review, 51 (1966), 82.

[13] Phillips, p. 82.

[14] Louise Westling, "Carson McCullers' Amazon Nightmare," Modern Fiction Studies, 28, No. 3 (Autumn 1982), 465.

[15] Westling, p. 472.

[16] Oliver Evans, The Ballad of Carson McCullers (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1966), p. 28.

[17] Evans, p. 41.

[18] Nancy B. Rich, "The 'Ironic Parable of Fascism' in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter," Southern Literary Journal, 9 (Spring 1977), 123.

[19] Rich, p. 109.

[20] Carson McCullers, "Author's Outline of The Mute, " in The Mortgaged Heart, ed. Margarita G. Smith (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1975), p. 136.

[21] Rich, p. 123.

[22] Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 478.

[23] Chester E. Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 251.

[24] Eisinger, p. 246.

[25] McCullers, p. 136.

[26] McCullers, p. 136.

CHAPTER 1

Carson McCullers: An Overview

When The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter was published in 1940, Carson McCullers, then twenty-three, became one of America's most popular writers. Indeed, her popularity was due largely to the theme central to her first novel. In her outline of The Mute (renamed The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter by her publisher, Houghton Mifflin), Mrs. McCullers stated that the theme is "of man's revolt against his own inner isolation and his urge to express himself as fully as is possible."[1] A more thorough examination of this inner isolation was expressed by Mrs. McCullers in "The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing":

> Spiritual isolation is the basis of most of my themes. My first book was concerned with this, almost entirely, and of all my books since, in one way or another. Love, and especially love of a person who is incapable of returning or receiving it, is at the heart of my selection of grotesque figures to write about--people whose physical incapacity is a symbol of their spiritual incapacity to love or receive love--their spiritual isolation.[2]

Perhaps what the reading public found so interesting about Carson McCullers was that she was sensitive to the nature of isolation, and that this sensitivity was demonstrated by one so young. Loneliness, or isolation, McCullers noted, has been called "the great American malady."[3] In discussing this "malady," McCullers compared the nature of Americans to that of Europeans:

> The loneliness of Americans does not have its source in xenophobia; as a nation we are an outgoing people, reaching always for immediate contacts, further

> experience. But we tend to seek out things as individuals, alone. The European, secure in his family ties and rigid class loyalties, knows little of the moral loneliness that is native to us Americans. 4

Spiritual isolation was not foreign to Mrs. McCullers; indeed, she "always felt alone."[5] Even before her birth, February 19, 1917, it was "known" that Carson McCullers would be gifted. Her mother, Marguerite Waters Smith, had been told by oracles that "her firstborn would be unique." Mrs. Smith confided to friends that "there had also been secret prenatal signs that her child would be precocious and eventually achieve greatness as an artist."[6] Certain that she would have a son, Mrs. Smith planned to name her child "Enrico Caruso." The son she expected was instead a daughter, and the daughter was named, less flamboyantly, Lula Carson Smith. (While visiting cousins in Cincinnati as a teenager, Carson Smith dropped "Lula" when her cousins teased her about her double name. Only in times of severe stress did the author resume the use of "Lula," although even then she limited herself because under stress, she suffered from agraphia.)

That Carson McCullers' mother insisted Carson was different from everybody else no doubt contributed to her sense of estrangement (14). Though Carson accepted her mother's belief, she was not entirely happy in being singled out, and consequently, estranged. Like many of her fictional characters, Carson wished to be a member of a group: "She reasoned that if she were 'a member,' she could have whatever degree of anonymity she wished" (24). Mrs. Smith's influence, however, prevented Carson from making many friends or even from associating well with her peers.

Carson herself may have contributed to her sense of estrangement by virtue of her wardrobe. Daring to be different, she wore tennis shoes or Girl Scout oxfords when her classmates in high school were wearing stockings and heels. Her schoolmates thought her eccentric (29). Carson remained a non-conformist all her life concerning clothing. She was dressed so garishly when she met her husband's family that her husband's aunt admonished family members not to "'stare at Reeves' wife so'" (77). Wallace Stegner, a companion of McCullers' at Breadloaf in 1941 remembered her as "a gangling, skinny girl who wore boys' white shirts and changed them three times a day" (112).

During her childhood and adolescence, McCullers spent much of her time reading, writing, and practicing the piano. She had an insatiable appetite for reading, and out of this lust came the desire to write. Her teenage years produced much material, but little survives. Some early writing attempts were directly influenced by her reading. After reading Eugene O'Neill, she was "writing a three-acter about revenge and incest--the curtain rose on a graveyard and, after scenes of assorted misery, fell on a catafalque. The cast consisted of a blind man, several idiots and a mean old woman of one hundred years." The next attempt was a play called The Fire of Life. McCullers had been influenced by Nietzsche, and her play had a cast of two characters: Jesus Christ and Friedrich Nietzsche.[7]

Imaginative outside the classroom in her writing, McCullers was less impressive in the classroom. According to Roberta Lawrence,

a former teacher of McCullers:

> 'She had an aloof, unconcerned attitude toward grades. . . . I remember only one of her themes. It was creative--something about a Bach fugue--brief and fragmentary. Shortly after this theme had been turned in, I encountered Carson's mother on the bus as I was going home in the afternoon and she asked me why I didn't give Carson better grades, adding that she was brilliant and very talented as a writer. I remember telling her that I would be more than glad to give Carson a better grade if she would produce for me some of this work of which she was capable.'[8]

Formal education bored Carson McCullers. She was graduated from high school, however, and in September of the following year (1934), she moved to New York City. The majority of Carson's time in New York was spent working odd jobs to save money to pay for creative writing classes at Columbia University and New York University. What free time she had was spent largely in telephone booths in Macy's department store. Here, a victim of agoraphobia, Carson wrote and read. In 1936, she enrolled at Washington Square College of New York University and took two semesters of writing courses under Sylvia Chatfield Bates. During the same year she enrolled at Columbia, where she studied under Whit Burnett, editor of Story magazine.

Carson McCullers' move to New York in 1934 began a series of changes. Illness forced her to return to Georgia frequently for extended periods. On one of these trips home she was introduced to James Reeves McCullers, Jr., whom Carson married in 1937. Before their divorce in 1942, Carson McCullers had had The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter and Reflections in a Golden Eye published, had attended Yaddo and Bread Loaf, suffered a mild stroke, and helped establish February

House (more commonly called by its location, Seven Middagh Street) in Brooklyn Heights with George Davis, a novelist and literary editor at Harper's Bazaar. February House was so named because of the number of people living there whose birthdays fell in February. People such as Gypsy Rose Lee, W. H. Auden, Benjamin Britten, Christopher Isherwood, Golo Mann (Thomas Mann's son), Louis MacNeice, and Richard Wright resided there. By virtue of its inhabitants, the house attracted such visitors as Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copeland, Salvador Dali and his wife Gala, Klaus Mann, another of Thomas Mann's sons, and Erika Mann, W. H. Auden's wife.[9]

After the publication of The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter and while living at Seven Middagh Street, Carson and Reeves' marriage began to disintegrate. Like her fictional characters Frankie Addams and Mick Kelly, Carson McCullers dreamed of fame. When Carson's dream was realized, she abused her marriage and basked in idolatry. Composer David Diamond, a close friend of both Reeves and Carson, assessed the situation years later:

> Carson did not even seem aware that she had rejected Reeves to the extent that she was now losing him. She appeared far more interested in everything else going on about her, in the celebrities she was meeting, in the hangers-on, in her pseudofriends who swarmed about her. Although her work of course, took her away from Reeves, at least 75 per cent of it was caused by people. Charmed by a smile, adulation, or kind remark, Carson at this time loved almost everyone she met. (151)

Carson McCullers was happy during the first year of her marriage. During this period, and throughout the remainder of the marriage, Reeves worked for a credit agency collecting overdue accounts,

and he carried out most household duties so that Carson might pursue her career as a writer. By most accounts, Reeves was devoted to Carson, but thrilled with the attention she received after the publication of Heart, Carson had less and less time for her husband. In 1940 and 1941, Carson and Reeves were separated many times. This time period also saw Reeves forging Carson's checks; by 1942, Carson had divorced Reeves.

Their reconciliation and eventual remarriage in 1945 surprised those close to them. When asked why he married Carson a second time, Reeves replied, "'Because I think we are all drones--and Carson is the queen bee'" (254). Though both marriages were stormy, friends observed Reeves' devotion as a husband:

> Carson accomplished a great deal under enormous hardships of her own making, but she was not alone. She was blessed with the support, encouragement, and contributions of a selfless, loyal and utterly devoted partner, whose only aim was the dedication to her happiness. Carson lived a great love story that few women have ever experienced, and that she may not have realized. (411)

Neither Carson nor Reeves could be considered an ideal marriage partner. Friends recall bitter arguments between the two. Carson maintained that Reeves abused her physically, but because of her tendency to stretch the truth, few believed her. The reality of observed exchanges was more convincing than Carson's tales. Simone Brown, who entertained Carson often and at length, found Carson to be "a difficult house guest and a taxing person with whom to maintain a close relationship" (389). She recalled:

> What Reeves did for Carson was beyond human endurance. He loved her too much--just as we all did. Carson had a terrible power of destruction. She destroyed everything around her--everything she loved. Yet she also wanted to give. It was a viperish thing--all involved in a rather unusual cycle of love. One can see it in her works. Certainly The Ballad of the Sad Cafe illustrates that power of destruction. Poor Reeves. He was a nice guy through it all. I sympathized with him. (389)

By 1953, Carson again found marriage to Reeves unbearable, and she had begun divorce proceedings when Reeves committed suicide in November, 1953 (403). After Reeves' death, Carson rarely acknowledged that he had been part of her life. Her infrequent references to him were disparaging. The most remarkable change in her following Reeves' death was her unwillingness to discuss intellectual ideas; Reeves had approached things rationally, and he always insisted that Carson reason with him. The change in Carson was apparent when she said to her good friend Jordan Massee, "'Honey, you know everything, but let's not talk about it.' As Massee saw it, 'Carson arrived at her truths through intuitive genius, without reasoning. But she got there, and truths they were'" (492).

Perhaps the most significant relationship in Mrs. McCullers' life, aside from that with Reeves, was with Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach, a beautiful and charming Swiss woman. The two women established a deep friendship which began in 1940; when McCullers' Reflections in a Golden Eye was published in 1941, the dedication was to Annemarie. Mrs. McCullers' feelings for her Swiss friend bordered on monomania. This relationship, and other "crushes" which Mrs.

McCullers had, led to speculation that she was bisexual. Indeed, Albert Erskine, Katherine Anne Porter's husband, remarked after reading The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, "'Katherine Anne, that woman is a lesbian'" (155). One year later, in 1942, McCullers and Porter met at Yaddo. McCullers developed a crush on Miss Porter, and one day pounded on the latter's door and pleaded, "'Please, Katherine Anne, let me come in and talk with you--I do love you so very much.'" Miss Porter shouted back that she would not leave her room until Carson had vacated the hall. Shortly thereafter Miss Porter opened the door, and "there lay Carson sprawled across the threshold. 'But I had had enough,' said Miss Porter. 'I merely stepped over her and continued on my way to dinner. And that was the last time she ever bothered me'" (156). To some, Carson's bisexual tendencies were obvious (110), but few of her attachments were reciprocated, except through friendship. In a letter to David Diamond in 1941, Carson confessed that "her need for love was awesome, that it was an insatiable craving; nor did she expect ever to feel differently. She also spoke of herself as an invert and wondered if she would ever know the love of a woman who might answer her multileveled needs." (167).

Carson hoped to satisfy her craving with Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach, but this was never realized (Annemarie was attracted to another woman, and Carson and Annemarie's friendship was cut short with the death of Annemarie at age thirty-four in 1942). Carson later admitted that "it was not Annemarie as a human being she had loved so desperately, for with her [Carson], inexplicably, passion

caused the beloved to become anonymous. Moreover, passion obviated any possibility of fulfillment in spite of one's dreams and pinings" (169).

The fact that Mrs. McCullers often isolated herself and "always felt alone" may have contributed to her frustrated relationships. Indeed, McCullers was motivated by fear. Throughout her life, she feared the unknown, she feared being unable to reach a goal, and she feared physical abandonment and the inability to survive on her own (23). As a result, relationships which she dared to attempt were entered into wholeheartedly: "She could not be bothered with a casual affair. She demanded much of a relationship, and if she met with rebuff or felt a lack of reciprocity she withdrew instantly, hurt, resentful, and often bitter and unforgiving" (86). Like her fictional character, Mick Kelly in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, Mrs. McCullers, fearing rejection, preferred to stay in her "inside room":

> There were times when she felt she could draw no nourishment from any human relationship, that she was inexorably set apart--as though she were locked inside a very small room in which there was no light. She was sure that something marvelous was going on just outside her door, but after a few vain attempts to get out, she decided that it was safer and warmer within. Locked in her inner room, she would not have to risk being an object of ridicule, sympathy, or even worse, indifference. (170)

This is not to say, however, that Carson McCullers was an introvert. She had many friends, and when she chose, she was warm and friendly; but she always felt alone or exiled, and she identified with other exiles or outcasts (100). As a child, for example, she

avoided the freakshows at midways. If she looked at the freaks, "she dared only to steal oblique glances, fearful of mesmeric union. Lula Carson knew intuitively their abject loneliness and felt a kinship through some mysterious connection" (1).

