

Alice Hamilton

LONELINESS AND ALIENATION:

THE LIFE AND WORK OF CARSON McCULLERS

CARSON McCULLERS' WRITINGS have been noticed most frequently for the exploitation of loneliness and of freakishness. *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter* is most famous on both counts. It opens with two mutes who are close friends. One mute, as a character, might make a book seem odd. Two mutes certainly do. Later in the book, one of these mutes meets three other mutes in a café. Taken literally, this freakishness strains the bounds of credulity.

Loneliness, too, must not be taken literally or in cliché fashion. "Alienation" is the cry of our age, and the jargon associated with the word covers much lack of thought. Mrs. McCullers is quite specific in her use of loneliness. She is writing about the inner isolation that man feels when he is frustrated from expressing himself as fully as possible. Loneliness, then, is tied to the self that demands room to realize its dreams and to find an object in which these dreams may be embodied. It is an eminently subjective state, one demanding freedom for each self to *see* itself in the world. There is no objective freedom allowed to another person to be himself in his own right. And so the dreamer of dreams seeks an object to love which is the product of his own dream-image. The beloved, at the same moment, hates being created in the image of the lover, and therefore resists the love. The lover then finds himself turned back into his inner room of dreams. Emotionally, such lovers grow "warts on themselves the size of gobers, and dream themselves into a dangerous inward world."¹

Mrs. McCullers distinguishes clearly between the inner world of dreams and the outer world of people. Her attitudes to these are realized dramatically in each story and require separate notice. She is consistent in her delight in the radiance of the world. Sometimes this is noticed in moments of instinct-

ive pleasure (for example, by Private Williams and Lenora Pendleton). Sometimes this radiance is noticed in moments of vision (for example, by Captain Pendleton and Biff Brannon). Sometimes it is just there, and only the authoress seems to notice. Against the radiance of nature is placed the disorder or chaos in society, and the seeming freakishness in the order of creation which is mankind. Mrs. McCullers' observation confirms for her that she lives in a world of freaks and abnormalities, that something is wrong with creation on the human level. There is here, of course, a basic theological question. If the world is created good, what then can be the explanation of deviations from the good?

Mrs. McCullers' position is that the Creator's hand stopped too soon. The world is epitomized in the fairgrounds described in *The Member of the Wedding*. In this novel Frankie is afraid of what she sees in the House of Freaks: the bi-sexual Man-Woman, the Midget, and the Pinhead.² Yet she is surrounded by freaks whom she accepts as part of her everyday existence: John Henry her cousin, and Honey Brown the boy who would suddenly run "hog wild" and who Big Mama said was "not quite finished by his Creator" (p. 122).

In Mrs. McCullers' writings, even when bodies are not freakish, souls are. Souls, she remarks, have colours and shapes like bodies.³ Indeed, these shapes are so marked that they give the impression of abnormality even in a normal body. Contradictions in the mind show in the body of Jake Blount as though he were a man who had served a term in prison, lived for a long time with foreigners in South America, or gone to Harvard. Something was different from the usual. The great question here is whether fulfilment obtained at the expense of normality should be considered wrong. Should such fulfilment be allowed to bring happiness?⁴ The soul of man is small and grotesque. It seeks to love its grotesque counterpart in the flesh. The flesh, however, does not recognize its soul and hates it.

What Mrs. McCullers is offering in this regard is a strange variant of neo-Platonism. In classical neo-Platonism beautiful soul cries out in longing to beautiful soul, finding its happiness in a union beyond the flesh as it reaches out to the bliss of the Transcendent Good. Mrs. McCullers' affirmation is that a Creator has formed an incomplete humanity, one that can only trust that there is sense in creation. Some good, rather than total good, is the meaning available for man.

Radiance, nevertheless, exists in the world and cannot be denied. Mrs.

