

A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FICTION OF  
CARSON MC CULLERS AND TRUMAN CAPOTE

by

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B. S., University of Kansas, 1961

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A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1963

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In recent commentaries on modern American literature the names of Carson McCullers and Truman Capote have often been linked--as being members of the same school of Southern authors; as having similar concepts, themes and character types; as employing similar metaphors and symbols. Irving Malin discusses them and four other authors as members of the new American Gothic school of writers, and while his study is not very convincing, it does indicate that there is a relationship between them.<sup>1</sup> Ihab Hassan notes that both are concerned with the general theme of spiritual isolation.<sup>2</sup> William Van O'Connor mentions the grotesque in Capote as being "quite similar" to that in McCullers:<sup>3</sup> John W. Aldridge observes that both deal with the experience of childhood in the South.<sup>4</sup> Frank Baldanza compares their concepts of love and suggests that both concepts are based on "distinctly Platonic theories of love."<sup>5</sup> As indicated by the comments of these critics, a relationship definitely exists between McCullers and Capote; but with the exception of Baldanza's study, it has not been extensively investigated. Such an investigation reveals that not only do they have very similar concepts of love, but the general theme of man's isolation and loneliness, the negative themes of initiation, and the types

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<sup>1</sup> New American Gothic. Crosscurrents (Carbondale, Illinois, 1962) passim.

<sup>2</sup> Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (Princeton, New Jersey, 1961), p. 231.

<sup>3</sup> "The Grotesque in Modern American Fiction," College English XX (1959), 344.

<sup>4</sup> In Search of Heresy: American Literature in an Age of Conformity (New York, 1958), p. 144.

<sup>5</sup> "Plato in Dixie," The Georgia Review XII(1958), 152.

of characters which are most frequently found in their writings all demonstrate that Capote has some striking resemblances to McCullers.

The works which contain the greatest number of these similarities are McCullers' The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter (1940), "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud" (1942), The Ballad of the Sad Café (1943), and The Member of the Wedding (1946); and Capote's Other Voices, Other Rooms (1948), and The Grass Harp (1951). In Other Voices, Other Rooms is found a negative theme of initiation which has many general and specific likenesses to the one found in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter. Both authors have a twofold concept of love; the "darker" view which McCullers proposes in The Ballad of the Sad Café is very closely paralleled by that found in Other Voices, Other Rooms; the "lighter" view in "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud" is almost identical to that in The Grass Harp. Furthermore, the ultimate value, the factor which redeems the condition of isolation, is the same for both authors. Naturally the question of why the two are so similar arises, but the answer is not easy to ascertain. It could be, as Baldanza suggests, that they share the distinct cultural background of the South and that both are "'natural' Platonists."<sup>6</sup> And it is also possible that the similarities may be the result of McCullers' influence on Capote, since all of the McCullers works to be discussed in this paper were written before either of the two Capote novels. According to Carvel Collins, this is a possibility which has already been indirectly suggested to and denied by Capote: "...when a reporter told him reviewers were saying that Other Voices, Other Rooms reminded them of the work of various authors, including Welty, McCullers, Cather and Poe, he replied, 'Some day I hope to read

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<sup>6</sup> "Plato in Dixie," pp. 151-153.

some of those authors.'"<sup>7</sup> But regardless of the fact that Capote would deny any such influence, as he undoubtedly would, definite similarities do exist between him and McCullers, as will be evident in the proceeding examination.

As their most representative fiction reveals, both authors feel that loneliness is the ultimate and inescapable condition of man-- loneliness because man is a solitary and isolated individual who is caught and trapped within the boundaries of his own being. As Berenice says to Frankie in The Member of the Wedding:

"We all of us somehow caught. We born this way or that way and we don't know why. But we caught anyhow....And maybe we wants to widen and bust free. But no matter what we do we still caught. Me is me and you is you and he is he. We each of us somehow caught all by purself."<sup>8</sup>

And as Randolph says to Joel in Other Voices, Other Rooms:

"...we are alone, darling child, terribly, isolated each from the other...with the garbage of loneliness stuffed down us until our guts burst bleeding green, we go screaming around the world, dying in our rented rooms, nightmare hotels, eternal homes of the transient heart."<sup>9</sup>

Both authors employ a similar symbolic means of expressing this isolation and loneliness, as seen in the selection of freaks and adolescents as their main characters. As Oliver Evans suggests, both types of characters are alien to the "normal" world, the former because they are physically or mentally defective, the latter because they do not wholly belong to either the adult or the child's world.

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<sup>7</sup> "Other Voices, " The American Scholar 25 (Winter 1955-1956), 115.

<sup>8</sup> Carson McCullers, The Ballad of the Sad Café: The Novels and Stories of Carson McCullers (Boston, 1951), p. 740. Subsequent reference to McCullers' works will be made by title alone, as they all are found in this collection.

<sup>9</sup> Truman Capote, Other Voices, Other Rooms (New York, 1958), pp. 147-148.

Therefore, both types constitute meaningful symbols of spiritual isolation and loneliness.<sup>10</sup> The fact that McCullers and Capote believe all men are isolated will perhaps explain the overwhelming number of freaks and grotesques in their fiction. For what most readers would consider "normal" characters are definitely in the minority in their writings. In The Ballad of the Sad Café are found a homosexual, tubercular hunchback and an exceedingly masculine woman. In The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter there are two homosexual deaf-mutes, one of whom is deranged and must be committed to an asylum. In Other Voices, Other Rooms the characters are even more grotesque and nightmarish--a homosexual cousin who at one point expresses the desire to be the madame of a whorehouse; a feeble-minded aunt who has a withered hand and the faintest suggestion of a mustache; a paralyzed father who is unable to close his eyes. Even if the characters are not obviously freakish, usually there is either something about them that suggests freakishness or some quality that sets them apart from others. In The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, Brannon thinks that Blount seems deformed, even though "each part of him was normal and as it ought to be."<sup>11</sup> Brannon himself is impotent and seems to have an unnatural aversion to his own body--although he is always "scrupulously clean from the belt upward," he bathes "all his parts" only "about twice during the season."<sup>12</sup> Bernenice in The Member of the Wedding has a blue glass eye which stares out "fixed and wild from her quiet, colored face."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "The Theme of Spiritual Isolation in Carson McCullers," New World Writing I (New York, 1952), pp. 301-302.

<sup>11</sup> McCullers, p. 163

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>13</sup> McCullers, p. 601.

John Henry's mind seems at times to Frankie as queer as the pictures he draws, like the one of the man with both eyes on one side of his face. Just as John Henry seems strange to Frankie, Joel in Other Voices, Other Rooms thinks Zoo, the Negro servant, is "almost a freak, a human giraffe."<sup>14</sup> Even the adolescents in McCullers and Capote either have a fear of being freakish or are described by others as being freakish. Both Mick, in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, and Frankie are afraid of being too tall; Frankie particularly fears the freaks at the carnival because they seem to look at her as if to say "we know you."<sup>15</sup> Miss Wisteria, the Midget in a carnival freak show in Other Voices, Other Rooms, thinks the tomboyish Idabel believes herself to be a freak; the man who gives Joel a ride into Noon City thinks he is "too pretty, too delicate and fair-skinned" to be a "real" boy.<sup>16</sup> While some critics and readers may feel there are far too many grotesque characters in McCullers and Capote and that these characters are too freakish to be believable, it must be remembered that, as Baldanza suggests, their particular physical or mental deformities are meant to parallel the condition of spiritual loneliness and isolation.<sup>17</sup>

The freak is in one way a better symbol than the adolescent because the break's abnormality is permanent. Just as he cannot escape or alter his freakishness, so cannot man escape his loneliness, for according to both authors, man is incapable of communicating and effecting meaningful relationships. He can no longer identify

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<sup>14</sup> Capote, p. 54

<sup>15</sup> McCullers, Member, p. 619.

<sup>16</sup> Capote, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> "Plato in Dixie," p. 151.



himself with others through claiming to share in common values and beliefs, for the unified and unifying body which these once formed no longer exists. Man's condition is one of loneliness and isolation, but more than this, it is often one of ignorance of himself. Only through meaningful relationships with other individuals can man discover and know himself. Denied these relationships, he is also denied a large part of the knowledge of his own self. His life, therefore, comes to be motivated by the search for his identity and the attempt to escape the conditions which prevent him from finding it. The end of this search is rarely a happy one, however; for rather than providing a release from loneliness, the search only intensifies the knowledge that he is alone.