The inner room to which McCullers retreated became, in essence, her world. Believing she could not find reciprocity in a relationship, McCullers depended on her imagination, and she came to find her imagination to be truer than reality (19). This was evident in the way she lived her life and in her writing. She made Reeves, for example, "what she wished him to be" (75) by choosing to ignore aspects of his life before their marriage and concentrating instead on what she thought he represented. After her marriage, Mrs. McCullers proudly told a friend Reeves was a writer and he had been "on his own" since he was a boy. In truth, Reeves only talked of being a writer, and he actually wrote very little. Neither was Reeves on his own until he joined the Army at age seventeen. After Reeves' father abandoned his family when Reeves was nine, the boy was shuttled from relative to relative until he graduated from high school (74). Similarly, Carson's friend, George Lang, recalled incidents in which Lang tried to please her. On one occasion he bought a large bunch of flowering almond branches to take to her. Through all sorts of difficulties, he managed to get the bouquet unharmed to her. When Carson saw the flowers she said, "'Oh, but this is not like our flowering peach trees used to be in Georgia'" (420). In "The Flowering Dream," McCullers admitted to this facet of herself in her writing:

> It is only with imagination and reality that you get to know the things a novel requires. Reality alone has never been that important to me. A teacher once said that one should write about one's own back yard; and by this, I suppose, she meant one should write about the things that one knows most intimately. But what is more intimate than one's own imagination? The imagination combines memory with insight, combines reality with the dream.[10]

For McCullers, "writing something made it true" (261). She understood that writing is communication, and "'communication is the only access to love.'"[11] Mrs. McCullers stated that the theme in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter is "of man's revolt against his own inner isolation and his urge to express himself." This theme may be seen in most of her fiction; implicit in her work is her characters' urge to express themselves. The message imparted is that there is a gap between what a person is and what that person thinks would fulfill him spiritually. What fills that gap, what the individual wishes to express, is spiritual love, not passionate love. The difference between spiritual and passionate love is in the amount of fantasy involved. A person who loves passionately invents his love. He creates an illusion. He deceives himself about his beloved. He sees his beloved as he wishes him to be, not as the beloved is. A passionate lover houses "a new inward world--a world intense, strange, and complete in himself"[12] because it is a world which the lover has created within himself. Because this inner world is created, it is chimerical.

Mrs. McCullers admitted that her love for Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach was passionate, and her passion "obviated any possibility of fulfillment in spite of one's [McCullers'] dreams and pinings."

Mrs. McCullers further explored her feelings concerning passionate love in "The Flowering Dream":

> The passionate, individual love--the old Tristan-Isolde love, the Eros love--is inferior to the love of God, to fellowship, to the love of Agape--the Greek god of the feast, the God of brotherly love--and of man. This is what I tried to show in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe in the strange love of Miss Amelia for the little hunchback, Cousin Lymon.[13]

In The Ballad of the Sad Cafe (1951), Mrs. McCullers delineates her theory of love. The strength and implications of the description warrant the inclusion of the quotation in its entirety.

> First of all, love is a joint experience between two persons--but the fact that it is a joint experience does not mean that it is a similar experience to the two people involved. There are the lover and the beloved, but these two come from different countries. Often the beloved is only a stimulus for all the stored-up love which has lain quiet within the lover for a long time hitherto. And somehow every lover knows this. He feels in his soul that his love is a solitary thing. He comes to know a new, strange loneliness and it is this knowledge which makes him suffer. So there is only one thing for the lover to do. He must house a whole new inward world--a world intense and strange, complete in himself. Let it be added here that this lover about whom we speak need not necessarily be a young man saving for a wedding ring--this lover can be man, woman, child, or indeed any human creature on this earth.
>
> Now, the beloved can also be of any description. The most outlandish people can be the stimulus for love. A man may be a doddering great-grandfather and still love only a strange girl he saw in the streets of Cheehaw one afternoon two decades past. The preacher may love a fallen woman. The beloved may be treacherous, greasy-headed, and given to evil habits. Yes, and the lover may see this as clearly as anyone else--but that does not affect the evolution of his love one whit. A most mediocre person can be the object of a love which is wild, extravagant, and beautiful as the poison lilies of the swamp. A good man may be the stimulus for a love

> both violent and debased, or a jabbering madman may bring about in the soul of someone a tender and simple idyll. Therefore, the value and quality of any love is determined solely by the lover himself.
>
> It is for this reason that most of us would rather love than be loved. Almost everyone wants to be the lover. And the curt truth is that, in a deep secret way, the state of being beloved is intolerable to many. The beloved fears and hates the lover, and with the best of reasons. For the lover is forever trying to strip bare his beloved. The lover craves any possible relation with the beloved, even if this experience can cause him only pain.[14]

The context in which Mrs. McCullers intended her thesis on love is curious to note. In autographing her friend Robert Walden's copy of The Ballad in 1954, Mrs. McCullers wrote an inscription on the page containing the thesis. She told him the thesis was "unadulterated truth only when a person was not in love. Under other circumstances, it was to be interpreted differently" (428). Presumably, McCullers implied by this statement that passionate love is not true love. True love is always spiritual, never passionate. Passionate and spiritual love exist in themselves, but they are not, however, mutually exclusive; one may become the other. McCullers believed "for love to survive, passion must mellow to friendship or to a love and devotion that do not depend upon reciprocity, in which there is nothing hoped for, no fear of rejection, no jealousy" (106).

McCullers' characters seek to love more than they seek to be loved. Frank Baldanza, in his essay "Plato in Dixie" (1958), stated: "Success and failure in love are dependent on whether or not one actually finds the other half of his own soul in the beloved."[15] The critical element in this statement is in understanding that the

"other half" of the lover's soul cannot be determined until the lover knows the "first half," or himself. This was noted by Margaret B. McDowell when she said McCullers' characters "inadequately define or articulate for their own understanding their problems of identity and of relationship."[16] One of McCullers' characters, however, did articulate his understanding of love and relationships in the short story, "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud." The story tells of a young newspaper boy, who after finishing his route, goes into a cafe for a cup of coffee. When the boy prepares to leave, a transient sitting near him says to him, "'I love you.'" Reluctantly, the boy sits next to the man who proceeds to explain his "science of love." The man tells the boy that he had been married for nearly two years to a woman who left him twelve years previously. In the fifth year of his search for his wife, the man finally found peace. He explained: "'I guess the logical explanation is that she and I fleed [sic] around from each other for so long that finally we just got tangled up together and lay down and quit. Peace. A queer and beautiful blankness. . . . And that is how the science come [sic] to me.'"[17] Men begin with love, he said, by loving a woman. But this is beginning "'at the climax. Can you wonder it is so miserable? Do you know how men should love? A tree. A rock. A cloud.'" His science evolved as follows:

> I meditated and I started very cautious. I would pick up something from the street and take it home with me. I bought a goldfish and I concentrated on the goldfish and I loved it. I graduated from one thing to another. Day by day I was getting this technique. For six

> years now I have gone around by myself and built up my science. And now I am a master. Son. I can love anything. No longer do I have to think about it even. I see a street full of people and a beautiful light comes in me. I watch a bird in the sky. Or I meet a traveler on the road. Everything, Son. And anybody. All strangers and all loved![18]

Ann Tucker Rogers notes in her dissertation, "The Search for Relationships in Carson McCullers" (1971), that the failure or success of McCullers' characters in relationships of love is not arbitrary.[19] Rogers maintains that those characters who succeed in a relationship are in touch with the natural order, that is, when they are "rooted in a physical context, the order of tree, rock, and cloud."[21] She further argues that the more subjective and Platonically oriented McCullers' characters are, the more frustrated they are.[21] Here, it is necessary to define Platonism. According to Baldanza:

> Platonism is a mystic philosophy that emphasizes the primacy of spiritual experience and absolute spiritual values over the weaker and less reliable evidence of the senses and their correlative dependence on the changeable physical world and its phenomena. In short, it retains the primacy of spiritual value along with a broad permissive latitude of individual behavior.[22]

Based on this definition, Platonism can be equated with spiritual love. Rogers states that "McCullers' characters do not find fulfillment in Platonism."[23] Therefore, Rogers implies that McCullers' characters are not fulfilled spiritually.

Referring to his statement that "success and failure in love are dependent on whether or not one actually finds the other half of his own soul in the beloved," Baldanza concludes that "love is

synonymous, almost mathematically, with wholeness."[24] Baldanza implies that since the soul is non-physical, the lover who will be successful is one who knows his own soul, and who therefore is able to recognize the "other half" of his soul. Hence, when the lover finds love, he will become whole and spiritually fulfilled.

Baldanza further points out that the physical and spiritual defects of McCullers' characters "serve symbolically to represent the worthlessness of the material realm."[25] This "material realm" is the world of images which the lover creates in the beloved. An image or illusion is mortal. That which is mortal eventually dies; hence, passionate love may not survive.

Chester Eisinger, in Fiction of the Forties, discusses McCullers' treatment of the world of images:

> . . . she bares the loneliness of each sentient being whose need is to create an image of wisdom and receptivity which receives and resolves one's problems, providing release and fulfillment. And here, with magisterial firmness, she condemns her characters to failure. The image they create out of their need has the same need they suffer from. They have wilfully obscured the fallibility of the image. They have stubbornly embarked upon a monologue in the mistaken notion that they have established the reciprocity necessary for dialogue. They are self-deluded in the conversation each holds with himself.[26]

As McDowell points out, McCullers' characters little understand their "problems of identity and of relationship," but when love in the material realm (passionate love) fails, a character may more clearly understand his relationship with the material and its worthlessness, which may in turn enlighten the person spiritually. Because the lover

may benefit spiritually, McCullers' characters may not be as frustrated as Rogers may think. Therefore, "the value and quality of love is determined solely by the lover himself," and the transient's experience in "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud." becomes applicable.

Passionate love may be doomed to failure, but that does not mean that the lover's experience is not rewarding. Rogers states that "unrequited love fails to bestow happiness."[27] This may be true when the image is shattered. Evans' statement that "love need not be reciprocal to benefit the lover"[28] is true only until that image is shattered, such as in the transient's case. The success or failure of the lover is determined, then, by his understanding of illusion and reality.

Mrs. McCullers employed a device by which to analyze these successes and failures. Her work is replete with characters with physical and mental defects. McCullers stated that these defects symbolize the "spiritual incapacity to love or receive love," or the characters' relationship with reality. Some of the defects of McCullers' characters manifest themselves sexually, in role reversal or homosexuality. This sexual ambiguity clearly symbolizes the wholeness, the other half of one's own soul, for which one seeks. Non-passionate love is spiritual. The spirit is without gender. Spiritual communion occurs only when the artifice of sex is abandoned. Like Carson McCullers' own sexually ambivalent nature, her characters' sexual defects, if they may be so called, merely serve as an agent in the search for spiritual identification.

In the following chapters the characters in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, and The Member of the Wedding will be analyzed according to their successes and failures in loving or being loved, in terms of their understanding of themselves and what they seek. Many of McCullers' characters believe they have found spiritual identification when their love is really passionate. Even so, the lover may be temporarily fulfilled, and relieved of his isolation and his loneliness. This basic human emotion was described by Carson McCullers in "Loneliness . . . An American Malady": "To the spectator, the amateur philosopher, no motive among the complex ricochets of our desires and rejections seem stronger or more enduring than the will of the individual to claim his identity and belong."[29] McCullers' characters, it is clearly evident, wish "to belong." The strength of their desire, however, obscures "the fallibility of the image" of that desire.

NOTES

Chapter 1

[1] Carson McCullers, "Author's Outline of The Mute," in The Mortgaged Heart, ed. Margarita G. Smith (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1975), p. 136.

[2] McCullers, "The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing," p. 280.

[3] McCullers, "Loneliness . . . An American Malady," p. 265.

[4] McCullers, "Loneliness . . . An American Malady," p. 266.

[5] Mark Schorer, "McCullers and Capote: Basic Patterns," in The Creative Present, ed. Nona Balakian and Charles Simmons (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1963), p. 85.

[6] Virginia Spencer Carr, The Lonely Hunter (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975) p. 3. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[7] McCullers, "How I Began to Write," p. 256.

[8] Delma Eugene Presley, "Carson McCullers and the South," Georgia Review, 28 (Spring 1974), 20.

[9] Oliver Evans, The Ballad of Carson McCullers (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1966), pp. 82-83.

[10] McCullers, "The Flowering Dream," p. 284.

[11] McCullers, "The Flowering Dream," p. 287.

[12] Carson McCullers, The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe and Other Works (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 24.

[13] McCullers, "The Flowering Dream," in The Mortgaged Heart, p. 287.

[14] McCullers, The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe and Other Works, pp. 24-25.

[15] Frank Baldanza, "Plato in Dixie," Georgia Review (Summer 1958), 159.

[16] Margaret B. McDowell, Carson McCullers (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), p. 28.

[17] McCullers, "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud.," in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe and Other Works, p. 137.

[18] McCullers, "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud.," p. 138.

[19] Ann Tucker Rogers, "The Search for Relationships in Carson McCullers," Diss. St. Louis University 1971, p. 5.

[20] Rogers, p. 6.

[21] Rogers, p. 10.

[22] Baldanza, p. 153.

[23] Rogers, p. 10

[24] Baldanza, p. 160.