McCullers shows two ways in which this radiance can be achieved. First, it may come through instinctive and intuitive means, where man finds satisfaction in comradeship, gaiety, good-manners, and the satisfactions of sex, food, and sleep.⁵

The second way is through the search for interior freedom and the expression of this freedom. In its lesser form it is seen in the universal offering of love to a beloved, where the person loved takes the form of the soul of the lover. In its greater form it is seen in the act of artistic creation, where great musicians, writers, and artists do not withdraw their hand too soon—as the God of creation unfortunately did. Love can aspire to rise to the love of all things and all decent people. Yet completeness is a remote hope for any one existing within a creation which is itself limited. If men could create their world, each person would fashion his out of his own narrow point of view, and the result would be grotesque.⁶

While dreams and love endure, the soul remains alive. When dreams and love die, the soul rots in boredom. Mrs. McCullers begins her last book, *Clock Without Hands*, with the remark that death is always the same, but each man dies in his own way. It is this sickness and death of people dying in inner rooms that her fiction is about.

Carson (Smith) McCullers' life has an affinity with that of three of her brilliantly-drawn adolescent characters: Mick Kelly in *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter*, Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding*, and Mollie Lovejoy in *The Square Root of Wonderful*. Since all these characters are searching for interior and exterior acceptance, her life is interesting in relation to theirs.

She was born on the nineteenth of February, 1917, and died on the twenty-ninth of September, 1967. She was odd, lonely, impulsive, precocious. Her talent in music appeared when she was five; her talent in writing by her fifteenth year. At eighteen she went to New York to study music at the Juilliard School of Music. A room-mate lost Carson Smith's money, and she was forced to work. Part-time work and part-time writing led to the publication, in 1936, of "Wunderkind", the story of a child prodigy who failed.

The next year she married Reeves McCullers. Mrs. McCullers was already suffering from ill-health that had begun with rheumatic fever in 1936. Paralytic strokes occurred after this, and twice in 1947.

Her emotional life, too, was as disturbed as her physical. In 1940 she and her husband quarrelled and were divorced. In 1945 they remarried, but their life together disintegrated rapidly. In 1953 Reeves McCullers committed

suicide. Between 1958 and 1964 her ill-health grew, manifest in a series of ailments: heart attacks, breast cancer, paralysis, pneumonia, and fracture of the hip. It is little wonder that she should be preoccupied with deficiencies in strength and health, in family relationships, and in communication between people of strong wills and sensitivity.

The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter is Mrs. McCullers' first novel. Published in 1940, it is the work of a young woman of twenty-two. The story centres around John Singer, a deaf-mute who becomes the "god" of the four chief characters. The five characters—John Singer, Jake Blount, Dr. Copeland, Mick Kelly, and Biff Brannon—are marked off from each other by their inner needs. Mick Kelly's cry, however, is the cry of all of them: "The feeling was a whole lot worse than being hungry for any dinner, yet it was like that. I want—I want—I want—was all that she could think about—but just what this real want was she did not know" (p. 41).

The story is complex. Two deaf-mutes live together in a town in Georgia for ten years. They are without friends but also without loneliness. Spiros Antonapoulos, an immensely fat Greek candy-maker, is idolized by John Singer, an engraver. When disease of mind and body weakens Antonapoulos, his greedy cousin puts him in an asylum. Singer moves to the Kelly boarding-house. He takes his meals at Biff Brannon's café.

When Jake Blount, drunk and abusive, comes to town, Biff keeps him at the café during a week-long drinking bout. Alice Brannon wants Jake turned out on the streets. Singer takes Jake home to the Kellys to be cleaned, fed, and given shelter. Jake finds work on the carrousel at the fair. He spends his spare time trying to rouse the mill-workers to indignation over the injustices done them by the mill-owners. Sundays are kept for Singer, to whom Jake brings his hopes for the workers. Singer thinks Jake is crazy.