The concept of man's loneliness and isolation can best be seen as it exists in the two authors' most typical treatment of love. Both McCullers and Capote are primarily concerned with spiritual love, as Baldanza has pointed out.<sup>18</sup> For both writers, love and sex have little, if any, connection. In fact, sex per se, sex as just a biological factor, has little importance.

By nature all people are of both sexes. So that marriage and the bed is not all by any means. The proof? Real youth and old age. Because often old men's voices grow high and ready and they take on a mincing walk. And old women sometimes grow fat and their voices get rough and deep and they grow little mustaches.<sup>19</sup>

This statement found in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter corresponds to one in Other Voices, Other Rooms. While Capote's view is not as fully expressed as McCullers', it indicates a similar attitude

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<sup>18</sup> "Plato in Dixie," p. 152.

<sup>19</sup> McCullers, Heart, pp. 273-274.

toward sex: "while the old man grows spinsterish, his wife assumes a mustache."<sup>20</sup>

According to Hassan, both McCullers and Capote have "desexualized" love, desexualized it in the respect that sexual communion of any form is not an essential part of the love relationship.<sup>21</sup> This desexualization leads in its most extreme form to the idea that the two people involved in a relationship do not necessarily have to be of different sexes. Desexualization with the concomitant spiritualization of love therefore allows homosexual love to be just as valid as heterosexual. This is represented most obviously by the homosexual tendencies and loves found in many of the characters of the two authors: Captain Penderton who "had a sad penchant for becoming enamoured of his wife's lovers";<sup>22</sup> Brannon who "sometimes almost wished he was a mother";<sup>23</sup> Idabel, the tomboy companion and female counterpart of Joel, who "put herself to life" with Miss Wisteria;<sup>24</sup> Randolph, Joel's middle-aged cousin, who occasionally masquerades in a countess costume of the Louis XVI era and writes letters to all parts of the world in hopes of locating his "beloved," Pepe Alvarez, a Mexican prizefighter.

One implication of these homosexual elements is that the social conventions and values which usually govern love are not meaningful. For in addition to desexualizing and spiritualizing love, McCullers and Capote "individualize" it; both feel that the value of love and

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<sup>20</sup> Capote, p. 196.

<sup>21</sup> Radical Innocence, p. 76.

<sup>22</sup> McCullers, Reflections in a Golden Eye, p. 508.

<sup>23</sup> McCullers, Heart, p. 274.

<sup>24</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 210.



the type of person one loves is an entirely personal matter which concerns the lover and no one else. McCullers in explaining the strange marriage between two characters in The Ballad of the Sad Café says, "The town laughed a long time over this grotesque affair. But...it must be remembered that the real story was that which took place in the soul of the lover himself. So who but God can be the final judge of this or any other love?"<sup>25</sup> Randolph expresses the same thought when attempting to defend his love for Pepe: "any love is natural and beautiful that lies within a person's nature; only hypocrites would hold a man responsible for what he loves."<sup>26</sup>

Love is an individual concern not only in respect to outsiders and social values, but in respect to the beloved as well. Love is a private matter for each of the two people involved in the relationship because there is little reciprocation and communion in the relationship. According to McCullers, "Often the beloved is only a stimulus for all the stored-up love which has lain quiet within the lover for a long time hitherto."<sup>27</sup> Capote feels similarly: "...one has always to love a good many things which the beloved must come only to symbolize; the true beloveds of this world are in their lover's eyes lilac opening, ship lights, school bells...."<sup>28</sup> In other words, the beloved has a completely passive role in the relationship. He does not have to express or feel any affection in order for love to be generated in the lover. He must only possess a particular combination of qualities which correspond to a "love"

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25 p. 31.

26 Capote, Voices, p. 147.

27 Ballad, p. 24.

28 Voices, p. 141.

that already exists in the lover. Thus in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, Miss Amelia, a woman who wears swamp boots and overalls and has the build of a man, arouses love in Marvin Macy, although she neither has nor demonstrates any feeling for him. Similarly, in Other Voices, Other Rooms, Pepe becomes the object of Randolph's love. In both cases the beloved makes no attempt to stimulate or encourage the love.

Once the love is generated, however, the beloved ceases to be entirely passive, for "in a deep secret way, the state of being beloved is intolerable to many. The beloved fears and hates the lover...."<sup>29</sup> Although completely unaffected by Macy's love for a while, Amelia's hatred of him becomes so strong that she is no longer able to tolerate him. In the first days of their marriage she only ignores him, but at the last she hits him whenever he comes within reach, throws him out of the house and finally tries to have him jailed for trespassing. A similar situation is found in Capote. Even though Pepe despises Randolph, he still accepts the gaudy clothing Randolph gives him. But finally his dislike becomes violent hatred which he manifests, among other and cruder ways, by breaking Randolph's nose and calling him "'horrible hurting names.'"<sup>30</sup>

Because of the beloved's passive "stimulus" role and his later active hatred and fear, it is evident that the love is lopsided, and the lover is alone even though another person is nominally involved.

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<sup>29</sup> McCullers, Ballad, p. 25

<sup>30</sup> Voices, p. 30.

And somehow every lover knows this. He feels in his soul that his love is a solitary thing. He comes to know a new, strange loneliness and it is this knowledge which makes him suffer....he must create for himself a whole new inward world—a world intense and strange, complete in himself.<sup>31</sup>

Capote's view as expressed by Randolph is again the same as McCullers':

"It was different, this love of mine for Pepe, more intense than anything I felt for Dolores, and lonelier."<sup>32</sup>

There is, however, some communion between the lover and the beloved, but only on a very limited and elementary level, especially in McCullers. Even though Amelia and her "beloved," Cousin Lymon, have many conversations, the two really do not talk about the same things. She talks on the "broad, rambling generalities of the matter"; he interrupts with some unimportant, vaguely relevant detail. She describes how her father used to treat her when she was a child, call her to breakfast, take her with him to the still; and Lymon interjects a comment on the poor quality of grits they had that morning for breakfast.<sup>33</sup> Again, a similar situation is found in Capote. Randolph describing the love he once had for a woman says, "...we very seldom talked; I can never remember having with Dolores a sustained conversation...."<sup>34</sup> Capote does seem to admit of a greater degree of communion than McCullers, however; Randolph goes on to say that the silence between Dolores and him "'communicated that wonderful peace those who understand each other very well sometimes achieve...." But it seems that it communicated little else, for he continues, "'yet neither knew the other truly...."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> McCullers, Ballad, p. 24.

<sup>32</sup> Capote, p. 147.

<sup>33</sup> Ballad, p. 34.

<sup>34</sup> Voices, p. 143.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

As is evident, McCullers and Capote feel that man's isolation is such that it cannot be escaped even through love; far from being a means of escaping one's aloneness, it only intensifies isolation. The feelings which are produced by love are certainly not conducive to any form of communion, for love as they conceive of it generates loneliness and pain in one, and fear and hatred in the other. The result of this type of love, therefore, is defeat. Thus McCullers' Miss Amelia sits alone in the house which was once a café, and only occasionally opens the shutters to look with mournful, crossed eyes at the town below. Thus Capote's Randolph creates for himself his own little world of fantasy and is content to find his true lover in himself. "Narcissus was no egoist . . . he was merely another of us who, in our unshatterable isolation, recognized, on seeing his reflection, the one beautiful comrade, the only inseparable love...."<sup>36</sup>

Randolph's solution of narcissistic love is not incongruous with McCullers' and Capote's general concept of love, for loving another person can bring pain and defeat while loving one's self cannot, at least not in the same way. A suggestion of narcissistic love is also found in the attraction of Mick, Blount and Doctor Copeland to Singer in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter. "Owing to the fact he was a mute they were able to give him all the qualities they wanted him to have," and the qualities they wanted him to have are those that they find in themselves.<sup>37</sup> Mick believes Singer shares her love for music; Blount believes he is one of the few people who see the truth in Marxian labor theories; Doctor Copeland believes he is the only white man who realizes the need of the Negro

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<sup>36</sup> Voices, p. 140.