[25] Baldanza, p. 154.

[26] Chester E. Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 246.

[27] Rogers, p. 10.

[28] Oliver Evans, "The Theme of Spiritual Isolation in Carson McCullers," in New World Writing (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1952), p. 307.

[29] McCullers, "Loneliness . . . An American Malady," in The Mortgaged Heart, p. 265.

CHAPTER 2

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter

Based on the number of major characters, The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter is the most complex of Carson McCullers' five novels. The five major characters are Mick Kelly, a thirteen-year-old girl; Biff Brannon, a middle-aged cafe owner and operator; Jake Blount, a transient handyman about thirty years old; Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland, an elderly black physician; and John Singer, thirty-two, a deaf-mute about whom the other characters pivot. The story takes place in an unidentified Southern milltown in Georgia; the time which elapses, fourteen months, is from 1938 to 1939.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part One McCullers introduces the four orbital characters and their relationship with John Singer. Part One also tells the story of Singer and his deaf-mute friend, Spiros Antonapoulos, whose oblique presence throughout the novel is essential to the novel's irony. In Part Two the author more thoroughly focuses on the relationship between each major character and Singer; this part concludes with the suicide of Singer. In Part Three, McCullers presents each of the four remaining characters one last time. Their meditations are largely influenced by Singer's death, and they reveal what sort of impact the deaf-mute had on each individual. Parts One and Three, which have six and four chapters respectively (Part Two has fifteen), are structurally similar. Mrs. McCullers anticipated this in her outline of The Mute. She called the technical similarity

between the two parts "pronounced."[1] The similarity lies in the individual treatment of each major character. A notable difference, however, exists between the two parts. In Part One, the characters come together; in Part Three, it is understood that without their common magnet, Singer, the characters separate.

John Singer is a flat character in the sense that "his essential self does not change."[2] He was orphaned at an early age and placed in a home for the deaf. Here he learned to read and write and to speak; he learned to speak with both his voice and his hands. He could also read lips. When he was about twenty-two, he began working as an engraver for a jeweler in the town in which the story takes place. (Jewelers are frequent in McCullers' fiction, as are references to timepieces. Mrs. McCullers' father was a jeweler.) Singer soon met Spiros Antonapoulos, a deaf-mute with whom Singer lived for the next ten years. In all aspects, the two are diametrically opposed. Antonapoulos is obese, slovenly, and dull-witted. Singer is neat, polite and considered intelligent. They live comfortably for ten years, and "except when they worked they were alone together."[3]

Their existence was simple. They had no other friends, and their lives became monotonous routine. Their routine included getting to and from work, payday, an occasional movie, and a home life which consisted of Antonapoulos' indulging in sensual pleasures and of Singer's plying Antonapoulos for a game of chess or at the very least, for Antonapoulos' attention, with a bottle or a delicacy of some sort. Ths life continued until Antonapoulos was sent away to an insane asylum by his cousin, Charles Parker. Parker used his money

and influence to send Antonapoulos to the institution because Antonapoulos was becoming a public nuisance. He was committing public indecencies, and he was often guilty of petty thievery and assault and battery, for which Singer used his money to bail Antonapoulos out of jail.

At first, Singer became completely a man unto himself without Antonapoulos. Singer did not use his voice to communicate because of his listeners' reactions; so without his only friend, Singer communicated very little with others.

After Antonapoulos had been away for several months, Singer moved from the dwelling which he and Antonapoulos had occupied, and his life resumed order. He did not lose sight of Antonapoulos in his mind. The Greek's presence was in his waking thoughts and in his dreams. Singer's mind was occupied with thinking about his friend and planning for his next visit to the asylum, where he presented Antonapoulos with food, clothing, and other gifts, which were along with Singer, received ambivalently.

Singers's relationship with the four other characters begins with his move to a new residence. He rents a room from the Kellys, a large, poor family. Mr. Singer intrigues Mick Kelly, who is a gifted, tomboyish thirteen-year-old. Since her home is always crowded with boarders and family, Mick often roams the streets of the town alone. Mick's night wanderings introduce her to music, which interests her more than anything. At night, she listens by open windows to radios. Mick's secret wish is to have a piano on which to play the melodies

she hears. At Christmastime, Mr. Singer buys a radio for his visitors, and Mick is allowed to listen to it during the day when Singer is at work. Because Mick visits Singer's room frequently, and because they live in the same building, Mick is always aware of who visits Singer and of Singer's coming and going.

One of Singer's most frequent visitors is Jake Blount, who is introduced in the novel in Biff Brannon's New York Cafe. Blount, a stranger to the town, immediately establishes his reputation as a radical. He considers himself everyman. He espouses communist doctrine, but sees communism as a failure in practice. When Blount is introduced, he has been drunk almost continuously for twelve days, and the majority of this time has been spent in Brannon's cafe. The climax of Blount's spree is a night of violent drunkenness. In a rage, Blount pounds his fists and head against a brick wall. The police threaten to arrest Blount, but Singer intervenes and takes Blount home with him. Blount stays with Singer several days until Blount finds a job with the Sunny Dixie Show as a mechanic. From then on, he visits Singer regularly each Sunday.

In this way, Singer, Blount, Mick, and Brannon become acquainted with one another. Theirs is not a social circle, but they are all in some way connected with Mr. Singer.

Dr. Copeland, the black physician, is estranged from the group because of his race. Dr. Copeland is denied access to many public places, including Brannon's cafe. Mick, Jake, and Mr. Singer are often seen in the New York Cafe. Brannon is aware of Copeland's

reputation as a physician, and he knows Copeland is related to Willie, who works for Brannon. Blount and Copeland have only one significant meeting in the entire novel. Copeland, like Blount, is considered a radical. He speaks of "the strong true purpose" for the people of his race, which is the Marxist doctrine "'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.'"(160). Mrs. McCullers described the likeness between Copeland and Blount as "so marked that they might be called spiritual brothers."[4] Mick's acquaintance with Dr. Copeland is through Portia, Copeland's daughter and the Kelly's cook. Through Portia, Dr. Copeland and Mr. Singer meet. Portia mentions the deaf-mute to her father, who becomes interested immediately because of a deaf-mute patient about whom Copeland thinks Singer can offer advice. When the two men meet, Copeland takes an instant liking to Singer, and the two establish a relationship. Copeland, like the others, visits Singer socially.

Perhaps because Singer treats his guests so well each visitor returns often. Singer welcomes his guests and he provides an atmosphere irresistible to them all. Each one comes to talk, although there is no dialogue. Except for a visitor-guest relationship, few exchanges occur between Singer and any one of his guests: "Singer was always the same to everyone. He sat in a straight chair by the window with his hands stuffed tight into his pockets, and nodded or smiled to show his guests that he understood" (78-79). Singer notices that the visitors come separately, "always alone. And invariably he met them at the door with a cordial smile. The want for Antonapoulos was always with him--just as it had been the first months after his friend

had gone--and it was better to be with any person than to be too long alone" (174).

Mrs. McCullers' outline of The Mute described the interrelation between the characters as "being like the spokes of a wheel--with Singer representing the centre point. This situation, with all of its attendant irony, expresses the most important theme of the book."[5] This situation is easily recognizable. Chester Eisinger saw the characters "arranged in a circle which revolves around Singer" in 1963, three years before the author's outline of The Mute was published.[6] The challenge lies in analyzing why each of the characters revolves around Singer and the significance of his death. A closer analysis of each person and his relationship with Singer will reveal that person's relationship with love. Part Three of the novel lends particular insight into the character's perception of illusion and reality, which is a determining factor in judging the success or failure of the person in loving.

As has been pointed out, The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter is not without themes other than the search for love. These naturalistic themes--sociological, political, and economic--are less important than the dominant theme, however. The dominant theme is expressed by Mrs. McCullers who said that Heart is "the story of five isolated, lonely people in their search for expression and spiritual integration with something greater than themselves."[7] For Mick, Blount, Copeland, and to a certain extent Brannon, the vehicle used in this search is Singer.

Although the characters may be seen as revolving about Singer, critical analyses of Singer's role in the novel are mixed. Because of Singer's seeming dominance, his position at the center point, his role is often interpreted in a religious context. Irving Malin sees Singer as a Christ figure,[8] as does Howard Dean Everett who views him as God the Son and Antonapoulos as God the Father.[9] Chester Eisinger sees Singer as a figure of the Virgin Mother and the Son,[10] and Frank Millichap even suggests that Singer is John the Baptist to Antonapoulos' Christ.[11] I interpret religious connotations only insofar as the characters attribute God-like qualities to Singer, not that the characters make of him a God or that he personifies a biblical character. Frank Durham, another proponent of Singer as a God-image, points out that "man makes God in the image of his desire."[12] The "God" in this case is not Singer; it is not the beloved, but each character's "reflection of himself" which he seeks. Malin argues that the characters' behavior suggests the actions of narcissists more than their conflict between real and ideal.[13] Granted, the characters exhibit degrees of selfishness, but their selfishness is a reflection of how much or how little they understand of themselves or of others. Their understanding also becomes evident in analyzing the symbols which Mrs. McCullers employs to illustrate her characters inability to love or receive love, their spiritual isolation. The characters will be discussed in the order in which they appear in Part Three.

Except for Singer's own story, Dr. Copeland's is perhaps the most tragic. As a young man, Benedict Copeland attended medical school

and returned to the South to teach his people the "strong true purpose." Dr. Copeland had high aspirations for his race alone; the "strong true purpose" did not include the white population. An ascetic, Dr. Copeland demanded of his family study and self-discipline, and he envisioned great careers for each of his four children, careers that would include carrying out his teaching of the strong true purpose. The gentler teaching of Daisy, Copeland's wife, was more appealing to the children than Copeland's ravings, and when Copeland became fanatical to the point of beating his wife and children, Daisy left, taking the children with her.

Thenceforth, Dr. Copeland lives alone and dedicates himself to healing his people, from his vantage point, in both body and spirit. Copeland's success with his people is aggravating to him because there is no success. Each year at Christmas, Dr. Copeland holds a party at which a five dollar prize is given the student who writes the best essay on a given topic. The Christmas party which the narrator describes is a dismal failure except for the festive party mood. The essays which have been submitted are all poorly written, and Dr. Copeland's annual address is obviously not understood by the genial party-goers. This failure is indicative of Dr. Copeland in his teaching, but not in his ability to practice medicine.

When Dr. Copeland meets Singer, Copeland believes he has found someone who finally understands him. Of Singer Copeland thinks: "Truly he was not like other white men. He was a wise man, and he understood the strong, true purpose in a way that other white men could not" (114).

For this reason Singer is invited to Dr. Copeland's party; Singer is "truly a good man. He was a white man of intellect and true knowledge. In him there was none of the mean insolence" (166). Singer is oblivious to the understanding which Copeland thinks they share. In describing Copeland in a letter to Antonapoulos, Singer says: "He is a doctor and he works more than anyone I have ever seen. He does not talk like a black man at all. Other Negroes I find it hard to understand because their tongues do not move enough for the words. This black man frightens me sometimes. His eyes are hot and bright" (183). There is irony in Singer's observation. Although Singer can read lips and understand what is said to him, he chooses to report not on what Copeland says, but on the idea that he is able to read Copeland's lips at all.

Dr. Copeland's tragedy is twofold. He does not see Singer as he is, and greater than that, he faces the end of his life knowing the terrible reality of racial persecution in its broadest concept without understanding the individual within this concept. Copeland's love for his people is abstract. He lacks the means to convey his message because he deals with abstractions and not with human beings. This is partly due to his own determined nature, but it is mainly due to his refusal to accept his own humanity. In this respect Ann Tucker Rogers is correct in maintaining that because Copeland is consumed with abstractions, he fails in his mission.[14] Similarly, Eisinger is correct in pronouncing a character's failure in establishing receptivity because of the fallibility of the image of the character's desire.

Dr. Copeland's failure is evident to himself. He admits his failure in Part Three, but he fails to realize the cause. He fails because he lacks perception. Mrs. McCullers exposes this lack by relying heavily upon sensory imagery in describing Copeland in the conclusion. She alludes earlier to his being blind and dumb (125), and refers frequently in Part Three to this defect. The conclusion sees Copeland leaving his home because he is ill with tuberculosis, and he has no money. He walks dizzily through the house for the last time. The blinds are drawn and the rooms are darkened. He feels nauseated. When he is in the wagon ready to start the trip to his new home, he shields his eyes from the sun. His last thought is that there is no one left to hear him (285-87).

Dr. Copeland entertains passionate notions all his life with the strong true purpose. This passion, as defined in Chapter 1, remains unfulfilled except for the one person who gives him hope--Singer. Copeland's association with Singer is passionate, but the relationship ultimately ennobles him spiritually. This becomes evident in Copeland's ruminations:

> But truly with the death of that white man a dark sorrow had lain down in his heart. He had talked to him as to no other white man and had trusted him. And the mystery of his suicide had left him baffled and without support. There was neither beginning nor end to this sorrow. Nor understanding. Always he would return in his thoughts to this white man who was not insolent or scornful but who was just. And how can the dead truly be dead when they still live in the souls of those who are left behind? (284)

Copeland finds in Singer a partial realization of his dream, of the

"strong true purpose." Copeland's belief in Singer rescues him from complete despair.

