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SELF AND SOCIETY: THE DIALECTIC OF THEMES AND FORMS IN THE NOVELS OF CARSON MCCULLERS

by

Christopher Michael Smith

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro 1976

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Feb. 24, 1976

This study provides an understanding of Carson McCullers' novels that spans the traditional distinction between the romance and the realistic novel and questions her image as a stereotypically "feminine" author. Support for such an approach is provided by McCullers' own comments, notably in her article "Russian Realists and Southern Literature," in which she calls for a new "philosophical novel" which brings together passion and realism in an exploration of the fundamental issues in human existence. Her own novels use elements of the romance and the realistic novel in a dialectical process through which the conflict between self and society is analyzed.

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter portrays this conflict through the story of Mick Kelly and her "inner" and "outer room." She, rather than the deaf mute Singer, is the protagonist, and her story unifies the novel and presents the normal development from the world of the isolated self into the world of social involvement. Measured against this standard, Singer, Blount, and Copeland are revealed as flawed characters who, despite contrary appearances, retreat into their private dream worlds. It is just this sort of retreat, McCullers implies, that leads to injustice and violence in the social world.
In her next two novels, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* and *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, McCullers continues her analysis of the tension between self and society, but she focuses more specifically on the flawed nature of romantic love, which is based on the distance between one person and another rather than on a transcendence of self. The two works are closely related in theme and form and both draw on the romance and realistic novel traditions, but *The Ballad of the Sad Café* is more successful, in part because of the ironic first person narration.

McCullers' last two novels are efforts at consolidation in which she Welds the adolescent initiation story and social themes of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* to the critique of romantic love in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* and *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. In *The Member of the Wedding* the result is a profoundly ironic story of a twelve-year-old's search for the illusion of community. This novel, rather than being a pleasant story of growing up in the 1940's, is the author's most pessimistic assessment of man's limitations. In *Clock Without Hands* McCullers returns to the broad social canvas of her first novel and, through contrasts and parallels among two adolescent and two aging characters, illustrates the need for individuals to accept social responsibility.

Each of these novels displays the ramifications in the social world of individual self-deception and
self-glorification. This is the theme on which McCullers focuses, and her most successful works, such as *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, present it through a synthesis of the romance and realistic novel. In these works McCullers reveals herself to be a shrewd and unflinching analyst of human nature and a skillful manipulator of fictional forms.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Dr. Charles Davis for his considerable assistance as director of this dissertation, Dr. James Ellis for introducing me to Carson McCullers' novels and providing useful suggestions for Chapter I, and Dr. Joseph Millichap for his advice on an early version of Chapter II.

I owe a special debt to my wife, Annette Cox Smith, whose keen insights and sharp criticisms were of more value than I sometimes acknowledged, and to my parents, Virginia and Cyril Smith, for their support and interest.
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CHAPTER I

ROMANCE, REALISM, AND THE "PHILOSOPHICAL NOVEL"

Carson McCullers has been the victim of a distorted and romanticized public image. During the 1950's and 1960's, when her career was in decline and she suffered serious illness and personal tragedies, she became known to a mass audience through interviews, a biography, and dramatic and cinematic versions of her novels. *The Member of the Wedding*, produced in 1950 as a play, received extravagant praise and won the Donaldson Award and Drama Critics Award that year; yet it lacked the toughness of the novel. Ethel Waters as Berenice, a minor figure in the original work, dominated the play and enveloped the story in hopefulness and sentimentality. Waters even inserted a tearful hymn of her choosing which she sang in the second act and hummed at the final curtain. The song is in neither the novel nor the original acting script; however, Stanley Kramer retained it in his film of the play, which conveyed the romanticized image of the novel to a wider audience.¹

The film of *Reflections in a Golden Eye* was more faithful to the original, the "subdued color" corresponding to the author's flat, unemotional prose style, but a sentimentalized cinematic version of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* appeared in 1969, with Alan Arkin providing an emotional portrayal of Singer, the deaf mute. In Arkin's rendering, Singer is loving and patient yet frustrated because no one returns his love and because he cannot express his own feelings. He is elevated to a Christ-like role, and the film ends with a spurious scene in which Mick Kelly weeps on his grave.

Oliver Evans' early study, *Carson McCullers: Her Life and Work*, the only biography available until 1975, failed to rectify the impression of McCullers as a dreamy romantic. His book provides appreciative readings of her fiction and some useful information on her life but also gives prominent mention to anecdotes that support her image as a withdrawn, delicate, and emotional writer. Evans describes the adolescent girl who first came north from Georgia and, in her country innocence, lost, or was swindled out of, the money her parents had scraped together. Without funds to attend Juilliard, she turned to writing by a fortuitous accident. Later, according to Evans, her frail constitution was overpowered by the excitement and wild parties at February

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House, a bohemian commune where she lived with other artists and writers. Marital troubles led her to divorce Reeves McCullers, remarry him, and separate again; he finally committed suicide alone in Paris. Meanwhile, she suffered strokes, paralysis, restricted vision, a broken hip, breast cancer, and pneumonia. Through it all, Evans assures us, she struggled to write, "typing laboriously with single hand at the rate of a page a day."³

The danger is that one's impression of the author and sympathy for the tragedies of her life may lead to a misunderstanding of her novels. McCullers herself encouraged this tendency late in her life. In a widely read interview with Rex Reed shortly before her death, she identified with her fictional characters and cast a sentimental aura about her life, referring to her friends as "the we of me" and her life as the "sad, happy life of Carson McCullers."⁴ Reed prefaced the interview with a description of her on her sick bed, "thin and frail like a quivering bird, with dark, brilliant eyes and an aura of otherworldness about her."⁵

These characterizations of McCullers should be put in perspective against other aspects of her biography. A more

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³Evans, p. 170.
⁵Ibid., p. 51.
balanced view of her life, such as Virginia Spencer Carr’s recent biography, makes clear that she was not the dreamy and withdrawn stereotypical woman writer but a brash, tough-minded, and intellectual author, at least through the period of her greatest artistic achievement before her first stroke in 1947. Carr reports the reactions of her acquaintances to the suggestion that she was weak:

Tennessee Williams likened her strength to his handsome, marble-topped table in Key West, which he pounded for emphasis, and producer Arnold Saint Subber, who knew her well in the mid-fifties when they worked together on her play The Square Root of Wonderful, found her not at all the 'wounded sparrow' that some persons had made her out to be, but called her, instead, an 'iron butterfly.' Carr also relates how McCullers' "ability to handle abstract intellect" sometimes surprised her listeners:

Even in her teens, she was a hard-headed prodigy, both a tomboy who preferred men's clothes, independence, and profanity (her early stories contained enough sexual explicitness to draw, at one point, a cautioning comment from her writing instructor) and an intellectual who was well read at an early age. The librarian at the Columbus, Georgia, public library reports that before graduating from high school she read nearly every book on the shelves, and her favorites were heavyweights:

7Ibid., p. 242.
I remember she came in one morning and told me that she wanted to read all the world's best literature. And she was ready to start that day. . . . I got out some books for her that I don't think had been off the shelf since the library first opened. She read Greek philosophy and drama, English, French, German, Russian and American literature. . . . The great Russians, Tolstoy and Dostoevski, she read over and over.

Tolstoy remained her favorite novelist, though she also admired Flaubert, Proust, and others. In fact, the major literary influences on her were English (Lawrence and Mansfield) and European rather than American.

When she went to New York at the age of seventeen, she was not the ignorant, helpless, and dreamy country girl some anecdotes imply, nor did she stumble into a writing career only by accident. The trip itself indicates her independence and determination; she was already committed to writing, having progressed, by her own account, from acting out plays before her family and friends to writing, at the age of fifteen, a three act play influenced by O'Neill and another.

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8Quoted in Margaret Sullivan, "Carson McCullers, 1917-1947: The Conversion of Experience," Diss. Duke Univ., 1966. The information in the following biographical sketch is drawn from Sullivan's dissertation, Evans' critical biography, Carr's new and very thorough biography, and Simeon Smith's dissertation, "Carson McCullers: A Critical Introduction," Diss. Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1964. Evans, Smith, and Sullivan all were able to talk with McCullers and to look at her papers in preparing their manuscripts. Unfortunately, since McCullers' death in 1967, her papers have not been available. According to Joyce Hartman, her editor at Houghton Mifflin, arrangements are being made by Margarita G. Smith, McCullers' sister and executrix of her literary estate, to turn them over to a suitable university library.
dealing with philosophical and religious issues provoked by her reading of Nietzsche. She began a novel (the manuscript is no longer extant) and, a year before the New York trip, wrote "Sucker," a story which eventually found publication in the *Saturday Evening Post*. 9

She had also formed a close friendship with Edwin Peacock, six years her senior, who influenced her intellectual development and encouraged her writing. Peacock introduced her to *Story* magazine, which provided McCullers with models for her early short stories. This magazine, edited by Martha Foley and Whit Burnett, was extremely influential on American fiction in the thirties and forties, making available an alternative to the market for sentimental and adventure stories and publishing the first fiction by Nelson Algren, Truman Capote, J. D. Salinger, and Tennessee Williams, along with regular contributions from William Faulkner, Kay Boyle, James Farrell, Richard Wright, Sean O'Faolain, Luigi Pirandello, and others. McCullers' first published story, "Wunderkind," appeared in *Story* in December, 1936. 10

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9 Simeon Smith came across this story while going through McCullers' manuscripts in preparing his dissertation. "Sucker" was subsequently published in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1963. It was reprinted in *The Mortgaged Heart* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), a posthumous collection, edited by Margarita Smith, which includes some previously unpublished stories and poems.

10 Evans, p. 34.
Once settled in New York in the winter of 1935-1936, she immediately registered for courses in philosophy and creative writing at Columbia. At Columbia and later New York University she studied writing under Whit Burnett and Sylvia Chatfield Bates. Rather than bursting on the literary scene as an untaught genius, as popular myth has it, she served a substantial apprenticeship, experimenting with styles, developing motifs that appear in her novels, and expressing a view of human nature that is, for the most part, anti-sentimental and anti-romantic. These early stories portray bleak scenes of depression poverty, ridicule those characters who choose to live in a world of illusion, and dissect the dilemma of adolescent characters caught between the equally imperfect worlds of childhood and adulthood. In most of them McCullers stresses man's limitations rather than his potential and maintains a distance between herself and her characters.

In the summer of 1936, while visiting in Georgia, she met Reeves McCullers, also an aspiring writer. They were married the following year, and she continued writing, creating scenes and characters for what would be her first published novel. With several chapters completed, she submitted a detailed outline to Houghton Mifflin Company and was awarded a $1500 Fiction Fellowship.\footnote{McCullers' outline is reprinted in Evans' biography and in The Mortgaged Heart, pp. 124-49.} She followed this
outline closely, contrary to the popular image of her as an impulsive romantic, and it was her editor who suggested that her matter-of-fact title, "The Mute," be dropped in favor of the more sentimental "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter."12

After this first novel was published in 1940, McCullers continued to expand her intellectual contacts. Her husband had already introduced her to Marxist economic theory. She became friends with Klaus and Erika Mann, son and daughter of Thomas Mann, and contributed poetry and her essay "The Russian Realists and Southern Writing" to their little magazine *Decision*. She also met the Swiss journalist and travel writer Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach, exchanging letters on the conflict of inner and outer worlds and the power of love, themes that are prominent in her fiction.

Having separated from her husband, she moved into February House, a brownstone at 7 Middagh Street in Brooklyn Heights. She was not just entering a bohemian environment of wild parties but also an intellectual and artistic center. Denis de Rougement visited there, and his concepts of romantic love expressed in *Love in the Western World* (1940) may have contributed to the theory of love expressed in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1943). Also at February House she met W. H. Auden, who influenced her views by

12See Carr, footnote 8, p. 540.
introducing her to the writings of Kierkegaard, the dominant intellectual force on her later work. 13

It is true, of course, that McCullers' life was marred by tragedy and ill health. She should be understood as a potentially great writer who produced brilliant works while she was still young but whom illness prevented from realizing her full potential. She suffered a severe stroke after The Member of the Wedding (1946) was published, and during the ensuing years her power and precision as a writer declined. Her second attempt at drama, The Square Root of Wonderful (1958), was a critical and popular failure. Some of the short stories of the 1950's are successful, but her last novel, Clock Without Hands (1961), is seriously flawed, lacking control and unity. It was only six years later, after working fitfully on a manuscript, that she suffered the last in a series of strokes and died on September 29, 1967.

13 The most thorough discussion of February House is chapter six of Carr's biography. In addition, see Evans, chapter six, and Sullivan, pp. 204-05, and Golo Mann, "W. H. Auden: A Memoir," Encounter, 42, No. 1 (1974), 7-11. Residents at February House included McCullers, Auden, George Davis (editor of Harper's Bazaar), Benjamin Britten (composer), Louis MacNeice, Chester Kallman (poet), Christopher Isherwood, Richard Wright and his wife, Golo Mann, Paul and Jane Bowles, Oliver Smith (stage designer), and Gypsy Rose Lee. Also, there were a number of important guests, among them composers Virgil Thomson, Aaron Copland, Marc Blitzstein, and Leonard Bernstein; painters Pavel Tchelitchew, Eugene Berman, and Salvador Dali; and author Denis de Rougemont.
Unfortunately, some critics interpret McCullers' fiction in line with her sentimental public image as it developed during the last two decades of her life. They ignore philosophical, social, and political issues and suggest that the novels are sentimental and optimistic. The assumption is that the author identifies with her characters' romantic quests for love, truth, and beauty. In this vein, Jane Hart in "Carson McCullers, Pilgrim of Loneliness" states:

Sometimes, Carson McCullers shows us, men find for a radiant moment the Thee they are seeking and so are lifted above their own loneliness by a sense of togetherness, of being with others in love, sorrow or beauty. They find truth, a moment of pure love, a sudden illumination.14

Similarly, Barbara Folk in "The Sad Sweet Music of Carson McCullers" refers to the "sad and tender vision of humanity which is central to Carson McCullers' writing."15

Most critics are less extreme, shying away from such words as "radiant," "sad," and "tender," but they still view her novels as the products of a romantic sensibility. Richard Cook in his recent book states that "the vision behind her art is one of man's alienation" and that McCullers portrays this vision "with sympathy."16

14 Georgia Review, 11 (1957), 58.
Durham agrees with the consensus that McCullers' theme is "human loneliness and the individual's attempts to break the barriers separating him from other human souls."\(^{17}\) Louise Y. Gossett refers to McCullers' "compassion for every attempt of the human being to become a we instead of an I," while John Vickery describes her typical character as "moved by a desire to break out of his isolation."\(^{18}\) In much the same fashion, Oliver Evans interprets *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* as the story of people who seek "release in love from the bondage of self."\(^{19}\) In each case these critics come to the conclusion that McCullers' characters are engaged in a romantic quest to escape their isolation and that the reader is intended to sympathize with their struggles. It is a perspective which has been characterized as "essentially feminine."\(^{20}\)

Another indication of her romanticism is thought to be her subjectivity. In fact, McCullers' novels have been criticized for focusing on the inner, subjective, emotional

\(\text{\^{\text{17}}}\)"God and No God in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter," South Atlantic Quarterly, 56 (1957), 494.


\(\text{\^{\text{19}}}\)Evans, p. 43.

lives of her characters rather than the objective, "real" world. Alfred Kazin, though admiring the beauty of The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, complains that in McCullers' novels "society is merely a backdrop to the aloneness of the hero." In similar fashion, Chester E. Eisinger states that her novels are weakened because she has banished from them "abstractions about the structure of society or ideological conflict of the contemporary world" and has turned instead to "memory and mood, and above all, feeling."

Because critics see McCullers as a subjective, romantic writer, they usually relate her fiction to the tradition of the romance, which is distinguished from the realistic novel by creating an imaginary world at variance with normal life rather than being an attempt at verisimilitude. The romance tradition, as Richard Chase shows, dominates the history of the American novel, and it is frequently observed that recent American novelists, after a brief foray into social realism in the 1930's, have returned to this sort of subjective writing. Critics identify McCullers with this return to the romance tradition and more specifically with the "gothic" school of writers, a number of them also

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Southerners, whose subjectivity has led to distorted and nightmarish fictional worlds. After all, her characters are grotesques—dwarfs, Amazons, deaf mutes, homosexuals—who engage in violent, irrational, and abnormal actions in a surreal atmosphere. Gothicism of this sort is seen as "very nearly the staple" of McCullers' novels.\(^2\)

There has, then, been a series of interrelated interpretations of McCullers' biography, temperament, and place in the tradition of the novel. However, a few recent critics have questioned the consensus that McCullers is a "feminine," delicate, withdrawn, emotional writer of gothic romances and have sparked a much needed re-examination of her work. They have suggested that her use of grotesque characters does not necessarily make her a gothic writer, that the violence and nightmarish qualities of her fiction may simply reflect the realities of the Southern experience, and that there are other realistic elements in her novels which past criticism has ignored.

Alan Spiegel attacks the association of "grotesque" and "gothic," arguing that the two terms are really

opposites, the former a characteristic of the realistic novel and the latter a type of romance. The grotesque mode, like McCullers' novels, takes place "within society in the daylight setting of ordinary communal activity," he suggests, while "the gothic gesture takes place outside [society] in a nightmare setting." Spiegel's point is well taken. Distorted characters are not necessarily products of a romantic vision and may be, as in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, which gave currency to the term "grotesques," an expression of the author's irony and realism. Spiegel places McCullers in a school derived by way of Flaubert, James, Woolf, Proust, and Joyce, from the eighteenth century realists, "the mimetic and historical, the analytic and the normative." Certainly her settings are realistic, consisting of small Southern mill towns, cafés, boarding houses, and an army post, most of which can be traced to places in and around Columbus, Georgia, where McCullers grew up.

Dale Edmonds suggests that not just the settings but the violence and nightmarish qualities which bind McCullers' novels with others in the Southern gothic mode are a reflection of the reality of the Southern condition. Such factors


26 Ibid.
as the impact of the Civil War, the influence of family
ties, the effect of fundamentalist religion, and the notion
of the "curse" of slavery "impart to Southern life a sense
of fragmentation, of diffusion, a dreamlike, unreal quality
which makes violence and grotesqueries seem both natural
and commonplace." McCullers herself makes a similar
point, arguing that Southern writers such as Faulkner are
realists, not gothic novelists, because they reflect the
poverty and social divisions of their region. They may seem
to be concerned with extreme characters and conditions, but
they try to present reality as they see it.

Joseph Millichap in a dissertation soon to be published
and an article drawn from it makes the best case for her as
a realistic novelist. The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,
according to Millichap, is grounded in social reality and
the history of the depression, deals with such issues as
racial and economic justice, and presents characters who try
to solve social problems and integrate themselves into
society. Not all of her later novels are realistic; in
fact, Millichap interprets The Ballad of the Sad Café as
romantic. But it is his purpose to emphasize social realism

27 Carson McCullers, Southern Writers Series, No. 6

28 McCullers, "The Russian Realists and Southern Litera-
ture," The Mortgaged Heart, pp. 252-58. This essay was
originally published in Klaus Mann's little magazine
Decision in 1941.
in her works in contrast to the previous consensus that McCullers is a writer of gothic romances. 29

Millichap prepares the way for a new view of McCullers' fiction that is less influenced by her sentimentalized popular image and that recognizes realistic elements in her novels. But a narrow view of McCullers as a realistic writer does not account for her effort to use her fiction primarily to illustrate moral and philosophical concepts. Unlike a strictly mimetic writer, she steps back from the action to manipulate both characters and social reality for a didactic purpose. Reading her fiction is rather like a chess game in which the pieces are manipulated by the author, who is well above the board, neither emotionally entwined with her characters nor enmeshed in the social reality of her fictional world.

Also, the realist interpretation counters the critical consensus by moving from one extreme to another without recognizing the degree to which both subjective and objective, romance and realistic, elements may be deliberately brought together within a single work. Millichap, for example, indicates that McCullers' fiction is most successful when it is clearly in one form or the other. According

to Millichap, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* is a successful example of realism; *The Ballad of the Sad Café* is "essentially romantic fiction [and] is her finest accomplishment after *Heart*"; *Reflections in a Golden Eye* "falters between realism and romanticism"; *The Member of the Wedding* and the short stories, "closer to the social realism of *Heart*, are successful, if not great, works"; and *Clock Without Hands* is a failure due to its "spurious social 'relevance.'"  

Other critics seem to see the romance and the realistic novel as opposites and find fault with those novels which bring together elements of both traditions. Lawrence Graver even criticizes *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* on these grounds:

> For the first one hundred pages of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, Mrs. McCullers is able to persuade us that contemporary reality and legendary story are one; but soon afterwards her technique falters and the novel becomes increasingly unsatisfactory both as document and as myth.  

The conflict that mars her work, according to Graver, is between "her nearer and her further vision, between her desire to document the world and a desire to give it evocative poetic significance."  

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30 *Diss.*, pp. 1-2.  
31 *Carson McCullers, Univ. of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 84 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1969)*, p. 13.  
32 Ibid., pp. 15-16.
In this way interpretations of McCullers' novels may be circumscribed, rather than advanced, by the definitions of the romance and the realistic novel as antagonistic forms. Perhaps forgotten are Northrop Frye's admonition that "the forms of prose fiction are mixed, like racial strains in human beings, not separable like the sexes" and Richard Chase's suggestion that romance and realistic elements may reinforce one another to create a masterpiece such as Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, a novel McCullers herself praised for the way it combines "reality and the dream."33

What is needed is an understanding of McCullers' novels which answers the mistaken view that they are sentimental or wholly romantic yet is open to the possibility that the author brings together elements of different traditions in exploring her themes. We might call such works "philosophical novels," borrowing a term McCullers herself used to describe the sort of fiction Southern writers should produce. She explains her concept of the philosophical novel in "The Russian Realists and Southern Literature," an essay which is a manifesto of sorts, published in Decision in 1941.

In this essay she deals directly with the problem of whether Southern fiction should be described as gothic or realistic, and thus she confronts the same sort of critical debate that centers on her own work. She objects to describing Southern writing as gothic, and instead argues that it is an example of a "peculiar and intense realism" that is mimetic, reflecting the hardships of the region.\(^{34}\) This realism, however, is limited, because it presents a view of human nature in which "human beings are neither good nor evil, they are only unhappy and more or less adjusted to their unhappiness."\(^{35}\) It is necessary, she says, that the element of "passion" be combined with realism in Southern writing, just as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy brought passion to the previous Russian realism of Gogol and Turgenev. Southern writing should move in this direction, combining the mimetic impulse with a sense of the value of human experience, a toughness of vision with a moral purpose.

This new Southern novel, McCullers seems to suggest, will both combine the traditional forms of romance and realistic novel and be a new form in its own right. It is this new form that she labels "philosophical" or "metaphysical" novel, a type of writing that poses spiritual, philosophical, and moral questions and that, like Tolstoy's

\(^{34}\) The Mortgaged Heart, p. 252.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 255.
novels, demands what, how, and why. Southern novelists, she says, should not merely reflect their environment and its "spiritual inconsistencies" but also should strive to analyze and finally "to propose an answer." By assuming this philosophical responsibility the tone and structure of the work will be altered. As she explains:

If and when this group of Southern writers is able to assume a philosophical responsibility, the whole tone and structure of their work will be enriched, and Southern writing will enter a more complete and vigorous stage in its evolution.36

She does not make clear just what the tone and structure of this new philosophical novel will be, but she leaves little doubt that she has in mind a type of writing that is not gothic and yet not narrowly realistic but rather brings together passion and realism while dealing with basic moral and philosophical issues in a systematic and analytical way.

