In her short stories, McCullers concerns herself once again with the theme of isolation, frustration and the psychic distance suffered by the growing children, but in many stories she focusses on the need to relate to others emotionally, to reach for love and to the acquiring of self-knowledge. In these stories McCullers initiates the spontaneous language of the child or the adolescents and manipulates relatively unconnected expressions of emotion peculiar to the immature. Nearly in all her stories, her central characters are situated within the family groups; the family provides background against which the crisis of the protagonist is developed. As in her novels, McCullers dramatizes in her stories the emotional crisis or the internal conflict which overwhelms the protagonists. The author illustrates the psychic tensions of a child or an adolescent caught up between the given situation and his own need for full expression and maturity. More often than not, the adolescent character experiences pain at the deepening of his or her own sense of isolation and psychic distance, which separates him from those around him. In her later stories such as 'A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud', 'A Domestic Dilemma',
'Who Has Seen the Wind', however, McCullers does emphasize the character's search for love as a spiritual therapy. Love, McCullers seems to suggest, not only lends significance and mystery to ordinary experience but "transforms the perception of the self, nature and God."\(^1\) This is particularly applicable to her allegorical story 'A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud'. Here McCullers does try to explore the nature of love, love appears to be an "incomprehensible force, too complex to be separated from hatred, pity, memory, hope or despair."\(^2\)

Many critics find in her stories a looseness of organization and the inclusion of irrelevant details, but the judgement can be applicable only to the stories written earlier in her career. Evidently, the author had not yet developed full control of action manifested in her novels. However, in the stories like 'Wunderkind' and 'Correspondence' she does achieve a high degree of artistry, which may be attributed to her abandonment of the first person point of view and her subsequent use of omniscient narrator. She reveals far greater control, directness and economy in her depiction of the main protagonist and the characters are equally convincing. Frances in 'Wunderkind', is shown incapable of entering into any emotional relationship with others including Heine. Music dies in her, as she walks out of her instructor's
lesson room. Henritta Evans in 'Correspondence' seeks a mirror image of herself in another hemisphere, just as the narcissistic characters in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter talk to Singer who never answers. It is, as if she writes letters to herself, a kind of talking aloud. The themes developed in Henky's letters are those encountered elsewhere in McCullers' fiction: the essential narcissism of human beings, the longing for reciprocity or any expression of interest or affection, and the ironic combination of gain and loss as one grows up. The epistolary form which McCullers employs gives to 'Correspondence' a unique stylistic coherence.

Here, a critical analysis of some of McCullers' stories will be attempted inorder to throw light on her basic themes and her artistic manipulation of these themes. 'Sucker' an early story by McCullers commands attention, for it portrays the deep sense of anguish experienced by the twelve-year-old foster brother of the narrator, and the changes that come within the boy, leading to a total diminishing of emotional reciprocity between the two boys. The twelve-year-old boy is called Sucker by everyone including his cousin Pete, because he used to follow, remember and believe every word that his sixteen-year-old cousin Pete said. In spite of the fact that he was ridiculed by his cousin Pete, Sucker kept on believing every word that Pete said. Talking to himself
all the time, playing make-believe games of his own, Sucker was like a shadow Pete could afford to ignore, never feeling the need to respond to the affection of Sucker. This went on for some time till Pete began to be attracted by his beautiful classmate Maybelle and she started responding. Pete, full of the sense of new found happiness and wanting to share it with someone, found in Sucker an avid listener and sympathizer. The two of them shared a period of comradeship and deep affection for each other, then Maybelle changed her affection and started going out with another boy. Unable to win back the attention of Maybelle, Pete took out his frustration and venom on Sucker. One night, while he was trying to console Pete, Sucker was brutally told of what Pete thought of him, "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!" This snapped the bond of brotherly affection between the two, and Sucker, after experiencing a brief spell of love and affection, is left all alone and lonely. It is then that Sucker changes back to his original name Richard and all subsequent efforts of Pete to re-establish the old affection are thwarted as something within Richard has snapped the old ties with Pete. This change of name suggests a regressive step — back from comradeship to aloneness, shutting out all possibility of rapprochement.
Another story of similar overtone is 'Like That'
where the protagonist feels lonely and isolated, because
her older sister is preoccupied with her own affair with
Tuck, and has no time for her younger sister who longs for
her love and affection. The young adolescent is afraid
that the same mysterious troubles that are making her older
sister unhappy may not be in store for her in future, and
this makes her experience the pain of psychic distance from
her sister, with whom she had once shared affectionate
rapport: "We don't do any of the things we used to. It's
good weather for fudge or for doing so many things. But no
she just sits around or goes for long walks in the chilly late
afternoon by herself. Sometimes she'll smile in a way that
really gripes — like I was such a kid and all. Sometimes I
want to cry or to hit her."