Jake Blount and Dr. Copeland, as Mrs. McCullers intended, are very similar. Their political ideologies are similar, and they share equal strength in their missions. Blount, too, creates Singer as he wishes him to be, and as with Copeland, Singer is mystified:

> [Blount] I think is crazy. Sometimes he speaks his words very clear like my teacher long ago at the school. Other times he speaks such a language that I cannot follow. Sometimes he is dressed in a plain suit, and the next time he will be black with dirt and smelling bad and in the overalls he wears to work. He will shake his fist and say ugly drunken words that I do not wish you [Antonapoulos] to know about. He thinks he and I have a secret together but I do not know what it is. (183)

Blount and Singer spend much time together. Blount is a talker; he can find no other suitable channel for his energies.[15] Singer is a perfect repository for Blount's ravings. Singer appears to accept Blount; others scorn him for being a radical, and many hold aloof from him because of his appearance, a symbol of Jake's inability to love or receive love. In Part One, Biff Brannon observes Blount:

> Blount was not a freak, although when you first saw him he gave you that impression. It was like something was deformed about him--but when you looked at him closely each part of him was normal and as it ought to be. Therefore if this difference was not in the body it was probably in the mind. (17)

Blount's association with illusion and reality is like Copeland's, although Blount's final meditations are more hopeful than Copeland's. Blount, too, is suffering an emotional crisis because

of Singer's death, but he is less contemplative than Copeland in his reaction. He feels cheated:

> Singer was dead. And the way he had felt when he first heard that he had killed himself was not sad--it was angry. He was before a wall. He remembered all the innermost thoughts that he had told to Singer, and with his death it seemed to him that they were lost. But anyway he was dead, dead, dead. (291)

Blount is also handicapped in his sensory perception. Part Three finds him dizzy, blinded by sun and dust, deafened by sound, and nauseated (287-89). However, Blount comes to terms with reality more pointedly than Copeland. It is not Singer or Singer's death which alerts Blount to reality, but a late night rendezvous with Copeland which occurs in Part Two. Of this encounter, Mrs. McCullers said: "In the course of a few hours these two men, after a lifetime of isolation, come as close to each other as it is possible for two human beings to be."[16] Copeland never realizes this, but Blount, in his nearly delirious state in the conclusion, admits to himself that Copeland is the spiritual tie which he has sought all his life:

> Copeland knew. And those who knew were like a handful of naked soldiers before an armed battalion. . . .on some points they might be able to work together after all. If they didn't talk too much. He would go and see him. A sudden urge to hurry came in him. Maybe that would be the best thing after all. Maybe that was the sign, the hand he had so long awaited. (293)

Unfortunately, Blount's realization comes too late for him to meet with Copeland again, but it is not too late for him to acknowledge the truth about Copeland. When Blount leaves the town, "There was

hope in him, and soon perhaps the outline of his journey would take form" (299).

Mick Kelly is as much a loner as Blount and Copeland, and she, like the others, engages herself in a passionate attachment to Mr. Singer. The three of them "felt that the mute would always understand whatever they wanted to say to him. And maybe even more than that" (81). On this, they based their relationship with Singer.

Mick comes from a large family, and as Brannon observes, unless she is taking care of younger siblings or tagging along with the older ones, she is alone. Her mother is barely visible in the story, as she is always busy overseeing a large household. Mick's father, an unemployed carpenter who has resorted to at-home watch repair, exposes Mick's link with reality. First, Mick is much more aware of the world around her than either Copeland or Blount. For a child her age, she is acutely sensitive, particularly about her family. One evening Mick's father calls her in to visit with him, and she "realized about her Dad":

> It wasn't like she was learning a new fact--she had understood it all along in every way except with her brain. Now she just suddenly knew that she knew about her Dad. He was lonesome and he was an old man. Because none of the kids went to him for anything and because he didn't earn much money, he felt like he was cut off from the family. and in his lonesomeness he wanted to be close to one of his kids--and they were all so busy that they didn't know it. He felt like he wasn't much real use to anybody. (85)

At the same time, Mick is given to hasty judgments. She declares rashly that she hates her brother Bill "More than anyone else in the

world" because she thinks he is "different entirely from what he used to be" (38). She hates Biff Brannon because according to her, he looks at her in a suspicious manner. In truth, Brannon likes Mick, and he wishes for such a daughter. Mick is simply too young to understand her emotions clearly. She is a victim of her age and of her environment. Mrs. McCullers said Mick's story "is that of the violent struggle of a gifted child to get what she needs from an unyielding environment."[17]

Mick copes with her environment by two means: her inside room and Mr. Singer. Both are means of escape through which she finds relief. Her inside room which houses music, Mr. Singer, dreams of fame and superhuman achievements, is entirely chimerical. For Mick, her inside room is a way of escaping that which she finds unbearable. She receives little attention from her family, she has few friends, she has no piano, and the Kelly family is virtually poverty-stricken.

Mick's attachment to Mr. Singer is passionate. She treats Singer almost as a savior. When she has a premature sexual encounter with a neighbor boy, Harry Minowitz, it is to Singer she turns, hoping that if he knows and if he understands, her anxiety will be relieved. The god-like qualities which she attributes to Mr. Singer become evident when she suddenly utters to herself "'Lord forgiveth me, for I knoweth not what I do.'" She wonders why she said that because "Everybody in the past few years knew there wasn't any God. When she thought of what she used to imagine was God she could only see Mister Singer with a long, white sheet around him. God was silent--maybe that

was why she was reminded" (101-102).

Singer's view of Mick is bemused, although he appears to enjoy her company:

> The girl used to dress in short trousers like a boy but now she wears a blue skirt and a blouse. She is not yet a young lady. I like her to come and see me. She comes all the time now that I have a radio. . . .She likes music. I wish I knew what it is she hears. She knows I am deaf but she thinks I know about music. (183)

Singer sees Mick's sexually ambivalent state. Her physique is boyish, but she is technically a woman; her behavior is often childlike, but her reaction to her experience with Harry is mature for her age. Symbolically she represents no gender, but a spirit in search of herself. Mick, much more than Jake Blount and Dr. Copeland, is sucessful in this search.

In Part Three, Mick finds herself clerking in Woolworth's. This job means quitting school altogether, because, she reasons, once the family becomes accustomed to the extra income, no one will want to do without it. There are two things Mick cannot believe: "That Mister Singer had killed himself and was dead. And that she was grown and had to work at Woolworth's" (300). Like Blount, she feels cheated, but "That was the way things were" (302). After Singer's death

> she held down the job. She wrapped packages and handed them across the counter and rung the money in the till. She walked when she was supposed to walk and ate when she sat down to the table. Only at first when she went to bed at night she couldn't sleep. But now she slept like she was supposed to, also. (300)

Mick has more tenacity than the others, and although she does not dwell on Singer and her relationship with him, she fully realizes the meaning of possessing something which belonged to him. She has his radio. Mick's final meditations are encouraging:

> Maybe she would get a chance soon. Else what the hell good had it all been--the way she felt about music and the plans she had made in the inside room? It had to be some good if anything made sense. And it was too and it was too and it was too and it was too. It was some good.
> All right!
> O.K.!
> Some good. (302)

Mick's tragedy, as McCullers noted, does not in any way come from herself.[18] According to McCullers, "[Mick] is defeated by society on all main issues before she can even begin, but still there is something in her and in those like her that cannot and will not ever be destroyed."[19]

Biff Brannon is the last of the four major characters seen in the conclusion, and he is the least passionate in his regard for Singer. He is also the most observant and contemplative of the major characters.

Brannon and his wife Alice run the New York Cafe together until Alice's death. Their marriage has become stale over the years; they call each other "Mr. Brannon" and "Mrs. Brannon." They rarely speak, and when they do, they carp at one another. However, when Alice dies, Biff questions:

> Why? Why was it that in cases of real love the one who is left does not more often follow the beloved

> by suicide? Only because the living must bury the dead? Because of the measured rites that must be fulfilled after a death? Because it is as though the one who is left steps for a time upon a stage and each second swells to an unlimited amount of time and he is watched by many eyes? Because there is a function he must carry out? Or perhaps, when there is love, the widowed must stay for the resurrection of the beloved--so that the one who has gone is not really dead, but grows and is created for a second time in the soul of the living? Why? (104)

With Alice gone, Biff changes. He begins wearing her perfume and uses her hair rinse. He redecorates their bedroom so that nothing reminds him of her, but "Certain whims that he had ridiculed in Alice were now his own" (193). Love is a mystery to Biff, but his observations about people are astute. In contemplating Mick he notes:

> She was at the age when she looked as much like an overgrown boy as a girl. And on that subject why was it that the smartest people missed that point? By nature all people are of both sexes. So that marriage and the bed is not all by any means. The proof? Real youth and old age. (112)

This observation and the fact that Biff is impotent compelled Ihab Hassan to label Biff bisexual, which he translates into asexual.[20] Mrs. McCullers saw Biff's observation "as a compensation for his own dilemma."[21] Biff's impotence is likely the result of a frustrated marital relationship rather than homosexuality. The fact that Biff exhibits characteristics of both sexes merely indicates Biff's search for love. He is clear in observing that people are of both sexes, but he is not able to fully apply it to himself.

Mrs. McCullers said Biff "has that faculty for seeing things which happen around him with cold objectivity--without instinctively

connecting them with himself."[22] He is an astute observer, particularly concerning John Singer. Biff has absolutely no attachment to Singer except for Biff's liking "freaks" and his desire to treat them with something at his cafe (18). He is more curious than anything, and he wonders why everyone persists in "thinking the mute was exactly as they wanted him to be--when most likely it was all a very queer mistake?" (191). Singer is aware that Biff is different from the rest. In describing him in his letter to Antonapoulos, Singer says "the New York Cafe owner is different--he is not just like the others. He watches" (182). It is Biff's watching which finally alerts Biff to himself. His final contemplations are focused on Singer and Singer's funeral. The time is the middle of the night:

> Then suddenly he felt a quickening in him. His heart turned and he leaned his back against the counter for support. For in a swift radiance of illumination he saw a glimpse of human struggle and of valor. Of the endless fluid passage of humanity through endless time. And of those who labor and of those who--one word--love. His soul expanded. (306)

Biff and Mick are the most perceptive of the four. Their presentations in Part Three lack references to sensory perception, but both contain references to sense. Mick wonders about things making sense, and Biff asks himself if he is a sensible man.

All the major characters are assembled only twice in the novel. The first time is in Singer's room; the scene is described by Singer in a letter to Antonapoulos. None of the guests feel comfortable, and any conversation is strained. Singer observes: "They sat like they

were from different cities" (184). Singer is as bewildered by this poor display of camaraderie as he is by a dream he has which also involves all the major characters. In the dream

> There were dull yellow lanterns lighting up a dark flight of stone steps. Antonapoulos kneeled at the top of these steps. He was naked and he fumbled with something that he held above his head and gazed at it as though in prayer. He himself [Singer] knelt halfway down the steps. He was naked and cold and he could not take his eyes from Antonapoulos and the thing he held above him. Behind him on the ground he felt the one with the mustache [Blount] and the girl [Mick] and the black man [Copeland] and the last one [Brannon]. They knelt naked and he felt their eyes on him. And behind them there were uncounted crowds of kneeling people in the darkness. His own hands were huge windmills and he stared fascinated at the unknown thing that Antonapoulos held. (185)

What Antonapoulos holds is open to speculation. Frank Millichap, for example, believes that what Antonapoulos holds is a cross.[23] My interpretation is in accordance with Howard Dean Everett's. Everett regards the identity of the object as academic. The important idea is that Antonapoulos "has displayed <u>something</u> on which attention can focus."[24] The "something" is spiritual fulfillment. The desire for spiritual fulfillment manifests itself through Singer for Blount, Copeland, and Mick; through Antonapoulos for Singer. What manifests itself is passionate love. For Blount, Copeland, and Mick, Singer is the stimulus of the desire of each character to be understood. Blount and Copeland exhort political and sociological theory, and they think only Singer understands. Mick, an unwittingly neglected child and a victim of naturalistic influences, also believes Singer understands

her. Each one is guilty of what the transient in "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud." describes as beginning at the wrong end of love. Since they begin with love at the climax, their passion enables them to impute to Singer "all the qualities which they would wish for him to have."[25] They do not really love, and because of this, according to the Kelly's cook, Portia, they can feel no peace. In an outburst Portia says to Mick, "'This afternoon you going to roam all over the place without never being satisfied. Your heart going to beat hard enough to kill you because you don't love and don't have peace'" (43). Their need for Portia's "peace" is so strong that "the longing made them trust in anything that might give it to them" (43). They blindly trust in Singer, who provides them with no spiritual fulfillment in his lifetime. The irony between the four characters and Singer is that the four never bother to know Singer as he is. Their created images of him are passionate, but after Singer's death each person is, in varying degrees, fulfilled spiritually.