Thus McCullers herself calls into question, at least by implication, the critical consensus that her work is in the tradition of the gothic romance and also those critics who react against the consensus and label her a social realist. Richard Wright is closer to the truth in his early review when he describes The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter as unconventional, based on an unusual blending of mood with naturalistic detail.37 Some other reviewers have gone so

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36Ibid., p. 258.

37The New Republic, 5 August 1940, p. 165.
far as to call her writing "metaphysical," recognizing her intellectual precision and her penchant for yoking together dissimilar elements. It is the purpose of the present study to provide a detailed analysis of McCullers' novels as "philosophical," in her sense of the word. This reading of her works will be unrestricted by an understanding of romance and realistic novel as wholly antagonistic modes and will recognize that in McCullers' fiction diverse forms are deliberately intertwined. Unifying them is the theory, the philosophical perspective, of man's relationship to society.

The fusion of elements of the romance and the realistic novel is evident, to varying degrees, in each of McCullers' novels and reflects the basic pattern of thought that runs

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39 There has been no comprehensive study of intellectual and philosophical concepts and influences in McCullers' fiction. Simeon Smith in his dissertation points out some influences, notably that of Kierkegaard, and Alice Hamilton in "Loneliness and Alienation: The Life and Work of Carson McCullers," Dalhousie Review, 50 (1970), 215-29, interprets what could be called existential themes in her works. Frank Baldanza in "Plato in Dixie," Georgia Review, 12 (1958), 151-67, suggests broad Platonic influences, particularly evident in McCullers' theory of love in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe and "A Tree, a Rock, a Cloud." The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter is interpreted as a religious allegory by Frank Durham in his article cited previously.
through all her writing. Her method is dialectical; she starts with a pair of opposites which she contrasts and, through this contrast, she points toward an ideal synthesis. The dialectical pattern is apparent in "The Russian Realists and Southern Fiction," in which gothic emotionalism is contrasted with narrowly mimetic writing and then a synthesis of passion and realism is called for in the new form of the philosophical novel. Her poems are frequently based on this dialectical process too. In "Dual Angel" man is initially described as "split upon our double image" and torn by paradox, but from these divisions arises a final sense of harmony in the realization that we are "spanned" on God's image and that death is the great leveler.

In the novels, the basic contrast of opposites, introduced in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, is between subjective and objective realities. The subjective world is one of dreams, illusions, youth, romantic love, and the self; while

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40 Carr in her biography indicates that McCullers was quite conscious of the problems inherent in combining two different forms. According to Carr, who cites the author's letter to David Diamond, 11 February 1942, McCullers, in writing The Member of the Wedding, "wanted to use two levels: one, objective--combined with a free poetical form--and the other, subjective. But to entwine them and bring about an artistic synthesis was a problem" (Carr, p. 200).

41 These poems are in The Mortgaged Heart, pp. 288-92 and 294. "The Dual Angel: A Meditation on Origin and Choice" was sent by McCullers to her friends at Christmas, 1951, and later was published in Mademoiselle (July 1952) and Botteghe Oscure IX (1952).
in the objective reality are material things, social and economic forces, and other people. The ideal synthesis, which is implied rather than demonstrated in her novels, is an integration of subjective identity with the realities of the social world. In demonstrating this duality and pointing toward the ideal synthesis, McCullers calls upon the traditions of both the romance and the realistic novel, which loosely correspond to the subjective and objective realities she juxtaposes. Her emphasis, like that of the romance writer, is on both the interior, subjective worlds within which her characters frequently are enclosed, and the exterior, social world which the realistic novelist explores and within which the "private" actions of her characters have public ramifications. In this way, rather than being a naive writer in one tradition or the other, she consciously uses elements of both.

Through the interplay of subjective and objective realities, McCullers engages in a process of questioning, defining, and theorizing about the relationship of self to society and the expression of love, fear, bigotry, and passion that mark that relationship. These are the major issues in her novels and, as McCullers herself explains in simplified form in a popular magazine article, they all cohere. Speaking as an "amateur philosopher," she suggests that the first abstract problem a person faces is
"consciousness of self." This sense of identity is within the subjective world and is based on a "newfound sense of separateness." Once achieved, self-identity must in turn be transcended or the individual will remain in a state of moral isolation. To bridge the gap between subjective reality and sense of community, he must love, for "Love is the bridge that leads from the I sense to the We . . . ." Love is the positive force, the life force. It makes possible intersubjectivity because it is based on a recognition of another's subjectivity and humanness. The opposite emotion is fear, which is a rejection of other people and which finds expression in the social world in the form of bigotry, intolerance, and injustice.

These issues and McCullers' use of romantic and realistic modes are best illustrated by considering *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter*. The contrast of subjective and objective realities is set forth through the character of Mick Kelly as she matures from her "inner room" of illusions, dreams, and music into the "outer room" of economic and social forces. She provides the norm against which the other characters can be judged. She is not an ideal figure, however,

42 "Loneliness . . . An American Malady," *The Mortgaged Heart*, p. 259. This article was originally published in *This Week*, December 19, 1949.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., p. 260.
and her emergence into the objective world is not a sweet victory. At the end of the novel it is clear that Mick has not been able to maintain a balance between inner and outer worlds; rather, economic forces have caused her to abandon her dreams and plans entirely, and she is forced to take a job in a five-and-dime and give up her music. She has succeeded in accommodating herself to reality—a greater achievement than Singer, Blount, or Copeland can manage—but she has lost something of herself in the process.

Through most of the novel, the subjective worlds of Mick and the other characters are alternately in the foreground as the narrative point of view shifts, in Faulknerian fashion, from one to another, but the external world with its social issues is never far in the background. The characters emphasize social issues in debates among themselves, as do the characters in a "novel of ideas." Jake Blount, the drifter who gets a job running the ferris wheel, and Dr. Copeland, the black doctor who seeks to secure justice for his people, come together in Singer's room and engage in lengthy discussions of philosophy and economic theory.

In addition, reality threatens the inner, subjective worlds of the characters in the forms of racial incidents and economic hardship, reminders that the social issues Blount and Copeland debate are not merely theoretical but have a pressing importance to the people of the Southern mill town. This external reality grows more dominant as the
novel progresses and as the narrative perspective gradually moves, as does Mick Kelly herself, from the internal and subjective to the external and objective. From the focus on the interior lives of the characters symbolized by the rooms in which the key scenes early in the novel take place (the café, Mick's room, Singer's room, Copeland's office, and so forth) in the first two sections, the reader is brought into the bright light of everyday reality in the third and last section, symbolized by the final scene in which Biff Brannon is outside his café in the morning and raises the awning. From this perspective we can look back on the characters and see that while Mick has matured and come face to face with reality, the other characters have remained mired in the self-delusion of their inner worlds.

An important aspect of their illusory worlds is their creation of false gods, another theme that McCullers explores in her first novel and which may have been suggested to her by Nietzsche's allegory in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* of people who would rather worship a donkey than have no god at all. In her novel, as in Nietzsche's philosophy, God is dead, at least in the sense that he plays no active role in the world and provides no comfort for people. Not that McCullers is anti-religious. On the contrary, she is the sort of religious writer whom Nathan Scott would recognize as "negatively theological," dealing with spiritual problems in the modern setting of a Godless world.
In *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, the characters create false gods as an extension of their illusory, subjective worlds. Singer makes a god of Antonapoulos, his moronic, deaf and dumb friend, while Blount, Copeland and others make a god of the mute Singer. In each case, someone who cannot hear, understand, or speak makes the perfect god figure for the others; they can make of him what they will and use him as an object to continue to build their subjective worlds.

This allegory is paralleled in the social world. Blount and Copeland use Singer to further their own subjective worlds and at the same time, as an outgrowth of their self-centered illusions, attempt to set themselves up as demi-gods and leaders of the people. Thus, in a sense, they too are god-figures (Blount is even replete with stigmata) who would manipulate the masses in pursuance of their dreams while failing to show any real compassion for the people they would lead. Ironically, their ideas of social reform are sound, but they misuse them and the people misunderstand them. McCullers was intrigued with this sort of misuse of ideas and commented later in her life on the paradox that a great philosopher such as Nietzsche and a great musician like Wagner could, due to the "warped and subjective understanding" of ignorant people, become "the mainstay of Hitler's emotional appeal to the German
people.\textsuperscript{45} In her first novel she tentatively explores the relationship of ideas, subjective illusions, and leadership to social movements, and her much debated description of the book as a "parable of fascism" is understandable in this context.\textsuperscript{46}

As the preceding discussion indicates, there is a complex interaction within the subjective and objective duality of the novel, as the author brings together elements of the romance and realistic novel in her philosophical and social commentary. None of the other novels in the 1940's are so ambitious, and in none is the social reality developed so prominently. They are shorter works with fewer characters and a narrower scope, and they seem at first glance to go off in different directions from each other and from McCullers' first novel. Reflections in a Golden Eye, for example, is a macabre and brooding story of perverted love between a rigid officer and a lithe young private. It is told in unimpassioned, impersonal prose and takes place in the realistic setting of an army post. The Ballad of the Sad Café, on the other hand, contains narrative intrusions and what at first seems to be a make-believe atmosphere. But both these works spring from the basic duality that motivates the action in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, and

\textsuperscript{45}"The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing," The Mortgaged Heart, p. 278.

\textsuperscript{46}Quoted in Evans, p. 43.
both of them, despite their differences, illustrate a similar concept of love and combine elements of the romance and realistic novel.

In these two novellas, McCullers provides negative examples of people who choose to manipulate others in order to further their own subjective worlds. Specifically her focus is on the possessive nature of romantic love, which is based on the attraction of one person for his opposite, an attraction encouraged by its impossibility and the distance between the lover and his opposite. It is a love that is illusory, one-sided, perverted in its very nature, and finally, ironically, is self-destructive.

Ideally, love should be the bridge between subjective worlds that enables one person to treat another as a person rather than as an object to be manipulated for selfish motives. The romantic love portrayed in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* is the opposite, as the narrator makes clear in a two page digression. McCullers chooses her words carefully in this section. This "love" is not between subjects but between the subject "lover" and the objective case "beloved." She shows that inter-subjectivity is not achieved through this sort of individual love. As she explains in "The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing": "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." 47

After exploring the theme of love in Reflections in a Golden Eye and The Ballad of the Sad Café, McCullers returns in The Member of the Wedding to the subject of a sensitive adolescent girl's growing up. Actually, McCullers began work on this novel before she wrote The Ballad of the Sad Café, and it is not surprising that the initiation theme and love theme are similar. Both involve the complexity of maintaining a balance between self-identity and identity in relation to others. Francis Addams faces this dilemma in The Member of the Wedding, and she, like the "lovers" in the novellas, tries to protect her subjective world of illusions by developing a "love" for the impossible, her brother's wedding. Thus in this novel McCullers yokes the initiation story of The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter with the love themes of the two novellas.

The critical debate over The Member of the Wedding typifies the controversy surrounding her work as a whole. Some critics emphasize gothic characteristics, while another calls it McCullers' "most realistic work." 48 In fact, she uses both traditions in portraying a subjective character's ironic search for community. The subjective world of

47 The Mortgaged Heart, p. 281.
Frankie Addams dominates some sections, which are
nightmarish and freakish. At the same time, the real world
of a Southern town during World War II is always close by,
as is the true community in the Addams' household. In
exploring the conflict between subjective and objective
worlds, McCullers deliberately juxtaposes the freakish and
nightmarish qualities of the gothic romance with the norma-
tive world of the realistic novel.

In her last novel, *Clock Without Hands*, on which she
worked during her long period of illness and which is her
least successful, she continues to juxtapose realities and
fictional forms. If *The Member of the Wedding* is an indica-
tion of McCullers' attempt to consolidate themes from the
previous novels, her last novel is too, although on a much
grander scale. The work bears particular resemblances to
*The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* with its broad canvas of char-
acters and the prominence of racial issues, except that
*Clock Without Hands* is not set in the depression but rather
on the eve of the 1954 Supreme Court ruling outlawing segre-
gated schools. With this backdrop, the novel displays
social issues prominently and presents characters who are
representative figures and spokesmen for different segments
of Southern society. Woven through this social fabric are
the personal dilemmas of certain characters, especially
J. T. Malone, the local druggist who discovers that he is
dying of leukemia, and Jester, an adolescent boy buffeted
by conflicting attitudes and in search of his identity in relation to his dead father.

Thus *Clock Without Hands*, though unsuccessful, is a fitting last novel. It and *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* frame McCullers' themes. The first novel spells out the distinction between subjective and objective realities in terms of an adolescent's development from one world to the next and establishes the dialectical pattern of the later fiction; the last novel revolves around the same basic duality, but it is cast against the backdrop of old age and death. Within this framework a number of other issues, all related to the basic duality of McCullers' vision, are explored: the conflict of individual identity and community, self-serving romantic love as opposed to other-directed brotherly love, and, within the social world, the root cause of hatred and bigotry and the role of the leader in mass movements.

At each stage of her analysis, as she juxtaposes concepts, worlds, characters, images, and fictional forms, McCullers probes and delineates. She does not advocate, except by implication, and she certainly does not celebrate or glorify. The ideal, the balance of opposites, is never realized until her last novel. In her best work she is not an optimist, sentimentalist, or romantic. She is more concerned with form and precision and theory than with
spontaneity and rapture. She would rather analyze than pity, and she recognizes both the failure of social institutions and the weaknesses, contradictions, and paradoxes inherent in the human condition.

With this understanding of McCullers' temperament and the themes and forms of her novels, we can proceed in the following chapters to a detailed consideration of the works themselves. A close reading of them demonstrates the interrelationship of the author's theories of a dual reality and the characters, images, and structures of her novels. The interrelation of ideas and fictional devices is especially evident in the conflict of subjective and objective worlds in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. 
Previous interpretations of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* have tended to undervalue the significance of Mick Kelly and thus the distinction between subjective and objective realities in the novel. One reason may be that she is more "normal" than the other four major characters and her story thus pales in comparison to the bizarre and tragic events surrounding them. Singer, the deaf mute who works in Mick's father's store, loses his only companion and kills himself. Jake Blount, a hard-drinking drifter who espouses Marxist doctrines, becomes involved in a race riot at the local carnival. Dr. Copeland, the proud and well-educated black doctor who is dying from tuberculosis, is assaulted by a deputy sheriff and arrested for trying to protest the brutal mistreatment of his son-in-law in prison. Biff Brannon, the owner of the local café, also experiences traumatic events; his wife dies, his bisexuality emerges, and his niece is accidentally shot in the head. In the
midst of the tumult and tragedy, Mick's story tends to be lost.¹

She may seem especially insignificant when compared to Singer, whom most critics see as the central character. After all, McCullers' original title for the novel was "The Mute," and in her outline she describes Singer as the figure around whom "the whole book pivots."² Singer's importance is reinforced by images which the author uses in the novel and which are emphasized in critical discussions. At one point, he is compared to the hub of the wheel toward which the other characters are attracted, and at another he has a dream in which he worships Antonapoulos while the other major characters kneel to him, indicating a pyramid structure with Antonapoulos at the top. Both images suggest that Mick's story is of minor importance.³

¹For example, Lawrence Graver relegates the Mick Kelly story to a position of lesser importance and praises McCullers for her "charming evocation" of adolescence (p. 18).

²The Mortgaged Heart, p. 125.

³Oliver Evans' interpretation in his critical biography illustrates the critical consensus. He refers to Singer as the protagonist at the "apparent centre" of the novel. About him "the other main characters are grouped in satellite fashion . . . in the same relation as the spokes of a wheel" (p. 40). Later he adds: "Though Singer is the protagonist and the apparent centre of the book, its real centre is Spiros Antonapoulos, a grotesque character who is not merely a deaf mute but a half-wit as well" (p. 40). Frank Durham in "God and No God in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter" advances the notion of a pyramid structure as suggested by Singer's dream.
But the novel may "pivot" around Singer, who in turn may be attracted to Antonapoulos, without either one being the most important character. In fact, we know less about them than we do of the other major figures, and both of them lack complexity and development. While we enter the minds of other characters and learn their thoughts, we never enter Antonapoulos' mind and our access to Singer's thoughts is severely limited, restricted for the most part to the recounting of some dreams and letters. McCullers herself downplays Singer's importance, explaining in her outline that he is "the simplest" of the characters and "is the first character in the book only in the sense that he is the symbol of isolation and thwarted expression and because the story pivots about him. In reality each of his satellites [Mick Kelly, Jake Blount, Dr. Copeland, and Biff Brannon] is of far more importance than himself."\(^4\) Singer may be the central symbol, but the central character is Mick Kelly, whom McCullers goes on to describe as "perhaps the most outstanding character in the book. . . . At the beginning of the second part of the work she steps out boldly—and from then on, up until the last section, she commands more space and interest than anyone else."\(^5\) McCullers' emphasis on

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\(^4\) The Mortgaged Heart, p. 126.

\(^5\) Ibid., p. 127. Richard Cook in his recent book recognizes Mick Kelly's importance as a character, commenting that she is the "most fully realized" figure in the novel and
Mick in the outline is borne out in the published novel. Significantly more space is devoted to Mick's narration than to any of the other four narrators, and the fewest number of pages are occupied by Singer's story.6

Furthermore, though other characters are not attracted to her as they are to Singer, Mick's story defines the concept of two realities that underlies all the action in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter and McCullers' later novels. Mick's development from an immature adolescent locked in her "inner room" to a young adult in the "outer room" provides the example of a normal progression against which the other major characters can be judged. Her "inner room" or subjective reality is represented by those things which are private to her: her own room, an unfinished house where she plays, her notebook, her plans and dreams, and her music.

is "probably its most normal personality" (Cook, p. 26). However, Cook does not explain Mick's significance in terms of the theoretical basis of the novel or her function in unifying the stories of the other characters.

6 In the collected edition of McCullers' novels and stories, The Ballad of the Sad Café: The Novels and Stories of Carson McCullers (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), approximately 105 pages are allotted to Mick Kelly's point of view. The other characters receive substantially less space, with about seventy-seven pages for Copeland, fifty-six for Blount, fifty-one for Brannon, and only forty-five for Singer and Antonapoulos together. All page references to The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, Reflections in a Golden Eye, The Ballad of the Sad Café, and The Member of the Wedding are to this collected edition, and citations are provided in parentheses in the text.
In the outside room are objective things: mathematics, economic pressures, racial intolerance, and other people.

The distinction is spelled out in a lengthy passage midway through the novel. Mick catches herself short in the middle of a conversation and thinks:

With her it was like there was two places—the inside room and the outside room. School and the family and the things that happened every day were in the outside room. Mister Singer was in both rooms. Foreign countries and plans and music were in the inside room. The songs she thought about were there. And the symphony. When she was by herself in this inside room the music she heard that night after the party would come back to her. This symphony grew slow like a big flower in her mind. During the day sometimes, or when she had just waked up in the morning, a new part of the symphony would suddenly come to her. Then she would have to go into the inside room and listen to it many times and try to join it into the parts of the symphony she remembered. The inside room was a very private place. She could be in the middle of a house full of people and still feel like she was locked up by herself (pp. 303-304).

The passage is long, but the specific wording deserves attention. Mick is set apart from the external world by her potential to enter her "inside room" or subjective world. Even when other people are around, she can ignore them and withdraw into a world of fancy and illusion.

Because she is an adolescent caught between childhood and adulthood, Mick Kelly is the perfect vehicle for portraying McCullers' concept of a dual reality. The subjective world is the realm of child-like illusions—of a mental "reality" often directly at odds with the harsh reality of the adult, everyday world—and within the private
world a young person can maintain a separateness from others while he tries out various roles and identities in his own mind. As he grows up, he must leave this subjective reality behind, as Mick Kelly discovers. She takes a hesitant step in this direction when she gives her first "adult" party and invites other people into her home. She dresses in a manner appropriate to the occasion, if not quite appropriate to her youth and her boyish personality. She appears to be "somebody different from Mick Kelly entirely" (p. 249). She goes for a walk around the block with Harry Minowitz, only to find, upon returning, the party disrupted by younger, uninvited children who "bellowed and ran and mixed with the invited people—in their old loose-legged knickers and everyday clothes" (p. 254). She is caught in the swirl; unable to keep up her adult facade, she jumps into a muddy ditch. Finally, after returning home, she yells to her guests, "Everybody go home! The door is shut! The party is over!" (p. 258).

Mick's first effort to deal with others in the adult, objective world thus ends in failure, with the door closed to outsiders and Mick Kelly still in her "inner room." Her retreat into her subjective world is clearly evident in her subsequent actions. She wanders about the neighborhood in the dark and finally stops outside a house where music is playing on the radio. Sitting outside on the grass, she
thinks what "a very fine and secret place" it is (p. 259). When the music starts on the radio, she withdraws into her inner world and wonders:

How did it come? For a minute the opening balanced from one side to the other. Like a walk or march. Like God strutting in the night. The outside of her was suddenly froze and only that first part of the music was hot inside her heart (p. 259).

This subjective world into which she retreats is one of imagined security buttressed by the god-like music she hears. She is isolated from others and uses the music as a means to further her illusions.

After Mick's first attempt to function as an adult, she finds that the problems of the everyday, social world increasingly impinge on her. At the same time, when the pressures become great, she can always retreat into her inner room. When her parents' income is reduced, she no longer gets lunch money and has to stop her music lessons; but she still is able to find some escape for herself for she thinks that "this was in the outside room. It had nothing to do with music and foreign countries and the plans she made" (p. 379).

Singer, with whom she feels she shares a secret, is also in this dream world. She thinks that now "there was this secret feeling between them. She talked to him more than she had ever talked to a person before" because although "The other people had been ordinary, . . . Singer was not" (p. 382-3). She makes the man of mystery into a
part of her dream world, as do Copeland, Jake Blount, and others. She imagines him with her "in a foreign house where in the winter it would snow" (p. 383). Just as do the other characters, she sees him as a god, and, just as the music she hears at the party, he provides an illusory sense of comfort and security and thus helps prop up her subjective world in the face of reality. She thinks, "Everybody in the past few years knew there wasn't any real God. When she thought of what she used to imagine was God she could only see Mister Singer" (p. 261). Although he does not understand her and is a deaf mute, she imagines him to be "some kind of great teacher" (p. 383). Clearly these illusions cannot be maintained, and Mick moves inextricably toward the climactic moment when the tension between her "inner room" and "outer room" is resolved.

The moment of crisis finally occurs not with Singer's suicide, as some critics suggest, but through sexual initiation. She becomes friendly with Harry Minowitz, a Jewish boy in the neighborhood, and they talk about fascism. At this point, before her initiation, Mick has no real grasp of the horrors of Nazi oppression or of much else in the objective world of relations among men and women. She and Harry dream of killing Hitler and becoming heroes. As they push and play around like children, Mick continues to have

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7See Graver, p. 14; Evans, pp. 40-1.
her mind filled with dreams and music. However, they decide to go swimming together one Sunday, and what begins as a picnic ends with sexual relations. Afterwards, on the way home, they try to understand what has happened, and Mick asks Harry if he can see any difference in her eyes; he nods affirmatively. Mick does feel herself to be different. "She felt very old, and it was like something was heavy inside her. She was a grown person now, whether she wanted to be or not" (p. 416).

