Conclusion

A 'Pilgrim of Loneliness' and an artist of remarkable originality, Carson McCullers writes of man's isolation, his irresistible desire to communicate and his dismal failure at it. Displaying unique sensibility, she captures the anguish, the agony and the ecstasy of the solitary souls fluttering against the inviolable citadels of emotional isolation. Audacious and dauntless, McCullers presents her vision of the human situation boldly: she explores and bares the complexities of the human heart, disturbing the accepted notions of human nature and behaviour. What is outstanding about her achievement is that she clothes her vision in an art of high order, making the reading of her works an aesthetically satisfying and intellectually provoking experience.

McCullers attributes man's isolation to the failure of love in his life. Love in McCullers' fictional world is too wide and comprehensive to be limited to its sexual connotation. McCullers dexterously detects the diverse ways in which love manifests itself and seeks expression: as an aching desire for the companionship of the loved one; as a life-long mission for the uplift of one's race; as a champion of the down-trodden; as an avenue of approach to beauty and even in the wayward act of complete identification with such abstract a thing as a wedding.

McCullers' vision of human loneliness is a part of the larger vision of alienation peculiar to the isolated South where totally different...
intellectual, cultural and emotional currents created, nurtured and perpetuated the sense of isolation. If McCullers' Southern identity makes her keenly perceptive to the plight of the alienated and the isolated, once again, it is her Southern identity that enables her to comprehend clearly the forces responsible for the isolation of her characters. The Southern mind shows an acute awareness of the significance of spiritual community and the natural and moral order in making living a meaningful and satisfying experience. For him any attempt to negate the spiritual worth of the community or to tamper with the natural order brings in a sense of isolation.

The fictional world of McCullers is steeped in isolation, ruptured bonds and unprofitable relationships because her characters fail to relate to others around them. They refuse to understand and appreciate others; they deny the wholeness of life, compartmentalising it into certain compulsive patterns; they refuse to accept their roles and sex identity and they deny the common brotherhood of man on the basis of arbitrary divisions of race and sex. Wherever McCullers' characters fail to forge a fruitful relationship there is some violation of the moral or the natural order. Sunk in their buried lives, shut in their “inner rooms,” McCullers' characters tend to obliterate the dynamism, vigour and energy of life, thereby, inviting the spectre of loneliness.

On the other hand, McCullers presents certain characters who despite heavy odds against them succeed in establishing meaningful relationships. By presenting some relationships which become productive, the novelist voices the belief that one can lift oneself up from the morass
of isolation. McCullers’ most isolated characters are those who disregard and overlook the reality of life and orient it toward the abstract, whereas her well-adjusted characters are those who accept their identity and responsibility. These characters are rooted in the physical rather than the metaphysical. They undergo moral suffering but retain their inner stability providing some coherence to their world, whereas the isolated characters of McCullers, in their efforts to be independent of reality stimulation, end up building a kind of impenetrable wall around them. McCullers by showing the miserable plight of those who get trapped in their crippling defences shows its other side.

In order to bring in an intense realism, enlarge the conception of human capacities and open on to a freer imaginative world wherein spiritual isolation of the human beings can be probed and bared, McCullers relies on the use of the grotesque. Through grotesque characters and grotesque situations, she is able to report the paradoxical reality which the traditional categories like tragedy or comedy fail to capture. Physical deformities and mental aberrations of her characters mirror the distortions of the psychic life.

McCullers makes a deft use of imagery to heighten the thematic effects of her work. The desolation, the brooding silences of dreary Southern towns are caught in stark imagery where heat and the scorching sun augment the sense of isolation - the particular experience in which her characters are involved. Though the realistic details of McCullers’ Southern towns provide an integrated sense of place and time yet the novelist chisels every detail with an eye on the metaphorical aspect of this background so that emotion and vision interfuse and the theme and the imagery conceivably deepen the sense of loneliness pervading her work.
With its depressing solitude and cloistered life, the South provides McCullers a medium to scan, explore and arrive at her metaphorical truth of the human situation – a task in which she is greatly helped by her cunning style. Seemingly artless, but in reality a very artful and deliberate use of nuances, shades of meaning, repetitions and certain omissions, help the novelist creating the required and desired mood and atmosphere. From *The Heart* to *Clock*, McCullers’ style in each and every novel acts as an extension of the central theme: it emerges as a co-operator, effectively instrumental in externalising the novelist’s comprehension of the human situation.

McCullers’ architectonic skill i.e., plot-construction, structure, settings display her notable artistry wherein her vision guides, moulds and shapes her art. The disjunctive forms in the shape of multiple narrators and the disjoined levels of narration reflect the personal alienation of her characters in *The Heart*; the economy and precision exercised in *Reflections* is in tune with the desolation and spiritual bankruptcy of the main figures; the division of *The Member* into three parts is dictated by the quest for identity by an isolated teenager; the simple structure and the archetypal energy of ballad enables the author to delve into the realm of elemental human passions in *The Ballad* and finally the realistic levels of *Clock* facilitate the delineation of the historical and the political situation of South of 1953 and 1954. The settings of her novels, laid out in the very openings of her fiction, set the climate of her work: they function as a barometer indicating the weather to be expected.
McCullers chooses rather melancholy and sombre aspect of human existence and explores it in all its ramifications by means of theme, symbol, structure and style. Her stories, characters and settings act as metaphors enacting the parable of human loneliness. McCullers’ apprehension of the human situation is subjective but her handling of the material is objective. The subject-matter of her fiction is emotion-laden but she does not let her own emotions and personality transfuse her creation which speaks highly of the discipline of McCullers as an artist.

There has been some criticism of McCullers’ work on unfortunate grounds. Some critics complain that McCullers’ work suffers from a limited range: it lacks the intellectual profundity and the social commitment of art. But this criticism is unfair and impertinent because it criticises the work of a writer of notable qualities for deficiency in certain qualities that are not in her nature to possess. Interestingly, her own comments made in an article “The Russian Realists and Southern Literature” now compiled by her sister Margarita Smith in The Mortgaged Heart (p. 257), give McCullers’ answer to this criticism. The novelist categorically asserts that the writer has the prerogative of limiting his scope and confining the boundaries of the fictional realm of his creation. McCullers’ domain always has been the human heart in all its complexities, the human soul in all its visible and obscure regions and she neither intends nor attempts to include other concerns as her main territory, though as peripheral concerns they are present like the
proletarian and racial undertones in *The Heart* and the racial bigotry in *Clock*. Critics may fling their barbs at her for her sense and sensibility but it is important that she writes out of the compulsions of her inner being, listening to her personal demon and intuition.

McCullers’ work has to be judged with an eye on her aims and the techniques she employs to give artistic shape to her vision. Evaluating her work by these standards we find her talent rich, intense and strikingly original. Portraying the predicament of the spiritual isolation of man in a bold and audacious manner, combining her special sensibility with her striking craftsmanship, and making her region, the South, an agent of the metaphysical truth of her vision, McCullers produced works of remarkable art, securing an assured reputation.