

CARSON MCCULLERS AND MODERNISM

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctorate of Philosophy in English

Middle Tennessee State University

December 2016

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This dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Kalpana Gowda, whose expertise and enduring support sustained me through my personal and doctoral degree journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following people contributed, in numerous ways, to the creation of this dissertation, and I wish to thank them from the depth of my heart:

Dr. Will Brantley, my dissertation director, who first gave me the opportunity to learn about Carson McCullers and encouraged and helped me throughout my time in the MTSU doctoral program. Thank you for your enthusiasm about Modern American literature and also for guiding me in my Film Studies specialization.

Dr. Allen Hibbard and Dr. Mischa Renfroe, my readers, who not only spent hours reading drafts of this dissertation but also taught me about modernism and postmodernism, the history of the American novel, and nineteenth-century American literature. I am indebted to you for the knowledge you imparted to me.

Dr. Rhonda McDaniel, my advisor, who spent much time helping me navigate the doctoral program and listening to my worries and concerns. Thank you for your patience and advice and for sharing your garden vegetables and tomato plants.

Bev and Bob Scherdin, who encouraged me along the way, watched over my husband in my absence, and helped me see the humor during trying times.

My sister, Cheryl Lamoureux; her husband, Dr. Ed Lamoureux; and their children, who graciously accepted me into their home so that I could rest, relax, and enjoy family time. I began researching for this dissertation in their living room and ended writing much of it at their dining room table. I love and am indebted to you all.

My sister in Idaho, Patty Tassinari, who kept up my spirits by sending me funny emails and relating hilarious stories over the telephone. I am grateful for your love and sense of humor.

Finally, my husband Steve Recio, my biggest cheerleader, who, for four years, sacrificed by having me live away from home so that I could pursue my dream of earning my doctorate. For your constant love and support, I am eternally grateful.

ABSTRACT

To read Carson McCullers solely through the lenses of autobiography, Southern regionalism, or the Gothic—as many scholars and critics have done in the past—is to neglect her artistry as a writer who also scrutinized and worked within the aesthetics and thematics of American modernism. McCullers presented the complexities of modernity itself: the desire to make meaning in an impersonal society; the sense that institutions of the past no longer function in the present; the questioning of a larger purpose when "truth" itself seems artificially constructed; and the need to erase the distance between the self and "other" because "othering" produces racial and ethnic discrimination, particularly in the American South where McCullers was born and bred.

This dissertation thus examines McCullers's modernist aesthetics and themes, beginning with her use of experimentation, specifically the ways in which she utilizes and manipulates musical forms to structure her fictions. I investigate McCullers's two most frequently recurring themes, isolation and alienation: isolation as a form of sequestration, and alienation in both its conscious and unconscious dimensions. With a focus on adolescent angst, motherhood, and nurture, I examine the quests for identity that mark the author's fictional landscapes. Finally, I explore her attempts to erase the boundaries that define racial and social "others." I thereby reveal the ways in which McCullers addressed the sociopolitical issues of her day, including racism, anti-Semitism, and the economic disparities in her native South.

Carson McCullers's found ways to expand upon the modernist preoccupations of other early to mid twentieth-century writers, including friend and sometime housemate W. H. Auden. This dissertation therefore asserts that, autobiographical elements and a narrow scope of themes notwithstanding, McCullers deserves a place in the literary canon of major writers who, with great artistry, dared to address the social, moral, and ideological problems of racism, classism, and economic disfranchisement that plagued the United States during its modern era.

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INTRODUCTION

Much debate surrounds the term “Modernism.” To some, it signifies a particular artistic aesthetic, one that employs abstractions and experimentation that go beyond literal, realistic presentations. Others use Modernism as a marker to explain what Postmodernism is not: if not the antithesis of Postmodern thought and art, then surely a measure of contrariety between two eras. Even the dates of Modernism provoke debate. Perhaps the period represents the cultural and historical time that occurred from the late-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, or maybe it began in 1913—the year of the Armory Show in New York in which abstract, shocking, never-before-seen visual works by European and American artists were unveiled—and ended right after World War II. Some argue that the Modern period began in 1914 with the onset of the Great War in Europe and ended when the Cold War took hold of the world in the 1950s. Scholars do not agree upon a universal definition of and conclusive dates for Modernism. However, Modernist artists and writers did employ a visionary style that, if it cannot be termed a “tradition,” can be classified as an aesthetic, a principle of design devoted to the exploration of life’s meaning at a particular period in history.

Carson McCullers, the female author from the American South, was born into this Modern period in 1917; she wrote her novels, short stories, plays, and poetry within this era and died in 1967, after this artistic tradition was purportedly over. Controversy surrounds McCullers and her literary achievements. She has been labeled a Southern Gothic writer, a writer of adolescent literature, or a minor author

who wrote on limited themes of loneliness and isolation. In *Wunderkind: The Reputation of Carson McCullers, 1940-1990*, Judith Giblin James observes that McCullers's works were published during the heyday of the literary methodology known as New Criticism, and she asserts that the academy's proclivity for formalist aesthetics at that time centered almost solely on the symbolic and allegorical devices in her writings to the neglect of the larger moral, sociopolitical, and ideological scope of McCullers's creations. Once New Critical scholars had plumbed the depths of her symbolism, interest in her works and subsequent scholarship waned for a decade or more. Moreover, many critics minimized her artistry by concentrating too narrowly on the autobiographical elements in her literature. For instance, in her discussion of the dying J. T. Malone character in *Clock Without Hands*, Margaret B. McDowell asserts that "McCullers records his experience with the validity that only an author who has adjusted, through various stages of resentment and despair, to suffering, disability, and early death could achieve" (*Carson McCullers* 25), as if McCullers's imagination and talent could not be enough to create such a poignant fictional character. A number of scholars, including Louis B. Rubin in *A Gallery of Southerners*, argue that *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Member of the Wedding* fall into the category of adolescent literature and that "the way in which her work can speak to the young reader is not susceptible to very much critical analysis" (Rubin 139). As such, critics have tended to judge McCullers a minor figure in the American literary canon: a regional, Southern Gothic author who (over)uses autobiography and focuses too narrowly on one or two leitmotifs.

To read McCullers's works solely through the lenses of autobiography, regionalism, or the Gothic is to neglect her artistry as a writer who also worked within, scrutinized, and revealed the aesthetics of American Modernism. In doing so, she presented the complexities of modernity itself: the desire to make meaning in a cold, industrialized society; the isolation and alienation that come from knowing that institutions of the past, like religion and education, which once provided "Truth," no longer function in the present; the questioning of a larger purpose when truth seems no longer to exist; the search for authentic identity; and the need to erase the distance between the self and the "Other."

With feminist, queer and cultural studies, race theory, and New Historicism, McCullers scholarship has taken new and welcome directions but has still failed to address how the author fits within and represents the Modernist period. This dissertation will argue that McCullers's fiction typifies the American Modernist tradition because her works, including her final novel published in 1961, are exemplars of Modernist aesthetics and themes put forth by great writers of that literary era, including her friend and sometime housemate W. H. Auden. It will be shown that, autobiographical elements and a "narrow" scope of themes notwithstanding, McCullers deserves to be placed in the literary canon as a writer who, with great skill and originality, dared address the social, moral, and ideological problems of racism, classism, and economic disfranchisement that plagued, and still afflicts, the United States.

Historical markers that define the beginning and end of Modernism vary depending on the scholarly discussion at hand. Mia Carter and Alan Warren Friedman contend that dates range from the Industrial Revolution in the mid-1800s to the Suffragette Movement, but they also argue that scientific concepts like Darwin's theory of evolution and "philosophical declarations, like Friedrich Nietzsche's 'God is dead' have also been deemed clarions of modernity" (1). In their reader, *Modernism and Literature*, which discusses European, American, and global modernisms, Carter and Friedman select 1870—the year the Franco-Prussian war started—as the beginning of the Modern era, and 1941 as the end of the period. However, in *The Modern American Novel*, Malcolm Bradbury argues that the beginning of true Modernism occurred in 1913, when the Armory Show "brought the American public face to face, for the first time, with the experimental movements in painting that had been developing in Europe in the century's first decade, since Impressionism" (51). Richard Gray in *A History of the American Novel* and Walter Kalaidjian, editor of *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism*, assert that the Great Exhibition of 1900 in Paris, which showcased scientific, mechanical, artistic, and other technologies from the late nineteenth century, seemed to define "the modern age" (Kalaidjian 1). Still others believe the Great War of 1914-1918 launched modernity and Modernism. For the purposes of this dissertation, the Armory Show of 1913 will signify the cultural and artistic transitions from Classicism and Romanticism to Modernism, while World War I will denote the historical impetus that launched the Western world into modernity and

shaped much of the philosophical and metaphysical considerations that emerged within the Modernist aesthetic.

In cultural terms, the 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art in New York, also known as the Armory Show, ushered in unfamiliar and experimental techniques in art and sculpture; it presented works not only from European artists but also from groundbreaking painters from the United States who rebelled against Victorian gentility and restraint to create bold, realistic paintings. The American public was exposed to two seemingly oppositional styles of Modern Art: the European Impressionist and Post-Impressionist movements, such as Cubism, German Expressionism, Symbolism, and other avant-garde art, and American naturalist works by Joseph Stella and realist paintings by Edward Hopper as well as those artists of the later-labeled Ashcan School, who concentrated on creating realistic art that depicted the poor and working-classes and the rougher side of New York. A number of critics and the press found the exhibition scandalous, even senseless, while others celebrated the artists' potency, energy, and originality. Up to that point, no art exhibit proved to be as revolutionary and innovative as the Armory Show. So why, at that particular time, did so many artists in the West create this fresh but unusual art? What prompted them to shatter the artistic aesthetics that had predominated in the art world up to that point?

Such a drastic change did not occur instantaneously. This transformation most certainly was influenced not only by a progression and expansion of cultural and societal beliefs and mores but also political and military developments

worldwide. In cultural terms, the ideology of the perfection of man through reason prevailed in eighteenth-century Europe and America as an alternative to faith-based traditions and superstitions from earlier centuries. Progress through individualism superseded the idea that standards were dictated solely from above (i.e., the Church), although the belief in monarchies and the divine right of kings still prevailed in Europe. Historian Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius defines this philosophy of liberalism in terms of progress:

Liberalism . . . identified its ideas and its prescriptions with the promise of progress. Also called 'classical liberalism,' this ideology had its origins in the Enlightenment thought of the 18th century, and [was] strongly represented in the European middle classes, who not coincidentally identified themselves with the very progress of the enlightened and of liberalism. Classical liberalism can be summed up as a faith in personal freedom and individualism bringing progress.

(World War I 1: 43)

More importantly, though, this growing middle class set the standards for behavior, etiquette, and the arts. As Hickok observes, "'Good taste' was the standard of the fashionable world. Taste reflected reason and reason opposed extravagance; the artist's objective was the unemotional rendering of nature's appearance" (Hickok 158). Mimesis characterized the great ideal of eighteenth-century artists, and they reproduced the poetic reality of the past, particularly of ancient Greece and Rome. This Classicism meant that "[s]pontaneity and frank expression of feelings were

frowned upon in polite society” (224). For example, a great poet was expected to study and master Greek and Latin as well as compose pastoral poems, odes, and epics modeled on those created by the Greeks and Romans. Moreover, it was believed that man controlled all things, even nature; thus, order, symmetry, and uniformity prevailed as the guiding aesthetic—for instance, in the construction of gardens where, rather than allow flowers and trees to grow naturally, human hands sculpted topiaries and trimmed lawns and blossoms. This philosophy of beauty reflected what people believed to be man’s natural propensity towards reason and order, and, as such, aesthetic standards engendered prescribed, systematic, and predictable, albeit beautiful, works of art, sculpture, architecture, and poetry.

The political revolutions in France and America ushered in the Romantic era of the nineteenth century, wherein philosophical concerns transitioned from the ideal of man’s reason to science, new technologies, and an altered vision of beauty. Politically, the Romantics were inspired by the revolutions in France and America that abolished monarchies in favor of democracies. In social and economic terms, the middle class continued to grow, but the poor and working classes remained in dismal poverty. However, as their plight became known to the middle and upper classes, the emphasis on individualism shifted to include society as a whole. Communal concerns, coupled with the desire for innovative scientific and mechanical discoveries, produced conditions in which a few social reforms were enacted, such as improved sanitation, housing, and education for the lower classes. These events, along with the evolution of cultural and philosophical thought,

naturally influenced the arts. Unlike the Classicists, the Romantics favored improvisation over mimesis, imagination over exact representation, and uncontrolled nature versus nature shaped by the hands of man. Thus, they improvised on traditional forms while still maintaining their essential structures. These new aesthetic standards generated fresh but still recognizable art, music, literature, and architecture.

By the latter part of the nineteenth century in Europe, a number of artists and composers began to feel restless with the composed, rather benign paintings, sculpture, and music that typified the Romantic and Victorian eras, and, like their predecessors, they began to defy these artistic standards. Rather than uphold traditional values of beauty, they challenged them, which allowed for innovation and greater freedom of expression. In the realm of music, dissonance and revolutionary rhythms began to supplant the melodic, measured cadences of Classicism and the rich, emotional depths of Romanticism. For example, Erik Satie's *Gymnopedie No. 1* (1897), despite its seemingly melodious musical structures, ends on a minor rather than a major chord, which creates the feeling of the piece being unfinished. And Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (1913), a musical work bursting with nontraditional rhythms and discordant motifs, was met with howls of disdain from the public and critics and caused a near riot when it debuted in Paris in 1913. In the visual arts, such paintings as Marcel Duchamp's cubist/futurist *Nude Descending a Staircase* and Henri Matisse's *Blue Nude* both shocked and delighted audiences and critics at the Armory Show in 1913. Yet, when the Metropolitan Museum of Art purchased a

Modernist Paul Cezanne painting from that exhibition, it became clear that Modernism in art and music was here to stay.

In the United States, the beginnings of the artistic vision of Modernism concerned the swiftness with which Western culture was changing, especially technologically. The Industrial Revolution created the need for more workers in factories; therefore, populations shifted from rural to urban areas. Faster, more efficient mechanical apparatuses increased the pace in which goods were manufactured, and locomotives, automobiles, and telephones improved the speed by which people could travel and communicate. Society itself seemed to speed up after each new invention or discovery, and people equated the latest technologies with progress and the advancement of humankind. The Gilded Age in America (1865-1900) saw “the emergence of industrial titans, such men as Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and J. P. Morgan. Many Americans celebrated them as ‘self-made men’ and ‘captains of industry’ whose genius was guiding the United States to greatness” (O’Donnell 1). But with these technological and cultural advancements came unanticipated problems such as overpopulation in cities and mounting unemployment as new mechanical devices in factories replaced human workers. Thus, growing poverty among the working classes became the norm. Conflicts between businesses and labor escalated as anxiety increased over the ever-growing wealth and influence of corporations via laissez-faire government and as the gap between the rich and poor widened. Historian Edward T. O’Donnell asserts that, during this period,

the ideal of the self-made man was presented in nothing but positive and optimistic terms. Anyone living in this great society can overcome adversity and achieve success. But some Americans took the ideal to its furthest extreme, embracing a concept known as *social Darwinism* . . . [which was used] to justify economic exploitation and inequality. . . . No amount of utopian theory, enlightened social policy, or Christian charity could alter this fact. (38-39)

Those who embraced social Darwinism believed the rich deserved to be rich and the poor to remain poor because it was the law of Nature. Liulevicius declares, “Such a doctrine would also give support to new, modern varieties of racism. This was not the sort of ethnic animosity that is unfortunately universal in human experience, but rather, a supposedly ‘scientific’ racism, which would rank mankind into a hierarchy of unequal races” (*Utopia and Terror* 1: 36). This ideology contributed significantly to the burgeoning class, ethnic, and racial stratifications that occurred at that time and still pose problems in the world today.

By 1900, social reformers worked to change the direction of the country because of its growing wealth disparities and the corruption endemic in that age of big business, robber barons, and laissez-faire economics. This cultural transition—the Progressive Era—aimed “to rein in the power of big business, alleviate poverty, improve public health, make the democratic process more honest and fair, provide greater opportunity for average citizens to improve their lives, and preserve the environment” (O’Donnell 8). In the world of art, the Ashcan artists rebelled against

the dominant genteel artistic traditions and aimed to reveal the underbelly of this supposed American progress. They focused on the darker, harsher side of urbanization, especially in the slums of New York, creating dark, unflinching paintings that exposed the tremendous poverty of the lower classes. Such visual art represented an astonishing divergence from the Romantic and Impressionist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Additionally, muckraking journalists, such as Upton Sinclair and others, sought to expose government and corporate corruption, while Naturalism in literature came to the fore during this time, focusing on the unsavory, contradictory, and discordant nature of humankind. Scholar Donna Campbell characterizes American Naturalism:

Works of naturalism pictured a deterministic universe in which life at the margins of society was reduced to the basic imperatives of food, clothing, and shelter; within this environment, human beings displayed the full panoply of primitive desires and emotions, among them sexual desire, greed, jealousy, and rage. In doing so, naturalism mirrored and unmasked the era's anxieties about the effects of urban life and industrialization, among them the threatened dissolution of the self and the sense of anomie inflicted by the modern city; the precarious physical and social position of those at the bottom of the social scale; the brutish, sometimes violent behavior of people in the grip of elemental emotions; the mingling of blood and ethnic 'races' as defined by the philosophically inconsistent yet tendentiously held

scientific theories of the day; and the fragility of a sense of personal autonomy, free will, and agency in a world seemingly governed by the forces of heredity and environment. (161)

This literary style pointed to man's inhumanity to man and assumed that one's fate was in the hands of Nature that proved indifferent, even hostile, to one's needs or desires. It also based itself on the ideology of social Darwinism. For example, Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* exposes the brutality, alcohol abuse, horrific poverty, and hopelessness of the Bowery area of New York. Frank Norris's *McTeague* reveals the violence, ethnic strife, and greed among the lower classes of San Francisco; Norris's main character, in fact, is written as if he were merely a beast, not a human being. And Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* lays bare the myth of the American Dream of wealth and happiness for those willing to work hard enough to climb the social ladder and achieve their aspirations. As Bradbury writes, "The new naturalism, strong in America, was factual, reportorial, socially aware; the new Post-Impressionism from Europe represented a challenge to realism, an anarchic vitalism, an image of the modern as displacement in perception, a breaking up of forms" (52). Clearly, artists, composers, and writers created works that "respon[ded] to the crisis of modernity" (161) rather than producing works of art for art's sake, as was done in the Romantic era.

Modernism must be understood in terms of the social and cultural apprehensions produced by modernity itself. The old maxim, the arts reflect the *zeitgeist* of society, could not be truer when it comes to the swiftly changing social

beliefs and traditions previously discussed, as well as the political and military policies that took place during late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Europe. The massive empires of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire (present-day Turkey), along with Great Britain and France, controlled much of Europe, Asia, and Africa. This was the age of imperialism, when Western nations raced to colonize territories throughout Africa, Asia, and the Middle East in order to consolidate power and bring resources and riches to the imperial homelands. However, these grasps for wealth and power generated suspicion between the empires. Nowhere was this more evident than in the control of the sea, the transport portal for resources to the colonizing nations and the only protection for the island nation of Great Britain. Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century, Great Britain chose to maintain “Splendid Isolation” (Massie xxv), in which it remained separate from the political affairs of the rest of Europe. Britain would intervene only if the balance of power in Europe were threatened (Liulevicius, *World War I* 1: 27). By the early twentieth century, Britain accurately claimed to be master of the sea; however, the German empire, too, had been building ships—merchant boats for supplies and dreadnoughts for battle—to keep in step with England’s shipbuilding. As Great Britain built ships, so did Germany, a political and economic situation that generated ever-increasing tension between these two nations as well as the whole of Europe. Further, Germany intensified its production of armaments to effectively become one of the most militarily powerful nations in the world. Historian Robert K. Massie proclaims, “Now, as Britain began to fear the

German Fleet, it feared also that the greatest military power in Europe would not aspire to become a great naval power unless it wished to dominate the world” (xxv). The German Empire’s expanded warship and arms manufacturing noticeably threatened this fragile balance of power that had predominated in European politics for centuries, a concept which meant that “whenever a contender for hegemonic power arises, all other powers will unite in coalitions to resist such a hegemon” (Liulevicius, *World War I* 1: 34). But the continued rise of militarism in Germany and Austria-Hungary began tipping this tenuous balance in their favor.

Additionally, by the beginning of the twentieth century, international anxieties had grown with the escalation of anarchism and political violence. Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, the Director of the Center for the Study of War and Society at the University of Tennessee, declares that “[i]n quick succession, there was the assassination of an Austrian empress, a Russian Tsar, the American president, the kings of Italy, Serbia and Portugal, the prime ministers of Spain and Russia, and the president of France” (*Utopia and Terror* 1: 51). Moreover, imperialist nations used oppressive violence and terror to control their colonial populations. For example, rather than being used for warfare, the machine gun actually was refined as a means to subjugate and terrorize the natives of colonized territories. Imperialists believed the machine gun was

only fit for use out in the colonies and in imperial warfare for the slaughter of masses of natives, as indeed had been the case, for instance, in the destructive battle of Omdurman in the Sudan in 1898,

when a small British force had wiped out a far larger Sudanese army in spite of its ferocious and heroic attacks. (Liulevicius, *World War I* 1: 230-231)

Aerial balloons and the newly invented airplane, too, were used “in colonial warfare against non-western peoples” (1: 243). Previously considered to be utilized for moral ends and the advancement of humankind, technology became a means by which increased violence and brutality were used against ordinary people.

The propagation of socialism and nationalism throughout the West, particularly in Germany, gave rise to increased tensions, for at the locus of nineteenth-century socialist thought lay the ideal of class struggle and violent conflict that purportedly would lead to economic and social revolution. The intensification of nationalism, as well as ethnic strife throughout Europe, particularly in the Balkans, contributed to the heightened suspicions within countries and between empires, resulting in numerous agreements and secret treaties between nation-states that “guaranteed” protection if attacked. Thus, the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy pitted itself against the Triple Entente of Great Britain, France, and Russia.

The arts naturally reflected such cultural, political, and military unrest as demonstrated in the deconstructed visions of beauty on display at the 1913 Armory Show, in the beginnings of atonality in the music of that time, and in literary Naturalism. The two-dimensionality and fractured forms of Cubism, the distortions and skewed perspective of German Expressionism, the discordant intonation and

disruptive meters in music—coupled with the upsurge of nationalistic music by such composers as Smetana, Dvorak, and Wagner—exemplify the troubled political, economic, and cultural climate in Europe on the cusp of great change, where there existed the desire to buttress oneself within a national identity while, at the same time, feeling disconnected from that very nation-state because of ethnic, class, and economic disparities; the sense of disorientation in a rapidly changing world, one in which escalating violence and political uncertainty were becoming the norm; and the realization that science and new technologies did not necessarily promote human progress or peace.

The outbreak of the Great War in late summer of 1914 proceeded under the idea that the war “was about self-defense” of all parties involved (Liulevicius, *World War I* 1: 77). Therefore, a type of euphoria took hold of the populations of the warring nations, the terrible international tensions finally having been broken with the declarations of war and the implosion of treaties and secret agreements between nations. And social Darwinism contributed to this elation. Margaret MacMillan, Professor of International History at Oxford University, declares:

The late nineteenth century’s admiration of the military as the noblest part of the nation and the spread of military values into civilian societies fed the assumptions that war was a necessary part of the great struggle for survival, that it might be good for societies, tuning them up so to speak. (xxix)

In other words, many politicians and citizens alike believed a little bloodletting might be good for their countries and the world.

The realization of “total war,” however, soon replaced this exhilaration.

Liulevicius defines this concept:

‘Total War’ was a term that was coined and used during the war itself in an attempt to sum up what contemporaries felt was the all encompassing nature of this modern industrial conflict. This new kind of war demanded total mobilization of mass armies, economies, and societies in the hearts and minds of people in the war, not merely soldiers on the battlefield. In this sense, this was not merely a war determined by government cabinets and elites, but in a very real sense, a people’s war. (*World War I* 1: 12)

Total war meant marshaling nearly everyone and everything to fight the enemy. Because men volunteered—and were later conscripted—for combat, industries relied more and more on women to do the labor once done by their male counterparts. All industries turned towards the war effort, while farms and personal gardens produced foodstuffs for soldiers and citizens. Railroad timetables were crucial to the transport of soldiers and materiel to the fronts. Total war also included the proliferation of propaganda that demonized the opposing sides. The nations’ economies grew so that nearly all their resources were put towards the war effort.

Soon after the conflict began, however, it became clear that it would be a struggle of attrition rather than an outright victory for one side over the other. The Great War turned into “a drawn out industrial war” (*World War I* 1: 96) on a monumental scale. MacMillan declares, “Science and technology which had brought so much benefit to humankind in the nineteenth century also brought new and more dreadful weapons” (xxx), such as enormous cannons, tanks, and poison gas, yet military tactics did not evolve with the weaponry, a situation that caused death and mutilation on a scale never before seen. Historian Niall Ferguson provides terrible statistics in his book, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I*:

All told, the war claimed more than 9 million lives on both sides, more than one in every eight of the 65.8 million men who fought in it. In four and a quarter years of mechanized butchery, an average of around 6,046 men were killed every day. The total number of fatalities for the British empire as a whole was around 921,000. . . . More of a problem were those among the 15 million men wounded during the war who were permanently crippled. Of the 13 million German men who at one time or another ‘served’, as many as 2.7 million were permanently disabled by their wounds. . . . Over 41,000 British servicemen had limbs amputated as a result of the war. . . . In addition, there were those whom the war unhinged: 65,000 British ex-soldiers received disability pensions because of ‘neurasthenia’

[symptoms associated with what was then called “shell shock” and is now termed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]. (436-437)

And Ferguson’s statistics do not include the millions of citizens killed, injured, or displaced due to this great conflict.

World War I became the defining event of the early twentieth century, not only because it involved much of the world’s nations and territories but also because it tainted the attitudes and belief systems of so many of the peoples directly and indirectly involved in the conflict. In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell declares that the war began in innocence, where it “took place in what was, compared with ours, a static world; where the values appeared stable and where the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable” (21). That innocence was forever lost, and the war became “Great in another sense—all-encompassing, all-pervading, both internal and external at once, the essential condition of consciousness in the twentieth century” (321). Ferguson asserts that it “literally and metaphorically blew up the achievements of a century of economic advance” (438), and he provides, in excruciating detail, the terrible monetary and human costs of the war. Certainly, that conflict altered the geographical boundaries of the world, as all the empires, except Great Britain, collapsed either directly because of the war (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire) or indirectly through political revolution hastened by the war (Russia). Hew Strachan, the Chichele Professor of the History of War at Oxford University, rightly asserts that the war remains a “paradox” for us, even today: Strachan observes, “On the one hand it was

an unnecessary war fought in a manner that defied common sense, but on the other it was the war that shaped the world in which we still live” (xvii). For instance, despite the human cost of participating in the latter years of the war, the United States became a world power, economically and militarily, by manufacturing arms and materiel and loaning money to the allied countries. Soon, New York developed into the financial center of the world, a position once held by London, as European warring nations repaid their loans to the U.S. One could posit that America was the only “winner” of the war, at least economically and politically. Most importantly, though, the notions of humankind’s reason and rational thought, of progress through science and technology, and of the inherent dignity of human beings no longer seemed true or relevant in the post-war modern world. As MacMillan asserts, pre-war Europe believed in an improving universe, one that was moving in a positive direction, but post-war countries, especially in Europe, lost “faith” in this belief (640). This loss of faith in the principles and doctrines that had sustained European and American societies for centuries transformed those cultures and the arts that reflected them.

The magnitude of individual and collective suffering of soldiers and citizens during and after this conflagration facilitated the massive cultural and social changes spawned by the Great War. Liulevicius stresses that “the trenches were a crucial site of modernity and are imprinted on Western collective imagination” (*World War I* 1: 116). As the war deteriorated into a virtual stalemate, soldiers soon began to feel anonymous, from something as simple as a change in uniform. Where

once combatants dressed in bright colors to represent their national flags and differentiate themselves from their enemy, soldiers in World War I wore gray and khaki to blend in with the landscape and trenches. They became an agglomeration of men, indistinguishable from each other, which contributed to the loss of their sense of individuality and identity. Considering trench life—eating, resting, and sleeping in standing water much of the time; living among the decaying bodies of comrades; eating poor food; suffering from vermin, dysentery, trench foot, and frostbite; and experiencing the terror of prolonged artillery bombardments, the release of poison gas, and eventually “going over the top” to charge the enemy—it is no wonder so many soldiers felt debased in the face of such mass-mechanized death. Combatants on all sides felt like nameless cogs in the wheel of this industrialized conflict, mere cannon fodder to the officers and politicians directing the war, and their acute dehumanizing experiences translated to noticeable feelings of isolation as well as “[a] gap of experience [that] could lead to alienation from civilian life at home as well as authority” (*World War 1*: 124-125). The sense of isolation as well as alienation from others and the world would become two hallmarks of Modernist thematic concerns.

After the armistice was signed, the effects of war continued as “aftershocks” (Liulevicius, *Utopia and Terror* 1: 114), and these susceptibilities are linked to Modernist aesthetics. One of the most understandable and profound of these shocks concerned the search for an authentic identity in the face of intensifying dehumanization that was a byproduct of the war, in the cultural and social changes

men and women encountered after the conflict ended, and in the individual's struggle to find a place and purpose in a cold, industrialized, and virtually unrecognizable modern society. By the war's end, millions of soldiers and citizens were dead, maimed, and/or displaced from their homelands by the redrawing of national boundaries. Belief and trust in institutions like religion and the doctrines of rational thought and progress essentially disappeared in light of the devastation caused by total war. Many believed the war had been a pointless venture, causing only death, destruction, and grief; this sense of pointlessness produced a post-war malaise and the subsequent disavowal of a faith in ideals once strongly held.

Liulevicius asserts, "The question now arose: What principles would replace those that had been declared bankrupt and finished?" (*Utopia and Terror* 1: 115). If one's faith in humanity and progress was gone, what would replace it? Fussell elaborates on one writer's sentiments about people's loss of faith in truth and ideals:

'The parapet, the wire, and the mud,' [H. M.] Tomlinson posited in 1935, are now 'permanent features of human existence.' Which is to say that anxiety without end, without purpose, without reward, and without meaning is woven into the fabric of contemporary life. Where we find a 'parapet' we find an occasion for anxiety, self-testing, doubts about one's identity and value, and a fascinated love-loathing of the threatening, alien terrain on the other side. (320)

Without definitive principles by which to live, people faced the challenge of finding a true purpose for their lives. As men came home and returned to work, middle class

women, once essential employees in factories and on farms during the war, were forced back into the domestic sphere. Where once they had experienced the freedom of being employed outside the home and earning their own money, these women resumed—some willingly, some unwillingly—their former roles of daughters, wives, and mothers. Former soldiers came back only to find their societies quite changed: increasingly industrialized and indifferent to the human condition. Businesses continued to utilize those methods of efficiency once used for the war effort. This meant new and improved “systems” (e.g., assembly lines) that increased productivity but created the feeling that workers—many of them ex-soldiers—had become, once again, mere cogs in a wheel, but this time of the industrial complex rather than the military. This corporate culture required that employees increase their performance; as a result, workers felt further dehumanized and nameless. Additionally, most nations underwent tremendous economic hardship after the war, which meant recessions and depressions and escalating unemployment. Former soldiers oftentimes found themselves without work despite the fact they had fought for their country to maintain a progressive and humane society.

While World War I did not bring about the concept of “us versus them,” it certainly amplified it, and this binary opposition—the “Othering” of human beings—became a prominent attitude in the post-war modern world. Humans like to group items and peoples into categories, and one result of this tendency is to set hierarchies within our own species. Social Darwinism used pseudoscience to create

a pecking order, if you will, of superior and inferior peoples, with Caucasians positioned at the top of the order, and most people in the nineteenth and early- to mid-twentieth centuries equated nationality with race and ethnicity, referring to the Irish “race” or the Polish “race,” for example. Therefore, ethnic and racial stratification proved common, which caused strife in nations and territories throughout the world, particularly in the Balkans. When war broke out, governments capitalized on their citizens’ natural propensity towards racial classification by utilizing propaganda to demonize the opposing side. Newspapers, magazines, poetry, stories, posters, and even early films advanced the idea of atrocities perpetrated by the enemy. The Germans soon became known as barbarians and were referred to derogatively as Huns, less than human. Austria-Hungary and Germany also put forth their own propaganda, but it was not as successful as Allied propaganda. Once it became clear that the Central Powers had lost the war, an imagined argument soon began to circulate that “German propaganda had been a failure and that the Jewish and/or socialist press had systematically undermined German morale” (Ferguson 213), a component of the post-World War I German “stab-in-the-back” conspiracy theory that promulgated yet another form of “othering,” especially before World War II: anti-Semitism. Further, the American army maintained racial segregation between African Americans and whites throughout World War I. Ironically, President Wilson—a Southerner—promoted his Fourteen Points for Peace at the end of the war while supporting segregation within federal offices, the White House, and the military.

Some Modernist writers, McCullers included, would address the Other in their writings, exposing ethnic, racial, and class divisions that fomented prejudice as well as overt and covert discrimination within modern societies.

Perhaps the most significant feature of the Great War involves the “series of shocks of the new,” as Liulevicius terms it (*World War I* 1: 75). These shocks included:

- the failure of the German war plans, which forced Germany and its allies to fight on two fronts (1: 88-89), thus causing the swift deterioration into a conflict of attrition;
- the “farewell to chivalry” that soldiers experienced, wherein the noble aims and glory of war quickly disintegrated into feelings of despair and futility and where soldiers believed they were easily, even intentionally, expendable (1: 107);
- the recognition of shell shock as a medical condition rather than the shirking of one’s duty (1: 201);
- the use of shock troops, also known as storm troopers, a new form of assault soldier (1: 211) that was utilized even more fully during World War II;
- the “unrestricted use of submarine warfare” (1: 259) that eventually compelled the United States to enter the war;
- the change from submarine commanders warning merchant ships before being fired upon to ordering the sinking of ships without any prior warning (1: 268), an ignoble action that became all too commonplace;

- “the growth of the wartime state” (2: 11);
- the unfathomable loss of life due to mechanized weaponry and the use of poison gas, yet another shock of the new (1: 196-197);
- and “the first full-scale modern genocide”: the Armenians at the hands of the Turks in 1915, a form of “mass violence” (2: 90) that would be repeated in World War II and at other times in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Sadly, such shocks soon became the norm, forever changing not only the “art” of war but also culture. This resulted in the desire of many artists and writers also to shock, to make something new rather than create works that reflected the past. The impulse for experimentation in literature would prove to be one of the most significant aesthetics of Modernism.

While this dissertation asserts that World War I thrust the world into twentieth-century modernity and cultural Modernism, other societal and historical events also shaped the aesthetics by which Modernist artists created their works. Shocks and cultural stresses continued after the war ended, including the growth of labor unions and the subsequent agitation between companies and laborers, oftentimes associated with the rise (and fear) of Communism, wherein thousands of political left-leaning people were vilified, jailed, or killed; the passage of the Volstead Act—the Eighteenth Amendment—prohibiting the production, sale, and consumption of alcohol, which spawned mass disobedience and a growing criminal underworld; the rise of Stalinism in the U.S.S.R., which increased world tensions and the fear of the spread of Communism; the Great Depression of the 1930s, wherein

millions worldwide were unemployed, thus augmenting the loss of faith in institutions and government already severely challenged by the war; and the upsurge of fascism in Spain, Italy, and Germany, which further intensified political anxieties, especially in those nations allied against the German Empire in World War I, and which finally led to the Second World War, yet another crisis that accentuated the anonymity of humans and their expendability in a cruel, impersonal, and immoral universe. These crises, among others, characterize the Modernist aesthetics and themes discussed in this dissertation: personal isolation, alienation, and the struggle to discover an authentic identity and purpose in a modern world gone awry with mass violence, genocide, and increasing anonymity; the “othering” of groups of peoples; and the “shock of the new” that both wars produced and that so greatly influenced the experimentation associated with Modernist writers.

If, as it has been argued here, the Modernist era began culturally with the Armory Show of 1913 and historically with World War I, when did it end? A number of scholars believe it concluded in 1939, when the world was on the brink of war, while others argue it ended when World War II concluded and the Cold War began. Still others argue that it never ended, for even in the twenty-first century, people still feel isolated and alienated, racism and ethnic strife continue to plague the world, and individuals struggle to find their true identity and place in a globalized world. David Perkins, in *A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to Pound, Eliot, & Yeats*, asserts that the mode of High Modernism “seemed almost unshakeable” until after World War II. Although Perkins specifically addresses

poetry, his assessment proves true for prose as well. He writes, “What is called here the ‘high Modernist mode’ is really a synthesis of diverse types of poetry that had gradually been created and made available as resources or models in writing during the thirty years between 1890 and 1920” (1: 449). In his second volume on Modernist poetry, *A History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After*, Perkins proffers a number of influences for High Modernism that also inspired Modernist prose writers. These include “the formalism, impressionism, and Dandyism of the London avant-garde of the 1890s”; the writings of Henry James, Gustave Flaubert, James Joyce, and Walt Whitman; schools of Modern painting, including Cubism; Freud and Jung, with their studies of the unconscious, dreams, archetypes, and the collective unconscious; Eisenstein’s theory of cinematic montage; and “the Wagnerian leitmotif”; among others (2: 35-36). The same types of sources influenced prose writers and dramatists of this period, such as Gertrude Stein, Jean Toomer, and Eugene O’Neill. But this period did not last indefinitely, and Perkins writes that High Modernism seemed “to erode . . . as a combination of values for practicing poets: by the later 1950s a ‘post-Modernist’ poetry was becoming more widespread” (1: 449). Most agree that the High Modernists—T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Faulkner, et al—produced their best works before the Second World War occurred. However, this literary “ending” does not take into consideration later writers like McCullers who produced works that reflect Modernist aesthetics.

Robert Genter offers a more complex approach to Modernism. In *Late*

Modernism, Genter argues that the general understanding of the era is insufficient to describe and classify those authors who utilized Modernist elements beyond the end of WWII. He rightly asserts that within High Modernism, artists “self-consciously determined to separate art from the detritus of daily existence. . . [and that high modernists] believed that aesthetics was the only refuge in a disenchanting, chaotic landscape” (7). Therefore, their works “were committed to aesthetics as a form of disruption and disorientation, a process of making the familiar seem unfamiliar and the commonplace enchanted” (8). Writers such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner employed techniques such as stream-of-consciousness narration; Ernest Hemingway utilized vignettes, isolated chapters, and non-chronological and nonlinear plots; both Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald created multiple and/or unreliable narrators. The artists within the High Modernist tradition explored the internal, psychological, and subjective, foregoing the events of the outside world.

Late Modernists, according to Genter, employed the techniques of the High Modernists; however, they wrote more as rhetoricians in the Kenneth Burke sense. That is, they created works in which “the true purpose of art [was] persuasion” (3).

Genter declares:

Unwilling to abandon the literary and cultural revolution begun in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by their modernist predecessors, whose original goal was to explore new forms of consciousness and unearth new forms of perception in the hopes of transforming the world at large, late modernists argued not only that

the nature of the aesthetic form needed to be rethought in an age of mass media but that the general assumptions about the nature of subjectivity needed to be updated. They reformulated aesthetics as a mode of symbolic action—a deliberate attempt to use the aesthetic form to challenge the choice of lens through which individuals made sense of the world around them and to persuade them that the visions offered by the artist were not merely more poetic but possibly more liberating. (4)

In other words, Late Modernists created works as “calls to action” (4), to assess and critique the modern world. Genter asserts that Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, and Jack Kerouac, among others, represent Late Modernist writers and poets. If, indeed, Late Modernism represents a type of call to action, a form of persuasion utilizing High Modernist techniques, then surely Carson McCullers fits within the era of Modernism itself, whether one labels it High or Late.

Although she has not been seen as a High Modernist author, Carson McCullers embraced a number of techniques used by writers of that tradition, and her works are dense in the High Modernist mode. She utilized complex musical structures in several of her novels, appropriated the mythic method, and wrote on taboo subject matters. She also advanced those aesthetics to address and critique the issues and problems of the world she encountered: disfranchisement of the poor and working classes, sexism, and above all, racism. Because her works center on characters rather than plot, this dissertation examines a number of characters

within her oeuvre to establish her as a thoroughly Modernist author who merits more than marginal status in the American literary canon.

Chapter One examines McCullers's utilization of experimentation, perhaps the most prominent aesthetic of High and Late Modernism. It demonstrates how she advances her storylines through ostensibly unconnected chapters as well as her employment of multiple and/or unreliable narrators and voices. The chapter discusses her use of dialect as a means of differentiating characters and exploring the psychological condition of each character. Finally, the chapter analyzes the ways in which McCullers uses and manipulates musical forms to design and construct her novels.

Chapter Two investigates McCullers's two most dominant themes: isolation and alienation. Isolation is analyzed as a form of sequestration—purposefully closing off one's self from society—rather than the more typical Modernist interpretation of isolation as an uncontrollable and overwhelming aspect of the human condition in modern society. People can alienate others consciously—deliberately—or unconsciously, and both modes of alienation are analyzed in this chapter. Many of McCullers's isolated and alienated characters represent the grotesque, and this, too, is examined, along with another form of alienation: scapegoating.

Chapter Three examines the search for an authentic identity and purpose in a cold, impersonal modern world. Adolescent angst and transformations of the self are analyzed, as is the failure to live up to the identity of “mother.” Additionally, the

chapter discusses McCullers's allusions to the theory of nature versus nurture in identity formation.

Chapter Four explores McCullers's literary attempts to erase the space between the self and social and racial "Other." The chapter examines how McCullers addresses some of the sociopolitical issues of her day, including socioeconomic disparities, anti-Semitism, and racism in the American South.

Each chapter contextualizes the respective aesthetic and/or theme in terms of McCullers's Southern roots as well as her social position as an "outsider," one who wrote about the South but also lived just outside New York City. Such geographical positioning substantiates the discussion of her Late Modernist penchant for addressing not only the internal and subjective but also the political and social problems endemic in her native South and the wider world. Ultimately, the goal of this dissertation is to place McCullers within the Modernist tradition through an intertextual examination of a number of aesthetics, themes, and techniques employed by High and Late Modernist writers.

CHAPTER I: EXPERIMENTATION

A few thousand will think of this day

As one thinks of a day when one did something slightly unusual.

–W. H. Auden¹

Formal experimentation represents the principal aesthetic of literary Modernism. Just as the Great War produced “shocks of the new”—mechanized weaponry, poison gas, modern genocide, and total war mobilization that established the modern wartime state—so, too, did Modernist authors create works intended to jolt people out of their unquestioning and compliant attitudes as well as to probe new forms of consciousness. They not only rejected the eighteenth-century artistic ideal of order, symmetry, and mimesis, but countless writers also scorned the nineteenth-century’s vision of science, technology, and religion as institutions of progress and peace. Instead, Modernist artists, composers, and writers devoted themselves to exploring innovative and original methods of creating meaning in their fragmented, alienating, and isolating post-World War I modern world. They intentionally chose disruption over order and disorientation over expectation in order to more fully understand, perhaps even to come to terms with, their new society and culture. In “Regionalism in American Modernism,” John N. Duvall declares, “In so many of its manifestations, from Cubism in painting to atonality in music and stream-of-consciousness narration in fiction, modernism bespeaks a self-conscious difficulty intended to shock the middle class out of its complacency and to

¹ All chapter epigraphs are from W. H. Auden. “In Memory of W. B. Yeats (d. Jan.

create the possibility of fresh perception” (242). What better way, then, to astonish and unsettle readers than by experimenting with character, voice, stream-of-consciousness narration, nonlinearity of plot, fragmented narratives, dense allusions, and irony? The preeminent British authors, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, used stream-of-consciousness narratives and nonsequential storylines in several of their prose works, while T. S. Eliot utilized various voices, styles, and allusions to create the seminal poetic Modernist work, *The Waste Land*, in 1922. Eliot’s masterpiece became the standard, if you will, for Modernist experimentation, and American “[w]riters such as Ernest Hemingway, Djuna Barnes, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and William Faulkner all specifically engaged *The Waste Land* so that, even when critical of Eliot, they nevertheless signaled their membership in the club of international modernism” (242). Experimentation became the hallmark of literary Modernism.

Like Eliot, many poets eagerly embraced disorientation and the unusual in their writings. So, too, did writers of prose. Tyrus Miller, in *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars*, defines High Modernism in the novel:

The novel, with its sedimented history, its well-codified conventions, and its strong ties to narrative forms, would seem by nature to tend toward an aesthetic of discursive mastery. The ‘mainstream’ of European high modernist fiction . . . focused on the problem of mastering a chaotic modernity by means of formal techniques: ironic

detachment; highly mediated and multiperspectival narration; narrative involution and self-referentiality; stylistic ostentation; use of large-scale symbolic forms; dramatization of states of consciousness, including the author's own. (16-17)

Scholars do not regard Carson McCullers as a High Modernist writer; however, she employed a number of these experimental approaches in her works that clearly place her within the Modernist tradition. In her first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, she created isolated chapters, their plotlines skillfully yet subtly linked through characterization and voice rather than overt action, a technique that forces readers to make connections, and thus meaning, for themselves. The concept of readers actively participating in the creation of meaning epitomizes Modernist experimentation. Ernest Hemingway famously argued that the substance of a story, its significance, should remain below the surface of details, much like an iceberg, where the majority of ice lurks in the depths of the sea. McCullers achieves this effect in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Member of the Wedding*.

McCullers also explored innovative ways to convey meaning by utilizing various voices and narrators within a single work, rather like William Faulkner in *As I Lay Dying*. She created a number of narrators in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and two voices in one narrator in her novella, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. And in the true spirit of Modernist experimentation, she applied musical forms to configure three of her novels—*The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, and *The Member of the Wedding*. This chapter will discuss McCullers's employment of

experimentation, which places her within the Modernist tradition: her creation of seemingly unrelated chapters to advance the storyline; her use of multiple and/or unreliable narrators, voices, and dialect; and her manipulation of musical forms to structure her novels.

McCullers certainly experimented with isolated chapters only loosely connected through characterization, but she was not the first Modernist writer to do so. Other authors explored ways to construct meaning through unfamiliar, strange, and nontraditional forms within their works. Sherwood Anderson created his groundbreaking *Winesburg, Ohio* in 1919, a novel that, on the surface, reads like a disparate collection of short stories about that small Ohio town. The tales include some recurring minor characters but only one major character, the young George Willard who, at the end of the book, leaves the town for the big city. Anderson's book centers on what he terms "grotesques," people who grasp onto a truth, live their lives within that truth, but soon become grotesque because their specific truth ultimately proves to be fallacious. The stories barely seem linked, but if read as if the town itself is a character, then such Modernist themes as isolation, alienation, and the "Other" become clear, and a quasi-plotline appears. Irving Howe writes in his Introduction to the book,

After a time the attentive reader will notice in these stories a recurrent pattern of theme and incident: the grotesques, gathering up a little courage, venture out into the streets of Winesburg, often in the dark, there to establish some initiatory relationship with George

Willard, the young reporter who hasn't yet lived long enough to become a grotesque. . . . Upon this sensitive and fragile boy, they pour out their desires and frustrations. (15)

Anderson reveals the estrangement of people in that small borough and their failure to communicate honestly with one another. His experimental, loosely connected chapters contribute to the Modernist themes revealed in the book, and they mimic the fragmented lives of the characters.

A number of early to mid-twentieth century authors—Carson McCullers included—realized the significance of utilizing Anderson's ruptured literary form and began creating their own unique structures that reflected specific Modernist themes within their works. In *Nightwood*, Djuna Barnes offered readers an even less connected tale than that of Anderson, one that has proven to be difficult and perplexing for scholars and lay readers alike. In her Preface to Barnes's book, author Jeanette Winterson declares:

Nightwood is demanding. You can slide into it, because the prose has a narcotic quality, but you can't slide over it. The language is not about conveying information; it is about conveying meaning. . . . This is not the solid nineteenth-century world of narrative, it is the shifting, slipping, relative world of Einstein and the Modernists, the twin assault by science and art on what we thought we were sure of. (x)

Like Anderson's novel, Barnes emphasizes character rather than conventional action designed to carry a plot to its logical conclusion. In fact, her novel's ending

leaves readers wondering what has happened because it provides no definitive conclusion in the traditional literary sense. Further, unlike McCullers, who created an outline for her first novel, Barnes “arranged chapters in piles on the floor, with only tentative and improvised ideas for the large-scale form of the book” (Miller 148). As a result, her chapters read as fragmentary and resemble a montage more than a linear narrative. Such experimentation unquestionably adds to her Modernist themes of isolation; alienation; unrequited, thwarted, and predatory love; and the strange, often bleak, modern world of the 1930s.

Other Modernist writers such as Jean Toomer and John Dos Passos exploited traditional narratives to formulate highly innovative and fragmented chapters. In *Cane*, published in 1923, Toomer writes about the African American experience, but he does so in a more impressionistic style. His short book, divided into three sections, includes character sketches, short stories, and chapters devoted to poetry. Section one occurs in Georgia, section two in the North, while section three returns to Georgia. Toomer creates impressions—mood, presence, atmosphere, and appearances—of black life in the South and North rather than a solid plotline with a standard conclusion. Although the novel’s form resembles late nineteenth-century Impressionism in its evocative form, prose, and poetry, it more accurately characterizes the fragmentation of the modern world by addressing Modernist themes of isolation, alienation, and the Other. More importantly, *Cane* confronts issues specific to the black community: Jim Crow laws, segregation, miscegenation, and violence. While Toomer used poetry and prose in his work, John Dos Passos

utilized even more extraordinary Modernist techniques to construct isolated chapters in his *U. S. A.* trilogy. Dos Passos's novel contains four different segments, and many can be found within a single chapter. The more traditional chapters deal specifically with one character and her/his hopes, fears, and behavior in the modern world, and Dos Passos uses that particular character's name as the chapter title. Newsreel portions read like actual newsreels of the 1930s, a device that anchors the action in specific times and places. The Newsreels contain headlines, snippets of current events stories, and snatches of contemporary song lyrics (e.g., *Alexander's Ragtime Band*). The Camera Eye units contain fragments of stream-of-consciousness narration that divulge the author's personal experiences as a child growing to maturity. The fourth segment provides readers with decidedly ironic, oftentimes bitter, "biographies" of influential and famous people of the time, such as Eugene Debs, Henry Ford, Isadora Duncan, and William Randolph Hearst. As with Anderson, Barnes, and Toomer, Dos Passos designs these disparate, nontraditional chapters to signify the fragmentary, alienating, isolating, and oftentimes soulless nature of modern America.

In 1940, Carson McCullers published her first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, when she was only 23 years old. Tripartite in structure, the story revolves around five characters; as with all her novels, it is set in Georgia, and the storyline is advanced through character rather than substantial action. McCullers writes in her outline for the novel, "Nearly all of the happenings in the book spring directly from

the characters" (*Illumination* 164).² Part One introduces readers to the deaf-mute, John Singer, and his mentally challenged deaf-mute friend, Antonapoulos; New York café owner Biff Brannon; the adolescent tomboy, Mick Kelly; politically radical autodidact, Jake Blount; and philosophical African American physician, Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland. Part Two consists of 15 chapters, with five centering on Mick, three on Dr. Copeland, two each on Biff and Blount, and three "summary" chapters. Part Three contains one chapter each for Mick, Biff, Blount, and Copeland, and "resolves" the novel in that each character reacts to the death of their friend, Singer (Millichap, "A Critical Reevaluation" 11-12). The book received critical praise, although some reviewers felt it too limited thematically. Reviewer Lewis Gannett asserted that it was "a strange and uneven book" (qtd. in James 10). In his doctoral dissertation, "A Critical Reevaluation of Carson McCullers' Fiction," Joseph R. Millichap argues that, because the novel does not focus on any one character, determining the protagonist proves challenging for readers. However, as a Modernist writer, McCullers experimented by *not* creating a fully central character in this novel. Singer personifies the hub of a wheel around which the other four major characters revolve, but the action of the novel is almost equally distributed among all the characters. Such a technique exemplifies McCullers's Modernist sensibility, for it requires readers to decide if any character qualifies as a protagonist. Moreover, McCullers does not create a conventional antagonist because there exists no true

² All references to McCullers are from her unfinished autobiography: Carson McCullers. *Illumination and Night Glare: The Unfinished Autobiography of Carson McCullers*. Ed. Carlos L. Dews. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1999. Print.

hero in her story. Dr. Copeland and Blount engage in an angry debate about race and politics, but they have little to do with each other for the greater part of the novel. Abstruse themes rather than a character represent the real antagonist, depending on how readers interpret the tale. By novel's end, Mick must give up her dream of becoming a composer and instead work as a salesgirl at Woolworth's. Blount feels a failure because he converted no mill workers to his socialist utopian ideas, and he finally leaves town. Due to his increasingly fragile physical condition, Dr. Copeland can no longer take care of himself. His family takes him to their farm, and he must abandon his life's mission of helping his people, the African Americans in town. Biff, the café owner, realizes he has no one left to love and nobody to love him, so he continues keeping his business open at night, despite the fact it makes little money for him. McCullers's creation of abstractions as the antagonist range from the unfairness of life, to utter failure to accomplish a life's purpose, to losing love and suffering without it for the rest of one's life. However, McCullers addresses other themes, which include gender inequity, racial inequality and racism, socioeconomic disparity, and poverty. How readers interpret her story dictates the themes that present themselves. McCullers offers ideas, but readers must create meaning.