Dr. Copeland is the agnostic Negro doctor of this town in Georgia. He has been separated from his wife and children for years, because he has allowed his love of Man to stand in the way of his love of family. Willie is one of Dr. Copeland's sons. His tragedy is bound in that of his father. He is apprehended for slashing a black man and put in jail. Picked on by a guard, three of the convicts are put in a cold shack, cruelly tied up by the feet. Willie loses both legs from gangrene. His father is severely injured when he tries to force Willie's case on the attention of the authorities. Beaten up by the guards and

dying from tuberculosis, Dr. Copeland is taken to live with compassionate relatives on a poor farm.

Mick Kelly is the adolescent middle child of a bitterly poverty-ridden family. She adores Mr. Singer, and tries to tell him about her "inside room" of dreams and her "outside room" of events. Caught in the growing poverty of her family, she knows that her dreams of being a concert pianist and of living in foreign lands must dissolve. Her outer life touches trouble everywhere: disease, cruelty, immature sexual experience, loss of employment, loss of dignity, loss of love, near-murder, and suicide. Mr. Singer is her "god". It is his death by suicide that leaves her unable to eat, unable to sleep. Singer would have understood those symptoms of joylessness.

Biff Brannon, the owner of the New York Café, is the man who watches everything and asks questions about it all. He is half everything. Half-compassionate, half-ironic, half-philosophic, half-romantic, half-man-half-woman, he embraces the qualities that might have made him, fittingly, their "god".

Yet it is Singer who is "the home-made god" of them all.

Singer is related by Mrs. McCullers to the voice of music. He was taught to speak when he was a child, but the dismay on the faces of people who listen to his voice keeps him silent. They cannot speak to him with their hands, either. Even Antonopoulos was too poor in intellect or too lazy to speak hand-language. So Singer watches Jake, Biff, Dr. Copeland, and Mick speaking for him, and they weary him with their busy thoughts. After the flesh of Antonopoulos is taken away from Singer, he remains the lonely, understanding mind-heart that other men seek. He seems to know thoughts that his voice can never utter. In his mind he seems to hear what his ears can never hear (p. 41). His grey-amber eyes are like glass that can be seen through and yet they reflect the thoughts of each of his lovers. Each man links John Singer with the Intelligence that he would have him to be (p. 171).

The broad theme of the book has been stated by Mrs. McCullers in the outline that she sent to the Houghton Mifflin Company for a Fiction Fellowship. Under the heading of General Remarks she writes as follows:

The broad principal theme of this book is indicated in the first dozen pages. This is the theme of man's revolt against his own inner isolation and his urge to express himself as fully as is possible. Surrounding this general idea there are several counter themes and some of these may be stated briefly as follows: (1) There is a deep need in man to express himself by creating some unifying principle or God. A personal God created by a man is a reflection of himself and in substance this God is most often inferior to his creator. (2) In a disorganized society

these individual Gods or principles are likely to be chimerical and fantastic. (3) Each man must express himself in his own way—but this is often denied to him by a wasteful, short-sighted society. (4) Human beings are innately co-operative, but an unnatural social tradition makes them behave in ways that are not in accord with their deepest nature. (5) Some men are heroes by nature in that they will give all that is in them without regard to the effort or to the personal returns.

Of course these themes are never stated nakedly in the book. Their overtones are felt through the characters and situations. . . .⁸

The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter revolves around the question of what makes sense in the eyes of the individual characters. Jake Blount, an intelligent and educated man, wishes first to serve Christianity, and ends serving Marx. He believes that everybody is "blind, dumb, and blunt-headed—stupid and mean" (p. 54). Man will never be free. Jake is so rigid in his ideology that his life in the town ends in a brawl, a riot, and a fight with every man for himself (p. 257). Bitterly, he admits that the smartest man will be able to enslave the others. Freedom is a word to make people feel good. He ends having a recurring dream that dissolves when he wakes. It is remembered once, when he recalls the image of himself carrying a huge basket to feed thousands of Eastern natives and not knowing where to put the burden down. His outer life is Marxist. His inner dream is tied to Christ's miraculous feeding of the thousands, and the promise of peace to those who bring their burdens to Him. Jake would be God.

