CHAPTER - V

CARSON McCULLERS (1917-1967)

Carson McCullers occupies a significant place among her contemporaries. Like Tennessee Williams, Eudora Welty and Flannery O’Connor, she is one of the most enduring authors of the American Southern literary tradition. V.S. Pritchett, her British editor, called her “a genius...and the most remarkable novelist to come out of America for a generation” (<carson-mccullers.com>). McCullers combines exquisite prose with a quick eye and a lyrical sensibility. Graham Greene once compared her to Faulkner while Tennessee Williams applauded her work for possessing “an understanding beyond knowledge, compassion beyond sentiment” (<with-malice-towards-none-with-charity>).

Although McCullers was originally categorized as a Southern Gothic writer due to her portrayal of social misfits and other unconventional characters, most contemporary scholars agree with the contention of Louis D. Rubin, Jr. that her protagonists function as “exemplars of the wretchedness of the human condition” (1977: 265), as symbols of psychological isolation and the failure of communication. McCullers’ characters are often androgynous, revealing the inadequacy of physical love to fulfill basic human emotional needs. Critics feel that McCullers was often misunderstood, as many people were put off and were unwilling to deal with her controversial subject matter. This may be because McCullers used the grotesque as exaggerated symbols of everyday experience. The loneliness and isolation of her Gothic-like characters were merely extreme
examples of feelings that most people have, though magnified and intensified to the number one degree.

McCullers’ collection of work includes five novels, two plays, twenty short stories, more than two dozen nonfiction pieces, a book of children’s verse, a small number of poems, and an unfinished autobiography; “every piece is a miracle of aching precision, of gentle and heartbreaking beauty” (<momus.wordpress.com>). She is best known for her novels The Heart is a Lonely Hunter (1940), The Ballad of the Sad Café (1951), Reflections in a Golden Eye (1941) and The Member of the Wedding (1946), all published between 1940 and 1946. Her last novel Clock without Hands (1961) and four of her other works have been made into films.

The playwright Tennessee Williams’ admiration for the novel The Member of the Wedding was so great that he persuaded her to make the novel into a play. After three and half years in 1949, McCullers finished writing the play. In addition to the New York Drama Critics Circle and Donaldson awards for her play The Member of the Wedding, McCullers also received two Guggenheim fellowships (1942, 1946), an Arts and Letters Grant from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1943), and various other awards and honors. She was inducted into the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1952.

The South invariably looms large in the background of her fictional situation and character and her portrayal of the South is never sentimentalized. It is a land rich in folklore and colorful superstition but a land where a man’s life may be worth, in the words of Carson McCullers, “Little more than a load of hay”
It is a region where servants like Portia and Berenice have dignity and become fully portrayed human beings but where racial hatred brings tragedy to other blacks like Willie Copeland, Honey Camdendown Brown or Sherman Pew. It is a region where white workers, as well as blacks, according to Carson McCullers become “lint-heads” (1940: 256) in textile mills, and refuse to follow radical union organizers and are dehumanized by monotonous work. Margaret McDowell says that it is also a beautiful region where children hide in the shade of a harbor and smell “the heavy scuppernong grapes” (1980: 146) or where one moves down heavily wooded trails covered with golden autumn leaves. The awareness of the South no doubt forms the background of all her longer fiction, but the intensity of her fiction finds roots in a sense of isolation and homelessness that her characters experience wherever they are. McCullers was descended from solid middle-class families in the Deep South for whom tradition and a sense of place were more important than wealth and material possessions. Her talent has firm roots in the local scene. The settings of her novels are Georgia mill towns, a dusty crossroads hamlet, and an army post in the Deep South.

In an essay on “The Understanding of Fiction,” John Crowe Ransom argues that “fiction brings us into a primitive world of spontaneous and natural affections. He opposes the primitive to the intellectual and sentiment to idea” (quoted in Chester Eisinger 1965: 243). Since an artwork must touch the heart, the substance of fiction should be drawn from feeling and not mind. Such a theory becomes at once a justification of the poetic vision as a means of apprehending experience. It gives sanction to a writer’s commerce in a fabulous rather than in a literal truth. Out of these rich implications, such a theory makes a beginning in the description
of Carson McCullers’ work. She is governed by the aesthetics of the primitive. This means that her overview is essentially anti-realistic. She has cut herself off from the world of ordinary experience and ordinary human beings who might entertain ordinary ideas. Her people are freakish and hermaphroditic.

McCullers’ gothic imagination dictates her narrowly specialized range of character. It is the gothic principle that drives her to a consideration of the outsider; the adolescent who has no place and no sex, the deaf mute, the beloved hunchback, the bisexual adult, or the maternal male. These bizarre characters, alienated from society and the self, dramatize the problem of their ambiguous sex in a life that is curiously desexualized. McCullers has said that flight in itself interests her. The remark has meaning not in images of terror from which her characters flee, for this is not the pattern of her fiction. It is flight from normative behavior: it is the frantic flight of the divided soul between the poles of male and female in the prison of the self that interests her. It is her gothic vision that denies a final resting place to this tortured soul, for no resolution of its dilemma is possible.

McCullers’ lifelong sense of herself as different from other people and consequently, as peculiarly isolated, finds powerful artistic expression in The Member of the Wedding (1946) and particularly in her portrayal of Frankie’s character, bearing autobiographical nuances. Perhaps the autobiographical element became for McCullers at the time of writing this novel more insistent. Like McCullers, Frankie is extraordinarily sensitive to sound and silence and she continually relates music to her mood, her developing philosophy and her situation. In the words of Margaret McDowell, “McCullers saw this novel and the play
which developed from it as ‘Poetic’ compositions comprising ‘fugue like’ passages. In the elusive changes of mood, the relationships among characters, the interplay among themes, and the interweaving of theme and metaphor she sought ‘precision and harmony’ much as a poet would” (1980: 81). The novel depends for its impact upon the characterization of Frankie and Berenice as they encounter conflict and bewildering change, both within themselves and the world surrounding them. The dramatic action is complex because each of the two figures is treated as a composite of the many unreconciled identities within her individual psyche. The very title, *The Member of the Wedding*, suggests a longing on the part of Frankie to enter joined life through wedding. Wedding is symbolic of the new revitalizing companionship.

*Clock without Hands* (1961), which was published after a gap of fifteen years, received tremendous response and varied critical reaction. Gore Vidal considered the novel to be “uneven and uncertain,” but found that “even this near failure of McCullers is marvelous to read, and her genius for prose remains one of the few satisfying achievements of our second-rate culture” (1961: 50). Nancy Sandroff observed that in *Clock without Hands* McCullers still “continues to probe and delve deep into the secret selves of her characters. What she finds and reports is always a rich mine of revelation to the reader” (1961: 11). Humer Godden felt that “not a word could be added or taken away from this marvel of a novel by Carson McCullers” and felt that she is “an incomparable storyteller” (1961:3). In the novel, McCullers portrays life on a much larger canvas so that it becomes the most comprehensive and inclusive among her fictional works. Racial antagonism, political controversy, class differences and the barriers between generations are all
issues explored in this novel, making it, as Nick Aaron Ford said, “the most significant novel of the year concerning race relations” (1962: 128). All these issues, however, are explored in this novel primarily as realities which magnify loneliness, isolation and internal conflict. Darren Millar says that, “A survey of McCullers criticism in the decades following the publication of her final novel would indicate that she exposes unhappiness that is spiritually, not historically, derived; that her works are allegorical depictions of loneliness and longing belonging to everyone; that her interest in socially and politically marginalized characters serves primarily to illustrate a universally tragic human condition.” (2009:95).

McCullers’ achievement as a story-teller and a writer of fiction is substantial, but, in the opinion of Margaret McDowell, “as in the case of her Southern contemporary Flannery O’Connor we are continually haunted by the sense of what might have been, had she lived long enough to consolidate her powers and to mature even more richly her artistic skill and her insight into human nature” (1980: 146). She might have been able to enlarge the scope and range of her fictional universe. Nonetheless the study of McCullers’ works provides the reader with a dynamic spiritual and aesthetic experience: her gifts are manifold, intense and varied.