Some scholars, including Millichap, believe Mick to be the most fully developed character (9), yet this is hardly surprising since McCullers used autobiographical details—Mick's love of music and her tomboyish demeanor, for instance—to produce the one major female character of the book. In fact,

McCullers's formation of Mick's personality establishes the Modernist aesthetic of self-referentiality discussed by Miller, a technique she developed more fully in her characterization of Frankie Addams in her 1946 novel *The Member of the Wedding*. Millichap also argues that the book contains a "structural" problem because McCullers's isolated chapters produce an "episodic form to the novel, as if it consisted of a number of short stories about the individuals" (10). He declares, "The shifts between characters often seem abrupt, adding to the disjointed air of the narrative." German scholar Klaus Lubbers, too, asserts that the novel is made up of "loosely juxtaposed elements" that create "a disjointed, if not chaotic, effect" for readers (34). However, as a Modernist writer, McCullers intentionally crafted this disjointedness, which reflects the Modernist technique of disruption as well as the themes of a fragmented and chaotic modern world.

McCullers's use of isolated chapters to advance the plot resembles Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, but her novel is more subtly structured than his. Her story occurs over the course of one year, and the reactions of her characters to situations presented to them move the plotline forward, so that, in essence, action does occur, however slightly. For example, we see Mick Kelly mature as the novel progresses, and McCullers inscribes this maturation in a sparing, almost imperceptible manner through the transformation in Mick's clothing. In the first Brannon chapter, Biff notices Mick's outfit and deportment: "He thought of the way Mick narrowed her eyes and pushed back the bangs of her hair with the palm of her hand. He thought of her hoarse, boyish voice and of her habit of hitching up her

khaki shorts and swaggering like a cowboy in the picture show” (22).³ When she enters high school, she remains a tomboy and “got special permission and took mechanical shop like a boy . . . ” (104). Yet, when her sisters loan her an evening dress, pumps, and rhinestone tiara for her thirteenth birthday party, Mick thinks to herself, “These clothes were really gorgeous. It was hard to imagine how she would look in them” (106), an indication that she desires but doubts her ability to look more feminine. At school, Mick dresses like the other girls but still maintains her tomboyish ways. Biff notices her in the café one evening: “She was dressed in the red sweater and blue pleated skirt she had worn every day since school started. Now the pleats had come out and the hem dragged loose around her sharp, jutting knees. She was at the age when she looked as much like an overgrown boy as a girl” (132). Here, we see Mick trying to fit in with the other girls but not succeeding. Eventually, she is forced to work as a salesgirl in order to help her family economically. At this point, Mick seems forced to mature beyond her 14 years, yet she yields to the trappings of ascribed femininity when she uses some of her earnings to purchase earrings and bangle bracelets. McCullers briefly describes Mick’s sartorial choices in order to show her growth from adolescence to young womanhood.

Each chapter in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* centers on one character, written from her/his point of view and in her/his voice, yet another Modernist

³ All references to *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* are from Carson McCullers. *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. 1940. New York: Mariner Books, 2004. Print.

approach embraced by McCullers and one that William Faulkner brilliantly mastered in *The Sound and the Fury*. In addition to using chapter breaks to demarcate a change of character and action, McCullers mentions the specific individual's name within the first few sentences of the chapter, a direct signal to readers that it centers on that character. For example, one chapter focusing on Dr. Copeland begins, "At eight o'clock Doctor Copeland sat at his desk, studying a sheaf of papers by the bleak morning light from the window" (181). And Chapter 4 starts, "Late in the afternoon Jake Blount awoke with the feeling that he had slept enough" (53), a sentence that clearly indicates the action will revolve around him. Because Mick is the only female major character, McCullers at times foregoes mentioning her name within the first sentence. Chapter 9 begins: "She never had a nickel to herself any more. They were that poor. Money was the main thing. All the time it was money, money, money" (238). The sentence begins with "She," so readers instantly intuit the chapter will be about Mick. Moreover, alert readers understand that, in earlier chapters, Mick's family has undergone financial troubles; therefore, the mention of money, along with the word "She," points to Mick as the central figure of the chapter.

In addition to writing each chapter to focus specifically on a single character, McCullers employs dialect to differentiate characters, an understated but complex device used to great effect by another Modernist writer, Zora Neale Hurston, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In her discussion on dialect variations in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Mary Jane Kinnebrew declares that "[f]or each of these five

characters [McCullers] develops not only a distinct dialect in direct dialogue, but also a distinct narrative voice to control specific sections of the novel" (76). Biff tends to use Standard English, although he occasionally says the colloquial "motherogod" instead of "mother of God." McCullers uses the language of the character of Jake Blount, the drunken socialist soapbox orator, to connote his internal chaotic confusion. Blount fluctuates between Southern vernacular and "elevated, artificial diction" (84). In his thoughts, Biff astutely sizes up Blount: "This man had a good mind, all right, but he went from one thing to another without any reason behind it all" (17). Blount admits he likes using big words. "'To begin with I like words. Dialectic materialism—Jesuitical prevarication'—Jake rolled the syllables in his mouth with loving solemnity—'teleological propensity'" (68). Unfortunately, when Blount talks to the locals of the town, he uses jargon like "'agglutination of capital and power'" (152) and "a vast and insidious conspiracy. Obscurantism" (24), phrases that the mostly uneducated populace cannot begin to comprehend. As a young person, Mick speaks and writes words and phrases the way she hears them. For example, she mistakenly says "plaster parish cast" and uses the childlike term for urination, "wee-weed" (37). Her language indicates not only her youth but also her relative lack of education. She writes "MOTSART" because she does not know how to spell "Mozart," and she says, "'You kids see that Ralph don't get out in the street" (164), obviously unaware of the correct "doesn't." Kinnebrew argues that Mick's dialect "emphasize[s] the closeness of the children to black servants such as Portia" (85), for in middle-class Southern households in the

early to mid-twentieth century, children spent as much time with their black servants as they did their white parents. Dr. Copeland's daughter, Portia, speaks in the Southern African American dialect of the time. For example, when Mick asks Portia if Dr. Copeland is mean, Portia replies:

'No, he not a mean man,' Portia said slowly. 'It just that something is the matter. My Father not like other colored mens. This here is hard to explain. My Father all the time studying by hisself. And a long time ago he taken up all these notions about how a fambly ought to be. He bossed over ever little thing in the house and at night he tried to teach us children lessons.' (49)

Portia's omission of "is" throughout the passage and her use of the words "mens," "hisself," "fambly," and "ever" for "every" clearly illustrate her lack of education, an indirect social commentary by McCullers about the poor schooling offered to blacks in the South. More importantly, though, McCullers presents Portia's colloquial language to contrast with her father's, a technique designed to illuminate Dr. Copeland's isolation and estrangement from his family as Dr. Copeland speaks only proper English. The Copeland chapters are written in Standard English, while Dr. Copeland's dialogue epitomizes correctly spoken English: his vocabulary is extensive, he speaks with perfect syntax, and he does not use contractions. For instance, when Portia visits her father, she offers to cook him a meal:

Portia opened a paper sack she had placed on the kitchen table.

'I done brought a nice mess of collard greens and I thought maybe we

have supper together. I done brought a piece of side meat, too. These here greens need to be seasoned with that. You don't care if the collards is just cooked in meat, do you?'

'It does not matter.'

'You still don't eat nair meat?'

'No. For purely private reasons I am a vegetarian, but it does not matter if you wish to cook the collards with a piece of meat.' (72-73).

Additionally, Dr. Copeland often addresses Portia as "Daughter," and for his son, he always uses "William" instead of "Willie" as others do.

McCullers's technique of creating separate dialects for these two family members points directly to their contrasting goals as African American citizens. In Part One, Portia and her father discuss one of their central differences. Portia begins:

'Course I realize that Willie or my Highboy or me—that none of us is scholars. But Highboy and Willie is both good as gold. There just is a difference between them and you.'

'Yes' said Doctor Copeland.

'Hamilton or Buddy or Willie or me—none of us ever cares to talk like you. Us talk like our own Mama and her peoples and their peoples before them. You think out everything in your brain. While

us rather talk from something in our hearts that has been there for a long time. That's one of them differences.'

'Yes,' said Doctor Copeland.

'A person can't pick up they children and just squeeze them to which-a-way they wants them to be. Whether it hurts them or not. Whether it right or wrong. You done tried that hard as any man could try. And now I the only one of us that would come in this here house and sit with you like this.' (78)

In this passage, Portia candidly reveals why she and her brothers are estranged from Dr. Copeland: he chose to instill in his offspring his own desire to improve the black race, but he forced them to the point that they suffered and ultimately rejected his great mission; speaking in colloquial English represents one of those rejections. Kinnebrew writes, "It is one of the central ironies of the novel that this man who has read so widely, has such grand dreams, and possesses such a command of formal language, can be so isolated from society as a whole and, more importantly, from his own people and family" (81). Additionally, the good doctor further alienated his children by naming them after important historical or literary figures—Karl Marx, Hamilton (probably for Alexander Hamilton), William (perhaps William the Conqueror or any other strong William from history, philosophy, or literature), and Portia (from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*), but rather than live up to their weighty, significant namesakes, all the siblings choose to blend in with their own

racial community, a choice that is reflected in their African American vernacular, a decision Dr. Copeland abhors.

While McCullers's utilization of voice variation and dialect differentiate her characters, it also reveals the consciousness of each character. This represents her Modernist affinity for exploring the interiority of human beings through literary means. McCullers writes all the characters' thoughts in the same voice and dialect in which they speak. Moreover, the narration blends with the character's thoughts, which creates a sense of intimacy with them, a feeling that we understand their psychological state at that moment. For example, when Dr. Copeland prepares to move to the family farm, he sits for a moment to drink some coffee:

As he rocked he drank the coffee and warmed his fingers in the steam. This could not truly be the end. Other voices called wordless in his heart. The voice of Jesus and of John Brown. The voice of the great Spinoza and of Karl Marx. The calling voices of all those who had fought and to whom it had been vouchsafed to complete their missions. (330)

The first sentence represents the narrator's voice, but the second sentence—"This could not truly be the end"—signifies Dr. Copeland's thought, his lament that his life has been a failure. The narrator then offers the third sentence, "Other voices called wordless in his heart," while the list of voices comes from within the good doctor. And the final sentence, written in Standard English and proper syntax, signals Dr. Copeland's inner voice. Such subtle blending of narrative voice with character

interiority signifies a true Modernist aesthetic, one that McCullers's brilliantly employs in this novel.

As a Modernist novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* requires readers to participate in the tale in order to create meaning. That is, McCullers provides only necessary surface details—Hemingway's iceberg theory—so that we must interpret the action and decipher for ourselves the implications of the novel. In his August 1940 review of McCullers's first novel, Richard Wright declares that “the value of such writing lies not so much in what is said as in the angle of vision from which life is seen” (18). In this case, readers must grapple with the motivations of five characters in order to comprehend McCullers's tale. In essence, readers decide not only what action(s) the characters take at the end but also how they feel about those actions. Only John Singer's suicide seems evident to readers, although not to the other characters: once Singer learns of Antonapoulos's death, he shoots himself in the chest because he cannot live without the odd man's friendship, despite the fact Antonapoulos had been oblivious to Singer's love and kindness. Readers must interpret the other four major characters' fates.

Mick ends up working at Woolworth's so that she may contribute financially to her family. Thus, she is forced to abandon her dream of becoming a composer, a bold vision for a female at that time and one that McCullers depicts throughout the novel. But does Mick actually give up her ambition to create music? In the final chapter about Mick entitled “Evening,” Mick comes home from work and thinks to herself, “What good was it? That was the question she would like to know. What

the hell good was it. All the plans she had made, and the music. When all that came of it was this trap—the store, then home to sleep, and back at the store again” (350). Later, as she sits in the New York Café eating a sundae and drinking a beer, she laments her current situation—always in her own mind, not to others—and realizes she no longer has music “in her mind”—what she earlier terms her “inside room”—because her job exhausts her in body, mind, and soul (353). However, she begins thinking of ways to restore music to her life. She remembers she has Mr. Singer’s radio and hopes to save enough money to buy a cheap piano. Mick vacillates between hope and despondency, finally understanding that having to work for money “was the way things were” (354). Here, it seems she is resigned to a future of mind-numbing dullness. However, it is worth quoting the entire concluding portion of Mick’s final chapter to appreciate McCullers’s Modernist artistry:

But maybe it would be true about the piano and turn out O.K. Maybe she would get a chance soon. Else what the hell good had it all been—the way she felt about music and the plans she had made in the inside room? It had to be some good if anything made sense. And it was too and it was too and it was too and it was too. It was some good.

All right!

O.K.!

Some good. (354)

So how does Mick actually feel? Hopeful? Angry? Resigned to her fate as a salesgirl? The meaning is unclear. “All right!” and “O.K.!” could be read as Mick expressing anger or acquiescence, but it can also be inferred that she is determined *not* to be trapped forever in a dead-end job. The exclamation points suggest the latter; however, McCullers punctuates the final sentence, “Some good,” not with an exclamation point but a period. Does this mean Mick’s resolve falters once more, since earlier she alternates between optimism and pessimism? Some scholars see Mick expressing hope, while others see her reluctantly accepting her undesirable situation. A true Modernist, McCullers constructs an ambiguous ending to Mick’s story, one that forces readers to make inferences and decide for themselves what has happened.

As with Mick, Dr. Copeland leaves readers wondering what he will choose to do. Having been bedridden from a tubercular attack, Copeland and his family prepare for him to move to the family farm where he can retire in peace from his physician’s practice. But Dr. Copeland feels compelled to continue his life’s mission—to inspire and educate his people, the African Americans of the town, about their civil rights and bring them out of illiteracy and poverty—a task at which he has been singularly unsuccessful. He believes he has failed, but he still longs to fight for equality for his black community. As he rides in the back of the wagon on his way to the farm, Dr. Copeland tells Grandpapa, “I believe in justice now” and “In justice for us. Justice for us Negroes” (336). At this point, the good doctor “felt the fire in him and he could not be still. He wanted to sit up and speak in a loud voice—

yet when he tried to raise himself he could not find the strength. The words in his heart grew big and they would not be silent.” In Dr. Copeland’s final phrase—“they would not be silent”—McCullers creates uncertainty as to whether he will continue his lifework. Logic dictates that, as an older man with tuberculosis, Dr. Copeland likely is incapable of fighting the good fight. However, his heart swells with the yearning to carry on, so perhaps he will recuperate enough to go on with his vocation. McCullers leaves readers with either possibility.

Jake Blount’s final chapter, “Afternoon,” begins *in medias res*, that is, readers only learn why he is running and feeling like he will vomit as he begins to recall the race riot at the Sunny Dixie show, a carnival where he operates the flying jinny. Through his thoughts, readers realize that Blount tried to stop the riot but soon joined in the fray, eventually running from the scene but not before tripping over the dead body of a black man. Like Dr. Copeland, Blount starts questioning his life’s purpose, which had been to spread the word of anti-capitalism to the local mill workers. He had written and hand-delivered pamphlets rebuking capitalism and exhorting workers to demand economic equality, “[b]ut who read them? What good had any of it done? A town this size was too big for any one man. And now he was leaving” (342). He decides to leave the town but “not out of the South.” At the New York Café, Blount once again reflects on his life’s calling and realizes he has been a failure. He thinks:

It was more than a year now since he had sat at this table for the first time. And how much further was he now than then? No further.

Nothing had happened except that he had made a friend and lost him. He had given Singer everything and then the man had killed himself. So he was left out on a limb. And now it was up to him to get out of it by himself and make a new start again. At the thought of it panic came in him. He was tired. (345)

Jake Blount walks out of town but soon questions himself: "But was this flight or was it onslaught? Anyway, he was going. . . . But he would not go too far away. He would not leave the South. That was one clear thing. There was hope in him, and soon perhaps the outline of his journey would take form" (350). Once again, McCullers leaves readers to interpret Blount's actions. Hope returns to him, but is he running away from or pursuing his radical mission? He does not know, so neither do readers.

Undoubtedly, the most enigmatic final chapter, "Night," belongs to Biff Brannon. Biff wanders through his empty café around midnight as the radio delivers news "about the crisis Hitler had cooked up over Danzig" (355). He walks outside, ambles up and down the sidewalk, and returns to the warmth of the café. Biff loves the night because "[t]hese were the hours for rest and meditation" (356), and he reflects on the year just past, of Mick, Singer, Blount, and Dr. Copeland. At this point, Biff experiences a type of epiphany:

The silence in the room was deep as the night itself. Biff stood transfixed, lost in his meditations. Then suddenly he felt a quickening in him. His heart turned and he leaned his back against

the counter for support. For in a swift radiance of illumination he saw a glimpse of human struggle and of valor. Of the endless fluid passage of humanity through endless time. And of those who labor and of those who—one word—love. His soul expanded. But for a moment only. For in him he felt a warning, a shaft of terror. Between the two worlds he was suspended. He saw that he was looking at his own face in the counter glass before him. . . . 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. Sharply he turned away.

‘Louis!’ he called. ‘Louis! Louis!’

Again there was no answer. But, motherofgod, was he a sensible man or was he not? And how could this terror throttle him like this when he didn’t even know what caused it? (359)

Jolted out of his ephemeral vision, Biff questions its cause and then his rationality. “For after all *was* he a sensible man or was he not?” He gathers himself together once more, lifts the awning of the window, returns to the café’s interior, and “await[s] the morning sun” (359). Clearly, Biff experiences an “illumination,” as McCullers puts it. But what does it signify?

Various scholars have analyzed this conclusion to McCullers’s novel and formulated theories concerning its meaning and significance. Klaus Lubbers

identifies a religious theme to Biff's vision, yet argues that Christ's message means nothing to the major characters. Instead, he insists that Biff will take up the mantle of "love in secular form" (40). In his essay, "The Necessary Order," Lubbers asserts that Biff assumes "Singer's burden of impersonal love. . . . He judges life soberly, perceiving its aspects. He is ready to wait, to endure doggedly though the prospects are gloomy" (40). Throughout the novel, Biff stands and watches people, contemplates their actions and the meaning behind them, and rarely judges people; in many ways, he is the kindest of all the characters because he accepts people as they are. Thus, Lubbers's theory of the character loving, waiting, and enduring does hold some merit. In *Understanding Carson McCullers*, Virginia Spencer Carr equates Biff's vision to a Christ-like epiphany, if you will. She asserts, however, that his vision is incomplete, for "[t]o know more is to know too much . . ." (32). Carr further states that Biff, not Singer, symbolizes Christ because he chooses to continue living and suffering in the world, unlike Singer who commits suicide. Nancy Rich offers a different appraisal of Biff and love in her book, *The Flowering Dream: The Historical Saga of Carson McCullers*. While her analysis of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* centers on religion and history, her interpretation of Biff's vision is a repudiation of it as a symbol of an overwhelming, all-inclusive love. She points out that "Brannon is said to perceive nothing"—that is, he cannot comprehend what he has just seen and experienced. Also, the word "love" does not appear in capital letters, which to her indicates that "[a]ll he has really seen is what we see, which is a word not capitalized, and is linked to two other words with a dash. Precisely, the

phrase reads ‘one word-love [sic]’ (31), a singularly cynical reading of McCullers’s conclusion. Rather than universal love, violence and terror lie at the heart of Margaret B. McDowell’s brief analysis of Biff’s final experience in the novel. She argues that Biff seems suspended between two worlds, binary oppositions—past and present, masculinity and femininity—and he does not understand what he has just seen. Yet, he remains in control of himself, despite the fact that he feels terror in his vision. McDowell declares, “The control of violence seems so tenuous in the lives depicted in this novel that McCullers communicates the terror that Flannery O’Connor once referred to as the slight ‘sense of suffocation’ one feels upon awaking at the edge of a nightmare” (*Carson McCullers* 43). In other words, Biff experiences a type of horrifying hallucination, not an illumination. In his monograph on McCullers, Richard M. Cook asserts that Biff experiences not an epiphany but rather a “vision too ironic and confusing to teach and finally too painful to bear” (*Carson McCullers* 42). Therefore, Biff dismisses it and carries on with his usual routine. McCullers biographer Oliver Evans theorizes that, since Biff sees his reflection in the counter glass, he becomes terrified that the vision represents “a projection of his own desires,” causing him to feel completely isolated. Because he feels so alone, he calls out for Louie, “[b]ut there is no answer” (*The Ballad* 55), which emphasizes the main theme of the book: moral isolation. In a feminist and Marxist reading, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak avers that Biff experiences a failed epiphany and that the counter glass “separates the personal and the political” (139). She situates her argument within the micro-structure, which signifies “the ruling sex” that dismisses

the power within relationships, whereas the macro-structure represents patriarchal structures encountered on a daily basis (129). Thus, Spivak asserts:

This [Biff's vision] is the careful glance into history and the broad glance into the future; on another register, it is the relationship between theory (knowing) and practice (doing). In yet another register, not quite the same but a similar one, it must be recognized that both knowing and doing are undermined, yet made possible, by the micro-structural network of an ever-fractured sense of being. A politicized socialist and inter-racialist feminism will work at redefining the personal as the micro-structural network of being that undermines as it makes possible the production of both theory and practice. McCullers's book is unable to provide a coherent redefinition. . . . indeed, a recognition of the micro-structure might disclose that a *coherent* redefinition is impossible. *The Heart* at least dramatizes the incoherence. . . . (140)

Spivak's claim that Biff's vision fails to unite the personal and political, however, can be countered because he catches "a *glimpse* of human struggle and of valor," and he senses all of humanity through time, in the past, present, and future, in a brief but continuously flowing manner [my emphasis]. Although he feels terror when he sees his reflection in the counter glass, for one fleeting moment, he experiences "illumination" (359). Yes, he swiftly returns to reality, using reason to understand

what he has just seen. But for that one millisecond, Biff comprehends love and humanity as unified in its glory and its “bitter irony” (359).

The conclusion of McCullers’s first novel proves to be wonderfully mysterious for readers and scholars alike, hence the variety of interpretations concerning its ending. While not quite so open to interpretation as Biff’s illumination, the narrative voice in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* also offers readers something to reflect on, for McCullers experiments with voice in this novella. Thus, a number of scholars have analyzed this voice and come to different conclusions about its nature and purpose in the story. In his 1972 essay, “The Presence of the Narrator in Carson McCullers’ *The Ballad of the Sad Café*,” Dawson F. Gaillard asserts that the voice that begins the story is “flat” and “inflectionless” when it describes the dull, poverty-stricken town in Georgia where the tale is set. However, the voice soon transforms when it begins portraying Miss Amelia Evans and relating the rest of the story, a technique that creates “a sense of timelessness” (419-420). Gaillard believes the ballad teller depicts the human condition and “the human spirit in action” (427), elevating McCullers’s tale to myth. Joseph R. Millichap sees the balladeer as someone born and raised in the small town and that the narrator’s “voice fixes the style of the novel—a perfect blend of the literate and colloquial, the objective and the personal, talky observation” (“Carson McCullers” 330). Unlike Gaillard, though, Millichap argues that the meaning of the tale cannot be mythic because too few incidents occur to make it so; “it [the tale] remains the narrator’s hypothesis, not McCullers” (331). In a stylistic examination of the story, “Two

Voices of the Single Narrator in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*,” Mary Ann Dazey convincingly argues that the balladeer of the tale utilizes two different voices. She labels one as the “lamerter,” the voice that uses only present tense, and the other as the “ballad-maker,” who speaks only in the past tense (34). The ballad-maker proves to be the more dominant of the two voices, using “simple diction” and “simple sentences,” and expressing objectivity, whereas the lamenter utilizes more complex sentence structures (36). Dazey declares that ultimately “[t]he two voices of the single narrator alternate and together weave the tale of the lover, the beloved and of love betrayed. The ballad voice tells the story, and the second voice provides the sad background music” (38). Such a variety of interpretations of the narrator’s voice(s) points to McCullers as a Modernist author, one who experiments with point of view and voice.

McCullers’s innovative and original application of music to her works proves to be the most experimental technique that establishes her as a Modernist writer. Virginia Spencer Carr, who wrote a comprehensive biography of the author, reports that McCullers began playing the piano by ear by the time she was six years old. She undertook lessons and practiced several hours a day in the hope of becoming a concert pianist (*The Lonely Hunter* 24-26). McCullers herself said she enjoyed composing tunes in her head and playing them on the piano (*Illumination* 13), an autobiographical feature she ascribes to Mick Kelly in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. Eventually, her piano instructor, Mary Tucker, suggested McCullers apply to the Juilliard School of Music; she did so, was accepted, and planned “not only to study at

Juilliard, but also to take creative writing from Dorothy Scarborough at Columbia University" (*The Lonely Hunter* 40). In 1930, after a devastating attack of rheumatic fever that was misdiagnosed as tuberculosis, McCullers decided not to pursue music but instead to write, a choice she did not disclose to her friend and musical mentor, Tucker, until 1934, at which time the young author-to-be sailed to New York to begin her writing career (569). Despite her decision to abandon the study of music, McCullers remained an ardent music lover, playing the piano for friends and endlessly listening to classical and popular musical records. Additionally, several musicians and composers visited and oftentimes stayed at February House, a home in New York City that McCullers shared with *Harper's Bazaar* editor George Davis and the poet W. H. Auden. These included David Diamond, Igor Stravinsky, Paul Bowles, Benjamin Britten, Aaron Copland, and Leonard Bernstein. Thus, she was influenced by classical and Modern music. More importantly, music formed the foundation for several of her novels and short stories, and as Carr writes, "[t]he discipline which she experienced through her work with Mrs. Tucker was of inestimable value to her when she began to write. She later attributed her excellent sense of form and structure to her study of music" (26).

McCullers used music in many of her short stories. In the 1962 essay, "The Sad Sweet Music of Carson McCullers," Barbara Nauer Folk asserts that "[m]usical allusions of one kind or another are to be found in almost all McCullers's stories, music serving now as architectural framework, again as extended correlative, often and regularly as minor symbol" (202). For instance, McCullers's first published

short story, "Wunderkind," concerns a fifteen-year-old pianist who, having been pushed by her instructor to the brink of mental and emotional exhaustion, realizes she does not have the talent to fulfill her dream of becoming a concert pianist and walks away from her lesson and music altogether. Music provides the background for the short story, "Poldi," about a young man in love with a female cellist who does not reciprocate his adoration; she is infatuated with a pianist named Kurt. McCullers uses music to anchor another short story, "Madame Zilensky and the King of Finland," a comic yet touching tale published in 1941, that deals with the eccentric female composer and college music instructor named in the title. The story illustrates the absurdity and loneliness of life. Madame Zilensky panics when she loses her metronome, consistently tells fibs about her life, and proves so mysterious and odd that the head of the music department, Mr. Brook, obsessively thinks about her. He catches her in a lie about knowing the King of Finland and finally confronts her by saying the King of Finland does not exist. Yet, she persists in telling Brook about meeting the royal personage. He suddenly realizes she *must* believe in her fabrications out of necessity in order to exist in her lonely world. Brook accepts her lie and simply asks her, "And was he nice?" (117).⁴ In "Art and Mr. Mahoney," McCullers uses a concert to foreground her satire of provincial concert-goers and their haughty behavior. She pokes fun at their superficiality; they attend the concert not so much to listen to beautiful music but to be seen in their

⁴ All references to short stories written by Carson McCullers come from *Collected Stories of Carson McCullers*. 1987. New York: Mariner Books, 1998. Print.

finery—"the chiffon and corsages and decorous dinner jackets" (136)—and drink liquor and eat hors d'oeuvre at the reception. Laughably and ironically, the concert takes place at the high school gym, not in a grand concert hall. When Mr. Mahoney claps after a movement of a Chopin sonata, his wife becomes "frozen" with humiliation. One simply does not clap between movements; one applauds only at the end of the sonata. Poor Mr. Mahoney endures the reception, while his wife ignores him. Nauer Folk declares that McCullers uses a Bach prelude and fugue in "The Sojourner" as an extended correlative because it "draw[s] attention to the story's inner meaning" (203).

Musical allusions also abound in McCullers's novels. Mick Kelly in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* loves music, is transfixed by Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony, and desires above all things to be a world-renowned composer. Additionally, Biff Brannon, the New York Café owner, plays a mandolin, and, despite being deaf, John Singer plays music on a radio, mostly for Mick's benefit. Alison Langdon and her Filipino houseboy, Anacleto, adore listening to music and attending concerts in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, a macabre novel of narcissism, self-mutilation, and murder on a peacetime Army base. In fact, music becomes Alison's emotional refuge, not only from the dull, monotonous world of Army life but also from the flagrant affair her husband has with his subordinate's wife. Miss Amelia buys a player piano for her café in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. And McCullers uses music as a form of protest in *Clock Without Hands*, where Sherman Pew, the young "mulatto,"

loudly plays the piano in his apartment located in the white part of town, intent on irritating the bigoted whites of the area.

Arguably, the most musically oriented and structured of McCullers's novels proves to be *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, in which New York Café owner, Biff Brannon, strums on his mandolin to relieve stress, and Willie plays his harmonica. McCullers presents readers with young Mick Kelly, an adolescent tomboy burning with desire to become a composer. She walks around town at night so she can listen to radio music that drifts from open windows of homes. Mick experiences a transcendent moment when she hears Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony on someone's radio. She dodges basketballs as she practices playing the piano at the school gym, and she hopes one day to purchase a used piano. But McCullers didn't just write about music in her first novel; she used musical forms to structure it.

In "*The Heart is a Lonely Hunter: A Literary Symphony*," Barbara A. Farrelly analyzes McCullers's book within the framework of Beethoven's *Eroica*, the classical piece that seems sublime to young Mick. She writes,

What McCullers has done in this novel has never been done before. Many works of the literary imagination have been 'set' to music, but never has a symphony been 'set' to literature. This achievement has significance not only for the literary world, but for the field of classical music as well. What Carson McCullers heard in the *Eroica* was more than music. She heard the whole world. She heard a novel. (16)

In her explication, Farrelly asserts that both the musical and literary works share the theme of heroism. Beethoven employed the Prometheus tale for his *Eroica*, inspired by his hero, Napoleon Bonaparte; John Singer in McCullers's novel "is heralded by all the other characters as a hero" because he seems to comprehend what they say to him (17). While the characters may see Singer as a hero—a debatable assertion—McCullers writes in her outline of the novel that he is the least important of the characters: "In reality each one of his satellites is of far more importance than himself" (*Illumination* 165). Structurally, both works—the *Eroica* and novel—are divided into three sections. The musical piece starts with the sound of two chords, and the novel begins with a description of Antonapoulos and Singer, the two deaf-mutes. Like Beethoven's exposition, where he introduces five themes, Part One of McCullers's novel presents five major characters (18). Part II of the musical work is slow, simulating the "march toward the grave" of the hero (19), while Part Two of the novel, according to Farrelly, "is probably the most convincing evidence that McCullers consciously patterned her novel after the *Eroica*" because the characters, too, seem to be heading towards death: Mick loses her innocence, Blount sees the "death of his idealism," Biff's wife dies, and Dr. Copeland abandons his vocation to save his race. Farrelly asserts that critics have denounced the second part of the symphony as being too long, with its numerous variations and repeated themes, and she attaches that same critique to Part Two of the novel. However, she states that some believe Beethoven deliberately created that section to "underscore boredom, the boredom that consumes so much energy in the lives of those who wait

for their heroes to change their circumstances" (19). She asserts that McCullers, too, structured Part Two because "she wanted the audience to feel the boredom" (20). As a Modernist writer, McCullers could have intended to mirror the boredom intrinsic in a depersonalized modern world where people feel isolated, alienated, and disfranchised; certainly, her characters experience those emotions. Part Three of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Farrelly argues, "does not seem particularly happy unless it is seen in light of Beethoven's symphony" (20). Prometheus's death is a victory because he brings light to people; Singer's death brings freedom to the other characters, freedom from Singer himself. While Farrelly's analysis seems to be somewhat of a stretch, particularly her discussion of Part Three of the novel, she does present enough evidence to make a case that McCullers was at least inspired by Beethoven's *Eroica*.

A more convincing analysis of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* concerns the novel's structure as a fugue. In fact, in her outline for the book, McCullers writes, "This book is planned according to a definite and balanced design. The form is contrapuntal throughout. 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 of the book" (*Illumination* 183). C. Michael Smith thoroughly explicates the fugue form of McCullers's novel in his 1979 analysis, "A Voice in a Fugue': Characters and Musical Structure in Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*." A fugue is polyphonic—more than two musical voices—and is written in three parts. McCullers's novel contains five major

characters (voices) along with several minor ones and contains three sections. Smith outlines each aspect of the fugue pattern—"imitation, canon, inversion, augmentation, and diminution" (259)—and compares elements and characters in the novel to these musical features:

Imitation is the simplest pattern; it is a repetition of one theme by another voice. Inversion is a form of repetition that reverses the progress of the theme producing a mirror image of the original voice. Whether repeated through imitation or inversion, the initial theme in a fugue is developed in a three-part structure. In the exposition, or first part, the theme is introduced. Characteristically, one voice sounds the theme, then a second voice is introduced, then a third. The fugue then proceeds with the second part, the development, consisting of a series of episodes in which the separate voices are interwoven. A final section, the return, then follows. It is a partial restatement of the theme, sometimes emphasized through *stretto*, the relatively rapid entrance of one voice after another. (259)

Smith asserts that McCullers begins the exposition by using John Singer to initiate the theme; Singer loves Antonopoulos, but the situation proves ironic since Singer deludes himself into thinking his simpleton friend reciprocates that love. For the imitation section, Jake Blount and Dr. Copeland simulate the ironic theme introduced by Singer in that both believe they sacrifice themselves for people when, in fact, they do not. Mick and Biff, on the other hand, represent the inversion

element of the fugue. Smith writes, “Biff Brannon and Mick Kelly underscore the ironic self-deception of the other major characters by reversing their movement toward illusion and isolation” (261). Both choose isolation—Mick retreating to her “inner room” and Biff objectively watching people in his café—rather than the “sacrifice” that Dr. Copeland and Blount believe they are making. The return aspect of the fugue occurs in the final section of the novel. A return partially repeats the initial theme, and according to Smith, a return takes place in the conclusion:

The novel ends not just with [Mick’s] initiation, but with a fully developed return. Here each voice with the exception of Singer’s, whose suicide concludes part two, is sounded in a rapid succession as in a stretto. The theme that each voice repeats harkens back to the exposition, though the order is reversed. (262)

McCullers devotes one short concluding chapter to each remaining major character but in reverse order from when they were presented in Part One. Finally, Smith declares, “It is this [fugue] pattern that eludes readers in search of a central character in a conventional structure. Not one voice but five make up the novel” (263).

While Smith argues that McCullers utilizes the fugue to configure *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Janice Fuller expands on that notion by asserting that, in fact, McCullers violates the fugue form. In “The Conventions of Counterpoint and Fugue in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*,” Fuller defines counterpoint and fugue: “Counterpoint, based upon a Latin phrase meaning ‘note against note’ or ‘melody

against melody,' consists of two or more melodic lines that are played at the same time. Fugue, a more specific term, refers to the 'mature form of imitative counterpoint' perfected by J. S. Bach" (57). The voices within a fugue are intended to be balanced as they weave in and out with each other. Fuller, however, argues that Mick's voice becomes more dominant in Part Two because the longer chapters are devoted to the young tomboy, an intentional disruption of the fugue structure. She asserts, "Thus, McCullers seems to have chosen to violate the contrapuntal principle of balance temporarily . . . in order to engage the reader more fully in the novel" (64). Fuller also observes that because one voice drops out of the piece altogether with the suicide of John Singer, McCullers once again intentionally disturbs the fugue form and contrapuntal balance of the novel. She declares,

This unconventional shift in contrapuntal 'texture' is even more dramatic since the missing voice is the one that made the original 'statement' of the novel's theme or subject and since it is Singer and his relationship with Antonapoulos that the other 'voices' most consistently imitate in the course of the novel. (66)

Both Smith and Fuller present convincing analyses of the structure of McCullers's first novel. However, it appears likely that, as a Modernist writer, McCullers would experiment with the fugue structure to create a literary piece uniquely her own. As one who composed original melodies in her head and played them on the piano, it seems logical that McCullers would do the same with her written works.

Smith argues that *Clock Without Hands*, McCullers's final novel, also represents a musical fugue, although he does not explicate it. He declares that it "clearly duplicates some aspects of the fugue pattern" (263). The tale is structured contrapuntally, and we see McCullers utilize multiple characters, much like she did in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. However, the subtlety and artistry of the fugue device in her first novel is less apparent in her last, undoubtedly because she suffered dreadfully ill health when she wrote *Clock Without Hands*. In any event, her use of multiple characters and their voices that weave through the story denotes the fugue form, albeit an attenuated one.

In *The Member of the Wedding*, music appears in the background but contributes to the atmosphere and mood of the novel. Twelve-year-old Frankie Addams and her six-year-old cousin, John Henry, listen to Berenice Sadie Brown, the black maid, talk, her words seeming to metamorphose into music:

And when she had begun this way, on a long and serious subject, the words flowed one into the other and her voice began to sing. In the gray of the kitchen on summer afternoons the tone of her voice was golden and quiet, and you could listen to the color and the singing of her voice and not follow the words. (84)⁵

Frankie struggles to understand her life and purpose in the world, and for much of the novel, she is filled with fear, frustration, and anxiety, and she vacillates between

⁵ All references to *The Member of the Wedding* are from Carson McCullers. *The Member of the Wedding*. 1946. New York: Mariner Books, 2004. Print.

being surly and kind when she interacts with John Henry and Berenice. McCullers uses music to symbolize the young teen's moods. As Frankie walks the town at twilight, she feels "a jazz sadness" as she sees birds flying to their homes and house lights piercing the oncoming darkness (25). After she discovers her true calling in life—to be a part of her brother's wedding and to live with the newlyweds forever—a somewhat happier Frankie, in her persona of F. Jasmine, walks in time to tunes playing in her head, "snatches of orchestra minuets, march tunes and waltzes, and the jazz horn of Honey Brown" (61). Other Modernist writers utilized music in their works. For instance, Langston Hughes created syncopated rhythms in "Weary Blues" and used repetition of phrases to mimic blues lyrics in "Young Gal's Blues." And in "Dream Boogie," he wrote short, truncated lines and fashioned his poem to be read in a brisk tempo, not only to imitate the fast music and dance moves of the boogie woogie but also as a way to mirror the ever-increasing discontent of African Americans in a Jim Crow America. Like McCullers, Hughes loved music, particularly jazz, because he believed jazz represented a uniquely African American musical style. Thus, we see Hughes use musical rhythms and jazz language—"Hey, Pop! / Re-bop! / Mop! / Y-e-a-h!" ("Dream Boogie" 1358-1359)—as a way of addressing the black experience. As a classically trained pianist, McCullers employed classical musical forms, such as the fugue and sonata forms. But both authors clearly utilized music as an articulation of Modernist innovation.

At one point in the novel, McCullers utilizes music as an objective correlative to underscore Frankie's complete frustration with her life and the world in general.

Once again, Frankie appears as F. Jasmine, and she, Berenice, and John Henry sit at the kitchen table eating. In the silence of the kitchen, where only the clock can be heard ticking, Frankie begins to explain her epiphany about belonging to her brother and his bride, but she stops as she hears a piano being tuned somewhere in the neighborhood:

F. Jasmine turned from the window, but before she could speak again there was the sound. In the silence of the kitchen they heard the tone shaft quietly across the room, then again the same note was repeated. A piano scale slanted across the August afternoon. A chord was struck. Then in a dreaming way a chain of chords climbed slowly upward like a flight of castle stairs: but just at the end, when the eighth chord should have sounded and the scale made complete, there was a stop. This next to the last chord was repeated. The seventh chord, which seems to echo all of the unfinished scale, struck and insisted again and again. And finally there was silence. (86)

After listening to the piano tuner ascend the scale and stop one note shy of the full octave, Frankie admits the music makes her feel melancholy “[a]nd jittery too” (87). The repetition of an unresolved scale, where one anticipates the concluding note but it does not come, leads to frustration, perhaps even irritation, because the scale is not completed satisfactorily. McCullers understood the feelings associated with an unfinished scale, and she deftly utilizes such a scale as a means to further reveal and define Frankie’s emotions of frustration and aggravation. Frankie says,

'It is that last note,' F. Jasmine said. 'If you start with A and go on up to G, there is a curious thing that seems to make the difference between G and A all the difference in the world. Twice as much difference as between any other notes in the scale. Yet they are side by side there on the piano just as close together as the other notes. Do ray mee fa sol la tee. Tee. Tee. Tee. It could drive you wild!' (109)

The unfinished scale certainly bothers Frankie, which may explain her irritability, but it possesses much more significance than just her perpetual crankiness. Frankie is convinced she is on the brink of something wonderful, of belonging to her brother and his wife, but she has not yet achieved that ideal relationship. McCullers states, "[t]he seventh chord . . . seems to echo all of the unfinished scale . . ." (109). This unfinished scale not only aptly reflects Frankie's exasperation at not fulfilling her dream, but it also symbolizes her adolescence, a time where one is not a child but not yet an adult. As Nauer Folk asserts, Frankie's "own life is a desperate search for a *Do*" (208), that final note that satisfactorily completes the scale.

In one sense, *The Member of the Wedding* resembles a chamber piece.

Designed to be performed in small settings, chamber music is meant to be enjoyed by both the audience and the performers. Roger Kamien, retired professor of musicology from Hebrew University in Israel, states that classical chamber music is "subtle and intimate" and that "each musician must be sensitive to what goes on and coordinate dynamics and phrasing with the other musicians" because chamber music requires no conductor (208). In the novel, the kitchen represents the

intimate setting of the piece, a place where most of the action takes place. Berenice, Frankie, and John Henry spend hours talking, eating, and playing cards. At times, the kitchen seems stifling, especially to Frankie, but at other times, it signifies safety and belonging.

Modern chamber works utilize tone color differently than in classical chamber works. Tone color refers to “the quality of sound that distinguishes” one instrument from another” (5). Tone color is also called timbre. Professor Kamien writes,

When the same melody is played by one instrument and then by another, it takes on different expressive effects because of each instrument’s tone color. A contrast in tone color may be used to highlight a new melody. . . . Tone colors also build a sense of continuity; it is easier to recognize the return of a melody when the same instruments play it each time. (5)

In Modern chamber music, the “individual tone colors are heard clearly” and “there is less emphasis on blended sound” found in classical chamber works (378). In *The Member of the Wedding*, Frankie, Berenice, and John Henry represent the “performers” in this chamber piece. Each character possesses a unique tone color that weaves throughout the story. Frankie signifies a loud, often strident tone, while John Henry sounds soft and gentle. Berenice epitomizes a strong, earthy, steady tone color, one that can be heard in the lower key register like a *basso continuo*. Such a voice provides continuity for the piece, and Berenice does function as the

anchor for Frankie and young John Henry. Yet their timbres are distinct and unblended, which marks this novel as a Modern “chamber work,” not a piece from the Classical or Romantic eras.

For Mary Ann Dazey and Daniel Patrick Barlow, *The Ballad of the Sad Café* represents a musical ballad, the latter arguing that the story itself signifies the American work song (75). On the other hand, Dawson F. Gaillard and Joseph R. Millichap assert that it is a literary ballad. However, the story closes with a coda entitled “The Twelve Mortal Men,” about 12 prisoners on a chain gang—“seven of them black and five of them white boys from this county” (71)⁶—singing as they work. Professor Kamien defines a coda: “An even more powerful feeling of conclusion is attained by following the recapitulation with yet another section. The coda rounds off a movement by repeating themes or developing them further. It always ends in the tonic key” (196). Because McCullers concludes her novella with the two-paragraph ending labeled as a coda, it seems apparent she intended her story to be read as a musical ballad, despite its literary balladic features.

Over the years, scholars have theorized about the purpose and meaning of McCullers’s coda. Nauer Folk considers it to be a signal to readers that the novella is both “a literary ballad and a folk dirge enclosing a cosmic statement” (203). She posits that the statement reflects the transcendence of humanity, even during cruel and miserable situations (202). Dale Edmonds declares that the tale contains “three

⁶ All references to *The Ballad of the Sad Café* are from Carson McCullers. *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*. 1951. New York: Mariner Books, 2005. Print.

major plot ‘movements’”; thus, it equates to “the three stanzas of the old French ballade form” with the coda representing “the envoy” of that form (21). *Ballade*, as defined by Professor Kamien, is “a French poetic and musical form that was introduced by the troubadours,” and its form is in three parts (98). An envoy concludes the ballade. Therefore, in terms of musical form alone, Edmonds’s hypothesis seems plausible. Thematically, Richard M. Cook believes the coda is used “to express the underlying message of her story” (*Carson McCullers* 100). He argues that the chained men find momentary, transcendent joy in their wretched situation, “[t]rapped in the cruelest and most hopeless of physical conditions . . .” (100). By placing *The Ballad of the Sad Café*’s coda in historical context, that is, within the segregated South that McCullers was born and raised in, Margaret Whitt argues that the temporary transcendent joy of the chain gang about which Cook writes proves problematic. She argues that integrated chain gangs rarely, if ever, existed in the American South, a situation “not lost on [McCullers].” Consequently, McCullers’s racially blended gang is meant to be ironic. Only when chained together can blacks and whites exist together in relative peace (119). Like Nauer Folk, Whitt believes the chain gang provides a frame for the story; however, she asserts that it does not represent a true conclusion. Rather, McCullers uses the chain gang’s singing to make a deliberate statement about the possibility of reducing, even eliminating, racial discord in the South. She writes, “McCullers gives a perverse hope, disturbing enough to let that message in the chain gang’s song reverberate: Must it be, always, ‘the sound of the picks’ or are ‘twelve mortal men who are together,’ without the

chains, possible in this specific geographic region?" Whitt believes McCullers considered it a possibility but that it had not happened "yet" (122).

While many have debated whether *The Ballad of the Sad Café* represents a musical or literary ballad, and theories have been advanced regarding the significance of its coda, no one seems to have examined McCullers's story, particularly its coda, in terms of the sonata form, specifically that musical form's recapitulation. As an accomplished musician herself, McCullers was keenly aware of musical structures, including the fugue, as previously discussed; the classical form (fast movement, slow movement, dance movement, fast movement); the tone poem (single theme with variations); sonata; and the sonata form, among others. In the case of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, an argument can be made that McCullers utilized the recapitulation section of the sonata form to create one of her most famous literary works.

For clarification, a sonata form differs from a sonata. The sonata form refers to one movement of a musical work, whereas a sonata represents an entire composition. Professor Kamien outlines the sonata form:

A sonata-form movement consists of three main sections: the *exposition*, where the themes are presented; the *development*, where themes are treated in new ways; and the *recapitulation*, where the themes return. These three main sections are often followed by a concluding section, the *coda* (Italian for "Tail"). (194)

In general terms, a recapitulation means a repetition of the main themes of a musical piece. Of crucial importance, though, is the fact that such a repetition of themes must be in the original key—the tonic key—of the piece. Professor Kamien explains:

In the recapitulation, the first theme, bridge, second theme, and concluding section are presented more or less as they were in the exposition, with one crucial difference: All the principal material is now in the tonic key. Earlier [in the piece], there had been strong contrast between the first theme in the home key and the second theme and closing section in a new key; that basis for tension is resolved in the recapitulation by presenting the first theme, second theme, and closing section all in the tonic key. (196)

In McCullers's novella, the first theme of the recapitulation begins when the balladeer describes the cheerless town and the dilapidated building from which a recluse, with totally crossed gray eyes, gazes from behind a window shutter. The narrator speaks of the town and declares that "there is absolutely nothing to do; you might as well walk down to the Forks Falls Road and listen to the chain gang" (4). He then finishes by stating that the house where the recluse resides used to be a successful café, but it "has long since been closed, but it is still remembered." The first theme continues with the arrival of Cousin Lymon, the beginning of the café, and the relatively peaceful four years that follow. Although the first theme is quite short, it sets the tone—the musical key—for that section of the story. The café is

remarkably successful, and Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon live together in relative happiness.

McCullers's famous interlude about the lover and beloved signifies the bridge, a term defined as "a section that connects two themes . . . [which] often effects a modulation" in a musical composition (Hickock 459). In musical terms, modulation means a change of key. McCullers's philosophical interlude about the lover and beloved—the bridge—modulates the first theme, thus slightly changing the "key" or tone of the story, by foreshadowing the much darker second theme: the return of Miss Amelia's criminal husband, Marvin Macy, and Cousin Lymon's collusion with Macy to harass and terrorize Amelia. This literary bridge anticipates the tension that builds in the second section. The balladeer begins by stating that Miss Amelia loves Cousin Lymon, but he does not say that Amelia's love is reciprocated; he discusses only Amelia's experience in loving the hunchback dwarf. Then the balladeer offers his philosophy 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" (25). The last phrase implies that difficulties may exist in the relationship between the lover and beloved. The lover is described as an almost desperate creature, one filled with a solitary loneliness that must be held within, which makes the lover 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" (26). Such an inner world of love allows the lover to see beauty and tenderness where it may not exist. The balladeer continues: "Now the beloved can also be of any description. The most outlandish people can be the stimulus for love," a reference, perhaps, to Cousin Lymon, the hunchback dwarf with darkened teeth from eating cocoa-sugar "snuff"; the ingratiating, loquacious braggart who is the only person allowed to forego using Amelia's title of "Miss"; a man who sees himself as a distinguished human being. Yet, the balladeer declares, "[Amelia] spoiled him to a point beyond reason, but nothing seemed to strengthen him; food only made his hump and his head grow larger while the rest of him remained weakly and deformed" (24). The balladeer also offers another vision of the beloved: "The beloved may be treacherous, greasy-headed, and given to evil habits" (24). Readers may believe Cousin Lymon fits this picture for, after all, he is not exactly presented as an attractive or kind person, just someone who thinks highly of himself and seems to take advantage of Miss Amelia. Only later will readers understand that the one with "evil habits" is Amelia's husband, Marvin Macy, and that "treacherous" can be applied to both Cousin Lymon and Macy. The explanation of the lover's loneliness and desperation, coupled with the unattractive description of the beloved, foreshadows an upcoming change in Amelia and Lymon's relationship.

A musical recapitulation in the sonata form repeats themes and concludes the piece in the original key. The closing section of the recapitulation occurs when Miss Amelia fights with Macy, he defeats her, Cousin Lymon and Macy flee the town,

the café eventually closes, Miss Amelia transforms into a recluse, and the town resumes its bleak and dreary state. McCullers's literary recapitulation concludes in the tonic key by echoing a sentence found in the opening of her story. Near the beginning of the tale, after the balladeer has described the isolated and desolate town, he says, "These August afternoons—when your shift is finished there is absolutely nothing to do; you might as well walk down to the Forks Falls Road and listen to the chain gang" (4). McCullers's balladeer closes the recapitulation by reiterating the same sentiment just before the coda begins:

There is absolutely nothing to do in the town. 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.* [my emphasis] (70)

Miss Amelia is left alone as she sits on her porch for three years awaiting her beloved's return. Rumors abound about Macy and Cousin Lymon, but nobody hears from either again. After four years, Amelia boards up the café, "and there in those closed rooms she has remained ever since" (69). Thus, the original key of her story returns: isolation, bleakness, and monotony.

In the spirit of a musical recapitulation, McCullers ends *The Ballad of the Sad Café* with a coda, "The Twelve Mortal Men," about twelve prisoners shackled together—"seven of them black and five of them white boys from this county"—who sing as they swing their picks to patch up a road. The coda adds "a more powerful

feeling of conclusion,” as stated by Professor Kamien (196), and also does so in the tonic key. Because the two sentences about the chain gang frame her tale, does McCullers’s coda imply that monotony, dreariness, misunderstanding, and isolation will recur through time? As a Modernist whose main theme in her works is isolation, McCullers might very well have intended to reinforce such an idea in her coda. After all, the ballad itself shows the failure of love to sustain Miss Amelia and the very town itself. The village reverts back to its original condition, and in the coda, nothing seems to change for the men shackled together. Their “voices are dark in the golden glare, the music intricately blended, both somber and joyful” (70), and Margaret Whitt’s hypothesis that McCullers offers a bit of hope by choosing to racially integrate the chain gang seems conceivable. However, McCullers wrote her story when the South still applied Jim Crow laws, enforced segregation, and mostly looked the other way when blacks were lynched. McCullers’s placement of the framing sentence—folks might as well go and listen to the chain gang—implies that nothing will change in the South. The gang is comprised of “[j]ust twelve mortal men, seven of them black and five of them white boys from this county. Just twelve mortal men who are together” (71). The Modernist McCullers leaves the interpretation of the coda up to her readers, but the framing sentences indicate she wishes to emphasize her theme of repetitious isolation.