As the thesis on love in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe points out, both the lover and the beloved can be "of any description." Certainly this applies to Singer's passion for Antonapoulos. Singer is consumed with thoughts of him. In his reverie Singer recalls his friend:

> . . .there was the time Antonapoulos took the rent money from the vase on the mantlepiece and spent it all on the slot machines. And the summer afternoon Antonapoulos went downstairs naked to get the paper. He suffered so from the heat. And the time Antonapoulos got drunk and threw a bowl of macaroni in his face. (173)

Singer further describes him: "This was the friend to whom he told all that was in his heart. This was the Antonapoulos who no one knew was wise but him" (173). According to Singer, Antonapoulos "watched the things that were said to him. And in his wisdom he understood" (173). This is the passion with which Singer sees Antonapoulos, and it is this passion which causes Singer's suicide when he learns of Antonapoulos' death. Singer cannot hear, and he can not or will not speak, but he can see. He is able to see, but he is blind to reality. He is thoroughly entrenched in the world he has created which contains only Antonapoulos. He is a passionate lover in the fullest sense. Singer's passion "obviates any possibility of fulfillment" because he commits suicide, thereby robbing himself of the introspection which benefits the others. Singer's passion is the strongest among the five characters, and he is the least successful of them in loving. The position of the other four in Part Three, beginning with Copeland and ending with Brannon, is indicative of the degree of each one's passion. Copeland's relationship with Singer is the most passionate, and he benefits the least spiritually. Brannon is the least passionate, and his spiritual reward is the most profound. Brannon's feelings are not based on illusion, as are the others'. Only Singer may be called a failure in loving; the passion of his love for Anatonapoulos completely "obscured the fallibility of the image" of his desire. Singer's suicide indicates his weak link with reality, and it shows that his passionate absorption in his beloved is even greater than any of the other character's. Biff wonders why "in cases

of real love the one who is left does not more often follow the beloved by suicide?" Singer commits suicide because his love for Antonapoulos is not at all real love.

NOTES

Chapter 2

[1] Carson McCullers, "Author's Outline of The Mute," in The Mortgaged Heart, ed., Margarita G. Smith (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1975), p. 158.

[2] McCullers, "The Mute," p. 138.

[3] Carson McCullers, The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1980), p. 3. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[4] McCullers, "The Mute," p. 153.

[5] McCullers, "The Mute," p. 154.

[6] Chester E. Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 246.

[7] McCullers, "The Mute," pp. 136-37.

[8] Irving Malin, The New American Gothic (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), p. 23.

[9] Howard Dean Everett, "Love and Alienation: The Sad, Dark Vision of Carson McCullers," Diss. University of New Mexico 1975, p. 32.

[10] Eisinger, p. 247.

[11] Joseph Millichap, "The Realistic Structure of The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter," Twentieth Century Literature, 17 (1971), 13.

[12] Frank Durham, "God and No God in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter," South Atlantic Quarterly, 56 (Autumn 1957), 497.

[13] Malin, p. 20.

[14] Ann Tucker Rogers, "The Search for Relationships in Carson McCullers," Diss. St Louis University 1971, p. 6.

[15] McCullers, "The Mute," p. 143.

[16] McCullers, "The Mute," p. 154.

[17] McCullers, "The Mute," p. 139.

[18] McCullers, "The Mute," p. 139.

[19] McCullers, "The Mute," p. 142.

[20] Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: The Contemporary American Novel (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 210.

[21] McCullers, "The Mute," p. 146.

[22] McCullers, "The Mute," p. 148.

[23] Millichap, p. 13.

[24] Everett, p. 33.

[25] McCullers, "The Mute," p. 137.

CHAPTER 3

The Ballad of the Sad Cafe

The Ballad of the Sad Cafe was written in the summer of 1941, when Mrs. McCullers was living at Yaddo. The novella was published in 1943 in Harper's Bazaar, and Houghton Mifflin included it in an omnibus edition of McCullers' short stories in 1951. The Ballad, whose characters are involved in a love triangle, was prompted, presumably, by a love triangle in which Mrs. McCullers herself was involved. At the time of the writing, Carson and Reeves McCullers were separated. Reeves was living with composer David Diamond, who was in love with Reeves and Carson both, and Carson was preoccupied with thoughts of her Swiss friend, Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach.

The Ballad of the Sad Cafe is sometimes considered the least successful of McCullers' novels. The novella certainly cannot be considered unsuccessful in terms of its lucid narrative. The language of The Ballad, which lends itself to tonal melancholy, is at once charming and disarming, from the eloquent passage on love (Chapter 1) to the description of a liquor which causes those who drink it to "grow warts on their livers the size of goobers."[7]

The melancholy tone, however, dominates. The very first sentence exudes bleakness: "The town itself is dreary; not much is there except the cotton mill, the two-room houses where the workers live, a few peach trees, a church with two colored windows, and a miserable main street only a hundred yards long." There is little activity in the town. The town is "lonesome, sad, and like a place

that is far off and estranged from all other places in the world" (3). The Ballad ends with the same tone: "Yes, the town is dreary. . . . There is absolutely nothing to do in the town. Walk around the mill-pond, stand kicking at a rotten stump, figure out what you can do with the old wagon wheel by the side of the road near the church. The soul rots with boredom" (65).

The Ballad of the Sad Cafe tells the story of three people who are, in turn, lovers and beloved; the story of the cafe, where much of the action takes place, is also told. The three major characters are Miss Amelia Evans, Cousin Lymon Willis, and Marvin Macy.

Miss Amelia is six foot two inches tall, cross-eyed, wears overalls and gum boots, smokes her dead father's pipe, and has "bones and muscles like a man. . . . There were those who would have courted her, but Miss Amelia cared nothing for the love of men and was a solitary person" (4). She earns her living running the store which she inherited from her father and she becomes rich. She also operates a still, is a skilled carpenter and a self-taught doctor. She is not, however, at ease with people; the only use she has for them is "to make money out of them" (5). Miss Amelia's life is generally uneventful except for a kidney stone operation, the death of her father, and a ten day abortive marriage to Marvin Macy.

Marvin Macy was one of seven children abandoned by their parents. Marvin and his brother Henry were taken in by Mrs. Mary Hale who "loved them as her own" (27). But as the narrator of The Ballad points out:

> . . . the hearts of small children are delicate organs. A cruel beginning in this world can twist them into curious shapes. The heart of a hurt child can shrink so that forever afterward it is hard and pitted as the seed of a peach. Or again, the heart of such a child may fester and swell until it is a misery to carry within the body, easily chafed and hurt by the most ordinary things. (27)

The latter happened to Henry Macy's heart. Henry became kind. Marvin Macy however, became cruel. He ruined the reputation of young girls, "carried about with him the dried and salted ear of a man he had killed in a razor fight," and "chopped off the tails of squirrels in the pinewoods just to please his fancy" (25-26). When Marvin Macy fell in love with Miss Amelia, his character changed. He loved her for two years without declaring himself, and during this time he reformed completely. His love for Miss Amelia was strong, and at times Marvin Macy would stand near the door of Miss Amelia's "his cap in his hand, his eyes meek and longing and misty gray" (27). At the end of two years he declared himself and they were married.

The marriage was disastrous. Miss Amelia refused to sleep with Macy, opting instead for a pallet in the kitchen. Miss Amelia had no contact with Macy whatsoever, and on the fourth day, in desperation, Macy signed over all his belongings, which were considerable, to Miss Amelia. That afternoon he got drunk, and when he returned home he "went up to Miss Amelia with wet wide eyes, and put his hand on her shoulder. He was trying to tell her something, but before he could open his mouth she had swung once with her fist and hit his face so hard that he was thrown back against the wall and one of his

front teeth was broken" (30). From then on "Miss Amelia hit him whenever he came within arm's reach of her, and whenever he was drunk. At last she turned him off the premises altogether" and when he trespassed on her property, she tried to get him sent to the penitentiary (30). Macy left town on the tenth day of their marriage, leaving a wild love letter for Miss Amelia swearing to get even with her. Miss Amelia was left with everything Macy had owned; "all he had ever done was to make her richer and to bring her love. But, strange to say, she never spoke of him but with a terrible and spiteful bitterness." When the townspeople learned later that Macy had been sent to the penitentiary accused of many crimes, "Miss Amelia was deeply gratified" (31).

Miss Amelia's marriage took place when whe was nineteen. One evening in the spring of her thirtieth year, she and some children and men were on the porch of her store, when a figure came into sight on the road. The figure approached the group and he identified himself as a cousin of Miss Amelia's, Lymon Willis. Lymon was a hunchback. "He was scarcely four feet tall and he wore a ragged, dusty coat that reached only to his knees. His crooked little legs seemed too thin to carry the weight of his great warped chest and the hump that sat on his shoulders" (6).

The narrator reminds the reader that it is important to consider the whiskey the group was drinking that evening. Without it, perhaps there would not have been a cafe (9). Miss Amelia's liquor has a special quality. It is compared with using a flame to reveal a message written on white paper with lemon juice. When one imagines "that the

whiskey is the fire and that the message is that which is known only in the soul of a man--then the worth of Miss Amelia's liquor can be understood" (9). With the drinking of the whiskey, presumably, Cousin Lymon's presence inspired love in Miss Amelia's heart--just as queerly as Singer's presence inspired love in the hearts of his followers. Miss Amelia invited Cousin Lymon in, served him supper, and the two were not seen for several days. The townspeople imagined that Miss Amelia had murdered the hunchback (this was imagined by all but three of the townspeople, because there were only three in the town who were not malicious). Finally eight or ten men gathered at Miss Amelia's to confront her. When she let them in to her store, they saw the hunchback, "whom they had already murdered in their minds" (16). Miss Amelia brought out some whiskey bottles and glasses, an unheard of thing, as she always sold her liquor by the bottle, and no one was ever allowed to drink inside her store. The group assumed the role of polite society, drinking and eating the crackers which Miss Amelia offered her guests. In this way the cafe was born. From then on Miss Amelia sold suppers every evening, and Cousin Lymon provided lively company. Cousin Lymon proved himself to be a gossip and a meddler. He was familiar with all the intimate details of everyone's life. He was also

> [the] type of person who has the quality about him that sets him apart from other and more ordinary human beings. Such a person 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. (19)

For the next four years Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon were always seen together; at the same time the cafe, the "only place of pleasure for many miles around," thrived (22). Miss Amelia loved Cousin Lymon. She sat up nights with him because he "was sickly at night and dreaded to lie looking into the dark. He had a deep fear of death. And Miss Amelia would not leave him by himself to suffer with this fright. It may even be reasoned that the growth of the cafe came about mainly on this account; it was a thing that brought him company and pleasure and that helped him through the night" (23).

Those in the town were aware of Miss Amelia's and Cousin Lymon's relationship, and they speculated on their activities. Some thought they were "living in sin," while the "good people thought that if those two had found some satisfaction of the flesh between themselves, then it was a matter concerning them and God alone" (24).

The effects of Miss Amelia's love for Cousin Lymon were twofold. Cousin Lymon was treated like royalty, and Miss Amelia's character changed. Miss Amelia held Cousin Lymon in complete confidence on all matters except for her marriage to Marvin Macy. Cousin Lymon had access to her checkbook, the cash register, and he "owned almost everything on the premises, for when he was cross Miss Amelia would prowl about and find him some present--so that now there was hardly anything left close at hand to give him" (35). She also had her two kidney stones "set as ornaments in a watch chain which she gave to him" (33). Miss Amelia changed obviously: "She laughed often, with a deep ringing laugh, and her whistling had a sassy, tuneful trickery. . . Cousin

Lymon was with her always, traipsing along behind her coat-tails, and when she watched him her face had a bright, soft look, and when she spoke his name there lingered in her voice the undertone of love" (42).

In the sixth year of Miss Amelia's and Cousin Lymon's life together Marvin Macy returned to the town. It happened one afternoon when Miss Amelia was away on business. Cousin Lymon was the first to see Marvin Macy. The two "stared at each other, and it was not the look of two strangers meeting for the first time and swiftly summing up each other. It was a peculiar stare they exchanged between them, like the look of two criminals who recognize each other" (43). Marvin Macy turned and walked away, and Cousin Lymon followed him. They finally returned to Miss Amelia's, along with other townspeople who had learned of Macy's return. Cousin Lymon was bewitched. He had a trick he used "whenever he wished to ingratiate himself with someone. He would stand very still, and with just a little concentration, he could wiggle his large pale ears with marvelous quickness and ease. This trick he always used when he wanted to get something special out of Miss Amelia, and to her it was irresistible" (45). Cousin Lyman tried it on Marvin Macy, who was not impressed. Macy thought something ailed the "Brokeback" (46). Macy cuffed him, and from where he fell, Cousin Lymon looked up at Macy "and with great effort his ears managed one last forlorn little flap" (46). Miss Amelia had returned by this time, and had witnessed the fracas. She did not react, but her face was "tense with reckoning some inward pain" (47). Marvin Macy simply walked away.

Macy moved into Mrs. Mary Hale's home and resumed his life in

the town. As time passed, the people in the town thought Marvin Macy was more dangerous than ever. They thought that "in the penitentiary in Atlanta he must have learned the method of laying charms. Otherwise how could his effect on Cousin Lymon be explained?" (48). Since Macy had come to town, Cousin Lymon lost all interest in Miss Amelia, and he focused his attention on Macy.