Dr. Copeland has rejected the Christian God, but he has lived by the virtues of patience and prudence, compassion and sacrifice. Despair has driven him at the end of his life to disbelief in the worth of habits of virtue, and to the conviction that man must fight cunning with cunning and might with might. He should agree with Jake, but his last strength is spent in calling Jake a foul blasphemer, a short-sighted bigot, and a fiend. He has recognized the inner dream of Jake, the pretension of wishing to play god to a world that he despises. Dr. Copeland's affirmation, at his moment of despair, is "the soul of the meanest and most evil of us on this earth is worth more in the sight of justice than—" (p. 232). We do not know what is the value Dr. Copeland invokes in his unfinished cry. Later, in the story of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Mrs. McCullers attempts to find the value that a mean and evil soul may have.

Because she is young and has not worn her fetters for long, Mick has

not lost the power to make a positive affirmation. Like her wants, the intensity of her affirmation is made in numbers rather than in depth of understanding. Seeing that her inner dream of being a concert pianist is not likely to become an outer reality, she questions why she has this longing for music. Inner freedom—is it given only that it can be checked from outside? She tells herself:

It had to be some good if anything made sense. And it was too and it was too and it was too. It was some good.

All right!

O.K.!

Some good (p. 270).

Mick has abandoned, even at the verge of adolescence, the idea of total good and of a "divine plan" for the individual. To survive in the "outside" room you have to be mean and tough, and she intends to develop these characteristics in her baby brother Ralph and in the seven-year-old Bubber. Her assurance to Bubber that he will be taken to Sing Sing for shooting Baby Wilson, and that "when they turn on the juice you just fry up like a piece of burnt bacon. Then you go to Hell," (p. 131) is scarcely the voice of a romantic musician living in the inner room of vision. In her hard young heart she speaks the truth as she knows it.

Mr. Singer is the centre of the lives of these four people, who run the gamut from half-noble to half-ignoble. Dr. Copeland knows Singer's generosity to the poor and the ill. Jake Blount knows his tolerance to ideas. Mick knows his understanding. Biff knows that Blount and Mick make of Singer "a sort of homemade God. Owing to the fact he was a mute they were able to give him all the qualities they wanted him to have. Yes. But how could such a strange thing come about? And why?" (p. 177).

Mrs. McCullers has given the answer. Man needs a god to worship and serve. In a disorganized society man creates his own personal god that is a reflection of himself. Each man expresses himself in his god. Since man is less than perfect, his god is a freak with some part of the total Good missing. The god whom man creates may be, in fact, other than that which man thinks he is.

The truth about Singer is that he is no god. He has been made into one by the love of four people. Singer can tolerate any one with him, rather than remain alone. He is dismayed by the busy nature of the minds of Jake, Mick, and Dr. Copeland. These three love activity, he notices, more than eating or sleeping or wine or friendly company. Singer's own thoughts are not

on the dreams, the loves, or the hates of his guests. He thinks only of his own needs: cigarettes, beer, meat, and Antonopoulos; for it with these he associates joy, pleasure, and rest. Singer's private dream is connected with the happy composure of his wise and good Antonopoulos. He has forgotten the pettiness, nastiness, envy, and anger of his fellow-mute. Instead, Singer believes that his friend and god is associated with a pagan delight in elemental variety compounded of gentleness, abundance, growth, colour, and love unchecked by will (p. 245). To these qualities he offers his worship. In a disorganized society, so Mrs. McCullers has pointed out, the "individual Gods or principles" are very likely to be fantastic and chimerical.