Carson McCullers implicitly embraced Ezra Pound’s entreaty to “make it new” by utilizing formal experimentation in her novels and stories. Like a number of her contemporaries, she crafted isolated chapters that produce disorientation and

disruption of form, two prominent Modernist techniques. She may not be as ostentatious in her use of voice as, say, William Faulkner, but her exploitation and manipulation of dialect and narrative voice clearly mark her as a Modernist author, one who experimented to create new meaning and perceptions. Her novels end without conventional closure, yet another hallmark of literary Modernism, and her exploration of the interiority of her characters' feelings and motivations further shows how she fits within the Modernist era. Finally, McCullers brilliantly employed her love for music in her art, not merely by alluding to music but by configuring her themes of isolation and alienation through various musical forms. We see that her use of such musical forms and motifs can be considered within the context of modernist innovation and experimentation. Combined, all of these techniques prove that Carson McCullers's works belong unmistakably within the Modernist canon.

CHAPTER II: ISOLATION AND ALIENATION

While formal experimentation represents the primary aesthetic mode employed by Modernist authors, isolation and alienation unquestionably signify two themes fundamental to writers of that era. The cultural and political tensions of the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries—growth of nationalism and militarism in Europe; poverty associated with mounting unemployment and labor unrest in the United States; World War I, with its traumatic repercussions for nations and peoples, as well as its inimical “shocks of the new”; increased anxiety concerning the spread of Communism and Fascism; the grievous economic and cultural consequences of the Great Depression; and, of course, heightened political violence that culminated in World War II—spawned social conditions that aroused the belief that human beings were increasingly expendable in a pitiless world. Thus, people experienced personal detachment and alienation from society as well as a growing sense of anonymity in the swelling rush of humanity, particularly in urban areas of the United States.

Modernist writers like Ernest Hemingway, T. S. Eliot, and John Dos Passos addressed isolation and alienation in many of their works—for example, *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Waste Land*, and the *U.S.A. Trilogy*, respectively—but Carson McCullers engaged these themes in all her fiction. Each of her novels deals with isolation and alienation that engender loneliness, sometimes leading to psychological desolation. McCullers herself wrote about these themes in her December 19, 1949, essay, “Loneliness . . . An American Malady.” She declares:

The sense of moral isolation is intolerable to us. . . . The loneliness of Americans does not have its source in xenophobia; as a nation we are an outgoing people, reaching always for immediate contacts, further experience. But we tend to seek out things as individuals, alone. The European, secure in his family ties and rigid class loyalties, knows little of the moral loneliness that is native to us Americans. (*The Mortgaged Heart* 260)

In a November 28, 1962, interview for television, McCullers said that “there is a kind of allegory between—a kind of symbolism rather . . . of man’s isolation to each other and the terrible need to try to communicate, and not to be able to communicate” (qtd. in Savigneau 306). Scholars and critics agree that isolation and alienation, or in a larger sense, loneliness, feature most prominently in McCullers’s fiction. For instance, Margaret B. McDowell asserts that McCullers “returns repeatedly to discussion[s] of her central themes—frustration when love is not available, the universality of isolation, the relationship between ‘moral isolation’ and evil, and love either as a cure for loneliness or as an intensifier of loneliness” (*Carson McCullers* 28). In his essay, “The Case of Carson McCullers,” Oliver Evans declares that “each man is surrounded by a ‘zone of loneliness,’ serving a life sentence of solitary confinement” (126). And Richard M. Cook writes that “the vision behind McCullers’s art is of man alone, man shut off in his eccentricity. . . . But if this vision behind her art is one of man’s alienation it is also a vision seen with sympathy” (*Carson*

McCullers 18). In fact, all scholars agree that McCullers consistently utilized loneliness, isolation, and alienation in her works.

Not all critics, however, consider McCullers's main theme of isolation to be a positive quality in her writing. Chester E. Eisinger argues that she forfeits realism in her fiction, "narrowing its range, perhaps to its detriment, in favor of memory and mood, and above all, feeling." He then asserts:

The purpose of her aesthetic lies in the artist's need to communicate his vision, a need that Mrs. McCullers says she feels intensely. "The function of the artist,' she has written, 'is to execute his own indigenous vision, and having done that, to keep faith with this vision.' If to keep faith is to pursue consistently a single theme, then she has succeeded. For everywhere in her fiction she works at variations on the theme of moral isolation. It is the paradoxes of loneliness and love that impel her characters to a wretched abandonment of hope and leave them to feed on the pain of frustrated communion. She is fascinated by the loneliness of individuals in a world full of individuals. (244)

While Eisinger asserts that McCullers succeeds in the pursuit of her artistic vision, he implies that writing on "a single theme" is somehow inconsistent with a writer's larger aims. Further, he insinuates that focusing on emotions is not a valid topic on which a writer should base her or his works. As shall be seen in this dissertation, McCullers certainly did not limit herself to writing solely about mood or emotions,

nor did she sacrifice realism in favor of myth, fable, or allegory as some critics have suggested. Rather, she engaged the world, particularly the American South, sociologically and politically, while still maintaining her vision of probing humanity's isolation and alienation in a modern world.

A number of scholars, Eisinger included, have conflated the notions of isolation, loneliness, and alienation in their analyses of McCullers's works. For example, Robert S. Phillips combines all three of these human states to define spiritual isolation in his essay, "Freaking Out: The Short Stories of Carson McCullers": "I have taken the phrase to mean, simply, personal dissociation—the feeling of being severed from society, disunited from others, lonely, separate, different, apart" (66). However, McCullers perceived and then concentrated on the nuances of these emotional concepts, and as such crafted works where loneliness proves to be the product of isolation—purposeful or otherwise—and alienation. The Oxford English Dictionary defines loneliness as the "want of society or company," whereas isolation means "separation from other things or persons." The distinction between the two terms can be understood through the idea of intent: people suffer loneliness when they are alone and desire human contact, but isolated people either may have their solitude inflicted upon them, or they may choose this solitary condition. Alienation, on the other hand, denotes "estrangement," a term markedly different from loneliness and isolation. Accordingly, this chapter will examine several characters from McCullers's fiction using the specific definitions of isolation, loneliness, and alienation noted above. Additionally, this chapter will

demonstrate that in McCullers's literary world, loneliness is not necessarily innate in the human heart but rather, a number of her characters intentionally choose isolation rather than being victims of having it imposed upon them by society.

Many scholars and critics have argued that McCullers employed her lover/beloved "formula"—also referred to as her thesis of love—from *The Ballad of the Sad Café* in all her novels, and they assume that this philosophical interlude in the novella expresses her universal credo about love, isolation, alienation, and loneliness. In that work, McCullers's balladeer inserts into the narrative her/his concept of love, a technique that contextualizes and foreshadows the emotional and physical struggles between Miss Amelia Evans, the Amazonian woman who dominates the small Southern mill town; Cousin Lymon, the hunchback dwarf upon whom Miss Amelia dotes; and Marvin Macy, the ne'er-do-well who once was married to Amelia for ten days:

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. . . . [The lover] 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. . . . Now the beloved can also be of any description. The most outlandish people can be the stimulus for love. A man may be a doddering great-

grandfather and still love only a strange girl he saw in the streets of Cheehaw one afternoon two decades past. The preacher may love a fallen woman. The beloved may be treacherous, greasy-headed, and given to evil habits. Yes, and the lover may see this as clearly as anyone else—but that does not affect the evolution of his love one whit. A most mediocre person can be the object of a love which is wild, extravagant, and beautiful as the poison lilies of the swamp. A good man may be the stimulus for a love both violent and debased, or a jabbering madman may bring about in the soul of someone a tender and simple idyll. Therefore, the value and quality of any love is determined solely by the lover himself.

It is for this reason that most of us would rather love than be loved. Almost everyone wants to be a lover. And the curt truth is that, in a deep secret way, the state of being beloved is intolerable to many. The beloved fears and hates the lover and with the best of reasons. For the lover is forever trying to strip bare his beloved. The lover craves any possible relation with the beloved, even if this experience can cause him only pain. (McCullers, *The Ballad* 25-26).

In this passage, the balladeer posits a cynical theory of love, one that offers little hope for lovers or their beloveds. However, McCullers did not subscribe to this theory of love, for when she autographed a copy of *The Ballad of the Sad Café* for her friend, Robert Walden, McCullers wrote a “special passage” to him, which declared

that “her thesis was unadulterated truth only when a person was *not* in love” (Carr, *The Lonely Hunter* 428). Yet, Eisinger applies this lover/beloved formula in his assessment of McCullers’s works, not just *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. He declares, “She is possessed by the unceasing failures in the consummation of love, because the lover is always rejected by the beloved, who would himself be a lover, and the lover thus goes on dying, into infinity, his spiritual death” (244). However, reading all of McCullers’s works through the lens of this formula limits her imaginative prose. Joseph R. Millichap rightly argues that the principle put forth by the balladeer does not signify McCullers’s ultimate idea of love. He asserts that the balladeer is an omniscient narrator, one who hails from the town where the action takes place, and that he acts as a type of “chorus” because he is privy to information that “only an omniscient author could have” (“A Critical Reevaluation” 73). The balladeer knows everything about the town and its residents and conveys his doctrine of love and “human passion.” Therefore, Millichap declares, “[t]he device . . . releases Mrs. McCullers from responsibility for the universalization of the fantastic observations on the mutual exclusiveness of love so often ascribed to her by the critics” (73). He argues that too few incidents of this principle occur in her novels to prove that it represents McCullers’s personal belief. Rather, the theory signifies only the balladeer’s conviction of love (74). Moreover, Millichap states that too many critics have made the mistake of employing the lover/beloved theory in their examinations of McCullers’s writing, specifically citing Oliver Evans, one of McCullers’s biographers, as one who “single-mindedly applies this one passage to all the other

works" (73). Because Evans uses the formula in his analyses of all McCullers's novels, he concludes that her works represent allegories. In taking this route, Evans neglects the obvious elements of social realism in McCullers's works, that is, racism, classism, and disfranchisement, as well as the themes of isolation and alienation. Therefore, this dissertation will not utilize the lover/beloved formula that so many critics have attached to McCullers's fiction because, as Millichap argues, it does not apply to any other works except the one in which it appeared, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*.

Isolation

And each in the cell of himself is almost convinced of his freedom.

—W. H. Auden

The more traditional scholarly reading of isolation in Modernist literature suggests it to be an uncontrollable, overwhelming facet of the human condition in modernity. Some argue that feeling isolated is intrinsic to the human psyche, while others believe such solitude is imposed because of societal pressures and the emotional and psychological constraints endemic in an increasingly industrialized and materialistic society, one that devalues human beings and, instead, cherishes the accumulation of wealth at the expense of the middle, working, and lower classes. The manufacturing of commodities requires human as well as monetary capital, and labor problems, agitation, and strikes in the early twentieth century point to the fact that many in the Modern era believed they were functionally necessary to the capitalist machine of mass production and marketing but regarded as insignificant

within this system and thus treated as such, generating the feeling of being isolated from others. McCullers scrutinized this psychological aspect of modernity in her fiction, and indeed some of her characters experience isolation being thrust upon them. For instance, because of his deafness, a condition he cannot control, John Singer is isolated from others in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. The characters in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* live on an Army base in Georgia; therefore, they are insulated geographically from the rest of the community through military convention, as a means by which to foster combat-ready cohesion and loyalty between soldiers and their officers. Residents of the small mill town in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* are isolated geographically as well, this time in a rural area of Georgia. There, working class families live in their own section of town, where they reside in rough shanties, while the blacks in the town remain separate from the whites. McCullers's novels take place in the South, where Jim Crow segregation existed. Subsequently, African Americans remained isolated from the white community, except when needed as laborers and domestic workers. They were relegated to their own section of town and were expected not to cross that imaginary boundary unless invited by whites. As such, McCullers's black characters are represented almost solely as domestics and laborers.

McCullers addressed inflicted isolation in her works, but she more frequently concentrated on the theme of isolation as a form of sequestration—purposefully closing off one's self from society. In his elegy to William Butler Yeats—"In Memory of W. B. Yeats (d. January 1939)"—W. H. Auden, a great friend and sometime

housemate of McCullers, speaks to this form of isolation, especially people's inclination to ignore what goes on around them, even when war looms, as it was at the time Auden wrote his poem in 1939. Essentially, he observes that people prefer being cloistered in their individual worlds, their own reality—"And each in the cell of himself is almost / convinced of his freedom" (l.27)—so that they may remain protected from the pain and suffering of others. Auden argues, however, that while they may believe they are free, in actuality they are psychologically imprisoned in their self-delusion. A number of characters in McCullers's fiction sequester themselves in the manner succinctly depicted by Auden. They deceive themselves by believing they can persistently shut themselves off from the fears and pain of daily modern life, but readers understand that, as social beings, these characters must live among others and deal with both the virtuous and despicable aspects of modern human existence. In other words, the pain of living in the world cannot be prevented or ignored.

In her short story, "The Court in the West Eighties," written in 1939 but only published posthumously in 1971 in *The Mortgaged Heart*, McCullers examines isolation as sequestration through her narrator, an unnamed 18-year-old woman who works at odd jobs and attends college in New York City. The first-person narration of the story points to the isolated state of the young university student, for she says, "I was too busy to make any friends down at school and I had never been so much alone" (12), a statement that merely intimates she is unhappy with that condition of solitude because at no other time in the tale does she express

loneliness. The narrator lives in an apartment building, and as she gazes out her window, she sees one of her neighbors, a red-haired man about whom she knows nothing. She thinks to herself, “It seems strange now to think of me standing there alone and this man asleep in his room on the other side and me not knowing anything about him and caring less” (12). Here, we see self-imposed isolation at work in the narrator’s life. She intentionally avoids getting to know her neighbor, preferring to remain insulated in her own apartment. The narrator does not care to know her neighbors, those who live so close by.

The action of the story takes place over three seasons, beginning in winter and ending in late summer, and the changes the narrator observes in her neighbors occur with each shift of the season. She watches a young married couple—the wife is pregnant—who start out being happy but begin to show signs of financial strain because the husband apparently has lost his job. The female narrator says, “You could tell by their faces he had lost his job” (15), and she soon observes that both young people are going hungry: “I had plenty of time to realize what it meant when the young man started coming in with a pint of milk instead of a quart, when finally one day the bottle he brought home was only one of the half-pint size” (16). The most telling observation about the narrator’s isolation comes next, when she declares, “It is hard to tell how you feel when you watch someone go hungry. You see their room was not more than a few yards from mine and I couldn’t quit thinking about them” (16). Clearly, the sight of two people struggling to put food on the table seems to upset the narrator, yet at no time does she offer to help. She and her

neighbors live closely together—“We are near enough to throw food into each others’ windows” (16)—but nobody helps the starving couple, least of all the narrator. Instead, she rationalizes that, because the building isn’t a tenement and it looks pleasant from the outside—after all, they’re not living in the slums; they live in the West Eighties of New York City—“it is not possible that inside someone could starve” (16). So she does nothing.

Instead, she pins her hopes on her red-haired neighbor, a man with whom she has become obsessed, to do something. The young female narrator continuously watches her male neighbor, projecting onto him her own desires: she wants him to be kind, considerate, good, and helpful, qualities she appears not to possess: “He seemed so calm and sure. When the trouble we began to have in the court started I could not help but feel he was the one person able to straighten it out” (14). However, when a neighboring cellist yells at the married couple for throwing orange peels out the window, the red-haired man does nothing, despite the narrator’s observation that “it seemed to me he wanted to stop the tension between the rooms” (14). She herself dislikes hearing people scream at each other, and she admits that it makes her agitated, but like her neighbor, she chooses not to interfere in the lives of the other residents. Later, when all the neighbors hear the husband violently yelling from the married couple’s apartment, the narrator longs for the red-haired man to handle the terrible situation. “*Do something do something, I wanted to call over to him*” (18). Rather than doing something herself, the narrator merely watches and listens, wishing for someone else to deal with the

unrest in the apartment building. But the red-haired man simply sits, smokes his pipe, and listens. Once again, McCullers deftly shows the narrator's chosen isolation; the young woman projects onto the red-haired neighbor her desire to break the tension between her other neighbors, to create peace among them all, rather than doing so herself, actions she clearly could do on her own if she cared enough to do so.

In this story, McCullers concentrates on the thoughts and feelings of the sequestered young university student and the inaction that results from such self-imposed isolation. By the end of the tale, she admits she knows nothing about the red-haired resident, a man she believed to be decent and kind: "When I think back over the times I have watched him I can't remember a thing unusual that he ever did" (19). Yet, she still attaches to him the notion that he could, indeed, solve difficult situations. The most profound statement the narrator makes occurs in the final sentence: "And there is one point in a thing like this—as long as I feel this way, in a sense, it is true" (19). Through this declaration, McCullers illustrates the self-delusion implicit in this form of sequestration. Robert Phillips asserts that the narrator "is a character who neither acts nor is acted upon, but merely records the scenes about her in an apartment house which serves as a microcosm of the macrocosm" (175). She convinces herself that the red-haired neighbor is someone he clearly is not: a man capable of rectifying violent situations and creating peace. But she desires him to be this way; therefore, he is. Through this narrator, we see McCullers craft a grotesque character in the manner of Sherwood Anderson. This

young narrator invents a truth about the red-haired man and her other neighbors, and she lives her life within that truth, never bothering to ascertain whether she is correct in her assumptions. Even when she sees that the red-haired resident does not meet her expectation, she manifestly refuses to change her mind about him, preferring instead to believe her fallacious assessment of him to be true.

McCullers demonstrates how specious the narrator's thoughts are about her neighbor; however, the tale exposes chosen isolation on a much broader level, for nobody in the story—the cellist, red-haired man, married couple, narrator, nor any of their neighbors—gets to know anyone in the apartment building. The narrator remarks, "You see all of us in the court saw each other sleep and dress and live out our hours away from work, but none of us ever spoke" (16). Here, McCullers makes an astute observation about modern urban life and isolation, but in this case, rather than social pressures causing these characters to feel separated from each other, they actively choose to sequester themselves in their own rooms, never once caring enough to help others clearly in need. The balloon man—the figure made of balloons that the cellist hangs in her window—serves as a symbol of the aloof, even callous, nature of this self-imposed sequestration. Like all the people living in the building, the balloon man merely exists, floating in the breezes of the window and perpetually grinning. Like the narrator, it does not act, nor is it acted upon. It simply exists in its ever-smiling state. Phillips declares that the balloon man "is an effigy mocking mankind," which proves quite accurate; he then asserts that it symbolizes "man's helplessness" (175). However, when interpreted through the

concept of intentional isolation, the balloon man does not represent helplessness but rather uncaring detachment from community. While Virginia Spencer Carr correctly concludes that “Court in the West Eighties” is a “long and less well-developed apprentice piece” (*Understanding* 140), readers see that McCullers dealt early on in her writing career with the theme of isolation as self-imposed sequestration. This story aptly reveals the existence of busy people in modern urban America, their lives intentionally cloistered from communion with their neighbors. They believe they are living life as free human beings, immune to others’ suffering, when, in reality, they are trapped in their delusion of freedom.

Rather than examining callous, deliberate sequestration as she does in “Court in the West Eighties,” McCullers instead reveals the emotional sanctuary one can sometimes find within the “cell” of self-imposed isolation. She does so in the character of Mick Kelly, the adolescent girl in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, written in the late 1930s and published in 1940. When her story begins, Mick must act older than her thirteen years because her parents are too busy running their boardinghouse to care for their two youngest children, one seven years old and the other a baby. Mick plays mother, father, and sister to Bubber and baby Ralph. Moreover, the shabby house in which she lives is too small to contain all the boarders as well as the large Kelly family. The narrator observes, “On Sundays the house was always full of folks because the boarders had visitors” (40). Thus, Mick must share a bedroom with her two older sisters, which means she has no privacy. As she pulls her two younger siblings in a wagon, Mick makes a telling statement to

them about her need for a safe place to be herself: “Some things you just naturally want to keep private. Not because they are bad, but because you just want them secret. There are two or three I wouldn’t want even you to know about” (40). A precocious child, Mick creates for herself an “inside room,” as she terms it (163). In the solitude of her own mind, young Mick dreams of faraway places and her beloved music: “With her it was like there was two places—the inside room and the outside room. School and the family and things that happened every day were in the outside room. . . . Foreign countries and plans and music were in the inside room. The songs she thought about were there” (163). After the occurrence when she becomes transfixed listening to Beethoven’s *Third Symphony*, she oftentimes retreats to her inside room to “listen to it many times and try to join it into the parts of the symphony she remembered” (163). For Mick, her inside room is a safe haven from the dull routine of her life, a place where she can imagine being rich and famous, a compartment within her psyche in which she can daydream of becoming a composer of music. She declares to herself, “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” (163). For an ambitious adolescent girl on the cusp of adulthood, such a sanctuary proves an emotional necessity, especially since she and her family live during the Great Depression and the boardinghouse makes too little money to adequately support the Kelly clan.

Unfortunately for young Mick, she eventually loses her psychological and emotional shelter. The Kelly family falls on harder times, so 14-year-old Mick must

quit school to work full-time as a salesgirl at a five and dime store. In her final chapter, Mick complains to herself about how tired she is from working at the store, while she bemoans Mr. Singer's suicide and the fact "that she was grown and had to work at Woolworth's" (351). More importantly, though, she grieves for the loss of her inside room, for now she can no longer access her sanctuary, the one "place" she could be completely herself and be immune to the pressures of the world. No longer can she hear music in her inside room, music being the most vital part of her life.

Instead, she is too exhausted to access her inner haven:

But now she was always 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. (353)

Here, we sense Mick as almost desperate to recover her self-imposed isolation. When she retreated to her inside room, she felt safe and could ignore everyone and everything else. And as a young teenager, she appears too emotionally and intellectually immature to comprehend exactly why she can no longer be in the inner room of her mind. She thinks to herself that it is "[a] very hard thing to understand" (353). Mick only knows she is tired all the time. Yet, despite her dejection, she ultimately demonstrates the resilience of adolescence by believing music can still be a part of her life, for she hopes to purchase a secondhand piano

and attempts to convince herself she can accomplish this by saving her money: “But maybe it would be true about the piano and turn out O. K. Maybe she would get a chance soon. Else what the hell good had it all been—the way she felt about music and the plans she had made in the inside room? It had to be some good if anything made sense” (354). As readers, we understand that Mick’s inner room signifies her cell of self-delusion; she may have convinced herself she was happy in her self-imposed isolation, but such a fantasy cannot last in the real world; it is merely an illusion. Mick does not fully understand this because of her age, so she gamely continues on, hoping she can somehow keep music in her life. But McCullers demonstrates Auden’s poetic statement that, ultimately, humans are social beings and must be in the world of people, not hiding away from it.

Interestingly, some critics misinterpret Mick’s self-imposed isolation. For example, Chester E. Eisinger argues that she “is forced in upon herself” (250), when, in fact, Mick consciously chooses to create her inside room and enter it when she pleases. Rather than fashioning a physical place where she escapes reality—such as the apartment where the narrator in “The Court in the West Eighties” sequesters herself—Mick provides herself a space where she can use her imagination and make plans for her future. Eisinger further asserts that she uses her inner room as a “refuge in her loneliness” (250), but at no time does McCullers describe Mick as particularly lonely. True, she does not belong to any particular group at school, and this does begin to vex her: “During the first week she walked up and down the halls by herself and thought about this. She planned about being with some bunch almost

as much as she thought about music" (104). Here, McCullers intentionally uses the word "planned" rather than "felt" or some other word connoting loneliness. Rather than expressing self-pity, Mick elects to organize a party so that she may feel a part of the high school crowd. Once again, McCullers shows Mick planning ways to join other students, not feeling lonely. In fact, Mick declares, "High school was swell." (104).

Like Eisinger, Richard M. Cook seems to misunderstand the purpose of Mick's inside room. He proclaims that "Mick seeks consolation by symbolically destroying the outside world" (*Carson McCullers* 26), and to support his claim, Cook cites the pictures she has drawn of catastrophic events like planes crashing and ships sinking. However, since Europe was on the brink of war, Mick could just as easily have painted those pictures from news reports she heard on the radio, or psychologically speaking, she could have drawn them as an unconscious way of easing her mind about impending war. Cook further asserts:

Mick's primary defense against the constricting pressures of the outside world is to retreat into an 'inside room.' . . . Mick's inside room brings temporary feelings of peace and direction, but it represents yet another retreat into a spiritual isolation that can cripple as well as console. (*Carson McCullers* 26-27)

However, Cook does not offer an explanation of this crippling spiritual isolation, and nowhere in the novel does McCullers indicate Mick to be emotionally or psychically injured in her self-imposed isolation. To the contrary, her self-imposed

sequestration helps her maintain a calmer disposition around others, particularly her family. She may occasionally lash out at her older sisters, but that proves to be a natural adolescent reaction to being teased by siblings and having her privacy invaded by family members. In the case of Mick Kelly, McCullers illustrates a positive facet of deliberately isolating oneself from the world, at least for a little while. But as usual, the author also clearly shows that sequestering oneself cannot be maintained forever, that eventually, we must all become a part of community. In Mick's case, she must face the truth of her family's economic plight by forsaking her inside room and entering the real world of employment outside the home. The space she once believed was a sanctuary for her imaginative freedom does not, in fact, exist for her anymore. Mick is forced to relinquish her safe space of self-imposed isolation, a place where she was "almost convinced of [her] freedom" (in Audenian terms), and enter the world of people.

In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, McCullers addresses yet another facet of self-imposed isolation in the character of Bubber, Mick Kelly's younger brother and favorite sibling. In the case of this seven-year-old boy, he intentionally sequesters himself because of an emotional trauma. Mick's parents charge her to care for her two younger brothers, Bubber and baby Ralph, while they tend to their boardinghouse responsibilities. For the most part, Mick gets along well with Bubber, for he uncomplainingly looks after the baby while she spends time by herself sitting on the roof of a newly constructed house and letting her imagination run wild (34). When she pulls the baby in the wagon, she tells Bubber to get in as

well, knowing his bare feet are burning on the sidewalk because of the hot summer sun. "I can walk all right," he replies, but Mick kindly says to him, "I don't mind pulling you," a clear indication they are mindful of being a burden to each other (39). Bubber proves to be an innocent, lovable young boy, for when Mick and the black domestic servant, Portia, discuss God as the two children eat their supper, he asks, "What all does God eat?" (50), a typically childlike question he genuinely wants answered. Mick trusts her young brother and sincerely likes him. In the first Mick chapter in Part Two, Mick thinks to herself:

Bubber was a swell kid and she had trained him pretty good. If she told him not to go out of hollering distance from Ralph she wouldn't ever find him shooting marbles with kids two or three blocks away. He played by himself near the wagon, and when she left them she didn't have to worry much. (98)

Additionally, Bubber speaks Spanish with Mick, an activity they enjoy together, and she sees him as an intelligent boy:

Bubber was sharp as a briar. . . . Every afternoon since school had started she had fun speaking the new Spanish words and sentences. At first Bubber was stumped, and it was funny to watch his face while she talked the foreign language. Then he caught on in a hurry, and before long he could copy everything she said. He remembered the words, too. . . . After a while the kid learned so fast she gave out of Spanish and just gabbled along with made-up sounds. But it wasn't

long before he caught her out at that—nobody could put a thing over on old Bubber Kelly. (102-103)

Bubber helps decorate the house for Mick's prom party, something young boys probably would hesitate doing, and when it rains for a number of days, brother and sister play board games and marbles on the porch, clearly enjoying each other's company. Bubber likes his sister and wishes her well, and she feels the same about him.

However, seven-year-old Bubber suffers a terrible trauma that completely changes his personality. He accidentally shoots Baby Wilson, a prissy Shirley Temple wannabe, and immediately runs away to hide, fearing he has killed her. When Mr. Kelly returns from the hospital to say Baby is only injured, Mick offers to find Bubber. "I can manage Bubber. Once he comes back I can take care of him all right" (168). Mick and Bubber are bonded through mutual trust, so she knows she can handle her brother. However, when she discovers him hiding in a box that serves as a tree house, she realizes that "[s]he was really mad with that kid and would have to teach him a lesson" (169), at which point she tells him that Baby has died and that he will be tried and sent to prison: "The words were so awful-sounding in the dark that a shiver came over her. She could feel Bubber trembling" (169). She then wounds him further by declaring, "They got little electric chairs there—just your size. And when they turn on the juice you just fry up like a piece of bacon. Then you go to Hell" (169). Mick adds to Bubber's suffering: "You better stay up here because they got policemen guarding the yard. Maybe in a few days I

can bring you something to eat” (170). To an innocent child who believes everything his sister tells him, Mick’s pronouncements amplify Bubber’s already traumatized psyche. More importantly, Mick shatters Bubber’s trust. Louise Y. Gossett asserts that Mick’s lies represent a form of violence: “His wounding Baby Wilson was less a shock than was the willingness of Mick to turn his violence and fear into a weapon against him” (163). Only later, after Bubber runs away from home, does Mick regret telling him such falsehoods; she then becomes protective of her little brother. She thinks to herself, “Bubber was always so thin and little and smart. She would kill anybody that tried to send that kid out of the family. She wanted to kiss him and bite him because she loved him so much” (172). Sadly for both Bubber and Mick, their mutual trust has been shattered, forever adversely changing their relationship.

McCullers illustrates not only how a traumatic event can alter a child but also that love cannot always be the antidote for emotional and mental misery. Mick soon learns her love cannot save Bubber from the terrifying shock of the shooting and her lies meant to teach him a lesson. Gossett posits that “[t]he consequences of a broken trust may be violent enough to change the personality of a character” (163), and in fact, Bubber’s mental torment triggers in him a drastic personality change. After Bubber runs away from home, Mick and her father discover him walking alone that night on a deserted road, and he struggles as his father puts him in the car: “He fought like a tiger in a trap, but finally they got him into the car” (178). When they arrive home, Bubber runs to the corner of the room, “holding his fists very tight and

with his squinted eyes looking from one person to the other like he was ready to fight the whole crowd" (178). Wedged into that corner, Bubber screams, "You can't get me! Nobody can get me!" and shrieks that he hates everyone (179). Once in bed, Bubber cries himself to sleep, and Mick vows to herself that she will never hurt him or lie to him again. However, the trauma proves too deeply embedded in the young boy's psyche, and he emotionally shuts himself off from everybody, even Mick. Mick observes, "After he shot Baby the kid was not ever like little Bubber again. He always kept his mouth shut and he didn't fool around with anybody. Most of the time he just sat in the back yard or in the coal house by himself" (180). The once happy, innocent Bubber now engages in self-imposed isolation as a form of emotional protection from others. Here, McCullers depicts the damage caused by mental and emotional injury to this child. In their study on psychological dissociation and trauma, DePrince and Freyd utilize betrayal trauma theory to investigate dissociation and psychological fragmentation, arguing that "dissociative tendencies appear to be high in populations of trauma survivors" (449). They define dissociation as "the lack of integration of thoughts, feelings and experiences into the stream of consciousness" (449), and though Bubber does not dissociate from reality—a loss of conscious awareness—he clearly exhibits psychic fragmentation, a symptom of dissociation. Feeling betrayed by his family—especially Mick, the one person who accepted him as he was, played with him often, and enjoyed his company—Bubber deliberately withdraws from the rest of the world, hiding his toys and favorite jackknife, and he "wouldn't let anyone touch his

story books" (180). The most obvious sign of his emotional fragmentation proves to be his name change. After the shooting, the neighborhood children call him "Baby-Killer," yet one more betrayal and blow to his already fragile psychological state. Moreover, his own family stops calling him Bubber, the sweet name that means "brother" and connotes family love and affection; instead, they call him by his real name, George. Only Mick refuses to call him by his real name; however, she soon drops his nickname and refers to him as George like everybody else. Mick also notices that George has transformed into a solitary boy, one who keeps everything to himself: "But he was a different kid—George—going around by himself always like a person much older and with nobody, not even her, knowing what was really on his mind" (180). Bubber suffers emotional anguish, but as a young boy incapable of fully processing the trauma he has experienced, he reacts in the only way he knows how in order to protect himself from further emotional strain. No longer feeling like an innocent child, Bubber/George chooses self-imposed isolation, thus closing himself off from any affection and love Mick or his family may show him.

McCullers's treatment of Bubber attests to her sensitivity to emotional trauma and her ability to acknowledge, explain, and thus expose the consequences of psychic anguish. Bubber's reaction to his terrible experience reflects the portion of W. H. Auden's poem used as the epigraph for this section on isolation—"And each in the cell of himself is almost / convinced of his freedom" (l.27). The young boy intentionally sequesters himself from others, even his beloved Mick, as a form of emotional self-preservation from further trauma and suffering. However, by doing

so, he shuts himself off from any happy event he may encounter. As a grotesque character, Bubber believes he is free from pain, but in reality, he creates—and will continue to experience—utter loneliness. Moreover, he cannot possibly experience any joy that life may bring to him. Thus, his intentional sequestration perpetuates his emotional suffering and self-delusion of freedom.

McCullers once again writes about self-imposed isolation through the minor character of Mr. Addams in *The Member of the Wedding*, a character loosely based on her own father, Lamar Smith, a watch repairman from Alabama who eventually owned his own jewelry store in Columbus, Georgia. In her biography of McCullers, Virginia Spencer Carr writes that Smith often “impulsively left his jeweler’s bench to walk about the town” (*The Lonely Hunter* 87), and he preferred to be alone, rarely speaking to others on his strolls through the Georgia town (10). He was also an alcoholic. In the autumn of 1943, Smith became dreadfully ill because of his addiction to alcohol. Carr writes, “Carson stayed by her father’s side, kept the liquor, and doled it out, drink by drink, until in less than a week he was able to do without it completely, and eventually, to go back to work” (238). However, his alcoholism permanently damaged his heart, and he passed away from a heart attack the following year (249).⁷ Reminiscent of McCullers’s father, Mr. Addams owns his own jewelry store, oftentimes sends young Frankie to “Finny’s Place” to fetch some

⁷ In *Understanding Carson McCullers*, Carr writes: “Although the newspapers reported it to be a heart attack, intimates of the family claimed that the melancholy jeweler had, in fact, shot himself” (83). Carr gleaned this information in her October 23, 1987, conversation with David Diamond and Vannie Copland Jackson, where they “spoke freely about the alleged heart attack and said that Lamar Smith’s death was ‘definitely suicide’” (87).

“frosted bottles of beer” for him (52), and prefers to be alone at home and at his store.

Mr. Royal Quincy Addams spends his days bending over his desk repairing watches and jewelry. Like Mr. Kelly, the father in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Mr. Addams only intermittently appears in the novel, but his presence proves important to the action that occurs in the tale, especially in his encounters with his daughter, Frankie. McCullers portrays him as a middle class man of the time: a widower who conscientiously works to support himself and his family. The Addams family seems financially secure for, like most Southern middle class families, they are able to afford a black domestic servant, Berenice Sadie Brown. But while Mr. Addams appears to love his child—he helps her with a difficult arithmetic problem, for instance (52)—Berenice represents both mother and father to Frankie. In essence, Berenice symbolizes the heart of the home, not only because Mr. Addams must work but also because he chooses to be away from the house as much as possible, for he oftentimes arrives home long after Berenice has left to return to her residence. True, he shows some patience with Frankie and her little cousin, John Henry, when they scribble pictures all over the kitchen walls: “At first her father had been furious about the walls, but later he said for them to draw all the pictures out of their systems, and he would have the kitchen painted in the fall” (9). Yet, when he tells Frankie she is too old to sleep with him anymore, he does so in a mocking fashion by calling her a “great big long-legged twelve-year-old blunderbuss” (24). At that moment, Frankie starts “to have a grudge against her father and they looked at each

other in a slant-eyed way” (24). Frankie feels abandoned by him; he senses this, yet he does nothing to help her or disabuse her of this notion. Instead, he leaves her in the care of Berenice. Such an action on the part of Southern parents was not uncommon in the twentieth century. After all, even in the late 1930s, when McCullers began to envisage this novel, the concept of separate spheres for men and women was still maintained, at least in middle and upper class households. A woman stayed home, while the man went to work. Yet, Mr. Kelly in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* seems more loving, attentive, and involved with Mick, his daughter, who is about the same age as Frankie, than Mr. Addams is with Frankie. Thus, it seems that McCullers chooses to portray Mr. Addams in a less than positive light, as one who chooses to isolate himself from his daughter.

Mr. Addams also appears, for the most part, emotionally distant from his daughter. When Frankie, as F. Jasmine, informs him that she will not return after the wedding of Jarvis and Janice, “he did not listen. He was a widowman, for her mother had died the very day that she was born—and, as a widowman, set in his ways. Sometimes, especially in the early morning, he did not listen to things she said or new suggestions” (52). When she tells him she needs clothing for the upcoming wedding, he only nods his assent, not speaking to her. Soon after, he scolds her for borrowing some tools and threatens that she must “be taught. From now on you walk the chalkline. Or you’ll have to be taught” (53). Later, F. Jasmine stops by her father’s jewelry store to tell him she has been walking throughout the town, “[b]ut he did not listen”; instead, he rather nonchalantly informs her of the

death of her Uncle Charles and then returns to his work desk without further discussion (65-66). After F. Jasmine hits the soldier in the head with the water pitcher at the Blue Moon Café, she sees her father reading a newspaper and posits a “hypothetical” question to him, hoping to learn if she may have killed the soldier:

F. Jasmine stood in the doorway, unable to leave. ‘Papa,’ she said, after a minute, ‘if somebody hits somebody with a glass pitcher and he falls out cold, do you think he is dead?’

She had to repeat the question, feeling a bitter grudge against him because he did not take her seriously, so that her questions must be asked twice.

‘Why, come to think about it, I never hit anybody with a pitcher,’ he said. ‘Did you?’

F. Jasmine knew he asked this as a joke. . . . (139)

Here, we see Mr. Addams more interested in his newspaper and evening ritual than the question put forth by his daughter. Had he paid attention, he may have seen her as she was: a young girl in emotional distress. Instead, he prefers to shut himself off from his child and treat her question, asked in a genuine manner, as a joke. In the final part of the novel, F. Jasmine makes a fool of herself at the wedding, and her father must physically pull her from the wedding car, but at no time does he offer comfort to his daughter. Instead, he says good night to her by calling her “Picklepriss” (150), an unkind appellation for a young teen who has suffered a great humiliation. Clearly, Frankie seems to be more of a hindrance than a pleasure in Mr.

Addams's life, for he treats her less like a feeling person and more like someone who must be tolerated.

Frankie learns more about life from Berenice than she does her own blood kin. For instance, after Frankie accidentally walks in on two boarders having sex in the front room of the Addams's home, she goes to Berenice, not her father, to ascertain "what kind of fit" the couple had been experiencing (40), despite the fact that it is Mr. Addams, not Berenice, who informs Frankie the boarders will be leaving. Clearly, Berenice seems safer to Frankie than does her own father. Once again, we see how McCullers crafts purposeful sequestration in her depiction of Mr. Addams. Rather than engaging with his only daughter, he intentionally goes into his own world during breakfast preparations, shuts himself off in his workroom at the store, hides behind his newspaper in the evenings, and psychologically and emotionally shuts himself off from his only daughter, Frankie. Mr. Addams's self-imposed sequestration hurts his child, but he seems not to care. In fact, he acts oblivious to her emotional and psychological needs. Yes, Frankie proves to be a resilient girl, but her father's behavior towards her contributes to her ultimate humiliation at the wedding.

In the figure of Mr. Addams, McCullers examines the role of fatherhood in modernity. He sequesters himself within his cell of isolation, believing he is free of any true responsibility for his daughter's emotional health and happiness. Mr. Addams economically provides for her physical welfare, but as far as helping her navigate adolescence and all the emotional, mental, and spiritual upheavals this

involves, he abdicates his responsibility and, instead, entrusts Berenice to do the job he, as a father, should be doing. After all, Frankie's mother is dead, so the duty of parenthood solely rests with Mr. Addams. As such, McCullers critiques not only the concept of separate spheres but also the notion that only women are necessary in the upbringing of girls and their development into womanhood.

In her second and most controversial novel, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, McCullers crafts a strange configuration of intentional isolation, not as a product of trauma or disinterest but rather as a form of sociopathy presented in the character of Private Ellgee Williams. A number of critics and scholars argue that, because McCullers writes about murder, blatant sexuality, and aberrant behavior in this book, her fiction must be treated and analyzed as Southern Gothic. However, in his Introduction to the novel, Tennessee Williams mounts an argument against pigeonholing McCullers as a Southern Gothic writer by pointing to the universality of dreadfulness, the main feature of the novel: "All of these things that you list as dreadful ['diseased and perverted and fantastic creatures'] are parts of the visible, sensible phenomena of every man's experience or knowledge" (132-133).⁸ He then declares, "*Reflections in a Golden Eye* is one of the purest and most powerful of those works which are conceived in that Sense of the Awful which is the desperate black root of nearly all significant modern art, from the *Guernica* of Picasso to the cartoons of Charles Addams" (134). Most of the characters in McCullers's novel are not

⁸ Tennessee Williams's comments originally appeared in the Introduction of the 1951 edition of McCullers's novel, published by New Directions. Williams's comments in this dissertation appear in the Afterword of the 2000 edition of *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, published by Mariner Books.

particularly likeable or even normal. In fact, one anonymous reader complained that “not even the horse is normal,” a sentence Oliver Evans employs as a chapter title for his analysis of *Reflections in a Golden Eye* in his biography of McCullers (*The Ballad* 59). However, Ellgee Williams proves to be the most peculiar and deviant of all the characters, and he personifies this through his self-imposed isolation, a condition symptomatic of his sociopathy.

Twenty-year-old Williams, an enlisted man stationed on a peacetime Army base in Georgia, deliberately chooses to separate himself from his fellow soldiers. “He was a silent young soldier and in the barracks he had neither an enemy nor a friend” (4).⁹ McCullers describes him in terms of animalistic tendencies: his amber-brown eyes resemble “the eyes of animals” and reflect an animalistic “mute expression” (4). Williams “move[s] with the silence and agility of a wild creature or a thief” (4), a noteworthy foreshadowing of his later criminal actions. His comrades, if they can be called such, find him mysterious and difficult because he does not willingly communicate with them, nor does he participate in the activities of the other men: playing sports, gambling, drinking, smoking, and fornicating. He prefers the company of the horses he tends on the base, and the only expression of love or compassion he displays takes place when he strokes the stomach of a mare ready to foal: “He stroked her swollen belly and stood for a time with his arms around her neck” (24). Williams often walks in solitude in the woods or rides a particular horse

⁹ All references to *Reflections in a Golden Eye* are from Carson McCullers. *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. 1941. New York: Mariner Books, 2000. Print.

and lies naked on a flat rock in a secluded spot to sun himself. Apparently, he requires nothing, but “there was one thing that this soldier could not do without—the sun” (54). Occasionally, he rides bareback completely in the nude. In her description of the naked, bareback-riding Williams, McCullers again foreshadows his sociopathic predisposition: “As he cantered about in the sunlight, there was a sensual, savage smile on his lips that would have surprised his barrack mates” (54). Williams never smiles or speaks to anyone; he simply stands, waits, and watches in his seemingly dull way, a clear sign he is anti-social. However, to exhibit such an awful smile reveals his true inner being, one that soon exhibits itself as sociopathic.

Private Williams proves to be abnormal, and his self-imposed isolation represents a symptom of his sociopathic disposition, for he becomes a stalker, voyeur, and criminal intruder after he sees Leonora Penderton’s naked body. The wife of Williams’s superior, Captain Weldon Penderton, Leonora is sensual, animalistic in her lust for food and her husband’s boss, Major Morris Langdon. She shows nothing but disdain for the sexually impotent Captain Penderton, and as a way of tormenting him before they throw a house party, she fully undresses and walks slowly up the stairs to her bedroom. She does this while the curtains are raised and the lights on, which mortifies Captain Penderton because anyone could see her nude body. And one person does witness her performance: Private Ellgee Williams. The young soldier has never seen a naked woman before because his father raised him to believe “women carried in them a deadly and catching disease which made men blind, crippled, and doomed to hell” (18-19). Unworldly, Williams,

who knows nothing about women or the sexual act, has the Army doctor examine him monthly “to see if he had touched a woman” (19). To illustrate his lack of sophistication and expose the source of his subsequent deviant behavior, McCullers writes, “Private Williams had never willingly touched, or looked at, or spoken to a female since he was eight years old” (19). Therefore, when he accidentally spies the nude Leonora Penderton and continues gazing on her with an expressionless face, Williams becomes fascinated with her. “The expression of his mute face had not been changed by his experience, but now and then he narrowed his gold-brown eyes as though he were forming within himself some subtle scheme” (19). Here, we see not only his animal-like eyes but also the germination of his subsequent sociopathic acts.

Obsessed with Leonora, Elgee Williams, the silent, deliberately isolated soldier, begins a nightly ritual of hiding so as to watch the Penderton house, but during his vigil, he focuses solely on Leonora. During the day, he retains “a deep reflection of the sight he had seen that night when passing before the Captain’s lighted vestibule” (28)—Leonora Penderton’s nude body—and he walks seemingly in a trancelike state. At this point in the tale, McCullers creates a brief interlude that further reveals Williams’s unhealthy psyche: he does nothing with any “conscious planning on his part” (29). Rather, he acts instinctively, like an animal. Only four times has he done an act on his own: he bought a cow; declared his belief in God, which he soon abandoned; committed a crime; and enlisted in the Army (28-29). Later in the story, we discover that 15-year-old Williams killed a black man because

of “an argument over a wheelbarrow of manure” (90). Filled with rage, the white teenager violently stabs the black man and hides his body. After killing the man, Williams “felt a certain wondering, numb distress, but there was no fear in him, and not once since that time had the thought shaped definitely in his mind that he was a murderer” (90). Williams feels no sense of guilt because he lacks any sense of right or wrong. As such, he does not think of himself as a murderer, an obvious sign he is a sociopath. While he also proves to be a racial bigot, more importantly, he further displays his sociopathy when we learn he does not consider black people to be human, and he places Army officers “in the same vague category as Negroes—they had a place in his life, but he did not look on them as being human” (123). Once again, McCullers creates a grotesque figure in the character of Williams, who personifies a classic sociopath.

Williams spends eleven nights watching the Penderton house, but on the twelfth night, his aberrant behavior intensifies. He sneaks into the Penderton house and quietly enters Leonora’s bedroom:

Very slowly the soldier tiptoed to the side of the bed and bent over the Captain’s wife. The moon softly lighted their faces and he was so close that he could feel her warm, even breath. In the soldier’s grave eyes there was at first an expression of intent curiosity, but as the moments passed, a look of bliss awakened in his heavy face. (53)

He remains in his crouched position till the early morning, intently watching Leonora. Then he sneaks out of the house and returns to the base.

Williams intentionally withdraws further into his own world of isolation, fixating on Leonora and clearly presenting deep sexual repression. So deliberately isolated is he that nobody notices he does not sleep on the base at night. McCullers further details his isolation when she discusses his name: "Private Williams always had been so unsociable that hardly half of his sleeping mates even knew his name" (89), and she soon reveals that Ellgee is not, in fact his real name, but rather L. G. The sergeant processing Williams's enlistment papers declares that L. G. is an unacceptable name for the Army and changes it to Ellgee: "Private Williams nodded and in the face of such indifference, the Sergeant burst into a loud raw laugh. 'The half-wits they do send us now,' he had said as he turned back to his papers" (89). However, Williams does not personify a half-wit but, instead, proves to be an unduly passive person who prefers self-imposed isolation to community and voyeurism to any real communication or intimacy with a woman.

Williams's deviant behavior escalates during his nighttime escapades when he eventually touches Leonora's hair and eats a chicken drumstick she left on her bed table. Tellingly, he possesses no sense of fear at being caught viewing the Captain's wife because "[h]e felt, but did not think; he experienced without making any mental résumé of his present or past actions" (90), yet another example of his sociopathy. Eventually, Williams is caught watching Leonora. Morris Langdon's wife, Alison, spies a man's shadow in the back yard of the Penderton residence, and she suspects her philandering husband of embarking on a midnight tryst with Leonora. Alison quietly enters the Penderton home, goes to Leonora's bedroom,

switches on the light, and sees Ellgee Williams: "Alison stood in the doorway, her face white and twisted with amazement. Then without a word she backed out of the room" (104). Neither Captain Penderton nor Major Langdon believe Alison's story of seeing an enlisted man in Leonora's bedroom, and soon she is committed to a sanatorium that "catered to patients who were both physically and mentally ill" (108). Thus, Williams is free to carry on his nightly intrusions into Leonora's bedroom.

However, after having been seen by Alison Langdon, Ellgee Williams experiences a type of personality change. He deliberately picks fights with other soldiers, and still withdrawn into himself, he sits for long periods of time and then suddenly "perpetrate[s] some inexcusable offense" (122). He begins to have nightmares and abandons his ritual of walking in the woods. Nevertheless, despite being caught by Mrs. Langdon, Williams cannot stop thinking of Leonora:

His memory of these times was wholly sensual. There was the thick rug beneath his feet, the silk spread, the faint scent of perfume. There was the soft luxurious warmth of woman-flesh, the quiet darkness—the alien sweetness in his heart and the tense power in his body as he crouched there near to her. Once having known this he could not let it go; in him was engendered a dark, drugged craving as certain of fulfillment as death. (124)

Williams objectifies Leonora in the term "woman-flesh," senses the strength and power of his body, and feels emotionally enslaved in his desire for the Captain's

wife. His predisposition for self-imposed isolation, combined with his sexual repression and deviance, transmogrify into a dangerously sociopathic, even psychotic, mental state. As foreshadowed by McCullers in the passage above, a tragedy does occur. On a moonless night, Williams once again returns to the Penderton property and is spotted and recognized by Captain Penderton, who grabs his pistol, enters Leonora's bedroom, observes Williams crouching by his wife's bed, and shoots Williams twice in the chest: "Even in death the body of the soldier still had the look of warm, animal comfort. His grave face was unchanged, and his sun-browned hands lay palms upward on the carpet as though asleep" (127). Yet again, McCullers refers to Williams's animal-like tendencies, as if to intimate that he behaves less like a rational human being than an animal that acts from instinct.

Williams's self-sequestration prevents him from experiencing real human contact and communication, which produces, or at the very least, augments his sociopathic propensities. Perhaps, had he been more open to others instead of shutting himself off from people, he might have learned what it means to be truly human, that is, to feel heartfelt love and passion rather than instinctual, and in this case, deviant sexuality. But McCullers crafts his character to be completely sequestered from all human contact in order to critique the American puritan-like tendency to believe that human sexuality reflects people's immorality and unhealthy sexual appetites. Ellgee Williams's self-imposed isolation reflects his sociopathy, but such sequestration may be a condition he is unable to control, particularly in light of his father's injunction that women are diseased creatures capable of blinding

and crippling men and dooming them to the fires of Hell. Such a horrific declaration—told to Williams when he was a youngster—clearly has scarred young Private Williams. Through his character, McCullers interrogates and then exposes the tragedy of viewing human sexuality as obscene and sinful.

Carson McCullers understood the nuances of isolation and addressed a number of them in her fiction. She wrote about people experiencing geographic seclusion, as in the Army base in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* and the rural mill town in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. McCullers often wrote about spiritual detachment as a product of modernity as well as the solitude caused by physical disability. But scholars and critics have not scrutinized the idea of self-imposed isolation—intentional sequestration from community—a theme prevalent in McCullers’s works and one which adds dimension to the concepts of isolation and loneliness previously articulated in McCullers scholarship. While she examines the pain and loneliness produced by childhood trauma in the character of Bubber in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, McCullers clearly demonstrates that intentional isolation does not necessarily generate the condition of loneliness, as can be seen in the female narrator of “Court in the West Eighties,” Mr. Addams in *The Member of the Wedding*, Mick Kelly in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, and Ellgee Williams in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. While this chapter does not represent an exhaustive study of intentional isolation, it does determine that such a topic is worth further examination.