> For since first setting eyes on Marvin Macy the hunchback was possessed by an unnatural spirit. Every minute he wanted to be following along behind this jailbird, and he was full of silly schemes to attract attention to himself. Still Marvin Macy either treated him hatefully or failed to notice him at all. Sometimes the hunchback would give up, perch himself on the banister of the front porch much as a sick bird huddles on a telephone wire, and grieve publicly. (48)

Because of Cousin Lymon's admiration for him, Macy soon realized that it was through Lymon he could get revenge on Amelia. Marvin Macy began visiting the cafe and Miss Amelia made no protest. Finally Macy moved in with Cousin Lymon and Miss Amelia. Miss Amelia was helpless; her bumbling efforts to cross Macy failed:

> She got caught in her own tricks, and found herself in many pitiful positions. But still she did not put Marvin Macy off the premises, as she was afraid that she would be left alone. The silence of a firelit room when suddenly the clock stops ticking, the nervous shadows in an empty house--it is better to take in your mortal enemy than face the terror of living alone. (56)

As Mrs. McCullers explained in her thesis on love, "The lover craves any possible relation with the beloved, even if this experience can cause him only pain." Certainly this applied to Miss Amelia. She was terrified of losing Cousin Lymon, so she endured Marvin Macy's

presence and his and Cousin Lymon's cruelty, especially the latter's. Cousin Lymon "was constantly plucking at Marvin Macy's trouser leg to draw attention to himself. Sometimes he followed in Miss Amelia's footsteps--but these days it was only in order to imitate her awkward long-legged walk; he crossed his eyes and aped her gestures in a way that made her appear to be a freak. There was something so terrible about this that even the silliest customers of the cafe. . . did not laugh. Only Marvin Macy drew up the left corner of his mouth and chuckled" (57).

It was understood among everyone that Miss Amelia and Marvin Macy would confront one another. Eventually it was understood that the confrontation would be a fistfight and it would occur on Ground Hog Day at seven o'clock in the evening. Everyone in the town attended the fight, and everyone bet on Miss Amelia. During the fight, it became obvious that Miss Amelia was winning:

> But at that instant, just as the fight was won, a cry sounded in the cafe that caused a shrill bright shiver to run down the spine. And what took place has been a mystery ever since. The whole town was there to testify what happened, but there were those who doubted their own eyesight. For the counter on which Cousin Lymon stood was at least twelve feet from the fighters in the center of the cafe. Yet at the instant Miss Amelia grasped the throat of Marvin Macy the hunchback sprang forward and sailed through the air as though he had grown hawk wings. He landed on the broad strong back of Miss Amelia and clutched at her neck with his clawed little fingers. (62)

Marvin Macy won the fight. Humiliated, Miss Amelia spent the rest of the night locked in her office. Sometime during the night Marvin

Macy and Cousin Lymon ransacked Miss Amelia's property. Among other things, they fixed a dish of Miss Amelia's favorite food and laced it with poison. In fact, "They did everything ruinous they could think of without actually breaking into the office where Miss Amelia stayed the night. Then they went off together, the two of them" (63-64).

After they left, Miss Amelia became gruff and surly. She seemed to care about nothing. "And those gray eyes--slowly day by day they were more crossed, and it was as though they sought each other out to exchange a little glance of grief and lonely recognition" (64). Miss Amelia waited for three years for Cousin Lymon to return, but he never did. "It was in the fourth year that Miss Amelia hired a Cheehaw carpenter and had him board up the premises, and there in those closed rooms she has remained ever since" (65). There is one window, however, which is not boarded up, and occasionally "a hand will slowly open the shutter and a face will look down on the town. It is a face like the terrible dim faces known in dreams--sexless and white, with two gray crossed eyes which are turned inward so sharply that they seem to be exchanging with each other one long and secret gaze of grief" (3).

In analysis, a theme which dominates criticism of The Ballad is sexuality. Various critics, including Oliver Evans and Robert S. Phillips see Cousin Lymon as homosexual,[2] while Louise Westling sees both Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon as sexual inverts.[3] Phillips claims a "'normal' love affair between the pair is unthinkable . . . with the handicap of Amelia's height and Lymon's twisted, humped back."[4] One wonders if Mr. Phillips considers Lymon's tremendous leap from the

counter "normal."

Louise Westling's observations revolve around the theme of male dominance. Apparently, Westling assumes males are dominant because she sees Miss Amelia refusing to accept "the diminished status of woman,"[5] which in turn reflects McCullers' "ambivalence about female identity."[6] Miss Amelia never feels threatened by Cousin Lymon because "he is not a real man who sees her as female."[7] Similarly, Lymon's "warped, childlike form clearly indicates his masculine impotence, just as Amelia's grotesquely masculine appearance expresses her inability to function as a woman."[8] These physical "peculiarities" do not, Westling says, represent the spiritual incapacity of McCullers' characters to love or receive love as McCullers indicated, but McCullers' sexual ambivalence.[9] Through Miss Amelia, McCullers attempted "to deny the feminine entirely and to allow a woman to function successfully as a man." The effort failed because McCullers, Westling believes, "knew it was impossible."[10] The failure is embodied in Miss Amelia's losing the fight. Miss Amelia proved that a woman could not "deny her sex and dominate men with a strength analogous to their own."[11]

While Westling adheres to the male dominance theory, Ihab Hassan interprets the fight between Amelia and Macy as "an unholy trophy of man's eternal struggle with Evil, with Death itself, which is the negation of Love."[12] In this sense, Marvin Macy represents Evil or Death. Chester Eisinger and Westling share Hassan's view that Macy symbolizes Satan.[13] Mrs. McCullers attested that "symbols suggest the story and theme and incident,"[14] but the aforementioned

critics may be straying from the theme which controls McCullers' fiction, spiritual isolation.

Obviously, all three major characters are tremendous failures in their love pursuits. The degree of each one's failure is directly proportionate to each one's physical defects. Cousin Lymon's dwarfism represents his childishness in giving or receiving love. He does not receive anything graciously; he is greedy, petty, and egotistical. When he wants to be noticed by Macy, he wiggles his ears. After the fight between Amelia and Macy, Lymon hides under the porch steps. He is thoroughly child-like. Miss Amelia's height and masculinity symbolize her incapacities. When the object of her love is within her grasp, Miss Amelia is perfectly content. But when Cousin Lymon has obviously jilted her, she becomes a complete recluse and is wholly incapacitated.

Neither Miss Amelia nor Cousin Lymon is lovable or attractive. Although Miss Amelia becomes a pathetic figure when she loses the fight, one rarely sympathizes with her. Except when Cousin Lymon lives with her, she is cold and calculating. And her treatment of Marvin Macy during their marriage is despicable. That Cousin Lymon, on the other hand, is a homosexual in love with Marvin Macy is unlikely. Cousin Lymon is shrewd enough to recognize an opportunity when he sees one. He is able to live well for six years with Miss Amelia; all he has to do is make his wants known and Miss Amelia sees that they are met. When Marvin Macy appears, Cousin Lymon's shallow attachment to Miss Amelia becomes apparent. He is infatuated with Macy's having been to the penitentiary and Atlanta; to Cousin Lymon this is glamorous.

His six years with Miss Amelia mean nothing to him, nor does Miss Amelia mean anything to him. Just as Amelia imagines what she sees in Lymon, so does Lymon become passionately attached to Macy.

In The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, Mrs. McCullers made it clear what each character except Singer sought and for what reason. In The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, it is clear that the characters, like those in Heart, seek spiritual fulfillment. In The Ballad each character is introduced with no meaningful attachment to anybody, just as they were in Heart. And like those relationships in Heart, the attachments in The Ballad are passionate. They also begin with what the transient in "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud." called the "climax of love." The motivation, however, for each one's desperate hold on passionate love in The Ballad, unlike in Heart, is not apparent. One wonders why Miss Amelia is so fond of Cousin Lymon and Lymon of Macy. In Miss Amelia's case, Lymon is "only a stimulus for all the stored-up love which has lain quiet for a long time hitherto" (24). The unlikely stimulus for Amelia is a person whose growth is stunted not only physically, but intellectually and emotionally as well. This is known only to the reader, and not to Miss Amelia. The reader also knows that in loving Cousin Lymon, Miss Amelia creates a giant. Miss Amelia does not see Lymon as he is. She does not see that there is nothing to love about Lymon; she does not see that Lymon takes her for granted; she does not see Lymon's selfish pettiness. She sees only what she creates in Lymon. Like John Singer, the strength of her love for this creation destroys her. Miss Amelia never acknowledges the value of her

happiness with Lymon. She never gives up the image she created; as a consequence, any spiritual rewards which might have been hers are lost. To her, the reality of her creation is unknown; she succumbs completely to illusion. As Antonapoulos' death destroys Singer, so does Lymon's departure, in essence the death of the relationship, destroy Amelia.

Since the story of the relationship between Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon reveals more of Amelia than of Lymon, the latter's perception of illusion and reality can be determined only in his infatuation with Marvin Macy. Since Lymon is infatuated with Macy, his feelings for Macy are obviously passionate. And since he runs off with Macy one can only suppose what the consequences of his passion will be. Presumably, the relationship will not survive.

More important than Lymon's perception of illusion and reality, and of equal importance to Amelia's, is Marvin Macy's. Of the three characters, Macy is the most likable. His physical defect is that he never sweats. He is a criminal, but before his marriage to Miss Amelia, "His reputation was as bad, if not worse, than that of any young man in the county" (25). The narrator is telling the reader that Macy's reputation is at least as bad as and only possibly worse than anyone else's. Therefore, he is not the demon some make him. Before he declared himself to Miss Amelia he spent two years reforming, a considerable length of time. Macy's loving Amelia is more rational than Amelia's loving Cousin Lymon. Since Macy and Amelia grew up in the same small town, they probably were at least acquainted, and as

the narrator points out, Amelia could have been courted.

The facts of the unfortunate marriage between Macy and Miss Amelia revealed, the narrator comments that

> though the outward facts of this love are indeed sad and ridiculous, it must be remembered that the real story was that which took place in the soul of the lover himself. So who but God can be the final judge of this or any love? (31)

McCullers did not choose to make this observation about Amelia and Lymon or Lymon and Macy, but about Macy and Amelia. What is remarkable about Macy is that he cared enough for Amelia to come back. Whether or not this constitutes a form of spiritual fulfillment for Macy is not known. He certainly was satisfied in taking from Amelia the most precious thing she had, Cousin Lymon. The humiliation Amelia suffers in losing the "fight" is not nearly so dramatic as that of the rejected bridegroom. By returning to avenge himself upon Amelia, Macy proved he has the clearest sense of reality. He clearly understands Amelia's earlier cruelty. Macy's early intentions for Amelia were honest, and Amelia's willingness to marry him and her immediate rejection of him is deplorable. Macy's understanding this cruelty suggests that he did not love Miss Amelia passionately, that his love for her was not based on illusion.

Frank Baldanza notes a disturbing aspect of McCullers' fiction: "All the love is wasted in a sense . . . since it is never even understood, much less reciprocated."[15] This is accurate when applied to The Ballad of the Sad Cafe. Unlike The Heart Is a Lonely

Hunter, there is a conspicuous lack of spiritual fulfillment. John B. Vickery assumes that Miss Amelia is aware of the repercussions of her passion for Cousin Lymon: "And it is only with the flight of the hunchback and the victorious Marvin, who wins revenge by publicly humiliating her, that she grasps the solitary nature of love and accepts its suffering."[16] Miss Amelia does not accept love's suffering; she gives in to it. Her love, as well as Macy's and Lymon's is wasted. None of them is successful in giving or receiving love. Perhaps it is for this reason that The Ballad of the Sad Cafe was less well received than other major works of McCullers'. The reader is not left with any feeling of hope for any of the characters. Each is or eventually will be alone. One feels as if the pursuit of love or companionship is futile. McCullers may have been refuting this idea when she added "The Twelve Mortal Men," a summary stanza common to ballads. This short account is of a chain gang. At various times during the day the men in the gang can be heard singing. The music they create "causes the heart to broaden and the listener to grow cold with ecstacy and fright." The gang which makes this music is "Just twelve mortal men, seven of them black and five of them white boys . . . Just twelve mortal men who are together" (66). "The Twelve Mortal Men" emphasizes people being together; it reiterates John Singer's statement that "it was better to be with any person than to be too long alone," and Miss Amelia's thoughts that "it was better to take in your mortal enemy than face the terror of living alone." The strength of the attachments in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe again points

to McCullers' notion that a person's desire to belong is strong and enduring. The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter and The Ballad of the Sad Cafe also reveal that the desire may be self-destructive. Perhaps McCullers suggests that even the togetherness of the chain gang is preferable to this.

NOTES

Chapter 3

[1] Carson McCullers, The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe and Other Works (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 65. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[2] Oliver Evans, "The Theme of Spiritual Isolation in Carson McCullers," in New World Writing (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1952), p. 305; Robert S. Phillips, "Painful Love: Carson McCullers' Parable," Southwest Review, 51 (1966), 82.

[3] Louise Westling, "Carson McCullers' Amazon Nightmare," Modern Fiction Studies, 28, No. 3 (Autumn 1982), 470.

[4] Phillips, p. 82.

[5] Westling, p. 466.

[6] Westling, p. 465.

[7] Westling, p. 466.

[8] Westling, p. 470.

[9] Westling, p. 465.

[10] Westling, p. 472.

[11] Westling, p. 472.

[12] Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: The Contemporary American Novel (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961) p. 225.

[13] Chester E. Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 257; Westling, p. 471.

[14] Carson McCullers, "The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing," in The Mortgaged Heart, ed. Margarita G. Smith (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1975), p. 282.

[15] Frank Baldanza, "Plato in Dixie," Georgia Review (Summer 1958), 157.

[16] John B. Vickery, "Carson McCullers: A Map of Love," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 1 (Winter 1960), 16.