Memory seems to play very little part in the lives of McCullers’ heroines, and they live in a world practically devoid of traditional Southern femininity. However, McCullers is included in this discussion as representative of Southern region. Walter Allen said of Carson McCullers; “Faulkner apart, the most
remarkable novelist the South has produced seems to me Carson McCullers” (1964:132). Like her contemporaries Ellen Glasgow, Katherine Anne Porter and Eudora Welty, she used the Southern themes like race, gender, family, region, place, and time in her fiction. In general the use of the elements of past and memory is less in the characterization of her heroines. McCullers heroines are contemporaries of Welty’s characters Virgie Rainey in *The Golden Apples* and *The Optimist’s Daughter* in Laurel Hand, yet they inhabit a flat present bereft of myth, history, or even family traditions. Surrounded by the tawdry everyday life of modern Southern towns, they seem to exist in a void, alienated from the few models of femininity available to them. The only warmth provided by women comes from Negro cooks.

Though nearly all her friends found McCullers charming, she was through much of her life an invalid, suffering from melancholia and loneliness. In spite of a remarkably full production for a comparatively short life, she only occasionally gathered energy to write with the perfection of style and structure she demanded of herself. Her narratives are in essence long novellas rather than short novels and her reputation rests on their success.

McCullers’ gifts as a novelist are essentially celebratory and elegiac; it is appropriate that the simple facts of her life should evoke both wonder and melancholy. From an early age, McCullers was recognized as an odd, brooding, solitary girl, obsessed with music, reading, fantasy, and making up stories. The passionate idealism of half-a-dozen adult characters was an astonishing act of
imaginative sympathy; and McCullers was heralded as one of the most promising writers in America.

The succeeding sections are devoted to two of her novels *The Member of the Wedding* and *Clock without Hands* in relation to her use of Southern themes like race, region, place, gender, setting, past and memory.

**THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING**

*The Member of the Wedding* is set in August 1944, toward the end of World War II – which would finally come to a close the following summer. The war, which began in 1939, had dramatically changed the landscape of the United States during the war time, sending American men overseas in the war effort while demanding for the first time in the country’s history that women join the work force en masse. The novel only deals with the subject of war peripherally, as news reports stream in over the radio. Despite the excruciating crisis of her life (between 1941 and 1946) when McCullers was faced with the exigencies of illness, bereavement and divorce, she was busy writing, the novel that was rated by Maxine Tull Boatner as “honest, true and real, more wonderful than any kind of fiction” (1946: 12). Having left this book incomplete for several months, McCullers completed *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, and later on published this novel

*Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*, Boston:Houghton Mifflin, 1946. All subsequent references to the novel are to this edition.
which is remarkable for its precision and harmony. The novel has a strong undercurrent of the insistent autobiographical element; drawing upon her own childhood memories. David Appel comments that McCullers “proves herself a consistently forceful writer; this probing into a child’s deepest thought produces a story that is unforgettable as it is unique” (1946: 21). The lifelong sense of being different from the others and a heightened awareness of individual isolation is present throughout the novel and the main protagonist, Frankie Addams, is seen suffering from the same affliction. The forceful impact of the novel is largely due to the skillful and artistic delineation of its main characters Frankie Addams and Berenice Sadie Brown, and the interaction of the two as they encounter conflict and turbulent change, both within themselves and the world around them which makes the novel, in the words of Alice Dixon Bond, “poignant and arresting, amazingly perceptive and exquisitely wrought” (1946: 17).

Frankie Addams is a young, confused twelve-year-old adolescent living in the American South in 1944. The story is framed around her main frustration stemming from feelings that she belongs to no group and that she is disconnected from the world around her. The daughter of a jeweler and a mother who died in childbirth, she is highly precocious and stubborn, but also naïve and unaware of the reasons for her own emotions.

‘The world is certainly a small place,’ she said.
‘What makes you say that?’
‘I mean sudden,’ said Frankie. ‘The world is certainly a sudden place.’
‘Well, I don’t know,’ said Berenice. ‘Sometimes sudden and sometimes slow.’
Frankie’s eyes were half closed, and to her own ears her voice sounded ragged, far away:
‘To me it is sudden’ (MW, 4).
Frankie knew that her only brother, Jarvis, was to be married, but felt the timing of the marriage was sudden as she had never thought seriously about a wedding till yesterday. She spends, during the main action of the book, which begins on the last Friday in August and ends two days later, obsessed with her brother Jarvis’s wedding to Janice Evans on Sunday “All I would like, said Frances, after a minute, ‘all I wish in the world, is for no human being ever to speak to me so long as I live” (MW, 130).

As the story begins, she expresses her fears, anxiety and confusion about this marriage to her housekeeper, Berenice, and her six-year-old cousin, John Henry. Berenice passes off her feelings as masked jealousy: “‘It is a known truth that gray-eyed people are jealous.’ ‘I told you I wasn’t jealous,’ Frankie said, and she was walking fast around the room. ‘I couldn’t be jealous of one of them without being jealous of them both. I sociate the two of them together’ “ (MW, 14). In the first part of the novella, the narrator describes the following Saturday morning, but then skips right to the early evening of that day. Only in the second part does McCullers return to Saturday afternoon to describe the events that took place: “The day before the wedding was not like any day that F.Jasmine had ever known. It was the Saturday she went into the town, and suddenly, after the closed blank summer, the town opened before her and in a new way she belonged” (MW, 41). “This was a part of town well known to her, and as she walked along she found herself remembering these familiar lanes in long-past times and other weathers – the ice-pale mornings in the wintertime when even the orange fires under the black iron pots of wash-women seemed to be shivering, the windy autumn nights” (MW, 54).
McCullers develops the main theme of the novel, isolation and longing for love, through the protagonist Frankie. At the same time she contrasts the experiences of Frankie with the memories of the past life of Berenice. *The Member of the Wedding* shifts from the obsessed and fevered world of *Reflections in a Golden Eye* to the warmer and more understandable world of the adolescent: “This was the summer when Frankie was sick and tired of being Frankie. She hated herself, and had become a loafer and a big no-good who hung around the summer kitchen: dirty and greedy and mean and sad” (MW, 18). Berenice guides tomboy Frankie through her transformation into giddy adolescent Frances, where the pursuit of love and human communion is as real as the Southern kitchen in which much of the action takes place.

The realism of this novel contrasts with the gothic character of the first two, and McCullers succeeds in avoiding the “romantic” tab for her material. She avoids this danger, happily, but she does lay herself open to the charge of repetition. The Frankie Addams of this novel is the Mike Kelly of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. According to Chester Eisinger, “the themes are those of the first book: that human beings wish to ameliorate their loneliness by joining themselves, one to another, in meaningful relationship, and that the pains of adolescence are succeeded by a growing recognition of the limits of selfhood and the inevitability of aloneness” (1965: 255). The emphasis is on the interior life of her protagonist. The substance of the novel is conveyed in an investigation of feeling – the poignance of adolescence offering so rich an opportunity – offered with an artist’s eye to color and a heightened sensitivity to mood. The particular movement in the novel may be charted in this way: Frankie suffers from insecurity and a sense of
loss at the beginning; she is then the victim of a self-generated fantasy about belonging; finally, at the end, her effort at joining is frustrated and she resolves her disappointment.

Frankie, who again bears a masculine name as a sign of the not-yet-determined sex of the adolescent girl, is at the beginning a member of nothing at all, the juvenile outsider alienated from her peers and her elders. The world seems separate from herself. Then she determines to join her brother’s wedding and become “a part of the group” in the future instead of “remaining a loner” as in the past. She is motivated by the search for love and security that will banish fear. The fear is a compound of the ineffable sadness of growing up, of the melancholy of a summer afternoon, of an undefined sense of guilt, all rendered with a skill that captures the evanescent moment and the inarticulate yearning. The love is the girl’s wish to be accepted as a part of the magnetic chain of humanity, and it is the love of man for woman, which Frankie does not yet understand. It is her innocence, which permits her to think she can join her brother’s wedding. It is this innocence that Berenice, the Negro cook, quietly dissolves as she instructs Frankie in the meaning of love. Out of all these episodes comes knowledge of sex, but she has not yet undergone a decisive initiation into sexual love. The limitations of the novel are in its focus on the child’s self-centered world in which the macrocosm plays no part. The contribution of the novel is to state once more the universal need for human dialogue.