Alienation

*Intellectual disgrace
Stares from every human face,
And the seas of pity lie
Locked and frozen in each eye.*

—W. H. Auden

Alienation and isolation represent two sides of the same coin because they tend to engender feelings of loneliness. In her short stories and novels, Carson McCullers examined different kinds of isolation, including self-imposed sequestration, a type of seclusion that requires self-intent. Like this form of isolation, alienation can denote an action upon the part of someone: that is, a person commits an act(s) that repels others, which may result in that person's isolation and possible loneliness. However, unlike intentional isolation, where someone actively chooses to separate from others, alienation is usually unconscious. Oftentimes, people who estrange others are unaware of their repellent behavior and continue to further alienate those around them; however, some deliberately choose to alienate themselves from other people. McCullers understood both of these states of mind and examined this theme through a number of her characters. Most commonly, scholars examine the Modernist topic of alienation in terms of modern social structures that alienate characters (e.g., through racial bigotry, gender inequality, social class inequality, etc.). However, this section will examine some of McCullers's characters who alienate others, consciously or unconsciously: Pete in her short

story, “Sucker”; Anacleto, the Filipino houseboy in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*; Morris Fineststein, a minor character in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*; and Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland and Jake Blount from *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. These characters exhibit the grotesque as outlined by Sherwood Anderson in *Winesburg, Ohio*: people who believe something to be true, hold onto that truth, live their lives by it, and continue to do so even when they realize that that truth proves fallacious.

“Sucker,” written when McCullers was 17 years old, remained unpublished “until discovered by dissertation researcher Simeon Mozart Smith, Jr.” and was subsequently published in 1963 in the *Saturday Evening Post* (James 171). The story involves hero worship and the alienation that results when the hero proves all too human. Narrated in the first-person and in retrospection by 16-year-old Pete, the tale involves Pete’s orphaned 12-year-old first cousin, whom he nicknames Sucker because of his gullibility: “Sucker used to always remember and believe every word I said. . . . And the funny thing was that no matter how many times he got fooled he would still believe me. . . . Not that he was dumb in other ways—it was just the way he acted with me. He would look at everything I did and quietly take it in” (1). Sucker shares a room with Pete, and the older boy treats Sucker as he would his own blood kin: that is, he becomes short with Sucker at times and tends to put him out of his mind. Pete says, “I never noticed him much or thought about him and when you consider how long we have had the same room together it is funny the few things I remember” (2). Mostly, though, Pete ignores Sucker, like most teenaged brothers would their younger siblings.

Their relationship changes soon after Maybelle Watts finally begins to notice Pete. Maybelle, who is two years older than Pete, “act[s] like she was the Queen of Sheba” (2), but Pete is infatuated with her and convinces himself that he loves her. Although she once “humiliated” him, he admits he would do “anything in the world to get her attention” (2). Yet, she treats Pete much as he treats Sucker: she takes no notice of him. After three months, however, Maybelle starts talking to Pete and copying his homework, and she even dances with him during lunch (3). Pete is overjoyed with Maybelle in his life, and his happiness spills over into his relationship with Sucker. The younger boy asks if Pete thinks of him as a real brother and inquires if Pete likes him as a brother. Pete responds, “You’re a swell kid, Sucker” (4). At this point, the teenager experiences an epiphany. He realizes how much he really cares for Sucker:

It seemed to me suddenly that I did like him more than anybody else I knew—more than any other boy, more than my sisters, more in a certain way even than Maybelle. I felt good all over and it was like when they play sad music in the movies. I wanted to show Sucker how much I really thought of him and make up for the way I had always treated him. (4)

Both boys talk well into the night, each one learning about the other and growing in fondness for each other. And for at least a month, Pete confides in Sucker about Maybelle, and they spend time together like brothers. Here, McCullers demonstrates the power of love to create authentic intimacy, for Pete’s feelings for

Maybelle opens his heart to others, particularly Sucker. As such, Pete regrets his dismissive treatment of his brother and begins to exhibit genuine care and tenderness towards his brother.

As is typical in a McCullers story, such bliss cannot last. Maybelle eventually turns against Pete, “getting snippy” when they talk and preferring to be with other high school boys (6). Pete reacts in kind, but not to her. Instead, he takes his anger and fear out on others and acts childish, much more like a young boy Sucker’s age than a 16-year-old. He admits, “Sometimes when Maybelle was around, a devil would get into me and I’d hold my face stiff and call grown men by their last names without the Mister and say rough things. In the night I would wonder what made me do all this until I was too tired for sleep” (16). More importantly, in his immature self-absorption, Pete finds Sucker to be an irritant, admitting that the boy “kept getting on my nerves more and more” (7). Maybelle breaks up with Pete, telling him “she was sick and tired” of him and that “she never cared a rap” for him (7). Pete withdraws into himself, essentially choosing to isolate himself from others, especially Sucker. In Pete’s self-imposed sequestration, he ignores, even avoids, Sucker, which mystifies the young boy. When Sucker asks Pete what is bothering him, he adds, “Why is it we aren’t buddies like we were before?” at which point Pete emotionally explodes, angrily shouting to Sucker, “Shut your damn trap” (7). But then he continues, taking his anger and frustration out on his little “brother”: “Why aren’t we buddies? Because you’re the dumbest slob I ever saw! Nobody cares anything about you! And just because I felt sorry for you sometimes and tried

to act decent don't think I give a damn about a dumb-bunny like you!" (7-8).

Although he sees the shock on Sucker's face, Pete continues his furious attack on the boy, accusing him of being a sissy and shouting "'Why do you always hang around me? Don't you know when you're not wanted?'" (8). Pete ends his tirade—"No you don't know when you're not wanted. You're too dumb. Just like your name—a dumb Sucker"—and then goes to bed, planning to "straighten it out in the morning" (8-9). But the damage has been done.

From that moment on, Sucker undergoes a drastic personality change, much like Bubber after the trauma of the shooting and Mick's lies to him. Sucker refuses to wear Pete's hand-me-down clothing like he so eagerly used to do, joins a gang of boys who have a club, and hangs a sign on the door of the bedroom they share that says "Woe to the Outsider who Enters" (9). The 12-year-old becomes emotionally hardened and isolates himself from others, and, like Bubber, he now goes by his real name, Richard. Pete observes, "It is worse when we are alone together in the room. He sprawls across the bed in those long corduroy pants with the suspenders and just stares at me with that hard, half-sneering look" (9). Most telling, however, is Pete's reaction to the entire incident, because he admits he cares nothing for Maybelle but worries constantly about Sucker and wishes he could take back the terrible words he said to the young boy. Pete admits he misses the relationship he had with his cousin, and he even fears that Sucker may do him harm: "[S]ometimes this look in his eyes makes me almost believe that if Sucker could he would kill me"

(10). Not only has Pete permanently ruined their relationship, but also he has completely alienated Sucker/Richard.

Pete represents a grotesque character and thus an unreliable narrator. In her essay, "The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing," published in *The Mortgaged Heart*, McCullers describes her use of the grotesque in her works: "Love, and especially love of a person who is incapable of returning or receiving it, is at the heart of my selection of grotesque figures to write about" (274). The tale is told in retrospect, and when he begins recalling Sucker and the terrible incident, Pete claims he "never imagined anything would suddenly happen that would make us both very different," and he continues to believe he can "try to get things settled" (2), an obvious sign of his denial. At the end of the story, Pete rationalizes that he could not control himself when he verbally attacked Sucker. "I didn't know what was coming next. I couldn't help myself or think" (8). Yet, after his first devastating words to Sucker, Pete notices the shock and pain on Sucker's face: "Sucker's mouth was part way open and he looked as though he'd knocked his funny bone. His face was white and sweat came out on his forehead" (8). Pete could have stopped his invective towards the boy, yet he chooses to continue. As a grotesque figure, Pete continues to believe that, not only could he not stop verbally attacking Sucker—that the angry words just flowed out of him—but that he may still be able to fix their relationship. He clearly believes in his own truth, preferring to ignore the reality of situation. As such, his narration cannot be fully trusted by readers. McCullers utilizes the Andersonian grotesque in the figure of Pete, and she creates his

character as an unreliable narrator, both of which point to one of the hallmarks of Modernism, which is to compel readers to participate in the interpretation of the story's meaning.

This short story shares similarities to two novels by McCullers. Robert S. Phillips notes that her "philosophy of love," that is, the lover/beloved formula from *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, appears in abbreviated form (66). Early in "Sucker," Pete declares, "There is one thing I have learned, but it makes me feel guilty and is hard to figure out. If a person admires you a lot you despise him and don't care—and it is the person who doesn't notice you that you are apt to admire" (2). In this instance, Pete refers to Maybelle Watts, the girl with whom he is infatuated but who pays him no attention whatsoever. The more she ignores him, the more he desires her. However, this passage refers to young Sucker as well. Before Pete starts dating Maybelle, he virtually ignores Sucker, and when he does notice him, he usually does so in an irritated manner. Yet, Sucker worships Pete like a hero, while Pete responds by continuing to ignore or snap at Sucker. In fine fashion, McCullers then switches the roles at the end of the story. Pete desires to keep company with Sucker/Richard, hoping to regain the relationship he intentionally destroyed, but the young boy shows nothing but scorn for Pete. In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Bubber clearly resembles young Richard in "Sucker." In fact, Sucker/Richard reads like the prototype for Bubber/George. Both characters experience severe emotional trauma—Bubber when he believes Mick's lies that he'll be electrocuted for supposedly killing Baby Wilson and Sucker when Pete verbally abuses and rejects

him—and both withdraw into self-imposed isolation. Sucker/Richard tends to be more churlish than Bubber/George, choosing to stare at Pete with his “hard, half-sneering look” (9), whereas Bubber/George isolates himself from everybody. More importantly, though, both Mick and Pete each alienate the one person who greatly cares for them. Mick unintentionally alienates Bubber because she genuinely thinks her lies to him about prison will straighten him out. But Pete intentionally alienates Sucker, despite his protestations to himself that he couldn’t control himself during his diatribe and thus didn’t mean to hurt the young boy. In both cases, however, the two teenagers must face the terrible consequences of such abuse: they estrange their loved ones.

McCullers explores the idea that people can willfully attempt to alienate others. She does so in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* through the character of Anacleto, the 24-year-old Filipino houseboy devoted to Major Langdon’s wife, Alison. Anacleto cares deeply for his mistress, and the feeling is mutual. For instance, when she gives birth, Anacleto assists her in the delivery room because “the Major could not stand it” (38), and the young man helps Alison deal with her sick baby girl, “bringing a diaper up to the light to judge the stool, or perhaps holding the baby for Alison while she walked up and down, up and down the room with her jaws clamped” (39). A sickly woman herself, Alison depends on Anacleto to bring her food on a tray and to keep her company, all of which Anacleto does in a kind and gentle manner. They share a love for classical music, theatre, and ballet, and Alison

takes the houseboy on adventures to experience the arts, hotel-living, and good food.

Anacleto acts in what most would term an effeminate manner, which both Captain Penderton and Major Langdon find exceptionally off-putting. He enjoys shiny objects, like the “crystal cigarette lighter which [Alison] had had made from an old-fashioned vinaigrette” (58). Linen fabric intrigues Anacleto, and in one instance, he shows Alison a number of cloth samples that he hopes she will turn into a dress for her and jacket for him (41-42). He borrows her glasses so he may look closely at her linen scarf, and in a rather fussy way, picks a “speck” from the scarf and carries it carefully to the trash bin (58). Because he loves fabric so much, Anacleto hopes to one day “open a linen shop in Quebec” (85). Since the day he beheld a ballet performance, Anacleto regularly goes about the Langdon house performing pirouettes, spins, and other ballet dance moves, and he enjoys painting watercolors in Alison’s room.

More importantly, because he and the Langdons live on an Army base, Anacleto’s behavior appears effeminate to others. His less than manly qualities automatically alienate him from the male officers and soldiers in this bastion of masculinity, yet this situation does not seem to bother Anacleto at all. He merely continues to perform his friendly nursing and housekeeping duties. However, Anacleto does work at alienating Major Langdon for one reason: Anacleto discovers that Langdon and Leonora Penderton are having an affair, which Anacleto takes into his heart as the ultimate betrayal of his dear Alison. He learns of the affair after he

and Alison return early from a trip to the city. Anacleto goes upstairs and discovers the Major and Leonora together in Langdon's bedroom. Alison thinks that, perhaps, the two are together in the kitchen, having seen Leonora's coat in the hallway.

But then before she entered the house Anacleto rushed down the steps with such a horrified little face! He had whispered that they must go into town ten miles away as they had forgotten something. And when, rather dazed, she started up the steps he had caught her by the arm and said in a flat, frightened voice: 'You must not go in there now, Madame Alison.'

With what a shock it had come to her. She and Anacleto had got back into the car and driven off again. The insult of it happening in her own house—that was what she could not swallow. (46)

From that day forward, Anacleto goes out of his way to irritate Major Langdon, and he succeeds. He intentionally acts more feminine around the Major by performing ballet moves and speaking French, which further estranges him from the Army man. For example, Anacleto walks down the stairs,

but when he reached the bottom of the stairs he slowly raised his right leg, with the toes flexed like a ballet dancer's, and gave an airy little skip.

'Idiot!' the Major said. 'How is she?'

Anacleto lifted his eyebrows and closed his delicate white eyelids very slowly. '*Très fatigué.*'

'Ah!' said the Major furiously, for he did not speak a word of French. 'Vooley voo rooney mooney moo! I say, how is she?'

'C'est les—' '*Maître Corbeau sur un arbre perché*, Major.'

(39)

And to further anger the Major, Anacleto purposefully misuses the word "suddenly," rather than using the correct word, "immediately": "He made this mistake only in order further to addle the Major" (40). Anacleto cares not a whit if he angers and alienates his boss's husband; he deliberately does so as a form of revenge on behalf of his mistress Alison.

Moreover, Anacleto also does not mind seeking a bit of revenge against Captain Penderton and Major Langdon. When the houseboy serves punch at a party thrown by Leonora—a task he is not pleased to undertake—he overhears a joke at his expense: "Below the general hubbub, and with cautious glances to ascertain the whereabouts of Major Langdon, a joke sneaked its way through the party—a story to the effect that the little Filipino thoughtfully scented Alison Langdon's specimen of wee-wee with perfume before taking it to the hospital for a urinalysis" (74). Such a joke not only points directly to Anacleto's effeminate behavior but also to the homophobia of those attending the party: Army officers with their girlfriends and spouses. Some time later, Anacleto hatches a scheme to get back at the two officers. The Pendertons go to the Langdon residence to meet the Major and take him out on the town. As they prepare to leave,

[t]he little Filipino followed them to the door and said very sweetly: 'I hope you have a pleasant evening.'

'Thank you,' said Leonora. 'Same to you.'

The Major, however, was not so guileless. He looked at Anacleto with suspicion. (100)

Once they leave, Anacleto watches them through the window. He observes, "The three of them, each of whom Anacleto hated with all his heart, had paused on the steps to light cigarettes" (100). Unbeknownst to them, Anacleto has rearranged some bricks on the walkway, and "[i]n his mind he saw all three of them tumbling like ninepins" (100-101). However, they walk across the lawn, and his plot is foiled. Ever the vigilant houseboy, he runs outside and fixes the bricks so that no one else will be injured. After Alison dies and Anacleto disappears, Major Langdon reminisces about the time Anacleto retaliated against him. During that occurrence, Anacleto appears particularly effeminate to the Major, for the houseboy and Alison drop little "particles" into a bowl of water which then turn into beautiful flowers. Revolted at seeing such behavior, Langdon loses his temper, trips over Alison's night shoes, and kicks them "across the room. Alison was disgusted with me, cold as ice for days. And Anacleto put salt in the sugar bowl before he brought me my coffee" (115). Anacleto fully understands that he represents a repulsive person to those living on the Army base; therefore, he sometimes strikes back at the homophobia overtly displayed by the officers. Most important, Anacleto purposefully alienates

his boss, Major Langdon, as a form of revenge and as a means by which he hopes Alison will divorce the major.

Scholars do not agree that Anacleto represents a homosexual, let alone an effeminate man. Chester E. Eisinger asserts that “Anacleto is a eunuch, a half-person because he is sexless” (254), an unflattering description at best. In her examination of McCullers’s novel, Margaret B. McDowell believes Anacleto to be neither male nor female: “he is ageless, though childlike in appearance” (*Carson McCullers* 59). While McDowell accurately claims that the houseboy appears to be a prototype of Cousin Lymon of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, she makes a curious—and inaccurate—statement regarding mutual attraction between Alison and Anacleto: “As a romantic or sexual partner for Alison, he is as ineffectual as Lymon is for Miss Amelia” (59). At no time in the novel does McCullers create a sense of sexual or romantic temptation between mistress and houseboy. Rather, Anacleto shows nothing but devoted friendship to Alison. Joseph R. Millichap pairs the young houseboy with Lt. Weincheck and declares them to be a “pair of arrested adolescents” (“A Critical Reevaluation” 58). Certainly, Anacleto’s propensity for vengeance smacks of adolescent behavior. But Millichap also declares Anacleto to be “asexual” (59), yet McCullers clearly presents him as a kind, albeit eccentric and effeminate, young man, a counterpoint to Major Langdon, for Anacleto symbolizes everything Major Langdon is not. He is small, gentle, artistic, and above all, devoted to Alison. Langdon, on the other hand, is a man’s man, described as having a “red-brown face” with a “blunt, jovial, and friendly expression,” and he proves popular with both

soldiers and his fellow officers (17). A superb horseman, “Major Langdon was called The Buffalo. This was because when in the saddle he slumped his great heavy shoulders and lowered his head” (25). And after Alison’s death, Major Langdon announces his goals in life: “Only two things matter to me now—to be a good animal and to serve my country. A healthy body and patriotism” (117). The only trait the two men share is loyalty, Anacleto to Alison and Major Langdon to the Army.

In Anacleto, McCullers creates another character in the Sherwood Anderson mode of the grotesque, for the young Filipino deludes himself by thinking his actions towards the Major will produce results that favor Alison and himself. He goes out of his way to aggravate and repel Langdon as a means by which to avenge Alison for the Major’s marital betrayal. However, Anacleto’s efforts provide only temporary satisfaction and ultimately fail to cause his dream to come true, that is, to have Alison divorce Langdon and take Anacleto away from the Army base. For instance, although Anacleto discovers Langdon and Leonora’s affair, he tries to protect Alison from learning about the betrayal. In fact, Alison decides for herself that she will divorce her husband; nothing her devoted houseboy does assists her in this dramatic decision. As Millichap puts it, Anacleto “is adolescent in his immaturity . . . and self-delusion” (“A Critical Reevaluation” 58), which points to the houseboy as a grotesque figure, one who maintains his “truth” despite its falseness. In the end, Anacleto’s attempts at repelling Major Langdon so as to further alienate him from Alison go nowhere, Alison passes away, and Anacleto disappears forever.

In a completely different vein, McCullers explores scapegoating, a form of alienation, in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. A minor character, Morris Finestein, appears early in the novella and in only two paragraphs. However, this brief reference to a Jewish man illustrates how easily stereotypes can be generated and perpetuated. And her fleeting mention of such a stereotype produced the accusation that McCullers was anti-Semitic.

To fully understand this type of alienation, context must be provided. Early in the tale, a hunchback dwarf, whom we come to know as Cousin Lymon, appears on Miss Amelia's doorstep claiming to be distant kin of hers. Those who have been congregating on her porch—Stumpy MacPhail, Henry Macy, the Rainey twins, and Amelia herself—silently watch as the dwarf introduces himself and declares he is related to Amelia. He presents her with a photograph and says that it is a picture of his “mother and her half-sister” (8), which he believes makes Amelia his relative. When MacPhail asks him from whence he came, Lymon responds, “I was traveling” (8). Then he promptly sits down on the porch and begins to cry. The balladeer continues:

At last one of the twins said: ‘I’ll be damned if he ain’t a regular Morris Finestein.’

Everyone nodded and agreed, for that is an expression having a certain special meaning. But the hunchback cried louder because he could not know what they were talking about. Morris Finestein was a person who had lived in the town years before. He was only a quick,

skipping little Jew who cried if you called him Christ-killer, and ate light bread and canned salmon every day. A calamity had come over him and he had moved away to Society City. But since then if a man were prissy in any way, or if a man ever wept, he was known as a Morris Finestein. (9)

In this passage, the balladeer clearly labels Finestein a Jew, a man sensitive to being called Christ-killer, which has been a long-established slur many Christians (and others) use against the Jewish people. The balladeer does not elaborate on the calamity that befalls Finestein, but he does use the term “prissy” to further depict the man, a thinly veiled insult against effeminate or homosexual men and a form of feminizing Jewish men, yet another stereotype. Another commonly held view, especially during McCullers’s time, is that real men do not show emotion, especially in the form of crying. To cry proves that a man is not truly masculine. It appears that the balladeer conflates Jewishness with unmanliness, an obvious anti-Semitic sentiment. Thus, Morris Finestein signifies an alienated person, one who cannot help being who he is (his Jewish heritage). But he also embodies a terrible stereotype and therefore is set apart from the rest of his community.

As a Modernist writer, McCullers obviously intended this passage not only to be ironic but also as a commentary on the cruelty of humanity. All the characters in this novella represent uneducated people, those forced to work for poverty wages in an isolated rural mill town and unable to afford schooling. As such, many of them oftentimes prove to be disagreeable, bigoted, and violent human beings. The

balladeer acknowledges that the town contains only “three good people” (14), a sign that the rest are not. Thus, their use of the term “Morris Finestein” to describe a man who is effeminate or cries seems “logical” in light of the rest of the story. Further, McCullers critiques the ludicrous yet pervasive nature of anti-Semitism in her ironic treatment of Finestein as a feminized Jew.

While most readers, scholars, and critics enjoyed *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, which had been printed in *Harper's Bazaar* in August 1943, at least one did not, for McCullers received an anonymous note that accused her of being an anti-Semite. According to her biographer, Virginia Spencer Carr, the note “was handwritten on 6-inch by 8-inch stationery with a patriotic letterhead of red, white, and blue and a picture of a formation of bombers in the sky against an American flag unfurled, with the phrase ‘Keep ‘Em Flying’ underneath” (*The Lonely Hunter* 236). The relevant passage reads:

To the distinguished young writer whose story I started to read but at the bottom of the second page you poke fun at the Jew. After seeing who the publisher is it is no wonder such a story goes on. Why don't you leave race alone and stop and look around and see who the big crooked polititions [*sic*] are and the heads of the money corporations. Your friends Mr. Lewis and Hitler perhaps too. Will certainly pan Harper's Bazaar until you and your kind learn to be human like the Jews are. (qtd. in *The Lonely Hunter* 236-237)

McCullers, shocked and devastated at such an assessment of her character, immediately sent letters to Jewish friends and those who had read her story to determine if she had, in fact, presented Finestein in a derogatory manner. All assured her she had not, but the accusation plagued her. Carr summarizes an “Open Letter” that McCullers hoped to have published that would explain that the story was meant to be read as ironic:

The Ballad of the Sad Café was a light tale told in a jesting manner, but beneath its simple narrowness were purposeful and bitter implications. The Jew, said Carson, was treated in the traditional and light way that she handled all of her characters. There was no intent to poke fun at the Jewish people. It was a tale of menacing tragedy indicting not the Jew, but the society which allowed such degradations to occur. (237-238)

McCullers obviously utilized the Modernist strategy of irony in her entire novella, using the technique to critique the isolation and barbarity of humanity.

Additionally, the Finestein passage points to the Modernist theme of alienation, in this case, as a form of scapegoating. In the character of Morris Finestein, McCullers succinctly illustrates the power of stereotypes and the negative impact they can produce in communities and the world at large.

Two of the most easily identifiable alienated characters in McCullers’s oeuvre prove to be in her first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*: Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland, the tubercular African American physician who desperately yearns to

help his people achieve racial equality, and Jake Blount, the perpetually drunken political radical who pontificates on economic equality. While it is true that Dr. Copeland is alienated from the white community because of his race and Blount because of his political ideology, through their behavior, both estrange themselves from those they wish to help, which results in their isolation. While Blount is oblivious to the fact that he alienates himself, Dr. Copeland knows he does so but refuses to change in order to make himself more fully understood by his people. Thus, we see McCullers explore unconscious alienation as a counterpoint to conscious estrangement.

As a black man, Dr. Copeland automatically exemplifies an alienated person because of his race, forced to work and live in the African American section of town, areas purposefully segregated from the white community via Southern Jim Crow laws. He cannot help white people with their medical needs despite the fact that he is a trained physician. Instead, he is relegated to the black sections of the town, where he struggles against their poverty, lack of education, and what he perceives to be the black community's obstruction to equality: religion. However, he estranges his family and community because of his philosophical and political ideas. He reads Marx, Spinoza, and the works of Shakespeare and considers himself a Marxist, a political principle unpopular with mainstream America at that time.

One of the most alienating facets of Dr. Copeland concerns his language, for he speaks precisely and in Standard English, never using contractions: "Doctor Copeland always spoke so carefully that each syllable seemed to be filtered through

his sullen, heavy lips" (72). However, the black community and his own children prefer to talk in Southern African American dialect. In particular, the doctor's language noticeably alienates him from his family. His daughter, Portia, points this out to him by declaring that, despite their lack of education, her brother and husband are good people and that she and her siblings choose not to speak like their father; instead, they talk like their "Mama and her peoples and their peoples before them" (78). She also tells her father that his use of the term "Negro" does not go over well with the black community: "Even old plain nigger is better than that word. But polite peoples—no matter what shade they is—always say colored" (77). She points out how African Americans have different shades of black. She declares, "None of us is pure colored and the word you all the time using haves a way of hurting people's feelings," to which Dr. Copeland responds, "I am not interested in subterfuges. . . . I am interested only in real truths" (78). Here, we see how Dr. Copeland represents another of McCullers's grotesque figures. The good doctor fully sees how he alienates those around him, especially his children, but he does not change because he lives within his view of truth, which distinctly differs from his own people's. Portia accurately expresses the essential truth of Dr. Copeland: while she and the rest of her community speak from the heart, Dr. Copeland focuses on the mind, logic, and reason, which only further pushes people away.

Not only does Dr. Copeland speak differently, but he also tries to force his family—his wife and children—to think and believe as he does. He names his progeny after famous people and Shakespeare characters—Karl Marx, Hamilton,

William, and Portia—but only Portia and Hamilton go by their birth names; Karl Marx is called Buddy, and William goes by Willie. Dr. Copeland continuously refers to Portia as “Daughter,” which suggests that he puts up a linguistic wall between them, perhaps because he realizes she will never become what he wishes her to be. When he reflects on his children, Dr. Copeland remembers the aspirations he once had for them: “Hamilton would be a great scientist and Karl Marx a teacher of the Negro race and William a lawyer to fight against injustice and Portia a doctor for women and children” (80). However, none of them follow their father’s vision for them, undoubtedly because of how they were raised. Growing up, the Copeland children were forced by their father to wear clothing different from the other children, which not only alienated them from their school mates but also from Dr. Copeland because they resented him for making them appear different from their peers. His wife, Daisy, a gentle and kind woman, speaks in the Southern black vernacular, which upsets him. As a stern man, Dr. Copeland demands order and “no fanciness” in the home, so when he realizes that Daisy will not get rid of a kewpie doll she placed in the living room, believes in ghosts, and devotedly takes the children to church, anger builds within him to the point that eventually he beats her and terrifies his children. Consequently, Daisy takes the children and leaves: “He wrestled in his spirit and fought down the evil blackness. But Daisy did not come back to him. And eight years later when she died his sons were not children any more and they did not return to him. He was left an old man in an empty house”

(143-144). Once again, Dr. Copeland sticks to his truth but suffers emotionally by doing so, for his truth does not coincide with his family's truth.

The feature of Dr. Copeland that proves to be most alienating is his profound longing to help his people, which he considers to be his true purpose in life. But while his aspiration certainly seems to be altruistic, worthwhile, and honorable, in actuality, it is the single most divisive aspect of his character, one that estranges him from his family and community. He thinks to himself, "All of his life he knew that there was a reason for his working. He always knew that he was meant to teach his people. All day he would go with his bag from house to house and on all things he would talk to them" (74). When his children "were even babies he would tell them of the yoke they must thrust from their shoulders—the yoke of submission and slothfulness" (80), and he tells them that God does not exist, yet one more belief that separates him from the church-going black community. But the children willingly attend church with their mother and believe in the Bible and angels. When Daisy's father, Grandpapa, comes for a visit, he relates a story about a time he had a sign from God, which creates in Dr. Copeland "the old evil anger in him. The words rose inchoately to his throat and he could not speak them. They would listen to the old man. Yet to words of reason they would not attend" (147). Clearly, Dr. Copeland does not reach his people where they are—through what they know—but rather tries to force *his* ways and ideas on them. Yet, he persists, growing ever more frustrated with his own race. When Portia tells her father about the many blacks who have been victims of a financial scam, she asserts that the man who stole their

money will suffer in hell for his actions. Dr. Copeland responds, ““The Negro race of its own accord climbs up on the cross on every Friday” (77). And he continues,

‘I mean that if I could just find ten Negroes—ten of my own people— with spine and brains and courage who are willing to give all that they have—’

Portia put down the coffee. ‘Us was not talking about anything like that.’

‘Only four Negroes,’ said Doctor Copeland. ‘Only the sum of Hamilton and Karl Marx and William and you. Only four Negroes with these real true qualities and backbone—.’ (77)

Here, the doctor puts the onus of change onto his people, the black community. Dr. Copeland sees his race as meek and submissive, unwilling to make the changes necessary to advance his desire for equality. And as if to make the point, we see Portia declare that he has turned the conversation from the scam to his true purpose, one she rejects. Dr. Copeland desires, above all things, to have his black community comprehend that change must start with them, and he frequently tells his patients this but to no avail.

By the end of the novel, Dr. Copeland seems resigned to giving up his true purpose. He is physically frail from tuberculosis, and his family insists he must move to the farm so he may live out his years in comfort. Feeling dreadfully depressed, he reflects back on his life and medical practice and thinks of some positive times.: “There were thousands of such times of satisfaction. But what had

been their meaning? Out of all the years he could think of no work of lasting value” (331). Dr. Copeland believes himself to be a failure, a man who could not lift up his people. He feels “[t]he warring love and hatred—love for his people and hatred for the oppressors of his people—that left him exhausted and sick in spirit” (333).

However, he believes deep in his soul he will return to his home in town and continue working for his true purpose, for he believes “in justice now. . . . [i]n justice for us. Justice for us Negroes” (336). When Dr. Copeland makes this declaration, he once again feels the old aspiration rise within him: “The words in his heart grew big and they would not be silent” (336), which indicates that, perhaps, he may very well once again speak to his people about equality and justice. However, since McCullers writes him as a Modernist grotesque, one who steadfastly believes and lives with a fallacious truth, readers may surmise that the good doctor will only continue to alienate the very people he so desperately yearns to help.

Many scholars have devoted themselves to more fully understanding Dr. Copeland’s behavior because he so obviously alienates everybody around him. Klaus Lubbers views McCullers’s entire novel through religion, in particular Christianity, and he concludes that for all the characters, “Christ’s gospel is dead for the protagonists. The substituted truths they embrace are private truths, not comprehensive enough to include others” (40), reflecting a Modernist condition, it seems. While his assessment may not fit all five major characters in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, it definitely applies to Dr. Copeland. The black community does not understand the good doctor’s “truth,” and as such, they reject it. As an educated

man, Dr. Copeland should recognize that placing the onus for change onto his people merely alienates them. Plus, he is only one man. In order to make real and lasting change, groups of people must organize, as was witnessed in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and beyond. But Dr. Copeland, trapped in his own truth, does not realize he cannot make a difference solely on his own. In a way, he tries to be the Moses figure for his people, the one who will deliver them from oppression. But he remains alienated from the people he wishes to help. In another religious interpretation of McCullers's novel, Jan Whitt argues that "the futility of human communication in this worst of all possible worlds must be noted" (28), and certainly Dr. Copeland proves incapable of truly communicating with his black community. Irving Malin provides an interesting psychological motivation for Dr. Copeland's continuous alienating behavior: He "is a compulsive follower of his strong true purpose because it helps him to refrain from questioning what he has done to himself and his children" (21). In twenty-first century psychological terms, Copeland focuses on his aspirations so as to avoid the pain he has caused his family; such avoidance allows him emotionally to numb himself and relieves him of any accountability towards the suffering of his children and wife. And perhaps the most astute interpretation comes from John B. Vickery. He declares that Dr. Copeland "is conscious only of the frustration of his lifelong mission to educate and transform his family and his people: in short, to make them reflectors of his own views. Consequently, he rejects the very real love, respect, and admiration which they proffer" (17). Dr. Copeland blames his people for not understanding him, but the

doctor should be blamed because he insists they do his bidding rather than think and do for themselves. By creating the Andersonian grotesque character of Dr. Copeland, McCullers illustrates the Modernist theme of alienation that ultimately spurns genuine love in favor of following a false truth.

In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, McCullers creates another grotesque and alienated figure in Jake Blount, but she does so in a different way. Dr. Copeland engages in the social realities of racial discrimination and white oppression. Blount, too, deals with the reality of economic oppression and poverty. But while she references the realities of the Jim Crow South in the Copeland chapters, McCullers uses a symbol that represents Blount's circular and estranging language and behavior: the flying jinny. McCullers may use symbolism more overtly in the Blount chapters, but in the end, both Dr. Copeland and Jake Blount alienate those whom they wish to uplift.

Jake Blount goes nowhere in life. Born in "Carolina"—he never specifies whether it is North or South Carolina (21)—Blount, an itinerant worker, travels throughout the Southern states, offering his proletarian message of justice and equality to anyone who will listen. But therein lies Blount's problem because nobody wishes to hear him moralize on the wickedness of the American capitalist system, with its exploitative labor practices and racial discrimination. He genuinely wants people to understand his message so that they, like him, may be part of the small group of "those who know" rather than the majority of "those who don't know" (24). But what, exactly, does he desire these people to know? No one can

tell because, try as he might, Blount cannot make himself understood by these poverty-stricken, largely uneducated, working-class people. He speaks in circular arguments filled with Marxist-like jargon and odd, seemingly disconnected examples, a personal characteristic that only serves to alienate those he tries to enlighten. And when he discovers that he cannot make progress in his mission to educate people, he moves on, traveling from town to town, in the hope of increasing the number of “those who know,” yet he never succeeds in accomplishing his goal. Much like the flying-jinny he is hired to operate and maintain at the Sunny Dixie Show, Jake Blount just seems to spin around in circles, learning nothing, going nowhere.

The flying-jinny appears as a minor image in the narrative, for it is only mentioned five times, and little explication has been given to this carnival contraption. Joseph R. Millichap contends that “the flying-jinny, or merry-go-round, symbolizes the meaningless and oppressive round of mechanical activities associated with modern urban civilization” (“The Realistic” 15). He refers to McCullers’s outline of her novel to suggest that the book’s setting is Columbus, Georgia, “her home town” (15). Millichap goes on to posit that the setting “is a symbolic type of the culture produced by industrialization—a world of decay, deprivation, and loneliness” (15). McCullers’s rundown flying-jinny, then, further symbolizes that very decay of the town. While industrialization may appear to be genuine progress for humankind, eventually, increased mechanization leads to unemployment because fewer workers are needed to produce goods. With

prolonged unemployment comes disenchantment, disfranchisement, and increased levels of poverty, all of which can be represented by the flying-jinny—the masses of the unemployed going round and round the town looking for jobs and finding none, becoming disconnected from the rest of working society, and finally settling into a poverty-induced malaise. According to Millichap, the Sunny Dixie Show represents not only entertainment but also an escape from the misery and despair associated with the Great Depression and that the flying-jinny, in essence, symbolizes “a combination of urban wasteland and a mechanical nightmare” (15). However, the fact that it is Jake Blount who operates the merry-go-round proves intriguing and, ultimately, metaphoric of the man himself, making the flying-jinny a more notable image than has hitherto been presented.

McCullers depicts the flying-jinny of the Sunny Dixie Show as a ramshackle apparatus. “The motionless wooden horses were fantastic in the late afternoon sun. They pranced up statically, pierced by their dull gilt bars. The horse nearest Jake had a splintery wooden crack in its dingy rump and the eyes walled blind and frantic, shreds of paint peeled from the sockets” (63). Her description of the carnival ride symbolizes Jake Blount at the moment he interviews for the job of the flying-jinny mechanic. Here, her word choice proves essential in understanding the machine as a representation of Blount. The splintery wooden crack in the horse’s rump implies a painful wound. The day before—his first day in that Southern mill town—Blount, extremely drunk, angry, and frustrated, bashes his head and fists against a brick wall, causing painful lacerations to his face and knuckles (26). Like

the “wounded” horse, Blount, too, is wounded. The word “pierced” defines the spirit of Jake Blount, an avowed radical who, throughout the novel, expounds on the corruption of the American capitalist system and who feels pierced to his very core by the inequities inherent in capitalism. The gold bars of the flying-jinny symbolize the wealth associated with capitalism, their dullness signifying the corruption within that economic scheme. The jinny horse’s proximity, coupled with the description of its eyes—“walled blind and frantic”—further epitomize Jake Blount, for he is blind to any other philosophy except his own. For instance, when he and Dr. Copeland discuss politics, Blount ignores Dr. Copeland’s interruptions to include blacks in their conversation, instead pushing forward his political position, becoming increasingly agitated (i.e., “frantic”) the more he speaks. Near the end of the discussion, Dr. Copeland reveals his plan to organize a demonstration, “a march to Washington” to rally “his people” and expose their plight to America—a prophetic declaration if ever there was one—to which Blount replies, “No. That’s not the right angle at all. I’m dead sure it’s not” (303). Blount sees only what he chooses to see and no more, convinced his political viewpoint must be the most worthy, thus making him a grotesque figure. In addition, the “motionless merry-go-round”—its impaled horses appear to prance but actually remain fixed in one position—also characterizes Jake Blount. He adheres so strongly to his political opinion that he cannot see the value of any other point of view; he remains stuck, intractable, and immovable in his own philosophical vision; thus, he never grows or progresses in his thinking.

The music of the flying-jinny also symbolizes Blount and his urgent, angry diatribes. When Blount interviews for the job of mechanic, the Sunny Dixie Show owner, Patterson, turns on the merry-go-round, “and the thin jangle of mechanical music began. The wooden cavalcade around them seemed to cut them off from the rest of the world” (63). The word “jangle” suggests a type of clanging sound, which seems more like raucous, discordant noise than music. Blount’s drunken political tirades often culminate in nonsensical gibberish that mimics the flying-jinny’s noisy, clanking sound. For example, when the highly intoxicated Blount first sits and talks to Singer in the New York Café, Biff Brannon, the café owner, observes them both and listens: “Jake Blount leaned across the table and the words came out as though a dam inside him had broken. Biff could not understand him any more. Blount’s tongue was so heavy with drink and he talked at such a violent pace that the sounds were all shaken up together” (25). In addition, Blount’s anger at people who do not understand him only makes it that much more difficult for him to be understood. He blusters and blows and comes across as harsh, loud, and disorderly so that, rather than making comrades out of those to whom he preaches, Blount merely “antagonizes everyone” (Rich, “The ‘Ironic Parable of Fascism’” 120).

Alienation is further represented in the machine when Patterson shows Blount how to run the merry-go-round. McCullers writes that the “wooden cavalcade seemed to cut them off from the rest of the world” (63). Patterson certainly isolates himself from people, since he sits all day in his rundown, rank trailer “playing cards with himself” and smoking marijuana (282-3). He leaves the

actual operations of the show to his employees. Blount, on the other hand, chooses to be in the world so he can spread his gospel of union organizing and social justice. But his abrasive demeanor, along with his disjointed pontifications, circular arguments, and million-dollar vocabulary, serve only to cut him off from the people he so desperately wants to help. Further, McCullers's choice to use "cavalcade" is particularly intriguing because the word means a procession, oftentimes done on horseback. A procession usually moves forward, not in circles like the horses on the flying-jinny. Thus, the cavalcade of wooden horses symbolizes the vast procession of people Blount has encountered and talked to over the years, all those folks who would not—and will not in the future—listen to him. The circular motion of the apparatus, however, signifies Blount's longwinded, endless ramblings that nearly always return to his refrain that the people need to *know*.

Blount, so filled with the Socialist spirit, also happens to be filled with spirits—usually an abundance of beer and whiskey—making it impossible for him to explain his ideas of social justice in any lucid and rational manner the townspeople can follow. Though he valiantly tries to get anyone to understand him, his fervor, coupled with his extreme drunkenness, causes him to ramble without making much sense. Biff Brannon listens to the drunken man:

The fellow seemed to be talking some queer kind of politics again.

Last night he had been talking about places he had been—about Texas and Oklahoma and the Carolinas. Once he had got on the subject of cat-houses, and afterward his jokes got so raw he had to be hushed up

with beer. But most of the time nobody was sure just what he was saying. Talk—talk—talk. The words came out of his throat like a cataract. (17)

Words gush from Blount's mouth, so much so that he is incapable of staying on topic. And the alcohol in his body clearly affects his thought processes (as well as the tongue in his mouth), making it impossible for him to be clear about what he wants people to know. Like many intoxicated people, Jake Blount rambles on and on, going from topic to topic, but he always returns to his catchphrase that people need to *know*, in essence, coming full circle time and time again, just like the spinning of the flying-jinny.

To add to Blount's rhetorical troubles, he sometimes says something that seems disconnected from anything real. For instance, on Blount's first night in the New York Café, young Mick Kelly walks in to buy a packet of cigarettes and accidentally drops her coins on the floor. Blount, in a drunken daze, retrieves one of the pennies from the floor and sets it on the counter: "Five mills for the crackers who grew the weed and five for the dupes who rolled it," he said. 'A cent for you, Biff'" (19). Then Blount, "fingering the two coins" sitting on the counter (19), moves them in a circular manner, like the circling motion of the flying-jinny. He then says, "And that's a humble homage to liberty. To democracy and tyranny. To freedom and piracy" (19). Only the reader knows that this comment stems from Blount's attempt to read "the mottoes" on the two coins (19). Giving no indication he understands Blount's remarks, Brannon merely places the money in the cash

register. Mick, too, does not grasp Blount's meaning, but she, at least, sees him as an interesting person. The rest of the patrons pointedly ignore or laugh at him. In his thoughts, Brannon astutely sizes up Blount: "This man had a good mind, all right, but he went from one thing to another without any reason behind it all" (17). Once again, Blount talks in strange, mysterious circles that alienate him from others.

His love for language, too, hampers Jake Blount's attempts to convert people to his political vision. In a conversation with the mute John Singer, Blount admits he likes using big words. "'To begin with I like words. Dialectic materialism—Jesuitical prevarication'—Jake rolled the syllables in his mouth with loving solemnity—'teleological propensity'" (68). Furthermore, he prides himself on being learned and well read, acknowledging that he reads "books that tell the pure honest truth," using Veblen and Marx as examples of truth-telling authors (68). Unfortunately, when Blount talks to the locals of the town, he uses jargon like "'agglutination of capital and power'" (152) and "a vast and insidious conspiracy. Obscurantism" (24), phrases that the uneducated populace cannot begin to comprehend. Regrettably, his passion for words means he presents circular arguments as well, and he often uses analogies that serve only to bewilder those to whom he speaks.

'There are those who know and those who don't know. And for every ten thousand who don't know there's only one who knows. That's the miracle of all time—the fact that these millions know so much but don't know this. It's like in the fifteenth century when everybody believed the world was flat and only Columbus and a few other

fellows knew the truth. But it's different in that it took talent to figure that the earth is round. While this truth is so obvious it's a miracle of all history that people don't know. You savvy.' (24)

His final pronouncement—"You savvy"—is clearly meant to be ironic because the listener, the deaf Mr. Singer, does not, in fact, understand virtually anything Blount says. Later in the novel, in a letter to his best friend, Singer writes,

The one with the mustache [Jake Blount] I think is crazy. Sometimes he speaks his words very clear like my teacher long ago at the school. Other times he speaks such a language that I cannot follow. . . . He will shake his fist and say ugly drunken words that I would not wish you to know about. He thinks he and I have a secret together but I do not know what it is. . . . Yah Freedom and pirates. Yah Capital and Democrats, says the ugly one with the mustache. Then he contradicts himself and says, 'Freedom is the greatest of all ideals.' (215-16)

Like the flying-jinny he works on and operates, Blount's speeches spin around and around, making him look crazy and creating only befuddlement in his listeners. Even Biff Brannon sees the circular arguments as a hindrance to the message Blount wishes to impart. Brannon thinks to himself, "The poor son-of-a-bitch talking and talking and not ever getting anybody to understand what he meant. Not knowing himself, most likely" (32). Blount talks and talks and talks but gains no converts, almost like he were riding that flying-jinny and just going around in circles, getting nowhere. More importantly, he estranges himself from those he yearns to help.

Blount also seems incapable of knowing exactly who he is politically. His hesitation, even confusion, about his political affiliation mimics the spinning motion of the flying-jinny. He preaches his own peculiar brand of Socialism, although he never claims to be a socialist or communist. At one juncture, he remarks, “‘Sure I’m a Red. At least I reckon I am’” (284), revealing how indecisive he actually is when it comes to labeling his political principles. Another time, Blount declares, “‘Some of us are Communists. But not all of us—. Myself, I’m not a member of the Communist Party’” (155). Though he includes himself as a Communist by using “us,” he turns right around and says he doesn’t belong to the Communist Party, further exhibiting his uncertainty about where he belongs on the political spectrum. He talks round and round without coming to a solid conclusion about whether he’s a Communist or some other type of radical. His lack of a solid political position further alienates him from the workers of the Southern mill town.

The Sunny Dixie Show is a traveling carnival, going from vacant lot to vacant lot, “staying always within the fringes of the city limit” (152). Jake Blount, the wanderlust-filled, drunken Socialist, also stays near the fringes of society, preferring to talk to folks who disregard him and to work at a tawdry fair, spending his money on liquor and beer and then talking even more to a deaf-mute man. Eventually, the Sunny Dixie Show completes a circle round the town; “the locations were changed but the settings were alike” (152). And Blount goes along, circling the town with the show, doing the same things every day and night—working, drinking, and talking.

He never moves forward politically or emotionally; he merely continues on with his circular life, as if he were that dilapidated horse on the merry-go-round.

While Mick, Dr. Copeland, and Brannon feel sorrow at Singer's passing, Blount is devastated because, as Brannon observes, "Blount would never really talk—only to the mute" (229). In his drunken, Socialist zeal, Blount never realizes Singer cannot comprehend him. He continues to believe the deaf-mute truly understands his proletarian vision for America, so that when Singer kills himself, Blount no longer believes he can remain in the town because the deaf-mute man was his sole friend and confidant. Blount thinks to himself,

It was more than a year now since he had sat at this table for the first time. And how much further was he now than then? No further.

Nothing had happened except that he had made a friend and lost him.

He had given Singer everything and then the man had killed himself.

So he was left out on a limb. And now it was up to him to get out of it by himself and make a new start again. At the thought of it panic came in him. He was tired. (345)

Here, Blount proves to be an unreliable narrator, for he says "he had given Singer everything," an unusual statement since, in fact, Singer often provided food and a bed for the perpetually drunken Blount. Yet, the radical has convinced himself that *he* sacrificed himself for Singer. Moreover, Blount acknowledges he has not accomplished anything in the town—"How much further was he now than then? No further." Blount is like that flying-jinny that spins and spins and goes nowhere.

Additionally, Blount becomes involved in a race riot at the Sunny Dixie Show, where “[t]wo Negroes were fatally injured with wounds inflicted by knives” (346). During the altercation at the carnival, “[t]he head was broken off one of the jinny horses” (339), an image that symbolizes Blount at this point in the story. He feels lost without his friend, Singer, and he knows he faces serious trouble because some of his pamphlets—“papers of a subversive nature”—are discovered where the riot occurred, a situation that causes the authorities to suspect the fracas “was caused by labor agitation” (347). Blount exists as a broken man—no friends, no comrades, no job, no money. So he must move on.

And yet, that very description, found near the end of McCullers’s novel, matches the man at the beginning of the story, the drunken radical who walks into Biff Brannon’s New York Café and begins preaching his Socialist dream of equality for all. Indeed, Jake Blount has come full circle but has made absolutely no emotional, economic, or political progress. But rather than stay in town, find another job, and continue proselytizing to folks he encounters, Blount chooses his usual routine and goes back on the road once more. He contemplates his situation and thinks about Singer’s suicide: “A wall, a flight of stairs, an open road” (342). Blount knows he’ll head out for places unknown, “[b]ut not in the South” because he believes the region too corrupt and entrenched in ignorance. He slowly walks away from the town, but when he reaches the city limits, “a new surge of energy came to him” (350). He asks himself whether he is fleeing from his problems or moving onward to continue his mission, but the answer doesn’t matter to him. Like the

flying-jinny, Blount's thinking processes spin around again, and he decides he will not leave the South after all. Filled with hope, he trusts "the outline of his journey would take form" (350). And because Blount has not grown or progressed, readers may assume he will repeat the same tired behavioral pattern, drifting around and around the South, going nowhere, and alienating nearly everyone he meets.

Analyses of alienation in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* often couple together Jake Blount and Dr. Copeland because both signify fanatics—grotesques in Modernist terms. For instance, Frank Baldanza declares that "the most frantically frustrated are Dr. Copeland and Jake Blount, both of whom are constantly rejected and reviled for their burning need to help others on a large social scale" (157). Horace Taylor asserts that both characters are "frustrated idealists who cling to their visions with all the crazed fanaticism of those who are driven to the brink of insane despair by ridicule and indifference" (160), a precise assessment of McCullers's two grotesque figures. Regarding the flying-jinny's symbolic function, Irving Malin believes it signifies the movement that all the characters make in the novel, what he terms "compulsive circles" (21), an assessment that accurately fits Blount but not the others. Singer commits suicide; Dr. Copeland leaves his home in ill health and moves to the country; Mick is forced to mature quickly because she must work at Woolworth's to help support her family; and Biff emotionally grows in that he accepts both the masculine and feminine aspects of himself, making him the most psychologically integrated of all the characters. Only Jake Blount lives in those compulsive circles of which Malin writes, for he declares he will leave the South and

then immediately changes his mind and vows to remain in that region. And despite the fact he has alienated everyone in the mill town through his behavior and jargon-filled Marxist language that nobody understands, Blount decides he will continue his mission to get people *to know*. To know what, exactly, nobody knows, perhaps not even Blount himself.

Although alienation frequently produces isolation and loneliness, at other times, it engenders a sense of self-satisfaction, as in the character of Anacleto with his intentional annoying behavior that exasperates and ultimately estranges him from Major Langdon and the other officers and soldiers on the Army base.

Unquestionably, denial plays a key part in alienation. Pete in "Sucker" simply refuses to comprehend how young Sucker became the surly Richard, a 12-year-old boy who once idolized Pete but now despises him. Dr. Copeland, who resigns himself to the fact he has not succeeded in his true purpose, still believes in his heart that he can uplift his people, when, in fact, he continuously alienates them through his Marxism and estranging language. Jake Blount, too, lives in a world of denial. Near the end of the novel, he acknowledges that he has accomplished nothing in the town, nothing that will help the poor working class mill workers. But, like Dr. Copeland, Blount soon changes his mind and believes he can still help people in the South "to know." Both Blount and Copeland stubbornly refuse to understand that people reject their ideas. Such intractability only further alienates them from those they yearn to help. McCullers understood racial and ethnic bigotry and succinctly addresses anti-Semitism and stereotypes using a minor character, Morris Finestein.

In this character, readers see how alienating stereotypes can be and how easily such stereotypes can become part of the cultural norm of a community (or nation). Once again, this section on alienation does not represent an analysis of all her alienating characters, but it demonstrates how McCullers examined the nuances of this Modernist theme, one that scholars have too hastily confused with isolation and loneliness.

CHAPTER III: SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AND PURPOSE

But for him it was his last afternoon as himself.

—W. H. Auden

Post-World War I modernity unquestionably spawned feelings of isolation and alienation, and it also gave rise to existential crises for many in the Western world. The Great War disrupted the customary cultural roles by which men and women had abided—the public sphere for men and domestic realm for women. Women participated in the total war effort, often doing the work of their male counterparts. Yet, at war's end, soldiers returned, and women once again were relegated to the home, a situation that caused countless numbers to question not only their purpose in society but also their very identities as females in a male-dominated culture. Men, too, struggled to understand who they were and how to live in a world capable of producing death and destruction on such a massive scale. Economic recessions and then the Great Depression exacerbated people's feelings of disfranchisement and anonymity in an ever-increasing industrialized and politicized State. For many artists and intellectuals, the traditional institutions of science and religion no longer seemed viable or relevant in modernity, for both had failed to construct a peaceful world. Millions felt themselves merely nameless objects of war, industrialization, and capitalism; thus, they sought avenues by which they could discover an authentic identity that went beyond societal and cultural dictates, as well as a larger purpose in life, one that transcended daily existence and held the potential to create a deeper, more fulfilling reality.