Biff Brannon's vision is wider than that of the four other characters in *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter*. At the close of the story Biff has a sudden moment of illumination. In the dark, he sees himself suspended between two worlds:

The silence in the room was deep as the night itself. Biff stood transfixed, lost in his meditations. Then suddenly he felt a quickening in him. His heart turned and he leaned his back against the counter for support. For in a swift radiance of illumination he saw a glimpse of human struggle and of valor. Of the endless fluid passage of humanity through endless time. And of those who labor and of those who—one word—love. His soul expanded. But for a moment only. For in him he felt a warning, a shaft of terror. Between the two worlds he was suspended. He saw that he was looking at his own face in the counter glass before him. Sweat glistened on his temples and his face was contorted. One eye was opened wider than the other. The left eye delved narrowly into the past while the right gazed wide and affrighted into a future of blackness, error, and ruin. And he was suspended between radiance and darkness. Between bitter irony and faith. Sharply he turned away (p. 273).

From this vision he makes an affirmation—riddles do work out, otherwise everything is a planned, ugly joke. Biff had done crosswords for years, and he affirms that there is order and the possibility of solution for problems (p. 271). The intelligent mind can ask questions and expect to find a fitting answer. Tranquillity is found in this trust.

Man, too, must keep himself awake in the dark; for it is useless to meet darkness with fear. Night is the time of rest and meditation when one can be composed, sensible, and reasonable. Wait for the dawn. The dawn is associated with a neo-Platonic, romantic-poetic concept of children playing on the sun-lit ocean shore. For Biff, universal love is the answer to darkness.

Love should be for "anyone decent who came in out of the street to sit for an hour and have a drink" (p. 272).

Vision of the "inside" and "outside" rooms is raised more subtly in Mrs. McCullers' second book, *Reflections In A Golden Eye*. The story took its origin in the discovery of a Peeping Tom at the army camp at Fort Bragg. In *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter*, Antonapoulos had been accused of being an exhibitionist. Here is the reverse situation of a voyeur. What Private Williams goes to view is his goddess, the "Lady who did not give 'the sickness'". In the hours of darkness he lives in a trance before the body of Lenora, wrapped in "the wholly sensual response to a woman that, once known, cannot be let go" (p. 136).

The story-line is relatively straight-forward. Major Langdon is married to Alison, a heart-invalid who is devoted to music. Major Langdon is devoted to three things: Captain Pendleton's wife Lenora, horses, and food. Lenora is devoted to food and horses. Anacleto, Alison's servant, is devoted to Alison and culture. Captain Pendleton is devoted to army rule. And Private Williams is devoted to sensuous emotions in which the sensual plays its part. He loves his Lady and his Lady's horse, Firebird.

Given these various devotions as a backdrop, the story is built around the ride that Captain Pendleton takes on his wife's horse. He tries to rule the horse as he rules the men in the army—by swift checks abruptly applied to its freedom. Army tactics are the Captain's business. But he is dealing now with a Firebird, and the horse (though trained, reluctantly, to submit to rule) will have none of it. The Captain is dragged through the forest, clinging desperately to the horse. When Firebird finally stops, Pendleton flogs the horse brutally. Hatred and fear are then transferred from the horse to the soldier who appears in naked pagan beauty and leads the horse away. Private Williams had been sun-bathing in the forest when he silently appears. He steps over the Captain, who has fallen exhausted to the ground, and takes charge of Firebird as though the officer did not exist.

Sometime before this incident, Private Williams had seen Lenora's naked body pass before the window of her living-room on the way to the bedroom. Desire to view her now dominates his thoughts. He enters her bedroom at night several times before he is seen by Alison from her neighboring house. Alison's call to Pendleton startles him. Langdon, Lenora's lover, is in his own house. Alison is thought to be mad, and is confined to an asylum

where she dies two days later. Williams, shortly after, is found in Lenora's room. He is shot by Pendleton.

Mrs. McCullers' mixture of melodrama and delicate perceptiveness appears again in *Reflections In A Golden Eye*. She raises the question of what is normal, and whether "normalcy" should be the rule.