<sup>37</sup> McCullers, pp. 371-372.

race. As Horace Taylor suggests, "It is evident at the outset that a deep-rooted narcissistic quality exists in all of these people, a degenerate sensibility that needs a human mirror in the form of a passive listener to reflect itself against."<sup>38</sup> Because they all can interpret Singer in terms of their own identity, they can communicate and effect a meaningful relationship with him, but as John E. Vickery explains, they are "...unaware that what they see imaged in the deaf-mute is their own alter ego, their own perfected and fulfilled self."<sup>39</sup>

In some ways this narcissistic quality in McCullers differs from that found in Capote. Randolph loves himself more or less directly, while the others "love" themselves through the character of Singer. But both situations are alike, however, in that they are ultimately ineffectual and defeating. After Singer's suicide, Doctor Copeland, Blount, and Mick all feel a sense of personal loss--not particularly of Singer, but a part of themselves, a part that before knowing Singer they had unequivocally possessed. Doctor Copeland thinks that he has failed, that all his years of work have produced nothing of lasting value. At the last he still feels "the true strong purpose," but he is now incapable of expressing it: "He wanted to sit up and speak in a loud voice--yet when he tried to raise himself he could not find the strength."<sup>40</sup> Blount too experiences a sense of personal loss. "He remembered all the inner-

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<sup>38</sup> "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter: A Southern Waste Land," in Studies in American Literature, eds. Waldo McNeir and Leo B. Levy, Louisiana State University Studies: Humanity Series, No.8 (Baton Rouge, 1960), p. 156.

<sup>39</sup> "Carson McCullers: A Map of Love," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature 1 (Winter, 1960), 16.

<sup>40</sup> McCullers, Heart, p. 476.

most thoughts that he had told to Singer, and with his death it seemed to him that they were lost."<sup>41</sup> And Mick feels the loss of the "inner room" and her music. With the death of Singer they all seem to lose part of their inner identity, mainly because they had invested this identity in Singer.

Randolph's narcissistic love fails because it cannot give him any real identity. Joel sees him as "X, an outline in which with crayon you color in the character, the ideal hero: whatever his role, it is pitched by you into existence."<sup>42</sup> Having resigned himself to a mirror and the isolation of Skully's Landing, Randolph's sole identity rests in the mirror and the Landing, as Joel realized on the trip back from Cloud Hotel; "He saw how helpless Randolph was: more paralyzed than Mr Sansom, more childlike than Miss Wisteria, what else could he do, once outside and alone, but describe a circle, the zero of his nothingness?"<sup>43</sup> Narcissistic love is a failure because only through experience and relationships with the outside world, with others, can a person discover and define his identity. Immersion in the self cannot give this type of experience; the narcissist sees others only as they relate to himself and not as they actually are in terms of their own personality and being.

Isolation, loneliness, defeat and pain--despite these, the results of loving, McCullers and Capote still felt there is value in love, for even though it may not help a person escape from loneliness or satisfy the desire to be loved, it still fulfills the need

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<sup>41</sup> McCullers, Heart, p. 481

<sup>42</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 211.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 227.



to love. The very act of loving has certain value, as both authors indicate in the transformations made in various characters by love, and in the idea that love is a "process," that by learning to love one thing a person can eventually learn to love everything.

Both authors have several characters who are redeemed and changed by love, even though the love or the transformation may not last. In Capote there is Randolph who "had no personal perception, no interior life whatever" until he met Dolores and through his love for her "came finally to believe in [his] own validity: for the first time [he] saw things without distortion and complete."<sup>44</sup> Dolly in The Grass Harp is afraid to show that she cares for people because she feels "it burdens people and makes them...unhappy."<sup>45</sup> But after loving and being loved by Judge Cool, she gains assurance and identity: "she could never again be a shadow in the corner."<sup>46</sup> In McCullers' "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud" the old hobo says that until he met "this woman" he felt "'loose'" and disconnected inside, but when he was with her "nothing lay around loose any more but was finished up by her."<sup>47</sup> And Marvin Macy in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe is changed by his love for Amelia from a wild, cruel man who used to carry with him the "dried and salted ear of a man he had killed in a razor fight" to a religious, gentle, well-mannered man.<sup>48</sup> But in addition to these, there are two characters in particular who show a great deal of similarity, Amelia in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe

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<sup>44</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 142.

<sup>45</sup> Truman Capote, The Grass Harp, (New York, 1951), p. 76.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>47</sup> p. 134.

<sup>48</sup> McCullers, p. 25.

and Verena in The Grass Harp.

Before loving Cousin Lymon, Amelia is a masculine and solitary woman who "cared nothing for the love of men." Although already richer than anyone else around, her primary interest in life is to accumulate even more money: "the only use that Miss Amelia had for other people was to make money out of them."<sup>49</sup> But with the development of her love for the deformed little hunchback, she is changed. Although she still wears overalls and swamp boots during the week, she becomes somewhat more feminine in that she puts on a dress on Sundays. More important, however, "her manners...and her way of life were greatly changed"; she socializes more and she becomes less hard and materialistic. "She still loved a fierce lawsuit, but she was not so quick to cheat her fellow man and to exact cruel payments."<sup>50</sup> Because of her love for Lymon the café is created; the whole town benefits, for it becomes a place where "the deep bitter knowing that you are not worth much in this world could be laid low."<sup>51</sup> In the end, of course, her love is defeating. Marvin Macy, her former husband, returns to town and Lymon quickly falls in love with him. After Macy, with Lymon's help, defeats Amelia in a wrestling match, the two men wreck the café and leave town. Amelia becomes even more feminine: "the great muscles of her body shrank until she was thin as old maids are thin"; her voice becomes "broken, soft, and sad as the wheezy whine of the church pump-organ"; her eyes become more and more crossed, "as though they sought each other out to exchange a

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<sup>49</sup> McCullers, Ballad, pp. 4-5.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

little glance of grief and lonely recognition."<sup>52</sup> Although at the last she isolates herself in the boarded-up café and is left with only the awareness of loneliness and grief, for a while at least she was transformed and made kinder by love.

A very similar situation and character is found in Verena in The Grass Harp. Before being changed by love, Verena, like Amelia, is a masculine and solitary woman who has no close friends; "men were afraid of her, and she herself seemed to be afraid of women."<sup>53</sup> She is described as being like "a lone man in a house full of women and children."<sup>54</sup> And like Amelia, she is the richest person in town, but still is interested only in getting richer: "money was like a wildcat whose trail she stalked with a trained hunter's muffled step and an eye for every broken twig."<sup>55</sup> Her transformation, however, although it takes an almost identical form to Amelia's, is different from Amelia's in that it is caused by the defeat of one love and the realization of another. The first involves Dr. Morris Ritz, with whom she plans to produce and sell Dolly's dropsy cure on a large scale. He, however, steals her money and leaves town, which causes her eyes, like Amelia's, to become crossed; she looks "woebegone, wasted--with eyes...drawn toward each other, their stare settled on an inner territory, a withered country."<sup>56</sup> More important, the betrayal makes her realize her loneliness and her need for others, particularly Dolly, her sister.

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<sup>52</sup> McCullers, Ballad, pp.64-65.

<sup>53</sup> Capote, p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-22.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

"Envied you, Dolly. Your pink room. I've only knocked at the doors of such rooms, not often--enough to know that now there is no one but you to let me in. Because little Morris...I loved him, I did....But he outsmarted me...and now: it's too long to be alone, a lifetime.... don't leave me, let me live with you. I'm feeling old, I want my sister."<sup>57</sup>

With the realization of love, Verena, like Amelia, becomes more feminine and less concerned about money. But unlike Amelia, who loses all awareness of others and their needs after being left by Lymon, Verena's transformation to kindness seems permanent—although after Dolly's death she becomes saddened and lonely and her eyes, like Amelia's "come permanently to have an uneven cast, an inward and agonized gaze...."<sup>58</sup>

There is in Verena the suggestion of the progression of love, for in actuality there are three loves in her life. Several years before Ritz, she had been "greatly attached" to Maudie Laura Murphy. But Maudie had married and moved away, and until Ritz, Verena had not been close to anyone else. Then, as has been shown, she loves, is defeated, and realizes a better love. In Verena the idea of love as a process is dramatized, for through successive loves, she seems to learn how to love, which is the essence of the idea that love can be a chain or process. By loving one thing, even if it is an inanimate object, a person can learn to love another.

In "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud," an old hobo explains his "science of love" to a young boy. The old man feels that men "'start at the wrong end of love. They begin at the climax.'" Rather than attempt-

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<sup>57</sup> Capote, The Grass Harp, pp. 153-154.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

ing to love a woman at the very outset of love they should start with smaller things. They should begin love with "A tree. A rock. A cloud." The value in this, as he explains to the boy, is that from learning to love a goldfish he has progressed from one thing to another until now he can love "Everything....And anybody. All stranger and all loved."<sup>59</sup>

Judge Cool in The Grass Harp states this same idea almost exactly:<sup>60</sup>

"Son, I'd say you were going at it the wrong end first.... How could you care about one girl? Have you ever cared about one leaf?....We are speaking of love. A leaf, a handful of seed—begin with these, learn a little what it is to love. First a leaf, a fall of rain, then someone to receive what a leaf has taught you, what a fall of rain has ripened. No easy process, understand; it could take a lifetime, it has mine, and still I've never mastered it—I only know how true it is: that love is a chain of love, as nature is a chain of life."<sup>61</sup>

The value of this, as Dolly expresses it to Collin is that after learning how to love, "You can forgive everything."<sup>62</sup>

Loving everything and forgiving everything--both authors envision the end of the chain of love as being a generalized beneficence and world love which can perhaps redeem to an extent the realization of loneliness. But it seems that love for the general, for everyone, should be able to include love for the particular, for a "someone." Furthermore, the idea of love as a process at least suggests the possibility that a full and mutual relationship between a man and a woman can be achieved, even though McCullers' and Capote's fiction usually demonstrates that it cannot. There are, however, two

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<sup>59</sup> McCullers, pp. 137-138.