This existential condition and subsequent exploration for self and purpose became two key thematic preoccupations of Modernist authors. John Duvall declares that the search for an authentic identity is a prominent theme in American Modernism (247) and that “the modernist questioning of larger purpose” also represents one of the chief literary subjects of that era (252). For example, in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes struggles with his identity because, once a robust man and soldier, he now suffers from impotency due to a war injury. To compensate for what he feels to be the loss of his masculinity, Barnes watches bullfights, a hyper-masculine activity; numbs his emotional pain by drinking heavily; and wanders from bar to bar, not knowing who he truly is anymore and lacking any real purpose or direction in his life. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* offers a twist on the search for an authentic identity. Rather than live as himself after the Great War, James “Jimmy” Gatz creates a new identity—Jay Gatsby—a wealthy and influential persona quite different from Gatz’s real self, a young man from humble stock with no money or status. Unlike Hemingway’s Jake Barnes, who remains incapable of finding his authentic self or place in the modern world, Tom Joad, John Steinbeck’s protagonist in *The Grapes of Wrath*, finds his purpose in life after suffering the travails of prison, dislocation from his birth home, migrant work in California, and violence associated with the Red Scare and labor union organization. After living the abysmal life of a migrant worker—witnessing corporate greed, overwork, lack of living wages, starvation, and death—and seeing his friend murdered during a labor strike, young Joad discovers the true objective for his life:

to work for justice for the poor and disfranchised. The above-named authors, among a host of other Modernist writers, used these questions of identity and life's purpose to illustrate how society grappled with modernity.

Like her Modernist contemporaries, Carson McCullers explored these themes in her fiction. All her novels except *Clock Without Hands* were published in the 1940s, a literary decade Chester E. Eisinger declares to be "about the elementary struggle for life . . . [and] about the possible survival of the individual identity, about the survival of the writer as artist" (1). In his book, *Fiction of the Forties*, Eisinger examines the themes and modes of novels written during that decade and places them within historical context of the Great War and World War II. In this discussion, he asserts:

With all forces thus conspiring to destroy the self, fiction set about recording the survival of the self. Its writers understood that its most sacred aim was self-discovery—for themselves and for their readers. Their most desperate, urgent, and yet heartening maneuvers were undertaken in the search for the self, ways of fulfilling the quest for identity or of consummating the process of individuation in the urge toward self-knowledge. This historic charge, the function, of literature has always been to uncover the self. But few periods in history have made the imperatives of that responsibility so difficult to obey. (20)

Though a young woman in her twenties in the 1940s, McCullers understood this crucial yearning to discover one's identity and life's aspiration. Her short stories and novels not only address these themes, but they also challenge the very nature of the self and confront societal norms for both men and women. This chapter examines a variety of ways in which McCullers appropriated and expanded these two Modernist themes. Thus, this chapter analyzes the following: nature versus nurture in the development of human identity, motherhood and the failure to successfully inhabit that role, artistic ambition, nascent teenaged sexuality, gender identity, adolescent identity crises, and the culturally restricted female roles during and after World War II.

Modernist writers explored the interior of the human mind, and Carson McCullers embraced this Modernist concern in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, where she indirectly alludes to nature versus nurture in the formation of human identity. She does so through the character of Marvin Macy, the ne'er-do-well once married to Miss Amelia Evans. While the tale centers on Amelia, Macy plays a key function in her emotional destruction. Little in-depth scholarship has been devoted to Macy, undoubtedly because Miss Amelia proves to be such a provocative character to examine and analyze, particularly after the advent of feminist theory and queer studies. Further, scholars focus much of their attention on Amelia's relationship with the hunchbacked dwarf, Cousin Lymon, frequently using McCullers's lover/beloved formula described in the introduction to Chapter Two of this dissertation. However, despite his arguably lesser position in the story, Marvin

Macy proves to be a fascinating psychological study, and readers are left to decide whether he was born evil or conditioned to be so.

Through the voice of the balladeer, McCullers crafts Marvin Macy to both attract and repulse readers, initially describing him as an ideal man:

For Marvin Macy was the handsomest man in this region—being six feet one inch tall, hard-muscled, and with slow gray eyes and curly hair. He was well off, made good wages, and had a gold watch which opened in the back to a picture of a waterfall. From the outward and worldly point of view Marvin Macy was a fortunate fellow; he needed to bow and scrape to no one and always got just what he wanted. (27)

However, the balladeer's next description presents him as a wicked human being: "But from a more serious and thoughtful viewpoint Marvin Macy was not a person to be envied, for he was an evil character" (27). The ballad maker seems to suggest that Macy is innately evil, listing his many criminal and immoral acts. As a boy, he committed a murder: "His reputation was as bad, if not worse, than that of any young man in the county. For years, when he was a boy, he had carried about with him the dried and salted ear of a man he had killed in a razor fight" (27). He also enjoyed hurting animals when he was young, "chopp[ing] off the tails of squirrels in the pinewoods just to please his fancy," and he carried marijuana in his pocket (27). Clearly, Macy represents trouble with a capital T. But some people are drawn to so-called "bad boys," and a number of women are attracted to Marvin Macy: "Yet in spite of his well-known reputation he was the beloved of many females in this

region—and there were at the time several young girls who were clean-haired and soft-eyed, with tender sweet little buttocks and charming ways. These gentle young girls he degraded and shamed” (27). The phrase “tender sweet little buttocks” reveals Macy’s penchant for objectifying women. However, readers may also deduce that Macy may not have gently seduced these women but rather molested or even raped them. McCullers scholar Sarah Gleeson-White believes the latter, referring to him as “the nothing-less-than-a-rapist Marvin Macy” (“A Peculiarly Southern” 51). A nice man Macy is not.

While the balladeer describes Macy as intrinsically evil, he also offers a reason for Macy’s cruelty: “Yet there is some explanation for the ugliness of his character, for Marvin Macy had had a hard beginning in this world” (28). Marvin Macy and his brother, Henry, were the youngest of “seven unwanted children whose parents could hardly be called parents at all” (28). The parents wander the swamps, work in the mill, beat their children if they cry, and neglect them on every level. So terrified are the children of their parents, “the first thing they learned in this world was to seek the darkest corner of the room and try to hide themselves as best they could. They were as thin as little whitehaired ghosts, and they did not speak, not even to each other” (28). In today’s terms, the Macy children would be considered severely emotionally and physically abused. Eventually, the parents simply abandon the children, who are “left to the mercies of the town” (28). Here, we see the balladeer offering a heartrending reason as to why Macy behaves in such an awful manner, describing horrific neglect, abuse, and abandonment that would warp

any child. Contemporary trauma theorists maintain that adult survivors of physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse often relive their ordeals either in the form of victimhood or by taking on the role of the abuser. In “Hidden Mission of the Psyche in Abuse and Addiction,” Gostecnik et al assert that childhood trauma directly affects adult behavior: “In the behavioral reliving of the traumatic experience, the person can play the role of the victim or executioner; in other words, he/she can harm others or the person can be self-destructive and again play the role of the victim” (363). Thus we see McCullers move away from the notion of nature—Macy as intrinsically evil—to suggest, rather, that the lack of love and nurturance damaged Macy’s young psyche, which fashioned him into the evil person he became.

The balladeer continues with his idea that the lack of nurturing, not biology, created Macy’s criminal character. He declares that both Macy boys were adopted by “a good woman in the town named Mrs. Mary Hale, and she took Marvin Macy and Henry Macy and loved them as her own. They were raised in her household and treated well” (28). However, such a declaration begs the question: why does Henry become a kind and gentle man while Marvin turns into a mean-spirited hoodlum, one who despoils innocent women and commits multiple crimes? The balladeer essentially asserts a contemporary principle concerning domestic violence, positing that an abused child becomes either a victim or an abuser. He declares,

But the hearts of small children are delicate organs. A cruel beginning in this world can twist them into curious shapes. The heart of a hurt child can shrink so that forever afterward it is hard and pitted as the

seed of a peach. Or again, the heart of such a child may fester and swell until it is a misery to carry within the body, easily chafed and hurt by the most ordinary things. (28-29)

Readers instantly recognize Marvin Macy as the former because they have been told of his hardhearted, shameful behavior. Henry Macy signifies the latter, for at the beginning of the tale, he is described as “a shy and timid person with gentle manners and nervous ways” (6). In this interlude about the hearts of damaged children, the balladeer continues to explain that Henry “is the kindest and gentlest man in town. He lends his wages to those who are unfortunate, and in the old days he used to care for the children whose parents were at the café on Saturday night. But he is a shy man, and he has the look of one who has a swollen heart and suffers” (29). Henry assumes the identity of the victim, for the balladeer then asserts that Marvin Macy’s “heart grew tough as the horns of Satan . . . [and] he brought to his brother and the good woman who raised him nothing but shame and trouble” (29). Once again, trauma theory supports the difference between Marvin and Henry Macy. Gostecnik et al report that “abused children can thus repeat this abuse, namely, by again becoming victims of violence as adults or becoming violent themselves” (363). In this section of the tale, the balladeer emphasizes that those extrinsic forces, not intrinsic nature, created Marvin Macy’s malevolent character.

The balladeer then relates the story of how falling in love positively influences Marvin Macy’s character, so much so that he undergoes a metamorphosis of identity, which once again suggests that external factors can, indeed, alter a

person's very self. Twenty-two-year-old Macy falls in love with 19-year-old Miss Amelia Evans, a situation that baffles the small mill town in which they reside, for Amelia dresses and behaves like a man and loves nothing better than to sue people in court and make moonshine whiskey. In his essay, "'The Ballad of the Sad Café' and Other Stories of Women's Wartime Labor," Charles Hannon makes the argument that Marvin Macy is, in fact, homosexual and that his choice of Miss Amelia "makes sense if we recognize her masculinity as the real object of his desire" (112). However, the ballad maker's lover/beloved interlude appears to explain why Macy loves Amelia: "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" (25). As an abused child, Marvin Macy knew no love at all, only emotional and physical pain. Children possess love within themselves and genuinely desire to show affection; however, abused children learn early on that to express themselves freely leads to emotional, physical, and/or sexual pain, so they soon repress their natural emotions, one of which is love. They have been conditioned to believe that to demonstrate love is to suffer. Thus, we see Marvin Macy pine for Miss Amelia, never daring to tell her how he feels: "He would stand near the door of her premises, his cap in his hand, his eyes meek and longing and misty gray" (29). Most astounding, however, is that Macy totally changes his bad-boy identity. The balladeer observes:

He reformed himself completely. He was good to his brother and foster mother, and he saved his wages and learned thrift. Moreover, he reached out toward God. No longer did he lie around on the floor

of the front porch all day Sunday, singing and playing his guitar; he attended church services and was present at all religious meetings. He learned good manners: he trained himself to rise and give his chair to a lady, and he quit swearing and fighting and using holy names in vain. (29)

The old axiom that love conquers all reflects the alteration in Marvin Macy's identity, for his love for Amelia defeats his malicious tendencies. In this case, perhaps Macy is, after all, intrinsically a good person.

In her psychological treatments of Frances in "Wunderkind," Mick, and Frankie Addams, which will be discussed later in this chapter, McCullers considers closely her character's shifting identities, and she does so with Marvin Macy as well. His ten-day marriage to Miss Amelia proves disastrous. She all but ignores him during and after their wedding, and on their wedding night, Amelia simply goes about her usual business as if Macy were invisible: "The groom hung about in the doorway with a loose, foolish, blissful face and was not noticed" (30). However, when he follows Amelia upstairs to go to bed, "what followed after was unholy," according to the balladeer (30). After a short time, the bride "stomped down the stairs in breeches and a khaki jacket. Her face had darkened so that it looked quite black. She slammed the kitchen door and gave it an ugly kick" (31). Readers can guess that Macy's attempt to bed his wife has gone awry, for the balladeer then says, "A groom is in a sorry fix when he is unable to bring his well-beloved bride to bed with him, and the whole town knows it" (31). The balladeer is able to relate the

incident because “[t]he young boys who watched through the window on that night said that this is what actually happened” (30). Macy valiantly tries to calm Amelia and buy her love—and sexual acquiescence—by purchasing gifts for her and signing over all his property to her. Seeing that she is unimpressed, he gets drunk and “put[s] his hand on her shoulder. He was trying to tell her something, but before he could open his mouth she had swung once with her fist and hit his face so hard that he was thrown back against the wall and one of his front teeth was broken” (32). Within the ten-day marriage, Marvin Macy suffers great emotional and physical stress—one can argue abuse—at the hands of Miss Amelia; most importantly, though, he knows the entire mill town watches his suffering and public humiliation, which becomes intolerable to him. On the tenth day, Macy flees Amelia and the town, but not before he leaves her a letter in which he swears vengeance.

At this point, we see external forces change Marvin Macy’s personality yet again. He once acted evilly, but love apparently transforms him into a kind and good person. However, in terms of trauma theory, Marvin Macy’s behavior reflects his childhood abuse in that, rather being the violent man he once was—the abuser—Macy assumes the identity of victim with his wife, Amelia, once again reliving his childhood trauma. Miss Amelia’s rejection of him in emotional, physical, and sexual terms again alters his identity, and he adopts the personality of the wicked person he used to be. Readers may feel pity for Marvin Macy because he does seem ill used and mistreated by Miss Amelia. However, his reversion may very well indicate that, perhaps, he is intrinsically evil after all. The balladeer declares,

For *the true character* of Marvin Macy finally revealed itself, once he had freed himself of his love. He became a criminal whose picture and whose name were in all the papers in the state. He robbed three filling stations and held up the A & P store of Society City with a sawed-off gun. He was suspected of the murder of Slit-Eye Sam who was a noted hijacker. All these crimes were connected with the name Marvin Macy, so that his evil became famous through many countries [sic]. [my emphasis]. (33)

Eventually, Macy is arrested and sent to the state penitentiary. If the balladeer is to be believed, Marvin Macy's malevolent identity is not created by outside forces but rather represents his true nature. However, the balladeer then proclaims, "But though the outward facts of this love are indeed sad and ridiculous, it must be remembered that the real story was that which took place in the soul of the lover himself" (33). So perhaps Macy's abusive upbringing, combined with Amelia's emotional and sexual rejection, means that a lack of nurturance, not "nature," forces Macy's identity to revert back to wickedness; McCullers does not tell us for sure. Whether Macy's evil character stems from nature or nurture, Panthea Reid Broughton rightly declares, "these characters simply do not know how to love" (38), least of all Marvin Macy.

The nature versus nurture debate reappears when Marvin Macy returns to the mill town. The balladeer remarks that the first thing Macy does upon entering the town is to go to the mill and "watch others hard at work, as do all born loafers"

(47). The term “born loafers” reveals Macy as innately lazy. Further, the ballad maker claims that “Marvin Macy brought with him bad fortune, right from the first, as could be expected” (51), an indication that the townspeople believe his malevolence to be supernatural; thus, they believe such a mystical condition must be innate. In the cold autumn, Miss Amelia and the rest of the mill town residents butcher their hogs to make sausage and other pork products. Macy arrives on a frigid day, but the next day, it turns unseasonably hot, and all the newly made pork spoils in the heat, killing an entire family who had eaten a rancid pork roast at a family reunion. Therefore, the town blames Macy for the spoiled meat, the dead family, and all its other misfortunes. The balladeer proclaims, “He was still handsome—with his brown hair, his red lips, and his broad strong shoulders; but the evil in him was now too famous for his good looks to get him anywhere. And this evil was not measured only by the actual sins he had committed” (51). Macy has robbed gas stations and claimed to have ruined the town’s youngest virgin. At this point, the balladeer makes a declaration that implies that Macy’s evil behavior comes from within him: “Any number of wicked things could be listed against him, but quite apart from these crimes there was about him *a secret meanness* that clung to him almost like a smell” [my emphasis] (51). Here, secret implies psychological interiority, something private that is held deep within his soul. Further, the idea that Marvin Macy’s cruelty clings to him like a smell suggests that the balladeer and townspeople believe him to be intrinsically evil, for body odor emanates from the vessel that holds the soul, the human body.

Macy maintains his malevolent identity for the rest of the tale, which seems to suggest he truly is innately evil. In fact, one wonders if he and Cousin Lymon collude to destroy Miss Amelia as a way for Macy to seek revenge and Lymon to get her money. When Macy earns parole from the state penitentiary and returns to the mill town, Cousin Lymon is the first to spot him in the middle of the road: "He and [Macy] stared at each other, and it was not the look of two strangers meeting for the first time and swiftly summing up each other. It was a peculiar stare they exchanged between them, like the look of two criminals who recognize each other" (46). Curiously, most scholars and critics have neglected to consider this curious statement by the balladeer. However, Charles Hannon posits a theory that "the conspiratorial glance between Macy and Lymon upon Macy's return suggests that the whole story of Lymon's kinship to Amelia is a setup, hatched during their involvement with each other in prison before Lymon's prior release" (113). If true—and the balladeer's statement regarding "the look of two criminals who recognize each other" seems to affirm Hannon's hypothesis—Cousin Lymon may very well spur on Macy's desire for revenge. Macy certainly seeks vengeance against Miss Amelia, which culminates in a physical wrestling match and fistfight between the two. The Amazonian Amelia nearly wins the fight, but Cousin Lymon jumps on her back at a crucial moment, and Macy triumphs over Amelia. Lymon's last-second interference suggests complicity between the two men. More importantly, on the night of the fight, both Macy and Lymon vandalize Miss Amelia's café, steal her property and treasures, and poison her favorite food, "grits with

sausage” (68). Then both men go “off together, the two of them” (68), never to be heard of again. As a true Modernist author, McCullers leaves us to speculate about Marvin Macy and Cousin Lymon’s fate. And she also complicates Macy in terms of his identity. Is he innately evil, or did his unfortunate upbringing cause him to become a hardened criminal? McCullers’s balladeer offers evidence for both interpretations, which, once again, compels readers to decide for themselves which type of identity represents the real Marvin Macy: the man who seems to be intrinsically evil or the man conditioned by others—and life itself—to be corrupted and malicious.

In *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, Alison Langdon represents the most pathetic—in the sense of pathos—and perhaps sympathetic of McCullers’s female characters. The tale takes place on an Army base in the South during peacetime and mirrors the boredom and latent violence associated with such a place. Married to Major Morris Langdon, Alison is expected to play the part of supportive wife by making a welcoming home for her husband and attending dinners and parties with other officers and their wives, an artificial existence at best. Alison feels trapped by the dullness of military life, what Betty Friedan terms “the problem that has no name” (19): the feelings of boredom, pent-up anger, confusion, and unhappiness that middle-class women—housewives and mothers—suffered in mid-twentieth century America. Alison’s only respite is her friendship with Lt. Weincheck, with whom she shares a love for music, concerts, and theatre, and the companionship and doting support of Anacleto, the Langdon’s Filipino houseboy. Most importantly, Alison

believes in the identity of femininity imposed upon women through patriarchal—and one may argue military—expectations in the early through mid-twentieth century United States. As a female, Alison is expected to be a wife and mother, and she invests herself in this expectation as well. However, she apparently fails at both imposed roles, for her husband has an affair with his subordinate's wife, and Alison gives birth to a deformed daughter who dies 11 months later. Alison clings to her identity as a failed mother and wife, which ultimately destroys her.

In the character of Alison Langdon, McCullers effectively critiques expectations of women in the male-dominated mid-twentieth century United States. Alison represents the average middle class woman of that time, one who attempts to fulfill the restrictive functions of wife and mother assigned to her gender. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir declares that from the time they are born, females are defined and conditioned by the patriarchy to fit within the role of the feminine, that is, to be at the service of men in the domestic realm as wives and mothers. She states quite frankly that “marriage is [women's] only means of support and the sole justification of [their] existence” and supports this claim by asserting that their functions are to provide children, to “satisfy a male's sexual needs and to take care of his household” (477). Alison's failure to become a “good” wife and mother shatters the identity inflicted upon her by patriarchal fiat. More importantly, however, such false expectations squelch Alison's authentic identity—a woman who loves the arts and teaching Latin—so that her true self essentially disappears, leaving only her false identity of failed military wife and abortive mother. That she

“fails” in these attempts reveals the power of such imposed roles on women, a cultural condition that still, to some degree, exists in this current century.

In her creation of Alison and her husband, Major Langdon, McCullers juxtaposes the Major’s callousness and innate violence with Alison’s deep sympathy and compassion for the suffering of others. In fact, Alison represents the polar opposite of her husband. Whereas Alison is “a small, dark, fragile woman with a large nose and a sensitive mouth” (18), Major Langdon is visibly masculine with a “red-brown face” and a “blunt, jovial, and friendly expression” (17). His nickname is “The Buffalo” because when he rides his horse, “he slump[s] his great heavy shoulders and lower[s] his head” (25). The Major proves healthy and hearty, but Alison suffers ill health brought on by grief at the death of her baby daughter. Major Langdon mocks his wife for her enjoyment of classical music: “Now my wife goes in for classical stuff—Bach, you know—all that. But to me it’s like swallowing a bunch of angleworms. Now take ‘The Merry Widow’s Waltz’—that’s the sort of thing I love. Tuneful music!” (74-75). As Richard M. Cook writes, Major Langdon “is a reckless, insensitive philistine and brute” (“*Reflections*” 70). Alison signifies intelligence and refinement, having once taught Latin at a girl’s school prior to her marriage (45). And sensitivity to those less fortunate proves to be a central element of her identity. When the Langdons are stationed in the Philippines, Alison insists they bring back the poor and fragile 17-year-old Anacleto to the United States and requires the Major to promise “never to let [Anacleto] be in want” (58). Additionally, in the early

days of their marriage, the couple goes quail hunting. Major Langdon disturbs a covey, and the birds instantly take flight:

As he was watching Alison, he had only brought down one quail, and that one he insisted gallantly was hers. But when she took the bird from the dog's mouth, her face had changed. The bird was still living, so he brained it carelessly and then gave it back to her. She held the little warm, ruffled body that had somehow become degraded in its fall, and looked into the dead little glassy black eyes. Then she had burst into tears. (35-36)

While Alison truly possesses a compassionate nature, the Major believes her ill health and sensitive spirit is "morbid and female, altogether outside his control" (35). Here, McCullers reveals not only the denigration of women in a patriarchal society but also the male need to control females. Thus, when readers combine all these factors along with Major Langdon's extramarital affair with Leonora Penderton, they can understand Alison's fragile emotional state.

The most tragic aspect of Alison's identity, however, proves to be her perceived failure as a mother. De Beauvoir describes the mystery of pregnancy using Christian symbolism:

In a sense the mystery of the Incarnation repeats itself in each mother; every child born is a god who is made man: he cannot find self-realization as a being with a consciousness and freedom unless he first comes into the world; the mother lends herself to this mystery,

but she does not control it; it is beyond her power to influence what in the end will be the true nature of this being who is developing in her womb. (555)

De Beauvoir further asserts that a mother-to-be also lives “in dread of giving birth to a defective or a monster, because she is aware to what a frightening extent the welfare of the flesh is contingent upon circumstances—and this embryo dwelling within her is only flesh” (555). Although Alison successfully endures her nine-month pregnancy, she gives birth to a deformed daughter who passes away within a year. Three years prior to the main action in the tale, Anacleto assists Alison in the delivery room; despite his outward machismo, Major Langdon refuses to help his wife deliver their baby because he “could not stand it” (38), which represents McCullers’s interesting twist on society’s notion of male courage and masculinity. When baby Catherine arrives, they discover that some of her fingers are webbed, and she develops into a sickly infant. Sadly for the child and Alison, Major Langdon’s reaction at seeing his malformed baby is to think that “if he had to touch that baby he would shudder all over” (38), which signifies yet another of McCullers’s critiques of cultural manliness.

At the death of Catherine, Alison suffers a profound and terrible depression. After all, she cannot claim the socially constructed designation of “mother.” DeBeauvoir explains that a “mother is delighted to feel herself necessary; her existence is justified by the wants she supplies” to her child (572). But in Alison’s case, her existence cannot be justified because her child has died. Friedan cites a

case where “a woman had a nervous breakdown when she found she could not breastfeed her baby” (17). Imagine Alison Langdon, then: not only does she not have an infant to care for and cherish, but she also no longer possesses the identity of mother, which makes her a failure in the eyes of society in general and the military specifically. She becomes obsessed with the idea of Catherine’s body lying in a grave in the cemetery, and she focuses “on decay and that tiny lonely skeleton” (83). Alison eventually has the little body exhumed and cremated so that her ashes can be scattered on the snow-covered ground. She thinks to herself, “And now all that was left of Catherine were the memories that she and Anacleto shared together” (84), yet one more indication of the heartlessness of Major Langdon, for he prefers to block out any memories of the deformed child. In fact, when the baby dies, he is relieved, but “Alison could never think about her baby without experiencing an emotion so loaded with love and grief that it was like an insuperable weight on her chest. It was not true that time could muffle the keenness of this loss” (85). Clearly, Alison’s identity, which centers solely on being a wife and mother, has been shattered. Moreover, as a woman in the mid-twentieth century, Alison would be viewed by society as a failure. Her husband sleeps with Captain Penderton’s wife; therefore, by cultural standards, Alison fails to keep her husband happy. Her daughter is born deformed and dies soon thereafter; therefore, society considers Alison to be a complete failure at motherhood.

Alison’s depression manifests itself in self-mutilation. After the death of her baby and not long after she discovers her husband is having an affair with Leonora

Penderton, Alison chops off her nipples with garden shears. The evening of her self-mutilation, the Pendertons entertain the Langdons, and Alison, running a high fever, runs out of the room to her own home: "She had seen the garden shears on the wall and, beside herself with anger and despair, she had tried to stab and kill herself. But the shears were too blunt. And then for a few moments she must have been quite out of her head, for she herself did not know just how it happened" (47). Anacleto finds her and runs screaming into the Penderton's house: "They found Mrs. Langdon unconscious and she had cut off the tender nipples of her breasts with the garden shears" (31). Several scholars have written about this terrible incident, offering varying theories as to why she would do such harm to herself. A. S. Knowles, Jr., offers a simplistic and unconvincing explanation for Alison's behavior. He declares that Alison is "asexual" and that her "response to her situation is self-mutilation, madness, and death in a sanitarium" (94). Sarah Gleeson-White inaccurately claims that Alison chops off "one of her nipples" and also argues that Alison represents a "hysterical" woman (*Strange Bodies* 42), an unusual interpretation coming from a scholar who uses gender theory to analyze McCullers's works. Richard M. Cook posits a slightly more complex theory:

Sensitive, artistic, and eccentric, Alison Langdon has been so badly scarred by her husband's neglect and cruelty and the army's repressive brutality that she has come to despise herself and her sex. Deranged by grief over the death of her deformed child . . . Alison, shortly after the novel opens, has cut off her nipples with garden

shears. It was an act of repudiating her sex and her life. (*Reflections* 70-71)

However, the notion that Alison's self-mutilation represents some type of abrogation of her gender and life still does not address her identity as wife and mother. In "Carson McCullers: A Map of Love," John B. Vickery considers Alison to be "the outraged wife who sees in her husband's philandering both personal insult and social humiliation. This and the death of her deformed baby daughter are the central acts of violence for her to face" (19). While it is true that Mrs. Langdon is angry and disgusted with her husband, at no time does McCullers write that Alison feels publicly humiliated. Vickery then places Alison's self-harm in terms of fleeing her situation:

She protests against the impossibility of escaping from a world which has deprived her of her husband's love and her child's existence by mutilating her breasts, an act which provides the criterion for her semi-deranged state. Its complete pointlessness and horror echoes her view of the world at the same time as it is a wordless attempt to wake the other dreamers to an awareness of her condition. (20)

This interpretation comes closer to explaining Alison's brutal attack against her own body. Those who self-mutilate—in contemporary terms, they are labeled "cutters"—usually do so as a means to release pent-up emotions that they feel unable to express outwardly. Additionally, cutters usually hurt themselves as a cry for help, once again feeling incapable of verbally doing so. Thus, Vickery's comment

that her action is pointless contradicts his claim that she hurts herself in order to make others aware of her emotional and mental state.

These interpretations of Alison's act of self-mutilation, while containing some elements of truth, neglect to examine her identity as a mother. After all, breasts represent life-giving nourishment to infants, despite Gleeson-White's claim that women's breasts are "a signifier of pleasure" (*Strange Bodies* 84), a statement that reflects patriarchal oppression of women in that breasts are meant for men's sexual gratification. In *Lovers & Beloveds: Sexual Otherness in Southern Fiction 1936-1961*, Gary Richards offers a theory that combines motherhood and sexuality to explain Alison's abasement: "McCullers presents in Alison a woman so invested in the results of her procreative heterosexuality that when her child dies, she mutilates those parts of her body simultaneously associated with erotic stimulation and the nurture of children" (166). Richards rightly describes Alison's identity as a mother: she completely believes in her vision of motherhood, a belief outwardly imposed by the culture in which she lives. At the time McCullers wrote this novel, societal expectations of women were narrow and powerful. The notion of separate spheres resumed after World War I, when middle class women were expected to marry and produce children. Alison's inability to bear a healthy child, coupled with her husband's affair, creates in her a fragmented identity. She knows she is female, but she cannot be the type of woman the culture demands. Unable to live with her perceived failure as a wife, mother, and woman, she attacks the outwardly female part of her body, an act symbolic of her disintegrating identity and purpose in life.

Although Alison does not feel publicly humiliated by her husband's extramarital affair, she does experience embarrassment because of her self-mutilation, an emotion quite natural to those who intentionally injure themselves: "Since the night she had rushed home and hurt herself, she had felt in her a constant nauseous shame. She was sure that everyone who looked at her must be thinking of what she had done" (34). In fact, no one knows of her self-injury except Anacleto, the Pendertons, Major Langdon, and the doctor and nurse who attended to her. Alison's shame signifies in her a profound sense of embarrassment combined with feelings of disgrace, degradation, and humiliation.

Such emotions amplify her already fractured identity to the point that it finally shatters when Major Langdon sends her to a sanatorium. The incident that compels Major Langdon to commit his wife occurs when Alison sees a man enter the Penderton home late at night; she believes he is Major Langdon having an assignation with Leonora. However, the man happens to be Private Ellgee Williams, a soldier so obsessed with Leonora that he regularly enters her bedroom at night and watches her until dawn. Alison sneaks into Leonora's bedroom, turns on the light, and spots Williams as he "half-rose from his crouching position" (104). Alison then tells Captain Penderton, "I think you had better go up to your wife's room" (104). Penderton instantly assumes that Major Langdon is in the room, for he has been aware of their affair for some time.

But surely not, for they would hardly be so willy-nilly as that! And if so what a position it would put him in! The Captain's smile was

sugary and controlled. He did not reveal in any way his feelings of anger, doubt, and intense annoyance.

'Come, my dear,' he said in a motherly voice, 'you shouldn't be roaming around like this. I'll take you home.' (105)

Because of Penderton's seemingly blasé attitude, Alison demands to know why, if he is aware of the man in Leonora's room, the Captain does "nothing about it."

Penderton, believing Alison to be quite mad, replies, "'You're not yourself and you don't know what you're talking about'" (105). When she returns home, she informs Major Langdon that Leonora has betrayed Captain Penderton and the Major by having an affair with an enlisted man. She also informs her husband that she will be divorcing him. However, he does not react in the way she anticipates, for "[a]fter a long time, when all that she had said had soaked into his mind and he was forced to acknowledge to himself that she was crazy, he took her nail scissors and the fire tongs out of the room" (107), fearing she will harm herself again. Later, the Major calls a physician who recommends she be committed to a sanatorium. When he tells Alison of her commitment, she "only listened bitterly" (108). Clearly, Alison internalizes the injustice being done to her. Such emotional internalizing, combined with her overwhelming feelings of failure to be a "good" wife and mother, shatter her very identity. She possesses no hope of successfully accomplishing the roles of wife and mother expected by society in general and the military specifically, and she cannot possibly divorce Major Langdon, all because she is now considered insane and forced into an isolated asylum. The indignity of being committed to a mental

asylum is bad enough, but when the reason is unjust, Alison's physical health finally breaks. She accepts her fate and dies of a massive heart attack.

In *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, McCullers critiques the power of the patriarchy to define women and their roles in American society. She further complicates this critique by situating the tale on an Army base, a place that represents a bastion of masculinity. McCullers's treatment of adult female roles in the character of Alison reflects the cultural trap experienced by women during the Modernist era and beyond, one where societal expectations of marriage and motherhood extirpate women's personal aspirations, which subsequently thwarts, even stunts, their authentic identities and true purposes in life.

McCullers is noted for creating distinctive female characters, particularly adolescents. In "Wunderkind," she addresses female adolescence and artistic aspiration through the character of fifteen-year-old Frances. This tale represents Carson McCullers's first published short story printed in *Story* magazine in 1936 under her birth name, Carson Smith (James 173), and it was written when the author was just fifteen years old (McDowell, "Short Stories" 87). Much of the tale is autobiographical, particularly references to one trauma that affected her deeply for many years and which appears in modified form in her story. As a young girl, McCullers desired to become a concert pianist and studied the instrument under Mary Tucker's tutelage. The promising pianist grew to love the Tucker family, but particularly Mary. At Tucker's recommendation, McCullers planned to attend the

Juilliard School of Music and was accepted into that prestigious institution. Virginia Spencer Carr observes:

Carson Smith's union with Mary Tucker was a bond entered into with her whole spirit, and for the next four years her piano teacher was the fulcrum of her physical and psychic existence. . . . From Mary Tucker, Carson craved not only enormous technical training to help launch her as a musician, but also a demonstrable love. She could never articulate such feelings to her teacher, however, whose firm demeanor and demanding standards and discipline in music unwittingly created a barrier between them. (*The Lonely Hunter* 26-27)

Their emotional and spiritual attachment broke, however, when Tucker's husband, an Army officer, received notice of his transfer to Fort Howard, Maryland, forcing the entire Tucker family to leave Georgia and, most importantly, Mary to leave McCullers. The young musician, devastated and feeling abandoned by her beloved teacher, soon coolly informed Tucker she was going to become a writer rather than a concert pianist. Tucker, shocked and hurt by McCullers's seemingly aloof demeanor, responded in kind. Carr relates, "Restrained almost to the point of coldness, neither sought solace nor offered balm to the other's psychic wounds. Neither woman allowed the other to know how deeply she had been hurt" (35-36). In fact, McCullers remained estranged from Mary Tucker for a number of years. In "Wunderkind," Margaret B. McDowell rightly asserts that McCullers "illustrates the

writer's use of his or her experience, modulated and transformed" (*Carson McCullers* 27). Judith Giblin James goes further, asserting that the story "allows McCullers, superficially if not emotionally, to reverse the loss" of her cherished Mary Tucker (173).

In the first volume of their trilogy, *No Man's Land: The War of the Words*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar declare that Kate Chopin's novel, *The Awakening*, "traces the annihilation of female creativity" (182). Such a statement can also be applied to McCullers's story, "Wunderkind," in that the adolescent protagonist, Frances, a young pianist, fails to live up to the label of child prodigy and subsequently renounces music altogether. Like young McCullers, fifteen-year-old Frances yearns to become a concert pianist, and she practices with Mr. Bilderbach, her German-bred Dutch-Czech piano teacher. From age twelve, she has attended lessons twice a week and practiced long hours each day, foregoing childlike playtime and the companionship of other children. Although a musical taskmaster, Bilderbach also becomes like a second father to the girl, often allowing her to eat dinner with his wife and him—a childless couple—and letting her spend the night at their home. When she prepares for her graduation from junior high school, Bilderbach selects fabric and shoes for Frances to wear; his wife makes the dress, but he frequently intervenes with suggestions for ruffles and other decorations (66). Of utmost importance, soon after twelve-year-old Frances begins lessons with Bilderbach, he declares to others—not to Frances herself, for he always refers to her as *Bienchen* (62), a German term of endearment that means "little bee"—that

Frances is a *Wunderkind*, a child prodigy, an identity the young teenager promptly claims and intrepidly tries to emulate.

At this point in the story, McCullers examines sexism and gender inequality through Bilderbach's character. He refers to his other prodigy, fourteen-year-old violinist Heime Israelsky, as "Master Israelsky" (60), but he chooses to use towards Frances the diminutive term *Bienchen*, which means "little bee." This difference in naming the two young people suggests that Bilderbach values Heime's talent much more than Frances's. Moreover, when Frances makes "enormous" errors while playing the piano, Bilderbach demeans her intelligence by stating, "I know it must be terrible. Carrying around all the time a head that thick. Poor Bienchen—" (62). His last words, "Poor Bienchen," epitomize Bilderbach's condescending attitude towards his female student, and the fact that he refuses directly to address her as *Wunderkind* points to his refusal to make her feel good about herself. By only telling others that she is a *Wunderkind*, he withholds from Frances the ultimate compliment for a young musician—child prodigy.

The story, told mostly in flashbacks, reveals Frances's severe identity crisis, for deep in her heart, she knows she is no longer Bilderbach's *Wunderkind*. When she enters his home for what we learn will be her final lesson, she tries to screw up her courage by reciting to herself, "A good lesson—a good lesson—like it used to be" (58). Filled with fear and anxiety that she no longer personifies a *Wunderkind*, she repeatedly declares to herself that she is still the person she once believed she was, that brilliant child pianist. Yet, "[s]he could see her fingers sinking powerless into a

blur of piano keys. She felt tired—felt that if he looked at her much longer her hands might tremble” (59). Before her lesson begins, Bilderbach’s violinist friend, Mr. Lafkowitz, points to a photo of Heime Israelsky, a 14-year-old violinist who is a true child prodigy and has played at Carnegie Hall. Frances recalls once playing a difficult Bloch duet with him at a concert, after which Heime received glowing reviews, but she did not: “Later, after the reviews had said she lacked the temperament for that type of music, after they called her playing thin and lacking in feeling, she felt cheated” (64). Yet, Frances still tries to convince herself she is a *Wunderkind*: “No matter what the papers said, that was what he had called her” (64), referring to Mr. Bilderbach. Lafkowitz unknowingly hurts Frances’s feelings by showing so much pride in Heime’s accomplishments, because she knows, despite trying to persuade herself otherwise, that she cannot measure up to the young violinist’s talent.

The reason for her musical struggles baffles Frances. She knows it started “four months ago” (66), but she does not understand how or why she cannot play with the passion Bilderbach expects of her. Ultimately, she blames her age: “Adolescence, she thought” (66). Here, we see Frances trying to hang on to her identity as a *Wunderkind*, a type of selfhood bestowed upon her by her instructor and second father, Mr. Bilderbach. But because this “self” does not come from within her, is not intrinsic, it cannot be sustained. She plays a Beethoven sonata but utterly fails to convey the passion required of the piece. Bilderbach implores her to “[f]eel it as Beethoven wrote it down. Feel that tragedy and restraint,” but when she

finishes the sonata, her teacher merely says, “No” (68). He then selects a piece she played when she first began lessons with him at age twelve, but he speaks to her with a voice “he used for children” (69). Frances’s outer, false identity shatters: “Her hands seemed separate from the music that was in her” (68). Bilderbach attempts to get her to play and finally orders her: “All of it,” he urged. “Now!” (69). But she cannot play the piano anymore. She tells him, “I don’t know why, but I just can’t—can’t any more” (69). Frances has lost her identity, what she thought was her very self—a *Wunderkind*—and in this trauma-induced state, she runs away. Grabbing her music and satchel, she dashes from his home but “turn[s] in the wrong direction, and hurrie[s] down the street that had become confused with noise and bicycles and the games of other children” (70). At this point, the story ends, leaving readers to speculate on Frances’s future and, more importantly, to interpret the true meaning of the tale, a quintessential Modernist technique that McCullers employs in her fiction.

Although most scholars and critics study McCullers’s full-length books and novellas because she is known primarily as a novelist, a few have devoted their energies to examining her short fiction. Robert Phillips declares that, while being the most well known of her stories, “Wunderkind” does not represent her best effort (175). Undoubtedly, this stems from the fact the author wrote the story as a fifteen-year-old teenager, the same age as Frances in the tale, and published it when she was only nineteen years old. He does, however, acknowledge—and beautifully so—that “[i]n the novels McCullers strove for grand moments; in the stories, for quiet

occasions which nevertheless are vital occasions” (175). In his analysis, Phillips interprets Frances in terms of the grotesque, that is, as a freak. She may play the piano with respectable technique, but she lacks inner passion, an essential constituent of a real artist. He asserts, “Outside she is all glitter; inside, she knows she is empty” (175). He further contends that Frances’s flight from Mr. Bilderbach’s home represents the loss of her childhood. Certainly, Frances’s stubborn insistence that she *is* a prodigy falls away, and she finally admits to herself she is not a *Wunderkind*. With this epiphany comes the realization that she has lost her childhood. But if she is not a *Wunderkind* as she was led to believe, who—or what—is she? Phillips asserts, “She is an emotional freak who is outwardly normal” (175). His theory about her loss of childhood seems reasonable. Frances “turn[s] in the wrong direction” and scurries down the street filled with children and their playtime equipment (70). The group of children points to Frances’s isolated state as a budding musician, for she clearly sacrificed friends and fun to pursue her musical dream. More importantly, though, she made this sacrifice because she took on the identity of a *Wunderkind*. Phillips asserts that “the reader comprehends the loss of the girl’s childhood, sacrificed to the music she cannot really play well” (175). Perhaps, Frances, too, finally comes to understand this as well. More problematic is Phillips’s declaration that Frances is an “emotional freak” because he does not support it. Nowhere does McCullers allude to the young girl’s “freakish” mien or behavior, unless, of course, a *Wunderkind* is freakish. The author does illustrate, to a minor degree, Frances’s immaturity when the young pianist blames her four-month

struggle with music on her adolescence. However, Frances may very well be correct to blame her problems on her age, at least in part. When she broods about other adolescents, she does so in the context of music: “Some kids played with promise—and worked and worked until, *like her*, the least little thing would start them crying, and worn out with trying to get the thing across—the longing they felt—something queer began to happen. . . “[my emphasis] (66). Here, Frances illuminates for readers the tremendous time and emotional exertion required in making music, and this would certainly prove especially hard for young people “like her.” She alludes to the physical, emotional, and one could argue spiritual, exhaustion underlying excellent musicianship, and she acknowledges the elemental passion required to make good music as well as the “longing” most musicians feel to create great art. Obviously, teenagers struggle with changes wrought by hormones, but in Frances, McCullers combines adolescent immaturity and hormonal changes with the young teen’s aspirations to be a musical prodigy. As such, the author demonstrates how easily young musicians emotionally can break down—from overwork, perfectionism, and isolation from their peers. So, rather than being a freak, Frances appears to be a normal teenager who has suffered the loss of her self, an identity that ultimately did not befit her. An emotional wreck she is, but a freak she is not.

Two scholars focus on Frances’s budding sexuality in the story. In her very brief survey in *Understanding Carson McCullers*, Virginia Spencer Carr points to Frances’s growing awareness of Bilderbach as a grown man and the teenager’s conflation of her inability to play music and her sexual feelings for her teacher

(134). Carr offers limited support for her contention, only citing the young pianist's awareness of Bilderbach's "deep voice" and her desire to "reach out and touch his muscle-flexed finger that pointed out the phrases. . . [and] to feel the gleaming gold band ring and the strong hairy back of his hand" ("Wunderkind" 62). Carr asserts that because Frances tries to please Bilderbach, "[t]hrough her teacher, Frances becomes aware not only of her musical ineptitude, but also of her evolving sexuality" (*Understanding* 134). Alice Hall Petry offers a Freudian interpretation of "Wunderkind," at times stretching the limits of plausibility. She argues that Frances experiences the Electra complex, that is, "a passionate interest in the father, which must be rejected if the girl is to enter into meaningful adult heterosexual relationships" (par. 14). More directly, Frances suffers "turmoil over her growing awareness of her sexual passion for her music teacher" (par. 1). Moreover, her confusion is exacerbated because she also loves him like a second father. Petry further declares that, not only is Frances sexually attracted to Bilderbach, but that he, too, responds in kind to his pupil: "The powerful sexual dimension of the piano music leads to the complex central motif of the story: Bilderbach and Frances respond to each other not just as teacher and student, and not just as father and daughter, but virtually as lover and beloved" (par. 5). Such a conflation suggests incestuous feelings on both their parts, but Petry does not use that term, an odd omission in her analysis. While Frances does look at physical parts of Mr. Bilderbach (e.g., his hands and fingers), she views them as a musician would: as elements of the instruments—the pianist and piano. In reality, the story more fully

focuses on Frances's emotional struggle that stems from her lack of musical inner passion, a key component of what she thought was her identity as a *Wunderkind*. In a particularly overdrawn statement, Petry suggests that Frances's four-month struggle with her musical ability may be due to menstruation—"hence, the repeated references to 'months'" (par. 11)—or masturbation—"hence the unexplained sore finger" Frances has on her hand (par. 11). She further adds that Heime Israelsky's first name may be "a pun on 'hymen'" (par. 11). Certainly, a case may be made that fifteen-year-old Frances could be experiencing some emotional troubles because of her hormonal changes—teenagers do—but Petry's parsing of the story contains some unconvincing analysis. One statement Petry makes tends to diminish her argument. She cites the section where Mr. Bilderbach orders Frances to play the piece she first performed when she was twelve years old, the "Harmonious Blacksmith." However, Petry does not quote the entire passage. The following appears in Petry's essay, the emphasis hers:

Then impulsively he squatted down to the floor. 'Vigorous,' he said.

She could not stop looking at him, sitting on one heel with the other foot resting squarely before him for balance, the muscles of his strong thighs straining under the cloth of his trousers

She could not look down at the piano. The light brightened the hairs on the backs of his outspread hands, made the lenses of his glasses glitter.

'All of it,' he urged. 'Now!'

She felt that the marrows of her bones were hollow and there was no blood left in her. Her heart that had been springing against her chest all afternoon felt suddenly dead. She saw it gray and limp and shriveled at the edges like an oyster.

His face seemed to throb out in space before her, come closer with the lurching motion in the veins of his temples . . . Her lips shook like jelly and a surge of noiseless tears made the white keys blur in a watery line. 'I can't,' she whispered. 'I don't know why, but I just can't—can't any more.'

His tense body slackened and, holding his hand to his side, he pulled himself up. (emphasis added) (par. 8)

Petry then declares, "Were this scene read out of context, one would assume that it was a failed sexual encounter, not a piano lesson" (par. 9). But herein lies the problem with her statement: this scene between Frances and her instructor cannot—should not—be read out of context. To do so skews the meaning of the story. More importantly, Petry omits that, when Bilderbach kneels by the piano with his muscular thighs "straining under the cloth of his trousers," his back is also "straight, his elbows staunchly propped on his knees" (69). Here, Bilderbach positions himself at Frances's playing level to more easily see her fingering technique, a common maneuver for piano teachers. He also tells Frances to visualize the blacksmith working in the sun "easily and undisturbed" (69), that is,

alone. Further, the thumping in her heart had occurred all day because of her anxiety about not being able to play the piano properly; it did not just begin when Bilderbach knelt beside her, which indicates that she experienced fear and anxiety, not sexual passion, for her piano teacher. The dead feeling of her heart signifies that she knows she has lost her identity, that of a *Wunderkind*.

Constance M. Perry briefly writes about “Wunderkind” in her essay, “Carson McCullers and the Female Wunderkind,” using Frances to bookend her more thorough discussion of Mick Kelly of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. Using McCullers’s traumatic separation from Mary Tucker for much of the basis for her analysis, Perry contends that McCullers experienced burgeoning adult sexual feelings for Tucker and that this, coupled with her feeling abandoned by her teacher, produced in young McCullers the idea that a career in music was impossible. Perry asserts, “This autobiographical conflict between a young person’s developing talent and her emerging sexuality dominates McCullers’s first literary works” (39). While Frances’s sexual feelings can be debated, Perry rightly asserts that Frances “inwardly wrestles with the dilemma of her identity” (39). However, in this case, her identity crisis stems not only from her lack of true talent but also because she is a female musician in the male-dominated music world. Perry declares that Heime “makes a happy transition from his *Wunderkind* adolescence to adult masculinity, becoming ‘young master Israelsky’” (39). This declaration seems more like speculation than interpretation because McCullers does not depict Heime as happy. She only says he wrote to Frances telling her that he listened to “Schnabel and

Huberman,” played at Carnegie Hall, and ate at the Russian Tea Room (66). His photograph shows that, in fact, he is “thinner,” which could indicate stress, especially when coupled with the pressure of being only fourteen years old and performing at such a grand venue. However, Perry more likely means that Heime happily makes his transition to masculinity simply by virtue of male privilege. In other words, Heime more easily can make the transition from child prodigy to professional musician because he is male.

Ultimately, through Frances’s struggle with her identity, McCullers confronts the rigid gender roles of women and men, especially since she wrote the story in 1936, a time when the concept of separate spheres remained ingrained in American culture. Throughout the story, we see the adolescent Frances surrounded only by men: Mr. Bilderbach, Mr. Lafkowitz, and the photograph of Heime. In fact, Heime represents an important absent presence in the story, for he symbolizes Frances’s dream of becoming a concert musician as well as the identity she once laid claim to but can no longer embody—the *Wunderkind*. Heime, a male, succeeds in the world of music, whereas Frances, a female, fails. Frances performs music written solely by male composers—J. S. Bach, Ludwig Von Beethoven, Ernest Bloch, and Robert Schumann (not his wife Clara, an accomplished pianist and composer in her own right). Virginia Woolf’s controversial but intriguing idea of sentences written based on one’s gender can be applied here. She argues in *A Room of One’s Own* that women writers in the nineteenth century “had no tradition behind them” (Location 1007), which means they were forced to use verbiage and sentence constructions created

by men. Woolf believes that male authors produced sentences specific to their needs as males, which then became the “standard” for writing, and she cites Balzac, Dickens, Gibbon, and others to support her theory (Location 1017). She declares, however, that “[t]here is no reason to think that the form of the epic or the poetic play suit a woman any more than the sentence suits her” (Location 1027). In other words, women writers of the time had no choice but to write within male forms, a situation that forced them to conform to patriarchally-sanctioned creative standards. Thus, it can be argued that female musicians and composers, like their literary counterparts, also conformed to male constructions of musical form and interpretation. Adrienne Rich declares in “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” “Men have the power to cramp [women’s] creativeness [through] cultural values [that] become the embodiment of male subjectivity” (19).

In essence, then, Frances, an adolescent girl, is expected to interpret and perform the music composed by men, despite the fact that, like the male sentence, it does not suit her because of her gender. As such, her male musical teacher will always find fault with her interpretation and performance because she is handicapped by her gender; she cannot possibly interpret the music “properly” because, on a deep level, it seems foreign to her. The only other female in the story is Anna, Mr. Bilderbach’s wife. Before she married Bilderbach, Anna was once a “*lieder* singer” in Germany (63), which suggests she possessed impressive musical talent herself. But she no longer sings—“she said it was her throat” (63). This rather terse statement suggests an excuse rather than a true reason for Anna quitting the concert hall. Because

women were expected to maintain a home for their husbands, most likely Anna felt forced to give up her musical career when she married. Now she spends her time either in the kitchen or “all her time in their bed upstairs, reading magazines or just looking with a half-smile at nothing” (62-63). While Frances likes Mrs. Bilderbach, she does not respect her, for Anna hardly represents a positive role model for the teenager: “Mrs. Bilderbach liked [Frances] in her calm, almost dumb way. She was much different from her husband. She was quiet and fat and slow” (62). Here, McCullers utilizes counterpoint to illustrate the importance of men—Mr. Bilderbach performs music with Mr. Lafkowitz, teaches budding musicians, and earns money to support his wife—versus the inferior status of women in modern society. Once an accomplished musician, Anna renounced her talent and career because she was a married woman and was expected to do so. In essence, Anna’s creativity has been annihilated, to use Gilbert and Gubar’s term, through the patriarchal expectation that married women must live and work solely in the domestic realm. As an adolescent female already struggling with the anxiety of not being a prodigy, Frances further intuits that her gender will preclude her from belonging to the world of music she loves so much. Perhaps, then, Frances unconsciously suppresses the passion essential for creating great music as a way to “choose” to abandon the piano. By doing so, she will never have to face the real possibility of being rejected as a performer because of her gender. As such, Frances’s lack of passion may very well represent a form of emotional protection, or perhaps she truly realizes she does not possess either the passion or talent to move beyond the label of *Wunderkind*.

Either way, like Anna Bilderbach, Frances's creativity and future as a pianist is annihilated, and she loses the identity she embodied for three years under the tutelage of Mr. Bilderbach.

In this short story, McCullers advances the search for an authentic identity and purpose in a modern world through her treatment of an adolescent girl, an infrequent literary venture in the Modernist era. Here, the author reveals how young Frances forfeits her sense of purpose when she runs from Mr. Bilderbach's studio, for in her choice to flee, she ultimately abandons her musical career, one that could still be available in some fashion, even though she is not a child prodigy. One can argue that Frances succumbs to societal (read: patriarchal) expectations of the feminine. Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* chooses death rather than lose her very self by conforming to culturally constructed feminine standards. Although Frances does not die literally, she chooses to run from the room, thus figuratively annihilating her creativity rather than following her heart and pursuing music at any cost. More importantly, though, Frances finds herself having to pursue a new sense of self that she undoubtedly fears cannot measure up to the *Wunderkind* identity she once believed she personified. As an adolescent, Frances likely will recover from the trauma of that afternoon. In the meantime, however, we may assume that she will suffer and struggle to discover her real identity. McCullers does not offer within the story an opportunity for Frances to find a new self, nor does McCullers extend to her readers a happy, conclusive, or easy ending to this tale of shattered identity and a thwarted life's purpose. Her utilization of two important

Modernist themes—the search for an authentic identity and the pursuit of a life’s purpose—makes evident her place within American Modernism.