Like a number of other carefully patterned modern novels (Nostromo, A Passage to India, To the Lighthouse, The Sun Also Rises), The Member of the
*Wedding* is divided into three parts to call special attention to the rhythmical quality of the action. The rhythm of the journey of childhood stepping into adolescence where stirrings of dissatisfaction and jubilant hope founded on misplaced idealism as well as disillusionment accompanied by a new wisdom shapes the characters’ self and vision of life. Frankie Addams is introduced in Part I, as a twelve-year-old tomboy with cropped hair and the scars of wildness decorating her feet. “The pale wisterias bloomed all over town, and silently the blossoms shattered. There was something about the green trees and the flowers of April that made Frankie sad” (MW, 19). Ever since April, Frankie has been in the press of a vague but powerful discontent, and now in the heat of August, she approaches her first serious teen-age crisis.

Berenice is a memorable character because she embodies in her own personality a complementary response to realism. As Brooks Atkinson has written (in *The New York Times*), “Everything of basic importance to the truth of life seems to have been gathered up into the personal experience of this simple housekeeper who has loved and lost more than once in her lifetime and can now view the trouble of her juniors with wisdom” (The Member of the Wedding). She is a woman with a profound romantic strain that has not been extinguished by those very disappointments on which her most mature stoicism is based. She is the wise, warm-hearted colored cook who mothers Frankie and her small cousin, John Henry West. She is the one element of stability in the haphazard Addams household and her divided loyalty between the white race and her own is symbolized by the blue glass eye she bought after she had lost her own during a fight with a worthless husband. The physical sign of Berenice’s fascination is her
false eye, the glittering blue counterpart of her real eye, which is melancholy and
dark: “There was only one thing wrong about Berenice – her left eye was bright
blue glass. It stared out fixed and wild from her quiet, colored face, and why she
had wanted a blue eye nobody human would ever know. Her right eye was dark
and sad” (MW, 3). However, the choice of her blue glass eye lies in the past and
experience has taught Berenice to recognize the dangers of nursing impossible
dreams. That this black woman should want a bright blue eye is a mystery to
Frankie but not to the readers, for it symbolizes her powerful desire to break from
the fated conditions of her birth and social position. The moral sign of Berenice’s
exoticism is implicit in the history of her marriages, a story that she tells with the
leisure and formulaic vividness of an ancient bard.

In the novel Berenice always speaks about her past; not only about her
personal life but she also speaks about racial discrimination and the social state in
South America. As pointed out in Chapter I racial issues are one of the
preoccupations in Southern literature. She is a foil for Frankie in another way.
She represents all Frankie has to learn and know. Firstly, she knows about love,
sex and relationships, not necessarily in that order. And secondly, she knows
about the real world, about the harsh realities of racism and how it divides people.
She serves as reality check for the delusional Frankie, always questioning
Frankie’s suspect motives and explaining Frankie’s feelings to her, as if she
understands the workings of the girl’s mind better than Frankie does herself. She
also helps Frankie to understand with greater empathy what a struggle it is for
minorities to deal with the division between the races. Frankie knows her mother
only as a timid and sad-looking picture shut up under the handkerchiefs in her
father’s bureau drawer. Berenice the cook is the wise black mammy figure who has raised the motherless child, but her race prohibits Frankie from following her example as a woman. Though she is not the protagonist of the novel, she is central to the significance of the novel as she embodies the past and she tries to share her experiences with Frankie and John Henry. She consistently tries to check and correct the adolescent longings of Frankie based on the wisdom gained from her past experiences. Berenice is quite opposite to Frankie Addams because Berenice always lives in and speaks about her individual memories in the past but Frankie always looks towards her future.

Her first husband was Ludie Freeman, a brick mason, and the favorite and best one of the four; he gave Berenice her fox fur, and once they had gone to Cincinnati and seen snow. Berenice and Ludie Freeman had seen a whole winter of Northern snow. They loved each other and were married for nine years, until the November he was sick and died. The other three husbands were all bad, each one worse than the one before, and it made Frankie blue just to hear about them. The first was a sorry old liquor-drinker. The next went crazy on Berenice: he did crazy things, had eating dreams in the night and swallowed a corner of the sheet; and what with one thing and another he distracted Berenice so much then finally she had to quit him. The last husband was terrible. He gouged out Berenice’s eye and stole her furniture away from her (MW, 24).

Because of Berenice’s legendary history, Frankie’s response to her is properly double. She is fascinated by the shining blue eye and by thoughts of marital melodrama, but she is suspicious of Berenice’s hard-won, unhistorical stoicism. After Berenice presses a gaudy dress that she had previously ridiculed, Frankie “would have liked for her expression to be split into two parts, so that one eye stared at Berenice in an accusing way, and the other eye thanked her with a grateful look. But the human face does not divide like this, and the two expressions canceled out each other” (MW, 97). This combination of hostility and admiration
is also revealed in Frankie’s response to the kitchen itself, and to the third member of its daily triumvirate, her little cousin, John Henry. The ritual of the kitchen – the protracted dinners, the ragged card games, and the repetitious, rhythmical conversation – is comforting and disquieting; and the room itself is both a sanctuary and a prison. For Frankie, however, the kitchen is more threatening. It is a horrifying prison for her, who moves into a completely new house at the end of the novel, leaving her freakish past behind.

The discussions and events that take place in the kitchen are memorable ones in her life. Although she recognizes the genuine warmth and protection to be found there, she instinctively realizes that her final destiny is elsewhere. If Berenice takes her pleasure mainly in the past and John Henry entirely in the present, then Frankie must place her fondest hopes on the promise of the future; and at the close of Part I, she makes her triumphant announcement that she will become a member of her brother’s wedding. Berenice who always lives in the past tells of her four marriages and cautions Frankie not to be delusional about her prospects of joining up with Janice and Jarvis after the wedding. They discuss what they would do were they God and could change the world to their liking. John Henry imagines a world made of good things to eat. Berenice sees a place where there is no distinction between black and white. Frankie imagines that boys could change into girls and vice versa, at will. Eventually, Frankie and Berenice come to a poignant understanding of the societal pitfalls of race differences.

Part I of the novel deals with the lanky, awkward, motherless twelve-year-old Frankie Addams. It brings out the vague feelings of discontent and monotony
that she experiences in the past. Sitting in the kitchen, “a sad and ugly room” (MW, 4), Frankie feels sick and experiences a squeezing of her heart and feels the world to be a small and sudden place. This sense of loneliness and separateness triggers an awareness that she was an ‘unjoined person’ and belonged to no club, and as a result the desire to belong, to be a member of something, makes the adolescent Frankie restless and she finds that “The world seemed to die each afternoon and nothing moved any longer”(MW, 1).

This long wait, with time seeming to stand still, ends when Frankie is suddenly aroused at the news of the wedding of her brother Jarvis who is arriving from Alaska to marry Janice of the nearby Summer Hill. The extraordinary effect of this event on Frankie is the sudden sense of exhilaration: she experiences a strong sense of belongingness and in order to share it with the others she walks around confiding to strangers who listen to her in surprise about the news of the wedding and her plans to join the bride and the groom. She went to the Blue Moon Restaurant to announce this surprise news. She found a soldier there and opened the conversation. “The Portuguese at first did not seem to hear her and went on reading the romantic magazine. So she repeated her remark, and when his eyes were turned to hers and his attention caught, she went on in a higher voice: ‘Tomorrow this brother of mine and his bride are marrying at Winter Hill’” (MW, 50). The sense of belonging animates and enthuses Frankie to adopt a new name F. Jasmine to rhyme with Jarvis and Janice. The lonely Frankie feels the world will be altogether different with the name change. Commenting on this name change, Margaret McDowell says, “she will be united in a Ja trinity – Jasmine, Jarvis and Janice and the lonely Frankie will no longer exist. The old kitchen trio will be
dissolved. In its place, the wedding will publicly acknowledge her new identity, exactly as a christening publicly acknowledges the naming of a newly born personality” (1980: 83).