<sup>60</sup> Hassan, Radical Innocence, p. 248, Baldanza, "Plato in Dixie," p. 166, and Paul Levine, "Truman Capote: The Revelation of the Broken Image," The Virginia Quarterly Review 34(1958), 617, also note this similarity.

<sup>61</sup> Capote, pp. 74-75.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

exceptions to this, two major characters who seem to achieve a more positive love in that it is a love which brings happiness and communion rather than hatred and isolation. For both of these characters love is connected with the idea of the "one person in the world."

The first of the characters is Berenice in The Member of the Wedding. For her, the "one person" is Ludie Freeman, her first husband who died twelve years ago. As she tells Frankie and John Henry, "Now I am here to tell you I was happy. There was no human woman in all the world more happy than I was in them days...."<sup>63</sup> But her love for Ludie gave her more than happiness. When talking with Frankie about being isolated and "caught" she says, "...we try in one way or another to widen ourself free. For instance me and Ludie. When I was with Ludie, I didn't feel so caught."<sup>64</sup> With Ludie's death, however, she becomes just as isolated and lonely as any of the other characters. "Sometimes I almost wish I had never knew Ludie at all....It spoils you too much. It leaves you too lonesome afterward."<sup>65</sup> In some ways her situation may seem worse than that of the others, for having found the "one person" in Ludie, she cannot disassociate love from him; she keeps looking for him in others. "I loved Ludie and he was the first man I loved. Therefore, I had to go and copy myself forever afterward. What I did was to marry off little pieces of Ludie whenever I come across them...My intention was to repeat me and Ludie."<sup>66</sup>

The second character is Judge Cool in The Grass Harp. It is he who uses the phrase "the one person in the world," the person "from whom nothing is held back....to whom everything can be said." As he explains, the communication is not primarily verbal, for "what

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<sup>63</sup> McCullers, p. 718.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 740-741.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 708-709.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 725.



one says hardly matters, only the trust with which it is said, the sympathy with which it is received.'" Like Berenice who attempts to find Ludie in parts of others, the Judge has "by scraps and bits...surrendered himself to strangers" who, if "put together, maybe...would've made the one person in the world."<sup>67</sup> He finds this person in Dolly, as she does in him. And although she ultimately rejects his offer of marriage to remain with Verena, the love between them is not really changed, and the Judge is not really "defeated." He and Dolly "accepted each other without excitement, as people do who are settled in their affections. If in other ways he was a disappointed man, it was not because of Dolly, for I believe she became what he'd wanted, the one person in the world...."<sup>68</sup>

With Dolly's death, the Judge, like Berenice, like all the other lovers in McCullers' and Capote's fiction, is left alone. But unlike the others, neither the Judge nor Berenice are defeated by the very nature of their love or by the hatred of the beloved. For this reason they are important only as characters but as representatives of the belief that a mutual relationship of love can exist. While they are only two against the many other characters who demonstrate that mutual love is impossible because of man's inescapable isolation, they are still valuable and significant. They illustrate a more optimistic view of love and to an extent balance the darker view that love is always defeating. And they add "reality" to McCullers' and Capote's entire concept of love—for just as love does not always bring happiness, neither does it always bring pain and defeat.

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<sup>67</sup> Capote, pp. 67-69.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 159-160.

The similarities, both the particular and the general, between the two authors' concepts of love are clearly apparent. There are, of course, areas in which the degree of likeness differs, but for the most part, Capote parallels McCullers almost point for point. There is also true in their negative themes of initiation represented by Mick Kelly in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter and Joel Harrison Knox in Other Voices, Other Rooms. Both initiations are negative in that neither can escape their isolation, neither can overcome the forces which seem to be defeating them, neither are able to fulfill their desires as they had intended. But the similarities between the two characters are more than just general ones. The attitudes and reactions of both are often identical, the specific causes of their defeat are alike, and the two important metaphors used in connection with both are the same--a "room" and snow. Because the two initiations are similar not just in their general aspects but in many specific details, and because Mick's seems to establish the pattern for Joel's, an extensive discussion of Mick's is required before actually comparing the two.

In one way Mick's initiation is the more negative of the two because Joel at least finds himself a part of a world, even though it is a socially and sexually abnormal one, while Mick is forced to surrender her ideals and live in a world which she neither likes nor fully understands. Part of the reason for her defeat is that many of her dreams and plans for the future are very grandiose and obviously fated to fail. She not only wants to learn to play the

piano; she wants to "learn every piece in the world."<sup>69</sup> And she does not want just to be able to write her own music; she dreams of being a "world-famous composer," of having "a whole symphony orchestra and [conducting] all of her music herself."<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, she seems to have no conception of the immense difficulty of achieving these dreams, for she expects them to be fulfilled in the very near future: "M. K.--That was what she would have written on everything when she was seventeen years old and very famous."<sup>71</sup>

She seems to have only one doubt that these plans may not be achieved, but this doubt is primarily a subconscious one.

" "This is a funny thing--the dreams I've been having lately. It's like I'm swimming. But instead of water I'm pushing out my arms and swimming through great big crowds of people....And sometimes I'm yelling and swimming through people, knocking them all down wherever I go--and other times I'm on the ground and people are trompling all over me and my insides are oozing out on the sidewalk."<sup>72</sup>

But though her hopes and plans are impossible and unreasonable, the motivation behind them is not, for they are just an exaggerated expression of the justifiable and human desire to be recognized. The rest of the desires which motivate her may also be seen to have reasonable bases. She longs for privacy, for a place where she can be alone, for she is one of fourteen who live in her family's boarding house. She dreams of traveling to foreign countries to escape the poverty which has surrounded her all her life. And she wants to

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<sup>69</sup> McCullers, Heart, p. 182.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

love and be loved in return. After Portia, the young Negro woman who works for the Kelly's, tells her, "...you don't love and don't have peace," Mick thinks to herself, "What would Portia say if she knew that always there had been one person after another? And every time it was like some part of her would bust in a hundred pieces."<sup>73</sup> She realizes acutely and painfully her desire to be loved, although she is not able to express it or identify it as such:

She thought a long time and kept hitting her thighs with her fists. Her face felt like it was scattered in pieces and she could not keep it straight. The feeling was a whole lot worse than being hungry for 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.<sup>74</sup>

Her primary desire, however, is founded on her love for music. More than anything else, she wants to own and play a piano and compose music. Had her family not been so poor, this dream might have been at least partially attainable, especially in view of her determination and willingness to sacrifice in order to achieve it. She gives up her week's lunch money to pay for lessons and practices after school on the piano in the school gym. She struggles to write down her own compositions, although she knows only the rudimentary fundamentals; "something she could hum in two minutes meant a whole week's work before it was down in the notebook."<sup>75</sup> Music is important to her not only because she loves it, but because it is the means by which she can achieve all her other dreams and wishes; her dreams of fame and traveling come to be associated with accomplishments in music.

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<sup>73</sup> McCullers, Heart, pp. 192-194.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 380.

It is important because it is with music that Mick identifies her inner reality. When listening to a Beethoven symphony one night, she at first thinks it sounds like "God strutting in the night," but after a while she feels that "it didn't have anything to do with God. This was her, Mick Kelly, walking in the daytime and by herself at night....with all the plans and feelings. This music was her--the real plain her."<sup>76</sup>

Music and all of Mick's other desires and dreams are housed in what she calls her "inside room." It fulfills her need for privacy, and it is a means of escaping and supplementing reality.