McCullers uses the Modernist theme of searching for an identity and life’s purpose through another female adolescent character: *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*’s Mick Kelly, also a budding musician, though not a child prodigy. As in her predecessor, Frances, Mick “fails” to become the musician she wishes to be, in this case, a composer. Like Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding*, which will be discussed later in this chapter, Mick undergoes a number of identity transformations, beginning with her initial queer performativity as a means of female resistance to culturally defined femininity. She undergoes two transformations in the novel so that, by the end, despite her inner defiance of societal norms, she resigns herself to live as a feminine being in a male-dominated culture. We also will see further societal and patriarchal pressures at work in Mick’s character, for, unlike Frances in “Wunderkind,” Mick’s creativity and musical hope is not completely annihilated by the end of her story, but it is, at best, weakened and postponed because of economic and educational gender inequality in the United States at that time.

Much of the scholarly criticism about Mick’s identity centers on her gender identification because, at the outset of the novel, Mick dresses and acts like a tomboy: her blonde hair is cut short, and she dresses in “khaki shorts, a blue shirt, and tennis shoes—so that at first glance she was like a very young boy” (18). When Biff Brannon notices her as she enters his New York Café, “[h]e thought of the way

Mick narrowed her eyes and pushed back the bangs of her hair with the palm of her hand. He thought of her hoarse, boyish voice and of her habit of hitching up her khaki shorts and swaggering like a cowboy in the picture show" (22). She likes to climb up to the roof of a house, sit, and daydream. She also smokes cigarettes, drinks beer, and roughhouses with other kids in the neighborhood. In her essay, "Relegation and Rebellion: The Queer, the Grotesque, and the Silent in the Fiction of Carson McCullers," Melissa Free succinctly traces the types of McCullers scholarship that concentrate on her queer characters. She declares, "What was once . . . read as universalized loneliness came to be read as the grotesque; next, disparagingly and later affirmatively, as homosexuality or androgyny; and is now read as queer in its broadest sense" (428). In one of the derogatory descriptions of Mick, Leslie Fiedler declares,

Mick . . . is the first of [McCullers's] ambiguously boyish girls who stand outside of everything, even their own sex, feeling themselves freaks and seeking a society of freaks. But Mick is no Faust, even in the sense in which Huck was a Faust, only a *poète maudit*, a potential invert in jeans. (453)

Fiedler places his assessment within the American gothic tradition and posits that McCullers "project[s] in her tomboys, ambiguous and epicene, the homosexual's sense of exclusion from the family and his uneasiness before heterosexual passion" (325), an inaccurate charge since Mick merely acts somewhat masculine and has sex with her friend, Harry Minowitz. In a less severe manner, L. Taetzsch describes

Mick's "trajectory" in the novel: "Mick Kelly begins in androgyny with high energy, enlightenment, and artistic transcendence. At the end of the novel she has become trapped in the flesh of a sexual being, heading toward confusion, exhaustion and the loss of artistic drive" (192). Sarah Gleeson-White discusses the liminal state of McCullers's female adolescents in *Strange Bodies: Gender and Identity in the Novels of Carson McCullers*, and argues that the "changing female body" signifies the grotesque in a patriarchal culture. Rather than being grotesque, however, she asserts that "the female adolescent body [is] a liminal site of *becoming* which challenges the very notion of 'female limits'" (8). Melissa Free believes McCullers uses the queer as a form of resistance against homophobia, her use of queer theory going far beyond the traditional concept of homosexuality or deviance.

McCullers leaves behind a record of and a protest against the violence that is queer-phobia, social and internalized. Unspeakable but present, the queer makes itself known in visible susurrations, grotesque articulations of the heavy cost of relegating queer identification and desire to silence (443)

In her discussion of Mick, Catherine Martin uses the South and its concept of femininity to argue that Mick's "characteristics [are] completely at odds with the model of femininity upheld in the American South, which takes exaggerated form in 'Confederate woman'" (7). Martin's description of twentieth-century Southern femininity matches the concept of the feminine in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Great Britain and the United States: "The white Southern woman is

supposed to be submissive, beautiful, physically pure, and socially dignified; ultimately conforming to the ideal of disembodied femininity” (7). Like High Modernist writers who placed the true substance and significance of their tales below surface details, McCullers crafts Mick Kelly’s character to allow readers and scholars to interpret her identity in innumerable ways, from the gothic to the grotesque, as well as masculine, feminine, queer, and beyond.

As we have seen above, McCullers creates in Mick a complex portrait of an adolescent girl. However, it is clear that Mick represents female resistance to imposed femininity and gender roles, the central component of her identity, and much of the girl’s rebellion concerns her clothing and demeanor. Throughout Part One, twelve-year-old Mick embodies the behaviors and mien of a tomboy as a form of rebellion against proscribed standards of femininity, particularly in the South, where women were expected to dress like “ladies” and comport themselves in a demure fashion. As DeBeauvoir asserts, women, in order to be “truly feminine,” must be “frivolous, infantile, irresponsible—the submissive woman” (xxvii), all the things young Mick is not. However, in Part Two, she attempts to dress in a more feminine style because she understands that as a thirteen-year-old girl, she will be expected not only to act more maturely but also to dress like a female. Thus, when she organizes her birthday prom party, where boys and girls mix, dance, and promenade through the neighborhood, Mick “dresses the part,” that is, in an evening dress, pumps, and rhinestone tiara she borrows from her older sisters. While she believes the clothes are beautiful, Mick cannot envision herself wearing them: “It

was hard to imagine how she would look in them” (106), an indication that she desires to look more feminine but doubts she can. Judith Butler asserts that “the regime of heterosexuality operates to circumscribe and contour the ‘materiality’ of sex, and that ‘materiality’ is formed and sustained through and as a materialization of regulatory norms that are in part those of heterosexual hegemony” (15). Thus, we see Mick perform her conception of femininity. She wears an evening gown, high heels, and tiara because patriarchal cultural standards dictate she do so in order to appear feminine and attractive to the boys who attend her party. When her “adult” party deteriorates into child’s play, Mick, still dressed in her fancy clothing, is the first to jump into a deep ditch. When she climbs out of the ditch, she realizes her identity has changed but doesn’t yet know in what way. She returns to her home:

In the bathroom she took off the blue evening dress. The hem was torn and she folded it so the raggedy place wouldn’t show. The rhinestone tiara was lost somewhere. Her old shorts and shirt were lying on the floor just where she had left them. She put them on. She was too big to wear shorts any more after this. No more after this night. Not any more. (116)

Here, we see Mick’s pain at failing to act grown up at her party transmute into her resolution to *be* more mature; however, her decision represents a superficial change at best, for she focuses on dressing more like a girl, which she equates as adult behavior. She deduces that to be a mature female, one must dress the part. As a high school student, Mick is expected to wear a skirt like the other girls, but still she

resists in the only way she can: by not maintaining her appearance: “She was dressed in the red sweater and blue pleated skirt she had worn every day since school started. Now the pleats had come out and the hem dragged loose around her sharp, jutting knees. She was at the age when she looked as much like an overgrown boy as a girl” (132). While she may believe her outfit makes her mature, in reality, her lack of sartorial care suggests, at the very least, an unconscious rebellion against the trappings of imposed feminine standards.

However, in Part Four, Mick appears to acquiesce to female gender norms. Exhausted from standing behind the Woolworth’s counter all day and forcing a smile on her face, Mick leaves the store after her shift: “Once she was out of the store she had to frown a long time to get her face natural again. Even her ears were tired. She took off the dangling green earrings and pinched the lobes of her ears. She had bought the earrings the week before—and also a silver bangle bracelet” (351). Her purchase of the earrings and bracelet suggests that Mick finally understands what it means to be feminine, at least in dress. After all, she works to support her family, yet she buys costume jewelry, an indication that she wants to look more like a girl and fit in with her female coworkers. While this may be true, Mick still dreams of becoming a composer, despite the fact she is always tired and can no longer enter her “inside room,” the solitary place in her imagination where she dreams of becoming a composer. In a necessary feminist reading of McCullers’s female adolescents, Louise Westling asserts that McCullers’s tomboys—Mick Kelly and Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding*—“have the immense advantage of

tomboy self-reliance and a habit of scrappy assertiveness” (341). Thus, we see that fourteen-year-old Mick still possesses “tomboy self-reliance” and “scrappy assertiveness” in her continued desire to fulfill her musical ambitions: she thinks about the radio Mr. Singer left her and makes plans to save money to buy a secondhand piano. Plucky Mick, channeling the masculine/tomboy self-confidence intrinsic in her identity, convinces herself she might be able to fulfill her dream of creating music.

But maybe it would be true about the piano and turn out O. K. Maybe she would get a chance soon. Else what the hell good had it all been—the way she felt about music and the plans she had made in the inside room? It had to be some good if anything made sense. And it was too and it was too and it was too and it was too. It was some good. (354)

The repetition of “and it was too” reveals Mick’s childlike thinking, her hope that she can succeed, while “what the hell good had it all been” illustrates her emerging maturity, for she also understands that the opportunities for women are limited and that she may very well not realize her dream.

Mick’s single sexual encounter with Harry Minowitz also alters her sense of self, and McCullers uses it to expose the cultural shame attached to women’s bodies, a circumstance that further subjugates the adolescent would-be composer. The two friends cycle out to the woods for a picnic, eat, and swim in a nearby creek. When Harry comes out of the water, Mick stares at him: “His skin was light brown and the water made it shining. There were hairs on his chest and legs. In the tight trunks he

seemed very naked. Without his glasses his face was wider and more handsome” (272). For the first time, Mick perceives her friend as a sexual being, viewing his near naked body and liking what she sees. Yet, soon thereafter, they both revert to childlike behavior, splashing and playing follow-the-leader, as if the increased awareness of their sexuality is too uncomfortable or frightening. Eventually, Mick dares Harry to skinny-dip; he removes his clothing, and “[t]hen they turned toward each other. Maybe it was half an hour they stood there—maybe not more than a minute” (273). Rather than swim naked, Harry suggests they get back into their clothing and eat their picnic dinner. Upon finishing, Harry tells Mick how pretty she is and proposes they lie down “[j]ust for a minute” (273). They lie together on the soft pine needles and talk. But then

[t]hey both turned at the same time. They were close against each other. She felt him trembling and her fists were tight enough to crack. ‘Oh God,’ he kept saying over and over. It was like her head was broke off from her body and thrown away. And her eyes looked up straight into the blinding sun while she counted something in her mind. And then this was the way.

This was how it was. (274)

For Mick, the sexual act figuratively breaks her identity, that is, her head from her heart, and in psychological terms, she dissociates from the act itself by counting in her head. Only after Harry finishes does Mick acknowledge what has happened to her, stating, “This was how it was,” an indication the experience was not pleasurable

for her. On their way home, Harry tries to talk to Mick about the sexual incident, couching it in terms of “adultery” and “sin” (275). Mick views it as a loss of her childhood, a part of her identity. She tells him, “I wasn’t any kid. But now I wish I was, though” (275). More importantly, when Harry suggests they should probably marry, Mick vehemently refuses: “Mick shook her head. ‘I didn’t like that. I never will marry with any boy’” (275). When Harry leaves town the next day, Mick, rather than fearing pregnancy, resigns herself to being an adult: “She was a grown person now, whether she wanted to be or not” (276). Constance M. Perry argues that Mick does not necessarily feel she is an adult, a condition that “implies status and privilege” (43). Instead, Perry rightly declares that Mick has “experience[ed] what it means to be female and inferior in her culture” (43). She now likens her gender, the very core of her identity, with being “somehow shameful and obscene” (43) because Harry essentially abandons her, leaving her with the idea that they have committed a great sin. Regarding Mick’s ambition to be a composer, Perry declares that “she thinks that in becoming an adult woman, she has somehow annihilated her artistic identity” (43). Thus, we may view Mick’s encounter with Harry not only in terms of an alteration in her sexual self but also her identity as a budding musician because Mick intuitively realizes that to be female is to be inferior in a male-dominated culture.

Certainly, Mick emerges as a more multidimensional character than Leslie Fiedler claims, for while she may dress and act like a tomboy, she signifies much more than a potential homosexual. In fact, she also embodies a mother figure to her

two younger siblings, seven-year-old Bubber and baby Ralph, because she has been tasked to care for the two young boys while her parents manage their boardinghouse. As an adolescent girl, Mick must take on adult obligations, which she seems to do willingly, though she craves time alone. However, Mick is under no illusion that opportunities are limited for her because of her gender. Here, we see McCullers point to the educational disparities of her time, which were based on gender inequality. For example, when she and Harry discuss Hitler and fascism, he declares, “And although I don’t believe in war I’m ready to fight for what I know is right” (245). Mick responds that she would also “like to fight the Fascists. I could dress up like a boy and nobody could ever tell. Cut my hair off and all” (245). Here, Mick sees herself as physically equal in ability to Harry, although she acknowledges she must change her appearance in order to fight alongside her friend. DeBeauvoir explains that “[u]p to the age of twelve the little girl is as strong as her brothers, and she shows the same mental powers; there is no field where she is debarred from engaging in rivalry with them” (302). At this point, Mick certainly exemplifies DeBeauvoir’s concept of the female child on the cusp of puberty. Further, Mick dreams of being a famous composer, but she does so at a time when women musicians, let alone female composers, do not take center stage in the male-dominated world of music. Yet, Mick’s youth and masculine behavior give her the confidence to try to pursue her ambition. Soon thereafter, however, Mick talks with Harry about his after-school job at Biff’s café. She declares,

'One thing I've thought about. . . . A boy has a better advantage like that than a girl. I mean a boy can usually get some part-time job that don't take him out of school and leaves him time for other things. But there's not jobs like that for girls. When a girl wants a job she has to quit school and work full time. I'd sure like to earn a couple of bucks a week like you do, but there's just not any way.' (246)

Adrienne Rich declares, "Characteristics of male power include *the power of men* . . . to withhold from [women] large areas of the society's knowledge and cultural attainments . . . by means of non-education of women" (19). In this case, high-school-aged girls do not share the same economic and educational opportunities as their male counterparts. A boy may take on a part-time job after school without having to stop his educational pursuits. Not so with girls. As Mick explains, if she wishes to "earn a couple of bucks a week" like Harry, she must drop out of school altogether and work full-time. And sadly, Mick must quit school at fourteen years of age to work at a dime store in order to help her family economically. Once again, she becomes a type of mother figure, but now she must care for her entire family, not just Bubber and baby Ralph.

Mick's fate proves to be that of most middle class women of McCullers's time. Not only is she expected to dress and act feminine and to be a mother—she does not need children of her own to be the caregiver for her family—but she also is relegated to "women's work," that is, as a salesgirl. In his book, *A Gallery of Southerners*, Louis B. Rubin, Jr. asserts that Mick's employment at Woolworth's

“seems somehow gratuitous, excessive” because her job does not reflect any sense of “permanent entrapment” (146). However, when read through a feminist lens, Mick’s plight at the end of the novel correctly reflects the rigid gender roles of early through mid-twentieth century America, roles that constrained women to “women’s work”: wife, mother, teacher, nurse, secretary, or salesgirl. Adrienne Rich asserts that “women are horizontally segregated by gender and occupy a structurally inferior position in the workplace” and that they “are not only segregated in low-paying service jobs (as secretaries, domestics, nurses, typists, telephone operators, child-care workers, waitresses), but that ‘sexualization of the woman’ is part of the job” (21). Thus, in making his statement about Mick, Rubin greatly minimizes the tragedy of women being unable to realize their full potential, their true selves. Richard M. Cook rightly asserts that “[i]n sacrificing her talent, her plans, her vitality, to the dehumanizing monotony of clerking in Woolworth’s for as far as she can see, Mick creates that impression of tragic waste—not the less tragic for its being contemporary and familiar” (*Carson McCullers* 31).

In this novel, McCullers uses Mick to reveal and critique the cultural gender bias that favors men over women, especially in the workplace. As Spivak asserts, “[McCullers] does not make the liberal mistake of saying that one can *choose* to work in a factory rather than make music and the difference between the two is that the first obliges you to read Marx whereas the second involves making an American revolution while having fun” (132). One does not need to read Marx to comprehend McCullers’s statement about gender restrictions and the perils inherent in female

identity. Through male privilege, Harry works part-time and still attends school; as a female, Mick does not have that same freedom. Instead, she must work full-time, and of utmost import, she must abandon her education, the vital requirement by which she can achieve her musical ambition. McCullers utilizes Mick's terrible quandary to point to the deep-rooted patriarchal system within the United States, one that habitually vitiates female sexuality and squelches women's ambitions.

Carson McCullers crafted her most intricate—and most difficult and variably interpreted—female adolescent character in *The Member of the Wedding*: Frankie Addams. To some degree, Frankie resembles Frances in “Wunderkind” and Mick Kelly in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. Frances is the oldest of the three at 15 years of age, while both Mick and Frankie are twelve years old at the beginning of their respective stories; at the conclusion of their tales, Mick is fourteen and Frankie thirteen. Frances approximates Frankie in terms of their shared name as well as their experiences with identity crises, but Mick appears closest to Frankie concerning tomboyish proclivities, her search for an authentic identity, and her pursuit of a life's purpose. Most scholars agree that Frances and Mick represent prototypes of Frankie, but Mick seems to be the most satisfying to readers, despite McCullers's inconclusive ending to the story, simply because Mick appears to be at least somewhat hopeful that she can bring music back into her life. On the other hand, Frankie emerges at the end of her tale as “less attractive,” according to Louise Westling, because “[t]he hard edge of her mind is gone, and all that is left is froth” (349), an assessment that will be examined later in this chapter. Whether or not

Frankie is a disappointment depends on each reader. However, when considering the Modernist theme of searching for an authentic identity and purpose, Frankie presents herself as a mosaic of selves, beginning as Frankie, metamorphosing into F. Jasmine, and finally settling on the identity of Frances.

Early critics tended to universalize Frankie's story, arguing that it concerns adolescent isolation and the attempt to come to terms with being separate from the world. Some believed the novel denotes an initiation story, with Frankie successfully—or unsuccessfully—navigating her adolescent angst. Oliver Evans argues that both *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Member of the Wedding* “involve the initiation of an adolescent into adulthood” (*The Ballad* 109). Both approaches, however, presuppose the journey through adolescence to be the same for boys and girls. Such “gender-blind reading,” as Judith Giblin James terms it (106), can be understood in terms of post-World War II political and social attitudes. Because the world seemed to be splitting apart during the war, the postwar culture in the U.S. strongly emphasized unity and solidarity, with the concept of difference being discouraged and oftentimes suppressed. In essence, then, society viewed female experience and understanding as the same as that of males. For example, a female initiation story was interpreted through human (read: male) experience. Thus, James declares, “the world of literary criticism persisted in wrapping the problems of difference in a normative cloak of male, white, middle-class experience” (107). Early scholars analyzed *The Member of the Wedding* as a story about being

human, that is, male, rather than specifically female. Chester E. Eisinger, for instance, discusses McCullers's works through this patriarchal approach:

Her view of *man's fate*, therefore, adds little, in the largest sense to the dimensions of our understanding. . . . She has succeeded perhaps too well in creating an art form that is cut off from life. It is a form cut off from society, from morality, from religion, from ideas, from concern with *man's burden* or with *man's hope*" [my emphasis]. (258)

In another example specific to *The Member of the Wedding*, Richard M. Cook asserts that the novel's "concern is with human isolation and *man's struggle* to overcome it" [my emphasis] (*Carson McCullers* 80). While it is understood that, at the time Eisinger and Cook wrote their critiques, the use of "man" was commonly used to mean "human," such a gender-specific term reflects the male lens through which most scholars and critics interpreted literature.

Most disturbing, however, is the fact that many accepted at face value Leslie Fiedler's assessment of McCullers's tomboys as lesbian. These scholars used McCullers's own supposed lesbianism, bisexuality, or asexuality to interpret and analyze Frankie's personas, as well as the author's other female characters, including Miss Amelia from *The Ballad of the Sad Café* and Mick Kelly. Through Virginia Spencer Carr's thorough biography of McCullers, published in 1975, we may believe McCullers to have been bisexual, asexual, or, at the very least, sexually ambivalent (110). Carson McCullers fell in love with women, most deeply with Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach, although no solid evidence suggests McCullers

ever had a sexual relationship with any woman. She twice married Reeves McCullers and appeared to have, at least for a time, a sexual relationship with him. Further, both she and Reeves carried on an intimate relationship—whether sexual or not has not been determined—with Modernist composer David Diamond. In writing about McCullers, Carr declares, “To her, nothing human in nature was alien or abnormal. A love relationship between two men or two women could also be a very spiritual union that should be above petty jealousies” (171). Certainly, Carson McCullers dressed most frequently in men’s clothing, often being portrayed in pictures wearing a man’s white shirt, suit coat, and pants. But she also wore women’s clothing, especially in her later years. In any event, Fiedler and others of his ilk coupled McCullers’s use of autobiographical elements in her stories with her ambivalent sexuality to claim that her female characters, too, represent lesbians, bisexuals, or some other form of non-heterosexuality. For example, in his discussion of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, A. S. Knowles points to McCullers’s use of the words “strange” and “queer,” John Singer’s apparent homosexual love for Spiros Antonapoulos, Biff Brannon’s acceptance of his feminine side, and, oddly, Mick’s sexual encounter with Harry Minowitz, to assert that “the loneliness, the alienation experienced by her characters can be mitigated only in some basically homosexual orientation toward human relationships” (91). However, correlation does not equal causation. While McCullers utilized some aspects of her childhood and adolescence in her stories and may have been something other than heterosexual, it simply does not follow that she created her female characters to mirror herself. Such a reductive

claim attenuates her imaginative and creative powers to mere autobiography and ultimately devalues McCullers as a Modernist writer, one who used her literary skill not only to create engaging, challenging fiction but also to address the sociopolitical issues of her time: sexism, racism, and economic disenfranchisement. James correctly asserts that early critics

largely avoided noticing . . . those very tremors that foretell and accompany seismic social upheaval. Growing racial unrest, a teenage counterculture, rebellion against confining gender roles, sexual norms, and other brands of social conformity were already subterraneously in motion beneath postwar consensus culture.

Novelists like McCullers registered the tremors minutely. (107)

Thus we see that, in the character of Frankie Addams, McCullers critiques the limited options for women in the twentieth century, effectively illustrating how gender restrictions and societal pressure to conform to culturally imposed feminine standards suppress, even alter, women's authentic identities and aspirations.

Through the character of Frances in "Wunderkind," McCullers examines patriarchal hegemony in terms of quashing women's creativity, and through Mick in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, she adds the social components of educational and economic disparities promulgated by gender inequality. However, McCullers takes these social constructions even further in her portrayal of Frankie, for this adolescent female assumes three separate identities and names to reflect her conception of

femininity. In doing so, McCullers delves more deeply into the machinations of female role-playing in a patriarchal society.

When *The Member of the Wedding* begins, twelve-year-old Frankie suffers from a terrible identity crisis. In fact, she wishes to be someone other than herself: “This was the summer when Frankie was sick and tired of being Frankie” (22). She hates her life and herself because she feels isolated. Her best friend, Evelyn Owen, has moved to Florida, and Frankie has nobody else to play with. She no longer sleeps with her father because he deems her too old to do so. Even her cat has run away, a situation that prompts Frankie to lament to Berenice Sadie Brown, the Addams’s African American housekeeper, “It looks to me like everything has just walked off and left me” (31). Not only does Frankie feel isolated, but she also feels excluded, for the neighborhood girls refuse to let her join their club: “[U]ntil this summer she had been like a younger member of their crowd, but now they had this club and she was not a member. They said she was too young and mean” (12). Additionally, Frankie dislikes herself because she has “become a loafer and a big no-good who hung around the summer kitchen: dirty and greedy and mean and sad” (22). For twelve years, Frankie Addams has been carefree tomboy Frankie, but now she dons the identity of “loafer” and “no-good,” and she adds “criminal” to her identity because she stole a knife from the Sears and Roebuck store and “committed a secret and unknown sin” with Barney MacKean in his garage (25). Frankie feels lonely, isolated, and excluded, and she also suffers from fear because she conflates her theft of the knife with the “secret sin” she and Barney perpetrated, convincing

herself “the Law” may be after her. Therefore, she decides to remain at home throughout the summer, choosing to spend the long, hot summer days, afternoons, and evenings with Berenice and her six-year-old cousin, John Henry West, a situation that makes Frankie even more irritable, mean, and sad.

At this early stage of the novel, McCullers presents Frankie as a dissatisfied adolescent female on the cusp of puberty. Like most girls her age, she desires to belong to a group of likeminded females, but she clearly doesn't fit in because she prefers to be a tomboy. However, she instinctively knows that to be part of the group, she must change herself, at least outwardly, to be like the other girls. And because she stole a pocketknife, an instrument associated with masculinity, she labels herself a “thief.” Frankie senses that she is on the verge of change, but she does not yet understand what that change may be. DeBeauvoir declares that girls who are near the age of puberty realize that “the future not only approaches: it takes residence in her body” (367), referring to a girl's growth of breasts and body hair and the onset of menstruation. DeBeauvoir continues, “She is already free of her childish past, and the present seems but a time of transition; it contains no valid aims, only occupations” (367). While McCullers does not reveal whether Frankie is experiencing any physical changes brought on by puberty, she does address this time of waiting, of Frankie having no real aims, merely occupations of her time, which proves distinctly dissatisfying to her.

Like Mick Kelly, Frankie chooses a masculine identity. She dresses and behaves like a boy, wearing shorts and “a B.V.D. undervest” (4) and walking around

barefoot, which creates thick callouses that she later cuts off with a butcher knife as she brags to herself that she has “the toughest feet in town” (28). To add to her boyish appearance, Frankie sports very short hair, prompting Berenice to observe, “You had all your hair shaved off like a convict” (90). Frankie knows she does not look or act like other girls her age, but she rebels against the American culture that dictates how women and girls should look, that is, being clean and wearing dresses. When Berenice teases her about having a crush on the wedding—Frankie’s brother, Jarvis, is to marry Janice Williams in two days, and the young girl is thrilled at the prospect of the wedding—Frankie grabs a knife from the table and throws it, the knife narrowly missing Berenice and sticking in a door. She boasts, “I am the best knife-thrower in this town” (36). Here, Frankie has not yet completely forsaken her “childish past,” as DeBeauvoir terms it. Further, Frankie utterly rejects the doll her brother and his fiancée give to her: “Frankie stared at the doll for a minute. ‘I don’t know what went on in Jarvis’s mind when he brought me that doll. Imagine bringing me a doll!’” (18). Instead, she gives the doll to John Henry, who loves it and names it Lily Belle. Dolls play a prominent role in the indoctrination of female children to become feminine and assume the role of mother, according to DeBeauvoir. By playing with the doll, “the little girl ascertains that the care of children falls upon the mother, she is so taught; stories heard, books read, all her little experiences confirm the idea” (318). And yet, Frankie rejects this symbol of patriarchal subordination and domestication of females. Here, she maintains her sovereignty, in essence maintaining some aspect of an authentic self.

Frankie clearly struggles with her sense of self. She has always been a tomboy, but now she begins to see that, as a female, a twelve-year-old girl, she is expected to look more feminine. The mirror in the Addams kitchen creates distorted images; however, when Frankie looks at herself in that mirror, she believes she sees an accurate portrait of herself: "The reflection in the glass was warped and crooked, but Frankie knew well what she looked like" (4), and what she sees she does not like, for Frankie fears becoming a freak, like those she once saw at the Chattahoochee Exposition. She knows instinctively that, as a girl, she should be petite and pretty, but she has grown taller over the summer. She thinks to herself:

This August she was twelve and five-sixths years old. She was five feet five and three-quarter inches tall, and she wore a number seven shoe. In the past year she had grown four inches, or at least that was what she judged. . . . If she reached her height on her eighteenth birthday, she had five and one-sixth growing years ahead of her.

Therefore, according to mathematics and unless she could somehow stop herself, she would grow to be over nine feet tall. And what would be a lady who is over nine feet high? She would be a Freak. (19)

The word "lady" proves important here because Frankie instinctively knows she will grow out of her tomboy identity and assume the role of grown female, or in this case, "lady," a term that implies beauty, refinement, and propriety. Constante González Groba rightly asserts, "[Frankie] has been growing so tall that she is afraid of becoming a freak one day, and this terror of freakishness is the terror of

becoming an ugly girl, as the governing standards demand that women should be smaller than men and 'cute'" (137). As a means to offset her fear of ugliness, Frankie wears perfume. She frequently douses herself with Sweet Serenade, for she is convinced the other girls are spreading rumors that she stinks. Frankie rubs the perfume on her head and pours some down the inside of her shirt: "'Boy!" she said. 'I bet I use more perfume than anybody in this town'" (13). Obviously, Frankie's overuse of perfume causes people to accuse her of smelling bad, but here, we also see her attempting to become more feminine in the only way she seems to comprehend, by using large quantities of perfume. After all, society dictates that girls and women should not only be clean and look pretty but also smell lovely.

Despite Frankie's attempt to conform to traditional modes of femininity, she desires to do masculine activities. The story takes place in 1944, when World War II is still going on in Europe, Asia, and the Pacific, and McCullers writes, "It was the year when Frankie thought about the world" (23). Frankie envisions the various battles raging in Europe and Japan. "It was the summer when Patton was chasing the Germans across France. And they were fighting, too, in Russia and Saipan. She saw the battles, and the soldiers" (23). Frankie wishes she were a boy so that she could be a Marine and fight in the war. "But she could not join the war, and this made her sometimes feel restless and blue" (23). Since she is not a boy and cannot fight, she decides to donate blood so that soldiers from all over the world will have some of her blood in them, "and it would be as though she were close kin to all of these people" (23). Frankie convinces herself that she would be a hero of sorts and

that, after the war, all the soldiers would call her “Addams” instead of just plain Frankie. However,

[t]he Red Cross would not take her blood. She was too young. Frankie felt mad with the Red Cross, and left out of everything. . . . She was not afraid of Germans or bombs or Japanese. She was afraid because in the war they would not include her, and because the world seemed somehow separate from herself. (24)

Frankie’s age, coupled with her gender, precludes her from participating in what she believes is the great adventure of war. Like Mick, who wants to join Harry Minowitz in fighting Fascists, Frankie desires to perform masculine duties to help with the war effort. But her gender further adds to her identity confusion. She wants the opportunities males have—to fly planes, fight in the war, win “gold medals for bravery” (23)—but she realizes that her culture forbids females from performing such feats. Hence, she becomes more frustrated with her current existence.

However, Frankie begins her identity transformation when Jarvis and Janice visit the Addams household on a Friday. They inform Frankie and Mr. Addams that they will marry in Winter Hill on Sunday, and Frankie immediately becomes enamored with the upcoming wedding. After the couple leave, Frankie insists that Berenice convey to her the entire story of their visit and wedding announcement. Berenice once again relates how Frankie and John Henry ran into the house to see Jarvis and Janice: ““The next thing I realize you busted back through the kitchen and run up to your room. You came down with your organdie dress on and lipstick an

inch thick from one ear to the next” (29). Frankie understands the import of such a visit, so she dresses up for the occasion. One would expect a tomboy merely to tidy up a bit, perhaps by washing her face and hands. But Frankie chooses feminine attire and lipstick, which indicates a distinct change in how she perceives herself, and, more importantly, how she hopes others will see her. And when Janice tells her that she doesn’t look too tall and that she, Janice, achieved her full height before she turned thirteen, Frankie sees the possibility that she may not grow up to be an ugly, freakish woman. Further, Frankie wishes her name were “Jane or Jasmine,” (17), two undeniably feminine names. She desires the name change because the monikers Jarvis and Janice both begin with the letters J A. Frankie says, “Jarvis and Janice and Jasmine. See?” (17). The couple’s wedding announcement signifies the genesis of Frankie’s shift in identity: she dresses more like a girl, wishes to be called a feminine name, and connects herself with the couple as a way to ameliorate her feelings of isolation and exclusion.

Frankie desires to be a more feminine version of herself, and she asks Berenice for confirmation that she is not, in fact, a freak. When they discuss the freaks at the Chattahoochee Exposition, Berenice declares that they give her “the creeps,” to which Frankie asks, “Do *I* give you the creeps?” (21). Having seen the beautiful Janice—her hair “done up in a knot” and wearing “a green dress and green high-heel dainty shoes” (30)—Frankie frets that she will not measure up to the wedding event because she does not present herself like other girls. She asks Berenice, “Do you think I will grow into a Freak?” (21). Berenice kindly responds

that Frankie most definitely will not. Frankie's next question, however, illustrates her longing to look more feminine: "Well, do you think I will be pretty?" (21). Berenice thinks Frankie is asking about the future, when she grows up. However, Frankie desperately wishes to make a noteworthy change in her self, her identity, by Sunday, the day of the wedding. She declares, "I want to do something to improve myself before the wedding" (21). The word "improve" is significant because it suggests Frankie believes herself to be deficient as she currently is. McCullers's word choice intimates that in order to be "better," Frankie thinks she must be more feminine, that is, she must dress and behave like a girl, not as she so recently preferred, as a tomboy. DeBeauvoir rightly contends that "[b]y means of compliments and scoldings, through images and words, [the girl child] learns the meaning of *pretty* and *homely*; she soon learns that in order to make herself look like a picture, she puts on fancy clothes, she studies herself in a mirror" (314). At this point, then, Frankie unconsciously begins to conform to the cultural standards of femininity, not because she necessarily wants to but because she knows she is expected to and feels the obligation, perhaps even the inner yearnings, to do so.

In addition to becoming more feminine, Frankie conjoins her identity with the couple, Jarvis and Janice. On the evening of the wedding announcement, after the couple has left to return to Winter Hill, Frankie goes outside to contemplate the day's events. She pictures Jarvis and Janice as separate from her, 100 miles away in a different town, and she feels sick at heart. Suddenly, a thought occurs to her: "*They are the we of me*" (41). Frankie cogitates on this phrase:

Yesterday, and all the twelve years of her life, she had only been Frankie. She was an *I* person who had to walk around and do things by herself. All other people had a *we* to claim, all others except her. When Berenice said *we*, she meant Honey [her foster brother] and Big Mama [her mother], her lodge, or her church. The *we* of her father was the store. All members of clubs have a *we* to belong to and talk about. The soldiers in the army can say *we*, and even the criminals on chain-gangs. But the old Frankie had had no *we* to claim, unless it would be the terrible summer *we* of her and John Henry and Berenice—and that was the last *we* in the world she wanted. Now all this was suddenly over with and changed. There was her brother and the bride, and it was as though when first she saw them something she had known inside of her: *They are the we of me.* (42)

Although Frankie belongs to the “we” of Berenice and John Henry, she rejects this relationship in favor of the “we” of Jarvis and Janice. Frankie joins herself with the wedding, believing she and the newlyweds will embark on great adventures.

According to Barbara A. White, Frankie “envies the soldiers she sees in town for their mobility, the opportunity they have to travel and see the world—in other words, to gain experience” (130). However, Frankie’s envy does not exist simply because she wishes to have more experience. Rather, in terms of gender restrictions, Frankie intuits that, as a female, she does not possess the freedoms that males have, that she cannot possibly do the things men can do (e.g., fighting in the

war and traveling the world). Therefore, she finds another avenue by which she can achieve some of the sovereignty males enjoy. In her childlike thinking, Frankie believes that, by joining with Janice and Jarvis, she not only will belong to something outside herself but also will be able to go on journeys most people only dream about. She tells Berenice:

‘Things will happen so fast we won’t hardly have time to realize them. Captain Jarvis Addams sinks twelve Jap battleships and decorated by the President. Miss F. Jasmine Addams breaks all records. Mrs. Janice Addams elected Miss United Nations in beauty contest. . . . We will know decorated aviators and New York people and movie stars. We will have thousands of friends, thousands and thousands and thousands of friends. We will belong to so many clubs that we can’t keep track of all of them.’ (118)

Frankie’s revelation that Janice and Jarvis are her “we of me” instantly prompts a change in her identity and gives her a purpose for her life: “For it was just at that moment that Frankie understood. She knew who she was and how she was going into the world” (45). Virginia Spencer Carr writes that when McCullers was writing this novel, she experienced a flash of inspiration and discovered that “Frankie is in love with her brother and the bride, and wants to become a member of the wedding!” (*The Lonely Hunter* 121). Frankie’s love for Jarvis and Janice sparks in her a yearning to transform herself into a new person. Moreover, she finds what she believes to be her true purpose in life: to belong to the couple and go on numerous

adventures with them, to join the ranks of heterosexual norms and thus gain the benefits attached to that status. Frankie believes they will travel the world and always be together. Louise Westling declares, “The old question of who she is and what she will become ceases to torment her when she decides to be a member of the wedding and go out into the world with her brother and his bride” (347). But more to the point, Frankie’s identity melds with the couple, which transforms her sense of self and generates in her a true purpose for her life.

Part Two of the tale presents a new identity for Frankie. She has become F. Jasmine Addams, a girl who no longer fears life and who now feels connected to the rest of the world, which for her means the town in which she lives. In fact, she tells Berenice, “Don’t call me Frankie! I don’t wish to have to remind you any more” (77). F. Jasmine credits her new confidence with belonging to the wedding, and throughout this section of the novel, the “old Frankie” is contrasted with the new F. Jasmine. For instance, “It was the old Frankie of yesterday who had been puzzled, but F. Jasmine did not wonder anymore; already she felt familiar with the wedding for a long, long time” (50). Upon waking to this new day, F. Jasmine decides to make visiting cards with her new name: “*Miss F. Jasmine Addams, Esq.*” (51). Groba writes that Frankie’s transformation into F. Jasmine has “‘feminine’ romantic connotations,” (139), but she couches the addition of “Esq.” to the name in terms of sexuality. According to Groba, “[t]he ambivalent Frankie wants to become a member of a wedding without the physical sexual union marriage entails, to become an adult without going through the process of restriction required to become a

'woman' in her society" (139). Thus, she adds the masculine "Esq." However, Groba's assertion proves weak because Frankie does not yet fully understand human sexuality. The adolescent girl rejects the descriptions of adult sexual activities told to her by the older girls. She tells John Henry, "'They were talking nasty lies about married people. When I think of Aunt Pet and Uncle Ustace. And my own father! The nasty lies! I don't know what kind of fool they take me for'" (12). Further, when Frankie was nine years old, she mistook Mr. and Mrs. Marlowe—boarders in the Addams's home—having sex, but in her child mind, she believed that Mr. Marlowe had been experiencing "a fit" (40). And she recalls "the unknown sin that [Barney MacKean] showed her, that later made her want to throw a knife between his eyes" (83), a reference to Barney exposing his penis to her. Clearly, Frankie/F. Jasmine does not yet understand the ways of adult heterosexuality; instead, she considers it to be unimaginable, some sort of physical ailment, or something sinful. Thus, the honorific of "Esquire" more likely reflects F. Jasmine's desire "to be known and recognized" (61). In other words, F. Jasmine, who still thinks more like an adolescent than an adult, chooses to add the title to reinforce that she is an important individual in the world.

While Part One—the Frankie section—takes place almost solely in the Addams's kitchen, Part Two shows a self-assured F. Jasmine who goes to purchase new wedding clothes and walks throughout the town telling nearly everyone she meets about the wedding:

Because of the wedding, F. Jasmine felt connected with all she saw, and it was as a sudden member that on this Saturday she went around the town. She walked the streets entitled as a queen and mingled everywhere. It was the day when, from the beginning, the world seemed no longer separate from herself and when all at once she felt included. (49)

Gone is the fearful, mean, and sad Frankie. Yet, in order to maintain her identity as F. Jasmine, she consciously must suppress the old Frankie within her. As the narrator relates, “the ghost of the old Frankie, dirty and hungry-eyed, trudged silently along not far from her” (61). For example, F. Jasmine enters the Blue Moon Café, a place she never dared go as Frankie. She tells the Portuguese owner about the wedding, and as she prepares to leave, she says “Adios” (60). Throughout the summer, Frankie frequently wore an old Mexican hat. So after F. Jasmine bids the café owner farewell, she automatically reaches up to her head to tip her hat, which, as F. Jasmine, she no longer wears. She suddenly realizes her error, feels ashamed, and pretends to scratch her head instead, as a way to cover for her mistake. Despite feeling embarrassed, however, her new identity allows her to continue on with her mission of buying new clothes and enlightening everyone about her new life with Janice and Jarvis, and she walks with a fresh feeling of “lightness, power, entitlement” (55). Where the name “Frankie” represents fear and confusion, “F. Jasmine” signifies power, sovereignty, and hope, attributes associated with male identity.

Throughout Part Two, F. Jasmine accedes to cultural standards of femininity in her sartorial choices, even though she does not fully comprehend the societal nuances attached to them. While Frankie dresses like a tomboy and takes pride in her tough, calloused feet, F. Jasmine prefers to clothe herself in her petticoat, pink organdie dress, and black pumps. She carries a pink pocketbook, wears lipstick, and splashes on Sweet Serenade perfume. Moreover, when she informs her father she needs “to buy a wedding dress and some wedding shoes and a pair of pink, sheer stockings” (52), he responds, “Charge them at MacDougal’s” (66), the local store. F. Jasmine rebels at having to purchase her clothing at that store. “I don’t see why we always have to trade at MacDougal’s just because it’s a local store. . . . Where I am going there will be stores a hundred times bigger than MacDougal’s” (66). Here, we see the more feminine F. Jasmine desiring to be fashionable and shop at classier establishments. Old Frankie would not shrink at having to trade at the local retailer, but “mature” F. Jasmine most certainly does. F. Jasmine adopts the cultural stereotype that grown women prefer to dress, look, and smell pretty and shop at trendy stores. Later, she tries on a number of dresses and finally chooses an ill-fitting orange satin evening gown, silver slippers, and silver hair ribbon to wear to the wedding ceremony. When F. Jasmine shows Berenice her new bargain basement outfit, the housekeeper is appalled:

‘What’s the matter?’ F. Jasmine asked.

‘I thought you was going to get a pink dress.’

'But when I got in the store I changed my mind. What is wrong with this dress? Don't you like it, Berenice?'

'No,' said Berenice. 'It don't do.'

'What do you mean? It don't do.'

'Exactly that. It just don't do.'

F. Jasmine turned to look in the mirror, and she still thought the dress was beautiful. (89)

Berenice fully comprehends the social implications of wearing such a lurid color of orange to a wedding, especially for a 12-year-old girl, but newly feminized F. Jasmine does not. She believes the outfit to be gorgeous and does not see it as inappropriate to the occasion. She insists, "I only want to look good" (91). Barbara A. White asserts that "she does not yet understand society's division of women into 'nice' (pink organdie) and 'not nice' (orange satin)" (128). In her assessment of the orange dress, Rachel Adams declares that "[i]nstead of transforming Frankie into a woman, the gown highlights the discrepancy between the body's awkward suspension between youth and adulthood, and the garment's unfulfilled promise of glamour and sophistication" (560). More importantly, while F. Jasmine's choice of the orange satin dress points to her desire to be a more mature and feminine teenager, in reality, the dress signifies her immaturity and lack of knowledge concerning the underlying values attached to female clothing.

Despite her inner transformation into F. Jasmine, the old Frankie still exists. Berenice points out that because Frankie shaved off nearly all her hair at the

beginning of summer, wearing a hair ribbon “just looks peculiar,” to which F. Jasmine replies, “Oh, but I’m washing my hair tonight and going to try to curl it” (90). In fact, as Frankie in Part One, the young girl regrets having cut her hair so short and tells Berenice, “The big mistake I made was to get this close crew-cut. For the wedding I ought to have long bright yellow hair. Don’t you think so?” (18). Once again, we see Frankie/F. Jasmine understand, and more importantly, accept, society’s vision of female beauty. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan recalls “women dying of cancer [who] refused a drug which research had proved might save their lives: its side effects were said to be unfeminine. ‘If I have only one life, let me live it as a blonde,’ a larger-than-life-sized picture of a pretty, vacuous woman proclaimed from newspaper, magazine, and drugstore ads” (17). Friedan then states that, at the time she performed the research for her book, “three out of every ten women dyed their hair blonde” (17). Frankie holds to this conception of female beauty: a woman (that is, a white woman) must wear her hair long and preferably be blonde. When Berenice tells her that the “brown crust” on Frankie’s elbows does not match with a “grown woman’s evening dress” (90), F. Jasmine hides her filthy elbows, for she knows that on this point, Berenice speaks the truth. However, F. Jasmine later reassures Berenice that she will take two baths that Saturday evening: “One long soaking bath and scrub with a brush. I’m going to try to scrape this brown crust off my elbows. Then let out the dirty water and take a second bath” (112). Thus, we witness the exterior conversion of Frankie into F. Jasmine:

she wears dresses, bathes, wishes to curl her hair, and desires to shop at a “good” store, not the same store where Frankie shopped.

Essentially a mother figure to Frankie, Berenice reinforces in the teenager the cultural standards of femininity, some of which represent negative stereotypes. The housekeeper encourages F. Jasmine to focus on finding a “‘nice little white boy beau,’” one who will pay her way to the movies (82). Berenice further declares that F. Jasmine must “‘fix yourself up nice in your dresses. And speak sweetly and act sly’” (83). Her emphasis on acting sly and speaking nicely bolsters the notion that, not only must a woman play a role—that she must not be genuine—she must also somehow trick a man in order to catch him. Berenice underscores the societal expectation that women must be artificial rather than authentic and that finding a boyfriend or husband should be a woman’s goal in life. When John Henry asks her how many beaus she has had in her life, Berenice responds, “‘How many! Lamb, how many hairs is in these plaits? You talking to Berenice Sadie Brown’” (84). Married four times, Berenice fully accepts these culturally imposed values of femininity; in fact, she prides herself on fulfilling them. F. Jasmine, too, seems to believe in Berenice’s teachings because she tells the housekeeper that she should marry Mr. T. T. Williams since she isn’t getting any younger. As Barbara A. White has noted, scholars interpret Berenice as kindly and helpful to Frankie, but, in fact, “McCullers presents Berenice as a completely man-oriented woman. For her to talk about her life means to talk about her four previous husbands and current beau” (129). White points to Berenice’s pride at being married at the age of thirteen, her

preference for associating with men rather than women, and her aversion to sleeping alone (129-130). Whereas Frankie oftentimes disregards Berenice's stories, F. Jasmine listens intently, which prompts her statement that the housekeeper should settle down and marry T. T., a declaration that reflects yet another cultural expectation for women: they must marry young or risk becoming a lonely spinster.

The idea of naming proves important in this novel. In "Passing: Narcissism, Identity, and Difference," Carole-Anne Tyler discusses identity in terms of the symbolic:

The wish for one's own terms and one's proper identity, perhaps the most deeply private property of all, is an impossible desire since both are held in common with others in the community as an effect of the symbolic. We can never be sure what is 'coming out' of us for the other, or from the other. Nevertheless, there persists a paradoxical desire to be self-present to others, to come out as our proper self to ourselves through the other's recognition of our proper name and image. (230)

For F. Jasmine, one's name does not necessarily equate to an authentic self. At twilight on that Saturday, she, Berenice, and John Henry sit in the kitchen and discuss life in general, when F. Jasmine wonders aloud why it is illegal for someone to change his or her name. Berenice declares that a law allowing name changes would only cause confusion: "Just think. Suppose I would suddenly up and call

myself Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. And you would begin naming yourself Joe Louis. And John Henry would try to pass off as Henry Ford. Now what kind of confusion do you think that would cause?" (113). Curiously, Berenice suggests a man's name for the girl, which implies that she still views F. Jasmine as the tomboy Frankie, despite the fact she now dresses like a girl and insists that everyone call her by her new feminine moniker. F. Jasmine argues that people should be able to choose their own names, "to a name you prefer," especially if the original name "doesn't suit you" (113). Clearly, F. Jasmine believes that by simply changing her name, she can discard her Frankie identity, not realizing that that identity is all part of her self.

Their discussion soon turns philosophical as Berenice asserts that "things accumulate around your name" (113). According to Berenice, life events and daily situations amass so that "soon the name begins to have meaning" (113). The adolescent girl declares that her name—Frankie—means nothing to anybody. Here, the old Frankie resurfaces because F. Jasmine refers to her original name, her first identity. In essence, then, F. Jasmine still thinks of herself as Frankie despite her name change. As the girl tries to explain what she means, she grows more and more agitated, eventually reverting back to her F. Jasmine identity, walking swiftly around the kitchen while describing all the adventures she and the wedded couple will undertake: "We will be members of the whole world. Boyoman! Manoboy!" (118). Suddenly, the old Frankie pops up once more as she grabs the butcher knife from a drawer, not wanting to use it but simply to have something "in her hand and wave about as she hurried around the table" (117). Soon, Frankie breaks down crying and

sits on Berenice's lap for comfort. They continue their discussion of names and identities. Berenice suggests that people in the world are caught in their identities:

'We all of us somehow caught. We born this way or that way and we don't know why. But we caught anyhow. I born Berenice. You born Frankie. John Henry born John Henry. And maybe we wants to widen and bust free. But no matter what we do we still caught. Me is me and you is you and he is he. We each one of us somehow caught all by ourself.' (119)

F. Jasmine declares that she does not want to be caught, to which Berenice agrees but offers up that she is more caught than Frankie because of her race. She declares, "I'm caught worse than you is. . . . Because I'm black. . . . Because I'm colored. Everybody is caught one way or another. But they done drawn completely extra bounds around colored people." Berenice's declaration echoes W. E. B. DuBois's concept of double consciousness found in his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk*:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness. . . . One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. . . . The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. (2-3)

While McCullers aptly points to the double-bind of African Americans, where they are "caught" because of the color of their skin, she utilizes Frankie's identity crises

to reveal that women, too, suffer from a double-bind because of their gender, that is to say, they are human beings, but, in patriarchal societies, they are also viewed as Other because the standard by which all things are assessed and valued (or devalued) is male, not female. Throughout the novel, Frankie struggles to find her authentic self. She seems most comfortable in her guise of tomboy, but she also realizes she is expected to conform to the ideals of female beauty and behavior. Therefore, whether she wishes to adapt to these standards, she feels compelled to do so. McCullers frequently points to the imposition of feminine ideals, especially in her F. Jasmine character. Just as Berenice is caught because of her race, F. Jasmine is caught because of her gender.

Additionally, in her philosophical discussion with Berenice, F. Jasmine conveys, as best a twelve-year-old can, the existential predicament of modernity. Rather than think of people being caught, as Berenice believes, Frankie argues that they are caught but also “loose,” disconnected from each other. She tries to explain her feelings to Berenice:

‘I mean you don’t see what joins [people] up together. You don’t know where they all came from, or where they’re going to.’ . . . F. Jasmine’s voice was thin and high. ‘But what is it all about? People loose and at the same time caught. Caught and loose. All these people and you don’t know what joins them up. There’s bound to be some sort of reason and connection. Yet somehow I can’t seem to name it. I don’t know.’ (120-121)

In his dissertation, "Ideas in the Raw: American Modernist Fiction as a Source of French Existentialism," Jonathan M. Bradley declares, "Frankie expresses the fundamental existential understanding that people possess a freedom that makes knowing one another impossible" (143). According to Bradley, who utilizes Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* to analyze the existential and feminist elements in McCullers's novel, both Berenice and F. Jasmine conclude that people are, in essence, trapped by societal dictates. However, how they come to this conclusion differs in terms of their personal perspective. He states,

Berenice is focused on each individual's conception of themselves. She argues that we, which in her slang refers to each person, might want to bust free. Frankie, on the other hand, is focused on those outside herself. She sees 'all people' and is concerned with knowing where they are from or going. (143)

In terms of cultural gender restrictions, DeBeauvoir asserts that men define women, that "[w]oman is not a completed reality, but rather a becoming, and it is in her becoming that she should be compared with man; this is to say, her *possibilities* should be defined" (38). Thus, Bradley argues that F. Jasmine's notion of loose "refers to their freedom to become something new at any moment, and that is a freedom she also wishes to have" (143). However, as a female, F. Jasmine cannot attain this freedom because of patriarchal constraints applied to women. As much as she desires the sovereignty that men enjoy, she cannot do so because of her gender. Bradley rightly asserts that both Berenice and Frankie's "understanding is

that everyone is imbued with an innate freedom and almost endless possibilities, but society restricts those possibilities, makes demands on people, and generally stifles those who want to break out, particularly women” (144). In F. Jasmine’s case, she instinctively perceives, if not fully comprehends, these societal limitations placed on her not only as a human being but additionally as a female. This intuitive “knowing” causes much of the strife she encounters in her endeavor for an authentic identity. She desires to be a full human being, but the society in which she lives constrains her because of her female gender.