Frankie is seen bursting with animal enthusiasm to break free from the prison of her loneliness into a radically new life where she could ‘belong’ and be a ‘member.’ This signals for her a new birth, as it were, so she imagines herself exclaim: “I love the two of you so much and you are the we of me. Please take me with you from the wedding, for we belong to be together” (MW, 128). Thinking of the warmth and conviviality of family life, she imagines people around a hearth talking with ‘woven voices’ and dreams and writes little plays about polar bear and igloos, and when she puts seashells to her ear, she has no trouble hearing tides in the gulf of Mexico. As Lawrence Graver says, “she sits with eyes half-closed at the kitchen table conjuring up the wedding of Jarvis and Janice in a snow-covered, silent church – the bride and groom with lumine blankness where there faces should be” (1969: 34). What imparts aesthetic authenticity to McCullers’ portrayal of Frankie is her counterpointing of Frankie with Berenice and John Henry.

This remarkable exposition of Frankie’s character is largely dependent on the other two characters – Berenice and John Henry. Berenice Sadie Brown, herself a woman of conflicting psyche, confirms, repeats and enlarges the questions of metaphysical import, which Frankie poses, through an adult perspective. The agonizing processes of adolescence and the consequent problems faced by Frankie are projected beyond this kitchen trio in a universal amalgamation of the struggles of all adults, by Berenice. In this subtle symbolic
amalgamation of the personal with the macrocosmic world around, the violence of the world is reflected in the basic antagonism of Frankie’s explosive encounters with Berenice, and the confusion and turmoil that rage in the heart of Frankie.

In the foreground of this setting is the imposing figure of Berenice Sadie Brown. With her hard won untheatrical balance of mind, and cackling full of foxy wisdom, Berenice represents the earth principle. She is ever eager in her encounters with Frankie to exercise gravitational pull and her clarity and bluntness serve as a genial check on Frankie’s foggy romanticism. She has the unerring ability to bring Frankie back from her imaginative flights to the things of the world and she has often enough alternated between anger and love, thereby becoming a mother figure in the novel. Despite her sense of mature stoicism, her sensitive heart and a deep romantic streak in her character makes Berenice desire for a bright blue eye because it symbolizes her powerful desire to break free from the fated conditions of her birth and social position in the past.

If Frankie lives in intemperance, Berenice lives on individual memory and often reminisces her vividly romantic past and Berenice recounts for John Henry and Frankie, the romantic saga of her marriage with Ludie Freeman, “Berenice spoke in an unwinding kind of voice, and she had said that she was happier than a queen. As she told the story, it seemed to F. Jasmine that Berenice resembled a strange queen, if a queen can be colored and sitting at a kitchen table. She unwound the story of her and Ludie like a colored queen unwinding a bolt of cloth of gold” (MW, 89). Berenice was entangled in the web of love which she has woven around the memory of Ludie, her first husband. Her repeated marriages,
after her first husband whom she had deeply loved and admired had died, are but symbolically indicative of her unconscious voyage to find his equal in other, less satisfactory men. In other words, she also longs for and needs an intimate, warm relationship or communion with others. “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 may be 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” (MW, 104). Without this communion being accomplished, she herself remains unfulfilled although she may have achieved a balanced mind that looks at life steadily and stoically.

McCullers employs the use of the imagery of the clock in order to add a feeling of suspense and anxiousness about the passage of time. She toys with the concept of linear time, asking us to alter our usual concept of one event leading logically to the next in a straight line. She skips over a large section of time in Part I and then returns to it in Part II. Furthermore, any of the parts including Janice and Jarvis are never described firsthand, rather in reflection after they happen. After the wedding Janice and Jarvis went to Alaska. Only at the end of the novel does Frances tell Berenice about their move to Luxembourg. “I was by the store about school and papa had a letter from Jarvis. He is in Luxembourg” (MW, 143).

The opening pages of Part II are one of the finest examples of McCullers’ powers as a celebratory novelist. She effectively dramatizes the paradoxical freedom to be found in human solidarity. At the beginning of part II McCullers
shows Frankie’s joy as if she was on the threshold of paradise. The familiar, and not the unexpected, strikes her with a strange surprise. Inspired by her new sense of belonging, Frankie finds the day before the wedding magical and unique because the familiar, not the unexpected, strikes her “with a strange surprise.” To communicate this “twisted sense of the astonishing,” as Lawrence Graver says, McCullers relies “heavily on a series of fresh metaphors that catch Frankie’s bright new perception of her ordinary world” (1969: 38).

In the past, Frankie was like Uncle Charles’s blinkered mule, moving laboriously in the same deadening circle, lingering on street corners, browsing at the dime store, passing time at the local movie; but now – rechristened F. Jasmine – she is an exotic one set free to wander in places she has never seen before. When F. Jasmine wakes up on this unforgettable Saturday morning, she feels “that day alone seemed equally important as both the long past and the bright future – as a hinge is important to a swinging door. And since it was the day when past and future mingled, F. Jasmine did not wonder that it was strange and long” (MW,52) and she also feels that “her brother and the bride had, in the night, slept on the bottom of her heart, so that the first instant she recognized the wedding” (MW,42). Exhilarated by the thought of her role at the wedding, she is able for the first time to understand the mundane ritual of her father’s life. Watching him across the kitchen, she breaks free from the prison of her ego, and feels a new tenderness for this bluff, good-hearted widower.

She saw him bent over the workbench down at the store dipping a tiny spring in gasoline, or whistling and peering with his round jeweler’s glass into a watch. Remembrances came suddenly and swirled, each colored
with its own season, and for the first time she looked back on all the twelve years of her life and thought of them from a distance as a whole.

‘Papa,’ she said, ‘I will write you letters.’

Now he walked the dawn-stale kitchen like a person who has lost something, but has forgotten what it is that he has lost. Watching him, the old grudge was forgotten, and she felt sorry. He would miss her in the house all by himself when she was gone. He would be lonesome. She wanted to speak some sorry words and love her father (MW, 44).

McCullers, realistic and anxious to avoid sentimentality, has Frankie’s expression of love throttled by her father’s demand for a monkey wrench and screwdriver. In this new state of gladness, her perceptions are of an almost visionary intensity.

This signifies a radical change in her mental make-up and revives her hope of acquiring a vitalizing new dimension to her personality and indicates the psychological transformational power of human connection: like the snakes she sloughs off her old self and sets out on the voyage of finding fulfillment through intimate relationship with others. No longer will she feel lonely after she has achieved human communion and she feels her heart aflutter and wings begin to grow under her arms. The desire for identification with others finds powerful expression in Frankie’s poignantly evocative coinage, “you are the we of me” (MW, 128). She finds the world a totally changed place as she had never known in the past and is now able to hear music in the noise the little children make, which until then had always irritated her: she feels impelled to talk to strangers and communicates to them the news of the wedding. As she looks into their eyes she feels the “unexplainable connection,” (MW, 51), with them as though they were known to each other.
In the third and final part of the story McCullers dramatizes the eventful disillusionment of Frankie. Her stubborn refusal to accept the inviolable aloneness of an individual, of Berenice’s simple equation that me is me, receives a shocking jolt when she is left behind by the newly married couple Janice and Jarvis. Frankie was disappointed as her brother left her alone after the wedding. She decided to leave her hometown Georgia. Before that she wanted to know about the Portuguese soldier, whether he was dead or alive, whom she met earlier in Blue Moon restaurant. “Then all at once, from the tangle of turning impossibilities she thought of the soldier; and this time the thought was not a glancing one – it lingered, stuck, and did not go away. She wondered if she ought to go to the Blue Moon and find if she had killed the soldier, before she left the town forever (MW,136). She soon begins to realize the childishness of the dreams that she had in the past, and becomes aware that the world was separate from herself. “She hurried faster. The night before was like a time that had happened so long ago that the soldier was unraveled in her memory. But she recalled the silence in the hotel room; and all at once a fit in a front room, the silence, the nasty talk behind the garage – these separate recollections fell together in the darkness of her mind, as shafting searchlights meet in the night sky upon as aeroplane, so that in a flash there came in her an understanding” (MW,136). She has established her own footing as she enters her teenage years, and she is able to leave the kitchen and Berenice and John Henry in her past. She finds a new friend, Mary Littlejohn. She and her father get ready to move. Berenice decides to quit and get married again. John Henry dies of meningitis. His passing is highly symbolic of the passing of Frankie’s childhood years. Standing in the kitchen, she feels that she can sense his
presence. She will not forget her childhood years but she realizes that they are in her past. Frankie begins to read Tennyson and plans, when sixteen, to take a leisurely trip around the world. This is McCullers’ way of indicating the drabness of everyday routine existence which constitutes the destiny of an individual. It is also a pointer to the fact that man is destined to be alone and that abiding love relationship is not possible for most of us. The game, if any, is only negative. The wisdom that comes from experience is more by way of disillusionment.