In both the stories, the protagonists have experienced
a brief period of affection and love, and long for it when
they find it missing from their lives. Pete, for instance,
very vividly recalls the brief period when he and Sucker had
been together and had shared secret thoughts, desires and
experiences with each other. When that friendship is lost,
Pete feels guilty of hurting the adolescent Sucker as well as
is hurt at Sucker's separation from him.
'Breath from the Sky' portrays vividly the frustration, isolation and sense of alienation of a dying child, who feels that none can understand her situation or sympathize with her. The sense of isolation is further heightened, when those around the child do not respond naturally to her condition and all their efforts at providing understanding and solace to the child prove futile. Constance, suffering from tuberculosis, feels estranged and cut off from her family and those around her because none seems to understand her plight; her emotional security appears threatened. She feels that she is being abandoned by her family because she is being sent to a rest home. Even her domineering nurse, whose brittle and loud voice she has come to hate, will leave her alone ultimately. Her family, as they prepare to go for swimming become an object of envy for her, and reclining on a chair in the garden, Constance longs to become a part of the blue water and the blue sky, as if that would brighten up the dull grey existence she leads. She longs for fresh air and wishes to be in lap of nature, because that she feels, will help her escape the desecration she associates with her illness and which, she feels, is the reason for other's rejection of her. She longs for love and understanding from those around her, especially her mother. The efficient but totally unemotional nurse, keeps on cautioning her about the importance
of cheerfulness but the child cannot respond to the gaiety of the nurse for she feels it be unreal and artificial. Her mothers efforts also at appearing unemotional, to keep away her grief from the child fail for in her behaviour the child sees rejection and not compassion and understanding. In an effort to be accepted by her family and to become clean, Constance wants her mother to cut off her hair. Her suffering becomes poignant when we see her mother hacking at the girl's hair with force, as if she too wishes to be cut off from her child who will be leaving home the next day. She hurries off from the scene to take the rest of the family for swimming, as if she were determined to keep herself and the rest of the family involved in the routines associated with life rather than death. The imperceptible shudder that passes across her shoulders while she leaves Constance, who is longing for love and understanding from her mother, makes the child feel all the more alienated from life and the world around her, for she feels that she has been rejected by her mother too.

With subtle deft strokes McCullers in the short story 'Breath from the Sky' blends the child's desire to be accepted and loved with the desire to go swimming with the rest of the family. The inability of the child as well as the futility of the desire for swimming, becomes symbolic
of the inability and the futility of the desire to be loved: Both remain unfulfiled in the story. For Constance, to be kept away from swimming and to be sent away from home, spell a fate worse than death. Understanding from her mother would have helped Constance to face her situation in a better way, and her anguish is increased when she finds no love forthcoming from her family.