The most alarming aspect of Frankie’s metamorphosis into F. Jasmine occurs when a red-haired soldier in the Blue Moon Café attempts to rape her. Tomboy Frankie disdains all things sexual, having declared that adult sexual activities represent ““nasty lies!”” (12). She interprets Mr. and Mrs. Marlowe’s sexual activity as the husband suffering from “a fit” (40). And she hates the “unknown sin that [Barney MacKean] showed her in the garage” (83). However, on her walkabout through town as F. Jasmine, she becomes intrigued with a soldier she meets in an alley, for he “was the only person during that day who spoke first to F. Jasmine and invited her to join with him” (69). Dressed in her pink organdie dress and black pumps, she appears older than her twelve years, especially to the soldier, who has been drinking all morning in the Blue Moon. From the start, McCullers shows that F. Jasmine is out of her depth with the young man. She attempts to make polite conversation, but he interprets her comments as sexual. For example, knowing he is a soldier, she wishes to know where he will be deployed once his leave is over. She

asks him, “Do you have any idea where you will be going?” to which he responds that he’s on a three-day leave (69). “He had mistaken the meaning of her question, for she had asked it to him as a soldier liable to be sent to any foreign country in the world, but, before she could explain what she had meant, he said: ‘There’s a kind of hotel around the corner I’m staying at’” (69), an obvious indication that he wishes to take her there and have sex. However, naïve F. Jasmine does not comprehend the true meaning behind his comment. So she takes his elbow when offered and walks with him to the hotel. Here, F. Jasmine marvels that she is actually walking with a soldier,

with one of the groups of loud, glad gangs that roamed around the streets together or walked with grown girls. They danced at the Idle Hour and had a good time, while the old Frankie was asleep. . . . And now F. Jasmine walked with a soldier who in his mind included her in such unknown pleasures. (70)

The adolescent girl, so wishing to be grown up and to belong, thrills at the thought of associating with the soldier, yet she also feels “an uneasy doubt” about the situation, a feeling she cannot place (70). Here, McCullers points to F. Jasmine’s intuition, for she knows, deep inside herself, that she does not fit with the soldier, nor does she belong in the Blue Moon, a place she understood to be a café and bar, not a hotel where people stay overnight. Still, she disregards her apprehension, accepts a beer from the soldier, and tries to converse with him once more. Interestingly, F. Jasmine unconsciously realizes she cannot be her real self around

this man; therefore, she speaks “in a voice that was absolutely new to her—a high voice spoken through the nose, dainty and dignified” (71). She changes how she speaks because she believes that is what women are supposed to do to attract men. F. Jasmine talks about the war, all the time thinking to herself about the wedding couple and how much she feels connected to the world. The soldier, getting increasingly drunker, cannot follow F. Jasmine’s words any more than she can understand his. When they met earlier, she had witnessed the soldier trying to buy the monkey from the monkey-man, an organ-grinder of sorts. So she says to the soldier, ““That certainly is a darling little monkey,”” and he replies, ““What monkey?”” (73). He admits he has had too much beer and offers to meet her at 9:00 that night after he has rested. F. Jasmine, stunned at the thought of going on a date, thinks to herself that the “very word, *date*, was a grown up word used by older girls. But here again there was a blight upon her pleasure. If he knew she was not yet thirteen, he would never have invited her, or probably never joined with her at all. There was a troubled sense, a light uneasiness” (74). The girl instinctively knows that “dating” this soldier is wrong for both of them, yet she desperately wishes to be someone other than old Frankie, fearful and sad. She wishes to be grown-up, feminine F. Jasmine, a girl who looks, dresses, and acts like a woman. Therefore, she agrees to meet him, but when she does, her intuition once again warns her of danger. And yet, she feels compelled to follow him up the stairs because she believes that is what is expected of her as a female: “The soldier was waiting at the foot of the stairs and, *unable to refuse*, she followed after him” [my emphasis] (135). When he becomes

sexually forceful with her, she bites down on his tongue and brains him with a glass pitcher. At this point, F. Jasmine connects the soldier's sexual advances with all the other sexual experiences she has encountered—Barney in the garage, the older girls' sex talk, the Marlowe's in the front bedroom—and flees the room via the fire escape. In this scene, McCullers demonstrates the danger associated with Frankie's new identity, F. Jasmine. In *Lovers and Beloveds: Sexual Otherness in Southern Fiction 1936-1961*, Gary Richards asserts that F. Jasmine "seems largely unaware of the sexual element when she accepts the date with the nameless soldier, doing so only because it affirms her maturity" (187). F. Jasmine does wish to date the soldier because it makes her feel older than she really is, yet another aspect of her new self. Old Frankie would not have placed herself in such a perilous position, but feminized F. Jasmine, following the cultural dictates of the feminine, feels obligated to ignore her intuition in favor of acquiescing to the man. McCullers offers a subtle but clear critique of these patriarchal cultural norms that dictate women should change themselves for men.

Part Three of the novel begins with a flashback of Frankie still as F. Jasmine. She humiliates herself at the wedding by being forcefully removed from the honeymoon car as she repeatedly screams to the newlyweds, "'Take me!'" (147). On the bus ride home, F. Jasmine transforms into Frances, a girl who wishes "the whole world to die" (144). Upon returning home, Frances attempts to run away from home, but "The Law" catches her in the Blue Moon Café. Three months pass, and thirteen-year-old Frances appears to have accepted her female self. John Henry has

died from meningitis, and, for a time, Frances regrets being forbidden to visit him when he was sick. Yet, “[h]e came to her once or twice in nightmare dreams, . . . But the dreams came only once or twice, and the daytime now was filled with radar, school, and Mary Littlejohn” (162), her new best friend. Frances appears to be a self-absorbed teenaged girl, one who “is just mad about Michelangelo” (159). She now wishes to be “a great poet—or else the foremost authority on radar” (159). Here, the old Frankie peeks through because at the time McCullers wrote the novel, women rarely became famous scientists, or at least were not recognized openly as such. For example, it only recently came to light that during World War II, the famous actress, Hedy Lamarr, helped invent a telecommunications system designed to disrupt radio-guided torpedoes. It is unlikely that F. Jasmine would wish to be a famous radar specialist, but Frankie certainly would. As such, Frances seems to be an amalgamation of Frankie and F. Jasmine. She prepares for Mary’s visit by “making sandwiches, cutting them into fancy shapes and taking great pains” (159), something Frankie would not consider doing but that F. Jasmine likely would do. Moreover, like Frankie and F. Jasmine, Frances fantasizes that she and Mary will travel the world and have adventures; Frankie wished to do these activities as a boy, while F. Jasmine desired to travel with the couple, her “we of me.” One aspect of Frances’s personality, though, proves disheartening. She purposefully hurts Berenice with her words. On the bus ride home, Frances sits with Berenice in the section designated for “colored people, and when she thought of it she used the mean word she had never used before, nigger—for now she hated everyone and

wanted to spite and shame” (144). Additionally, Frances takes exception to Berenice’s description of Mary Littlejohn as “lumpy and marshmallow-white” (160). As she prepares the dainty sandwiches for Mary’s visit, Frances tells Berenice:

‘There’s no use our discussing a certain party. You could not possibly understand her. It’s just not in you.’ She had said that once before to Berenice, and from the sudden faded stillness in her eye she knew that the words hurt. And now she repeated them, angered because of the tinged way Berenice had said the name, but once the words were spoken she was sorry. (160)

Despite Frances’s regret at hurting Berenice, she then indignantly corrects the housekeeper when Berenice calls Mary’s braids “pigtails.” “‘Braids!’” Frances cries. In her examination of “the ‘girling’” of girls, Judith Butler discusses the power of names: “The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm” (8). In Frances’s case, her new moniker reveals not only a boundary of behavior—she no longer resembles either Frankie or F. Jasmine and has become quite a different personage—but also Butler’s notion of the inculcation of a norm. In other words, through her behavior, Frances now conforms to the socially constructed, patriarchal vision of femininity. Thus, we see McCullers render this adolescent girl’s change in personality, from fearful Frankie to confident and feminine F. Jasmine to thoughtless and self-absorbed Frances.

Scholars have offered a number of different interpretations of Frances in McCullers’s ending to the story. Margaret B. McDowell believes Frances has “failed

to develop in any genuine sense. A superficial self-assurance, along with heightened insensitivity and complacency, pass for maturity" (*Carson McCullers* 82). Joseph R. Millichap declares that in choosing to be with Mary Littlejohn, Frances

believes the girl can provide her with an identity—the identity not achieved in the wedding. Of course, she is mistaken; Mary will disappoint her just as the wedding has, but she does not know this now. Now she is alive with a heedless love, love which is really self-love and self-delusion. ("A Critical Reevaluation" 105)

Louise Westling argues that Frances is not as appealing a character as "frightened tomboy Frankie. She has become a silly girl . . . [who] instead gushes sentimental nonsense about the Great Masters. The hard edge of her mind is gone, and all that is left is froth" (349). Certainly, Frances presents herself as a somewhat persnickety person, but considering her age, such a trait hardly seems unusual. Moreover, Westling's statement implies that Frances's identity will remain static for the rest of her life. Frances is merely thirteen years old, still a girl, who has much living and learning and changing to experience. To suggest that she will continue on as the self-absorbed, rather frivolous Frances does not take into account the transformations that have already taken place in the girl. As Sarah Gleeson-White declares, "Frankie's parade of feminine masks, signaled by her name changes as well as her dress, parodies any notion of a fixed identity" (*Strange Bodies* 90). She declares:

There is no such thing here as a peeling away of masks in the hope of getting to some firm core. Beneath each mask lies another, and another. The reader is foiled at every turn in any attempt to get to the bottom of identity through Frankie's various name-crossings, dress, and behavior. Behind the sensible 'Frances' is the flighty 'F. Jasmine,' and behind her the tomboy 'Frankie.' But the masquerade does not stop there for 'Frankie' is another mask, of masculinity, which enacts a type of gender suspension. (90-91)

While Gleeson-White correctly assesses the notion of Frankie's masks, we cannot discount the masks that Frances will continue to adopt as a female in a patriarchal society. As Frankie, she tries to rebel against her gender, wishing she possessed the sovereignty that boys inherently have. Yet, intuitively she knows that as a girl, she is expected to look and behave in a feminine manner; hence, her declaration that she should really have long, yellow hair. F. Jasmine attempts to adapt to culturally imposed standards of womanly dress and behavior, and she nearly gets raped for her efforts. Although Frances seems to accept the restrictions of her gender, we do see that she still holds some element of the "tomboy self-reliance" and "scrappy assertiveness" that Westling speaks of concerning Frankie and Mick Kelly, for Frances dreams of being a radar specialist. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the novel centers on societal restrictions for women. As Barbara A. White declares, "Frankie has done exactly what has been expected of her, what she has been educated to do" (141). White couches this statement in terms of Frankie losing her

very self, but she has not lost her self. She simply continues adding masks as the patriarchal culture dictates: she must be beautiful, act sly, and search for a man to complete her. Otherwise, her identity becomes that of a lonely spinster.

As an author during the Modernist era, McCullers lived through the existential crises that took place after World War I, addressing the human need to be genuine and find a true purpose in life. Two world wars prompted psychologists to investigate whether people are born evil or are conditioned to be so, and McCullers, too, examined this notion of nature versus nurture in her fiction. Certainly, middle class women's roles were greatly restricted during the Modernist era, notwithstanding the freedom from the domestic sphere many women experienced during World War I. Despite their war work outside the home, these women were expected to return to the culturally designated realm of the home, create comfortable havens for their husbands, and produce children. Moreover, McCullers clearly understood the female desire to be and do more than the male-dominated society dictated, that there was more to a woman's life than being a wife and mother. In all these instances, McCullers subtly but clearly critiques the American culture that not only conditions women to forego their own aspirations and adapt themselves to serve males, but that also imposes standards that force girls and women to be inauthentic persons.

CHAPTER IV: ERASURE OF SPACE BETWEEN SELF AND “OTHER”

In the deserts of the heart

Let the healing fountain start,

In the prison of his days

Teach the free man how to praise.

—W. H. Auden

Modernity generated existential crises of individual identity as well as personal and collective purpose within the Western world, especially after World War I, where the populace questioned, even disbelieved in, institutions formerly considered bulwarks against social chaos—religion, science, technology, education, and the like. Further, this critical point in history produced feelings of isolation and alienation in the increasingly industrialized and urbanized United States. Modernist writers concentrated on these issues, composing narratives in an attempt to uncover social structures intended to separate, isolate, and alienate various peoples. For instance, John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* exposed the class struggles between the economically-defined haves and have-nots in the United States—corporate owners of the land versus poor migrant white workers in California—where workers experienced extreme poverty and overwork as well as violence when they attempted to organize labor unions. In *Light in August*, William Faulkner revealed the complexities of race in Jim Crow Mississippi. In that novel, Joe Christmas is a Southern biracial man who can “pass” for white. Although light-skinned, he possesses African American blood; as a result, society labels and treats

him as black and, thus, inferior. Only when it becomes known that Christmas is a black man does law enforcement pursue him as a suspect in the murder of a white woman, a situation that ends with Christmas being shot and subsequently castrated by a white racist. Richard Wright's *Native Son* also dealt with racial struggles in America; however, his novel's setting is urban Chicago, where Bigger Thomas suffers from black stereotyping and the assumption that African Americans are racially inferior to whites. In this narrative, Wright explores the violence of racism and Jim Crow above the Mason-Dixon Line, baring to readers the fact that racial prejudice and bigotry do not exist exclusively in the American South. All three of these novelists, among numerous other Modernist writers, chose to expose the underbelly of American life, that is, the disfranchisement of the poor and working classes as well as racial strife endemic in a nation founded with the system of slavery intact.

While High Modernist writers used their creative energies to examine fresh ways to perceive the world, they concerned themselves less with the external world and more with the inner consciousness of human beings. Robert Genter thus defines High Modernism as "the medium through which the artist discovered himself outside the concerns of the world at large" (4). Genter asserts that Late Modernist writers, in contrast, viewed their work as a means by which to engage the world, to reveal and interrogate social and political mechanisms in an age of mass production and popular culture that included radio and cinema. He states:

Unwilling to abandon the literary and cultural revolution begun in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by their modernist predecessors, whose original goal was to explore new forms of consciousness and unearth new forms of perception in the hopes of transforming the world at large, late modernists argued not only that the nature of the aesthetic form needed to be rethought in an age of mass media but that the general assumptions about the nature of subjectivity needed to be updated. They reformulated aesthetics as a *mode of symbolic action*—a deliberate attempt to use the aesthetic form to challenge the choice of lens through which individuals made sense of the world around them and to persuade them that the visions offered by the artist were not merely more poetic but possibly more liberating. For late modernists, the spoken word, the written work, the musical refrain, and the abstract canvas were all *calls to action* on the part of the artist as rhetorician, that is, an artist who interweaved rational arguments, libidinal enticements, and poetic pleas in his works in order to produce a commitment or at least a response from the viewing audience. [my emphasis] (4)

In essence, Genter posits that Late Modernist writers embraced Kenneth Burke's position that literature presupposes symbolic action. Genter rightly asserts, "Burke argued that an exclusive focus on separating the artist and the artwork from the consuming public was foolish, ignoring the fact that the goal of the artist was to

persuade the spectator, listener, or reader” (3). Certainly, Late Modernist authors like Steinbeck, James Baldwin, and Richard Wright wrote to expose the hypocrisy of democratic egalitarianism and the myth of the American Melting Pot; however, they also intended to raise the consciousness of their readers to the plight of the Other—the socially, economically, ethnically, and racially disfranchised. So how do we explain Faulkner, considered a High Modernist during his most prolific writing period of the late 1920s and early 1930s, who brought to the fore the racial problems of the American South? The answer involves his intention in the use of the outside world in his most famous works. Simply put, as a High Modernist, Faulkner used the social problems of the South as a means to contemplate the inner workings of his characters’ minds. As such, their thoughts and reactions to social and racial constructs were more important than the constructs themselves. Thus, we see the difference in intent between High and Late Modernists that Genter describes.

Both High and Late Modernists utilized the aesthetics of formal experimentation and interrogated the themes of isolation, alienation, and the search for an authentic identity and life’s purpose, as has been described in previous chapters. But like Steinbeck and other more politically motivated writers, Carson McCullers went further than the High Modernists in her examination of those social structures, mores, and attitudes that created or contributed to the gaps between peoples. In “Social Representations Within American Modernism,” Paula Rabinowitz states, “Erasing the space between social others—the middle class from

the poor and working class, Jews from Gentiles, blacks and whites from each other—became an aesthetic as well as a political imperative by the 1930s” (267). McCullers saw the need to reduce the distance between the self and the Other because she saw, first hand, how othering produced racial, ethnic, and social class discrimination, particularly in the South where she was born and bred. Therefore, she foregrounds the erasure of space between self and Other to expose, interrogate, and critique the notion of economic and social equality in the United States, anti-Semitism, and racial prejudice in the American South.

Not all critics have viewed McCullers to be a socially engaged author. Judith Giblin James offers a thorough treatment of McCullers’s critical reception, and for the most part, early scholars regarded McCullers as an author who wrote on the symbolic or allegorical level, rarely venturing into social realism like Steinbeck or Wright. She became labeled as a Southern Gothic writer as well as one who wrote on limited themes of isolation, alienation, and adolescence. In fact, James argues that British, not American, reviewers perceived “the social world” within McCullers’s first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, with its setting of an industrialized Southern town filled with poor workers living in shanties (10). In the period of New Criticism—when McCullers published her literary works—scholarly interpretation centered on the text itself, its meaning divorced from the world at large. Symbology superseded social significance and critique. As such, Chester E. Eisinger considers McCullers’s works “essentially antirealistic,” claiming that she “has cut herself off from the world of ordinary experience and ordinary human

beings" (243), an implied criticism of her penchant for the grotesque. Most importantly, Eisinger declares that McCullers did not concern herself with social constructions that affected her characters. He writes,

For her, further, the truth of the fable is the truth of the heart. It is not concerned with abstractions about the structure of society or with ideological conflicts in the contemporary world. She has banished these sociological and intellectual matters from her fiction, narrowing its range, perhaps to its detriment, in favor of memory and mood, and above all, feeling. (243-244)

While it is true that McCullers created narratives using mood and emotions, Eisinger's claim that she focuses almost solely on "feeling" is problematic. Rather, Joseph R. Millichap rightly argues that McCullers's novels do, indeed, reflect social realism, and his 1970 dissertation carefully examines the social elements and her engagement with the outside world within her fiction. According to Millichap, "The greatest social fiction demonstrates the source of social behavior in individual psychology and the pressure of society on individual behavior" ("A Critical Reevaluation" 7). As such, Modernist writers like McCullers still maintained their proclivity for examining the inner consciousness of character while also using their narratives as social commentary. Moreover, Millichap declares that *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* epitomizes social fiction and uses it as the benchmark to analyze her other novels and novella. In her biography of McCullers, Virginia Spencer Carr asserts that McCullers was keenly sensitive to any sort of prejudice and that she

possessed a “hatred of discrimination against any minority group—especially the undemocratic principles which she felt extant in her southern region” (*The Lonely Hunter* 238). Thus, because McCullers’s fiction does, in fact, reveal and critique the othering of the poor and working classes as well as ethnic and racial minorities, this chapter will examine some of the characters that reflect her desire for social and racial equality, particularly Jews and African Americans. Ultimately, the chapter will reveal McCullers’s evident literary call to action regarding the United States’ deep need to come together as one nation and one people, no matter a person’s social class, ethnicity, or race.

An avid reader of nineteenth-century Russian novelists, McCullers marveled at their techniques for writing socially realistic works. She argues in her essay, “The Russian Realists and Southern Literature,” that writers such as Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy contrast the absurd with the sublime, the inconsequential with the consequential, “the sacred with the bawdy, [and] the whole soul of a man with a materialistic detail” (252-253). Most importantly for this chapter, she equates “Old Russia”—Czarist Russia—to the South of the United States, asserting that in both, “the cheapness of life is realized at every turn” (254). McCullers set all her novels in the South, specifically Georgia, where she was born and raised. In the main, her characters represent middle-class whites who reflect the values associated with the modern South. Those white Southerners who could afford to do so employed African American housekeepers who not only maintained the home but also were responsible for the day-to-day care of the children in the family. However,

McCullers also brings attention to the poor and working classes of the region, subtly juxtaposing their plight with the more affluent members of the community. For instance, in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Miss Amelia Evans owns a car, her own home, and land, all of which mark her as the most powerful and wealthy person in town. The mill workers, on the other hand, reside “with others in a two- or three-room house for which the rent was ten dollars or twelve dollars a month” (20), a large sum of money during the first half of the twentieth century. The balladeer of the story tells us that their lives center on toil, so that when Miss Amelia’s café opens, they are unaccustomed to meeting with one another for recreation: “For people in this town were then unused to gathering together for the sake of pleasure. They met to work in the mill” (22). Miss Amelia’s café becomes a haven of sorts for the mill workers, a place where they may lay down their burdens for a time, enjoy a hearty Southern meal of fried chicken, and drink some of Amelia’s famous moonshine liquor. Consequently, the townspeople grow to have pride in the café, a sentiment not heretofore seen in their underprivileged community. The balladeer explains why Miss Amelia’s café becomes so important to the townspeople:

To understand this new pride the cheapness of human life must be kept in mind. There were always plenty of people clustered around the mill—but it was seldom that every family had enough meal, garments, and fat back to go the rounds. Life could become one long dim scramble just to get the things needed to keep alive. And the confusing point is this: All useful things have a price, and are bought

only with money, as that is the way the world is run. You know without having to reason about it the price of a bale of cotton, or a quart of molasses. But no value has been put on human life; it is given to us free and taken without being paid for. What is it worth? If you look around, at times the value may seem to be little or nothing at all. Often after you have sweated and tried and things are not better for you, there comes a feeling deep down in the soul that you are not worth much. (54)

This passage highlights the poverty, and more importantly the hopeless feelings of Southern working class whites. Like the serfs and peasants in Old Russia and the factory workers in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, McCullers's mill workers suffer in their attempts to make enough money to eat, let alone to enjoy a little time away from the factory.

McCullers admitted that she leaned politically towards the left. According to Carr, friends introduced her to Marxism, although she did not join the Communist Party or become politically active (*The Lonely Hunter* 38). Carr writes,

Although Carson had toured the mills and viewed with distress the squalid conditions and pervading hopelessness among the people of the mill district in her hometown, and had become increasingly aware of what she considered the weaknesses of her country's capitalistic system, she had not embraced Marxism so passionately that she was willing to give up precious writing time to become actively involved in

politics. Nevertheless, she was much aware of the plight of the millworkers, and many of her views involving capitalism were graphically bared later in her first published novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. (57)

In her unfinished autobiography, McCullers writes, “My sympathies at first were all with Marx and Engels, and when I think about the current riots [in 1967] I feel it’s a pure application of Marxism. . . . Adequate jobs, good jobs must be found for all who are capable of fulfilling them” (*Illumination* 64-65). Certainly, her leftist beliefs can be seen in the balladeer’s commentary above, especially in her linkage of human worth to money, a direct criticism of corporate greed and capitalism, to be sure.

McCullers also pointedly describes and critiques the poverty in which mill workers live in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, which takes place in a small factory city in Georgia. Biff Brannon, the owner of the New York Café, tells Jake Blount, a political radical new to town, that the population of the city is “[a]round thirty thousand” people (60). He tells Blount that the city supports factories and mills: “That’s right. Four big cotton mills—those are the main ones. A hosiery factory. Some gins and sawmills” (60). On his way to apply for a job at the Sunny Dixie Show, a traveling carnival that needs a mechanic, Blount notices the bleak living conditions of the workers and their families:

Soon he entered one of the mill districts bordering the river. 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. . . . People stood silently in doorways or lounged on steps. They looked at Jake with yellow, expressionless faces. (61)

The mill city here resembles the town found in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, where workers signify a sad and pathetic lot. In fact, the mill district looks nearly identical to the areas designated for African Americans in the South, places with unpaved streets, cabins made of rotten wood, and poor or nonexistent sewers and electricity. McCullers shows readers that poor and working-class whites are economically treated almost as badly as Southern blacks. In the passage above, McCullers, in only a few words, particularizes the hunger and malaise of the workers and their families. Like Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath*, McCullers exposes the terrible conditions of the working classes, where starvation wages engender tired, hungry, despondent people. McCullers's mill laborers are imprisoned in their poverty with no way to escape their economic entrapment. Ultimately, in this brief section, she shatters the myth of the American dream, showing that social class distinctions and discrimination do, in fact, exist in this supposed land of the free.

Her most politically radical character proves to be Jack Blount in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, a man who excoriates the capitalist system and is as determined to organize factory laborers as a Southern preacher is to lead unbelievers to Jesus. Through this character, McCullers once again critiques capitalism and points to the

destitution suffered by Southern mill workers. Despite Blount's often tangled syntax and almost incomprehensible use of million-dollar words, he does, at times, clearly elucidate the plight of the poor and the subsequent malaise generated by their lack of power to share in the wealth of industrialization and capitalism. He asserts that the person who "knows," that is, one who fully understands the true condition of the poor and working classes, sees an America that suffers under the capitalist system, especially in times of economic crises like the Great Depression, the setting of the novel. Blount declares,

'He sees America as a crazy house. He sees how men have to rob their brothers in order to live. He sees children starving and women working sixty hours a week to get to eat. He sees a whole damn army of unemployed and billions of dollars and thousands of miles of land wasted. He sees war coming. He sees how when people suffer just so much they get mean and ugly and something dies in them. 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.' (152)

Here, Blount points not only to the adverse effects of capitalism but also to the hopelessness of the working class and poor because of this economic system of labor exploitation. His words are clear and simple rather than incomprehensible and rambling, an indication that McCullers, versed in Marx and Engels, uses Blount's rare clarity to expose the conditions under which mill laborers work and live. And

she reveals why they do not—or cannot—change their situation: they no longer see or understand that they are victims of capitalist greed. Rather, they accept their plight as “just the way things are,” no longer questioning why it should be so. Like the townspeople in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Blount’s “don’t-knows” believe their lives have no real value in their community or the world at large. According to Sylvia Jenkins Cook in *From Tobacco Road to Route 66*, a “strange dichotomy was perpetuated in depression literature between those worthy and victimized poor whites who, somehow, deserved revolutionary change and those cunning and servile poor whites who, somehow, deserved to go on living in poverty, contempt, and neglect” (156). Thus, we see McCullers create poor white mill workers who represent mere laboring chattel to the manufacturing elite, and they accept this view and their social role, which only further perpetuates their own suffering.

Interestingly, Blount also proves to be the vehicle through which McCullers seems to argue against Communism, suggesting it is, at best, a confused and confusing ideology. Blount’s verbal attempts at criticizing capitalism prove to be muddled and perplexing to the very people he wishes to convert to his ideology, whatever that may be, for he tells two employees of the carnival, “‘Sure I’m a Red. At least I reckon I am’” (284). On the other hand, he explains to John Singer, his deaf-mute friend:

‘Some of us are Communists. But not all of us—. Myself, I’m not a member of the Communist Party. . . . The main fact is I don’t think so much of Stalin and Russia. I hate every damn country and

government there is. But even so maybe I ought to joined up with the Communists first place. I'm not certain one way or the other. What do you think?' (155)

In this passage, McCullers appears to offer up her own opinion of the authoritarian Soviet leader, Josef Stalin. However, she also lumps together Communism and anarchism, two ideologies that have advocated violence as a means to their political ends. The fact that Blount cannot decide whether or not he is a Communist agitator implies that such a political philosophy, too, is an uncertain one, one that may or may not be utilized for the common good of the people to whom it is meant to serve. In her autobiography, McCullers proclaimed her disdain for Communism: "The Communists have learned very well to exploit, expose and socially enfeeble areas to their own ends" (*Illumination* 64-65), and this belief manifests in her characterization of Blount, a drunken blowhard who tries to sway the "don't-knows"—the local factory workers—to his political viewpoint. But however much he genuinely cares for these laborers—and he expresses deep concern for their welfare—his outrage at their plight, coupled with their complacency, overtakes him to the point that he nearly goes mad with anger, a situation that not only causes him to bully the workers but also makes him drink alcohol to excess in order to calm his nerves. Thus, we see how McCullers uses Blount as a critique of Communism, an ideology based on violence and one that people in the novel do not understand, including, apparently, Blount, who tries but fails to pronounce the effectiveness of such a philosophical ideal.

The Heart is a Lonely Hunter was published in 1940, when war already had broken out in Europe, and the United States had implemented its Lend-Lease program with its allies that fought against Adolph Hitler's Nazi Germany. McCullers fervently opposed Fascism and any type of totalitarian ideology, and through John Singer, the deaf-mute character at the center of the novel, she critiques Fascism. She once claimed that *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* represents "an ironic parable of fascism" (qtd. in Brinkmeyer 239), a claim that Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr. illustrates in *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930-1950*. In his chapter on McCullers, Brinkmeyer asserts that McCullers "not only repeatedly voiced anti-Fascist political views but also deliberately used her fiction to explore what she saw as both Fascism's dangerous psychology and its frightening manifestations in southern society" (229). He goes on to discuss Harry Minowitz's change of heart concerning Nazi Germany, Jake Blount's claim that "[a]t least one third of all Southerners live and die no better off than the lowest peasant in any European Fascist state" (297), Dr. Copeland's linkage of Southern racism to the suffering of Jews within Hitler's Third Reich, as well as the ever-present news of the war on the radio and in Biff Brannon's newspaper cuttings. Curiously, Brinkmeyer does not mention the cult of personality surrounding John Singer. Twentieth-century Fascism produced three central figures: Adolph Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Francisco Franco. In their respective countries, each came to power through the cult of personality. That is, each man created propaganda about himself and utilized mass media to portray an idealized version of himself, one in which their

respective peoples became infatuated and worshipful. Without this cult, Fascism would not have existed as it did in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, for at the center of that ideology was the man himself.

McCullers's novel, therefore, can be read as a type of cautionary tale about Fascism in that all three major characters—Mick Kelly, Jake Blount, and Dr. Copeland—come to view Singer as a type of god, a man who seems to empathize with and understand them completely. They never realize that Singer does not, in fact, understand them at all, nor does he truly care for them because he, too, idolizes another: Antonapoulos. In other words, they all search for and find their own version of an ideal person. Like so many in Germany who fell under the spell of Hitler, these three characters fall under the spell of Singer, despite the fact that he does not intend for it to happen. Rather, they choose him to be their ideal. However, at no time does Singer attempt to dispel their illusion of him or clarify that he does not comprehend them, a failing on his part that adds to McCullers's critique of Fascism. Only Biff Brannon seems less worshipping of Singer; yet, he, too, finds the deaf-mute intriguing and mysterious, and, like the others, Brannon does not learn anything about Singer. All four—Mick, Blount, Copeland, and Brannon—simply accept Singer as they wish him to be. But when he kills himself, he leaves behind four people who feel different levels of abandonment. In essence, Singer comes into their world, seemingly understands them, and then intentionally leaves them through suicide. The cult of personality they build around Singer proves to be a total failure, and McCullers uses this concept of the cult of personality to offer her

version of a call to action. She warns readers about Fascism and making gods out of fallible human beings.

Not only did McCullers bring to the fore the terrible conditions of the poor and working classes in the South as well as her critique of totalitarianism, she also examined the treatment of Jews in America and abroad, offering literary examples of both anti-Semitic characters and compassionate portrayals of Jews. McCullers included a number of Jewish characters in her works. In fact, each of her novels contains at least one Jew: Harry Minowitz and Biff Brannon in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*; Lt. Weincheck in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*; Morris Finestein in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*; the piano tuner, Mr. Schwarzenbaum, in *The Member of the Wedding*; and Dr. Hayden and Herman Klein in *Clock Without Hands*. Further, some of her short fiction presents Jewish characters (e.g., “Wunderkind” and “Madam Zilensky and the King of Finland”), including a refugee from Nazi Germany in “Aliens.” Like discrimination shown towards the lower classes and African Americans, anti-Semitism distressed McCullers. Having once been accused of such bigotry in her handling of Morris Finestein, the Jewish character in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* who cries when labeled a Christ-killer, she penned an “Open Letter” to explain that her novella was “a tale of menacing tragedy indicting not the Jew, but the society which allowed such degradations to occur” (Carr, *The Lonely Hunter* 238). Although she did not publish the letter, McCullers was deeply troubled that readers would think her anti-Semitic. Larry Hershon argues that in the character of Morris Finestein, “McCullers certainly depicts southern anti-Semitism . . . in the well-worn accusation

about Christ and a feminization illustrated by Finestein's sensitivity and precious, meat-free diet" (64). However, rather than branding her anti-Semitic, Hershon argues that McCullers presents the tension of being Jewish in the 1930s and 1940s and that she "specifically and repeatedly addresses the issue of Jewish identity in terms of its being one, if by no means the only, symbol in her work of spiritual wisdom and oppression" (52). In "Expanding Southern Whiteness: Reconceptualizing Ethnic Difference in the Short Fiction of Carson McCullers," Cynthia Wu declares that in McCullers's treatment of Jews, she "interrogates white southern identity through means other than comparisons to black southern identity" (44). By introducing Jews into her literary works, Carson McCullers attempted to expose not only the oppression of the Jews but also their very humanity. In essence, then, her treatment of Jews was her effort to reveal the othering implicit in anti-Semitism and to present Jews as fellow human beings.

In the characters of Lt. Weincheck and Morris Finestein, McCullers offers one stereotype of the Jew: as feminized and somewhat pathetic. A bachelor, Weincheck cuts "a sorry figure" (36). He must soon retire because of his poor eyesight, and he has remained a lieutenant his entire Army career. He owns an Angora cat, plays the violin, and, along with Alison Langdon, listens to classical music and consumes "crystallized ginger by the fire" (37). Although she does not state so directly, McCullers subtly presents Weincheck as effeminate. Finestein, as discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, leaves town because he is lonely, cannot tolerate being called a Christ-killer, and suffers from an unknown "calamity" (9). Therefore,

the townspeople call men who cry openly or act in any “feminine” manner a “Morris Finestein.” Additionally, because he leaves the mill town, Finestein could be interpreted as the Wandering Jew. Interestingly, McCullers does not attach the stereotype of Jewish usury to these two characters, as both Lt. Weincheck and Finestein possess little money. Despite this, these two characters signify the stereotype of the feminized Jew, which some readers may find troubling. But does her introduction of Jewish stereotypes mark McCullers as an anti-Semite? Jewish scholar Louis Harap argues that presenting stereotypes does not necessarily mean an author is anti-Semitic. He writes, “In any given instance of the use of the stereotype, the degree of intensity of anti-Semitism needs to be judged within the entire context of the social milieu, personal history of the writer, and context of the work in which it appears” (12). When we consider McCullers’s entire literary oeuvre, we see that she uses anti-Semitic Southern whites to point out how such bigoted beliefs work to “other” Jews. The white men in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* show their ignorance when they label other men as Morris Finesteins. Mr. Finestein, himself a quiet and gentle figure, is used as a means to disparage those who do not fit within the white, hetero-normative standards of the mill town, and McCullers uses these Southern characters to point to the ease with which ethnic bigotry degrades and “others” those who do not fit within social norms. Moreover, McCullers juxtaposes Lt. Weincheck’s mild, erudite, and unobtrusive persona with the boorish behavior and attitude of Major Langdon to show how Jewish Weincheck is as kind as Southern white Langdon is insensitive and cruel.

McCullers presents anti-Semitism in all its ugliness in the character of J. T. Malone in *Clock Without Hands*.¹⁰ The novel begins with Malone discovering he is dying of leukemia. During a hospital stay, he dreams of Dr. Hayden, the physician who delivered to Malone the crushing news of his terminal cancer. Upon awakening, he suddenly realizes that Hayden is a Jew, and Malone holds Jews responsible for his lack of success in medical school. Malone thinks to himself:

The memory concerned the time he had failed in medical school in his second year. It was a Northern school and there were in the class a lot of Jew grinds. They ran up the grade average so that an ordinary, average student had no fair chance. The Jew grinds had crowded J. T. Malone out of medical school and ruined his career as a doctor—so that he had to shift over to pharmacy. . . . Across the aisle from him there had been a Jew called Levy who fiddled with a fine-blade knife and distracted him from getting the good of the class lectures. A Jew grind who made A-plus and studied in the library every night until closing time. (7)

Here, Malone clearly scapegoats all Jews for his inability to concentrate in class and earn good grades in medical school. Rather than admit he did not possess the scholarly aptitude or dedication required to succeed in school, Malone blames Jews for his own failure. Throughout the novel, Malone returns to this grudge against the

¹⁰ All references to *Clock Without Hands* are from Carson McCullers. *Clock Without Hands*. 1961. Boston: Mariner Books, 1998. Print.

“Jew grinds” who kept him from realizing his dream of becoming a physician. Moreover, he finds it inappropriate that Dr. Hayden’s name—Kenneth Hale Hayden—resembles a “good old Anglo-Saxon, Southern” name, and Malone believes that a Jew having such a moniker “was somehow wrong” (7). Like many bigots and anti-Semites, Malone believes “he had no prejudice,” yet in the same thought, he recalls Hayden’s children in stereotypical terms: “He remembered that the Hayden children had hooked noses” (7). Most importantly, the dying pharmacist convinces himself that he doesn’t dislike Dr. Hayden because he’s Jewish but rather because he will continue to live while Malone will soon die. However, in this section as well as in his continual use of “Jew grind” terminology, McCullers clearly writes Malone as an anti-Semite who merely uses his terminal disease as a way to excuse his bigotry and hatred of Jews. In fact, he switches doctors twice, and both are Christian, not Jewish, a clear sign of Malone’s anti-Semitism. In the anti-Semitic characterization of J. T. Malone, McCullers reveals how easy it is to scapegoat the innocent and to “other” Jews.

In a completely different vein, McCullers imparts a poignant portrayal of a Jew in her short story, “Aliens.” The tale takes place on a bus traveling through the South in August of 1935, two years after Adolph Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. McCullers immediately declares the protagonist to be a Jew—only near the end of the tale do we discover his name is Felix Kerr—who appears to be approximately 50 years old, wears rather threadbare clothing, and smokes incessantly. A younger Southern man sits beside him, shares some of Kerr’s food,

and talks about the landscape they view through the bus's window. The affable Southerner asks Kerr where he comes from, to which the older man replies that he will travel to and settle in Lafayetteville. At this point, the narrator interrupts the story to explain Kerr's "careful and oblique" answer to the young man:

For it must be understood at once that this was no ordinary traveller. He was no denizen of the great city he had left behind him. The time of his journey would not be measured by hours, but by years—not by hundreds of miles, but by thousands. And even such measurements as these would be in only one sense accurate. The journey of this fugitive—for the Jew had fled from his home in Munich two years before—more nearly resembled a state of mind than a period of travelling computable by maps and timetables. Behind him was an abyss of anxious wandering, suspense, of terror and of hope. (74)

Such an interlude contextualizes Felix Kerr in time and place. In 1933, the "two years before" in the passage, Hitler came to power. While anti-Semitism had been ongoing in Europe, the rise of the Nazis and the subsequent codification of anti-Semitic legislation created the abyss to which the narrator refers. In essence, Jews able to escape Nazi Germany became Wandering Jews, but rather than fitting the stereotype of those Jewish people who mocked Christ on the cross—the myth behind the caricature of the Wandering Jew—they fled their homeland to avoid being placed in concentration, and later extermination, camps.

Throughout the story, Kerr takes pains not to disclose his ethnicity, undoubtedly because of his past experiences with Nazi ideology and anti-Semitism. The Southern man continues to make conversation with “the Jew,” as Kerr is referred to. He explains to the foreigner that the flowers in the field are cotton plants, and he asks Kerr if he happens to be Greek. Rather than reply that he is Jewish, Kerr deflects the question, although he does say that his wife and two daughters will join him when he gets settled in Lafayetteville. Eventually, the Jew relaxes with the unnamed young Southerner, and the narrator declares, “By now they were no longer strangers” (75), a crucial point McCullers makes to demonstrate that two people of different ethnicities and backgrounds possess the capacity to be not only friends with each other but to see the humanity they both share.

However, when a poor African American woman enters the bus, Kerr becomes visibly upset at her condition. The narrator describes her:

The Negro was of indeterminate age and, had she not been clothed in a filthy garment that served as a dress, even her sex would have been difficult at first glance to define. She was deformed—although not in any one specific limb; the body as a whole was stunted, warped and undeveloped. She wore a dilapidated felt hat, a torn black skirt and a blouse that had been roughly fashioned from a meal sack. At one corner of her mouth there was an ugly open sore and beneath her lower lip she carried a wad of snuff. The whites of her eyes were not

white at all, but of a muddy yellow color veined with red. Her face as a whole had a roving, hungry, vacant look. (76)

The woman's appearance serves two purposes here. She represents abject poverty and ill health, which can also be equated to people forced to flee their country and become refugees, as Felix Kerr has done. Kerr's clothing, like the black woman's, is well worn and threadbare, and he appears to possess little money. Secondly, the description of the woman as "stunted, warped and undeveloped" mirrors the terrible stereotype of Jews, who were often depicted in anti-Semitic literature as malformed, fiendish-looking creatures, barely human. When Kerr asks his companion what is wrong with the black woman, the Southerner replies, "'Who? You mean the nigger?'" (76). The Jew implores the young man to speak in lower tones because the woman has chosen a seat right behind them. The narrator continues:

But already the southerner had turned in his seat and was staring behind him with such frankness that the Jew winced. 'Why there's nothing the matter with her,' he said when he had completed this scrutiny. 'Not that I can see.'

The Jew bit his lip with embarrassment. His brows were drawn and his eyes were troubled. (76)

This passage graphically reveals the indifference many white Southerners had for African Americans, whom they considered to be racially inferior. The young man treats the black woman as a thing rather than a person, as anti-Semites view Jews.

Here, McCullers intentionally juxtaposes the newly found companionship between the Jew and the Southerner with the young man's utter disregard for the black woman's feelings. Unlike the Southern man, Kerr sees the African American woman as a suffering human being—when she leaves the bus, the narrator expresses Kerr's belief that she is "that derelict of humanity" (77)—and his furrowed brows at the Southerner's comments clearly confirm that the Jew is troubled at the blatant racism of the young man, despite his friendliness towards Kerr. McCullers draws readers' attention to the fact that to "other" someone, whether black or Jew, is to deny their very humanity.

In her depiction of Felix Kerr, McCullers demonstrates her endeavor to raise awareness of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany and the terror of living under that racially based political ideology. Near the end of the tale, the narrator explains that Felix Kerr is grief-stricken, not because he has escaped from his homeland, where his wife and "little daughter" still live—"These two—God be willing—would join him here as soon as he could prepare for them" (78)—but rather because he does not know where his older daughter is, nor does he know if she is alive or dead. The narrator comments, "The Jew sorrowed for his elder daughter, Karen, whose whereabouts and state of welfare were unknown to him" (78). Such a situation—where Jewish family members as well as entire families, neighborhoods, and towns disappeared without a trace because of an anti-Semitic political philosophy and dictatorship—was all too common at the time McCullers wrote this story. According to Robert Phillips, "McCullers's Jew has neither horns nor tail, and can in no way

qualify as a freak. She uses his Jewishness to emphasize his displacement. He is an alien on the bus of life, as it were—rootless and totally other” (178). However, McCullers’s literary tone poem—a story grounded in grief and fear—signifies the author’s desire to reveal the terrible cost of bigotry run amok. Remember that the title is “Aliens,” plural, not singular, which suggests that the poor black woman, too, signifies as an Other. As such, McCullers presents a cautionary tale that suggests bigotry by whites against blacks in the United States, as represented in the automatically thoughtless and cruel behavior of the young white Southerner towards the African American woman on the bus, could very easily metamorphose into the horrifying conditions of anti-Semitism in Europe, particularly Germany, where a group of people—Jews, the Other—were rounded up into concentration and extermination camps.

The poor and working classes as well as Jews play a part in McCullers foregrounding and then erasing the space between self and Other. However, African Americans prove to be the most prominent group that she utilizes within this aesthetic. Although born and raised in Columbus, Georgia, Carson McCullers lived most of her adult life away from the South, only returning to visit, recover from ill health, or manage family issues. She preferred living in New York City and eventually settled in Nyack, New York, with her mother. However, the American South never left McCullers’s consciousness, and all of her novels are set in that region. In her unfinished autobiography, *Illumination and Night Glare*, McCullers admits to being homesick for her Georgia home, stating, “Columbus gave me the

same tranquility and calm that was so necessary to my work” (33). Yet, she considered the town to be “a backward Southern community” (16), and deemed the two years she spent writing *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, set in Georgia in the late 1930s, to be “two years of contemplation of certain hideous aspects of the South, such as the white people’s treatment of the [Negro]” (62). Virginia Spencer Carr discusses McCullers’s emotional quandary concerning her native South:

Carson had absorbed into her pores since childhood the nuances of the South, and she exuded at will with great fidelity—as well as through purposeful distortion—her youth and life in Georgia. Whereas she used to feel that she had to go back periodically to freshen her ambivalent feelings about the South, . . . [h]er mother had a way of keeping the South—with its absurdities and incongruities—in front of Carson far more effectively than Carson did through actual visits. (*The Lonely Hunter* 419)

McCullers acknowledged, though, that in New York, racial discrimination could also be seen, citing the difficulty her friend, African American writer Richard Wright, had in finding suitable housing in the city for his family. McCullers writes, “As usual there were no decent places for [Negroes] to live” (*Illumination* 62). The difficulties encountered by blacks in the South specifically, and the United States in general, proved to be a paramount social concern for McCullers, as can be seen in a number of her literary works, but she worried that true racial change in America would take a very long time to achieve. She declares, “The ghettos must be abolished and

decent housing built in their stead. . . . This takes education & the [Negro] becomes more & more aware of this, but this unfortunately, will take years of effort and I along with millions of [Negroes] feel time is running out" (65). Therefore, we can see that McCullers chose to raise the consciousness of her readers to the struggles with which blacks lived in the American South, a place of blatant segregation and racial violence. Her works, especially her final novel, *Clock Without Hands*, are enriched by an understanding of events prior to the time in which they are set.

Most Americans think of Jim Crow as the system of racial segregation. Historian Leon Litwack asserts that "segregation . . . came to be linked to white fears of black aggression and social equality" (8). But Jim Crow meant more than segregation. It represented the systematic (and legal) disfranchisement of African Americans. According to Litwack, "[b]ecause the issue of political participation remained linked in the white mind with black assertiveness and social equality" (7), blacks were denied their fundamental American right: to vote. Further, most African Americans were relegated to live and work in rural areas because whites held the higher paying industrial jobs. Therefore, blacks represented an "extreme case of poverty." In fact, "African-Americans in the South were bound as fast to the land of debt, ignorance, and intimidation as they had been by slavery itself" (Kennedy 19).

The system of Jim Crow in the South, along with the racial prejudice and discrimination throughout the nation, virtually silenced black voices in this country. They became methodically marginalized on every front, socially, politically, and

economically. The constant threat of violence further contributed to their systematized silence. In *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, Cheryl Glenn writes that “the dominant group in a social hierarchy renders ‘inarticulate’ subordinate or muted groups (any of the traditionally disenfranchised) and excludes them from the formulation, validation, and circulation of meaning” (25). In the system of Jim Crow, the dominant group was white, and the muted group was black. Most certainly, African Americans, as the disenfranchised group, became silenced and invalid through the Jim Crow structure. Glenn further equates voice with power:

In ancient times, speech was perceived as a gift of the gods and thus as a distinguishing characteristic of humans; therefore, speech became the authorized medium of culture and power. . . . Little wonder, then, that speaking or speaking out continues to signal power, liberation, culture, or civilization itself. That seeming obverse, silence, signals nothingness. (3)

Blacks lacked individual and collective power because they had been silenced by a system of bigotry, discrimination, and violence.

In his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. DuBois asserted, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line,—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” (17). DuBois’s proclamation proved prophetic with the dissolution of British, Dutch, German, and French colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean and their subsequent nationhood, with the violence and corruption that naturally occurs

with the freeing of peoples from systemic political oppression. Blacks in the United States, however, continued under Jim Crow well beyond the mid-twentieth century. Some scholars and activists, in fact, argue that such discrimination, while not officially codified as it was in McCullers's time, exists in this country today. In any event, systemic racial bigotry and violence continued through the time McCullers wrote her literary pieces, and a number of her works illuminate for readers the social conditions of African Americans in America and how they tried to live within the strictures of racial prejudice and segregation.

Margarita G. Smith, younger sister of Carson McCullers, declares in her editor's note in *The Mortgaged Heart* that a number of McCullers's short stories "should be referred to as 'exercises,' in deference to the author. Whatever they are called, these examples of her early work are most interesting in their own right and are amazing for one so young" (4). One of these exercises to which Smith refers is "Untitled Piece," a rather long and somewhat rambling reflection piece about 20-year-old Andrew Leander, who returns to Georgia after having fled three years prior. Written long before her novels and told mostly in flashback, McCullers offers glimpses of future characterizations of Mick and Harry Minowitz as well as making Andrew a male form of Frankie Addams. The tale involves specific memories of Andrew's childhood and adolescence; however, the story takes on a racial tenor near the end, when he and the black maid, Vitalis, have sex. According to Robert Phillips in his brief analysis of this story,

Andrew Leander seems a male Frankie. . . . [a]nd Berenice Sadie Brown has somehow transmogrified into a younger black named Vitalis. In his attempt to become joined to something, Andrew commits an act of unpremeditated miscegenation with Vitalis, then flees the town in guilt. His one act of union and love has forced his separation and fear. (174)

While Phillips's somewhat flippant analysis can be read as correct in that Andrew resembles a male Frankie and Vitalis is, in fact, a black maid in the Leander household, he neglects to interrogate the social and historical significance of Andrew and Vitalis's caring relationship and ultimate sexual act. In the tale, McCullers describes the way white children viewed their black maids: as mother figures, women who offered comfort and advice, food when hungry, and company when lonely. More importantly, most of these African American women, who worked long hours to make a home for their white charges, genuinely cared for the children, and the children loved their black servants in return. Such affectionate relationships eventually had to change, however, when the children became adults, for white adults were expected to adhere to the constraints of Jim Crow segregation. That is, they could no longer treat the black maids as mothers, as loving human beings. Rather, whites distanced themselves emotionally as well as physically; thus, Jim Crow bigotry, which included the unwritten rule that a white adult must never touch a black person, became the social norm for both whites and blacks. In McCullers's story, Vitalis cares for, feeds, and generally supervises Andrew and his

two sisters, just as real black maids did with white middle-class children. The fact that the children in the story are motherless further enhances Vitalis's role as a mother figure. However, Andrew's sexual relation with Vitalis symbolizes the white male privilege of the planter class of the antebellum South. It is well known and documented that many white plantation owners regularly raped their black female slaves. While it is true that Andrew does not rape Vitalis, McCullers indicates that such a situation—the miscegenation that Phillips speaks of—hovers over both young people. Andrew thinks to himself, "It wasn't him and it wasn't her. It was the thing in both of them" (101). Such a thought may be interpreted as both young people not being in control of their emotions or sexual urges. Yet, the fact that Andrew is white and Vitalis black adds a critical racial dimension to the situation, such that the "thing in both of them" can be construed as that historical cloud of white racial superiority that permits a white man to have sex with an African American woman. Further, Andrew thinks, "This had never been in his mind. But it had been there waiting and had crept up and smothered his thoughts" (102). The term "this," which refers to a white man having sex with a black woman—miscegenation—signifies one of the ever present race problems in the South: the paradoxical behavior on the part of whites, where their children may be loved and cared for by black women, but white adults cannot touch other blacks or consider them as equals. Moreover, white fear and disgust surrounding miscegenation, so graphically portrayed in Faulkner's *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, proves to be as strong in McCullers's story, if not as horrific as in Faulkner's tales, in that

Andrew runs away from Georgia to the North: "He was lost lost and it seemed to him that the end had surely come" (102). Andrew knows he can no longer treat Vitalis as he once did, for now he is a man, and as a white adult male, Andrew must not, cannot, care for the black maid. Thus, as a Southern seventeen-year-old male, Andrew comprehends the implication of having sex with a black woman. While miscegenation frequently occurred in antebellum times, it was never officially accepted as socially proper behavior. Despite Vitalis's reassurance to him that nobody will ever know about their sexual encounter, Andrew cannot risk having people discover his deed of miscegenation. More importantly, however, he cannot abide himself for having committed what he considers to be a racially abhorrent act. Therefore, he runs away—certainly an adolescent response to trouble—so that he will not have to face the consequences of his actions. Andrew's innocence has vanished; therefore, he flees the South and only attempts to return three years later. Yet, at the end of the story, after having gotten drunk in a restaurant, he does not get back on the bus headed for home. Instead, he asks a stranger where he might find a place to stay for the night. And then he asks the same stranger, "Will you tell me the name of this place?" (103). Will he stay where he currently is or return home? Ever the Modernist writer, McCullers leaves readers to answer this for themselves.