With her it was like there was two places--the inside room and the outside room. School and the family and the things that happened every day were in the outside room. Mister Singer was in both rooms. Foreign countries and plans and music were in the inside room. The songs she thought about were there....The inside room was a very private place. She could be in the middle of a house full of people and still feel like she was locked up by herself.<sup>77</sup>

At one time there had been other people in the room, people she most wanted to be loved and recognized by. But now Singer, the deaf-mute, is the only person there, for in him she seems to find the fulfillment of all her desires. In his listening to her, she feels she is recognized and loved; furthermore, she can speak to him about music and all her secret dreams: "Even if he was a deaf-and-dumb mute he understood every word she said to him. Talking with him was like.... finding out new things about music. She would tell him some of her plans that she would not tell anybody else."<sup>78</sup> Because she loves him,

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<sup>76</sup> McCullers, Heart, p. 259.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. 303-304.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

she wants to be more like him and be more like him and begins to adopt some of his habits, such as disliking cabbage after she learns he dislikes it. But she not only loves him, she worships him; Singer not only becomes an occupant of her inside room, he achieves in her mind the qualities of a deity. "When she thought of what she used to imagine was God she could only see Mister Singer with a long, white sheet around him."<sup>79</sup>

Mick's initiation is marked by certain steps toward maturity, by increased dependence on Singer, and finally by the defeat caused by Singer's death. Her first movement toward maturity is a realization about her father.. She is on her way out one night when he stops her and tries to think of some excuse to talk with her: "Now she just suddenly knew that she knew about her Dad. He was lonesome and he was an old man....And in his lonesomeness he wanted to be close to one of his kids." Although she is in a hurry, she does talk with him for a while and "afterward she felt older and as though she knew him as good as she could know any person."<sup>80</sup> A second step toward maturity follows the party she gives. Just as she stretches her other plans and dreams to the extreme, she thinks her party will be "better than and different from any party she had ever gone to or heard about before."<sup>81</sup> Her principal reason for giving it is based on her desire to belong to one of the cliques at school; "she planned about being with some bunch almost as much as thought of music....And finally she got the idea of the party."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> McCullers, Heart, p. 261.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. 241-243.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 246.



But the party is not "better than anything else in all her whole life";<sup>83</sup> it turns into a rowdy, wild melee with the boys in their suits and the girls in their evening dresses running around in the streets. The fact that the party turns out so differently from what she had planned does not "defeat" her, however; instead it leads her to a mature realization.

For a long time she remembered how she thought it would be, how she imagined the new people at Vacational. And about the bunch she wanted to be with every day. She would feel different in the halls now, knowing that they were not something special but like any other kids. It was O.K. about the ruined party. But it was all over. It was the end.<sup>84</sup>

Her realization that being a member of a "bunch" is not the most important thing in life is a fairly advanced one for a adolescent of thirteen; furthermore, it implies that she recognizes the value of her individuality. After the party she feels older: "She was too big to wear shorts any more after this. No more after this night. Not any more."<sup>85</sup>

The third event which causes her to feel older is not a positive movement into maturity like the other two, however; for this experience, the loss of her virginity, just seems to happen without either her or the boy being able to understand why or how it happened. Afterward she feels an unwelcome sense of being older: "She felt very old, and it was like something was heavy inside her. She was a grown person now, whether she wanted to be or not."<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, this

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<sup>83</sup> McCullers, Heart, p. 249.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 416.

experience causes a guilt which ultimately is one of the reasons for her defeat. When she first returns home she fears that her family will be able to tell that she is "different"; a short time later that night she almost wishes that they could tell because maybe then "she would feel better."<sup>87</sup>

Mick's defeat first begins with the increased poverty of her family. She is forced to discontinue her music lessons, but she still has music in her mind all the time and she still has Singer and her inside room to escape to. But then with the loss of her virginity, a deep sense of guilt begins to grow in her. And with its growth, she begins to lose her inside room; she finds that "now she could not stay in the inside room. She had to be around somebody all the time....And if she was by herself she counted on figured with numbers....Because if she did not have her mind on numbers this terrible afraidness came in her."<sup>88</sup> She can still dream about traveling and seeing snow, "but these thoughts about good things wouldn't last....Then what was there? Just Mister Singer."<sup>89</sup> Because of her guilt, she feels an increased sense of dependency on Singer. After deciding to take the job at Woolworth's, she begins to feel trapped and goes to Singer thinking, "if he said the job sounded O.K. then she would feel better about it."<sup>90</sup> But what she really wants to talk to him about is her experience with sex; she believes "if only she could tell him about this, then it

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<sup>87</sup> McCullers, Heart, p. 418.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 445.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 446.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 458.

would be better."<sup>91</sup> She can never bring herself to do so, however; for her guilt is such that she thinks that even following him around is in some way wrong. And then it is too late to confess to Singer, for a month later he commits suicide.

With Singer's death, the door to Mick's inside room is closed for good, and she is shut away from the music which gave meaning and hope to her life.

...now no music was in her mind....It was like she was shut out from the inside room. Sometimes a quick little tune would come and go—but she never went into the inside room with music like she used to do....she wanted to stay in the inside room but she didn't know how. It was like the inside room was locked somewhere away from her. A very hard thing to understand.<sup>92</sup>

Her defeat is more total than it might have been if she had been able to accept reality and with its acceptance in some way modify and therefore still retain some of her dreams.. But this she cannot do. "There were these two things she could never believe. That Mister Singer had killed himself and was dead. And that she was grown and had to work at Woolworth's."<sup>93</sup> She is unable to accept reality and the world. Furthermore, she has no idea why or how she was defeated. There is only the dim and uncertain feeling that "she was cheated. Only nobody had cheated her. So there was nobody to take it out on. However, just the same she had that feeling. Cheated."<sup>94</sup> Her attempt to cling to her old dreams is unsuccessful,

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<sup>91</sup> McCullers, Heart, p. 452.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 492.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 490.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 493.

for she cannot convince herself that they, or life itself, has much meaning.

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

All right!

O.K.!

Some good.<sup>95</sup>

Joel's initiation in Other Voices, Other Rooms has some almost identical parallels and some almost exact inversions to Mick's. Like Mick, Joel is an adolescent of thirteen. And also like Mick he has the desire to escape. After his mother's death he had lived with his aunt, uncle, and their five children, and although they were kind to him, he still resented them, though he was not sure why. Similar to Mick he finds the thought of foreign lands promising of wealth and excitement and escape: "he spent solitary hours watching the loading and unloading of banana boats that shipped to Central America, plotting of course a stowaway voyage, for he was certain in some foreign city he could land a good-paying job."<sup>96</sup> But then the letter, supposedly from his father, arrives and he prepares to go to Skully's Landing. This is his chance to escape from the unreality he has felt while living with his aunt, for while there, "it was if he lived...wearing a pair of spectacles with green, cracked lenses, and had wax-plugging in his ears, for everything seemed to be something it wasn't and the days melted in a constant dream."<sup>97</sup> And

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<sup>95</sup> McCullers, Heart, p. 493.

<sup>96</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 11.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11.

his father takes the place in Joel's mind of the "goodhearted stranger" who, he had always believed, would someday miraculously recognize him, rescue him, and love him. Like Mick he is confident that his dream will be fulfilled; "he'd counted on some such happening all along."<sup>98</sup> But this improbable dream has, like Mick's, a justifiable basis--his desire to be loved. One night when his aunt read "The Snow Queen" to him and the other children, he thought, "suppose, like Little Kay, he also were spirited off to the Snow Queen's frozen palace? What living soul would then brave robber barons for his rescue? And there was no one, really no one."<sup>99</sup> Like Mick, Joel feels lonely even though he is surrounded by others. But unlike her, Joel is able to define his desire to be loved, even though he too does not really know how to express it. He could pray for the concrete things; "only how, how, could you say something so indefinite, so meaningless as this: God let me be loved."<sup>100</sup>

Joel's initiation, the exact inversion of Mick's, comes about through his contact with fantasy and loss of reality. For instead of escaping from the sense of unreality, he enters more fully into it at the Landing. At first he is totally unable to accept it; his reaction is similar to Mick's after her disillusionment. He like Mick, feels tricked and cheated by some unknown power. "Now here again he'd locked the door and thrown away the key; there was conspiracy abroad, even his father had a grudge against him, even God. Somewhere along the line he'd been played a mean trick. Only he

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<sup>98</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 12.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

didn't know who or what to blame."<sup>101</sup>

Just as Mick has an "inside room," so does Joel.<sup>102</sup> His "far-away room" also contains people who recognize him and love him: Mr Mystery, a great magician who is a special "buddy" of Joel's; Annie Rose Kupperman, a little girl who in real life is "stuck-up and sassy" but in the far-away room repeats over and over "'I love you, Joel.'" The third and most important person, however, is one who appears in various disguises, "but always his name was Edward Q. Sansom," Joel's father.<sup>103</sup> Like Mick, Joel uses his far-away room as an escape, but here it is an escape from the lack of reality he finds at the Landing. When Amy, his half-crazy but harmless step-mother breaks into incoherent raving at dinner, Joel attempts "with all his might to find the far-away room."<sup>104</sup>

Unlike Mick who gains some maturity from "realizing" about her father, Joel is disillusioned by meeting his father. For instead of the person he had hoped would love and take care of him, instead of the virile, tall, powerful man he had expected, he finds a helpless paralytic who can communicate only by dropping a red tennis ball, who can speak only six simple words. "All pleasure, all pain he communicated with his eyes, and his eyes, like windows in the summer, were seldom shut, always open and staring, even in sleep."<sup>105</sup> Just as Singer becomes a deity to Mick, so does Sansom to Joel, only

<sup>101</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 71.