In *The Member of the Wedding*, McCullers exhibits the kind of formal unity which her first novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* lacks. There is also a smarting sense of life in the work, a profound sense of change, and a quality of intense groping which the behavior of the central characters seeks continually to incarnate. The style of the novel presents the blossoming of human feelings no less aptly than it presents the varying moods of nature. But it is a style of confession, or rather of manifestation, sensitive to the sudden epiphanies of our daily life. According to Ihab H. Hassan, “it is not dramatic despite the inimitable tang and humor of its dialogue, and despite the plasticity of character, which allowed the novel to be made into a highly successful play” (1959: 322).

What drama the novel contains, it draws from the juxtaposition of three characters to one another – not from their interactions. Thus is Frankie caught between the innocence of John Henry and the experience of Berenice. Berenice is indeed the rock on which the novel rests who always speaks about her past experiences. To all of Frankie’s wild dreams, she stands as a silent modifier – for she is too wise to rebuke. With three husbands behind her and a fourth in the
offing, she speaks as one who has known love and experienced loneliness. In the words of Ihab H. Hassan, “her understanding of life is as tragic, in a Chekovian sense, as Frankie’s misunderstanding is pathetic. Without her, the tortured sensitivity of Frankie – a sensitivity, after all, which has no correlative but the wistfulness of puberty – would seem pointless and contrived. But between innocence and experience only illusion can lie. And the illusions of Frankie disguise the hopes of all mankind” (1959: 323).

*The Member of the Wedding* does not let one forget its temporal setting, and the details locating it in time are hardly accidental: twice Frankie and Berenice discuss the “Atom-bomb” (MW, 83); brother Jarvis ends the play with the “Occupation forces in Germany” (MW, 117); Mr. Addams complains to Honey that “I’ll be so glad when the war is over and you biggety, worthless niggers get back to work” (MW, 68). As a decisive comment on post-war America, then, the future slouching toward them will still be filled with death and violence. Frankie and others persistently envision her future as bleak (death, jail, freak-show attraction), and the dialogue is riddled with portentous omens: Frankie’s “I think something is wrong. It is too quiet. I have a peculiar warning in my bones” (MW, 48). Berenice’s “I have a feeling like you get just before a big thunder storm” (MW, 96). If Walker Percy was right when in *The Movie Goer* (1961) he has Binx says that, “What people really fear is not that the bomb will fall but that the bomb will not fall” (1961: 228), Frankie too in her adolescent way voices this same cultural death wish: “I wish the whole world would die” (MW, 126).
The tone is in fact often near that of comedy, even when the material verges on the tragic. *The Member of the Wedding* is a gentler book, about a girl in adolescence excited by a wedding in her family and vaguely ambitious to become “a member of wedding,” an organic part of it, in a way that is not physically or psychologically possible.

The symbolic suggestiveness of McCullers’ novels is considerably enhanced by the use of appropriate backdrops by way of temporal and local setting. She uses stagnant Southern mill towns as the backdrop of most of her novels. The abysmally depressing settings create an atmosphere of futility and reinforce the sense of barrenness which is the hallmark of her fiction. The kitchen in *The Member of the Wedding* is of symbolic significance, representing as it does the microcosm of the macrocosm. A significant part of our response to Frankie is controlled by the setting in which the trio are situated. The kitchen where most of the action takes place is most imaginatively conceived and ingenuously executed. The setting is an integral part of the novelistic scene and by its symbolic implications, represented and validates the human situation. Frankie wishes to leave her (place) hometown in order to become a member of the brother’s family. The place where she lives is real but she wishes to go to an imaginary place. The shifting of place from real to imaginary creates suspense and anxiousness in her. It implies her desire of flight from presentness of the past to the future.
Both in thematic conception and structural design *Clock without Hands* is a much more complex novel than all the earlier novels by McCullers and in the words of Richard M. Cook, “the comprehensive nature of its primary theme, the isolated self in time, permits her to incorporate into the novel matters that have concerned her throughout her career, matters such as the failure of love, the private, inward suffering of the grotesque or freak, the individual’s helplessness in the face of racial and social injustices” (1975: 116). Though McCullers focuses on the internal conflict of her characters in this novel, she attempts to give to the dramatization of this conflict the sociological base and a historical perspective. She explores such issues as racial antagonism, political controversy, class differences and the barriers between generations, thereby enlarging the ambit of her novelistic concern; but she deals with them primarily as realities which magnify loneliness, isolation and internal conflict.

*Clock without Hands* is an intergenerational, interracial novel that explores and explodes conventional racial and gender arrangements in a Southern community. Analysis of the complicated issues regarding identity in the novel would suggest that McCullers’s characters live in a world where race, family, age, and class are implicated in their gendered identity.

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Clock without Hands is best approached through its four main protagonists, who inhabit a small town in Georgia. J.S. Malone, age forty and owner of a pharmacy, learns that he has leukemia and is given a year to live. He has been a passive man who drifted into a rut, and the imminence of death makes him painfully aware of “the life he had spent unlived.” The only man to whom he confides his misfortune is old Judge Clane, the town’s leading citizen, a former congressman whose beliefs are fantastically—indeed, farcically—reactionary. Deprived of what he cared for most—his wife, the son he worshipped (who committed suicide), the satisfaction of his gigantic appetite (the doctors have forced him to diet), and a place in the political arena from which to uphold white supremacy—the judge, in spite of the presence of his beloved grandson, Jester, finds his life frighteningly empty. He decides to act on a long-cherished dream which will make him the restorer of the South’s glory. To fulfill his campaign, Judge Clane engages as “amanuensis” a clever blue-eyed young Negro, Sherman Pew, an orphan whose past is a mystery to which the judge alone knows the answer.

Clock without Hands tries to link the existential crisis of a man doomed by cancer to the sociological crisis of the South poisoned by racial strife. Set in the town of Milan, Georgia, provides the novel with its time scheme and organizational frame. The novel is an exploration of the American South on the brink of desegregation. It is a novel about the difficult and lonely ways that the Old South comes to deal (and not deal) with its ghosts. Running parallel to Malone’s story is the history of the town’s leading family, the Clanes. The story is told from the perspective of four characters. Malone is a storekeeper who has been
diagnosed with leukemia and is trying to make sense of the “tedious labyrinth of his life” (CWH, 147) in the last summer that is left to him.

He remembered the dormant shame that had troubled him the day before and he knew the source of the obscure distress he had felt in the doctor’s office. Also he realized for the first time that Dr. Hayden was a Jew. He recalled the memory that was so painful that forgetfulness was a necessity. 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 (CWH, 7).

Judge Fox Clane is a bigoted ex-Congressman, a senile and powerless man trying to fill the lonely days of his dotage with the memories of past glory:

The Judge, when he thought of his ornate Victorian house with the colored windows and the stiff old furniture, sighed. It was a sigh of pride, although the people in Milan often referred to the house as ‘The Judge’s White Elephant.’

“I think I would rather be moved to the Milan Cemetery than have to move to another house.”

The Judge takes back his words by saying;

“Pshaw, I didn’t mean that, Son.” He touched wood carefully. “What a foolish thing for a foolish old man to say. I was just thinking that I would find it mighty hard to live elsewhere on account of the memories” (CWH,178).

Jester Clane, the grandson of Judge Fox Clane, is a sensitive young adolescent trying to find an identity for himself in the cross-fire of ideas that his world has become. “Who Am I? What am I? Where am I going? Those questions, the ghosts that haunt the adolescent heart, were finally answered for Jester. The uneasy dreams about Grown Boy which had left him guilty and confused, no longer
bothered him” (CWH, 203). The memories of all these people are not individual memories but shared by others also.

Both the Clanes are haunted by the collective memory of the Judge’s son and Jester’s father, John, who committed suicide after the unsuccessful defense of a Negro accused of murdering the husband of a white woman with whom he had been intimate; and Sherman Pew, an angry, aggressive black man, seeking desperately for acknowledgement from the world around him. Together, these characters make up a powerful allegory of the South in the days when the civil rights movement was still nascent; in the microcosm of their Georgian hometown they are like stage hands, setting the scene for the greater drama that is inevitably to follow. The novel does not actually take us into this drama – the book ends at the point when the Supreme Court decision to desegregate schools is announced, but the certainty of that revolution is a living presence in the story, making this McCullers’ most overtly political novel.