Mick's sexual initiation breaks her suspension between childhood and adulthood and catapults her into the objective world. Her subjective world, represented by the motifs of rooms and houses, begins to disintegrate, and she thinks,

How would it be if the house fell apart? Once their Dad had said the whole place ought to be condemned. Did he mean that maybe some night when they were asleep the walls would crack and the house collapse? Bury them under all the plaster and broken glass and smashed furniture? So that they could not move or breathe (p. 451).

She feels a need for some sort of relationship beyond herself because "at night she was by herself in the dark and figuring was not enough. She wanted somebody" (p. 451). She also faces economic responsibilities by deciding, before Singer's suicide, to take a job at the local five-and-dime in order to help support the family. She understands that she will be trapped into working in the store indefinitely rather than just for the summer as she tries, at first, to
pretend, but she still volunteers to work. It is as though the decision has already been made for her, as though once sealed off from her nighttime dream world of music and plans she is committed entirely to the everyday world of economic necessity and responsibility for others. She accepts reality fatalistically, thinking to herself, "That was the way things were" (p. 457).

The most explicit statement of Mick's final position in the everyday world is contained late in the novel when she puzzles over Singer's suicide and her status as a grown-up, working woman. There is no causal relationship between these two events: instead, Singer's death is intended as another symbol, along with the ending of the music and fantasies, of the sealing off of her "inner room." Now she works each day, sleeps at night "like she was supposed to," counts her pennies, worries about the run in her stocking, wears earrings, and generally concerns herself with ordinary, everyday problems. She is revealed as a very different person from the Mick Kelly of a year before, and as she sits in the New York Café eating ice cream and drinking a nickel beer, she thinks about the change:

But now no music was in her mind. That was a funny thing. It was like she was shut out from the inside room [italics mine]. Sometimes a quick little tune would come and go--but she never went into the inside room with music like she used to do. . . . When she used to come home from school she felt good and was ready to start working on the music. But now she was always too tired. At home she just ate supper and
slept and then ate breakfast and went off to the store again. A song she had started in her private notebook two months before was still not finished. And she wanted to stay in the inside room but she didn't know how. It was like the inside room was locked somewhere away from her. A very hard thing to understand (p. 492).

Mick may not fully understand, but she has clearly arrived in the objective world with all its attendant economic hardships, social problems, and obligations toward others.

Her initiation into the objective world is at best a muted victory, particularly when one considers that the "inner room" from which she is eventually barred contains her music—something more significant than idle dreams and fancies. The objective world in which she finds herself at the end of the novel is much less appealing and much less romantic. It is, however, the best option open to Mick Kelly. Life may not be very sympathetic or appealing, but there is nothing to do but face it, the author seems to suggest. Better to have the courage to thrust oneself wholly into the everyday world than to try to cling to a past world that is, after all, an illusion. Thus, although Mick feels "cheated" at "the way things were" at the end of the novel, she forces herself to at least a partial acceptance of her circumstances. "It was some good," she thinks, and these words conclude her final section: "All right! O.K.! Some good" (p. 493).

Mick's story establishes the basic conflict of inner and outer worlds and also sets the normal progression from
one world to another against which the self-deceiving characters can be evaluated. It is precisely this progression that two of the other four major characters try to reverse. If Mick successfully reconciles herself to the everyday world, Jake Blount and Dr. Copeland do not. Their failure is profoundly ironic since they are reformist leaders steeped in Marxist ideology. They should be the two characters most committed to dealing with external reality, and on the surface they appear to do so. Certainly their speeches point to the issues of economic and racial injustice that underlie the social world of the novel. Yet it becomes increasingly clear that they have withdrawn from reality and have created "inner rooms" of their own in which they can go through the gestures of leadership and mouth their rhetoric. As does Mick, they use Singer as an object around which to form their illusory worlds precisely because he cannot understand or answer.

The irony of Blount's attraction to Singer is apparent early in the novel when he buttonholes the mute in the New York Café and pours out a string of drunken monologues. Not knowing that Singer is deaf, Blount says to him, "You're the only one in this town who catches what I mean. . . . I know you understand the things I want to mean" (p. 165). Even after he learns of Singer's handicap, Blount uses him to maintain the illusion of communication and understanding.
He explains to the uncomprehending Singer: "There are those of us who know and those who don't know. . . . When us people who know run into each other that's an event. It almost never happens" (pp. 165-66). Thus he immediately includes Singer with himself as the "knows" set in opposition to, and isolated from, the mass of "don't knows."

The isolation apparent in Blount's arbitrary division of people becomes clearer in a later scene when he asks what one can do when he "can't make the others understand." The others, the great mass of people, he refers to as "blind, dumb, and blunt-headed--stupid and mean" (p. 210). He holds himself aloof from them, seeking instead to live in his subjective world for which Singer serves as a convenient prop. The irony of Blount's apparent efforts to communicate with Singer is underscored by his inclusion of the mute in the "knows" as opposed to the "dumb" other people. Singer, though he can read lips, understands little of the slurred speech, as is revealed in one of the mute's letters to his friend Antonapoulos. He writes that Blount sometimes "speaks such a language that I cannot follow. . . . He thinks he and I have a secret together but I do not know what it is" (pp. 354-55). Blount himself realizes that talking with Singer is "a queer thing," but he cannot resist the temptation to escape from his frustrated efforts to proselytize among the workers. He retreats into an imagined
communication with the mute, whom he makes over in his own image.

As Jake Blount moves away from the objective world, the irony of his position grows. In one important scene, he fervently explains to Singer his insights into society:

But say a man does know. He sees the world as it is and he looks back thousands of years to see how it all come about. . . . But the main thing he sees is that the whole system of the world is built on a lie. And although it's as plain as the shining sun--the don't knows have lived with that lie so long they just can't see it (pp. 292-93).

At this point, of course, Blount himself has already begun to live a lie. He encloses himself within his private world of illusion represented by Singer and seeks out the sanctuary of the mute's room.

Blount's alienation and self-delusion are evident when he meets the one person in the novel with whom he should have most in common. He and Dr. Copeland, though they share a similar Marxist view of social and economic issues, are unable to come to terms with one another. Clearly Blount has lost any possibility for communication or effective action in the objective world. Because he does not even recognize the humanness of his fellow man, it is not surprising that later, when violence and hatred break loose at the carnival where he works, he joins in the fight swinging wildly, not seeing whom he hits, and with senseless words spinning in his mind. He thinks, "So this was the finish."
A brawl. A riot. A fight with every man for himself" (p. 476).

Blount's separation from others and retreat into his subjective world are paralleled in many respects by Copeland's failure as a leader of the black people. He tries to better his race and thinks that he has the "real true purpose," while at the same time he puts himself above the masses. His "real true purpose" corresponds with Mick's "inner room" and Blount's "knows," all concepts that imply self-isolation. Though he is more sympathetically portrayed than Blount, he is no more successful at reaching his people, who greet his Marxist lectures with the inappropriate cries of "Save us!" and "Hallelujah! Save us, Lord!" (p. 334).

He too turns to Singer in an effort to retreat from problems in the objective world and from the knowledge both that he has failed as a leader and that he is dying. He comes to the mute's room to speak with pride of the black race which has endured so much; yet even his pride is an illusion: the blacks in the novel are portrayed, for the most part, as weak, and he frequently shows contempt for them and their culture. He increasingly depends on Singer to further his illusions, imagining that the mute has the knowledge of "a race oppressed." Singer, of course, has no more understanding of Copeland's "real true purpose" than he has of Blount's theories or Mick's music. His only
comment about Copeland in his letter to Antonapoulos is that "This black man frightens me" (p. 355).

The irony of Copeland's position is especially evident at the end of his story when, a sick and defeated man, he echoes precisely the stubborn inability to act which he has fought against in his people. His daughter tries to get him to leave the house for his final ride to the family farm, but he "will not be hurried." "Just let me be," he says. "Kindly allow me to sit here in peace a moment" (p. 469). As he continues to rock himself in his chair and stare around him at his empty quarters, the symbolic value of the house once again, as with Mick, becomes evident. Copeland's dream world is indeed empty now, his illusions shattered. He has failed to deal effectively with reality. He has been unable to lead his people or to prevent the racial injustice and prejudice that caused his son-in-law's maiming and the carnival riot. And now he is dying. His defeat may seem harsher and more final than Blount's; yet Copeland, unlike his fellow socialist, at least recognizes something of his shortcomings: "I have done those things which I ought not to have done," he thinks, "and left undone those things which I ought to have done" (p. 470). Though he wishes to speak aloud as he is bounced about in the wagon leaving town, he realizes that "there was no one to hear him" (p. 476).
Most critics see Blount and Copeland, because of the accuracy of their perceptions of social injustice and because of the obvious need for some of the solutions they advocate, as well-intentioned men who are simply unable, because of the general inertia of society, to carry out their plans. McCullers herself had this interpretation in mind when she wrote her outline. In it, she describes them as selfless characters genuinely motivated toward social reform: "The great effort of each of them has been to give and there has been no thought of personal return." The major encounter between them is to end in harmony. As McCullers explains, "the inner purpose of each man is seen fully by the other. 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."

In writing the novel, however, McCullers abandoned the romantic characterizations of Blount and Copeland. Their encounter ends not in harmony and insight but in anger and abuse. Blount calls Copeland a "Short-sighted bigot" and the black doctor retorts, "White . . . Fiend!" (p. 445). Elsewhere in the novel they are revealed as flawed characters who deceive themselves and fail to deal realistically with social problems or compassionately with other people.

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8 The Mortgaged Heart, p. 141.
9 Ibid., p. 143.
One possible explanation for the change is that McCullers, in trying to "sell" the outline to a publisher, tended to romanticize her characters and make the story sound less depressing and cynical. At the end of the outline she stresses that the reader will not be "left with a sense of futility" and that some of the characters "come very near to being heroes." 10

However, there are more important reasons for the change. The vision of humanity that she promises in her outline is simply not consistent with her temperament. She was too much the moral analyst to allow herself to glorify her characters and endorse easy solutions to complex social problems. Also, as she worked on the novel, she must have become aware that the characters of Blount and Copeland could be more closely related to the Mick Kelly story by having them reverse her initiation process. In this way, their growing attraction to Singer, the central symbol of isolation, would be consistent and understandable. In addition, by taking a more critical stance toward them, she could explore the abstract problem of the relationship of the leader to society, an issue brought to the fore by the depression, the rise of fascism, and the coming of World War II.

In this regard, we should recall McCullers' later description of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* as "an ironic parable of fascism . . . presenting the spiritual rather than the political side of the phenomenon." Most critics ignore or denigrate the remark, and indeed it may be confusing; but it does point to the role of Blount and Copeland as failed social leaders. They place themselves above human understanding while engaging, at the same time, in the rhetoric of social reform. As a result, they themselves become bigoted, selfish, and doctrinaire. One final irony is that they, both social activists who cry out for justice, equality, and Marxist reform, are the bearers of a type of selfishness which destroys the human spirit and which has an analogue in the demagoguery evident in European fascism.

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11 Evans, p. 43.

12 Chester Eisinger states: "The comment makes sense only if we assume that the economics of capitalism and the racial practices of the South suggest to her the barbarism of fascism" (*Fiction in the Forties*, p. 251). Oliver Evans, in an effort to clear up the question in his book, suggests that although "this description of the novel is indeed misleading in the sense that it limits the real subject too narrowly, it is possible if we think of Singer and Antonapoulos as leaders, blindly invested by others with attributes in which they are only too conspicuously (for those whom they fail to hypnotize) lacking, for us to see the terrifying meaning of the parable: in this absurdly grim game of follow-the-leader, the ultimate leader, the power behind the power, is a lunatic" (p. 43). Graver objects even to this interpretation: "the analogy [to fascism] has no roots in the narrative. In what sense does Singer actively tyrannize anyone; who is being regimented, and to what degree? Can Christ and Hitler live comfortably within the confines of the same myth?" (pp. 17-18).
This political fascism, referred to at several points in the novel, is also the result of self-glorifying illusions of a single person who occupies a position of leadership.

Blount's and Copeland's actions in creating inner worlds in which they reign supreme are duplicated, though without the social issues, by Singer and Antonapoulos' one-sided relationship. Just as Blount and Copeland seek out the one person who, through his handicap, cannot understand or question and thus serves to prop up their subjective illusions, so too does Singer. When he talks to his friend through sign language, Antonapoulos, who is moronic as well as deaf, is unresponsive. As McCullers makes clear in the novel, "Singer never knew just how much his friend understood of all the things he told him. But it did not matter" (p. 146).

Their friendship is no more reciprocal than their "conversations." Their relationship is illustrated when the two play chess, Singer's favorite game. By careful reinforcing, Singer teaches his friend a few moves, though "The Greek never got on to the erratic movements of the knights and the sweeping mobility of the queens" (p. 147). After the first moves, Singer plays the game himself, moving both white and black pieces while Antonapoulos watches. It is not necessary that Singer have a real opponent, only that he be seated opposite the Greek, who is able by his presence to
fill the role of contestant in Singer's mind. The same one-sidedness and illusion is evident in other aspects of their relationship. When Singer visits the asylum, he talks feverishly and makes a desperate effort to say everything possible before he has to leave. Antonapoulos, however, understands little or nothing of Singer's speech, which must seem to the Greek as garbled as Blount's and Copeland's monologues seem to Singer.

Because Singer's dependence on his friend does not derive merely from the fact that both men share the same handicap, he should not be seen as a man isolated by his deafness, frustrated by his inability to communicate with others, and thus compelled to pour out his feelings to the only person who can understand his sign language. Nor is he a compassionate lover who makes "the gift of love" to Antonapoulos. McCullers romanticizes Singer no more than she does Blount or Copeland, explaining in her outline that the mute is only kind and cooperative "on the surface" and that "nothing which goes on around him disturbs his inner self." He cares even less about real communication than do Blount and Copeland, as emphasized by the fact that he chooses not to speak even though he has learned how to voice words. After he meets Antonapoulos, he never speaks this

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13 Evans, p. 45.

14 The Mortgaged Heart, p. 126.
way again, "because with his friend there was no need for this" (p. 153). Singer makes a conscious choice not to communicate in the everyday world and instead withdraws into himself using the Greek to fill out his fantasies of communication.

He is not really isolated by his handicap, then, and he even rejects the friendship of other deaf mutes. After he learns of his friend's death in the asylum, he wanders aimlessly around the town until he happens upon three mutes in a poolroom. He goes up to them and offers a sign of greeting, and they respond enthusiastically; but after telling his name and where he is from,

... he could think of nothing else to tell about himself. He asked if they knew Spiros Antonapoulos. They did not know him. Singer stood with his hands dangling loose. His head was still inclined to one side and his glance was oblique. He was so listless and cold that the three mutes in the bowler hats looked at him queerly. After a while they left him out of their conversation. And when they had paid for the rounds of beers and were ready to depart they did not suggest that he join them (pp. 464-65).

Singer's dangling hands at this moment of possible communication with those who could provide understanding and compassion indicate not only that he seeks no communication but also that he wants none of the "understanding" the mutes might offer. They do not share his real handicap, for Singer's sickness is in his mind and derives from the subjective world in which he seeks to escape reality. He
uses Antonapoulos for this purpose, and with the Greek's death Singer's inner world collapses.

Singer earlier in the novel seems more completely entrenched in his dream world than do either Blount or Copeland, and this may explain why he ends his life while the other two characters are merely severely shaken by the collapse of their inner worlds. In any event, all three dream worlds disintegrate, and a fourth, Mick's, is left irrevocably behind. One character, however, succeeds in maintaining an inner world right to the moment of his death, and that is Antonapoulos. Limited not only by speech and hearing deficiencies but also by a childish level of intelligence, he is able in all innocence to preserve the world of a child, a world similar to that which Mick must leave behind as she is initiated into the everyday world. As McCullers explains in her outline: "His mental, sexual and spiritual development is that of a child of about seven years old."\(^\text{15}\) He, of all the characters, is able to achieve this world with no pretending, with no dependence upon any other figure.

For this reason, and because he seems to be the final link in a series of dependencies among the characters, some critics see him as a god figure. We have previously

\(^{15}\text{Ibid., p. 138.}\)
mentioned the passage upon which this interpretation is largely based. In a dream Singer finds himself kneeling on stone steps looking upward at Antonapoulos, who is naked and holds aloft some object to which he seems to pray. Behind Singer, farther down the steps, are the four other major characters; and behind them, crowds of people. This passage, both revealing and ambiguous, has too often been evaluated out of context. It is necessary to keep in mind that this is Singer's dream and no one else's. Perhaps he may subconsciously betray an awareness of his own dependence on Antonapoulos, and perhaps he also sees himself, as Frank Durham in his previously cited article suggests, as a Christ figure kneeling before God; but this is only Singer's vision and cannot necessarily be taken as the author's assessment of the character.

It would be more accurate to say that McCullers uses the Singer-Antonapoulos relationship to point out that each of the major characters, in creating their inner worlds of illusion, imagines himself in a Christ-like role. Certainly Singer is not the only Christ figure. Jake Blount, who once drove a nail through his hand and still bears the stigmata, sees himself in a sacrificial role and even takes to the streets to preach to the masses. Also, Biff Brannon assumes a Christ pose when, early in the novel, he lies in bed and "stretched both of his arms outward and crossed his naked feet" (p. 174).
McCullers has not provided these religious references in order to confuse the reader, nor, as Lawrence Graver suggests, because she fails to exert firm control over her material, but rather to emphasize the central pattern that lies behind the major characters, actions, and themes. All spring from the basic distinction between subjective and objective realities. The Christ-like stance that Blount and Copeland feign is directed related to their inner dream worlds as defined by Mick Kelly's story. All three of these characters glorify themselves and imagine Singer to be a god figure over them. Seen in this way, the relationship between Antonapoulos and Singer is consistent with these characterizations. Singer is a "Christ figure" not in the author's view but only within his own subjective world. He uses his friend to maintain this illusion, just as others use him. Thus, though Singer pictures himself in his dream as worshipping Antonapoulos, this dream itself is an example of his self-delusion, for Singer, in the final analysis, uses other people and worships himself, as do Blount, Copeland, and, before her initiation, Mick. Antonapoulos is a self-worshipper, too, but the reader feels no sense of tragedy about him since he is so child-like and does not have to suffer through the loss of his inner world. Singer does  

\[16\] Graver, p. 17.
suffer, however, and his tragic end is born from his self-delusion.

The religious references and, more broadly, the lives of the major characters are put in perspective by the one character who is an observer, Biff Brannon. He watches the others as they pass through his establishment; Mick moves through various stages of development which illustrate the conflicts and needs of the other characters, and Brannon takes it all in and finally reaches some sort of partial understanding of just what is happening. He alone seems to be both uninvolved enough to see and question and also involved sufficiently to understand in a personal way the plight of the other characters; and he more than any other character is able to maintain a fragile balance between subjective and objective worlds.

Brannon, like Singer, is silent. He is really more silent than the deaf mute, for Singer at least can pretend to unburden himself to Antonapoulos while Brannon confides in no one. Even with his wife he thinks, "With her, silence was better. Being around that woman always made him different from his real self" (pp. 156-57). In his silence, Brannon puzzles over the various characters who appear, at times like a rogues' gallery, before his counter. Early in the novel he listens as Blount pours out a steady torrent of words, and Brannon thinks quietly to himself that "This man
had a good mind, all right, but he went from one thing to another without any reason behind it at all. He is a man thrown off his track by something" (p. 159). He realizes almost at once that there is something abnormal about Blount, not physically but "in the mind," and he finds himself helping this stranger. Brannon, indeed, is used to helping people in need, and it seems it is precisely the abnormality that attracts him. As he thinks to himself:

... he did like freaks. He had a special friendly feeling for sick people and cripples. Whenever somebody with a harelip or T.B. came into the place he would set him up to beer. Or if the customer were a hunchback or a bad cripple, then it would be whiskey on the house. There was one fellow who had had his peder and his left leg blown off in a boiler explosion, and whenever he came to town there was a free pint waiting for him. And if Singer were a drinking kind of man he could get liquor at half price any time he wanted it (p. 164).

The obvious implication is that Brannon helps others whose deficiencies somehow reflect his own. Thus, silent like Singer, he is attracted to the mute; mentally somewhat abnormal, he seeks to help Blount; sexually ambivalent, he would help the castrated man and, likewise, finds himself attracted to the adolescent, tomboyish Mick Kelly, who is herself not yet a woman and yet not a boy. This last attraction becomes so strong that Brannon begins following Mick around, just as she follows Singer.

To the extent that Biff Brannon identifies with those who reflect his own character flaws, he shares something of the experience central to the other major characters; and
yet he is able to keep from being drawn into any one, self-consuming relationship. He is further removed from the others because his personality includes the element of true compassion lacking so obviously in some of the other characters. As a result he remains as much the spectator as the participant. He witnesses, for example, but does not really participate in Blount's drunken efforts to talk to Singer that first night in the café. Others present laugh at Blount's routine, and "only Biff was serious. He wanted to ascertain if the mute really understood what was said to him" (p. 166).

In a way this scene in the New York Café early in the novel acts as a paradigm of some of the later roles. Mick appears briefly going about her business and displaying her adolescence. Blount holds forth, succeeds in imposing on Singer's patience, and even tries to drag the reluctant Dr. Copeland into the all-white establishment. Through it all, Brannon stands and wonders, as he does through the rest of the book. His curiosity grows. It seems that the more he watches and questions the actions of the others the more he learns about himself, and thus he is distinguished from the other characters because he seeks not illusion but rather self-knowledge. To gain this insight, he keenly observes the present, records the past (he files and saves newspapers), and tries to answer the crucial question "why?"
His questioning of others leads him to question himself, as illustrated by the following sequence. He thinks at one point that


in nearly every person there was some physical part kept always guarded. With the mute his hands. The kid Mick picked at the front of her blouse to keep the cloth from rubbing the new, tender nipples beginning to come out on her breast. With Alice it was her hair... And with himself? (p. 170)

These physical aspects, of course, correlate with those tender spots in each character's personality: Mick's adolescence, for example, and Singer's means of self-fulfillment through Antonapoulos. If he himself is vulnerable, it is in the sense that he questions so much and rejects the easy comfort of illusions. He is—perhaps this is his curse—plagued by a strange curiosity that compels him to seek an understanding of whatever it is that lies at the very heart of human nature itself. And in the process, he identifies with and suffers with each of the other major characters.