<sup>102</sup> Baldanza, "Plato in Dixie," p. 152, also notes this.

<sup>103</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 84.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 125.



Sansom is a malevolent, all-seeing, all-powerful deity. "Joel thought: who knows what goes on anywhere? Except Mr Sansom. He knew everything; in some trick way his eyes traveled the whole world over: they this very instant were watching him, of that he had no doubt."<sup>106</sup> In reality, it is only Joel's guilt, his feeling that he should attempt to love his father, which causes Sansom to attain such powers in Joel's mind. Once while reading him a recipe for banana custard pie (Joel has realized that "it was all the same to Mr Sansom, romance or recipe"),

he was tantalized by a sense of guilt: he ought to feel more for Mr Sansom than he did, he ought to try and love him. If only he'd never seen Mr Sansom! Then he could have gone on picturing him as looking this and that wonderful way, as talking in a kind strong voice, as being really his father. Certainly this Mr Sansom was not his father. This Mr Sansom was nobody but a pair of crazy eyes.<sup>107</sup>

But these crazy eyes appear at two crucial moments, both of which contribute to Joel's final defeat and acceptance of Randolph. He sees Sansom's eyes in the water moccasin's head, and he sees Randolph at the carnival as "a messenger for a pair of telescopic eyes."<sup>108</sup> Thus, Joel, like Mick, is in a way defeated by his own sense of guilt.

And again like Mick, he is defeated by his experiences with sex. But whereas Mick feels guilty because she loses her virginity (and thus asserts her femininity), Joel is defeated because he cannot assert his masculinity. In his relationship with the dominant and tomboyish Idabel, he is forced to take the lesser role. Once when he sees through her rough exterior, he expresses his tenderness by kissing her cheek. She responds by attacking Joel "and when she did

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<sup>106</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 173.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., pp. 170-171 .

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

this a terrible, and puzzled rage went through Joel. This was the real betrayal."<sup>109</sup>

Joel is once again defeated when he and Idabel go to Cloud Hotel to get a magic charm from the old Negro who lives there. When they come to a creek he starts across first on the old beam because "he was a boy and she was a girl and he was damned if she was going to get the upper hand again."<sup>110</sup> But halfway across he sees a water moccasin which suddenly seems to have his father's eyes, and he is incapable of doing anything. Idabel grabs the sword which Joel is wearing and kills the snake. They do not go on to the hotel to get the charm, for "his danger had already been, and he did not need a charm."<sup>111</sup> He has already lost his chance to find a normal manhood, for as John W. Aldridge says, Idabel has figuratively killed it.<sup>112</sup>

The final defeat of Joel's initiation occurs while he and Idabel are at the carnival. Although she has twice proven her dominance over him, she is his only hope of escaping from the Landing, of finding love and a friend. For Zoo, in whom Joel had hoped to find love and escape, has left for Washington. As he and Idabel run toward town and the "outside," he feels exhilarated and free. Furthermore, it seems that he still has a chance to find his normal manhood, for on the way they see two Negroes making love and Joel feels that while watching them

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<sup>109</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 135.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>112</sup> After the Last Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars, (New York, 1951), p. 210.

...all undefined whisperings had gathered into one yearning roar: he knew now, and it was not a giggle or a sudden white-hot word; only two people with each other in witness, and it was as though a tide had receded leaving him dry on a beach white as bone, and it was good at last to have come from so grey so cold a sea.<sup>113</sup>

This revelation makes Joel desire, as once before, to express his tenderness for Idabel; but seeing the two lovers has just the opposite effect on her. Just as Joel had been defeated by her killing of the snake, she is defeated by seeing the lovers; "when he spoke to her she looked at him mean and angry and scared; it was as if their positions of the afternoon had somehow reversed."<sup>114</sup> Just as Mick loses her chance to confess to Singer and thereby perhaps to be successful in her initiation, so Joel loses his chance to find a normal male-hood. But even though Joel realizes that Idabel falls in love with Miss Wisteria when they arrive at the carnival, he still attempts to cling to her and while she is riding on the ferris wheel with Miss Wisteria, he thinks, "Idabel, come back, I love you."<sup>115</sup> She cannot come back, however; nor can he follow her, for when the rain begins and he sees Randolph, he feels hopelessly trapped and caught. He sees him as an envoy of his father and feels as though "vine from the Landing's garden had stretched these miles to entwine his wrists."<sup>116</sup> Like Mick, his attempts to escape are defeated, and he has no course but to surrender.

The end of Joel's initiation is negative in that he turns away from the real world to the fantasy world of his homosexual cousin

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<sup>113</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 188.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

Randolph. In Randolph, he finds acceptance, he finds a friend, and he partially finds his own identity. "Now in the process of, as it were, discovering someone, most people experience simultaneously an illusion they are discovering themselves: the other's eyes reflect their real and glorious value. Such a feeling was with Joel...."<sup>117</sup> Like Mick's wanting to pattern herself after Singer, Joel wants to be like his cousin; he wishes his hair "were curly gold like Randolph's." And like Mick's becoming dependent on Singer, Joel wants "to put himself in the hands of his friend, be, as here in the sickbed, dependent on him for his very life."<sup>118</sup>

Joel's initiation is completed with his and Randolph's visit to Cloud Hotel. Here he makes the final exchange of reality for fantasy and illusion. He makes the decision that it is "better holding heaven in your hand like a butterfly that is not there at all" than to search for the real heaven and real butterfly.<sup>119</sup> Unlike Mick who is shut away from her inside room, Joel is locked into his far-away room. And unlike Mick who feels trapped and cheated, Joel feels free and exuberant, even though he is caught as surely as the hanged mule at the hotel. Unlike Mick who wonders, "what the hell good had it all been," Joel feels confident and joyously assured of his identity: "I am me," Joel whooped. 'I am Joel, we are the same people.'<sup>120</sup>

Two similar metaphors are developed in Mick's and Joel's initia-

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<sup>117</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 208.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., pp. 207-208.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

tions; the "room" is one; snow is the other. Snow in McCullers symbolizes the far-away, the attainment of illusions and dreams.<sup>121</sup> "A lot of the times the plans about the things that were going to [Mick] were mixed up with ice and snow."<sup>122</sup> After her sexual experience she attempts to renew her plans by asking Singer to tell her about the snow in Canada, but still the "snow and the foreign land were a long, long time away."<sup>123</sup> In Capôte, snow also seems to symbolize the attainment of illusions and the far-away. Like Mick, Joel has "a great yearning to see bona fide snow." While in New Orleans with his aunt he used to dream of "snow falling in August and silvering the glassy pavement, the ghostly flakes icing his hair, coating rooftops, changing the grimy old neighborhood into a hushed frozen white wasteland."<sup>124</sup> But at the Landing, snow acquires another meaning--the far-away becomes death. When Zoo, the Negro cook, asks Joel if he has ever seen snow he tells a lie about his mother and him being lost in the Canadian mountains "'and snow, tons and tons of it, was piling up all around us....And a man in a red coat, a Canadian mountie, rescued us. . . .only me really: Mama had already frozen to death.'"<sup>125</sup> Later, when lying in a coma after he has been brought back from the carnival, snow is associated not with his mother's death but his own. He dreams he is riding in a sleigh with Mr Mystery, "over snowdeep fields and down unlikely hills" when

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<sup>121</sup> Hassan, p. 219.

<sup>122</sup> McCullers, Heart, p. 239.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 446.

<sup>124</sup> Voices, pp. 57-58,

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-59.

an ice-wall rose before them, the sleigh raced on to certain doom, that night radios would sadden the nation: Mr Mystery, esteemed magician, and Joel Harrison Knox, beloved by one and all, were killed today in an accident which also claimed the lives of six reindeer who . . . r-r-rip, the ice tore like cellophane, the sleigh slid through into the Landing's parlor.<sup>126</sup>

And there in the Landing, "a strange sort of party seemed in progress." It is a funeral, Joel's own: "inside the chest lay Joel himself, all dressed in white, his face powdered and rouged, his goldbrown hair arranged in damp ringlets."<sup>127</sup> Just as Singer's death brings about Mick's defeat, Joel's own imagined death brings on his. When he awakes, he is powerless to escape, for he has no desire to escape; he does not want to leave the Landing even to go to Cloud Hotel. Unlike Mick, Joel does not lose the snow, but gains it, and with it his death in the real world and his birth into the Landing. In the final paragraph of the novel he is standing in the garden when he looks up at Randolph's window and sees him there dressed in his countess costume.