Sputtering, incoherent with anger, the Judge told about the Supreme Court decision for school integration. Martha, flabbergasted and taken aback, could only say ‘Well! I vow!’ as she had not quite taken it in. ‘There are ways we can get around it,’ cried the Judge. It will never happen. We will fight. All Southerners will fight to the last ditch. To the death (CWH, 239).

And yet a political novel is precisely what Clock without Hands is not. McCullers’ greatest gift as a writer is her almost boundless capacity for empathy – her ability to not only see things from the point of view of each one of her characters, but to show these points of view directly and simply to the reader, so that the reader is able to find understanding in his heart for every one of her many players.
J.T. Malone is a man who does not realize he will die by novel’s end, but “confuses the end of life with the beginning of a new season.” This novel’s second narrative focuses largely on Fox Clane, a senile judge and former Congress man his grandson, a privileged white homosexual adolescent, and Sherman Pew, an illegitimate mixed – race man, employed by the judge. While Jester, recoiling from the racial prejudice of his aging grandfather, finds himself attracted to Sherman, Sherman himself is obsessed with discovering his racial heritage with the judge. Learning that the judge wants to introduce legislation to redeem Confederate money and restore the Old South, Sherman quits his job and decides to avenge the blatant racism of Southern society by integrating a white neighborhood.

The Judge was very much attached to his wife and he always recollected her in his memories even after her death.

In the old days when he became, little by little, an early riser, he would make his own breakfast, then lovingly prepare his wife’s tray, often stopping to go out into the garden and pick some posies to decorate the tray. Then he would walk up carefully, bearing her breakfast, and if his wife was sleeping he would awaken her with kisses, as he was loath to start the day without her gentle voice and encouraging smile before he left for the office. (Except when she became ill he did not waken her; but he could not start out on his day until he saw her, which meant that sometimes toward the end he did not get to the office until afternoon).

But surrounded by his wife’s possessions, his grief subdued by the years, the Judge seldom thought consciously of Miss Missy, especially at breakfast time. He just used her things and sometimes would stare at the blue salt and pepper set with the stun of grief in his eyes (CWH, 86).

As mentioned in Chapter I, the South’s troubled history in terms of its racial issues continually appears in its literature. Though the novel provoked many unsavory reviews from critics who thought that the plot in this novel was clumsily
managed, the prose stylized and the symbolism ineffectively contrived, the fact remains that this is the only novel which McCullers tried deliberately to situate in history indicating her rise towards maturity and made a serious attempt to envision man caught up in a particular historical situation in the Unites States. The Judge said “the wind of revolution is rising to destroy the very foundations on which the South was built. The poll tax will soon be abolished and every ignorant Nigra can vote. Equal rights in education will be the next thing. Imagine a future where delicate little white girls must share their desks with coal-black niggers in order to learn to read and write” (CWH, 13). In the novel McCullers’s underlying purpose is to share the sociological problem, at the deepest possible level, as it penetrates the secret recesses of the human souls. She subtly presents the moral issues and analyzes psychology of the distressing situation as it obtains in the South.

In Clock without Hands, socio-historical context is most important. McCullers wants to indicate that individuals will either save or condemn themselves depending on their ethical choices in relation to others. The action opens in March 1853, when the Supreme Court is debating the constitutionality of the practice of “separate-but-equal” in the South. Malone dies on May 17, 1954, the day the Supreme Court made public its ruling in the Brown vs. the Board of Education case. The troubled relations between blacks and whites in the novel play a crucial role in the configuration of the individual identities of the main characters. Malone definitely finds himself when he draws a marked slip of paper designating him to bomb the house of a black youth who rented an apartment in the white section. His moral strength has always been latent yet unnoticed, as are so many of the miracles of life. His blind passage through life is brilliantly expressed
by the episode of the vegetable garden in chapter six. On returning home after a morning at his pharmacy, he sees for the first time the garden that he had traversed that very morning, without noticing it: “He went through the back-yard gate and then, though he was tired, he recognized the miracle. The vegetable garden, which he had shown so carelessly and forgotten in that long season of fear, had grown up. There were the purple cabbages, little frills of carrots, the green, green turnip greens and tomatoes. He stood looking at the garden” (CWH, 117).

By rejecting the social conventions that he has always blindly accepted and by asserting his responsibility against the impositions of the masses, Malone acquires traits of an existential hero — on asserting his freedom he discards his “ordinary existence” in favor of his “authentic existence.” This results in a heightened sense of loneliness and in this state of loneliness time seems to move with maddening slowness. Frankie Addams experiences this in The Member of the Wedding when she feels that the world seemed to die each afternoon and nothing moved any longer. J.T. Malone in Clock without Hands goes through the same experience while he awaits death.

As he sat holding the pestle there was in him enough composure to wonder at those alien emotions that had veered so violently in his once mild heart. He was split between love and hatred – but what he loved and what he hated was unclear. For the first time he knew that death was near him. But the terror that choked him was not caused by the knowledge of his own death. The terror concerned some mysterious drama that was going on—although what the drama was about Malone did not know. The terror questioned what would happen in those months—how long? – that glared upon his numbered days. He was a man watching a clock without hands (CWH,25).

It is this psychological rather than chronological measuring of time that McCullers deals with in the novel. As time plays an important role in the
recollection of the past, J.T. Malone recollects every event that happened in the past. J.T. Malone, who dies fifteen months after he has learnt he is suffering from leukemia, has led an empty life and cannot ascertain the precise time of his death during the fifteen months of his illness, he has consequently lived a life according to a clock without hands. Malone stoically accepts the passage of time which obsessed him during his anxious search for meaning when he would complain to his jeweler that his watch lost two minutes a week. He is no longer a clock without hands since he has adjusted to a new social order that steadily gains ground in the South. McCullers has placed Malone in a transitory position between the Old South represented by Judge Clane and the New South represented by the Judge’s grandson Jester, who belongs to a new generation more responsive to human rights. Judge Clane in his violent and self-destructive attempt to stop the hands of the clock that brings irrevocable change to the South, insists that, naturally, a black and a white man are two different things and that “white is white and black is black—and never the two shall meet if I can prevent it (CWH,40).

Clane’s defeat at the hands of progressive forces reflects the process by which the South in the 1940s and 1950’s was beginning to see that its “unity” and homogeneity were not only threatened but also illusory. McCullers exposes the cracks that had always existed and could not be covered much longer by the plaster of myth and legend.

Judge Fox Clane, a racist and a staunch believer in the supremacy of the white race, finally lives according to a clock without hands for he tries to ignore the passage of time and changes that are part of the course of history. “The Judge
ignored the past tense and there was the warmth of self-pride in his veins. A mirror like projection reflected his own feelings for his grandson—the fair, unfolding child of his fair doomed son. Love and memory left his heart open and unaware” (CWH,32). Jester Clane, who represents the hope of the South must also be measured by a ‘Clock without Hands’ for his ideologies are vague and sentimentalized and things are never really seen in their proper perspective by him.

The relationship between the Judge and his grandson, with the unbridgeable generation gap between the two, call to mind Frankie’s companionship with the elderly Negro cook. As Margaret McDowell says, Jester Clane contrasts with his grandfather in age and in his liberal views on racial integration and politics. According to her, Jester, the liberal white youth epitomizes “the hope of the South”(CWH,111). He has inherited his father’s liberal views and he boldly questions the justice of white supremacy. Jester, with his affinity with the blue-eyed negro youth, represents those liberal minded white men who are lenient and sympathetic to the blacks. Like Malone, the adolescent Jester has, after much soul searching, decided to become a lawyer to fight for racial equality in his native region, reflecting McCullers’s agreement with those who feel that the solutions to the racial problem will have to come from the South itself, rather than from outside it. Jester’s passion for Sherman symbolizes his desire to establish racial harmony and unity in the South.