Major Langdon, the senior of the four chief male characters in the novel, asserts the formula: "Only two things matter to me now—to be a good animal and to serve my country" (p. 129). This formula assumes that to be a good animal is equivalent to being a well-trained horse. In terms of the army and of his understanding of patriotism this means to be disciplined to expect to have one's freedom checked abruptly from without by a superior (p. 73). *Superior* here does not imply superiority by virtue of worth or of given adoration.

In *Reflections In A Golden Eye* superiority over "inside" and "outside" rooms comes from three sources: the process of time; hard work; and "army" brilliance—which is associated with response to violence and to the power of command. Captain Pendleton's early dream, induced by swallowing a triple dose of Seconal, is of a "unique and voluptuous sensation; it was as though a great dark bird alighted on his chest, looked at him once with fierce, golden eyes, and stealthily enfolded him in his dark wings." He surrenders his adoration to the brilliance and power of the State (p. 120).

When Pendleton found that he was powerless to rule Firebird, he passed from terror to a mystical rapture of union with the earth as horse and rider hurtled on through the sun-flecked woods. Then, unappeased after the rage that left him exhausted on the ground beside the cruelly beaten animal, he transferred to Private Williams the same medley of exorbitant feelings. The naked man who led Firebird away represented the same mystic union of sun and earth, flesh and spirit, beauty and pain. Out of his ambiguous love-hate for the private, the Captain began to live. Bitter in his knowledge of never having experienced real love, he enviously planned to make Williams suffer.

That night was the night of Alison's first glimpse of Williams hiding in the trees. On the same night, too, Anacleto suddenly drew a picture of a ghastly green peacock with one immense golden eye (p. 95). In this eye was seen the reflection of something "tiny and grotesque." Anacleto is a youth gifted with vision. Later in *Reflections In A Golden Eye* Captain Pendleton sees his own soul as a homunculus, tiny and grotesque (p. 125). The great

dark bird of the Captain's dream has been transformed by Firebird into the peacock.

Freedom from rule brings out sensual, savage joy, together with pride and elegance—the signs of the peacock. The dark love of patriotism has been turned to the ghastly green of spiritual envy in Pendleton's obsession over Private Williams, the man who carries a wholly sensuous response to the world and to woman (p. 137). Strange and secret penances are inflicted by the Captain upon himself. But penances are curbs to freedom imposed by outside rule, and they are fruitless without the existence of a penitence that leads to forgiveness. Freedom from rule is what Williams and Lenora stand for. Pendleton suffers from a loss of "the primitive faculty that instinctively classifies the various sensory impressions according to their relative values" (p. 131). He is a thief who can understand the theft of Lenora by a superior man-of-rule (Langdon). He has lost the power to steal the unconscious relationship of man to woman. Unable to recognize in Williams the "god" of his suppressed self, he kills him.

Twice Mrs. McCullers has displayed her ideal of the value of the instinctive, natural life. The startling title of *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter* disguises the fact that she intended the book to be called *The Mute*. Antonapoulos, the fleshy, naked figure at the head of the stairway in Singer's dream is the man devoted to the life of eating and drinking. Tomorrow he dies—and so does Singer, who has not thought of that fact. In the same way Williams belongs to the instinctive, natural life. (Both Antonapoulos and Williams, incidentally, recall pagan Greece. The former has a Greek name, while the latter is made to suggest a Greek god of the groves.) In both novels, death comes as the consequence of a disorganized society that finds no room for primal values. Singer dies because his "inside" room has not accommodated the full pattern of life-and-death, brightness-and-darkness. Williams dies because Pendleton does not wish instinctive freedom to threaten the rigid pattern of his world. Imposed rule from "outside" means that "inside" destruction is inevitable, which then exacts its penalty outwardly also.

The ideal of the "outer" world is set out in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. The atmosphere of a proper café, as Mrs. McCullers points out, should exhibit these qualities: "fellowship, the satisfaction of the belly, and a certain gaiety and grace of behaviour" (p. 34). The one gift that the mannish Miss Amelia has is for making a whiskey that can reveal the secrets of the soul (p. 18). In

other words, the "marsh lily" that Miss Amelia creates has the power of revealing the radiance of the world and, at the same time, the smallness of the soul (p. 34).