Brannon, as an observer, functions as a literary device as well as a participating character, and the deftness with which the author handles this character reveals much of her skill. The temptation must have been great for McCullers to put not only the questions but also the answers in the mind of the café owner—to use him to "explain" the book and clear up the apparent ambiguities. To do so, of course, would both limit the potentials of her fictional form and
also destroy the credibility of the character, and the author wisely avoided the temptation. Brannon does serve, however, to focus the reader on the critical questions about the book and also very subtly to suggest some of the basic elements and thematic structures which unify the characters. One example occurs early in the novel. When Jake and Singer leave the café after Jake's furious drunk, Brannon looks after them and then up at the sky, and "the vast depth of it fascinated and oppressed him" (p. 171). The strangeness of what he sees leads him to try "to explain something to himself," and later, as he lies in bed, he puzzles over Blount's actions that night. Significantly, he sees Blount in Christ-like terms:

In some men it is in them to give up everything personal at some time, before it ferments and poisons—throw it to some human being or some human idea. They have to. In some men it is in them—The text is 'All men seek for Thee.' Maybe that was why—maybe— (p. 174)

Whether or not the reader agrees entirely with Brannon's characterization of Blount in religious terms, this train of thought obviously serves to focus attention precisely on Blount as a Christ figure. Brannon reaches no pat conclusions, but as he mulls over characters and events, he serves the reader by underscoring key points. In this particular scene, as if for further emphasis, Brannon himself adopts a Christ-like pose, as though he is trying out Blount's role in his own mind.
Later in the novel Brannon becomes even more questioning and thus more significant as a device. After his wife's death he reacts analytically with a series of questions, and such questions together with repetition of the word "why" become more frequent in the last chapters. Moments after Alice's death, while he is alone with her, he thinks:

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? (p. 264)

This passage is fairly oblique, as the author intends, but it does at least serve to suggest an inter-relation between Christ images ("the resurrection") and the one-sidedness of the relationships among characters. Whether Brannon himself is fully aware of it, a central problem of the book is being posed through his thoughts. The idea of a "loved one" after death being recreated in the lover's own mind or soul emphasizes precisely man's ability to fill his own needs, make up for his own deficiencies, by creating his own inner world.

Yet a third example of the author's technique is illustrated as Brannon adopts again his familiar pose behind his
Blount and Mick both kept their eyes on Singer. They talked, and the mute's expression changed as he watched them. It was a funny thing. The reason—was it in them or in him [Singer]? He sat very still with his hands in his pockets, and because he did not speak it made him seem superior. What did that fellow think and realize? What did he know? (p. 275)

He wonders, without putting his finger on the answer, why these characters try to talk with the deaf mute. "Was it in them or in him?" he puzzles. This is a basic question. Put in the terms we have been using, the question is: Are the characters attracted to Singer because of anything in him, something they seek to tap through true communication, some special knowledge? Or is the mystique about Singer something each character creates within his own mind, for his own selfish purposes, for his own subjective world? Brannon never fully understands the answer, but the author succeeds in using him to raise the question in the reader's mind.

Biff Brannon's function as a literary device has not been fully appreciated. If Mick Kelly is at the center of the novel in her delineation of subjective and objective realities, then he frames the action and characters within the proper set of questions. He acts as something of a camera lens, first focusing the reader on one aspect of the novel and then another, always as McCullers suggests in her
Throughout it all, the reader is not quite aware that he is being positioned in this way. We take Brannon for what he is on the surface—just another of the characters attracted to Singer. We sympathize with him as a character; we follow his trial excursions into the inner world as he attaches himself briefly to Singer, Mick, and Blount (whom he actually pictures as an Inca Indian in a dream), and we are snapped back to reality with him. We feel for his position as it is described:

Between the two worlds he was suspended. He saw that he was looking at his own face in the counter glass before him. Sweat glistened on his temples and his face was contorted. One eye was opened wider than the other. The left eye delved narrowly into the past while the right gazed wide and affrighted into a future of blackness, error, and ruin. And he was suspended between radiance and darkness. Between bitter irony and faith (p. 498).

Yet at the end of the book as he resigns "himself to await the morning sun," we find ourselves turning back to precisely those questions he raises so unobtrusively, and we seek just those answers he does not voice.

Brannon's position at the end of the book has been commented on frequently, and some critics have seen his final questioning and his unanswered call for help as an indication of pessimism on the part of the author. But it is precisely his questioning, so important for the framing

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17 The Mortgaged Heart, pp. 143, 137.
of the novel, that also makes him a very positive character. At the end of the book, he thinks, "But, motherogod, was he a sensible man . . . ? . . . And he would just stand here like a jittery ninny or would he pull himself together and be reasonable?" (p. 498). The question is answered by his actions. He tends to everyday concerns; he goes outside to raise the awning, and "As he went to the door his walk gained steadiness" (p. 498). He succeeds in composing himself despite the fact that he, more than any other character, has witnessed the full panorama of the human struggle. Even though, like Mick, he does not understand everything that has happened, he still looks forward to the "morning sun."

Brannon's position in the objective world at the end of the novel is similar to Mick's. Both characters also fulfill a similar function in the novel by asserting the unity that the novel has been accused of lacking. As Klaus Lubbers states in his excellent article: "The story gives the impression of being made up of loosely juxtaposed elements which are parts of a barely coherent whole. Unless one can perceive governing patterns, the book leaves in the reader a disjointed, if not chaotic, effect."\(^\text{18}\) Indeed, the major characters are separate and isolated; it is this fault

\(^{18}\) "The Necessary Order: A Study of Theme and Structure in Carson McCullers' Fiction," \textit{Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien}, 8 (1963), 188. Lubbers offers a persuasive analysis of the theme of illusion and reality as the unifying element in McCullers' works.
that McCullers criticizes in them. Yet the story of each one is related to those of the others through a series of parallels and variations on the same theme, as explained by Mick's and Brannon's stories. As McCullers says in her outline, "like a voice in a fugue each one of the main characters is an entirety in himself— but his personality takes on a new richness when contrasted and woven in with the other characters."19

In attempting to make a case for the novel being unified, many critics have, as we have seen, relied on an understanding of Singer as the central character and have supported their interpretations by referring to the wheel and pyramid images to explain the interrelations among the characters. It is not surprising that their interpretations have met with objections precisely on the grounds that Singer is not sufficiently connected to events in the social world of the novel and that there is no causal relationship between his death and the outcome of the other major characters.20 The present discussion, it is hoped, makes it clear that Singer, though the central symbol of isolation, is not, nor was he intended to be, the central character. Instead, a different view of the characters and structure of the novel is suggested.

19 The Mortgaged Heart, p. 148.
The central figure is Mick Kelly, a complex, developing character whose story receives more attention than any other character's. She sets forth the thematic conflict of subjective and objective worlds and represents a normal and positive, if not entirely happy, development from one to the other. Brannon is used to comment on the other characters, stress McCullers' principal themes, and pose the questions with which the author wished to confront the reader. Within this structure of themes and ideas, the other major characters are contained. Blount and Copeland, similar characters in many respects, emphasize the social issues in the novel. They relate to Mick's story by reversing the progression from subjective to objective worlds. Singer is an ironic symbol whom they imagine to be god-like but who is himself weak and withdrawn into his own "inner room." 

The relationships among the major characters form a complex structure, but it is a pattern with which McCullers had some prior experience. In her early short story entitled "Court in the West Eighties," published posthumously in The Mortgaged Heart, the characters are arranged around a pivotal figure who is, like Singer, an ironic god image. The setting reflects the structure. The story takes place in a tenement with the rooms facing an empty courtyard. Each character is isolated within his own room, and each experiences hardships. Two characters are set apart from the others: the narrator, who is a student occupied with reading theoretical works on economics and philosophy while trying to come to terms with the harsh reality outside the window, and a man who lives directly across the court from the narrator and who, the narrator imagines, understands everything that happens. In fact, he is nothing but a drunkard whose words are never heard; yet the narrator, like the characters in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, invests him with special qualities as a way of avoiding facing the realities of poverty and loneliness in the tenement.
of the respective characters are drawn together not just by their attraction to Singer but also through Mick Kelly, who is the protagonist. She provides the schema against which we understand the other characters. Through her story, and Brannon's framing of the action, the other characters are revealed not as romantic searchers after the truth but as flawed people who delude themselves and whose failings have adverse effects on other people.

With this understanding of the complexity and range of the novel, we can appreciate the significance of McCullers' concept of the "philosophical novel" outlined in her essay "Russian Realists and Southern Literature." The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, like the philosophical novel, is not confined to either the romance or the realistic novel tradition. It incorporates elements of the two forms because its central concern is the meeting ground between two worlds. In delineating this territory and people's inability to bring the two into harmony, the author explores the inner worlds of her characters and the process by which illusions are fostered and reality obscured. Yet she also depicts social reality, which is adversely affected by such self-serving illusions.

The social world of the novel is, as Millichap makes clear, significant. The theoretical discussions in which Blount and Copeland engage reverberate against very real
examples of social injustice. When Blount talks about exploitation of the workers and their need to organize and strike for better working conditions, the reader is confronted with concrete illustrations of their abject poverty in contrast to the prosperity of the cotton mills. It is only four pages into the novel that the mills are described as "big and flourishing" while "the workers in the town were very poor." Their wages, as Brannon tells Blount, are "around ten or eleven a week on the average--but then of course they get laid off now and then" (p. 202). Blount is described walking through one of the mill districts:

The streets became narrow and unpaved and they were not empty any longer. Groups of dingy, hungry-looking children called to each other and played games. The two-room shacks, each one like the other, were rotten and unpainted. The stink of food and sewage mingled with the dust in the air (p. 203).

And when he tries to organize the workers, to tell them the "Gospel," they only laugh at him and continue living in their poverty, happy that they have any job at all, regardless of the wages and conditions.

The examples of racial injustice are even more prevalent and telling. Copeland speaks of the need for his people to maintain a sense of pride in their race and to educate themselves and practice birth control. Surrounding his remarks are incidents of white bigotry and black subservience. Portia, Copeland's daughter and the Kellys' maid, is a stereotypical, though compelling, Southern mammy
figure who, like her brothers (ironically named Hamilton and Karl Marx) has rejected her father's plans for her and adopted a traditional black role. Copeland himself is insulted and degraded. Even Mick falls into the pattern and calls him "uncle," and his attempt to see the judge about Portia's husband, Willie, accused of knifing a white man, results in Copeland's own arrest. Worse still is the treatment Willie receives in prison. He is abused by a white guard, tries to escape, and upon his recapture is left for three days in a cold cell with his feet tied in the air. Gangrene develops, and as a result both his feet are amputated.

But McCullers is not content to stop at merely reflecting the harsh reality of Southern life in the 1930's. She tries to go beyond this sort of realism, as she called on other Southern writers to do in "Russian Realists and Southern Fiction." The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter not only displays social realism but also attempts to relate conditions in society to an overall concept of human behavior, a theory that serves to unify the various characters, themes, and motifs and attempts, in an indirect way, to propose some answers to the question "why" that Brannon asks. The result is a profoundly ironic work that presents characters who claim to be absorbed with others, who appear to be Christ-like and self-sacrificing, but who in fact, because of their
own failings and also the magnitude of the external forces ranged against them, have turned inward upon themselves using other people to further their own selfish, illusionary, subjective worlds.

An ideal is never fully realized in the novel—McCullers was not one to idealize—but the negative examples she provides in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* point toward the need for some sort of balance between self-identity and sense of community, just as her fictional form brings together the inner world of the romance with the objective world of the realistic novel. A balance and harmony of this sort, we infer, might be achieved by the ingredient lacking even in the characters who profess concern for others: love. Brannon has a momentary vision of this sort of reconciliation of opposites at the end of the novel. It is this theme that McCullers explores more fully in the two novellas she wrote next, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* and *The Ballad of the Sad Café.*
CHAPTER III

THE CRITIQUE OF ROMANTIC LOVE IN REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE AND THE BALLAD OF THE SAD CAFÉ

McCullers' two novellas, Reflections in a Golden Eye and The Ballad of the Sad Café, published just three years apart, are variations on the same basic story, though in the second work the setting is altered, the number of characters reduced, and the narrative point-of-view changed. Unfortunately, critical discussions frequently separate the two works and obscure the parallels between them. For example, in Oliver Evans' critical biography, four chapters, including one devoted to The Member of the Wedding, not published until three years after The Ballad of the Sad Café, come between the discussions of the two novellas. And

1 McCullers wrote Reflections in a Golden Eye in 1939, after she finished The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter and before its publication. The novella first appeared in two installments in Harper's Bazaar, October and November 1940. A hardcover edition was published by Houghton Mifflin in February 1941, followed nine years later by a New Directions reprint and a Bantam edition, both of which included an introduction by Tennessee Williams. After finishing Reflections in a Golden Eye, McCullers began The Member of the Wedding but interrupted her work to write The Ballad of the Sad Café. Her second novella appeared in the August 1943 issue of Harper's Bazaar and was included in The Best American Short Stories, 1944. It later became the title piece in the collection of McCullers' fiction published in 1951 by Houghton Mifflin and also in a collection of her short stories published by Houghton Mifflin and Bantam.
although a number of excellent articles on The Ballad of the Sad Café have appeared, few of them refer to McCullers' previous novella. 2

The tendency to separate the two works is underscored in the debate between those critics who see McCullers as a romantic writer of gothic romances and those who emphasize her realism. Her first novella is seen variously as a gothic romance, an example of realism, or a work flawed by the author's vacillation between romantic and realistic modes; the second is praised as an example of pure romanticism. 3 A consideration of McCullers' two novellas together,

2 Of the two novellas, most of the critical attention is directed toward The Ballad of the Sad Café, and few parallels are drawn between the two works. A notable exception is Robert M. Rechnitz's article "The Failure of Love: The Grotesque in Two Novels by Carson McCullers," Georgia Review, 22 (1968), 454-63.

3 There is considerable confusion about whether Reflections in a Golden Eye is romantic or realistic. Evans states that "it is the least subjective of all her books" and compares it to Flaubert's Madame Bovary in the objectivity of the narration (Evans, p. 60). Irving Malin in The New American Gothic, however, considers McCullers' first novella to be a prime example of gothic writing, while Millichap and Graver suggest that it is flawed precisely because it incorporates elements of both the romance and the realistic novel which do not cohere. About The Ballad of the Sad Café there is more agreement. Edmonds calls it McCullers' "most stylized, most nonrealistic work" (Edmonds, p. 24), and Millichap, both in his dissertation and his recent article, "Carson McCullers' Literary Ballad," Georgia Review, 27 (1973), 329-39, considers it to be a romantic work in the ballad tradition. Albert J. Griffin stresses its timeless, mythic qualities in "Carson McCullers' Myth of the Sad Café," Georgia Review, 21 (1967), 46-56. Graver expresses the consensus that McCullers is most successful in
then, provides the opportunity to evaluate the consistency of her thinking from one work to the next, to face squarely the central critical debate concerning all her works, and to test the usefulness of her concept of the "philosophical novel" in pointing the way to a resolution of the critical controversy.

The dialectic between subjective and objective realities introduced in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* is carried forward in the novellas and couched in terms of the author's analysis—and indictment—of romantic love. Love, as McCullers explains in her essay "Loneliness . . . An American Malady," should be the bridge between the subjective world of the individual and the social world. It ought to be an expression of community based on a transcendence of self and a recognition of the humanness of others, a realization that there are other people beyond the subjective "inner room" of a single individual's consciousness and that they are not objects to be used but other subjects with human needs and emotions. McCullers clearly perceives the difficulty in achieving this ideal, however. Most people, she recognizes, are weak. They express not love but a selfish need to compensate for their own deficiencies. Their resulting relationships with other people are illusory, at works such as *The Ballad of the Sad Café* in which she "wisely moves in a limited area more suited to her talents—the alien, elemental world of legend and romance" (Graver, p. 24).
best romantic loves based on the distance between the lover and the love object. In this respect the romantic love exhibited in Reflections in a Golden Eye and The Ballad of the Sad Café closely parallels the attraction of Blount, Copeland, Brannon, and Mick Kelly to Singer and the mute's attraction to Antonapoulos in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter. In all three works, the relationship of one character to another is based on an illusion and is encouraged by the impossibility of any true communication. Each person constructs his own inner world of imagined fulfillment. The result is a mockery of love.

In the novellas the distance between people is stressed by McCullers' division of her characters into two groups, lovers (subjects) and beloveds (objects). A person can be both lover and beloved but, in the two works, he does not fill both roles in the same relationship. As a result, the supposed love relationships are not reciprocal. Furthermore, the characters are attracted not to people with whom McCullers' concepts of brotherly love and romantic love may have been influenced by the distinction drawn between agape and Eros in Denis de Rougemont's Love in the Western World. De Rougemont's book was published in 1940, after McCullers wrote Reflections in a Golden Eye, but before she began The Ballad of the Sad Café. De Rougemont visited February House early in 1941, according to Carr (pp. 124-25). There he found a center of thought and art, which he described in his preface to the French translation of McCullers' first novel, Le Coeur est un Chasseur Solitaire (Paris: Club des Librairies de France, 1946).
they have something in common but to opposite personality
types. Their relationships are based on their need to act
out a union with an opposite, to use the object of their
love as a means to create within their own minds a sense of
wholeness.

In Reflections in a Golden Eye this attraction of
opposites and the mutually exclusive subjective and objec-
tive worlds are emphasized in the setting. The army post
where the story unfolds establishes an atmosphere of
rigidity and repression. As the narrator describes in the
opening passage,

An army post in peacetime is a dull place. Things
happen, but they happen over and over again. The
general plan of a fort in itself adds to the monotony—
the huge concrete barracks, the neat rows of officer's
homes built one precisely like the other, the gym, the
chapel, the golf course and the swimming pools—all is
designed according to a certain rigid pattern. . . .

once a man enters the army he is expected to follow
the heels ahead of him (p. 502).

The setting is not confined to the rigid patterns of the
post, however. Standing in opposition, and reflecting
McCullers' dialectical method, is the surrounding forest,
which is wild and natural, a world apart from everyday

McCullers was familiar with the army post setting
from her visits to Fort Benning, Georgia, where she once
took piano lessons. Also, when she wrote Reflections in
a Golden Eye she was living in Fayetteville, North
Carolina, near Fort Bragg. As several critics point out,
the story may have been suggested to her by accounts of
actual cases of voyeurism and violence at the two posts.
See discussions in Evans, Sullivan, Smith, and Millichap.
existence. Thus there are two "worlds" within the novella which help to define the two major characters.

Captain Penderton, the central figure, is at home on the post. He is a person almost wholly repressed and controlled; he is described as rigid, stiff, intellectual, and interested in objective things such as numbers. Even on horseback he "sat rigid as a ramrod in the exact position taught by the riding master" (p. 518). His attitude toward the natural and instinctive reflects this rigidity. He is afraid of horses, especially his wife's fine stallion Firebird, and he tries to shield himself from the world represented by the forest. When one of the soldiers, Private Williams, trims too many branches from an oak tree behind the Captain's house, opening up the woods to full view, Penderton is enraged. "[S]hutting off the rest of the woods was the whole point," he says, and he is left feeling threatened and diminished, "a small man" (p. 506).

In opposition to Captain Penderton is the young private, Ellgee Williams, who cuts the branches. He is, like the soldier in Lawrence's "The Prussian Officer," animal-like and natural, a creature of instinct. His eyes are described as possessing "a mute expression that is found usually in the eyes of animals," and he moves "with the silence and agility of a wild creature or a thief" (pp. 502-03). He is also, like other Lawrence primitives, attracted to the sun. He rides out into the
woods, leaves the trails, and finds a solitary spot where he can strip off his uniform and lie in the sunlight. However, as Evans points out, he is not the typical Lawrence character; he is not a healthy noble savage free from sexual repression, nor is he idealized in any other way. His personality is flawed: he refuses to associate with other men in the barracks, is afraid of women, and once murdered a man.

A third character spans both worlds in the novella and is more normal and healthy. Leonora Penderton, the Captain's wife, is not the extreme personality that the Captain and the Private are. She is at home both on the post, where she gives successful parties and is popular, and in the woods, where she rides Firebird. She possesses a sensuality and conviviality that the innocent and solitary soldier lacks, while her robustness, appetite for food, and sexual relationship with her neighbor, Major Langdon, contrast with her husband's repressed personality, impotence, and latent homosexuality.

The main plot in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* is generated by the relationships among these three figures. The two extreme characters, Captain Penderton and Private Williams, find themselves attracted to opposite personality types, and a triangle of unreciprocated relationships.

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6 Evans, p. 67.
results. The rigid and intellectual Captain is drawn increasingly toward the animalistic and instinctual Private, who in his innocence and isolation, is attracted to the Captain's sensual, gregarious wife. Thus Williams is both the object of one person's emotions and the subject in a relationship with a third character. None of these people is fully aware that he is involved in a triangle. The Captain knows Williams only as the object of his attraction, not as the subject in a relationship with his wife, and the Private is at best vaguely conscious of the fact that he is the object of the Captain's "love" for him. Leonora knows neither that her husband is attracted to Williams nor that Williams is obsessed with her.

Penderton and Williams do not communicate their emotions, and their silence, like Singer's in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, is a sign that they prefer to keep their feelings within their "inner rooms," where they can act out a relationship with another person without running the risks of rejection. Their relationships, in short, are not examples of love but instead are based on a separateness in which the self shrinks from external reality. Thus Penderton follows Williams around but carefully keeps at a distance and avoids speaking except to reprimand the soldier. Williams, in turn, sneaks into Leonora's room at night yet never wakes her.
The relationships among these characters are explained by another duality, the life force as opposed to the death force. Both Penderton, who kills Williams at the end of the novel, and Williams, who has himself killed one man, are associated with death. The Captain's death impulse is made explicit in the narrative: "In his balance between the two great instincts, toward life and toward death, the scale was heavily weighted to one side—to death" (p. 508). Indeed, Penderton and Williams not only bring death to others but are finally, because they try to live wholly within their subjective worlds, self-destructive. The implication is that either extreme—rigid control or animalistic wildness—is, by itself, destructive. Unlike Lawrence, McCullers believes that the life force exists not in the instinctive and primitive but in the balance between poles, in the union of intellect and control with emotions and vitality.7

Firebird, Leonora's horse that used to be wild and unmanageable but has been trained, represents this balance and is an important symbol in understanding the roles of Penderton and Williams. The significance of the horse is

7Other critics suggest that Penderton represents the death force and Williams the life force, an interpretation that tends to idealize the second character. For example, Rechnitz states that the Private is "the embodiment of life itself, an innocent, almost mindless god of life" and that Penderton, "psychologically unable to embrace life, ... in despair destroys it" (Rechnitz, pp. 457, 458).
made evident when Penderton decides one day that he will ride Firebird. He mistreats the animal in an effort to establish his dominance, deliberately giving Firebird his head and then, without warning, brutally reining him in. The Captain's repressiveness upsets the balance within the horse and has the opposite effect from what Penderton anticipates. Firebird bolts, careening from the pattern of the riding trails and plunging into the woods. Thus the Captain is thrust into the "other world" of the novella, a world of instinct and emotion and the subconscious. He is lashed by branches, barely remains mounted, and has a vision of mystical transcendence of self. He thinks, "I am lost," and he achieves "that rare level of consciousness where the mystic feels that the earth is he and he is the earth" (p. 551). This transcendence, however, is only a momentary illusion, an image of an opposite extreme which Penderton cannot really achieve. After Firebird tires, the Captain, that much more frustrated by the vision he has had, beats the horse mercilessly and then falls sobbing to the ground.  