Sherman is caught between the whites and the blacks, but he fits neither community. His black color sets him apart from the whites whereas the blue eyes single him out as the odd man out among the blacks. According to Margaret
McDowell, the fact that Sherman is a blue-eyed mulatto may be a symbolic indication of his “confusion in his search for racial and personal identity. This mixture of physical characteristics does not symbolically join the races, as Berenice’s glass blue eye seems to in *The Member of the Wedding*” (1980:103).

McCullers’ insight is that it is possible to be kind without being partial; to judge without condemning; to be sympathetic without being forgiving. There is no false sentiment here – not for a moment does McCullers waver in her vision of right and wrong – there is only the recognition that to disagree with someone does not mean that the reader cannot feel sorry for them, cannot see where they are coming from. In a sense, this is what makes McCullers the most American of writers – the spirit of her novels is the spirit of Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address – “let us judge not, that we be not judged”, Lincoln said, and that is McCullers’ greatest, most generous recognition.

And it is in that recognition that McCullers true genius is born. More than any other writer since Chekhov, McCullers understands that the idea of ‘character’ is a myth. Very few of us are truly good or evil, very few of us have any real talent for either heroism or villainy. These are things that are thrust upon us, not things we are born with. Behind the masks of champion and bigot, of saint and murderer, lie the same tired and intensely human faces, the same confused, tentative and inconsistent souls. The Judge spoke to his grandson Jester about the War: “But what happened after the War Between the States? Not only did the Federal Government of the United States free the slaves which were the *sine qua non* of our cotton economy, so that the very resources of the nation were gone with the
wind. A truer story was never written than Gone with the Wind. Remember how we cried at that picture show?”(CWH,36). There is no reason, in her novel, that a bigoted and corrupt judge cannot also be a senile and laughable old fool who quotes Shakespeare and believes he could have written Gone with the Wind (only better):

Well, maybe not the Bard himself, but after all Ben Jonson was a mortal too. Immortality, that was what the Judge was concerned with. It was inconceivable to him that he would actually die. He would live to a hundred years if he kept to his diet and controlled himself...deeply he regretted the extra toast. He didn’t want to limit his time for just a hundred years, wasn’t there a South American Indian in the newspaper who lived to be a hundred and fifty...and would a hundred and fifty years be enough? No. It was immortality he wanted. Immortality like Shakespeare, and if ‘push came to shovel,’ even like Ben Jonson. In any case he wanted no ashes and dust for Fox Clane (CWH, 96).

There is no reason why both these people cannot also be estranged and the dying old man struggling to come to terms with the deaths of his beloved wife and son, desperate for love, for admiration. Acts of great horror and acts of great nobility are not committed by men of exceptional parts.

Ever since she created that yearning, harum-scarum, twelve-year-old Frankie who wanted to be the member of the wedding, McCullers has been part of the U.S. tradition of mooning, a tradition to which Sherwood Anderson, Eugene O’Neill, and William Saroyan, at his infrequent best, belonged. But where Frankie shed her fantasies for the more abundant life of growing up, the characters in the current novel are stripped of their fantasies only to wither away. Clock without Hands is thus a kind of Member of the Funeral.
The novel is important because for in it McCullers sets her ambitions high and explores various themes like memory, race, guilt and dreams that she had only occasionally touched on in her earlier works. The Judge said to Malone about his daughter in law: “Indeed, the only memory that stood out was one Sunday dinner when the gentle stranger said: ‘I love baked Alaskas’ and the Judge took it upon himself to correct her. ‘Mirabelle,’ he said sternly, ‘you love me. You love the memory of your husband. You love Miss Missy. But you don’t love baked Alaskas, see? He pointed out, with a most loving glance at the piece he was cutting, ‘You like baked Alaskas. See the difference, child?’ She saw, but her appetite had quite left her” (CWH, 57). And he also recollected how he brought up his grandson in childhood with Malone:

It was the time when Jester was seven. The Judge broke off his story to of those years. Oh, the trouble for a man to raise a motherless child, and not only to raise but to rear him. Oh, the Clapps baby food, the sudden earaches in the night which I stopped with paregoric soaked in sugar and sweet oil dropped in his ear. Of course his nurse, Cleopatra, did most of the doing, but my grandson was my responsibility and no question about it. He sighed before he continued his story (CWH, 60).

The most significant character who provides structural design and aesthetic effect to the novel is J.T. Malone. The forty-one-year-old pharmacist Malone learns in the beginning of the story that he is suffering from leukemia and has only a short while to live. A passive man, Malone has let life slip by till then and the news of his impending death awakens in him the sudden self-realization that he has never really lived. Determined to acquire meaning and a sense of identity in the remaining months of his life, Malone starts seeing life in a new perspective and achieves new psychological and philosophical insights into life even as he faces his impending death. Choked with terror at the suddenness of death and the
incomprehensible mysterious drama surrounding it, Malone seeks comfort in the company of the Old Judge Fox Clane and discusses his disease with the Judge who refuses to believe the doctors since he himself has never heard of leukocytes.

Malone tries to find out whether any close relationship exists between living a decent life on earth and getting a reward in heaven; whether immortality can be confirmed; and is led to the conclusion that a reasoned view on the questions cannot be attained. The refusal of the Judge to believe the prognosis of the doctor and the calm acceptance of his disease by his wife Martha leave Malone discouraged and baffled and he refuses to be comforted by his wife only to rush out of the room when she tries to re-establish physical intimacy between them. He reminisces about his past and thinks of the physician he might have become had he not accepted life so meekly.

Those years of boyhood were good for the forty-year-old Malone to dwell on. He had not been lost then. But his father was ambitious for him, too ambitious it seemed later to Malone. He had decried that his son would be a doctor as that had been his own youthful ambition. So the eighteen-year-old Malone matriculated at Columbia, and in November he saw snow. At that time he bought a pair of ice skates and he actually tried to skate in Central Park. He had had a fine time at Columbia eating the chow mein he had never tasted before, learning to ice skate, and marveling at the city. He had not realized he had started to fail in his studies until he was already failing. He tried to bone up ... studying until two o’clock on examination nights ... but there were so many Jew grinds in the class who ran up the average (CWH,148).

He now deeply understands how he has wasted his life; the blankness and the insensitivity of his spirit and finds himself unable to remember exactly how and when he had lost the zeal for life and become content to go along with the tide.
In this world of impending doom, the druggist is obsessed with the passage of time. He becomes enraged when the jeweler cannot regulate his watch to railroad time, and as he touches various material objects, he is repelled by the idea that they will exist when he is gone. The ancient stone pestle that he has held a thousand times in the fellowship of work “mocks him” with its look of indestructibility.

In the last few months before his death, he undergoes meaningful changes in his inner life and very soon they are translated into a visible public act which for him is the climactic moment of change because he will no longer act like a conventional automaton; he will assert himself and be himself. In the terminology of the existentialists, he is involved in the process of becoming – becoming his independent unique self. Out of his dead past will emerge a new man with a distinct identity, no longer member of the herd. Malone recalls his past life and sees that it has been without purpose or meaning. Even his marriage seems to be a vague, bewildering, and unimportant experience “There was no particular time when he asked, ‘Is this all there is of life?’ but as he grow older he asked it wordlessly. No, he had not lost an arm, or a any particular five dollars, but little by little he had lost his own self” (CWH,149). Very soon he reaches the point of cognition and this awareness brings about an abrupt change in his personality making him take days off from his work, loiter around in the garden, even say a few intimate things to his wife. He is now capable of the most astonishing action in refusing to bomb a Negro (Sherman Pew) at the instance of his friend Judge Clane and his accomplices and is no longer the same cowardly, ordinary man, for he has now acquired the courage of his awareness.
It is towards the end of the novel that Malone, mellowed and at peace within himself, is not tortured by the idea that his body will be a corpse a moment after his death and no longer is he anxious to unravel the mystery of heaven and hell and his relationship to these concepts: “Malone thought of the drabness of his life and wondered how it could be more intensified. Was afterlife continual tedium and was that why he struggled so in order to hold onto life? He shivered although the parsonage was hot. ‘Do you believe in heaven and hell?’ Malone asked” (CWH,156); his only concern is his immediate comfort, with the desired warmth of the hot water bottle, and whether or not he wants ice in his drink. J.T. Malone’s experience of death forms the somber background against which the novel’s other characters are seen grappling with a changing world, specifically the changing South of the early 1950s.