Another story 'Correspondence' deals with an important theme basic to McCullers' canon, that is, the longing for reciprocity in the expression of love or affection thwarted by the basic narcissism of human beings. The fourteen-year old Henrietta (Henky) Evans has been writing letters to a South American boy, who has volunteered in a magazine to be a pen-pal. She expresses her inmost desires and longings in the letter. She likes to believe that she will be understood and her emotions will be reciprocated and that barriers of time, place and nations will cease to exist, and her pen-pal will be joined in a common bond of human love, and that, the two of them so far away from each other will come together and be able to communicate with each other. For two and a half months, Henky writes letters and her initial bewilderment at not receiving an answer soon changes to disappointment and then to cynicism when the realization dawns that she will never get any answer to her letters. She wonders why Manoel Garcia
had given his name in the list if he had no intentions of corresponding.

Henky's disappointment at the lack of reciprocity to her overtures of affection, as manipulated in the story, assumes a universal dimension. As McCullers views it, more often than not, there is very little response to such overtures of love and affection in human relations. Most of the people are impervious to such demands of reciprocity of love expended on them. This lack of reciprocity and communication as McCullers sees it, is basic to human condition. Lack of love, inevitably leads to cynicism, just as lack of response leads Henky to become a cynical adult. The lack of reciprocity to love and affection makes most of the human beings turn cynical.

An epistolary form which McCullers employs gives artistic coherence to the gradual change that Henky experiences, from the spontaneous trustfulness of a young girl to a disappointed and cynical adult. In just a short period of two and a half month (of letter writing), her letters suggest the painful process of growing up, that is getting disillusioned about deeply cherished hopes and aspirations. The subtle use of gentle irony, in exposing Henky's failure to realize her self-centeredness is a superb
stroke of McCullers' artistic excellence. In her eagerness
to forge communication with the South American boy, Henky
forgets that in her writing, she must reach out to learn about
a culture far different from her own. She fails to realize
that she is seeking a mirror image of herself in another
hemisphere. She wants to be reassured that the South American
is the spiritual twin she seeks. In an ironic undertone
McCullers suggests the essential narcissism of human beings
even when they aspire for and expect love and understanding
from others.

'A Domestic Dilemma' underscores the incomprehensible
complexities of love; in it the author reveals the nature of
love of an individual caught up in the conflicting emotions
of love and hatred for a drunken spouse. Love, in this story,
proves to be a dominant force intermingled with the emotions
of hatred, hope, despair and pity. Martin Meadows is unhappy
because his wife Emily has taken to drinking heavily. He
rushes home every evening from work, to look after his children
who are too young to look after themselves. A year before,
Emily, in one of her drunken bouts had dropped their baby
daughter on her head and hearing the screams of the children.
Martin "had an affrighted vision of the future." Martin's anger
is directed towards Emily because of her inability to protect
the children; and in moments of loneliness Martin feels
overwhelmed by fatigue, despair and loathing for his wife. But again, as he looks at Emily, sleeping tranquilly, unaware of the turmoils of his mind, Martin is drawn to her and he realizes that the bond of love is stronger than any other emotion and then "All thoughts of blame or blemish were distant from him... His hand sought the adjacent flesh and sorrow paralleled desire in the immense complexity of love."6