8There has been a tendency to over-simplify the Captain's experience on Firebird. Evans, for instance, explains that Penderton is unable to control the horse, which represents his inability to master life, and thus is defeated by the ride. Actually, Penderton is able to stay mounted and enjoys the illusion of transcendence he experiences; it is Firebird that is defeated at the end of the ride, and the Captain reacts as he does because he has not been able to sustain the illusion, because Firebird is not a vehicle by which he can escape reality.
The experience alters Penderton's emotions but leaves him still enclosed in his inner room. First his frustration turns to hatred for Private Williams, whom he identifies with the horse. His hatred is as "passionate as love" and is, indeed, similar to the romantic attraction he feels for the soldier earlier in the story; both emotions are based on Penderton's desire to isolate himself from meaningful contact with other people by imagining a relationship. Then the Captain's emotions move beyond either love or hate to a feeling that he must "break down the barriers" between himself and Williams. Ironically, this thought, too, is a self-serving illusion. Like the characters in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, he only imagines breaking out of his shell while he remains locked within himself.

Williams is just as trapped in his inner world. Though he finally begins frequenting some of the places of amusement on the post, he refuses to communicate with his fellow soldiers. In one scene which recalls Singer's encounter with the three mutes after Antonapoulos dies, Williams joins three men at a table: "The young soldier looked into their faces and seemed to be on the point of asking some question of them. But in the end he did not speak, and after a time he went away" (p. 566). Instead of reaching out for companionship, he prefers to fall back on his voyeurism, using Leonora, just as the Captain uses
him, as an object to stimulate an imagined, romantic love, which is, in turn, encouraged by its very impossibility.

McCullers criticizes both these characters because they are not able to deal with objective reality and other people, but her own perspective is less clear than in her first novel. One reason may be the absence of a strong, normal character who contrasts with the flawed characters as Mick does. In Reflections in a Golden Eye, Leonora might serve this purpose; she is a healthy and robust person who can enjoy a normal sexual relationship, take pleasure in food and drink and physical exertion, and who is able to manage the animal spirit. But relatively little space is devoted to her, and she is described as being so lacking in complexity and intelligence that it is difficult to consider her an important figure, or even a normative one.

The absence of a strong, normal character at the center of the novella is more noticeable because of the number of additional characters who confuse the issues and obscure the schema on which the story is based. Major Langdon, his wife Alison, and her houseboy Anacleto form a second triangle of relationships intended, evidently, to be a reflection of the first. Langdon corresponds to Leonora in his healthy sexuality; Alison, who cuts off her nipples with garden shears, resembles the Captain in her repression and anti-life impulse; and Anacleto is similar to Williams in his primitivism. But the roles of these
characters are confused and ill-defined, and they vie with Penderton, Williams, and Leonora for positions of prominence.

Anacleto, for example, seems to be a minor figure; yet there are indications McCullers intended him to serve as an objective observer who could, like Biff Brannon, comment on the other characters and frame the story. As an artist he is well-suited for such a role, and at one point, in words that give the novella its title and can be taken as a comment on the characters and narrative style, he describes an image of a peacock's eye in which are reflected tiny, grotesque figures.9 Alison, too, is a confusing figure. She is significant in the main plot only because she sees Williams during his nocturnal visits to Leonora. Her importance is exaggerated by her grotesque actions, however, and Klaus Lubbers, in his article, even concludes that she

9 Several critics point out that the novella only "reflects" the surface of its characters and events. Richard Cook comments on the image of the peacock's eye: "Reflections in a Golden Eye presents us with a radically reduced if not, indeed, a 'tiny' vision of human life. And though the book's characters may have the hard, brilliant intensity of concentrated reflections, they lack the warmth of feeling, the humor, and the psychological depth that are the result of a more complex, expansive and sympathetic view of human nature" (p. 58). Oliver Evans in his book suggests that "We are intended to associate the golden eye with the mirror or art (one is reminded of Stendhal's dictum, 'A novel is a mirror carried along the highway'), and it is significant, as Mr. Hassan has observed, that this eye does not see: It merely reflects, thereby symbolizing the objectivity with which Mrs. McCullers wishes to render her effects" (p. 71).
is the central character because after she dies the other relationships collapse.\(^{10}\)

The roles of these characters are unclear, and there is insufficient space in the novella form to develop fully their subplot. Alison, for example, has a Platonic relationship with an officer, Lieutenant Weincheck, to which is not given adequate attention. Unable to deal satisfactorily with her characters, McCullers finally eliminates, hurriedly and unconvincingly, two of them. Alison has a mental breakdown and is hustled off-stage to die, suddenly, at a sanatorium. Anacleto, who accompanies her there, is never heard from again. Of those figures in the second triangle only Major Langdon, the least intriguing, remains at the end of the novella.

Amidst the welter of characters there is no central intelligence through which the reader can understand their motivations. Instead, the narrator remains detached and casual in tone, content to tell the story without any explanation or intrusion. This narrative device poses special problems in view of the type of writing to which McCullers was committed. The "philosophical novel," as she suggests in "Russian Realists and Southern Fiction," is a moral and intellectual endeavor rather than simply an emotional outpouring of the author's subconscious or a

\(^{10}\)Lubbers, p. 196.
stark reflection of reality. It demands an underlying theory of behavior that unifies the characters and the different forms of the romance and the realistic novel. It should pose fundamental questions about existence, and perhaps even suggest some answers. Without a central consciousness or a narrator who can comment on the action, Reflections in a Golden Eye seems to lack this philosophical dimension, and it is no wonder that the novella is considered by most critics to be a flawed work. Indeed, without a prominent intellectual framework it does seem bizarre and morbid, the characters stylized and unbelievable, and the tone nightmarish and unrealistic.\textsuperscript{11}

With these failings in mind, we should compare Reflections in a Golden Eye with McCullers' next work, The Ballad of the Sad Café. Both are based on the same triangular arrangement of characters, are variations on the theme of romantic love, and incorporate elements of the romance and realistic novel. The second work, however, is far superior to the first and comes closer to McCullers' ideal of the "philosophical novel."

There are three main characters in The Ballad of the Sad Café. Miss Amelia, an Amazonian woman who runs a store,\textsuperscript{11} The lack of a carefully worked out schema for Reflections in a Golden Eye is suggested by McCullers' comment, quoted by Evans: "When I began I had no idea who was going to shoot whom" (Evans, p. 81).
makes moonshine, and rules over a small mill town in the South, is the central figure. She is flanked by Cousin Lymon, a hunchbacked dwarf who claims to be her cousin, and Marvin Macy, an ex-convict previously married to Miss Amelia but whom she bullied, refused to sleep with, and finally sent packing. As in Reflections in a Golden Eye, these three characters form a triangle of relationships which are not reciprocal. Miss Amelia becomes infatuated with Lymon, who in turn snubs her and follows after Marvin Macy. The resulting conflict among Amazon, dwarf, and ex-convict leads, at the end of the novella, to the loss of Miss Amelia's strength and self-confidence. She and her former husband fight, and Lymon enters the fray, tipping the balance in favor of Marvin Macy. Miss Amelia is left alone, a broken woman, robbed, as is Captain Penderton, of the object of her romantic love around whom she creates her illusory world.

The development of these characters roughly parallels that of the major figures in Reflections in a Golden Eye. Early in the story they are sharply contrasted personality types. In the previous work, the extreme characters are defined by the dichotomy between the rigid and controlled as opposed to the natural and instinctive; in McCullers' second novella the poles are based on a reversal of sex
roles, as Panthea Brought points out. Miss Amelia, though the female character, is actually closer to the masculine stereotype. She is dominant, fights like a man, dresses like one, makes the best liquor anywhere, has a shrewd head for business, and rejects contact with, or compassion for, other people. She is, for the most part, cold and calculating. Her only use for other people was "to make money out of them" (p. 5).

In the middle portion of the story Miss Amelia, like the characters in Reflections in a Golden Eve, appears to change as she is attracted toward her opposite, the small and effeminate Cousin Lymon. She loses her sharp tongue and brutal ways and becomes distinctly more "feminine" and social. She opens the café as a gathering place for the townspeople and even wears a dark red dress on Sundays instead of her usual swamp boots and overalls. We are aware, however, that her change and her "love" for Lymon are not normal or healthy. She spoils him "beyond reason," and he in turn spurns her (p. 22).

The parallel with the earlier novella is apparent. None of the "love" relationships really involves love, at least not McCullers' notion of love as a bridge between individuals and between the subjective and objective worlds.

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None of the relationships is reciprocal, and the object of one person's attraction is drawn to a third party. However, *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* differs in that the lack of reciprocity and the false nature of romantic love are made explicit in the narrative. The narrator explains the reason for Miss Amelia's attraction to Lyman: "Now some explanation is due for all this behavior. The time has come to speak about love" (p. 23).

The passage that follows this interjection is often quoted and is sometimes loosely referred to as McCullers' theory of love:

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 his love within himself as best he can; he must create for himself 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 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 (pp. 24-25).
The type of love portrayed in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, as this passage suggests, is based not on mutual communication but rather on the manipulation of one person by another. The "love" is actually an internal experience, a state of being of the lover's subjective world. This notion is directly related to the motif of inner and outer rooms expressed in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. The key sentence in this respect is: "He [the lover] must house his love within himself as best he can; he must create for himself a whole new inward world—a world intense and strange, *complete in himself*" [italics mine]. Rather than bridging the gap between the subjective world of the individual and the objective world of other people, the "love" described in the digression depends precisely on the distance between people.

Miss Amelia's café stands as a symbol of the "inner room" of her subjective illusions, just as does Mick's room in *McCullers' first novel*. As we have seen, Mick is at first locked within her inner room of imagination and illusion. Midway through her story, she opens up her home for a party, ostensibly a sign that she is emerging from her subjective world; yet in fact she is only trying to extend her illusions and act out the role of an adult, and the party ends with her retreat once again into her inner world as she listens to music outside a neighbor's house. It is not until the end of the novel, after her sexual initiation
and the pressures on her to get a job, that she finally emerges from her subjective reality.

In *The Ballad of the Sad Café* a similar progression is evident, except that Miss Amelia never emerges into objective reality. The café reflects the three stages in her development. Before Cousin Lymon's arrival the place is just a store where Miss Amelia uses other people to make money by selling them her liquor. They can enter the store to make their purchases, but they cannot remain there to drink and to talk with one another. The narrator explains that

it was necessary to go around in the dark back yard, and there she would hand out your bottle through the kitchen door. There was no feeling of joy in the transaction. After getting his liquor the customer walked off into the night. Or, if his wife would not have it in the home, he was allowed to come back around to the front porch of the store and guzzle there or in the street (p. 20).

Miss Amelia remains inside, where she has her private office and living quarters and where she can withdraw from the objective world and the people whom she uses so profitably.

After Lymon arrives, she opens her premises, allowing townspeople to drink inside and providing them with glasses and crackers. The store becomes a café, the center of the local community, and there, as the townspeople drink and enjoy themselves, Miss Amelia dotes on Cousin Lymon. However, though the café is open, suggesting the Miss Amelia
has moved beyond the isolation of her inner world, in fact only the appearance of community and brotherly love is achieved. Miss Amelia herself is described as "looking inward" even when she is with Lymon and the other townspeople (p. 21). Her attitude toward him is suspect too: she mothers Lymon, acting out a feminine role alien to her usual personality. Her conversations with him are another indication that her openness is really just an extension of her dream world. She talks of vague, "interminable" subjects which "could be worked over for decades" (p. 33), and she reminisces about her childhood and her father as though trying to escape the present reality.

Indeed the past does come back to her, but with a force of reality which she does not anticipate. The one subject she will not discuss with Lymon is her former husband. When Macy unexpectedly returns, having been released from prison, the hunchback becomes attracted to him and, significantly, invites Macy to move into "the private rooms where Miss Amelia had lived the whole of her life" (p. 55). Macy's return and intrusion into Miss Amelia's inner world is a test of her ability to maintain her illusions in the face of reality. The alteration of her subjective world is indicated by Lymon's decision to paint the café on the day she and her former husband meet in mock-epic combat. After the fight, the café remains
half-painted, and Lymon and Macy ravage the building, take Miss Amelia's private possessions, and leave.

But she does not emerge in the objective world at the end of the story. She has experienced a further defeat, not a victory over her inner self, and the descriptions of the café and Miss Amelia's features indicate that she withdraws even further in the third stage. The café is tightly boarded so that no one can enter. Miss Amelia remains inside, her eyes becoming increasingly crossed so that she seems to be looking at herself. At the time from which the story is told, the building is leaning to one side and is about to collapse entirely, and her face is barely visible behind an upstairs window. "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" (p. 3).13

13 An unusual interpretation of Miss Amelia, at variance with that offered here, is suggested by Rechnitz, who sees Amelia as the victor. Before the fight, she composes herself and assumes a death-like position. According to Rechnitz, "About to destroy all the meaning which she has created for herself through her love for Lymon, she is resigned to death. And the inner world to which she at last retreats is one which she has bravely chosen" (Rechnitz, p. 462). However, the descriptions of her by the narrator suggest anything but a victor, and there is little in the novella to support an interpretation of Miss Amelia as a heroine who finally gains self-knowledge.
With Miss Amelia described in this fashion, the Ballad of the Sad Café would seem very pessimistic. Indeed McCullers is one who criticizes rather than celebrates the human condition. The depressing tone is alleviated in some measure, however, by a coda which concludes the novella and provides a brief image of ideal love, the agape of which McCullers speaks in later comments on The Ballad of the Sad Café. As she explains in "The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing," "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 ideal love brings people together by drawing them out from their private worlds and illusions, and only it, McCullers implies, provides the basis for lasting relationships, a recognition of the humanness of one's fellow man.

The coda, entitled "The Twelve Mortal Men," is brief, comprising only a page of print. It describes the chain gang that labors three miles from town on the Forks Falls Highway. The description contrasts sharply with the cynicism of the digression on romantic love. The twelve members of the gang, though engaged in brutally hard work with picks and shovels, lift their voices in song.

14 The Mortgaged Heart, p. 281.
One dark voice will start a phrase, half-sung, and like a question. And after a moment another voice will join in, soon the whole gang will be singing. The voices are dark in the golden glare, the music intricately blended, both somber and joyful. The music will swell until at last it seems that the sound does not come from the twelve men on the gang, but from the earth itself, or the wide sky. It is a music that causes the heart to broaden and the listener to grow cold with ecstasy and fright. Then slowly the music will sink down until at last there remains one lonely voice, then a great hoarse breath, the sun, the sound of the picks in the silence.

And what kind of gang is this that can make such music? Just twelve mortal men, seven of them black and five of the white boys from this county. Just twelve mortal men who are together (p. 66).

The music these men sing is an emblem of racial harmony and brotherly love juxtaposed with the isolation, selfishness, and withdrawal from reality evident in the preceding narrative.

The coda is the source of much debate among critics. Those who see McCullers as a romantic writer seize upon this passage as typical of McCullers' vision of man. Barbara Folk, for example, singles out the coda as portraying the "sad and tender vision of humanity which is central to McCullers' work."15 On the other hand, critics who emphasize McCullers' realism are less likely to stress this passage; Millichap even suggests that it is superfluous.16 It may be better to understand the coda as a necessary addenda to the narrative, a glimpse of harmony

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16 Millichap, Diss., p. 83, footnote 9.
and brotherly love that, true to McCullers' dialectical process, provides a contrast with the self-directed romantic love which is her subject earlier.

In assessing the significance of these last words in the novella, we should consider their relationship not just to the story of Miss Amelia, Cousin Lymon, and Marvin Macy but to the narrator who tells that story. The narrator suggests going to hear the chain gang only as an afterthought, because, now that the café is closed, there is nothing else to do: "Walk around the millpond, 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. You might as well go down to the Forks Falls highway and listen to the chain gang" (p. 65). The tone of weary disinterest evident in the sentences that precede the coda is also reflected in the opening words of the novella, and in this way the story is framed and told in retrospect by a narrator who interprets the events and whose own relationship to the story is important.

The narrator is, as recent criticism points out, a character in his own right whose voice is prominent in the novella.¹⁷ Unlike the narrator in Reflections in a Golden

Eve, he interprets events rather than simply reflecting the bare bones of the story. Since he is a character, he may not necessarily speak for the author. This point is especially significant in view of the frequent references to "McCullers' theory of love" by some critics, comments that assume that the digression on love is McCullers' own statement of her beliefs on the subject rather than her analysis of a certain type of flawed, romantic love which she does not endorse. 18

Not only should we distinguish between author and narrator, but we should also question whether the same person tells both the main body of the story and the coda. Though the diction is similar, the coda is separately titled and contrasts markedly with the tone of cynicism in the preceding narrative. The first narrator suggests that going to hear the chain gang is of no more significance than kicking a rotten stump and is just another indication of the boredom of the town. His attitude is consistent with his cynical view of love expressed in the digression.

Introspective Narrator in The Ballad of the Sad Café," South Atlantic Bulletin, 38, No. 4 (1973), 40-44; and Millichap, "Carson McCullers' Literary Ballad."

18 For example, Evans states: "Near the beginning of The Ballad of the Sad Café there is a passage in which Mrs. McCullers, momentarily abandoning the narrative vein for the expository, discourses briefly on the nature of love" (Evans, p. 129). Millichap in his article on the novella warns against confusing the narrator's theory with McCullers' own concept of love.
For him, all "love" can be explained as a selfish desire of one person to use another in order to create an inner world. In the coda, however, we find evidence of a very different sort of love, and the narrator of this section is obviously caught up in the image of harmony and togetherness projected in the convicts' song. Thus there are two "songs" in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, the ballad which the first narrator relates and the song of brotherly love in the coda. The two "songs" depict two forms of love and together project the dialectic that undergirds the entire novella.

The two songs—one cynical, the other romantic—suggest the traditions of the realistic novel and the romance that McCullers brings together, and the narrator plays an important role in this respect also. As stated earlier, The Ballad of the Sad Cafe is generally understood in the tradition of the romance. For instance, Simeon Smith, referring to Henry James' comment that the romancer seeks to cut the cable connecting his balloon to earthly reality, states: "Nowhere else in her fiction does Carson McCullers manage to sever this cable so neatly as in Ballad."19 Even Millichap, who emphasizes McCullers' realism in her other works, states that in this novella "McCullers ignores realistic social setting and even the

19Smith, p. 71.
social manifestations of personal psychology" and does not "probe economic conditions or regional problems in a realistic manner." There are valid reasons for these interpretations. The work is called a "ballad" and does have a fairy tale quality about it. The relationships among the characters seem timeless, and descriptions of mill workers' poverty and racial injustice that are so prominent in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter are absent here.

Yet there is some realism in the setting and there certainly are, if we take the narrator and other townspeople into account, social ramifications. The narrator's initial description of the setting incorporates realistic details: "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, a miserable main street only a hundred yards long. . . . The nearest train stop is Society City, and the Greyhound and White Bus Lines use the Forks Falls Road which is three miles away" (p. 3). The details provide a strong sense of the physical reality of the town and locate it geographically.

In other passages the social reality is prominent. The first narrator describes several of the townspeople and conveys a sense of the community and the conditions in which

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they live: "Each of them worked in the mill, and lived with others in a two- or three-room house for which the rent was ten dollars or twelve dollars a month" (p. 18). The townspeople are waiting on the porch when Lymon first arrives; they enjoy the social setting that the café provides; and they are directly affected by the conflict among Miss Amelia, Cousin Lymon, and Marvin Macy. When the café closes, they are left with no social center and no sense of comraderie, and thus the subjective worlds of the major characters affect the entire community.

Even more important in portraying these ramifications is the first narrator, himself one of the townspeople. His voice of weary resignation and his cynical and restricted concept of love represent the consequences to others of the illusions and selfishness of Miss Amelia, Lymon, and Macy. Whatever Miss Amelia's illusions, the café was a real place for the narrator. With its closing, there is nothing to alleviate his depression and boredom, and he is worse off than before Lymon arrived and the store became a café. All he can do is walk the three miles out to the chain gang or perhaps buy some inferior liquor from a still eight miles away and, like the other townspeople, dream himself "into a dangerous inward world" (p. 65). In this way the narrator himself displays the consequences of the events he describes.
Thus, though The Ballad of the Sad Café may at first seem wholly romantic, a ballad in the romance tradition that lacks social ramifications and realistic setting, on closer examination it is evident that, like The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, it combines elements of romance and realism, employing both traditions in a further exploration of the relationship between individual and community. In this novella, romantic love is portrayed and condemned precisely because it fails to provide communication and mutuality, because it is, finally, an illusion that is both self-destructive and socially detrimental.

The same can be said of Reflections in a Golden Eye, where a similar sort of romantic love is evident. Here the two traditions are reflected in the two distinct settings, the normative army post and the romantic woods, as well as the subjective world of the individual characters and the objective world of social reality. As the Captain is drawn increasingly toward the instinctual and emotional that is so foreign to his nature, he finds himself uncomfortable in the carefully structured environment of the post. His actions and those of Private Williams, both of whom are romantic lovers who envelop themselves in their inward worlds, have an impact beyond their own lives. Penderton, Leonora, Langdon, Alison, and Anacleto are involved in a matrix of relationships that is torn apart
by the tragic events resulting from the major characters' illusions of love.

Of course McCullers' two novellas lack the scope of her longer works; because of the limits of the short novel form, the physical and social reality is given less space. But in both, social consequences are significant in the author's concept of a dual reality and her analysis of romantic love. As we have seen, Reflections in a Golden Eye is less successful in this endeavor. It was written quickly and, if we can believe the author's comment, without sufficient forethought. The major weakness springs from the absence of a central consciousness or questioning observer to call attention to the theoretical underpinnings of the characters and plot. As a result the work seems more bizarre and disjointed than in fact it is and fails to measure up to the standards of moral and philosophical analysis called for in "The Russian Realists and Southern Literature."

Perhaps it was partly in recognition of this deficiency that McCullers expressed herself as she did in calling for

21 Carr states that McCullers "told her editor later that writing Reflections in a Golden Eye, as the Army Post was eventually entitled, was simply for fun, that it was as easy as eating candy" (Carr, p. 90). After she finished writing, she put it away with no thought of trying to publish it.
a new novel that is overtly moral and theoretical. In any case, she remedied the problems in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* in her reworking of similar themes in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. In the second version she gained better control of her subject, pared down the superfluous characters, and provided a narrator who could comment on romantic love and at the same time display the social ramifications of such wholly subjective and one-sided relationships.

*The Ballad of the Sad Café* stands as a major achievement in McCullers' canon, second only to *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*; yet she was to complete another significant novel before ill health impinged on her career. She began *The Member of the Wedding* before *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, though she did not finish it until 1946. In this work she attempted to synthesize her previous explorations of the problem of a dual reality by welding the basic pattern of Mick Kelly's initiation in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* to the portrayal of romantic love in the two novellas.

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22 We might recall that McCullers' essay on the "philosophical novel" was published after *Reflections in a Golden Eye* and before she wrote *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. Also, de Rougemont's *Love in the Western World* appeared between the publications of McCullers' two novellas.
CHAPTER IV

THE IRONIC SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY IN

THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING

In The Member of the Wedding, McCullers portrays a twelve year old girl, Frankie Addams, who is tormented by the need to achieve a sense of community. As in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter and The Ballad of the Sad Café, the theoretical basis of the conflict is explicit in the text. The central character herself phrases the problem. She is concerned because she belongs to no group in town. She feels herself to be an "I" rather than a "We," and to make up for this sense of isolation she forms a desire to be part of her older brother's wedding. She thinks that he and his bride are "the we of me" (p. 646), and she sets out in pursuit of the illusion of becoming a "member of the wedding," of joining a new community or family.