"Untitled Piece" offers some insight into the white fear of miscegenation that was so prominent in the Jim Crow South of McCullers's time. McCullers illustrates the contradictory nature of black and white relationships. She creates Vitalis to be a kind, good-natured woman who loves the Leander children. Andrew and his

siblings, in turn, care for Vitalis. Their living situation—a black maid caring for the home and children of white employers—represents typical Southern middle-class values. Yet, when Andrew and Vitalis have sex, everything changes. In a trite but true way, he becomes a man through the sexual act. But in social and racial terms, he has committed a great social sin. In his discussion of Frankie Addams and race in “‘Somehow Caught’: Race and Deferred Sexuality in McCullers’s *The Member of the Wedding*,” Chad Jewett asserts that in a number of Southern novels, adolescents like Frankie begin “to understand the full weight of the social hierarchy on [their] whiteness, a realization often linked with puberty as a sort of end of racial innocence” (96). In the case of Andrew Leander, he not only loses his innocence by having sex with Vitalis, but he also loses the social protection of childhood. As a child, he could love Vitalis as a mother, but as an adult white male, he cannot love her as a woman. Nor can he touch her because of the strictures of Jim Crow. In this story, McCullers exposes some of the racial codes of the South, allowing readers to contemplate the human cost of living within such a socially and racially schizophrenic culture.

The novel that most directly centers on the racial problems in the South also proves to be McCullers’s least successful literary work, *Clock Without Hands*. She began writing the novel ten years before it was published in 1961; however, she also composed it during the decade when she was most physically ill. McCullers suffered from rheumatic fever, a number of strokes, breast cancer, and other debilitating illnesses that left her partially paralyzed. Further, she drank heavily, which

contributed to her fragile health. Most critics argue that the novel is about dying and death, for J. T. Malone, diagnosed with leukemia, struggles to save his soul and accept that his death is imminent. However, Malone is only one of four major characters in the story. Jester Clane and Sherman Pew represent two seventeen-year-old boys; Jester is white, while Pew is a black man with slate blue eyes, which indicates that one of his parents is white. Judge Fox Clane, Jester's 85-year-old grandfather, rounds out the list of major characters. The action concerning Jester, Sherman, and Judge Clane focuses on race, lynching, and civil rights so that, ultimately, McCullers's novel proves to be her strong commentary on racism, racial violence, and the burgeoning Civil Rights movement in the South. Because *Clock Without Hands* includes a number of plots, subplots, and major and minor characters, the analysis of this novel will focus solely on the racial issues found in the text.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, J. T. Malone, the dying man in the novel, is an anti-Semite. He regularly harks back to the old saw that Jews are to blame for his problems. Malone believes that "Jew grinds" prevented him from being successful in medical school (7). Moreover, he appears to be a bigot in that he "automatically used the harsh term *bad nigger*" to refer to Sherman Pew, the "colored boy" with blue eyes who "had a bleak, violent look" (11). Here, McCullers's use of "automatically" is key to understanding race relations in the South, for such bigotry was inculcated in whites from the time they were born so that labeling blacks in terms of "good nigger" or "bad nigger" became an unconscious thought

process. Further, Sherman accidentally bumps into Malone, “steadied himself but did not budge, and it was Malone who stepped back a pace” (11), a circumstance that demonstrates a racial role reversal in that whites held the expectation that blacks were to acquiesce in all things, including stepping “back a pace” when colliding with a white person.

The fact that Sherman does not follow this unwritten code corroborates Malone’s opinion that Sherman is, indeed, a “bad nigger.” However, after Sherman moves into a house in the white section of town and the local White Citizens’ Council meets in Malone’s drug store to plan how to deal with such an affront, Malone refuses to fire bomb Sherman’s home. As someone who is “[n]o Ku Kluxer,” Malone admits to Judge Clane that he would not like to live “next door to a Nigra,” as the Judge phrases it (219). Yet, when the group of white citizens agrees to bomb Sherman’s house, Malone sees “the weaknesses of these ordinary people, their little uglinesses,” and he experiences an epiphany: “No, none of them were leading citizens” (222). Malone begins to see them as racial bigots. Despite Judge Clane’s declaration that these white men are “defenders of our race,” Malone refuses to commit violence, suggesting instead that they talk with Sherman. The vigilantes ignore him, however, and Malone draws the paper with the X on it, which means he must attack Sherman’s house. At this point Malone directly refuses to do so:

‘Gentlemen.’ Looking around the drugstore, Malone realized there were few gentlemen there. But he went on. ‘Gentlemen, I am too near death to sin, to murder. . . . I don’t want to endanger my soul.’

Everybody looked at him as though he had gone stark raving crazy. . . .

‘What is all this talk about soul?’ asked Bennie Weems in a loud voice.

Pinioned by shame, Malone repeated, ‘My immortal soul.’ . . .

‘What the fuck is an immortal soul?’ Bennie Weems said.

‘I don’t know,’ Malone said. ‘But if I have one, I don’t want to lose it.’ (225)

Curiously, the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens’ Councils were comprised of white Christian people, yet they committed extreme violence against those they deemed as Other, especially African Americans. The assembly that meets in Malone’s drug store exemplifies those two groups, and like their real-life counterparts, they show no compunction in bombing an innocent black man’s home. Only Malone proves to be the conscience of this collection of white men, for when Judge Clane argues that the group as a whole should do the bombing, not just a single man, Malone responds, “‘But it is the same thing. Whether one person does it or a dozen, it’s the same thing if it’s murder’” (225). Despite his adamant refusal to do harm to Sherman, another man volunteers to do the job, and he does so successfully by blowing up the house with Sherman in it.

Readers may very well ask if Malone does, in fact, save his soul. True, he refuses to commit violence against Sherman Pew, and he suffers because of his decision. Those pillars of the community—the men who planned the bombing—

subsequently shun Malone, and despite having done the right thing by refusing to kill, Malone believes he suffers from being ostracized. He broods on this:

At first Malone cared. When he saw that Bennie Weems had taken his trade to Whelan's and that Sheriff McCall did not drink his customary cokes at the pharmacy, he cared. In the front of his mind he said, "To hell with Bennie Weems; to hell with the sheriff." But deep down he worried. Had that night at the drugstore jeopardized the good will of the pharmacy and a sale for the good will? Was it worth taking the stand he did at that meeting? Malone wondered and worried and still he did not know. (235)

Notice that the first sentence indicates Malone cares, but that in contemplating the situation, he ends up merely wondering and worrying. Eventually, Malone lies dying in his bed. After listening to Judge Clane's chaotic and confused radio denunciation of the Supreme Court's decision regarding school integration—*Brown v. Board of Education*—where, rather than criticizing the decision, the old man accidentally recites President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Malone's wife says to him, "I don't know what he was talking about. . . . What happened?" to which Malone responds, "Nothing, darling. . . . Nothing that was not a long time in the making" (241). At this point, readers may believe that Malone has seen the light regarding the racial problems in the South, with its lynchings and bombings, segregation, and Jim Crow laws.

It certainly appears that Malone has changed his opinions about racial prejudice. After all, he refused to murder Sherman Pew and economically and emotionally suffered from being blackballed by the white businessmen of the town. His final comment indicates that he apparently approves of school integration. However, after telling his wife that the Supreme Court decision was inevitable, he thinks to himself, "What did it matter to him if the Supreme Court was integrating schools? Nothing mattered to him" (241). In this sense, we see that for Malone, dying is the only thing of import anymore, especially since he passes away within minutes of his thought about integration. Undoubtedly, McCullers wished to show Malone as a changed man and that he saved his soul when he refused to commit murder to defend the white race; her story can certainly be interpreted as such. And yet, it begs the question: why didn't Malone warn Sherman of the impending bombing? Perhaps Sherman would have ignored Malone, for certainly, Sherman intentionally moved into a house in the white section as a political statement against racism. However, as a truly changed man, wouldn't Malone have done the right thing by at least telling Sherman of the White Citizen's Council's plan? Perhaps this is the point McCullers chooses to make in her novel. That is, she wrote Malone as a complex character, one who struggled with his conscience and vacillated between doing right and wrong. By creating Malone in this fashion, McCullers not only made him a more complicated human being, but she also revealed the difficulty in choosing the correct path, especially when it concerned the race question in the South. Did Malone save his soul? McCullers refuses to tell us.

While *Clock Without Hands* can be read as a treatise on death, it also can be interpreted as a social commentary about race relations in the South. Interestingly, McCullers fashioned an allegory of sorts, with Judge Clane signifying the Old South, J. T. Malone the New South, and Jester and Sherman as representatives of the Civil Rights South. Eighty-five-year-old Judge Clane believes in the power of the white race. When he talks about white superiority to Malone, the judge declares, “You see, J. T., it is a matter of pride. You and I have our pride, the pride of our blood, the pride in our descendants” (220). Such a belief harkens back to the Old South creed of “ancestral legitimacy,” as James C. Cobb terms it in his book, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (392). Cobb asserts that the early Southern planter class “propounded the merits of slavery” and believed “slavery was a ‘natural’ outgrowth of human inequality and that as a slave society the South was much closer to nature than the cruel, exploitive, mercenary, and competitive industrial society of the North” (46). In essence, those who held slaves romanticized their role in perpetuating the peculiar institution, “not as a contemporary reality, but as they imagined it had been when the right people with the right values had presided over it” (46-47). Such a belief in white supremacy typifies the Old South—the antebellum South. Judge Clane, in turn, exemplifies this Old South creed of white racial superiority. He regularly pronounces black men guilty in his court, despite evidence that supports their innocence. He declares, “The institution of slavery was the very cornerstone and pillar of the cotton economy” (160), and he concocts a scheme for Civil War reparations, not for the descendants of slaves but for Southern whites, the

white people who lost their property—their slaves—because of Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and General Sherman and the Yankees’ plundering of the South. And the most clear example of Judge Clane as a metaphor for the Old South comes in his statement: “White is white and black is black—and never the two shall meet if I can prevent it” (40). Despite the fact that the South lost the Civil War and was “reconstructed,” Judge Clane holds on to the Old South beliefs that forced the war to occur in the first place.

J. T. Malone, on the other hand, personifies the New South, the post-Civil War and Reconstruction era that lasted into the mid-twentieth century, a time known as the Jim Crow South. During this period of Southern history, white supremacy became codified in Jim Crow laws. *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the 1896 Supreme Court decision that legally sanctioned segregation at the state level, ushered in the Jim Crow period. This “separate but equal” statute remained in effect until the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision became law, the very Supreme Court decision cited in *Clock Without Hands*. During this time, Southern whites created White Citizens’ Councils to ensure that segregation was maintained. If an African American broke the written or unwritten law of Jim Crow, these councils often used violence as punishment for such a violation as well as a warning to other blacks not to break Jim Crow laws. One of the most infamous examples of such violence concerns fourteen-year-old Emmett Till, an African American Chicago native who violated the unwritten rule that blacks must not show disrespect to whites, especially black men towards white women. While visiting Mississippi, Till

allegedly whistled at or spoke to a white woman, an act considered a racial outrage. Because he broke the New South code of black behavior, Till was kidnapped by two white men who beat him severely. One of the men shot Till, and then both “used barbed wire to tie a seventy-five pound cotton gin fan around [Till’s] neck before tossing his body into the Tallahatchie River” (Cobb, *The South* 40).

In McCullers’s novel, Malone must confront his own conscience concerning racial violence towards Sherman Pew, the young black man who has moved into a home in the white section of town. Malone admits that to bomb Sherman’s home is to commit murder, and he refuses to go along with the other white men who want to teach Sherman a lesson about violating Jim Crow. Yet, despite his refusal to commit violence, Malone proves to be a racist and anti-Semite, especially his “automatically” thinking of the term “*bad nigger*” when first he encounters Sherman (11). His conscience is pricked by the thought of racial violence, but he does nothing to stop it other than refuse to do the bombing himself. Though he will not commit a lynching, Malone continues to follow the Jim Crow creed of white supremacy.

The two youngest characters, Jester Clane and Sherman Pew, signify a distinct shift in Southern racial politics in that both young men choose to confront racism: Jester decides to become a Civil Rights attorney, while Sherman chooses to martyr himself for the Civil Rights cause. Throughout the novel, Jester struggles to figure out what to do with his life, and as an orphan being raised by his grandfather, Judge Clane, Jester desires to know the reason behind his father’s suicide, intuiting that by doing so, he will discover his life’s purpose. As a seventeen-year-old boy,

Jester also begins to see the South in a new light. He questions the laws and rules of Jim Crow and does not understand the desire for whites to enforce segregation. In fact, he tells Judge Clane, "I can't see why colored people and white people shouldn't mix as citizens" (29). The key terms here are "mix" and "citizens." As a young man growing up in the mid-1950s, Jester has seen the racial violence and inequity in the South. Thus, he questions the very existence of the South's social imbalance based on race. Whether he means "mix" to denote miscegenation or simply having blacks and whites together in school and other social settings, his use of the word "citizens" certainly implies that blacks should be treated as equals, as citizens of the United States. Later, when Jester overhears the white men plotting to bomb Sherman's house, he tries to warn the young black man, imploring him to leave the house. Sherman responds, "Serious? Why should they bomb me? Me who is not even noticed" (227). At this point, Sherman relates that he tried breaking a Jim Crow law by sitting in a white's-only area of the dime store, much like the Civil Rights activists at Jim Crow lunch counters. But rather than stand his ground against the racial code, Sherman backed down and merely asked for a glass of water. Because of this, Sherman must demonstrate to himself and the world that he is not a coward. Instead, he chooses to stay in the house, knowing it will be bombed and that he will most likely die. As Jester tries to convince him to escape certain death, Sherman continues to pound the piano keys as he thinks to himself, "*I have done something, done something, done something. And fear only buoyed his elation*" (228). Sherman

fulfills his destiny: he dies in the fiery conflagration of his bombed home, a martyr for the cause of Civil Rights in the South.

Angry and devastated, Jester decides to avenge Sherman's death by killing the bomber. He takes Sammy Lank, the poor white man who threw the bombs into Sherman's home, up into his plane with the intention of shooting him. Sammy confesses to killing Sherman, and because he is terrified of flying, he prattles on about his life, how poor he is, how he and his wife tried to earn prize money by having quintuplets, like the parents of the Dionne quintuplets in Canada. Ultimately, Sammy admits that he amounts to nothing in life. He says, "I'll be nothing but Sammy Lank" (233). Here, Jester sees the pitiful humanity in Sammy Lank, despite the gruesome murder he committed. At this point, young Jester Clane abandons his plan for revenge because "[t]he whole earth from a great distance means less than one long look into a pair of human eyes. Even the eyes of the enemy" (234). In the characters of Jester and Sherman, we see two young people actively resisting the racism established during the Old South and codified in the New South era. The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was, for the most part, fueled by American youth, black and white, and both Sherman and Jester symbolize those young people who, through nonviolence, challenged the system of racial bigotry in the American South. While some critics like Louis Rubin argue that "*Clock Without Hands* was an artistic disaster" (138), they cannot ignore McCullers's desire to bridge the racial gap between blacks and whites of the South. As a social critique, it proves to be an important work in the canon of Southern literature.

The most important manner in which McCullers erases the space between self and Other involves her treatment of the African American characters in her works. In his review of McCullers's first novel, Richard Wright proclaimed,

To me the most impressive aspect of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* is the astonishing humanity that enables a white writer, for the first time in Southern fiction, to handle Negro characters with as much ease and justice as those of her own race. This cannot be accounted for stylistically or politically; it seems to stem from an attitude toward life which enables Miss McCullers to rise above the pressures of her environment and embrace white and black humanity in one sweep of apprehension and tenderness. (18)

One of McCullers's most memorable black characters, Berenice Sadie Brown in *The Member of the Wedding*, succinctly expresses her desire for racial equality. When she, F. Jasmine, and little John Henry play Holy Lord God—a game in which each tells her/his wishes for a different world, as if they were God, a deity that could grant these very wishes—Berenice announces, “First, there would be no separate colored people in the world, but all human beings would be light brown color with blue eyes and black hair” (96), a clear reference not only to integration but a genetic mixing of all the races. The narrator continues with Holy Lord God Berenice's declaration: “There would be no colored people and no white people to make the colored people feel cheap and sorry all through their lives. No colored people, but all human men and ladies and children as one loving family on the earth” (97). And

Berenice goes beyond racial equality between blacks and whites, asserting that in her capacity as God, there would be “[n]o killed Jews and no hurt colored people. No war and no hunger in the world” (97). Through the character of Berenice, McCullers offers readers a world of peace and societies where all people—children, women, and men—are created as one race and thus treated equally.

As genuinely kind and egalitarian as Berenice is, the most dedicated and prophetic black character in McCullers’s oeuvre proves to be Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, a man devoted to challenging the racial bigotry endemic in Southern society. For example, Dr. Copeland recalls how whites treated him in his youth as well as an older man:

When he was younger it was ‘Boy’—but now it was ‘Uncle.’ ‘Uncle, run down to that filling station on the corner and send me a mechanic.’ A white man in a car had called out those words to him not long ago. ‘Boy, give me a hand with this.’—‘Uncle, do that.’ And he would not listen, but would walk on with the dignity in him and be silent. (84)

Here, McCullers points to the privilege exercised by whites and their blatant bigotry towards an African American man, but in this case, that man is a physician, a complexity she adds to further reveal the extent to which racial prejudice existed in the South. Additionally, Dr. Copeland desires above all things to improve his people as a race. When we meet Copeland, he is an old man suffering from tuberculosis. Yet, he still works as a doctor in the black community; as an African American, Jim

Crow law stipulates that he cannot treat whites, nor can he work in white clinics or hospitals. An atheist, he tries but fails to convince his children that God does not exist; however, Copeland does “impress upon them . . . that their lives were holy and for each one of them there was this real true purpose” (80). This sentiment, written by a white Southern author, proves revolutionary in that the majority of white Southerners in the late 1930s believed blacks were racially inferior, not quite human, and thus not holy beings at all. McCullers certainly risked alienating her readers with her Copeland character; instead, her novel became a bestseller, an indication that some audiences were ready to read racially charged material. Unfortunately for Dr. Copeland, his children do not follow his instructions to speak Standard English as a means to improve their standing in the community as well as to be models for their fellow blacks. Ultimately, Dr. Copeland’s heavy-handedness in bringing up his children and admonishing them to advance themselves merely drives an emotional wedge between them. He reflects, “Sometimes he thought that he had talked so much in the years before to his children and they had understood so little that now there was nothing at all to say” (82-83). Overall, Dr. Copeland succeeds merely in pushing his children away, so much so that only his daughter, Portia, regularly visits with him.

Throughout the novel, Dr. Copeland continues to speak proper English and model upstanding behavior for his people. Every Christmas, he hosts a party in which black community members donate clothing and food for the poor. He also judges a writing contest at each of these parties, where high school students write

about a particular subject, such as “My Ambition: How Can I Better the Position of the Negro Race in Society” (182). However, Dr. Copeland laments the lack of mental and emotional energy spent in composing the essays, and more importantly the students’ ambivalence to their lower place in the racial hierarchy of the South:

The young people would not think. They wrote only about their ambitions and omitted the last part of the title altogether. Only one point was of some significance. Nine out of the lot of twenty-five began with the sentence, ‘I do not want to be a servant.’ After that they wished to fly airplanes, or be prizefighters, or preachers or dancers. One girl’s sole ambition was to be kind to the poor. (183-184)

Here, McCullers points to the very real situation of black employment, for at the time of the novel’s publication, most African Americans in the South were forced to work for whites as servants, maids, gardeners, or laborers. Additionally, she exposes the malaise of the black community. Much like the mill workers who unquestioningly accept their powerlessness in a capitalistic society, Dr. Copeland’s children and the black community also appear to resign themselves to their station in life, believing they are inferior people in a world of white privilege.

While McCullers creates Dr. Copeland as one way to interrogate bigotry towards blacks in the South, she also utilizes him to expose racial violence within that region. Willie, the harmonica-playing youngest son of Dr. Copeland, gets into a fight over a woman, an altercation in which Willie cuts his opponent’s throat. The

man lives, but Willie is convicted and sentenced to prison and hard labor. Later, Portia learns that Willie has been assigned to a chain gang. Several weeks pass without Willie writing his weekly letter to his sister. Eventually, Portia discovers that, while on the chain gang, one of Willie's prison friends talked back to a white prison guard, while Willie and another friend tried to escape. Portia tells her father that the guards took all three young black men back to the chain gang camp and placed them in an ice-cold room. She continues:

'They put Willie and them boys in this room like ice . . . and their feets swolled up and they lay there and struggle on the floor and holler out. And nobody come. They hollered there for three days and three nights and nobody come. . . . They put our Willie and them boys in this here ice-cold room. There were a rope hanging down from the ceiling. They taken their shoes off and tied their bare feets to this rope. Willie and them boys lay there with their backs on the floor and their feets in the air. And their feets swolled up and they struggle on the floor and holler out. It were ice-cold in the room and their feets froze. Their feets swolled up and they hollered for three nights and three days. And nobody come.' (254)

Stunned by the news, Dr. Copeland proclaims that he does not understand. Portia goes on to say that the guards finally go into the room to check on the three black men. They rush the young men to the prison health ward, where it is discovered that Willie has contracted gangrene, and "[t]hey sawed off both our Willie's feet.

Buster Johnson lost one foot and the other boy got well. But our Willie—he crippled for life now. Both his feet sawed off” (255). An event like this may seem beyond belief, but many episodes of racial torture and violence occurred during the Jim Crow era. Dr. Copeland tries to think of someone who can help Willie: “He could think of no white person of power in all the town who was both brave and just. He thought of every lawyer, every judge, every public official with whose name he was familiar—but the thought of each one of these white men was bitter in his heart” (260).

The fact that Dr. Copeland looks to white men for assistance shows the utter powerlessness of African Americans during this period in Southern history. As a physician, he should have possessed ample authority to seek justice for his son. But as a black man, Dr. Copeland holds no power in the white world. The final terrible insult comes when Dr. Copeland attempts to speak with the Superior Court judge and is prevented from doing so by a white deputy. When Copeland insists he must see the judge, the deputy hits him in the face, and two other white men drag the good doctor down the stairs and throw him into a police wagon. The deputy declares, “That’s the trouble with this country. . . . These damn biggity niggers like him” (261). When Dr. Copeland arrives at the jail, he becomes enraged and tries fighting the jailers, but they beat him with their billy clubs, drag him by his feet to the cell, and throw him inside, where “[s]omeone behind kicked him in the groin and he fell to his knees on the floor” (262). Once again, it may seem as if the plight of Dr. Copeland comes solely from McCullers’s imagination; however, many Southern

white law enforcement personnel used their official power to beat, torture, and lynch black prisoners. For instance, Bull Connor, the Commissioner of Public Safety in Birmingham, Alabama, was notorious for his use of violence against African Americans as a means to both punish and warn them. He utilized beatings and, most infamously, ordered that high-powered fire hoses be used against black people, including children, during Civil Rights marches in that city. Taylor Branch, who chronicled the early years of the Civil Rights movement in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63*, writes that during one particular march in Birmingham on May 4, 1963, those fire hoses did not stop the peaceful marchers. Therefore, Connor ordered K-9 units to attack them. Branch states that the dogs bit a number of marchers, some so severely they needed to be taken to the hospital (760). As a white Southern woman, McCullers clearly understood the terrible risk a black man undertook to confront white law enforcement, and she heartrendingly expresses this risk in her characterization of Dr. Copeland's experience in seeking some sense of justice for his maimed son.

In this section of the novel, McCullers also reveals the quandary under which African Americans lived in the South. For blacks to speak out against the white guards was to put their very lives in danger, but to do nothing meant the perpetuation of injustice. Dr. Copeland follows Portia and Highboy to the Kelly boardinghouse, where she works as the kitchen maid. When Mick inquires as to what will happen to the guards who maimed Willie and Buster Johnson, Portia responds, "Nothing us could do would make no difference. Best thing us can do is

keep our mouth shut” (257). Portia understands the lack of power she and her race possess, and she is fully aware that to speak out against the white guards would be extremely dangerous; thus, she believes the best route to take is to do nothing. But Mick, a white girl, exclaims that she would kill the guards, to which Portia responds with precisely the thing Dr. Copeland despises as an atheist and man who has worked his entire life to improve the conditions under which his people live: she tells Mick that the guards will suffer in Hell for their actions. Portia’s Christian response points to the difference between her black community and Dr. Copeland: they believe in the redemptive power of Christ to bring them justice, while the doctor does not. He declares earlier in the novel, ““The Negro race of its own accord climbs up on the cross on every Friday”” (77), which signifies Dr. Copeland’s criticism of his African American community in that they choose to rely on the hereafter for justice rather than do anything in the present to seek justice and improve their lot. And once Dr. Copeland is released from jail, Portia laments, ““Father, don’t you know that ain’t no way to help our Willie? Messing around at a white folks’ courthouse? Best thing us can do is keep our mouth shut and wait”” (263).

Such a sentiment is later expressed by two of the leading African American citizens. When Jake Blount and John Singer visit Willie at Dr. Copeland’s home, the local black pharmacist, Marshall Nicholls, and a postal worker, John Roberts, speak with Jake about the difficult situation concerning Willie. Nicholls says, ““Naturally we have discussed this matter *extensively*. And without doubt as members of the

colored race here in this free country of America we are anxious to do our part toward extending *amicable* relationships” (292-293). In his statement, Nicholls implies through the use of “we” that the leading black citizens have decided that maintaining some semblance of peace with the white community must supersede seeking true justice for Willie’s permanent impairment. Nicholls continues,

As we were remarking a while ago, it is important not to *impair* these amicable relations but to promote them in all ways earnestly possible. We members of the colored race must strive in all ways to uplift our citizens. The Doctor in yonder has strived in every way. But sometimes it has seemed to me like he has not recognized fully enough certain elements of the different races and the situation.

(294)

In this latter statement, Nicholls implies that peace with the white community must be maintained at all cost—at the cost of Willie’s legs—and he further criticizes Dr. Copeland’s attempt to speak with the Superior Court judge, an action which has upset the “balance” of race relations in the town. Such a situation resembles the conflict in the 1930s and 1940s between the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which advocated working through the existing judicial system to effect positive change for African Americans, and the Committee [later changed to Congress] of Racial Equality (CORE), that promoted using “demonstrations to force the desegregation of restaurants, theatres, and municipal bus lines” (Kennedy 768). Once again, McCullers reveals to readers not

only the power that whites wielded over blacks, but also how the African American community as a whole struggled with different factions to effect positive change.

Of all the modes in which McCullers erases space between self and Other, surely the discussion between Dr. Copeland and Jake Blount about race relations and capitalism signifies one of the finest and most prescient passages in Modernist literature. In the original outline of the novel, McCullers intended for both men to come to an understanding regarding the manner in which the plight of African Americans and the economic injustices of the working classes would be brought to the attention of Americans, particularly the United States government. She writes in her outline, published in *Illumination and Night Glare*:

The two men are together in [Dr. Copeland's] bedroom. . . . Jake is drunk and Dr. Copeland is almost out of his head with fever. Yet their dialogue comes from the marrow of their inner selves. They both lapse into the rhythmic, illiterate vernacularisms of their early childhood. 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. (179)

While neither man speaks in the “illiterate vernacularisms of their early childhood,” a distinct change from McCullers’s outline, each does voice beliefs that originate from his very heart and soul. Initially, Dr. Copeland orders Blount to leave his bedroom, for he distrusts any white man. But Blount simply sits down and waits.

Eventually, both talk for hours on end, “long past midnight” (296). Blount vehemently addresses the economic travails of white mill workers in “[t]he strangled South. The wasted South. The slavish South,” to which Dr. Copeland responds, “And the Negro people” (296), a phrase he must continually repeat to Blount, as the radical white man prefers to speak only of his beloved white laborers. Once again, McCullers uses Jake Blount to elucidate the terrible economic situation of the laboring class and Southern sharecroppers, and he does so clearly and without speaking in circles like he usually does. Moreover, though, he voices the idea that these laborers have been fed lies by the government: “I’m talking about the way that the truth has been hidden from the people. The things they have been told so they can’t see the truth. The poisonous lies. So they aren’t allowed to know” (297). However, when Dr. Copeland attempts to include the African Americans in the discussion, Blount interrupts him to continue his diatribe, much as any other white bigot would do to a black person. Soon, Dr. Copeland confronts Blount about “giving no attention to the very separate question of the Negro” (298); the word “separate” proves key here. Whereas both men believe in uplifting those who are downtrodden and oppressed, each believes the other’s cause is less important than his own. For Dr. Copeland, race problems are of paramount importance, whereas for Blount, social class issues trump race.

Their dialogue comes to a climax when both agree that action must be taken.

Blount exclaims:

‘The whole system of capitalistic democracy is—rotten and corrupt. There remain only two roads ahead. One: Fascism. Two: reform of the most revolutionary and permanent kind.’

‘And the Negro. Do not forget the Negro. So far as I and my people are concerned the South is Fascist now and always has been.’

‘Yeah.’ (299)

Here, both men seem agree, but it proves to be the sole time they do. While they conclude that action must take place for any positive change to occur in the South, they disagree on the means this action should take. Blount argues that chain letters should be utilized to spread the word of his revolution to the don’t-knows. At this point, their concordance begins to falter as Dr. Copeland snorts and says, “‘Don’t be childish! You cannot just go about talking. Chain letters indeed! Knows and don’t-knows!’” (301). And then Dr. Copeland admits that his entire life’s work to uplift his people has been a failure, an admission deeply felt by the sick old man:

‘I believed in the tongue instead of the fist. As an armor against oppression I taught patience and faith in the human soul. I know now how wrong I was. I have been a traitor to myself and to my people. All that is rot. Now is the time to act and to act quickly. Fight cunning with cunning and might with might.’ (301-302)

At this point, McCullers proves prophetic in that Dr. Copeland passionately proposes that his people gather in groups to demonstrate and protest. He asserts, “‘The most fatal thing a man can do is try to stand alone’” (302), an argument that proved to be

the foundation of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. But Copeland goes further, declaring, “In August of this year I plan to lead more than one thousand Negroes in this county on a march. A march to Washington. All of us together in one solid body” (303). Here, McCullers demonstrates an uncanny prescience, for in 1941, A. Philip Randolph organized a March on Washington as a reaction to President Franklin Roosevelt’s refusal to integrate the military on the eve of World War II. Historian David M. Kennedy writes that Randolph decided to make the demonstration not just about integration of the military but also about jobs for blacks in “defense industries” (766). In fact, two weeks before the scheduled march, over 100,000 blacks had signed up to participate in “his March on Washington Movement” (766). Roosevelt soon backed down and signed an executive order that effectively prohibited discrimination “in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin” (767). And, of course, in 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. lead his March on Washington as a demonstration of nonviolent direct action against racism and Jim Crow in the South particularly, and the United States as a whole.

Unfortunately for Dr. Copeland, Jake Blount disagrees with this type of action, arguing that it cannot possibly work. Instead, he suggests he pull Willie and Buster in a wagon while he talks about “the dialectics of capitalism—and show up all of its lies. I would explain so that everyone would understand why those boys’ legs were cut off. And make everyone who saw them *know*” (304). At this point, any amity and agreement they shared is shattered. Both men begin to argue, which ends in

Blount accusing the good doctor of being a “[s]hort-sighted bigot” and Copeland responding with “[w]hite . . . fiend” (305).

McCullers’s outline states that she planned to make Dr. Copeland and Jake Blount come to a deeply held understanding of each other’s beliefs and plans for local and national change. So why did she reverse the outcome of the discussion between these two characters? McCullers never answered this question, but it seems clear she chose to create a literary work that forced the issues to the forefront without offering any easy or pat answers. In other words, she erases the space between self and Other to illuminate the very real problems of economic disfranchisement of white laborers as well as the intrinsic racism and racial violence of the South, but she refused to “solve” those problems, choosing, instead, to use the two men’s dialogue to raise the consciousness of her readers and, hopefully, to plant seeds for change in their minds. In writing about *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, A. S. Knowles argues that authors like Steinbeck, William Saroyan, and McCullers “focused their attention upon the American lower classes, finding among them virtues of humor, courage, and sympathy that elevated them as human beings” (88). More importantly, though, Knowles rightly declares:

But Carson McCullers also felt distress at injustice, and so a major factor in her examination of the little people is a depiction of the economic and social oppression of the white worker and, especially, of the Negro. What sets her apart is her realization of the degree to which the white worker was a victim of his own apathy, and the

'Negro problem' a function of the Negro's inability to develop a consistent idea of himself and his goals. (89-90)

In fact, McCullers uses this approach in nearly all her works as a way to shed light on the social, economic, and racial problems so prominent in the South. In this way, her literary works exemplify American Modernism.

CONCLUSION

In 1939, W. H. Auden wrote an elegy upon the death of the Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, entitled "In Memory of W. B. Yeats (d. January 1939)." Comprised of three parts, Auden's poem signifies a distinct Modernist departure from the customary elegy, wherein the speaker laments for and grieves the deceased subject. Rather, Auden argues throughout that, as a person, Yeats did little in the way of effecting change in his native Ireland and that only Yeats's poetry possesses the power to make any positive alterations to the world. Part I describes the cold and frozen time of year when Yeats died, and Part II not only directly addresses Yeats and his weaknesses, but also his poetry as a means to create change. Part III seems more traditionally elegiac, in that Auden begins by asking the earth to accept Yeats into itself as "an honoured guest" (III.1), to accept the body of the poet "Emptied of its poetry" (III.4); however, Auden's language suddenly shifts to address the tension and anxiety of a world on the brink of war. In this section, Auden specifically describes Europe, which anticipates the start of war:

In the nightmare of the dark

All the dogs of Europe bark,

And the living nations wait,

Each sequestered in its hate;

Intellectual disgrace

Stares from every human face,

And the seas of pity lie

Locked and frozen in each eye. (III.5-12)

Here, Auden places his elegy within time and space, for by 1939, Adolph Hitler's Nazi regime had annexed Austria and brought it into the Third Reich. Further, the nations of Great Britain and France signed an agreement with Hitler to allow Germany to annex the Sudetenland, the area where ethnic Germans lived in Czechoslovakia. And in the first months of 1939, when Auden composed his elegy, political rumors spread of Hitler's plan to invade Poland, a situation that caused deep consternation in France, Great Britain, and the United States. Auden was 32 years old when he wrote this poem, and although he was only seven years old at the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, he was old enough to have experienced the travesty of that conflagration and to remember when the Armistice was declared on November 11, 1918, and the Treaty of Versailles signed in 1919. As such, Auden could well recall the utter devastation of that terrible world war, and in 1939, his elegy reflects his personal fear and loathing of nations that seemed hell-bent on manufacturing war once again. Soon, though, the language in the final three stanzas of his elegy changes again, this time to reflect the influence of the poet to bring, if not peace, then at least some sense of healing or restorative energy to the world at large. Auden writes:

Follow, poet, follow right

To the bottom of the night,

With your unconstraining voice

Still persuade us to rejoice;
With the farming of a verse
Make a vineyard of the curse,
Sing of human unsuccess
In a rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of his days,
Teach the free man how to praise. (III.13-24)

Although Auden points to humanity's propensity to make conflict with itself—for nations to fight war after war after war—he also asserts that the poet possesses the voice of emotion, passion, and reason to expose the darkest parts of our nature and our world and, thus, to bring hope and healing to the human race.

Auden's friend and sometime housemate, Carson McCullers, addressed in her fiction the same concerns expressed in Auden's elegy to Yeats. Many of her works are framed by World War II, and all of her fiction deals with the problems of modernity itself: human isolation and alienation, the search for some measure of a genuine identity and purpose in life, and the social constructions of racism and classism that plagued the United States, particularly in the South. Thus, we can see McCullers's literary efforts reflected in Auden's elegy. Although she deals with human frailty and failure, her fiction proves to be her attempt to bring dignity to a

distressed humanity and to offer hope when despair seems to prevail. Ultimately, her writing shows her determination to expose modernity's difficulties and complexities.

Like her compatriot, Auden, who experimented with the content of the traditional elegy to craft a poem designed as social commentary, McCullers also employed a number of experimental approaches in her fiction, which certainly places her squarely within the Modernist tradition, whose hallmark was formal experimentation. In his elegy, Auden seems to have created a paean to the Modernist aesthetic of formal experimentation when he writes, "A few thousand will think of this day / As one thinks of a day when one did something slightly unusual" (l.28-29). Just as so many High Modernist poets, writers, and composers utilized experimentation in their works, so, too, did McCullers. In her first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, she created isolated chapters that were linked almost solely by characterization. Such a technique mirrored the fragmentation of the human personality engendered by the rush of social changes in modern society. Modernist works such as Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, John Dos Passos's *U.S.A. Trilogy*, and Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*—three High Modernist books—also used isolated and fragmented chapters in the same manner. And like Jean Toomer in *Cane*, Zora Neale Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, as well as the above-mentioned authors, McCullers crafted dialect as a device to differentiate characters and delineate social class distinctions. Moreover, McCullers generated fiction that prompted readers to participate in the creation of its meaning. By utilizing what has

become known as Ernest Hemingway's concept of the iceberg—the substance and meaning of the literary work lies below surface details—she wrote stories and novels that did not end with definitive, easily understood conclusions. Instead, McCullers fashioned her works so that the audience must decipher their meaning as well as their implications. Modernist writers like McCullers intentionally created their works so that they offered myriad interpretations, depending on each reader's frame of mind and experience at the time of the reading. McCullers also experimented with narrative voice, particularly in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, where readers can discern two different voices narrating the tale.

Most importantly, though, Carson McCullers utilized her love of music within a number of her fictional pieces. She often alluded to music, including Beethoven's *Eroica* and Mozart in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, jazz in *The Member of the Wedding*, classical music as well as contemporary tunes one might hear on the radio in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, the player piano and the singing of the chain gang in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, as well as Sherman Pew and Jester Clane playing the piano in *Clock Without Hands*. Some stories deal more directly with music, such as "Wunderkind," "Poldi," "Madame Zilensky and the King of Finland," and "Art and Mr. Mahoney." However, it is McCullers's use of musical forms in her fiction that distinguishes her within the Modernist tradition. In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, her very first novel, she utilized the fugue form to create balance and reinforce her Modernist themes of isolation, alienation, identity and purpose, and erasure of space between self and Other. However, as a true Modernist, she also demonstrated her

ability to violate this musical structure in the same novel so as to craft something new literarily. In other words, her first novel reflects the Modernist aesthetic of allowing readers to interpret the meaning of the work. While one scholar argues that her tale epitomizes the fugue form, another asserts that McCullers disrupted that very same form. Additionally, she used music as an objective correlative in *The Member of the Wedding*, as a means to accentuate young Frankie Addams's total frustration with her life. And in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, McCullers utilized the sonata form—exposition, development, and recapitulation—to enhance the theme of isolation, both geographical and personal. Of crucial importance is the recapitulation, for it must conclude the musical piece in its original key. As such, McCullers reinforces the dullness of that mill town where folks might as well just go and listen to the singing of the chain gang, a sentiment that bookends her novella. The recapitulation as well as the framing sentence emphasize that nothing will really change in the South. McCullers's use of these two techniques underpins the theme of repetitious isolation in this piece.

As a Modernist writer, McCullers focused on human isolation and alienation. All of her novels reflect these themes in the more traditional understanding of loneliness and separation from others. People suffer when isolation and alienation are thrust upon them by an impersonal, unfeeling society or through geographical remoteness. But McCullers utilized the theme of isolation in an original fashion: rather than treat it as a byproduct of an industrialized, modern world, McCullers reversed this concept so that her characters choose isolation, much like Auden

writes in his elegy, "And each in the cell of himself is almost convinced of his freedom" (I.27). Additionally, while she used self-imposed sequestration in a variety of forms, she did so in order to create grotesque figures on the order of Sherwood Anderson's grotesques, characters who convince themselves of their truth and live by that truth to their detriment. The young woman in "Court in the West Eighties" intentionally isolates herself from the rest of her apartment dwellers, deluding herself that her red-haired neighbor is someone he is not: a person who will help the young, starving couple next door. Further, McCullers's short story exposes modern urban isolation, where people prefer to protect themselves from the pain of life and those suffering around them by intentionally isolating themselves from others. Sequestration as sanctuary also plays a large role in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, in which we see Mick Kelly invent an "inside room" for herself. Here, she daydreams of becoming a composer and hides away from her family's economic stresses produced by the Great Depression. Mr. Addams in *The Member of the Wedding* also chooses to isolate himself from others, but mostly from his daughter, Frankie. In his character, McCullers explores the early and mid-twentieth century role of fatherhood. Despite being a widower, Mr. Addams elects to abdicate his duties as a father and allow the black maid, Berenice, to assume the role of mother and father to young Frankie.

Trauma serves as another literary vehicle for McCullers to investigate sequestration. In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Mick's younger brother, Bubber, experiences a terrible emotional ordeal when he believes he has killed a little girl.

And Mick further adds to his trauma by telling him he will be sent to prison and executed in the electric chair specially made for children. Seven-year-old Bubber, completely believing his older sister, purposefully goes inward, shutting himself off from all others, as a means by which to protect his already fragile psyche. His intentional isolation, however, sentences him to a life of utter loneliness. Finally, McCullers looks at sequestration through sociopathy in the character of Private Ellgee Williams in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. His sequestering tendencies prohibit him from living life to its fullest through communion with other people, which further augments his sociopathic behavior. Through these characters, McCullers crafts grotesque figures who intentionally choose to insulate themselves from others; they live their truth, convinced they are doing what is best for them, but they suffer loneliness from their self-imposed isolation.

Like isolation, alienation proves fertile ground for McCullers's literary exploration. A number of her characters either consciously or unconsciously alienate others. They behave in such a way that people prefer to shun them. Auden accurately addresses the consequences of alienation: "Intellectual disgrace / Stares from every human face, / and the seas of pity lie / Locked frozen in each eye" (III.9-12). Here, we can almost feel the icy stares of those who have experienced the off-putting behavior of someone. In McCullers's story, "Sucker," seventeen-year-old Pete emotionally pushes away his foster brother, Richard; however, Pete convinces himself that he did so unintentionally when, in fact, he knew that Richard, a sensitive boy, would react badly to Pete's hurtful words. The character of Pete

demonstrates McCullers's penchant for creating grotesque figures in that Pete convinces himself he didn't mean to hurt Richard, but readers know that he really did want to hurt his brother. The Filipino houseboy in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, Anacleto, purposefully antagonizes his boss, Major Morris Langdon, in the hope that Mrs. Langdon will eventually divorce her husband and leave with Anacleto in tow. As a grotesque character, however, Anacleto fails in his mission and merely alienates Major Langdon, along with the rest of the men on the Army base.

McCullers explores scapegoating as alienation in her Jewish character from *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*, Morris Finestein. In this novella, McCullers points to the ease in which negative stereotypes are created, fostered, perpetrated, and promulgated. Finally, she investigates alienation in the form of near-fanatical devotion to one's perceived purpose in life. In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Jake Blount dedicates his life to spreading his brand of socialism to the masses, particularly poor white mill workers in the South; however, he proves to be a drunken socialist fanatic who cannot clearly express his ideas. Both his confused and muddled verbiage and his rough, oftentimes abusive behavior only serve to push away those he desperately wishes to help. While Blount does not understand that he alienates the workers, Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland, the African American doctor devoted to improving his race and his people's living conditions, clearly knows he alienates his community yet refuses to change the means by which he attempts to educate and assist them. Thus, in both characters, we see McCullers once again craft two grotesque figures, two

men who continue to live their truth but do so by alienating the very people they hope to help.

One of the effects of living in an ever-increasing industrialized and materialistic modern society was the need—not just the desire—to search for an authentic identity and larger purpose in life, a situation that became a Modernist theme. Having been thrust upon the world by the Great War, modernity created existential crises for individuals, communities, and nation-states. Although his elegy centers on Yeats, W. H. Auden seems also to address this very topic when he writes about identity: “But for him it was his last afternoon as himself” (l.12), a line from the poem that accurately points to the Modernist theme of authentic identity and life purpose. As a Modernist writer, McCullers preferred to examine this topic through the individual as a means by which to analyze the nature of the self as well as to scrutinize and challenge societal norms for men and women.

In her examination into the formation of identity, McCullers focused on Marvin Macy’s horrific upbringing and subsequent criminality in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. However, as a Modernist author, she did not offer a definitive answer to the question of whether the self is constructed through nature or through nurture. Instead, she carefully balanced both concepts in her narration so as to leave it to her readers to decide whether Macy’s malevolence was innate or created by his parents and society.

In *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, McCullers analyzed what it means to be a wife and mother through the character of Alison Langdon, the wife of Major Langdon.

Alison represents a typical middle class white woman in mid-twentieth century America, where men control society, and women's roles are restricted to those of wife and mother. McCullers's story shows how such social constructs squelch women's genuine identities to the point that their very selves become fragmented and inauthentic. Through Alison's failure as a wife and mother as well as her ultimate death, McCullers points to the devastating results of socially imposed roles for women: false identities, fragmented personalities, and dreadful unhappiness.

McCullers addresses artistic aspiration, adolescent fear and anxiety, and identity in "Wunderkind," one of her most autobiographical works, and *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. In the former, fifteen-year-old Frances's identity centers on being a child prodigy of the piano, a *Wunderkind*. However, the story recounts the pain she suffers when she realizes she is not, in fact, a prodigy. As a teenager, she will surely "try on" various identities, but the tale accurately reflects the anguish Frances feels when her identity is shattered, albeit a false identity created by herself and her piano teacher. In the latter work, McCullers examines Mick Kelly's complicated identity. By acting the tomboy, Mick resists imposed feminine standards and gender roles. Yet she also knows that as she grows older, she must eventually conform to those standards. Mick finally acquiesces to the female role of store clerk because of economic stressors brought on by the Great Depression. Further, McCullers explores psychological dissociation when Mick has sex with her slightly older friend, Harry Minowitz. Here, Mick's identity is figuratively broken through dissociation of her mind with her body. By the end of the novel, Mick's identity is bruised but not

yet broken, for it seems she still holds out hope that things can change for her—despite her identity as a female—and that she can actually achieve her dream of becoming a composer of music. Through this adolescent female character, McCullers ultimately points to the American patriarchal culture that quashes women's ambitions and debases their sexuality.

Finally, in the character of Frankie Addams, McCullers crafts her most complex female adolescent of all. Frankie assumes three different identities in the course of the novel: Frankie represents the recalcitrant tomboy, F. Jasmine signifies a tomboy desperately trying to embody the cultural feminine standards of the time, and Frances demonstrates the "final" identity Frankie assumes at the end of the story, a girl who seems to be somewhat flighty and superficial at best. Ultimately, though, McCullers indicates that all three identities are, in fact, false. Frankie's three selves signify mere masks that she dons as a way to fit within the feminine norms imposed on her by a male-dominated society. Through this story, McCullers interrogates and brings to light the socially imposed roles that women are expected to assume, roles that vitiate their authentic selves and ambitions.

Despite those critics who declare that McCullers's works do not deal with the social issues of her time, we have seen that she does, in fact, address classism, anti-Semitism, and racism in her fiction. As such, she utilizes the Modernist aesthetic of erasing the space between self and Other. In his elegy, Auden urges the poet to write of the darkest elements of humanity with his "unconstraining voice" (III.15) so that "In the deserts of the heart / Let the healing fountain start, / In the prison of his

days / Teach the free man how to praise" (III.21-24). McCullers does just that by exposing, through her novels and short fiction, the covert and overt discrimination she encountered in her native South. She attempted to bring to light the economic, ethnic, and racial disparities in the United States in the hope, however slight, of effecting change.

Her exposure of social problems qualifies her as a Late Modernist, one who used her fictional works as a symbolic call to action. The balladeer in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* points to the extreme poverty suffered by the mill workers of the town and the importance of the café to bring to them a brief respite from the daily body- and mind-numbing routine of labor and despair. McCullers implies through her story that corporate greed and capitalism engender the belief that not all human life has value, particularly the lives of laborers. Through her radical socialist, Jake Blount, in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, McCullers critiques capitalism and gives voice to the economic travails of white mill workers in the South by pointing to their struggle to make enough money to eat, let alone live in broken down shanties. But she also uses Blount to criticize Communism, Fascism, and totalitarianism in general by creating him as a drunken blowhard who cannot convert anyone to his political philosophy. John Singer also signifies McCullers's commentary on Fascism and the cult of personality, for ultimately he commits suicide, leaving his followers to live their lives without their self-created god, Singer.

McCullers critiques anti-Semitism in several of her fictional pieces, especially in the bigoted J. T. Malone in *Clock Without Hands*, a character who blames Jews for

his failure in medical school. She uses Morris Finestein from *The Ballad of the Sad Café* to demonstrate how easy it is for a Jew to be scapegoated. And she utilizes Finestein as well as Lt. Weincheck from *Reflections in a Golden Eye* to exhibit the stereotype of the feminized Jew, an implicit form of anti-Semitism. However, McCullers also offers a touching portrayal of a Jewish refugee in "Aliens," where Felix Kerr fears for his daughter whom he was forced to leave behind in Hitler's Germany. The story also brings to light the utter disregard many whites felt towards African Americans in the South. She does so through the unnamed young Southern white man who sits next to Mr. Kerr on the bus. As a victim of discrimination, Kerr winces in emotional pain as the young man calls a black woman "nigger." In this tale, McCullers conflates anti-Semitism and racism to craft an argument against both those abhorrent social attitudes.

McCullers also examines racial prejudice in the South, and in "Untitled Piece," she interrogates the fear of and ramifications of miscegenation. She analyzes what it feels like to be a white man who has sex with his black housekeeper and reveals the social consequences of doing so. In *Clock Without Hands*, McCullers scrutinizes racial discrimination from the white perspective. She does so through J. T. Malone, an anti-Semite and racial bigot who refuses to bomb a black man's home. In this novel, she exposes the bigotry endemic in Southern society and the white power structures determined to keep segregation and Jim Crow laws in place. Further, she creates a type of allegory to reveal the Old South, New South, and burgeoning Civil Rights South.

Noted especially for her humane literary treatment of her black characters, McCullers created a number of memorable African American characters, including Berenice Sadie Brown in *The Member of the Wedding*, the affectionate, sometimes stern black housekeeper who dreams of a world filled with brown-skinned, blue-eyed, black-haired people who all live together in harmony. She imagines a world without segregation and anti-Semitism. However, Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland proves to be McCullers's most complex black character, a man so devoted to lifting up his race and community that he alienates them all. Through his character, readers see the overt racism in the South, where whites treat Copeland, a trained medical physician, as if he were nothing, just an old black man, a less-than. More importantly, McCullers also points to the indifference of the African American community to Dr. Copeland's attempts to raise them up, an attitude produced by centuries of oppression as well as Jim Crow violence. She exposes the trepidation of blacks to directly confront white racism, a true fear in light of the power White Citizens' Councils possessed to promote violence against blacks, let alone the dread produced by Ku Klux Klan violence and lynchings. And in the discussion between Jake Blount and Dr. Copeland, McCullers addresses the disfranchisement of both white laborers and African Americans. But as a true Modernist, McCullers does not solve the problems of racism and classism. Instead, her mission as a Late Modernist is to expose the problems, hint at different solutions, and let her readers contemplate what action or actions should be taken. McCullers's use of the

Modernist aesthetic of erasing the space between self and Other proves to be her symbolic call to action.

In 1969, critic A. S. Knowles wrote that Carson McCullers was an author who possessed a “precociousness of talent” as well as a “depth of . . . sympathy” (97). He also declared that despite this talent, “she now seems less important than she once did, and we may hope to be forgiven for observing, without malice, how greatly her reputation was enhanced by the time in which she wrote and by her regional association” (98). Knowles’s assessment centers on his interpretation of her works as Depression-era literature, which focused on the disfranchisement of workers as well as the poverty suffered by Americans during this years-long economic disaster. However, his dismissal of McCullers as a writer whose works transcend time and space certainly proves problematic when one considers that the themes upon which she wrote and the Modernist aesthetics she utilized—formal experimentation, isolation, alienation, the search for an authentic identity and life’s purpose, and the erasure of space between self and Other—are present in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Americans still struggle with modernity and the existential crises it generates. They suffer from feelings of being separated through isolation and/or alienation in this ever-growing capitalistic and globalized society. They still try to discover their true identities, who they are in this increasingly materialistic and ultimately false culture, one focused on the latest celebrity scandal or “reality” television program, all promulgated by instant communication and social media. And, sadly, the United States is still afflicted with the consequences of slavery: racial

bigotry, socioeconomic disfranchisement, and new forms of segregation. To declare that McCullers's works are outdated is to not adequately understand her as a Modernist writer, for she dared to address the social, moral, and ideological problems of classism, racism, and economic disfranchisement that plagued the United States during the Modern era. Further, she found ways to expand upon the Modernist aesthetics and themes put forth by other early- to mid twentieth-century writers, including her friend, W. H. Auden. This dissertation therefore asserts that, by considering McCullers within the Modernist project, her work gains more import and credibility, and that autobiographical elements and a "narrow" scope of themes notwithstanding, McCullers deserves a place in the literary canon of major writers of the Modernist period.

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