It is with a great depth of characterization that McCullers portrays the conflicting emotions of Martin through the interaction of his character with that of Emily. If Martin is suffering from the discordant atmosphere of his family life, Emily too is a victim of the loneliness and anguish of an unsettled life. She is homesick for the warmth of the South, the bonds of her family, cousins and childhood friends, and is unable to adjust herself to the life of the North. Never really accepting her life in New York, Emily finds motherhood and housekeeping oppressive and finds release and solace in drinking. The emotions of guilt and anger at herself, the surge of love that she feels for her children, make her situation pathetic, for she is seeking escape from her tension through drinking which would lead to a sure disaster for herself and her family.
It is with great artistic skill that McCullers combines the conflicting emotions of love and hate, loathing and anger, suggesting that love is a composite sentiment. The vacillating emotions of Martin become obvious to the reader gradually, as the story moves towards the climax but Martin becomes aware of them only in the final movement of the story when drawn to Emily through consciousness of the common bond of suffering, he reaches out to touch "the adjacent flesh," and "life, for a moment, achieves again a glimmer of its lost radiance." It is with great artistry that McCullers depicts the complexity of a situation involving the intricate tensional relationship between Martin and Emily in the story. Emphasizing Emily's drunkenness, McCullers brings out skilfully, the interaction of Martin with the children as he bathes them and feeds them while Emily sleeps in her drunken stupor: the surge of love that he experiences for the children while he washes them and gets them ready for bed; and the anger and loathing he feels towards Emily for her inability to look after the children. Nonetheless, to his great surprise, he feels overwhelmed with waves of affection for Emily while he watches her sleeping in full repose. As Margaret B. McDowell astutely observes: "Like the couple caught in the bottle in 'The Instant of the Hour After', Martin sees himself and Emily caught together in bonds of suffering that are stronger than those of love, but those of
love still survive. That is, love abides because of the realization on the part of Martin that Emily no less than he himself has suffered immensely — for her suffering is nameless. She has been as much a victim of circumstances as he himself has been.

The force of love and its power over an individual, is once again expressed in 'The Sojourner' which reveals the strength of love over an individual and his surprise when love catches him completely unawares. Returning from his father's funeral in Atlanta, John Ferris glimpses his former wife Elizabeth, in a street in New York. Feeling lonely, as he can contact no old friends, Ferris impulsively calls her on the telephone and agrees to visit her home for an early dinner. Elizabeth graciously receives him along with her husband and has a surprise in store for him — a birthday cake — with thirty-eight candles. Marveling at the way in which Elizabeth still manages to look beautiful, Ferris feels envious of Elizabeth's new family and the close ties they seem to share. A stab of anxiety pierces his heart, for he feels that he has lost his own youthful days and wasted life, and he momentarily mourns for not only his father's death but also for the snapping away of his own family ties. Sharing the warm atmosphere of Elizabeth's home, it dawns upon Ferris that he has been a nomad through
out his life — from the South to New York and then to Europe — with only a brief period of breakage in his wandering during his years of marriage with Elizabeth.

The force of love which suddenly surges within his heart, and his desire to share the same type of idyllic life as Elizabeth is enjoying with someone makes Ferris lie about the marriage plans he and his mistress Jeannine have. Ferris goes back to Paris and waiting for Jeannie to return from the night club where she sings, he sits cuddling her lonely little son for whom he never had any time before. He talks of taking the boy to Tuilries, fondles him affectionately and presses the child close to his heart in a desperate hope that the versatile emotion of love will enter and become a prominent part of his life from that moment onward.

McCullers subtly suggests the futility of such an endeavor to attain love, as Ferris is making. Ferris has, by refusing to give up his individual freedom — a facade for his egoism — after his marriage to Elizabeth, chosen to lead a life of a sojourner. It is ironic that a man like Ferris who refuses to give up his freedom while seeking the fullness of life, lands up getting no fullness at all. The surge of love that affects Ferris when he finds himself in the idyllic atmosphere of Elizabeth's new home is indicative of the absence of love in his life and the sudden realization that "His own
life seemed too solitary, a fragile column supporting nothing amidst the wreckage of the years," bring home to Ferris the bitter truth that he has wasted his chances of getting love when it was available to him: The music that Elizabeth plays for him acts as a catalyst for his tumultuous emotions, and the serenity and purity of the unfinished music makes him realize the incompleteness of his own life like the unfinished song. Sitting in Elizabeth's dining room, celebrating his birthday and at the same time mourning for his dead father, Ferris realizes the brevity of life and also that he has lost the best part of his life being unable to commit himself to another person. His lying about his marriage with Jeannine, express the strong desire in his heart to become committed to another person so that he may be able to attain the fullness of life.