It is in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* that Mrs. McCullers makes explicit her concept of love. Love is a joint experience, but never the same to the two people involved in it. The lover sees his beloved as the object of his stored desires; and that makes him aware of his loneliness, because the inner world of this love is inhabited by him alone. The beloved reveals the soul of the lover, making the nature of the lover more clear. The beloved has merely objectivized the "ego".

To love is the desire of all men. To be loved is the desire of few. So Mrs. McCullers avers, insisting that the lover is always trying to strip the beloved naked. That is, as the lover becomes more aware of his "inner" room, so he wishes to know utterly the "soul" that inhabits it. He wants every nature of experience with the beloved (pp. 38-9). But, in the end, as his "inner" freedom moves outward into consciousness, so he restricts the freedom of the beloved to be what he or she is. As in Singer's dream, each naked soul kneels behind its adored, home-made god, attended by other naked souls kneeling behind him.

The "outer" world has a calculable value that people admit. Mrs. McCullers points out that all useful things have a price and can be bought with money (p. 75). Goods and men's labour lie in this area. Some bargaining may be done in the outer world, the world that is the concern, for instance, of Jake Blount and Dr. Copeland.

The value of the "inner" life, where dreams and love exist, cannot be assessed in this way. On the surface life is worth nothing (p. 75). It was given free, and it is taken away without bargaining. The function of the café is to give worth to life—to make men proud. In the café gaiety, satisfaction, and fellowship can be bought cheaply. The bitter feeling that one is worth very little can be "laid low" (p. 76). (Mrs. McCullers notes that all the people in the town came here except the Reverend T. M. Willin. His outlook, evidently, would be at variance with pagan naturalism.)

The Ballad of the Sad Café features one of Mrs. McCullers' freaks: the hunchback Cousin Lymon. He brought out the true qualities in Miss Amelia's love, and made the café gay for a time. But, when he fell in love with Marvin Macy, the café became sad. Cousin Lymon, the "outward" freak, made Miss Amelia appear to be one. She was trapped in the unpredictable truth—that

her "inner" life was dwarfed and crooked. She could fight to keep her beloved, but, after Cousin Lymon had found the "god" whom he wished to follow, nothing would prevent him. Not even the undisguised loathing of the "god" himself would prevent the service of the lover. The sad café must be closed. In the final fist-fight in which Miss Amelia tried to oust Marvin from her home into which he had settled, she would have won by superior strength, had not the hunchback thrown himself into the fight, proving himself a "hawk" desiring only her death (p. 91). She could no longer function in the "outer" world, since her "inner" world was dead. The result for the town was spiritual stagnation, the situation in which "the soul rots with boredom" (p. 95).

Mrs. McCullers' last novel is *Clock Without Hands* (1961), written over a period of ten years. Briefly, it is the story of four "adolescent" people who face death in different ways.

Malone is a pharmacist of forty-one who is dying of leukaemia. He tries to find the meaning of life and death from octogenarian, semi-paralytic Judge Clane. Clane's definitions of living are tied to a sentimental love for a dead wife, and to a passionate love for the son who had despised his father's greed and duplicity. Clane's method is to ignore what is unpleasant and live for the moment.

The moment involves Sherman Pew, a seventeen-year-old negro orphan who seeks his origins. Sherman works for Clane, and in Clane's files he finds that he is the child of a poor white woman and a Negro sharecropper, whom Clane's lawyer son had defended. Sherman's fury, envy, and hatred are turned against Jester, Clane's seventeen-year-old grandson. When Jester tries to save Sherman from the bomb thrown by anti-Negroes in the town, he is bitterly rejected by Sherman. Malone dies, having refused to be the man to throw the bomb.