McCullers presents the Judge as a conscious and deliberate reactionary who not only resists change but denies the reality of the present. The Judge was the first person who spoke first of his dream to correct the South. He handed Sherman a sheaf of papers and asked him “read carefully, boy, for this may be my final contribution as a statesman to the South” (CWH,158). While the discussion was going on between Sherman Pew and the Judge Sherman wrote down some important words: “Sherman wrote down the word ‘polarities’ thinking he would look it up later; he was benefiting from the Judge’s vocabulary if nothing else. All I would say is that your plan would turn back the clock for a hundred years” (CWH,161). In the words of Richard M. Cook, “McCullers undoubtedly intended her portrait of Judge Clane as a caricature of certain Southern traits at their worst and most ridiculous. The Judge’s self-centered provincialism as well as his
monumental failure to come to grips with the changing world around him may be seen as half-serious, half-burlesqued vision of the South’s know-nothing conservatism and its ineffectual resistance to inevitable change” (1975: 111). Evidently McCullers saw the 1950s as a critical period of the South’s struggle for maturity, and her portrait of Judge Clane suggests how hard the struggle to bring about a new social order based on racial equality and justice will be.

The symbolic roles which were to have given Clock without Hands its forceful social reference detract from the effectiveness of the novel on the level immediate, inward experience where McCullers’ powers are greatest. Besides, the symbolic action is questionable. J.T. Malone represents the conscience of the South, and at a crucial moment he recoils from violence. His quiet death in bed, however, has doubtful implications for the collective conscience for which he stands. Judge Clane, with all his demagoguery and his delusions, is made the embodiment of the Old South.

But if the white South was going through a cultural crisis in the 1950s, so was the black. The Judge’s domestic servant Sherman Pew finds it extremely difficult to adjust himself to the historical change, indicating the adaptation to a historical change could be as difficult for the oppressed as the oppressor. Passion beclouds judgment and shuts out any possibility of seizing up the situation in perspective and when passions rise high, reason goes under. In such a situation there is no love lost between the whites and the blacks. Sherman Pew finds it as difficult as Judge Clane does to synchronize feelings with history. Sherman as an adolescent has nourished a deeply felt resentment against the wrongs done to
Negroes; the knowledge that his father (like himself a Negro) was executed as a result of the machinations of the judge, makes him furiously militant. Like Dr. Copeland in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Sherman suffers moments of uncontrollable rage against the wrongs suffered by the Negroes in the South.

Violent deaths seem to be recurrent motif of *Clock without Hands* and violent details reflect racial conflict – black man murders a white and is executed, a retarded black adolescent dies when a policeman carelessly strikes him, a black youth hangs the pet dog of a white youth and he himself is later killed when his house is bombed by racists. The title *Clock without Hands* symbolizes a world where the characters ignore the course of history and passage of time, where time does not march and life stagnates, breeding violence and death. McCullers delineates the barren quality of the life of her characters: for them, the clock has never had hands because their lives are too insignificant to be the subject of any sort of measurement. Each day for them is a repetition of every other day, full of hopeless monotony. The tragedy of their deaths increases precisely because their lives have been so pointless. A number of individuals die before they can discover meaning in their lives and solace in human relationship. The dullness, barrenness and limitations of their daily experience make living for such people inconsequential and their dying is equally pointless. They do not exist in time — they live lonely lives and are situated in space. Malone lives “surrounded by a zone of loneliness” (CWH,8) and Judge Fox Clane also lives according to clock without hands as he does not take into account the passage of time and forces of history.
All of the novel’s stock characters fade into the background as McCullers uses some of her most beautiful prose to humanize both Malone and Martha. In this, perhaps more than any other novel, our sense of what it means to be human is enlarged, but it is enlarged not only through the shattering of gender conventions but also through the shattering of conventional racial, familial, generational, and class relationships. In the words of Anne M. Boyle “McCullers uses race, disability, age, and class to disrupt binary or conventional thinking about what it means to be human” (<monkeynote.stores>).

As Southern white writers who gained prominence during the 1940s and ‘50s, Carson McCullers and Lillian Smith, both from Georgia, shared the common goal of rejecting a false conception of loyalty to fantasies like Southern tradition or white supremacy. They tried to make Southerners see that the myth of absolute racial difference could no longer be sustained, and that this myth was harmful to both blacks and whites.

Both the novels *The Member of the Wedding* and *Clock Without and Hands* have been frequently discussed from the perspective of the presence of queers and freaks. Those who recognize particular forms of race or gender – based oppression tend to connect them in the words of Pamela Bigelow “to the variety and complexity of human isolation and … the destructive repercussions of that alienation” (1994:257). According to Rachel Adams “it ignores the historical specificity of McCullers’s writing, in which freakish characters point to the untenability of normative concepts of gender and race at a moment when these categories were defined with particular rigidity” (1999:552).
There is a relationship between her insistent use of the queer and its current redeployments, the link between the queer and the freak, and finally, the way that each of these categories is inextricably bound to problems of racial difference. At the same time, her understanding of the conjoined histories of race and sexuality is important to queer theory’s interest in exploring interlocking forms of difference. In both *Member of the Wedding* and *Clock without Hands*, sexual difference always functions in relation to the hierarchical relationship between black and white that structures Southern culture. In both the novels, the histories of racial and sexual difference cannot be separated from the ownership of material possessions that enable some forms of deviance to be closeted while bringing others clearly into view.

This chapter has focused on two novels of McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding* and *Clock without Hands*. While discussing the themes of love, loneliness, race, gender, history, region, place, death, adulthood and adolescence, attention is also drawn to how she makes use of the elements of past and memory in these two novels as part of her narrative technique. In the novel *The Member of the Wedding* McCullers used both collective and individual memory through the characters, Berenice and Frankie. In the novel *Clock without Hands* McCullers used historic memory as she spoke about the South and the War through the character of the Judge. The other important character is Malone, who knows in advance about his death so he wanted to spend remaining life in a peaceful manner recollecting all the things that happened in the past. The novel *Clock without Hands* depicts how past events often lead to grotesque results in seemingly normal citizens.
“Clock without Hands is a powerful and sublime book - a novel of delicious humor and tender irony, a book that combines searing, passionate outrage with a deep well-spring of compassion” (<kirjasto.sci/fi/ Carsonmc>). This (Life) is a hard road, and it is the ease with which McCullers helps us to travel it that makes her one of the purest, most moving writers in the language. Situated in history, the novel deals with the moral issues pertaining to racism, injustice etc. that characterized the South at that time.

The Member of the Wedding is McCullers’ best book because it remains complete in itself – a small but undeniably affecting story of adolescent joy and frustration. The plot is limited to a few days in the life of a twelve-year-old girl. It is more skillfully managed than the elaborate murder story in Reflections in a Golden Eye, or the haunting but ultimately mechanical quest pattern in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter. The characters carry great conviction because McCullers is wholly in command of their limited psychologies, and does not strain to suggest that they are darkly symbolic of more than themselves. Lawrence Graver in his book on Carson McCullers comments: “Tonally, the novel is one of the few sentimental comedies in recent years to escape the charge of being maudlin; stylistically, it is the freshest and most inventive of her novels and stories. Berenice is the wise mother figure representing the past, while Frankie represents adolescent longings and looks towards the future” (1969:42).

McCullers is fundamentally a master of bright and melancholy moods. She is a lyricist but not a philosopher; she is an observer of injured characters but not of impure cultures. She writes of the uncomplicated people in straightly narrative
forms as can be seen in *The Member of the Wedding*. In *Clock without Hands* she tried to link the existential crisis of a man doomed by cancer to the sociological crisis of the South poisoned by racial strife. In the recent past, a number of critics have sometimes taken McCullers’ intentions in her weakest novels as a measure of her performance, and have evoked the names of Tolstoy, Proust, and Faulkner to describe the range and quality of her achievement. Yet *The Ballad of the Sad Café* and *The Member of the Wedding* (the stories that will most likely last) demand comparison not with books by the prolific masters of European literature, but with works by three writers of a more moderate level of accomplishment: Eudora Welty, Katherine Anne Porter, and Flannery O’Connor. In the opinion of Lawrence Graver “Although McCullers may eventually rank fourth in this distinguished quartet, she belongs by disposition and the solidity of her accomplishment in their company” (1969: 45).