CHAPTER 4

The Member of the Wedding

The Member of the Wedding (1946) was written over a period of five years. This period was tumultuous for Mrs. McCullers; among other things, she divorced and remarried, wrote The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, and had experienced painful romantic involvements. Perhaps this tumult made Mrs. McCullers introspective and willing to expose herself. Margarita G. Smith, the author's sister, maintained that "Of all the characters in the work of Carson McCullers, the one who seemed to her family and friends most like the author herself was Frankie Addams: the vulnerable, exasperating and endearing adolescent of The Member of the Wedding who was looking for the 'we of me.'"[1] Like Mick Kelly of The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, the adolescent Frankie Addams closely resembles the author as an adolescent. Frankie, too, is thin and tall for her age, and she frequently roams about the town by herself. Frankie is a loner: "She belonged to no club and was a member of nothing in the world."[2] Neither did Mick or Lula Carson Smith "belong." Adolescents are common to McCullers' fiction,[3] broadening the scope of McCullers' theme of isolation. As Oliver Evans points out, during adolescence "the sense of individual isolation is stronger than at any other [time]. Adolesence sets one apart just as effectively as does a physical or mental aberration: one is no longer a child, nor yet an adult." Since adolescents do not "belong" anywhere, Evans perceives them as "excellent symbols of spiritual isolation."[4]

In addition to Frankie, The Member of the Wedding includes two other major characters, John Henry West, Frankie's neighbor and six-year-old cousin; and Berenice Sadie Brown, the Addams' black cook and housekeeper. The majority of the action, which spans approximately three days, takes place in the Addams' kitchen, a "sad and ugly room" which has a "crazy look, like that of a room in the crazyhouse" (602). In the course of the three part novel, Frankie's identity changes from "Frankie" in Part One to "F. Jasmine" in Part Two to "Frances" in Part Three. This in itself is indicative of Frankie's problems with her own identity, but a more thorough examination of her will reveal her isolation and her search for spiritual fulfillment. Berenice, too, symbolizes isolation, and her struggle for fulfillment is also evident, although not as markedly as Frankie's.

When the story begins, Frankie is twelve years old. She is very tall and she considers herself a freak. Frankie figures that if she reaches her full height by her eighteenth birthday she will be over nine feet tall. She asks: "And what would be a lady who is over nine feet high? She would be a Freak" (618). As a result of these feelings, Frankie, like Mrs. McCullers, fears "mesmeric union." At midways, Frankie "was afraid of all the Freaks, for it seemed to her that they had looked at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with hers, as though to say: we know you. She was afraid of their long Freak eyes" (619). People tease Frankie about her height and because she feels she is different, she avoids the company of her peers. Her companions are John Henry and Berenice. When the reader

meets Frankie it is late August, and Frankie has spent most of the summer in the kitchen visiting and playing cards with the other two. Frankie hates the kitchen and the dismal scene the kitchen provides. The conversation among the three is always the same; Frankie longs for involvement among people in a much larger sense. In one attempt to feel she belongs, she decides to donate blood to the Red Cross:

> . . . she wanted to donate a quart a week and her blood would be in the veins of Australians and Fighting French and Chinese, all over the world, and it would be as though she were close kin to all of these people. She could hear the army doctors saying that the blood of Frankie Addams was the reddest and the strongest blood that they had ever known. (623)

But because she was too young, the Red Cross would not take her blood. Therefore, "Frankie felt mad with the Red Cross, and left out of everything. The war and the world were too fast and big and strange. To think about the world for very long made her afraid. . . . She was afraid because in the war they would not include her, and because the world seemed somehow separate from herself" (624).

Frankie, as was Mrs. McCullers herself, is motivated by fear: "She was afraid of these things that made her suddenly wonder who she was, and what she was going to be in the world, and why she was standing at that minute, seeing a light, or listening, or staring up into the sky: alone. She was afraid, and there was a queer tightness in her chest" (624).

Frankie "is afraid" no less than ten times in Part One. That Frankie has no significant ties to anyone no doubt contributes

significantly to her fear. Frankie's mother died giving birth to Frankie; her father, a jeweler, is always busy at his store; her only sibling is in Alaska in the army; and as mentioned, she has no friends. Frankie compensates for this loneliness in several ways. One of them is close physical contact with John Henry, who often stays overnight with Frankie. Previous to the summer, Frankie had slept with her father. When he told her it was time she had a room of her own, "She began to have a grudge against her father and they looked at each other in a slant-eyed way. She did not like to stay at home" (625). John Henry, however, is a convenient alternative to sleeping alone, and "with somebody sleeping in the dark with her, she was not so much afraid" (614).

As well as physical contact with John Henry, Frankie uses her imagination to fulfill her wish to belong. Her own "inside room" is filled with her dreams of remarkable achievements. Her exaggerations of herself are evident to Berenice:

> 'This is a serious fault with you, Frankie. Somebody makes a loose remark and then you cozen it in your mind until nobody would recognize it. Your Aunt Pet happened to mention to Clorina that you had sweet manners and Clorina passed it on to you. For what it was worth. Then next thing I know you are going all around and bragging how Mrs. West thought you had the finest manners in town and ought to go to Hollywood, and I don't know what all you didn't say. You keep building on to any little compliment you hear about yourself. Or, if it is a bad thing, you do the same. You cozen and change things too much in your own mind. And that is a serious fault.' (636)

Berenice's observation is lost on Frankie.

The culmination of Frankie's daydreaming spans the weekend of her brother Jarvis' wedding. On Friday Jarvis brings his fiancee, Janice, home to meet Mr. Addams and Frankie. The couple spends the afternoon with Jarvis' family, and then returns to Winter Hill, the bride's home. Frankie thinks "'it's a curious coincidence that Jarvis would get to go to Alaska and that the very bride he picked to marry would come from a place called Winter Hill. Winter Hill,' she repeated slowly, her eyes closed, and the name blended with dreams of Alaska and cold snow" (604). Frankie ruminates the rest of the day about the couple who she thinks has "'a good time every minute of the day'" (601) and who "'went away and left me with this feeling'" (637). Frankie ultimately resolves this "feeling":

> The long hundred miles [to Winter Hill] did not make her sadder and make her feel more far away than the knowing that they were them and both together and she was only her and parted from them, by herself. And as she sickened with this feeling a thought and explanation suddenly came to her, so that she knew and almost said aloud: <u>They are the we of me</u>. (646)

Frankie realizes that everyone has a "we" except for her. Her father has his store, Berenice has several "we's," and "All members of clubs have a <u>we</u> to belong to and talk about. The soldiers in the army can say <u>we</u>, and even the criminals on chain-gangs" (646). Frankie decides that because she "loves the two of them so much" she will join them and go with them wherever they go. She claims: "'It's like I've known it all my life, that I belong to be with them'" (650). Knowing this relieves Frankie of all her old fears:

> For when the old question came to her--the who she was and what she would be in the world, and why she was standing there that minute--when the old question came to her, she did not feel hurt and unanswered. At last she knew just who she was and understood where she was going. She loved her brother and the bride and she was a member of the wedding. The three of them would go into the world and they would always be together. And finally, after the scared spring and the crazy summer, she was no more afraid. (651)

The next day, Saturday, sees a great change in Frankie. She decides to call herself "F. Jasmine," and her new identity also manifests itself in how she perceives her whole environment: "Because of the wedding, F. Jasmine felt connected with all she saw, and it was as a sudden member that on this Saturday she went around the town" (655). Frankie's mission that day is to buy new clothes for the wedding; she spends most of the day walking about the town. She approaches strangers and tells them about the wedding, and she feels a connection with everyone she encounters. Frankie approaches a woman sweeping her front porch, and when Frankie "looked into the lady's eyes, she loved her, though she did not even know her name" (671). Frankie notices changes in herself, and she determines that of all her feelings, "the strongest of all was the need to be known for her true self and recognized" (670). Thoughts of the wedding, at least temporarily, satisfy this need.

In the course of Frankie's wanderings, she enters the Blue Moon bar, where she strikes up a conversation with a soldier. He buys her a beer, and they make a date for nine o'clock that evening. Frankie feels confused about the soldier because his conversation

does not seem to follow hers. She wonders if having a date with him is the right thing to do, and she broaches the subject with Berenice that afternoon.

Berenice first of all chastises Frankie for falling in love with a wedding. Berenice says: "'I have knew women to love veritable Satans and thank Jesus when they put their split hooves over the threshold. I have knew boys to take it into their heads to fall in love with other boys'" (694). Berenice also tells Frankie, "'I never before in all my days heard of anybody falling in love with a wedding. I have knew many peculiar things, but I never heard of that before'" (695). Berenice thinks Frankie should be thinking about a beau. From this point, Berenice begins a discussion on love.

Berenice explains that she has been married several times. Her first marriage to Ludie Freeman was the happiest. After nine years Ludie died, and Berenice's subsequent marriages were failures. One of her husbands beat her. In one assult he severely damaged one of her eyes, so that Berenice now has a glass eye which is blue. Berenice married this man because he wore a coat of Ludie's Berenice had pawned. Another man had a smashed thumb like Ludie's, and Berenice married him, too. Berenice tries to explain to Frankie what she did by marrying these men:

> 'I loved Ludie and he was the first man I loved. Therefore, I had to go and copy myself forever afterward. What I did was to marry off little pieces of Ludie whenever I come across them. It was just my misfortune they all turned out to be the wrong pieces. My intention was to repeat me and Ludie.' (725)

Frankie does not understand how this applies to herself, and Berenice explains, "'You see something unheard of at Winter Hill tomorrow, and you right in the center'" (725). She thinks Frankie is "'determined to suffer'" (726). Again Frankie thinks Berenice is wrong, and the conversation becomes existential. Frankie tries to explain herself:

> Doesn't it strike you as strange that I am I, and you are you? I am F. Jasmine Addams. And you are Berenice Sadie Brown. And we can look at each other, and touch each other, and stay together year in and year out in the same room. Yet always I am I, and you are you. And I can't ever be anything else but me, and you can't ever be anything else but you. Have you ever thought of that? And does it seem to you strange?' (734)

Frankie ponders these questions, and she tells Berenice it is odd that two people can pass each other on the street, exchange a glance, and perhaps the two people will never see each other again; they will never know one another. She tells Berenice she wants to know everyone in the world, and when she leaves with Janice and Jarvis, the three of them will know everyone:

> 'And we will meet them. Everybody. We will just walk up to people and know them right away. We will be walking down a dark road and see a lighted house and knock on the door and strangers will rush to meet us and say: Come in! We will know decorated aviators and New York people and movie stars. We will have thousands of friends, thousands and thousands and thousands of friends. We will belong to so many clubs that we can't even keep track of all of them. We will be members of the whole world.' (738)

As Frankie explains this to Berenice, she is walking wildly around the kitchen. Berenice grabs her and holds her. She tells Frankie she

thinks she knows what she means and says: "'We all of us somehow caught. We born this way or that way and we don't know why. But we caught anyhow. I born Berenice. You born Frankie. John Henry born John Henry. And maybe we wants to widen and bust free. But no matter what we do we still caught'" (740). Frankie understands Berenice's point, but instead of seeing people as being caught, she sees them as loose. Frankie says: "'People loose and at the same time caught. Caught and loose. All these people and you don't know what joins them up. There's bound to be some sort of reason and connection'" (741-742). As Berenice points out, if Frankie could answer these questions, she would be God. The conclusion of the discussion is a reiteration of Frankie's thoughts:

> 'I wonder if you have ever thought about this. Here we are--right now. This very minute. Now. But while we're talking right now, this minute is passing. And it will never come again. Never in all the world. When it is gone it is gone. No power on earth could bring it back again. It is gone. Have you ever thought about that?' (742)

Berenice does not answer Frankie's question, but in unison, the three of them, Frankie, John Henry, and Berenice, start to cry. The crying stops as suddenly as it started, and Berenice puts an end to the gloominess. Frankie's dilemma over the soldier remains unresolved.

It is as if the conversation in the kitchen that afternoon is an omen. Frankie meets the soldier in the Blue Moon that evening, and he takes her upstairs to his room. Frankie has little comprehension of his sexual advances, and when he kisses her, she grabs a water pitcher, cracks him over the head with it, and flees. When Frankie

returns home she says to her dad, "'I'll never be so glad to get to any place in all my life as Winter Hill tomorrow. I will be so thankful when the wedding is over and we have gone away. I will be so thankful'" (764).

The relief Frankie hopes to find in the wedding is unfounded. Frankie never has a chance to speak with Janice or Jarvis. The bridal pair leaves without her, and Frankie is devastated. On Sunday evening, when Frankie comes home from the wedding, she tries to run away. She leaves a farewell note for her father, packs a bag, and heads for the Blue Moon. A policeman sees her, recognizes her, and calls Frankie's father to come and get her. From here, the scene changes quickly. It is later on in the fall, and Frankie is now thirteen. She never speaks of the wedding. She begins to use her legal name, "Frances." Frankie and her father are moving to a new house with John Henry's parents for two reasons. Berenice has decided to marry T. T., a man she has been dating for many months, but who does not give her "shivers," and John Henry has unexpectedly died.