In portraying the tensions between these two worlds, the author employs, once again, the traditions of the romance and the realistic novel, which loosely correspond to the "I" and "We" categories in The Member of the Wedding just as they do to Mick Kelly's inner and outer rooms in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter. However, most
critics view the novel exclusively in one tradition or the other. For example, Chester Eisinger complains that the focus of the work is limited to "the child's self-centered world in which the macrocosm plays no part."¹ Graver praises the novel on the same grounds, stating that such a limited scope is the author's forte, that she is "a lyricist not a philosopher, an observer of maimed characters not of contaminated cultures."² A related view is that The Member of the Wedding is another example of McCullers' characteristic gothicism. In this vein, Robert Phillips stresses the atmosphere of nightmare and the freakishness of the characters. He suggests that her novels seldom depict "a normal pattern of activities" in "the recognizable South" and concludes by pointing out similarities between The Member of the Wedding and traditional gothic novels: "With its moribund setting, fear of sexuality, terrifying death scenes, dark dreams and nightmares—even touches of fear of Catholicism and the supernatural—the novel is yet another manifestation of the author's Gothic vision."³

These interpretations are countered by other critics who stress McCullers' realism. For example, Millichap

¹Eisinger, pp. 255-56.
²Graver, p. 42.
compares the novel to *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* and notes that McCullers continues "the picture of mill-city society." The setting, rather than being divorced from the macrocosm of society, is, according to Millichap, a microcosm in which the author explores "the spring of hatred and conflict" of the Second World War, and the novel as a whole "demonstrates the social novelist's ultimate purpose of linking the narrative of an individual life to the larger world of human society." Edmonds goes even further, describing *The Member of the Wedding* as McCullers' "most realistic work," containing "provocative social commentary" and recreating "the 'stateside' atmosphere during World War II."

Both interpretations are valid in some respects, but they fail to recognize the author's conscious use of elements of both the romance and the realistic novel. Insistent on the need for community yet sceptical of people's ability to achieve it, she draws on the two traditions to portray the opposing worlds of the self and the community, the "I" and the "We." The "I" world is

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4 Millichap, Diss., p. 85.
5 Ibid., p. 106.
7 The letter from McCullers to David Diamond indicates that she was conscious of the difficulties inherent in combining two different forms. See footnote 40 in Chapter I and Carr, p. 200.
presented through the distorted perspective of the central character's subjective vision. It is a world of fantasy and illusions that contains freaks and criminals and violence and eerie places, a world of nighttime and the subconscious mind. The world of community is represented by the kitchen, which contains young and old, black and white, in one "family" presided over by the realistic vision of Berenice. It is here in the dialogue between Berenice and F. Jasmine that the author's own view is voiced and the duality that undergirds the novel is made explicit. And it is this realism that, ironically, Frances leaves behind in her romantic quest for a sham "community" with Mary Littlejohn.

These two worlds are further defined by the movement of the central character, a development carefully orchestrated and controlled by the author, through three distinct stages corresponding to the main parts of the novel and underscored by changes in the character's name. In the first part, she is Frankie Addams, a tomboy who remains isolated in her inner world. In the second, Frankie tries on a new identity, an exaggerated and romanticized caricature of womanhood, and assumes the name F. Jasmine Addams. In the final section, she becomes Frances, an average young person with a new friend and new social interests. Ostensibly, she matures and enters the adult world; yet she does not really achieve a sense of community or come
to grips with objective reality, and thus her initiation is ironic.

At each stage in her progression, her development is revealed by clusters of related symbols and motifs which mark her position in the schema of subjective and objective worlds. Rooms and houses are used, as they are in McCullers' previous fiction, to delineate the distinction between these two realities. Early in the novel there are two locales, Frankie's private bedroom in which she retreats to dream and plan for the future, and the kitchen, in which there is a communal existence and a sense of family. Unfortunately, Frankie's subjective world increasingly intrudes into the communal world of the kitchen, and in Part Two it even extends into the town as Frankie, now calling herself F. Jasmine, wanders about telling strangers of her crazy plans and illusions. In the final section, she is on the verge of moving into a new house, leaving behind the only true community she has known.

There are other patterns of images and symbols in this novel with which we are familiar from McCullers' earlier works. Snow, discordant music, nighttime, far-off places, and freakish people are all used to represent the inner world of dreams and illusions which Frankie inhabits. In contrast are those images associated with objective reality: heat, numbers, adulthood, and daylight. These motifs in the novel cohere around the underlying division
between "I"-subjective and "We"-objective realities, and this careful alignment indicates the precision with which McCullers has constructed The Member of the Wedding. It is, in fact, her most controlled work, almost like a poem instead of a novel. The careful patterning can be attributed to both the length of time McCullers spent writing the novel and her use of similar themes and motifs in earlier fiction.

Marguerita Young in her review article, "Metaphysical Fiction," points out the precision and control with which The Member of the Wedding is crafted. Young states that in this novel "control is never absent. The framework is always visible" (p. 153).

McCullers' early short story "Sucker," written when she was seventeen, is a similar initiation story in which an adolescent character moves through distinct stages of development defined by his relationship to the dual realities of inner and outer worlds. It is narrated by Pete, who puzzles over the adult world toward which he is moving. Like Frankie, he has his cousin to play with; yet he is really locked within his own world. He thinks: "It was always like I had a room to myself. Sucker slept in my bed with me but that didn't interfere with anything. The room was mine and I used it as I wanted to" (The Mortgaged Heart, p. 9). In the second stage, Pete acts out an adult role by imagining a relationship with a girl, while he is clearly still a child in fact. In the third stage, reality dominates and Pete finds himself thrust, none too willingly, out of the room. Sucker and his young friends have taken it over as a place to listen to music on the radio and act out their own fantasies, and Pete, on the outside now, is confronted with the sign, "Woe to the Outsider Who Enters Here" (The Mortgaged Heart, p. 18).

In The Member of the Wedding, McCullers makes the initiation story more ironic, avoids the first person narration that seems so unrealistic in the short story, captures more effectively the rhythms of her characters' speech, and gives the events sharper focus by centering the initiation story on the idea of the wedding.
These motifs are evident in each section of the novel. In Part One, Frankie, as her name suggests, is young and tomboyish. Dissatisfied with both characteristics, she wants to achieve a new identity and sense of connection with others. She is acutely aware that she is "a member of nothing in the world" and is "an unjoined person" (p. 599). Even the neighborhood girls, who are older than she, exclude her from their activities. They are interested in boys and have parties in their clubhouse on Saturday nights while Frankie stands outside in the shadows. Frankie, who is indeed still a child, is repulsed by their "nasty lies" about married people; yet she is dissatisfied with her childhood identity, and to compensate she retreats even further into a dream world. She imagines herself in far-off places that are different from her own town. Her dreaming is represented by the glass globe with snow inside which she can turn over, watching the snow fall and imagining herself in Alaska, far removed from the August heat of her Southern town.

The external reality of which she wishes to become a part is especially significant, for the war is still raging and Frankie wants to play a role in it. Significantly, however, her desire to be connected with the war on fascism is itself childlike and romanticized. She has no grasp of the harsh effects of war. When she decides to donate blood, it is not from a realistic perception of the physical
threat warfare poses but rather from a romantic and basically selfish yearning to have her blood coursing through "the veins of Australians and Fighting French and Chinese, all over the whole world, and it would be as though she were close kin to all of these people" (p. 623). Without realizing it, she is expressing a chauvinism that echoes fascist rhetoric. She imagines hearing "the army doctors saying that the blood of Frankie Addams was the reddest and the strongest blood that they had ever known. And she could picture ahead, in the years after the war, meeting the soldiers who had her blood, and they would say that they owed their life to her; and they would not call her Frankie—they would call her Addams" (pp. 623-24).

Frankie's feeling that she is separate from the real adult world is reflected in her fear that she may be a freak. She is self-conscious about her height and calculates that at her present rate she will grow until she is over nine feet tall; then she will be, she fears, a freak like those at the carnival. She has seen "The Giant," "The Fat Lady," "The Wild Nigger," "The Pin Head," and "The Half-Man Half-Woman," and, standing there in the tent staring at them, she felt they "looked at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with hers, as though to say: we know you" (p. 619). They typify her feelings of isolation, of separateness from the normal community,
and she says at one point, "I doubt if they ever get married or go to a wedding" (p. 620).

Indeed the wedding represents normality and community, and this explains why she is so struck by the impending marriage of Jarvis, her older brother, to Janice. The act of marriage is an emblem of communication, of transcendence of self, of family ties, of a tearing down of the barriers between individuals, and it stands in opposition to romantic love, which is self-isolating and depends precisely on the impossibility of union. Yet, ironically, even this emblem of community can be perverted and made the object of a romantic, illusory quest which only serves to separate the individual that much further from reality. Just as Penderton, Williams, and Miss Amelia are attracted to others yet are really only fantasizing, entrenching themselves in their inner worlds, so too Frankie develops a romantic attraction to the wedding. Berenice, the Addams' cook, puts it accurately when she teases Frankie:

Frankie got a crush!
Frankie got a crush!
Frankie got a crush!
On the Wedding! (p. 638)

10 An unusual interpretation of Frankie's desire to be a member of the wedding is offered by Irving H. Buchen in "Carson McCullers, a Case of Convergence," Bucknell Review, 21 (1973), 15-28. According to Buchen, "when Frankie Adams (sic) unreasonably demands to be a member of the wedding, what she is really asking for is to be a voyeuristic observer of parental sex or an active participant in the bed of her brother--surrogate for that of her father" (Buchen, pp. 24-25). Frankie, however, never thinks of the
The nature of Frankie's obsession with her brother's wedding is indicated by the words she uses. She thinks that the wedding will provide a "We" for her, that her brother and his bride will be "the we of me" (p. 646). Her desire is misdirected, however, and the phrase "we of me" indicates the flaw. Frankie thinks that she can draw others into her subjective world and thereby achieve an imagined adulthood and community. Here, as in the theory of romantic love in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, McCullers chose her words carefully. Frankie's "love" for the wedding is like the romantic lover's desire to use the object of his love, to strip him bare. Both impulses are selfish: rather than leading toward a true transcendence of self, they further isolate the individual.

The images in this part of the novel are a further indication that Frankie's obsession is unrealistic. She associates the wedding with foreign places, snow, and escape from her present environment. The ceremony is to take place not in Frankie's hometown but in Winter Hill, and she imagines what it must be like for Jarvis and Janice to travel toward the wedding site leaving the town far behind: "Mile after mile they went away, farther and farther away from the town, and as they traveled to the wedding in sexual terms, and Buchen's explanation, though ingenious, tends to reduce the character's motivation to simplistic psychological terms while ignoring the broader context of individuality versus community.
North, a coolness came into the air and dark was falling like the evening dark of wintertime. The train was winding up into the hills, the whistle wailing in a winter tone, and mile after mile they went away" (pp. 634-35). She comments to Berenice, "I think 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," and when she repeats the name of the town to herself, it blends in with her "dreams of Alaska and cold snow" (p. 604). Her image of both places, like her glass globe of snow, is at variance with reality. Clearly, she prefers to fantasize, and she is upset when her mental picture is contradicted by such details as her brother's reference to swimming in Alaska.

Frankie's actions may be understandable for a child of twelve, but for an adult, which she imagines herself to be, the selfish dreaming is potentially dangerous, bound, as are the romantic illusions of other McCullers' characters, to be both self-destructive and harmful to others. The music which she hears serves as one warning of this danger. Harmonized music, such as the chain gang song at the close of The Ballad of the Sad Café, can represent an ideal balance and sense of community. But by the same token, music which is either off-key or in a minor key, or which is left unfinished, represents a flawed impulse. At the end of Part One, Frankie listens to a blues tune being
played on a horn by some strange black person she does not know. The music seems to speak to her, to represent the desires and troubles she experiences. Then without warning it breaks off and is left incomplete.

The first section of The Member of the Wedding is dominated by similar images of incompleteness. Frankie feels herself to be an "unjoined" person, even a criminal at odds with the law. The carnival freaks, people who lack physical wholeness, are another such image. The moths that she watches smashing against the window screen as they try to get near the light inside also represent a lack of fulfillment and the inevitable failure of Frankie's romantic quest. And, we are told, ever since the previous April Frankie has walked around the town with a feeling that "the things she saw and heard seemed to be left somehow unfinished" (p. 625).

We are not surprised, then, that the peace Frankie briefly achieves in her subjective world does not last. Its passing is accompanied by references to transition and death. In one scene, while she thinks of her brother's impending marriage, the death of her old identity is symbolized. "I just wish I would die," she says, and John Henry and Berenice echo her words: "Well, die then!" (p. 621). Later in Part One, when Berenice teases her about her crush on the wedding, Frankie picks up a knife, threatens the black woman, and finally throws it so that
it sticks in a door. Berenice admonishes her: "You are not fit to live in a house." It is at this moment that Frankie resolves to run away from the only place that offers her a social unit with which she can feel at home. She feels "just exactly like somebody has peeled all the skin off me" (p. 639-40). The section ends in this fashion, with Frankie having shed her old identity but not having come to terms with her new self or with external reality. She is, in fact, close to what she fears she might become, a freakish person, a grotesque figure that somehow seems if not physically deformed at least out of balance in terms of her own concept of her identity and her relationship with the community around her.

Frankie's resolve to leave the town and pursue her impossible dream of becoming a member of her brother's wedding catapults her completely into the inner, subjective world of her own mind in Part Two of the novel. This part is subdivided into three units which focus on events in the morning, afternoon, and evening of the Saturday before the wedding. In the first of these subsections, it is made clear that the central character is totally immersed in her own inner world and her imagined connection with everything else. From her subjective vision, "the unexpected did not make her wonder, and only the long known, the familiar, struck her with a strange surprise" (p. 656). She ventures forth into town on a dream-like odyssey, occasionally
thinking of the wedding which, in line with the previous associations with winter, makes her shiver despite the summer heat. As she exchanges glances with people on the street, she is obsessed with the mistaken notion that there is a new connection between herself and others.

She stops in the Blue Moon café—the name suggests both nighttime and fantasy—and in the darkened interior, as she glances into the mirror "tinting the faces pale and green" like the mirrors at the fair, she pours out her ambitions to run away. The Portuguese proprietor to whom she speaks hardly listens to the young girl and makes no reply, but she still imagines that she is communicating and thinks that "it is far easier . . . to convince strangers of the coming to pass of dearest wants than those in your own home kitchen" (p. 667). She imagines herself to be a "free traveler," like her brother and in contrast to the motionless, lethargic, and bored Frankie in Part One. She thinks the people she meets during this excursion "exchange the special look of friendly, free travelers who meet for a moment at some stop along the way" (p. 668). And as she walks around town talking to uncomprehending strangers, she hears in her mind portions of music—minuets, waltzes, marches and jazz tunes—all jumbled together.

Also in this section is an incident that links together the distortions of F. Jasmine's inner world with her sexual naiveté. She stumbles upon a drunken soldier,
whom she saw at the Blue Moon, engaged in an argument with an organ grinder. The soldier insists on trying to buy the man's monkey, which, frightened at the commotion, runs up F. Jasmine's leg and crouches on her shoulder with his hands around her head. The freakishness of her character is suggested in this image, as is the possessiveness and materialism of the soldier, who turns his attention from the monkey to F. Jasmine and buys her a beer. He, of course, represents reality, the hard facts of the objective world, and is interested in F. Jasmine only for sex. She does not understand and romanticizes the encounter, thinking of him as "joining with her like a traveler who meets another traveler in a tourist town" (p. 679), and reacting to his questions as though they are "a story-tale wand upon her mind" (p. 680). Without realizing the potential consequences, she accepts a date with him for that night.

That her naivety is related both to her position in her subjective world and to her illusions about joining the wedding is emphasized by another encounter which concludes this section of the novel. As F. Jasmine walks back home, she catches a glimpse out of the corner of her eye of what she thinks are Jarvis and Janice in an alley. Significantly she is afraid to look again, for she prefers her mental image to the reality. When she does look, she sees only two black youngsters, one taller than the other. As the narrator explains, "something about the angle or the
way they stood, or the pose of their shapes, had reflected the sudden picture of her brother and the bride that had so shocked her" (p. 687). Berenice later tells F. Jasmine that this sort of occurrence is experienced by people who are in love, and indeed Frankie does have a romantic love, an imagined infatuation for the couple and their wedding. It is a state of mind which is at variance with reality and which distorts one's perceptions, and the only possible outcome must be a disastrous encounter with reality itself.

In the second section of Part Two the setting shifts from the nightmarish town back to the reality of the kitchen community. F. Jasmine re-enters the world of the normal and the sane where the events of the morning are put in proper perspective. As the narrator explains, "F. Jasmine paused, for at home in the kitchen that last afternoon, the soldier seemed unreal" (p. 696). Indeed, she is unable to tell Berenice about him or the date they have arranged. However, she and Berenice do carry on a dialogue that expresses the dialectic underlying the entire work. F. Jasmine, young and romantic, tries to explain her desires to be a member, to join the wedding, and to go somewhere far-off and become rich and famous. Berenice, who is older and speaks from a realistic perspective, tries to counter F. Jasmine's illusion. She has been married five times herself, and has seen all sorts of strange unions of one person to another, but she has never heard of anything
like F. Jasmine's crazy plan. She tells of husbands she has had and the errors she has made, and her voice of experience relates directly to the problems created for F. Jasmine by her romantic attraction to the notion of joining the wedding.

After her first husband died, Berenice tried to marry his image. Like the romantic lovers in McCullers' other works, she fell in love with an image in her mind, inverting the process of true love, which should, ideally, bind one person to another. As she explains, "I loved Ludie [her first husband] 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 turned out to be the wrong pieces. My intention was to repeat me and Ludie" (p. 725). Her "love" for these men had not been true love at all. Rather than being a positive force that transcends self, it was a destructive drive that fragmented the object of love and was ultimately self-destructive as well. And Berenice, with a wisdom and self-knowledge rare among McCullers' usually self-deluded characters, recognizes the flaw within herself and seeks to warn F. Jasmine that the crazy attraction for the wedding is similar.

Berenice also speaks to the issues of illusion, identity, and isolation which are central in all of
McCullers' fiction and which F. Jasmine confronts. The young girl wonders that each person has an identity separate from others and from which he cannot escape, and she asks Berenice: "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?" (p. 734) She has tried to escape her identity by changing her name from Frankie to F. Jasmine, and Berenice, who is more realistic, explains that a person accumulates an identity because of what he does, and that simply changing the name, the surface appearance, provides only an illusion of a new identity. "Things have accumulated around the name," she says. "If it is bad and you have a bad reputation, then you just can't jump out of your name and escape like that" (p. 733).

In these matters Berenice serves the function of Biff Brannon in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter and the narrator in The Ballad of the Sad Café. Theirs are the voices of experience that provide a more objective commentary on the romantic illusions of the central characters, that present the other side of the dialectic of romanticism and realism. Berenice is especially qualified to comment on the problem of identity and isolation. Not only has she learned much
about the dangers of romantic love from her own experiences, but also, as a black person in the South, she has felt the sense of personal entrapment and suppression which F. Jasmine, in her child's way, voices. Berenice acknowledges that "Me is me and you is you and he is he. We each one of us somehow caught all by ourself" (p. 740). She continues, in words that bring to the foreground the social issues in the novel, "I'm caught worse than you is. . . . Because I am black. . . . Because I am colored. Everybody is caught one way or another. But they done drawn extra bounds around all colored people. They done squeezed us off in one corner by ourself. So we caught that firstway I was telling you, as all human beings is caught. And we caught as colored people also" (p. 740).

In the third section of Part Two, F. Jasmine, not having learned from Berenice's advice, leaves the realistic setting of the kitchen and ventures into the town once again, carrying her grandiose illusions with her. She keeps her date with the soldier at the Blue Moon, but the events that follow do not conform to her plans. As she sits talking with him at a table she thinks that, contrary to her expectations, "their two conversations would not join together" (p. 757). She yields to his urging to go upstairs to his room, but once there she responds to his advances by biting his tongue and knocking him over the
head with a pitcher. This confrontation foreshadows events at the wedding, described in Part Three.

The wedding is, of course, not what she imagines. She is treated as the child she is, rather than as the adult she imagines herself to be, and she is unable to express to Jarvis and Janice her desire to be a member of the wedding. She thinks what she should say, but "her tongue was heavy in her mouth and dumb" (p. 771). Her silence, like that of McCullers' other characters who try to live in their subjective worlds, signifies her insolation from reality and points to the irony that her very desire to join a social unit is not real.

When her brother and his bride go off and leave her, she reacts in a complex way. At first she wishes to be completely alone, without anyone speaking to her, and resolves to run away from home that very night. Still clinging to what is left of her dream, she thinks that she will escape into the darkness and catch the northbound train and maybe eventually she would dress up like a boy and join the marines under a false name. But when she is out in the street alone, her bravado diminishes. She wishes for some company; even the monkey and the monkey man would do. She thinks that she needs somebody so that "she would not have to go into the world alone" (p. 781). The motifs associated with her inner world—nighttime, trains, travel, the north, military glory, freakish figures—all
cluster together in her mind as she takes a last fling in her subjective world. She even contemplates another wed­ding, this time to the soldier whom she hit on the head, and this thought is an additional expression of her need for community and family.

These ideas, even more outlandish than her plan to become a member of the wedding, are short-lived. When she enters the Blue Moon in her search for somebody to run away with, she is discovered by a policeman and her odys­sey ends. At this moment, unable to explain to the officer what she is doing in this nightspot, she realizes that the people around her are really strangers and that the connection with them that she previously imagined does not exist. When she looks into the policeman's eyes, she sees not a secret look of connection but only a reflection of herself. Significantly, the motif of music is repeated, too, but this time, as though to emphasize the falseness of F. Jasmine's plans, the tune comes only from a juke box and is pantomimed on the counter by the café owner.

As in Part One, there is a second movement in Part Three that completes the structural symmetry and brings the novel to a close. The central character is portrayed three months after the wedding. She has changed her name again, to Frances, and she is, as this change suggests, much more the typical teen-age girl than she appears to be earlier in the story. The change in her personality is underscored
by the fact that she and her family are moving to a new house. Most of the furniture has already been moved and the kitchen, the communal world that she shared with Berenice, has been painted over. As the narrator explains, "It was not the same kitchen of the summer that now seemed so long ago" (p. 786). Two other events have also occurred that indicate the change in Frances. John Henry West has died from a sudden attack of meningitis, and Berenice, who gave notice when she found out the Addamses were moving, is spending her last afternoon with Frances.