...and it was as if snow were falling there, flakes shaping snow eyes, hair: a face trembled like a white beautiful moth, smiled. She beckoned to him, shining and silver, and he knew he must go: unafraid, not hesitating, he paused only at the garden's edge where, as though he'd forgotten something he stopped and looked back at the bloomless, descending blue, at the boy he had left behind.<sup>128</sup>

As Hassan observes, it is uncertain whether Joel's response to Randolph is made in "triumph or defeat";<sup>129</sup> Joel's initiation, unlike Mick's, is not one which is clearly and undeniably negative. In some ways he seems to have been successful, for he does find

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<sup>126</sup> Voices, p. 204.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>129</sup> Radical Innocence, p. 244.



his identity. Through Randolph he fulfills his desire to be loved, and in love he finds a redeeming factor, a constant in which he can believe;

The world was a frightening place, yes, he knew: unlasting, what could be forever?...but remember Little Three Eyes? show her love and apples ripen gold, love vanquishes the Snow Queen, its presence finds the name, be it Rumpelstiltskin or merely Joel Knox: that is constant.<sup>130</sup>

But in other ways his initiation seems to be definitely negative; he has not really triumphed, but has been forced to surrender to Randolph and the Landing. He has been defeated in his efforts to find normal manhood and therefore must turn to the homosexuality of Randolph; he has been defeated in his efforts to escape to the real world of the Landing. He has not escaped isolation, but has permanently resigned himself to it. The implications of Mick's initiation seem to be that it is impossible to escape isolation; the implications of Joel's seem to be not only that it is impossible but that it is undesirable as well, for it is only within the isolated private world of the Landing that he finds the love and identity he sought.

There are, however, two positive views of initiation in the works being discussed, that of Frankie Addams in The Member of the Wedding and Collin Fenwick in The Grass Harn. Frankie's is positive in that she is not permanently defeated by not being able to be a "member of the wedding." But in other ways her initiation is not entirely successful, for she does not seem to learn anything from her disillusionment; she matures only superficially and continues to make impossible plans. As Hassan says, "There is change; there is really

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<sup>130</sup> Capote, Voices, pp. 195-196.

no knowledge or confirmation."<sup>131</sup> Frankie's principal desire, the one which motivates all her actions, is her desire to belong, for "she belonged to no club and was a member of nothing in the world."<sup>132</sup> And she wants to escape from the boredom of the summer, of sitting around in the kitchen with Berenice and John Henry. Gradually all these desires come to be centered in her plan to be a "member of the wedding," to join her brother and his bride and travel with them all over the world. This decision satisfies her restlessness and fear.

...when the old question came to her--the who she was and what she would be in the world, and why she was standing there that minute--when the old question came to her, she did not feel hurt and unanswered. At last she knew just who she was and understood where she was going.<sup>133</sup>

The next day she changes her name to F. Jasmine, partially because both her brother's and his bride's names begin with the letters "J A," but also because she no longer believes herself to be like the old Frankie. For now instead of feeling unconnected with the world, she feels that she is a part of it; "it was the day when, from the beginning, the world seemed no longer separate from herself and when all at once she felt included."<sup>134</sup> She walks down the streets of the town and seems to feel a "connection" with everyone she sees. Like Mick, she has no doubt that her plan might fail for she believes in it too completely. Only when Berenice attempts to convince her of the impossibility of going with the bridal couple does F. Jasmine seem to feel the encroachment of reality. But she is able to ignore

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<sup>131</sup> Radical Innocence, p. 222.

<sup>132</sup> McCullers, Member, p. 599.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 651.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 655.

Berenice's wise advice and warnings, and though her plan is unsuccessful as Berenice told her it would be, perhaps it is good that she is able to believe in it, even for one afternoon. Because through her belief that she loves and is loved in return by her brother and his bride, she is able for the first time to accept the fact of love, for "the old Frankie had laughed at love, maintained it was a big fake, and did not believe in it."<sup>135</sup> And from her conversation with Berenice, she finds out that the isolation and separateness she had felt as the old Frankie are conditions common to all people, that, as Berenice tells her, "Everybody is caught in one way or another."<sup>136</sup>

Ideally, from this discussion she should learn greater awareness of others, a compassion perhaps, based on the realization that everyone is lonely. Unfortunately, however, it is not really evident that she does, from either the conversation or her disillusionment, for after recovering from her "defeat" at the wedding, she does not seem to have any increased awareness of others; her new little friend and their plans to go around the world together seem more important to her than those with whom she has spent most of the recent part of her life. While she listened in a "spell of horror" when told about John Henry's suffering, and while she was haunted by nightmares about him after his death, "the daytime was filled with radar, school and Mary Littlejohn....and it was seldom now that she felt his presence."<sup>137</sup> Nor does the fact that Berenice is going away seem as important as the fact that Mary is coming over to spend the night. Most important, Frances, as she is now called, does not seem to learn any true way to

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<sup>135</sup> McCullers, Member, p. 716.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 740.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 790.

redeem the condition of loneliness, for she escapes the isolation and fear she felt after the wedding in the same way as she had before--by absorbing herself in impossible illusion and dreams founded on a relationship with another person. Certainly it cannot be expected that she would find some complete solution to loneliness because in many ways, her initiation is not complete--she has made only a few steps towards maturity and there yet remain many more. But because she has made these more or less successfully, there is the hope that she will eventually reach fuller realizations about herself and others, that eventually she will be able to understand and adopt for her own, Berenice's more enduring and meaningful wisdom.

Frankie's initiation is in many ways like Joel's. Both are able to recover from disillusionment and go on to other dreams; both often feel that the situations they find themselves in are unreal and the expression of this unreality many times takes the same or similar form. Just as Frankie at first feels the summer is like "a green sick dream, or like a silent crazy jungle under glass,"<sup>138</sup> Joel feels as though the days in New Orleans "melted in a constant dream," and were seen as through "green, cracked lenses";<sup>139</sup> later the Landing seems to him to be "captured under a cone of glass."<sup>140</sup> Just as Frankie thinks that "the world seemed somehow separate from herself,"<sup>141</sup> Joel feels "separated, without identity" with "no connection linking himself" and the Landing.<sup>142</sup> Both at times look in a mirror and

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<sup>138</sup> McCullers, Member, p. 599.

<sup>139</sup> Capote, Voices, pp. 10-11.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>141</sup> McCullers, Member, p. 624.

<sup>142</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 71

see themselves as distorted: Frankie's "reflection in the glass was warped and crooked";<sup>143</sup> Joel's "formless reflected face was wide-lipped and one-eyed, as if it were a heat-softened wax effigy."<sup>144</sup> Both connect unreality with a clock in the kitchen. When Frankie is in the soldier's room it seems to her that "the silence in the room was like that silence in the kitchen when, on a drowsy afternoon, the ticking of the clock would stop--and there would steal over her a mysterious uneasiness that lasted until she realized what was wrong."<sup>145</sup> Joel has a similar feeling when waiting in the kitchen for Amy to return.

...the old broken clock ticked like an invalid heart....the walls swelled to an enormous quivering shape, like the crystal flesh of a jellyfish....When...he raised the clock off its battered face it promptly stopped beating and all sense of life faded from the kitchen....She was not coming, and it was all some crazy trick.<sup>146</sup>

In addition, what they feel to be distortions of reality are compared with a carnival, particularly a crazy house. Frankie does not want to go to the soldier's room, but feels "it was like going into a fair booth, or fair ride, that once having entered you cannot leave until the exhibition or the ride is finished." And when the soldier starts to make an advance on her, "the next minute was like a minute in the fair Crazy House...."<sup>147</sup> The first time Joel hears one of the red tennis balls bouncing down the stairs, "the parlor, when he did not concentrate hard, had a bent tilted look, like the

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<sup>143</sup> McCullers, Member, p. 601.

<sup>144</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 64.

<sup>145</sup> McCullers, Member, p. 760.

<sup>146</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 63.