A clock with hands is one that can be manipulated. The man who feels he has power over life and time can seem to turn back the hands, or turn them forward. In his own eyes he effects change and creates values. He is a god.

A clock without hands can not be manipulated. Man has no control over time and events in time. Within the spatio-temporal continuum man moves inexorably towards death. As an ordinary man he considers death a phenomenon that does not effect him, for he thinks of it in terms of other people.

The words of Kierkegaard in *Sickness Unto Death* come to the dying

Malone like the sounds of the brassy clamour of city clocks, uncadenced and flat.⁹ The saying of Kierkegaard that haunts Malone is this: *Losing one's own self can pass off quietly as if it were nothing; every other loss, that of an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc., is sure to be noticed.*

Sickness Unto Death bored Malone, but he could not forget it. How had he lost himself? When? How can a man die when he has not known how to live? A review of Malone's past life did not help him to see anything but a blundering progress. Who, then, was responsible for his mistakes? Malone addressed his questions to a successful minister of a prosperous church. They brought words about "righteous living," but nothing about dying. There was no spiritual solace here, because the minister had no knowledge of the soul or of eternity.

Malone, however, encountered three miracles that taught him about "livingness." The first was Judge Clane, soft-hearted and soft-headed, who knew that it was a miracle to be alive, living in the here-and-now in the intuitive way that—earlier—Mrs. McCullers had suggested was adequate. The second miracle Malone met was a garden that grew, luxuriant and untended, a free gift. The third miracle was the strength that he found to refuse to commit an act that he felt to be wrong. By his refusal, on the verge of death, he avoided endangering his soul (though he did not know what his soul was). He would not throw a bomb at Sherman, in hatred or in prejudice, to keep his popularity with his fellows.

The story of *Clock Without Hands*, in the end, confirms some of Mrs. McCullers' earlier ideas. Men still love others for what is at that moment the dream in their own hearts. Their self is objectified in their choice of a beloved. But people in *Clock Without Hands* grow in moral stature. Malone, the Judge, Sherman, and Jester are, when the book begins, four adolescents crying out for care. When it ends, Malone and Jester have found pity and remorse. The old Judge doesn't know what he has said in quoting Lincoln's speech on freedom—but he has said it. Only Sherman Pew, who "lived it up" rather than lived, died making "senseless pounding on the piano, the senseless laughter" of some one who has lost belief in compassionate care.

NOTES

1. *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (London: Cresset Books Press, 1948), p. 95.
2. *The Member of the Wedding* (New York: Bantam Books, 1958), pp. 17-18.

3. *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1940), p. 39.
4. *Relections In A Golden Eye* (New York: Bantam Books, 1950), p. 125.
5. The café of *The Ballad of the Sad Café* symbolizes this means of humanizing humanity, and also the fragility of all human achievement in this area.
6. *The Member of the Wedding*, pp. 91-92.
7. *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter*, p. 41.
8. Printed in Oliver Evans, *Carson McCullers, Her Life and Work*, (London: Peter Owen, 1965), p. 195.
9. *Clock Without Hands*, p. 157. Probably Mrs. McCullers was remembering W. H. Auden's "As I Walked Out One Evening" when she wrote this passage. Her long acquaintance with Auden, his publication of selections of Kierkegaard, and the cynical voice of the city clock in the Auden poem, are too striking a combination of circumstances to be disregarded.

BLESSED CONDEMNATION

Helen Sue Isely

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

—George Santayana

If I could swing remembrance arcs like scythes,
in great swish-swashes I would reap the stemmy
hours and days succulent with you.

My spirit's metal is shiny seismograph
to yours, quivers to your changing thoughts,
and in your absence, idles quiverless.

Memory's dull knife does not secure
perception's flash. Love wields a sharper wit:
what can't be kept is clasped and re-exclaimed.

Renewal's star-shell zooms through bleak forgetting.
Like earth, empowered with lightburst every dawn
by spinning through the darkness of each night,

I can but warm and chill and warm again.