Judging from these changes and the fact that she has a new friend, Mary Littlejohn, who is her own age, one would think that Frances has faced reality and completed her development from the "I" world to the "We" world. After all, the nightmare world which floods over external reality and distorts F. Jasmine's perceptions in Part Two is now put in proper perspective, and for Frances "the daytime now was filled with radar, school, and Mary Littlejohn" (p. 790). She has even lost her self-conscious fascination with freaks, and when she and her new friend visit the fair together they avoid the Freak Pavilion.11

11 Graver interprets the novel as a typical initiation story ending in a new awareness on the part of the central character. Graver states that the novel "follows the familiar journey of adolescent initiation: the stirrings of dissatisfaction, jubilant hope founded on misplaced idealism, and disillusionment accompanied by a new wisdom about the limits of human life" (Graver, p. 33). W. R. Robinson in "The Life of Carson McCullers' Imagination" in
But there is an irony in Frances' position at the end of the novel just as there is in the conclusion of Mick Kelly's story in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter. Although Mick faces economic necessity and overcomes her illusions, she does not achieve an altogether satisfying victory. She moves into the objective world, but the reality in which she finds herself is oppressive, and one expects that she is condemned to a life of clerking in the five-and-dime, a future which, in view of the creative energy she displays earlier in the novel, is not worthy of her. In The Member of the Wedding, the irony is even more pronounced and the author's perspective more pessimistic. Frances, though she may seem grown-up in some ways, is an uncaring and superficial character. She displays little concern for Berenice, for example, even though it is the cook's last day at the Addams' house. Clearly she has not achieved a "We" sense, has not developed a love for people that transcends her selfhood. In fact, without realizing it, she has proved the truth of Berenice's observation that each person is trapped and doomed to isolation.

The way she speaks reveals her superficiality. She has foresaken the alive and forthright diction of Frankie

Southern Humanities Review, 2 (1968), 291-302, concurs that the novel ends positively. Robinson states that "Frankie ends up wed, in effect, to Mary Littlejohn" and "her imagination's creative thrust ... assumes a social role in service to humanity" (Robinson, p. 297).
and F. Jasmine and resorts instead to clichés and pretentiousness. "I am just mad about Michelangelo," she says at one point, and the novel ends with her unfinished statement: "I am simply mad about---" (p. 791). The allusion to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" may not be intentional, but there is a parallel between the vapid world that Eliot satirizes and the world that Frances has created for herself at the end of The Member of the Wedding.

Also, Frances, like Prufrock, is not so free from her world of dreams and illusions as she might at first appear to be. Her attraction to Mary Littlejohn is itself another manifestation of her romantic love; Frances merely substitutes the older girl in place of the wedding as the object of her attraction. She still clings to her plans of going abroad and becoming famous, and simply draws her friend into her inner room from which the wiser and more realistic Berenice is excluded.

Indeed, what Frances has given up at the end of the novel is the only "family" she has. Berenice, who is a substitute mother/father for her, is left behind, without even a sense of regret on Frances' part. John Henry, who figuratively was both a brother and a child to her, is no longer alive and Frances chooses to neglect his memory. In their place, Mary Littlejohn is a pale substitute at best, and Frankie is left at the end with less sense of
community than she had before, though she steadfastly insists on believing the opposite. Because of her illusions about herself and her lack of sensitivity toward others, the novel ends, as Millichap rightly observes, in an even more frightening manner than *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter.*

The Member of the Wedding, then, represents a hardening of the author's attitude toward the dual reality she perceives. The novel, rather than being a lyric evocation of youth, is a chilling testament to man's inability to transcend the "I" world in which he is enclosed. It is in this sense that *The Member of the Wedding* may seem, as Edmund Wilson remarks in a highly derogatory review in *The New Yorker,* to be static and lack drama. There is, in fact, no real development of the central character; this is McCullers' point. She uses the format of the adolescent initiation story to comment ironically on man's inability to develop beyond his inner self to the "We" world of the community and objective reality. The surface changes in

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12 Millichap, Diss., p. 105.

13 Graver describes the novel as "a small but undeniably affecting story of adolescent joy and frustration" (Graver, p. 41). McCullers intended it to be more, however. In an interview with Harvey Breit in *The New York Times* (January 1, 1950, sect. 2, p. 3, she states: "The play (it's the same as the novel) is about adolescence, but that's not really what it's about. It's a play about identity and the will to belong."

14 March 30, 1946, p. 87.
Frances at the end of the novel, her interest in a friend her own age and in objective things such as radar, are but a feint in the direction of community and brotherly love. Really she remains self-possessed and isolated. Only Berenice, whom Frances leaves behind, stands as a symbol of true compassion and insight.

What makes Frances' actions more appalling is that they, like the illusions of McCullers' other romantic characters, have ramifications in the objective world of the novel. In pursuing her illusions she hurts other people. She leads the soldier on in the Blue Moon and then does violence to him. She threatens Berenice with a knife. She is cruel to John Henry and actually chases him from her home. And at the end of the novel, she discards Berenice herself in her infatuation with her new friend, who, no doubt, will soon also be spurned in the interests of Frances' "I" world.

In exploring once again the meeting ground between subjective and objective worlds, McCullers draws on the themes and motifs developed in her earlier fiction. The Member of the Wedding is, in fact, an effort at consolidation in which the story of adolescent initiation worked out in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter and some of the short stories is brought together with the critique of romantic love in the two novellas. The resulting major theme is
the failed search for community as represented by the lack of family ties.

The failure of the family is suggested in McCullers' earlier works also. Mick's parents in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter are shadowy figures far in the background of the story, people with whom Mick has little in common, despite the fact that she ends up taking a job partly in response to family pressures. The Copeland family is an even more obvious example of the broader failure of community that dominates the novel. Dr. Copeland's children have not measured up to his dreams for them, and the gap between the intellectual and elitist father and his uneducated and unambitious offspring is an indication of the larger division between him and the black people whom he imagines himself leading to economic and social salvation.

The family is not a viable social unit in Reflections in a Golden Eye either. Williams is without family and spurns the possibility of using the army in place of one. The two families that are present in the novella, the Pendertons and the Langdons, are mockeries of the ideal of community. In neither is there mutual love, and in fact the wife in one family is having an affair with the husband in the other. Also, there are no children and no prospect of having them. Likewise, in The Ballad of the Sad Café the "family" composed of Miss Amelia, who adopts a motherly
role, and Cousin Lymon, who acts like a spoiled child, is torn by possessiveness, jealousy, and fighting.

In The Member of the Wedding, McCullers takes the theme of the family and gives it special emphasis through Frankie's obsession with her brother's wedding. In the process the root cause of the disintegration of community is suggested. Those people who live in a world shrouded by illusions can achieve no lasting relationships, McCullers is saying. It is this same concept that is again emphasized in her final novel, Clock without Hands, which centers on two characters, an adolescent boy whose initiation is linked to his search for family identity and an older man who, by facing the reality of his own death, learns how to live.
CHAPTER V

SYNTHESIS AND FAILURE IN CLOCK WITHOUT HANDS

In Clock Without Hands, McCullers returns to the broad scope of her first novel, in which social issues such as poverty and racism are given special prominence. She creates a 1950's story of race relations, just as The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter can be seen as a book about the Depression. The setting is the Southern town of Milan, Georgia, on the eve of the Supreme Court school desegregation decision in Brown versus The Board of Education. Represented are two faces of the white South: the old line segregationists who harken back to the ideals of antebellum society and the new moderate Southerners, a minority, whose goals are not separation of the races and white dominance but equality and brotherly love. The old and the new in black society are also portrayed: the humble blacks employed as servants and kept segregated and poor by the white majority and the new militancy of those who challenge established ways. The novel stands as a condemnation of the illusion of white supremacy and the violence and inhumanity that spring from it. Implicit is the
author's call for tolerance, understanding, brotherly love, and compassion.¹

However, McCullers faced problems in depicting the South in her new novel. For one thing she had been away from her native region, indeed from the country, for some time and had to make a conscious effort to re-familiarize herself with the social issues. As a result, the social dimension of the novel is at times unconvincing. It is also, according to some critics, at odds with romance elements in the work. Oliver Evans, for example, calls Clock Without Hands a literary "hybrid" in which allegory and abstraction compete with realism and the concrete. The result is a novel that is intriguing but not truly successful as a work of art.² Millichap seems to concur. He concludes that "the sections of the novel which deal more closely with the timeless world of the personality, the Malone sections, are fine, but they are compromised by the

¹It is not surprising that McCullers' last novel reflects these social themes so prominently. She made a special effort to come to terms with the South during the time she worked on this book. After returning from Paris in 1953, she traveled to Georgia to research an article which she agreed to write for Holiday magazine. Evidently, her appraisal of the state was too critical for a light travel piece. When the article was rejected, even after McCullers revised it, she blamed an editor at Holiday for being unable to see the South as it actually was (Carr, p. 422).

²Evans, p. 187.
author's attempt to connect them to her unsuccessful topical material."

An especially telling indictment is Donald Emerson's essay "The Ambiguities of Clock Without Hands." He, too, concludes that the book is flawed because the social issues are not fused with the personal. According to Emerson: "The symbolic roles which were to have given Clock Without Hands its forceful social reference detract from the effectiveness of the novel on the level of immediate, inward experience where Mrs. McCullers' powers are greatest." This weakness is especially evident in McCullers' portrayal of Sherman Pew and Jester Clane, in which she is "sensitively penetrating when she deals with the inner life but fumbling and uncertain when she attempts a social paradigm."

But the novel is weakened not so much by the author's use of both romance and realistic novel traditions, which is a source of strength in this work as in McCullers' previous efforts and which is an integral part of her aesthetic, as by other problems, some of them caused by her declining health, which slowed her work and interfered with her concentration. She suffered a severe stroke in Paris in August, 1947, and a second one only three months

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4 Contemporary Literature, 3 (Fall 1962), 17.
5 Ibid., 17-18.
later left her partially paralyzed. Other serious ailments occurred before she could finish the novel, including bronchial pneumonia and pleurisy in 1951, continuing illness and pain in her paralyzed arm in 1956, depression that became especially severe in 1958 following the unsuccessful run of her play *Square Root of Wonderful*, and operations on her bad arm and wrist in 1959.6

The effect of these debilities, together with the time spent on other writing projects, which included short stories and the play, interfered with her progress on the novel. She wrote very slowly, and while her work dragged out over a decade, the Southern experience itself was undergoing drastic changes. She was faced with the task of writing a topical novel while the experience she tried to capture was in flux. As a result there is a tension in the finished work between those elements more believable in a late 1940's setting and those which seem more a part of the late 1950's and early 1960's.7

One characterization, that of Sherman Pew, the orphan adolescent of mixed racial backgrounds, is especially flawed. Pew is, as Louis Rubin points out, an unbelievable

6The chronology in Carr, pp. 574–78, provides a useful summary of McCullers' illnesses during this period.

7McCullers finished writing the novel in December 1960, and it was published the following September 18 by Houghton Mifflin. Page references in this chapter refer to the Houghton Mifflin edition.
character who is "sometimes a symbol, sometimes a human being, but never both at the same time."\(^8\) Much of the difficulty with the characterization can be attributed to McCullers' efforts early in the novel to portray him as a fanciful adolescent in the mold of F. Jasmine, while further in the book he is made to assume the improbable role of black militant. Nearly as unconvincing is Judge Clane, the eighty year old former Congressman who on the one hand represents antebellum Southern aristocracy while on the other assumes the role of a modern Ku Klux Klan rabble rouser encouraging the working class citizens to use violence to prevent the "niggers" from taking over.

McCullers, it seems, was simply unable to work the novel to a fine polish as she did in her previous efforts. Some passages are marred by awkward word repetition. Also, some actions and characters seem grossly improbable, and the strong, three-part structure through which she exerted control in the other novels is lacking. Yet even in failure, Clock Without Hands stands as a useful illustration of the author's attempt in all her novels to draw on the tradition of both the romance and realistic novel in her ongoing investigation of the meeting place of subjective and objective worlds. The success of her effort can best be judged by considering in detail the four major

\(^8\)"Six Novels and S. Levin," Sewanee Review, 70 (1962), 511.
characters, two of whom fail to transcend the boundaries of the subjective world. They are, in addition to Sherman Pew and Judge Clane, the Judge's grandson, Jester Clane, and J. T. Malone, a middle-aged druggist who is dying from leukemia.\textsuperscript{9}

The stories of all four characters are unified by McCullers' familiar motifs, which cluster around the distinction between subjective and objective realities. For example, music, especially jazz or off-key melodies of the sort Sherman Pew plays, represents the subjective world. So, too, do snow, timelessness, the radio, distortions, lies, rooms and houses, unanswered letters, possessiveness and romantic yearnings and dreams. Many of these images come together in the brief section dealing with the house Sherman rents in the white neighborhood of town. When Jester goes there to warn Sherman to leave, he finds that Sherman has enclosed himself in a dream world of his own. He has rented extravagant furniture, including "an elegant baby grand" piano which he strokes "lovingly" (p. 227). He exhibits a dangerous pride of ownership that

\textsuperscript{9}Evidently, the Jester and Malone sections were those to which McCullers gave first attention. Carr reports that she began work on a manuscript called "The Pestle" in the fall of 1951. It focuses on Malone and was published in the July 1955 issues of Mademoiselle and Botteghe Oscure. Later it became the first chapter of Clock Without Hands (Carr, pp. 575-76). Simeon Smith in his dissertation refers to an early McCullers manuscript called "Jester Clane," which "is similar to the outline which she prepared
eclipses the social reality that hovers just outside his
door. He exclaims to Jester that everything is "all my
own," and "in an ecstasy of ownership" he forgets his
fear of white retaliation (p. 227). In words that recall
the house and room motifs in McCullers' earlier works, the
house is described as "all of Sherman's world" (p. 228).
He pounds on the piano and refuses to listen to Jester's
entreaties that he move out. As a result, he becomes the
victim of the irrational social forces he refuses to
recognize.

Even more dominant a motif is the need for family,
which is so prominent a theme in The Member of the Wedding.
Each major character in Clock Without Hands, like Frankie
in the previous novel, desperately needs to integrate
himself into the social reality. Yet ironically he seeks
instead a contrived and illusory sense of "family." Judge
Clane has lost one son, finds his grandson in revolt, and
ironically turns to Sherman Pew, who is totally at odds with
the Judge, as a surrogate son. Likewise his wife is dead,
and even his long-time maid, Verily, leaves him to work for
a man who will pay her social security. Sherman himself is
without parents, and his efforts to establish their identity
lead first to romanticized illusions of a famous person

for Heart in that ideas which are only implied in Clock
are fully developed here" (Smith, p. 94).
being his mother and then to disillusionment and further withdrawal when he finds out the truth. A similar ironic search for family is evident in Jester and Malone. Jester nags his grandfather to learn the circumstances of his father's suicide, and even Malone, who has a family but no close family ties, calls out "Father, Father, help me," even though "his father had been dead for these long years" (p. 25). Both the young boy and the dying druggist overcome this narrow and ironic search for their immediate families and achieve the broader sense of unity and community which stands as an ideal, while those characters who refuse to deal with reality and time gain no reward.

Through these motifs the major characters are distinguished on the basis of their ability to deal effectively with reality, both the reality of their personal lives and that of the social world. Clearly, Judge Clane does not handle social issues in a realistic manner. His attitude toward time indicates his shortcomings. He is a throwback to the old South, unable to accept the changes that time inevitably brings. As Sherman Pew remarks, the old man's ideas about the South "would turn back the clock" (p. 177). In fact, his wild plans for providing reparations for the South and revaluing Confederate money are an attempt to escape "the years of boredom and endless blank time" (p. 107). He develops this scheme in response to his own impending death, as though he can somehow escape from that
ultimate reality. The narrator explains that "It was inconceivable to him that he would actually die" and that "the energy of his new life came from his thinking, his dream" (pp. 96, 174).

He is just as unwilling to face the deaths of others. He has trouble reconciling himself to his wife's terminal illness, about which "he didn't want to know and tried to deceive both her and himself," and after she dies he, like Berenice in The Member of the Wedding, tries to find a duplicate of her in "a veiled, subconscious search for his dead wife" (pp. 51, 53). In the same vein he refuses to grasp the reasons for his son's suicide and avoids explaining the circumstances to his grandson, Jester. Nor will he accept the reality of Malone's dying. He tells the druggist that what the doctors have diagnosed as leukemia is merely a reflection of their own deficiencies, their own lack of "good blood." The Judge says, "Don't let them intimidate you, J. T." (p. 16).

Clane's refusal to accept reality, his tendency to lock himself within his subjective world of dreams and illusions, is indicated by his obsession with "passion." McCullers uses this same word in her essay "The Russian Realists and Southern Literature" to designate the subjective element that should be infused into realism to achieve a synthesis of forms. In Clock Without Hands, passion again represents the subjective world, as opposed to
objective social reality. McCullers implies that an ideal balance of the two opposites is necessary. Clane, however, represents an extreme, not a balance. His character is marked by passion alone without any social responsibility. As he tells his grandson, "Passion is more important than justice," and when he explains his ridiculous scheme to Sherman Pew he speaks "passionately, drunk with his dream," and uses "the language of passionate demagoguery" (pp. 40, 159).

It is this sort of heedless and irresponsible passion that, according to McCullers, leads to tyranny. She demonstrates this thesis in her portrayal of characters in her earlier novels who try to live entirely within their subjective worlds yet whose actions have an adverse effect on others in the objective world. In the case of Judge Clane, his dreams and passionate rhetoric ultimately lead to racial violence and Sherman Pew's death. Finally his passion defeats his own purposes when, attempting to denounce the Supreme Court desegregation decision, he can only summon up the rhetoric of Lincoln's Gettysburg address. At this point, the judge's ideas are too divorced from reality even to be expressed. They are "so chaotic, so inconceivable, he could not formulate his protests. They were too passionate" (p. 240).

Clane is like Blount and Copeland, despite the fact that his conservative and regressive social concepts are
the opposite of their Marxist ideology. All three characters are selfish, fail to treat other people as people, and are more caught up in their own rhetoric than the social reality that surrounds them. Like them, and like Singer too, Clane goes through the motions of communication, writing letters of no consequence to no one who would be interested. Once he even responds to an advertisement for Kare Free Kamping Equipment, "posing trenchant questions about sleeping bags and the quality of frying pans" (p. 106). And with McCullers' other passion-ruled characters, his subjective state distorts his perception of objective reality. When he looks at the portrait of his wife, which Malone describes as "the living image of Miss Missy," he sees not a realistic representation but a monkey-like, grotesque figure reminiscent of F. Jasmine's subjective vision in *The Member of the Wedding* (p. 50).

Ironically, Clane is one person whose position in the community calls for social responsibility. As a jurist, he had the duty to decide matters of life and death for other people. Yet the descriptions of his trial experience indicate that he shirked responsibility for his decisions. When he considered a death sentence, he always prayed because this action "somehow siphoned the responsibility away from Fox Clan and dribbled it to God" (p. 180). In one case in which he wrongly executed a "Nigra" accused of rape, he
avoided accepting the blame: "although the Judge regretted it deeply, he kept reminding himself that the boy had been tried by twelve good men and true and that he, himself, was only an instrument of the law" (p. 181). His son, Johnny Clane, was right in saying to his father, "Often this past year I have wondered how responsible you are" (p. 187). The Judge's great flaw is that he refuses to accept responsibility for the consequences of his actions. He fails to recognize the meeting ground of his own being and the world of other people; he holds himself aloof from the consequences of his actions in society.

This is a flaw that is not restricted to conservatives who would turn back the clock. McCullers' satirizes with nearly equal vehemence the left-wing social reformers in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, who, despite the accuracy of their perception of social evils, just as surely separate themselves from the people they would aid and isolate themselves in their subjective worlds. In *Clock Without Hands*, Johnny Clane is described as a dreamer of the left. Though committed to radical theory and the defense of human rights, he is, like his father, an impassioned and subjective person, as the conversations between them, which the Judge recalls at one point, reveal. Though the two men differ politically, they are, as the older man says, "like two brothers" (p. 188). Johnny Clane's passions also interfere with his
public duty, as his conduct in defending a black man accused of murder reveals. The defendant was Sherman Jones, who was having an affair with a married white woman, Mrs. Little. Her husband tried to kill Jones but was accidentally killed himself in the struggle. Mrs. Little later gave birth to and then abandoned Jones' child, who is Sherman Pew. The Judge's son, although righteous enough to defend Jones and go against the wishes of his father and the white community, lets his rhetoric and good intentions run away with his reason and is unsuccessful in his defense. Like his father at the end of the novel, he inappropriately recites the Gettysburg Address to the Southern white jurors. His difficulty in defending Jones is compounded by his own attraction to Mrs. Little, a love that is, like that of McCullers' other romantic lovers, illusory and self-deceiving. His emotions have an impact in the real world, to the detriment of his client and justice generally, and as a result he not only loses the case but commits suicide. 10

10 Millichap criticizes the description of the trial as "a stock situation of pious liberal fiction about the South. . . . All the trappings are employed; the hot, crowded courtroom, the bigoted, blowhard judge, the red-neck jurors, the noble young lawyer" (Millichap, Diss., p. 120). Though most of these elements are present, they were not so uncommon in Southern justice in the thirties and forties and do not seem implausible in the novel. We should also bear in mind that the author is critical of the liberal lawyer, Johnny Clane, as well as the bigots. A more glaring flaw in the trial scene is the extraordinary contrivance of having a father preside as judge at a trial in which his son is the defense counsel.
Sherman Pew is another passion-ridden character at the opposite political pole from Judge Clane but who is just as taken with lofty rhetoric and wild dreams. He adopts a sophisticated facade and continually lies about himself and his experiences. When Jester asks him why, he replies: "A lot of my life I've had to make up stories because the real, actual was either too dull or too hard to take" (p. 141). His attempt to escape reality is, as with F. Jasmine in *The Member of the Wedding*, represented by his ironic search for a family identity. As an orphan with blue eyes and black skin, he is anxious to discover who his parents were. But his search is marked by wild and distorted imaginings. He becomes convinced that Marian Anderson is his mother and, in an act that parallels the worthless letters the Judge sends out, he writes to her. When he receives no reply and later learns that Anderson was never even in Milan, Georgia, he is bitter and disappointed. The final blow to his subjective world occurs when he reads the clippings pertaining to the Sherman Jones murder trial which the Judge has stored in his office files. His feeling is one of disgrace and shame, and he thinks, "No, Marian Anderson had not been his mother, nor Lena Horne, nor Bessie Smith, nor any of the honeyed ladies of his childhood. He had been tricked. He had been cheated. He wanted to die like the Negro man [his father] had died" (p. 212). His impulse is self-destructive,
and he carries out this impulse by allowing himself to become the victim of white hatred and racial prejudice.

In one sense the reader may sympathize with Sherman, who is not fully responsible for the circumstances in which he finds himself and who represents the injustice his race has suffered at the hands of white society. But it is also clear that he is a flawed personality not only dangerous to himself but to others. Locked within his subjective world, acting out of the force of his passions, he is unable to form meaningful relationships and instead brings harm to others. His attitude toward the Judge's grandson, Jester, is a case in point. Jester is attracted to Sherman, but Sherman, like the "beloved" in other romantic relationships in McCullers' works, turns against the "lover." He insults Jester at every opportunity and causes torment for the boy, and his actions are not restricted to merely childish cruelty. After he learns the truth about his parents, he kills Jester's dog by hanging him from a tree and then explains in words that indicate his inability to transcend his subjective world, "I don't love no white man's dog and I don't love nobody" (p. 217). He even tries to kill the Judge by substituting water in place of insulin in the old man's injections.