Frankie is filled with delight at the prospect of the new house, and she is entranced by her new friend, Mary Littlejohn, whom Frankie expects at five o'clock. Frankie and Berenice are in the kitchen. Frankie tells Berenice of the plans she and Mary have made and that "'There's no use our discussing a certain party. You could not possibly understand her. It's just not in you'" (787). Frankie knows Berenice's feeling are hurt, but she does not apologize. Instead, she continues telling Berenice of their schemes. It is quiet, and Frankie says:

"'I am simply mad about--' But the sentence was left unfinished for the hush was shattered when, with an instant shock of happiness, she heard the ringing of the bell" (791).

Mrs. McCullers' thesis on love in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe points out that the object of love can be anything. And as Howard Dean Everett notes, the object, such as what Antonapoulos is holding in Singer's dream, is academic. In "falling in love" with the wedding, Frankie chooses a curious object indeed. Berenice's observation about Frankie is entirely correct; Frankie is passionately attached to the wedding. What Frankie "sees" as her salvation in the wedding is certainly chimerical. Her expectations are wholly unrealistic; Frankie bases her happiness on illusion. However, Frankie's reactions to the feelings she derives from dreaming about the wedding and her life with Janice and Jarvis, and her reaction to being "rejected" by the wedding are worth noting.

Frankie is an excellent example of what Mrs. McCullers described in "Loneliness. . . An American Malady." Mrs. McCullers described the strong and enduring "will of the individual to claim his identity and belong." Since Frankie has no one, and since she is tormented by the monotony of the kitchen, she seeks some sort of fulfillment. The wedding comes at a propitious time for Frankie. It comes after the "scared spring" and the "crazy summer," and she is vulnerable. For this reason she latches on to the idea of the wedding; it is for her, the nearest and most accessible release. Frankie's "loving" the wedding is beneficial to her. She realizes that "the need to be recognized for her true

self was for the time being satisfied" (673). Her reaction to her beloved is like that of those characters discussed in the earlier chapters of this study. While the object of her love is within her grasp, she is temporarily satisfied. Mrs. McCullers described the response to love:

> Love is the bridge that leads from the I sense to the We. . . . Love is affirmation; it motivates the yes responses and the sense of wider communication. Love casts out fear, and in the security of this togetherness we find contentment, courage. We no longer fear the age-old haunting questions: 'Who am I?' 'Why am I?' 'Where am I going?'-- and having cast our fear, we can be honest and charitable.[5]

The very questions which Mrs. McCullers raised in the previous quotation are the questions which Frankie attempts to answer. The wedding answers them for her and in her newfound magnanimity, she no longer feels afraid.

The Saturday afternoon discussion in the kitchen reveals both Frankie and Berenice as Platonists. Berenice, at one time, was "whole." She found what Baldanza calls the "other half of one's soul" in Ludie Freeman. It took her several bad marriages, however, for her to discover the reality of the singularness of her marriage to Ludie. The pieces of him she saw in other men, she learned, could not make a whole. Berenice's only defect, her glass eye, symbolizes a "linking of the worlds of the Negro and the white," according to Margaret B. McDowell.[6] This may be valid, but Berenice's blue eye more likely pertains to her vision, that is, her perception of reality. Berenice understands that she tried to marry pieces of Ludie, hoping to repeat their relationship. Initially, she does not carry this understanding over to her relationship

with T. T. He does not make her shiver, and Ludie did. Her final decision to marry T. T. reveals that she has come to terms with herself. Her vision is clearer. He may not make her shiver, but he is a good, honest man; so was Ludie. Berenice may be marrying T. T. just to be married, but she is thoughtful enough to know that her present basis for marriage is better founded than marrying a man because he has a coat or a thumb which resembles her former husband's. In this sense, Berenice's former passion is replaced by spiritual value.

McDowell also suggests that Frankie, at the conclusion of the novel, has not grown spiritually:

> Frankie's willingness, finally, to ignore all unanswered questions at the close of the book suggests that she has, in fact, failed to develop in any genuine sense. A superficial self-assurance, along with heightened insensitivity and complacency, pass for maturity.[7]

There is reason to dispute this. Although Frankie does fail to reflect on the wedding and its failure to include her, she reflects on more important matters. She attempts to understand and accept the death of John Henry. She also realizes when she attempts to run away that "she must find somebody, anybody, that she could join with to go away. For now she admitted she was too scared to go into the world alone" (782). Frankie understands the need and importance of "belonging." Her friendship with Mary Littlejohn and the happiness she feels from this friendship verify this. She also understands that her last remark to Berenice was cruel. It is not the first time she has made a cruel statement to her, but it is the first time Frankie considers an apology. Frankie's feelings for Mary Littlejohn may be yet another passion for

her, but her sensitivity to other people has been heightened by her experience with the wedding. Like Mick Kelly, her age prevents her from complete maturity. She is not too young, however, to be sensitive to others, and in turn, to understand the value of belonging.

Of The Member of the Wedding, Oliver Evans says: "On the whole, it is easier to view the book as yet another parable dealing with the essential loneliness of man and the eternal futility of escape."[8] The novel does deal with man's loneliness, but I believe the ending of the novel implies hopefulness rather than futility. In the final sentence of the novel a doorbell is rung. Bells are rung at weddings and funerals, and since Frankie reacts to the bell's ringing "with an instant shock of happiness," the emotion implied is joyful. Frankie is never, as the title indicates, a member of the wedding, but she is ultimately, nonetheless, a member.

NOTES

Chapter 4

[1] Margarita G. Smith, Introd., The Mortgaged Heart, by Carson McCullers (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1975), p. 11.

[2] Carson McCullers, The Member of the Wedding, in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe and Other Works (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 599. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[3] See "Sucker," "Breath from the Sky," "Like That," "Wunderkind," "Correspondence," "The Haunted Boy," and the novel Clock Without Hands. Adolescent types are seen in Anacleto in Reflections in a Golden Eye and Cousin Lymon in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe.

[4] Oliver Evans, "The Theme of Spiritual Isolation in Carson McCullers," in New World Writing (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1952), p. 302.

[5] Carson McCullers, "Loneliness . . . An American Malady," in The Mortgaged Heart, ed. Margarita G. Smith (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1975), p. 266.

[6] Margaret B. McDowell, Carson McCullers (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), p. 81.

[7] McDowell, p. 82.

[8] Evans, p. 304.

CONCLUSION

In a 1940 review of The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, Richard Wright commented: "In the conventional sense, this is not so much a novel as a projected mood, a state of mind poetically objectified in words, an attitude externalized in naturalistic detail."[1] What Wright describes here applies not only to The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, but to The Ballad of the Sad Cafe and to The Member of the Wedding as well. Wright further describes Heart, and again, the description may be applied to all three novels:

> . . . one has the feeling that any string of typical actions would have served the author's purpose as well, for the value of such writing lies not so much in what is said as in the angle of vision from which life is seen. There are times when Miss McCullers deliberately suppresses the naturally dramatic in order to linger over and accentuate the more obscure, oblique and elusive emotions.[2]

Identifying these "obscure, oblique and elusive emotions" is perhaps the most puzzling aspect of analyzing McCullers' fiction. In studying the characters in three of McCullers' novels, it becomes apparent that the emotion most often exemplified is loneliness; and each character's degree of loneliness, by virtue of that character's individuality, is obscure and oblique.

McCullers' characters are introduced in her novels as lonely people; they are often physically alone. In addition, they are "grotesques." They are, according to McCullers, "people whose physical incapacity is a symbol of their spiritual incapacity to love or receive love--their spiritual isolation." True to herself, McCullers'

characters, except for Heart's Biff Brannon, all have a physical handicap. Each of these defects symbolizes the character's incompleteness. Since the characters are lonely people, they attempt to alleviate their loneliness and become complete. They wish to claim identity and belong, or as Frankie Addams felt with the wedding, to be "connected." Each character's desire varies by degrees, but each shares one common trait. Each tries to fulfill himself spiritually, and in his craving for instant fulfillment, he creates an illusion in the object of his desire. Each is therefore a passionate lover, and passion, Mrs. McCullers observed, causes "the lover to become anonymous." Since this love is "chimerical and fantastic," the object of love, in the mind of the lover, is idealized; the lover attributes God-like qualities to the beloved. Singer, for example, always understands; Cousin Lymon, even after his departure, is thought by Miss Amelia to be the source of all her happiness; and Frankie believes the wedding will provide an instant all-encompassing link with the entire world--she will be at one, and she will be complete. McCullers' characters typify the transient's experience in "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud." They begin at the climax of love, and this is what compelled Baldanza to claim that all the love is wasted. In further exploring this idea and referring to The Ballad of the Sad Cafe's "Twelve Mortal Men," Baldanza says:

> . . . in reality, it is the togetherness of the gang that is presented as the only alternative to the senseless waste of pursuing love. We simply have our choice between one kind of adversity and another, and suffering emerges as the one constant.[3]

Howard Dean Everett also sees that "love pursuits and its inevitable corollary, alienation bordering on aberration, are the lot of man."[4]

I take exception to both of these statements. In "Loneliness . . . An American Malady," Mrs. McCullers said: "Consciousness of self is the first abstract problem that the human being solves. Indeed, it is this self-consciousness that removes us from lower animals. This primitive grasp of identity develops with constantly shifting emphasis."[5] It is also this self-consciousness which provides the human being with the ability to create--the ability to see what is not there in what the creation is based upon. And, too, it is this self-consciousness which provides the ability to discern the difference between what is created and what is not. McCullers' characters are self-conscious enough to be lonely, and they are self-conscious enough to love passionately, and most of them are self-conscious enough not to let their passion destroy them. Only John Singer and Miss Amelia allow their passion to destroy themselves.

Self-consciousness allows an individual to realize he is alone, within himself, and that the challenge in accepting this reality lies in his ability to perceive reality. McCullers' characters never admit to their dependence on illusion, but the final analysis of their love pursuits indicates that they surpass passion, at least temporarily.

Mrs. McCullers said that "maturity is simply the history of those mutations that reveal to the individual the relation between himself and the world in which he finds himself."[6] It is the history of mutations, then, which allows an individual to accept or reject reality.

As McCullers indicated and as her characters exemplify, the answer to the search for spiritual identity "waits in each separate heart."[7] Each individual is therefore faced with the idea that "The value and the quality of love is determined solely by the lover himself," but he is not faced with the knowledge of this at all times. This is precisely what McCullers' fiction illustrates, especially through those characters whose passion overcomes themselves.

Passionate love predominates in McCullers' fiction, and it is viable. Passionate love, Mrs. McCullers reveals, may be rewarding in itself; it may provide temporary fulfillment while the beloved is within one's grasp, and ultimately fulfill a person spiritually; and too, it may destroy the individual when the object of passion is removed. None of McCullers' characters has a "total vision" of love, according to John Vickery. He explains: "The reason for this is that the knowledge of love is a matter of an awareness of the capacities of one's own heart."[8] The "capacities of one's own heart," Mrs. McCullers seems to say, lies in one's perception of reality, in one's ability to accept his individuality, and in one's ability to recognize that it is one thing to live with oneself, and quite another to live with oneself alone. Man, by virtue of his consciousness and individuality is isolated, but it is the knowledge of this isolation which gives him the opportunity to overcome isolation. Mrs. McCullers said love is the bridge that "leads from the I sense to the We," and it casts out isolation and fear. Mrs. McCullers herself was motivated by fear, as were her characters, who feared isolation. McCullers' characters' fear

was intensified by their understanding of themselves. The author understood the relationship between an individual's knowledge of himself and his ability to love:

> For fear is a primary source of evil. And when the question 'Who am I?' recurs and is unanswered, then fear and frustration project a negative attitude. The bewildered soul can answer only: 'Since I do not understand 'Who I am,' I only know what I am not.' The corollary of this emotional incertitude is snobbism, intolerance and racial hate. The xenophobic individual can only reject and destroy. . . .[9]

Mrs. McCullers knew well the feelings of isolation, loneliness, and the desire to belong. In an interview shortly before her death, however, she said, "I don't know what I'd do without my friends. They are the 'we' of me."[10] To have a "we of me," to belong, is a strong urge, as McCullers' fiction suggests. The urge to obtain a "we of me," however, is more comprehensible than the ability to understand the motivation and the implications of the reality of that urge. McCullers' fiction, as John Vickery points out, implies that "love is a matter of loving unaltered by not being loved and that the dream of one's life is a matter of faith not fact."[11] Faith in the beloved may not be based on actual fact, but the negation of passionate "facts" may bring an individual closer to the reality of his dream to belong.

NOTES

Conclusion

[1] Richard Wright, "Inner Landscape," rev. of The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, by Carson McCullers, The New Republic, 5 Aug. 1940, p. 195.

[2] Wright, p. 195.

[3] Frank Baldanza, "Plato in Dixie," Georgia Review (Summer 1958), 162.

[4] Howard Dean Everett, "Love and Alienation: The Sad, Dark Vision of Carson McCullers," Diss. University of New Mexico 1975, p. 33.

[5] Carson McCullers, "Loneliness . . . An American Malady," in The Mortgaged Heart, ed. Margarita G. Smith (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1975), p. 265.

[6] McCullers, "Loneliness," p. 265.

[7] McCullers, "Loneliness," p. 267.

[8] John B. Vickery, "Carson McCullers: A Map of Love," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 1 (1960), 24.

[9] McCullers, "Loneliness," p. 266.

[10] Rex Reed, Do You Sleep in the Nude? (New York: The New American Library, 1968), p. 42.

[11] Vickery, p. 24.

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