But as in her other works, McCullers once again underlines the futility of such efforts to attain love by an individual caught in a web of circumstances and an insatiable ego. Ferris' attempt to acquire love is not at all selfless and hence it must inevitably fail. He lies about Jeannine and any relation that may develop in future between the two cannot be deep-rooted nor enduring, as Ferris must remain a sojourner. Though the journey down the memory lane has given a momentary insight to Ferris yet it is not enduring enough to actuate
him to make a radical point of departure from his habitual course as a sojourner; for he essentially is a person who accepts transitory pleasures. Though apparently leading a free life Ferris is "in reality a hollow individual — a sojourner in life, who evades its challenges and difficulties and so never achieves its rewards."¹¹

Ferris' attempt to love Valentine, Jeannine's child is also self-motivated; "the terror, the acknowledgment of wasted years and death"¹² make him press the child close to his heart in a hope that "an emotion as protean as his love could dominate the pulse of time."¹³ Ferris eventually proves a self-centered egoist who refuses to learn anything from experience, for any search for love that an egoistic individual makes must lead to frustration. Till an individual is willing to commit himself totally to another and submerge his egocentric self in the deep emotion of love, love will continue evading him as it must happen with Ferris. In order to love, one must step out of his egoism and realize the otherness of the other. Love is not self-love.

Perhaps one of the most important stories of McCullers that deserve to be studied and analyzed in its own right as well as in its relation to the rest of her work is 'A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud', for it universalizes the concept of love, that McCullers has so prominently depicted in all her works. She
presents love as a science in this story, and this science of love can be inculcated by an individual to gain insight into the experiences of life. By learning to love small things and objects or living beings at a time, an individual can learn to love human beings, and to love with greater understanding than ever before.

'A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud' revolves around a tramp who has come to an all night Café for beer. The owner of the café is "a bitter and stingy man" called Leo, who is a witness to the conversation that takes place between the tramp and the newspaper boy who has come to have coffee in the Café. The tramp beckons the boy to join him and when he does so, declares in a simple manner "I love you." He talks of his wife, who had left him ten years ago, for another man and tells the boy of how through years he has come to acquire the science of love. The reminiscent story of the tramp holds the boy spellbound, though Leo interrupts the recital contemptfully and apparently has no interest in the tramp's story.

The tramp has always been an intense person who has been able to assimilate experiences till he met his wife. The things, which before had always appeared meaningless and scattered for him, acquired a new meaning: "What happened was..."
this. There were these beautiful feelings and loose little pleasures inside me. And this woman was something like an assembly line for my soul. I run these little pieces of myself through her and I come out complete."

his wife, whom he loved intensely, helped him to assimilate things till she deserted him, and then he was inconsolable. Giving up his job as railroad engineer, the tramp searched after her for two years and then he became a victim of indulgence in every form of wickedness. Drifting aimlessly for three more years, the tramp tried to overcome the intensity of his sorrow, and then in a flash of illumination the 'science' came to him. The biggest mistake, he perceived, that most men made was when they fall in love for the first time: "Without science, with nothing to go by, they undertake the most dangerous and sacred experience in God's earth. They fall in love with a woman," they start at the wrong end of love. Since most men start at the climax rather than from the beginning, they are bound to fail in their love. The real science of love is to start with a tree, a rock, a cloud and then move gradually upward. When the tramp understood this significant truth, he too taught himself to love according to this new science: "I meditated and I started very cautious. I would pick up something from the street and take it home with me. I bought a goldfish and I concentrated
on the goldfish and I loved it. I graduated from one thing to another. Day by day I was getting this technique." After six years of effort, the tramp has been able to perfect his technique and has learnt to love anything and anybody: "I can love anything. No longer do I have to think about it even. I see a street full of people and a beautiful light comes in me. I watch a bird in the sky. Or I meet a traveler on the road. Everything, Son. And anybody. All stranger and all loved! With this remark and telling the boy "Remember I love you," the tramp finishes his beer and leaves the café. The boy then asks Leo what he thinks of the tramp, whether he is drunk or a dope fiend or crazy or lunatic, on which Leo refuses to make a comment though he denies the tramp to be either a drunk or doped.