<sup>147</sup> McCullers, Member, pp. 758, 760.

topsy-turvy room in the crazyhouse at Pontchartrain."<sup>148</sup> Distortion is also represented for both by the feeling of being underwater. After Frankie has attempted to run away from home, she goes to the Blue Moon where "the blue light gave the place a look of being under-seas," and where "she felt as queer as a person drowning."<sup>149</sup> When Joel is leaving with Jesus Fever for the Landing, "a sea of deepening green spread the sky like some queer wine";<sup>150</sup> and later at the Landing at Zoo and Jesus Fever's prayer meeting, "the land came to seem as though it were submerged in dark deep water. The fern undulated like sea-floor plants, the cabin loomed mysterious as a sunken galleon hulk...."<sup>151</sup> Distortions in others are described as doll-like and waxen. After John Henry dies, Frankie sees him in her dreams as being like "an escaped child dummy from the window of a department store, the wax legs moving stiffly only at joints, and the wax face wizened and faintly painted...."<sup>152</sup> The first time Joel goes to his father's room, he sees Amy sitting there "like a kind of wax machine, a life-sized doll."<sup>153</sup> And for both, the completion of their initiation is announced by the same device--that of a bell. Frankie is in the kitchen waiting for Mary Littlejohn and is talking about their shared interests. "'I am simply mad about----' But the sentence was left unfinished for the hush was shattered when, with an instant shock of happiness, she heard the ringing of the bell."<sup>154</sup> Joel is along in the garden after his and Randolph's return from

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<sup>148</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 87.

<sup>149</sup> McCullers, Member, pp. 782, 785.

<sup>150</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 27.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., pp. 69-70.

<sup>152</sup> McCullers, Member, p. 790.

<sup>153</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 120.

<sup>154</sup> McCullers, Member, p. 791.



Cloud Hotel; just before he sees Randolph in the window he hears "a sound, as if the bell had suddenly tolled, and the shape of loneliness...seemed to rise from the garden...."<sup>155</sup>

It is evident that most of the similarities between Frankie's and Joel's initiations are superficial ones, possible even coincidental ones, especially in the last case. And there are even fewer similarities between Frankie's initiation and Collin's except in a very broad way, which is that both have the opportunity to learn from the wisdom of an older person. Collin differs from Frankie in that he is able to benefit from this wisdom and find a redeeming factor for the isolation of mankind, not just for himself. Unlike Frankie he does not seem to sense isolation personally, but instead seems to learn about it, or more specifically its effects, from Judge Cool. Isolation is connected with the inability to find identity, as it was to some degree for Frankie, but here it is the isolation induced by the inability to communicate, the inability to find the "person to whom everything can be said." As the Judge tells the four in the tree-house, "I was a man convinced that his life will have passed uncommunicated and without trace."<sup>156</sup> But he regards their being together in the tree-house as their chance to find the one person, to communicate, to find their identity. It is Dolly who first benefits from this knowledge and from the Judge's explanation of love as a chain of love. She realizes that she has been in love all her life; she, before Collin, finds her identity, and from her

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<sup>155</sup> Capote, Voices, p. 230.

<sup>156</sup> Capote, The Grass Harp, p. 66.

Collin learns more fully the meaning of the Judge's message of love.

"Charlie said that love is a chain of love. I hope you listened and understood him. Because when you can love one thing," she held the blue egg as preciously as the Judge had held a leaf, "you can love another, and that is something to live with. You can forgive everything."<sup>157</sup>

According to Paul Levine, this is the "redeeming element in life," not just for Collin, but for Capote.<sup>158</sup> Love here is an outward movement by the very nature of which a person can extend beyond himself, can learn acceptance and forgiveness, and thus can at least partially alleviate the condition of isolation. Similarly love is the redeeming element for McCullers. In the epilogue to The Ballad of the Sad Cafe the narrator describes the singing of a chain gang.

The voices are dark in the golden glare, the music intricately blended, both somber and joyful. The music will swell until at last it seems that the sound does not come from the twelve men on the gang, but from the earth itself, or the wide sky. It is music that causes the heart to broaden and the listener to grow cold with ecstasy and fright....And what kind of gang is this that can make such music? Just twelve mortal men....Just twelve mortal men who are together.<sup>159</sup>

As Evans suggests, the chain gang is a symbol of mankind, the singing the symbol of love. Just as the twelve are prisoners, so are all men prisoners of spiritual isolation.<sup>160</sup> While their singing cannot change their condition, it can unite them, even if temporarily, and it can cause "the heart to broaden."

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<sup>157</sup> Capote, The Grass Harp, p. 171

<sup>158</sup> "Truman Capote: The Revelation of the Broken Image," The Virginia Quarterly Review, 34 (1958), 616.

<sup>159</sup> p. 66.

<sup>160</sup> "Spiritual Isolation," pp. 309-310.

In one way this view of love seems darker than that of Capote. The music is not only "joyful," but "somber"; the listener feels not only "ecstasy," but "fright." McCullers, it seems, retains the defeating aspects of love within the redeeming vision of love. But in another way, this final vision of McCullers' is more outgoing, more inclusive than Capote's. The concept of love he proposes, while it is a means by which all men can escape isolation, still seems to be a more private love than McCullers'. For although he implies that one can be led outside himself by love, the main value of the love still seems to be primarily confined to the individual himself. McCullers, however, makes it explicit that the value is not limited just to the lover, but that love can benefit others, the "listeners" as well. She suggests that just the presence of love can redeem to an extent all who come in contact with it--just as the cafe created by Amelia's love for Lyman benefited the entire town. And while Capote does not deny that this is possible, it is not definitely included in his vision--his concern with love seems primarily private.

But it yet may seem paradoxical that love should be able to redeem at all, that love, which between two people produces more isolation, should also be the means to escape isolation. Any apparent contradiction is resolved, however, with the realization that love produces isolation only when one expects reciprocation, love in return. Love is for Capote as Vickery suggests it is for McCullers, "a matter of loving unaltered by not being loved...."<sup>181</sup> Love principle, an attitude, as an act of giving without hope of return, is redeeming and can transcend the fact of isolation.

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<sup>181</sup> "Carson McCullers," p. 24.

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A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FICTION OF  
CARSON MC CULLERS AND TRUMAN CAPOTE

by

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B. S., University of Kansas, 1961

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1963

Although several critics have noted similarities between Carson McCullers and Truman Capote, and one critic has compared their concepts of love, no extensive study of the relationship between them has been made. Such a study reveals that they are similar in many other ways besides the concept of love, as can be shown by an examination of McCullers' The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud," The Ballad of the Sad Café, and The Member of the Wedding; and Capote's Other Voices, Other Rooms and The Grass Harp.

The theme of man's isolation and loneliness underlies the fiction of both authors. This theme, which both represent symbolically by the same types of characters--adolescents and freaks--is apparent in their "darker" concept of love which demonstrates that man cannot escape isolation even through love. The two authors are concerned with spiritual love in which sex, even as a biological distinction, is unimportant. Homosexual love is therefore just as possible as heterosexual, and just as valid since both believe that the type of person one loves is a completely personal matter. It does not concern even the object of one's love, since there is no communication or reciprocation between the lover and his beloved. For the beloved hates and fears the lover, who is made only more isolated and alone and is ultimately defeated by any attempt to become closer to his beloved. But even though love is usually defeating, McCullers and Capote believe that there is value in it, as they show in the transformations made by love in many of their characters and in their "lighter" concept of love. This concept--that love is a "process" or "chain" consists of the belief that by learning to love one thing,



even an inanimate object, a person can gradually learn to love everything and everyone.

In addition to the similarities in their concepts of love, McCullers and Capote have many likenesses in the negative themes of initiation, represented by Mick in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter and Joel in Other Voices, Other Rooms. Both have impossible illusions based on their desire to love and be loved, and both want to escape to foreign lands. Both have a "room" in their minds which houses these dreams and serves as a means of escape. They each have one person with whom they associate the attainment of their desires; for Mick it is a deaf-mute; for Joel, his father. And most of the reasons for their defeat are similar. In some ways, however, Joel's initiation is the exact opposite of Mick's. She is defeated by her contact with reality and the loss of her dreams; while Joel is defeated by his contact with fantasy and the loss of reality. She is locked out of her "inside room"; he is locked into his "far-away room."

McCullers and Capote each develop a more positive view of initiation, that of Frankie in The Member of the Wedding and Collin in The Grass Harp. Frankie's, however, is more like Joel's than Collin's; both she and Joel often feel that reality is distorted and the expression of this distortion is many times similar. Collin's initiation is more positive than Frankie's in that he finds a redeeming element for the condition of isolation. This element is love, not a love which demands reciprocation, but a love which is an outgoing impulse, an attitude. This for both McCullers and Capote is the means to transcend the loneliness and isolation of man.