All three social types—the segregationist judge, his white liberal son, and the militant young black—are flawed
characters who are unable to transcend their subjective worlds and come to terms with other people. McCullers' critique of them is underscored by the successful initiation stories of the other two main characters in much the same way that Mick Kelly's story in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* serves to provide the norm by which Singer, Antonapoulos, Blount, and Copeland can be judged. In *Clock Without Hands*, Jester Clane, the Judge's grandson, provides one model of normal development. At first he is young and romantic, a child living in a world of the imagination. But as the novel progresses, he learns to face reality and to accept responsibility for his own actions. The other character is J. T. Malone, who, though he is dying, also undergoes an initiation.

Jester's initial desire to escape reality is indicated by motifs which call to mind McCullers' previous fiction. He is attracted to sad-sounding jazz music, as is Sherman, and he is concerned that he is a freak. He also has homosexual tendencies and is obsessed with his lack of sexual experience. His initiation proceeds in a series of orderly steps, by which he learns to face reality while establishing his own identity. At the outset of the novel, he displays signs of rebellion against his grandfather, whom he had previously idolized, and asserts his own independence. The change in his attitude is reflected in his different
perception of a picture over the mantlepiece. Jester used to see in it the same objects that everyone else saw—"an orchard and clouds and a Nigra shack"—but now he does not see things which he used to see, and, as he comments to the Judge, "I have different feelings, different thoughts" (p. 30). The painting, he adds, is "A symbol of this summertime. I used to have ideas exactly like everybody else. And now I have my own ideas" (p. 31). His own ideas involve a reevaluation of the dominant social concepts in the South. Jester has begun to question white supremacy and the moral authority of his grandfather. He also wonders about the circumstances of his father's death, and it is clear that his dual search for identity and social reality is wrapped up in his need for a family, especially a father image with which he can identify.

Another step in his initiation is his first sexual experience with a prostitute, after which he feels "cocksure and free" (p. 93). The next morning he is able to avoid the temptation to lie in bed daydreaming, and he has a more realistic sense of his relationship to time. When he leaves the house he does not hurry but takes "his mortal time" (p. 98). All the same, his experience is not the sort of definite turning point that Mick's affair with Harry Minowitz proves to be in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter. Jester is not yet a man and has not yet come to terms with
his subjective passions or his role in society. He has experienced sex but has not grasped the meaning of brotherly love. And even during the sex act itself, he maintains a certain ambivalence and illusion by thinking of Sherman Pew instead of the prostitute. He continues to nourish his illusion-bound, unreciprocated "love" for Sherman through most of the novel.

His continuing obsession with flying indicates his lack of complete contact with reality. Soloing in the Moth airplane with its open cockpit, he enjoys the illusion of freedom, and when he lands, he forgets other people and is absorbed with only the narrow responsibility "for his own life and for the training Moth" (p. 99). He also plays the role of the proud and swaggering pilot, jumping to the ground "with careful grace" and wishing "somebody could have seen him" (p. 99). When he thinks to himself "that every adult had the moral obligation to fly," he displays a significant lock of insight into the nature of "moral obligation" and "responsibility" (p. 99). In McCullers' view, moral obligation involves more than merely a concern with self-identity, and Jester has not yet reached the point at which he can transcend the world of his own ego and establish meaningful relationships with other people and develop social consciousness.
But gradually events propel Jester toward objective reality, a sense of responsibility, and a true love for his fellow man. One such occasion takes place when Grown Boy, the moronic nephew of the Judge's cook, snatches some coins from a beggar's hat. Jester, who witnesses the action, chases Grown Boy and unwittingly sparks a mob scene. The white mill hands who are on their lunch break join in the chase yelling "Git the nigger. Git the nigger bastard," and a cop comes up and cracks Grown Boy over the head killing him (p. 103). From this experience Jester learns that he cannot hold himself completely aloof from society; in fact, every man is responsible for the impact of his personal actions on other people. He thinks to himself that "he was responsible for the murder and the knowledge of that fact brought further responsibility. Those were the moments when impulse and innocence were tarnished, the moments which end the end, and which, many months later, were to save him from another murder--in truth, to save his very soul" (p. 102).

This foreshadowing points to the final sequence in Jester's story. He is increasingly drawn into events in the social world of the novel as racial tensions mount in Milan. He hears the plans of the white citizens to bomb the house that Sherman has rented in the white neighborhood, and he tries to warn his young friend. Sherman refuses to heed the warning, however, and Jester, having lost the object of his
love, vows revenge on the murderer, Sammy Lank, a poor white millworker. The means he chooses would be a regression into his subjective world and away from the communal world of brotherly love. He lures Sammy into his plane, planning to shoot him while flying high above the town. There he is in a world of his own, and down below, the objective world assumes the illusion of perfection and order. As the narrator explains, "From this height you do not see man and the details of his humiliation. The earth from a great distance is perfect and whole" (p. 233). This perspective distorts reality by presenting the human condition from such a distance that the human is blurred to indistinction. Instead, the "terrain seems designed by a law more just and mathematical than the laws of property and bigotry" (p. 233). The narrator adds: "But this is an order foreign to the heart, and to love the earth you must come closer" (p. 233).

The moment is decisive in Jester's initiation into manhood. He has the responsibility for his actions, and he can either choose hatred, withdrawal, and negation or affirm humanity and act from compassion and an understanding of Sammy's fundamental humanness. He chooses the latter course, in an unusual, and not wholly convincing, expression of the author's optimism that contrasts sharply with the cynical conclusion of The Member of the Wedding. He does not use the pistol as he intended, and "in that instant the
seed of compassion, forced by sorrow, had begun to blossom" (p. 233). He acts not out of weakness, as Donald Emerson suggests, but from the strength of his new perspective of the worth of human life.\footnote{Emerson criticizes Jester as "ineffectual" and "incapable of retribution when the wretched human condition of the murderer is brought home to him" (Emerson, 17).}

The importance of his decision is underscored by the symbolism. He wheels the airplane closer to the earth and achieves a realistic perspective of the town, which is fragmented and strife-torn rather than perfect and just, and which should be seen as it is. As he glides "downward, low over the town and countryside, the whole breaks up into a multiplicity of impressions. . . . As you circle inward, the town itself becomes crazy and complex" (pp. 233-34). Most of all, closer to the earth the people become individualized, losing their "automatic look, like wound-up dolls" (p. 234). As the narrator states, "The whole earth from a great distance means less than one long look into a pair of human eyes. Even the eyes of the enemy" (p. 234).\footnote{McCullers similarly used the flying motif and the perspective achieved by height in an early story which, judging from the outline for "The Mute," was intended to be included in the Mick Kelly section of The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter. In the story, which Margarita Smith simply calls "Untitled Piece" in publishing it in The Mortgaged Heart, a young boy and his younger sister construct a glider and attempt to fly. It is woefully heavy and cannot possibly work, and they are bruised and battered by their crash landings. Their efforts are a romantic yearning to rise above the world and achieve a simplified vision divorced
This passage is particularly significant and is yet another example, along with the digression on love in The Ballad of the Sad Café, of McCullers' willingness to have her narrator intrude to provide commentary on the action. Here the digression, which is set apart from the narrative by double spacing, present tense, and the use of second person, is not ironic but rather is the author's own assertion of the need, also stated in her essays,¹³ for a brotherly love based on a recognition of the humanness of others. And at this instant her character achieves the same sort of blending of the subjective and the realistic as McCullers calls for in her definition of the "philosophical novel." Jester unites a new compassion with a willingness to recognize the tensions in the social world, and as he glides downward toward the earth, the subjective world of the novel merges, figuratively at least, with the realistic social dimension.

This statement in Clock Without Hands is more optimistic than in any of McCullers' previous novels. The

from the complexities of the social reality. The same motive leads the boy to climb to a roof top and look down. From this subjective perspective the world appears in comforting patterns, neatly ordered and designed. At the end of the story he learns, however, that "there's really no such thing" as "a great fine design" (The Mortgaged Heart, p. 115).

dialectic is apparently resolved in a final synthesis represented by Jester's moral victory at the end of the novel. Unfortunately, the optimistic resolution seems forced and unconvincing. It is difficult to accept that her character has changed for the better so quickly. Though the dualism of McCullers' thinking consistently points toward an ideal synthesis, she is more persuasive depicting man's failure to achieve it. She is, foremost, a critic of human nature, and at the end of Jester's story she seems to strain for the optimistic outcome. By way of contrast we should recall Mick Kelly in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter. Her story concludes more convincingly with the character having matured and progressed from subjective to objective world but somehow having missed an ideal balance of the two.

The strained optimism at the end of Clock Without Hands is also evident in the character of J. T. Malone. While Jester is growing up and achieving a new sense of himself and the world around him, Malone is learning to die, to face the reality of his mortal condition. Because his illness comes on gradually, it is especially hard for him to accept its seriousness. He makes excuses for himself, dismissing his symptoms as "spring fever," which he treats with the homespun remedy of sulphur and molasses. Furthermore from his mind is his own death, which he has never considered "except in some twilight, unreckoned future" (p. 2). He is, then, at the outset of the novel, similar
to Judge Clane. Neither character is able to grasp the ephemeral nature of his own being or to understand the passing of time.

Even Malone's doctor, in telling his patient the prognosis, avoids the reality of this man's mortality. Instead of saying plainly that Malone is dying, he resorts to cataloging numerical values, as though to objectify this most personal of all phenomena. He refuses to look Malone in the eye and says, "The red blood cells have a count of only 2.15 million so we have an intercurrent anemia. But that is not the important factor. The white blood cells are abnormally increased—the count is 208,000. . . . . You probably understand what that means" (p. 3). Even when Malone asks outright if he is going to die, the doctor remains silent.

Malone's first reaction is to try to escape the reality of his own death. He seeks false assurances in the church and in the Judge's derogatory comments about the doctor, and all the time, as he avoids facing his mortality, his perception of reality itself becomes distorted, as though a clarity of vision in the objective world depends on an accurate perception of one's personal life and death. As the narrator explains, Malone "was unable to acknowledge the reality of approaching death, and the conflict led to a sense of ubiquitous unreality" (p. 9).
The central problem facing Malone, like the basic issues in McCullers' previous novels, is the tension between subjective and objective realities and the impact of one on the other. The two are intertwined, so that Malone's subjective state, just as Jester's, Sherman Pew's and Judge Clane's, affects his perception of external reality. At one point we are told that "The subjectivity of illness was so acute that Malone responded violently to whole areas of the most placid and objective concepts" (p. 59). The implication is that if Malone can come to grips with the central problem in his subjective world—his own death—his perception of external reality will sharpen and he will have a positive impact on the social world of the novel.

Events later in the novel demonstrate the truth of this proposition. Malone has a remission and enters the hospital. While there he picks up a copy of Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death*, and one passage he reads directs him toward a reexamination of his life. He repeats these lines to himself: "The greatest danger, that of losing one's own self, may pass off quietly as if it were nothing; every other loss, that of an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc., is sure to be noticed" (p. 147). Like Ivan Ilych, the central character in Tolstoy's story, he recalls how his sense of identity has passed away as he slipped into a career, married, and performed as society expected him to. He realizes that "he had not lost an arm, or a leg, or any
particular five dollars, but little by little he had lost his own self" (p. 149). Ironically, his approaching death and his new realization derived from Kierkegaard's philosophy lead him to a new sense of the value of his "livingness."

The philosopher's words ring in his mind "like the brassy clamor of the city clock," and Malone moves toward a new perspective not just of life but of time as well (p. 157). After a trip to Johns Hopkins for another diagnosis, he takes his watch to Herman Klein, the town jeweler, complaining that it is losing two minutes per week. His concern with time has become an obsession, for he is beginning to understand the relationship of time to self and the importance of each minute of his life that he let slip by him by not asserting his own identity.

With these changes in his personality, Malone increasingly becomes not just an observer but the moral consciousness of the novel. His new role and its relationship to social reality become apparent in Chapter Twelve, at which point both Malone and Jester are forced to deal with social issues. At the Judge's urging, a Klan-like meeting is called at the drugstore. Malone is uninterested but bows to the wishes of the man he has long idolized. Of those in attendance, only the druggist and the Judge's grandson are disapproving. Malone recalls "something unpleasant about each of the men he met that night" (p. 221).
These are his fellow townspeople, ordinary citizens like himself, about whom he used to think nothing at all. But now that he is achieving a new concern with his own self, he also is able to look at them with a morally discerning eye. He sees "the weaknesses of these ordinary people, their little uglinesses" (p. 222).

As the Judge incites them against the "coal-black niggers moving in right next door" and the "nigger bucks" next to whom white wives will have to sit on the bus, a "fraternity of hate" develops among the men (p. 223). It is Malone who perceives, more than anyone else, what is happening. He expresses the moral condemnation the author intends, urging the men to "just talk with the Nigra" because "violence or bombing I don't hold with" (p. 223-4). Ultimately the responsibility falls on him, for he draws the lot of bombing Sherman's house. Because he has accepted responsibility for his own life and learned to value his existence, he is able to stand up to the crowd and make the choice to refuse to take the life of another. He will not sin or "endanger my soul" (p. 225).

With this sense of the importance of the individual, he is also able to argue against the suggestion that the crowd act together. The Judge says, "if we do it, I think we ought to do it all together, because then it's not the same thing" (p. 225). Malone recognizes that responsibility cannot so easily be shirked, that, as Kierkegaard states in
another of his works, the crowd is the untruth because it submerges individual responsibility. Malone, who, as his name suggests, learns to stand alone, cries out: "But it is the same thing. Whether one person does it or a dozen, it's the same thing if it's murder" (p. 225). It is a moral stance that draws the scorn of those assembled, except for Jester, who "never thought old Mr. Malone had it in him" (p. 225).

Thus for Malone, as for Jester, the subjective and objective worlds converge. The Judge's son grows out of his illusion-ridden childhood world of passion into the objective world of social consciousness, moral responsibility, and compassion. He brings the best of the subjective world to bear on the social issues that envelop him and achieves a synthesis of the sort denied to Mick Kelly and Frances Addams. Malone, in his death, is similar. He too achieves a synthesis of individuality and social concern, as his actions during the drugstore meeting demonstrate.

Ultimately, he experiences a transcendent moment when the world of things and the world of the soul are united. Though he is scorned by the townspeople for his stand against the bombing, he can look about him at nature and feel that "it was part of himself" (p. 236). He also feels

a renewed love for his wife. Finally, with the Judge's garbled recitation of the Gettysburg address blaring over the radio and the Supreme Court desegregation decision now a matter of law, Malone dies. And his death is a victory, for in that moment he achieves a wisdom and sense of unity and the design of life that for Jester, flying high above the ground, can only be a dangerous illusion. In Malone's death, "living assumed order" and "The design alone emerged" (p. 241).

These four characters—Judge Clane, Sherman Pew, Jester, and Malone—are carefully paralleled and contrasted. The two older men, one an aristocratic and conservative activist, the other a retiring and self-absorbed small businessman, are both confronted with the problem of facing time, change, and death. The one who achieves self-knowledge, who reaches within himself and beyond the illusions and rhetoric, is the one who, finally, is able to take a moral stand in the social world of the novel. Likewise, the two boys, one a grandson and the other the surrogate son of the Judge, are contrasted. Sherman Pew continues to cling to his illusions, fails to come to terms with the truth about his own family, and finally allows himself to be destroyed, while Jester, because he comes to an understanding of himself and his family background, frees himself from his world of illusions and also makes a moral decision that governs his relation to others. Both Malone and Jester, in refusing
to participate in murder, affirm the value of human life in a society filled with hatred and bent on the negation of life.

The novel that these characters comprise is not entirely within any one literary tradition but deliberately spans the forms of both the romance and realistic novel in the author's attempt to wrestle with the problems posed by her perception of a dual reality. With its treatment of topical subjects such as desegregation, its characters who represent political and social ideologies, and its realistic setting, *Clock Without Hands* can not be accurately described as a sentimental or romantic example of the gothic romance. On the other hand, the more personal stories of Jester's initiation and Malone's death stand apart from social protest or narrowly mimetic writing. Instead, the author's aim is to unify elements of both traditions around the tension between subjective and objective worlds and her conviction that a synthesis of the two is necessary for moral insight.

Thus, despite its flaws, *Clock Without Hands* is worthy of study for what it tells us about the author's method. It should not be dismissed merely as "a well-intentioned embarrassment"¹⁵ but should instead be viewed in the context of McCullers' previous works. Not only does she

¹⁵ Edmonds, p. 30.
repeat the motifs and themes of her earlier novels, but she comes full circle in her canon by returning to the broad scope of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* and, by intricately paralleling and contrasting four characters and their confrontations with reality, attempts a resolution to the dilemma first posed in that novel. It is ironic, and unfortunate, that in portraying the transcendence of the "inner" world McCullers abandons the uncompromising critique of human nature that is the hallmark of her best work. For this reason, as well as because of her failing health and diminished powers of concentration, her last novel stands as an ambitious but finally unsuccessful effort.
CHAPTER VI

AN APPRAISAL

Having considered each of McCullers' novels, we can appreciate the significance of her early essay "Russian Realists and Southern Literature," in which she criticizes Southern novelists for failing to deal with moral and philosophical issues. She advocates moving beyond their "peculiar and intense realism" toward a literature that will rival the best nineteenth century Russian fiction. If moral and philosophical issues are confronted, she implies, the form of the novel will reflect this new concern. Just as the "moral and metaphysical explorations" of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy had a "catalytic" effect on their works, so too will the philosophical and moral probings of Southern writers affect the "tone and structure" of their novels.¹

Her own fiction provides examples of how the form of a novel responds to the thematic concerns of the author. The dualism of McCullers' vision, her continued exploration of the meeting ground between subjective and objective worlds, and her analysis of man's inability to transcend the limits of his selfhood to achieve a sense of community

¹*The Mortgaged Heart*, pp. 252, 256-7, 258.
and brotherly love necessitate the use of elements of both the romance and the realistic novel. In portraying the subjective world she turns to the romance; the dreams, illusions, and distortions of such self-absorbed characters as Singer, Captain Penderton, Private Williams, Amelia Evans, Cousin Lymon, Frankie Addams, Judge Clane, and Sherman Pew have, as Hawthorne would say, "a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead than with any portion of the actual soil." But McCullers does not lose herself in these clouds. Like Jester Clane, she returns to earth to juxtapose the subjective worlds of these characters with historical events and social issues. Thus, though parts of her works are similar to the romance as Richard Chase defines the term—they tend toward melodrama and display the underside of consciousness—she cannot be called simply a romancer. In fact, she criticizes those characters who fail to accommodate themselves to reality and instead hold up the positive examples of Mick Kelly and Jester Clane, who assume social responsibility. The world with which these two characters come to terms is the province of the realistic novel, which traditionally is concerned with the details of normative life and with social and moral issues. And this world is given equal prominence in McCullers' novels.

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Critics notice this duality of form but often conclude that it results from McCullers' lack of control over her material. According to this view, she is not a writer able to deal with social or intellectual issues; instead, she is most successful in creating haunting portraits of lonely and bizarre people. Any realistic elements are dismissed as intrusions that are unintended or at least poorly handled. The assumption seems to be that elements of the romance and the realistic novel do not coexist comfortably in the same work, and that certainly McCullers' novels are most successful when they are confined to one traditional form.

There are flaws in this approach to her fiction. In the first place, definitions of literary forms should be used only with great caution as yardsticks for judging the success of an individual work. A novel is not necessarily weakened because it does not fit squarely within one category. After all, discussions of the American romance tradition, like Aristotle's analysis of tragedy, are descriptions, not prescriptions. Great works of prose fiction have spanned diverse elements, bringing together widely different forms. Furthermore, it is condescending to dismiss as accidental consistent elements in an author's work and to fail to recognize intellectual ambitions and influences.

No doubt McCullers' popular image as a withdrawn and emotional person contributes toward the tendency to
recognize only one dimension in her art. Perhaps sex-role stereotyping, especially the image of the Southern woman, is also a factor. Something of this sort of bias seems to underlie at least some of the adverse criticism of her writing. For example, Robert Brustein, in reviewing Edward Albee's stage version of The Ballad of the Sad Café, remarks: "Miss McCullers' Gothic stories were modish twenty years ago, but since they were so obviously written for female readers, they eventually found their proper level among the pages of Vogue and Harper's Bazaar. For beneath the bizarre costuming, Miss McCullers wears the girdle of the genteel lady novelist—Charlotte Bronte gone sour on too many chitlins and grits."³

The vitriol of Brustein's comments is unusual among critics, and in fact McCullers' work, with the exception of her last play and novel, has found much critical acclaim. But praise too can be damaging—one need only consider the effect of Jane Austen's admirers on her reputation—and the tendency to stress McCullers' supposed romanticism, sentimentality, compassion, and gothicism to the exclusion of other elements in her writing is misleading. One effect is the slighting of her intellectual concerns; another is the complaint that the range of her

novels is too narrow. It is suggested that she withdrew further and further from society and from outside interests and as a result had to return over and over to the same story. Richard Cook makes this point in his generally favorable assessment of McCullers' oeuvre. "Her fiction does not grow out of a broadening intellectual inquiry into new areas of thought and experience," according to Cook.\(^4\)

The success of her novels rests on "the terrors and the pathos of man alone," and this theme "circles further and further inward, leading less and less to concerns beyond itself—a solipsistic pattern that may eventually have strangled her art."\(^5\)

It is clear from our previous discussion, however, that McCullers kept pace with changes in American society and continued to explore social and intellectual issues from her early work with its 1930's setting through the war years and into the 1950's. Only after her health declined markedly did she necessarily withdraw, and only under the burden of her physical condition did her writing lose its fine edge and her control over her material diminish. It is true that, like Henry James and William Faulkner, she does return to familiar issues in novel after novel; but these themes are significant and deserving of elaboration,


\(^5\)Ibid., p. 124.
and each novel provides a variation on what has come before.

We have seen this process of development and amplification. In *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, the dualism is first introduced through the character of Mick Kelly, the central figure, whose story of initiation from subjective to objective world unifies the novel and sets the keynote for the following works. In *Reflections in a Golden Eye* these two realities are evident in the conflict between the rigid and repressed army post and the wild, instinctive forest. Here the central theme takes on Freudian and Lawrentian overtones and finds expression through an examination of the failure of romantic love. *The Ballad of the Sad Café* continues McCullers' analysis of the shortcomings of romantic love, but she alters her style and presents not a brooding story of perversion and voyeurism but an ironic comment on the narrator's own inability to recognize the possibility of a brotherly love such as that portrayed in the "Twelve Mortal Men" coda. Then in *The Member of the Wedding* she brings together the critique of romantic attraction with Frankie's Addams' ironic search for community, and through this mock initiation story McCullers conveys her grimmest appraisal of man's limitations. The last novel is an even more ambitious effort to consolidate the variations on her theme. She returns to the broad canvas of her first novel and portrays two contrasting initiation
stories—one successful and the other not, one ending in the rejection of violence and the other in brutal tragedy—set against the background of race relations and changing attitudes in the contemporary South.

On the first four of these novels, those published before her major stroke in 1947, her reputation must rest. Taken together they are a significant canon, each an important work, each written before the author's thirtieth birthday. Two of them, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, are remarkable achievements of lasting value. On the basis of this slender but impressive achievement, McCullers must certainly be recognized as a writer of skill, intellect, and ambition whose works at their best exhibit the author's firm control over her material and her ability to achieve the difficult synthesis of the romance and the realistic novel traditions. Through this union she forged a trenchant analysis of social ills and their root cause in man's failure to transcend, whether by love or social activism, the "inner room" of his subjective world.
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