The 'science of love', which the tramp has acquired as a result of his experiential journey is symbolically suggestive of the spiritual integration of the protagonist who can visualize a clear relationship between self, nature and God. In order to be able to love, one must learn how to be openly receptive to all that exists—a tree, a rock, a cloud, a goldfish, a puppy or merely a stone. In other words, one must learn how to relate to the otherness of the objective world. In spiritual terms, it implies surrendering of one's self to all that exists. It is a
mysterious process because it makes one conscious of the divine presence in all objects of nature as well as in human beings. It enables one to achieve a feeling of harmony with the objective world as well as other human beings. This is an insight which the tramp has painfully gained from his suffering as a sequel to his desertion of his wife, and the frantic search that he made to find her.

Like the Ancient Mariner, the tramp brought upon himself the curse of suffering — a guilt ridden lonely existence. Just as the Ancient Mariner carries the burden of the dead Albatross around his neck, the tramp has not found it possible to rid himself of the burden of guilt, which weighs heavy on him. In S.T. Coleridge's poem the Albatross falls from the Ancient Mariner's neck the moment he experienced: 'A spring of love gushed from my heart/And I blessed them unaware'. It is when the Ancient Mariner is able to love 'All things both great and small' that the curse falls off and he becomes 'A sadder and a wiser man'. Similarly in this story the beloved's desertion makes the tramp at first to search for her and later to discover salvation through the science of love which he has worked out in order to achieve a kind of spiritual therapy for his great grief. As McCullers sees it, it is the close identification with nature, which enables the protagonist once again to attempt love and thereby to gain insight into the transcendental aspects of sexual
experience: "By learning to love one small object or living thing at a time, the man hopes that he will eventually develop fully the ability to love a woman again, at least to love with greater understanding than he had been able to do previously." ²¹

The story is told more in the nature of a fable with a directly stated message and the message is grounded in the time-old wisdom treated often by poets since time immemorial. McCullers herself has treated this theme in a short poem 'The Twisted Trinity'. However, the beauty of the story lies in the authors' deft handling of the theme, and the atmosphere that raises the story to an allegorical level and gives it an extra dimension of depth. She here achieves the maximum economy in the poetic treatment of the theme. The treatment of love in this story has a unique flavor of its own; it is not a mere variation on the theme as stated by McCullers in her other works. She has enlarged the scope of love by giving it a spiritual dimension, so that love becomes an all-inclusive perspective on life.

According to John Betjeman, the stories have been written in an exciting style and are "too well written, too sensitive. The pleasure of each vivid sentence of description, each tenuous thought and feeling captured in black and white,
can cover obscurity and weak construction." However, it must be admitted, that most of these short stories are too static to be among her finest narratives. They hardly stand comparison with her novels. In the words of Richard Cook, McCullers "spent these years writing mostly short stories for women's magazines, all of which seem trivial and thin when compared to the novels." Maybe, this has something to do with the limited nature of her fiction's subject matters and her own attitude towards it. The stories do not show her as a first rate writer, they are not as impactful as The Heart is a Lonely Hunter or The Member of the Wedding. These stories appear far removed from the wealth of odd and homely details that create in her best works a felt sense of time and place. Likewise, the characters do not come alive, stand up and cast real shadows.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Margaret B. McDowell, Carson McCullers, p. 130.

2. Ibid., p. 114.


4. Ibid., p. 73.

5. Ibid., p. 140.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Margaret B. McDowell, op. cit., p. 133.

9. Ibid.


13. Ibid.
14Ibid., p.143.
15Ibid., p.144.
16Ibid., p.147.
17Ibid., p.150.
18Ibid., pp.150-151.
19Ibid., p.151.
20Ibid.
21Margaret B.McDowell, op.cit., p.130.
23Richard M.Cook, Carson McCullers, p.123.