The Member of the Wedding Study Guide

The Member of the Wedding by Carson McCullers

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Introduction

Regarded by many critics as Carson McCullers's most accessible work, *The Member of the Wedding* is a sensitive portrayal of twelve-year-old Frankie Addams. McCullers was able to finish the novel with the help of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Institute of Arts and Letters grant, and several summers at Yaddo, a writers' colony in New York. Much of the material for the novel is autobiographical. The town in which Frankie lives is based on McCullers's hometown of Columbus, Georgia. McCullers's father, like Frankie's, was a jeweler, and her family had employed African- American servants in her childhood home. Many of Frankie's feelings of awkwardness are drawn from McCullers's own memories of what it was like to be twelve years old. She, like Frankie, felt like a gangly misfit whose tomboyish ways made it difficult to fit in with boys or girls her age.

At the urging of her friend Tennessee Williams, McCullers's adapted the novel into a play. The play was highly successful, opening on Broadway in 1950 and lasting for fourteen months and 501 performances. In addition, the play received a number of prestigious awards. Despite the popular and critical success of the play, most critics agree that some of the insight into the characters is lost on the stage. It is just such insights, along with believable characters, a smooth writing style, and an unsentimental tone that continue to impress readers and critics alike.

Author Biography

Carson McCullers was born Lula Carson Smith on February 19, 1917, in Columbus, Georgia. Mc- Cullers's mother had early intuitions that her daughter was destined for greatness. Consequently, as a child, McCullers was lavished with attention by her mother to the exclusion of her two other siblings. Her musical ability became apparent at an early age, and when she graduated from high school, she was sent to the prestigious Juilliard School of Music in New York City. Because her family could not afford such an expensive school, they sold a family heirloom ring to pay the tuition. Before she enrolled, however, McCullers's roommate lost all of their money, and McCullers was forced to take odd jobs instead of attending Juilliard. She enrolled in writing classes at Columbia and New York University where her ability to write compelling fiction developed.

In 1936, McCullers met an army corporal named James Reeves McCullers. They married the following year, beginning a tumultuous marriage. Her writing career took off in 1939 with the publication of her critically acclaimed novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter.* That same year, McCullers began writing *The Member of the Wedding,* a novel she would work on for seven years. Her other works include *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* and *Reflections in a Golden Eye.*

McCullers and her husband separated and reconciled numerous times. In addition, the mid-1940s brought the beginning of McCullers's health problems, including recurrent influenza and pleurisy. Her failing health did not stop the couple from traveling extensively around Europe, however, until she suffered a debilitating stroke at the age of thirty. In 1948, she attempted suicide. By 1953, when her husband tried to talk her into a double suicide, she was no longer interested in taking her life so she left him in France to return home. Soon after, he killed himself.

Unable to write much in the last years of her life because of further strokes, McCullers became quite eccentric, opting to wear white almost constantly. She often gave interviews wearing white nightgowns and tennis shoes. She underwent surgeries to repair damage from strokes, a heart attack, and a broken hip, and she had a cancerous breast removed. On August 15, 1967, McCullers suffered from a massive brain hemorrhage and fell into a forty-seven-day coma. She died on September 28 and is buried beside her mother in Oak Hill Cemetery in Nyack, New York.

Plot Summary

Part One

Frankie Addams is an awkward twelve-yearold tomboy who is out of school for the summer. She lives with her widower father (her mother died in childbirth) and an African-American housekeeper named Berenice. Her father, who is seldom home, runs a successful jewelry store in the small mill town where they live. Berenice, as a result, is closer to a parental figure for Frankie than is her father. Frankie's six-year-old cousin, John Henry, often spends the days and nights with Frankie. Frankie feels like a misfit because she is so tall, has cropped hair, and is no longer included in the group of slightly older neighborhood girls. At the same time, she is at a point in her adolescence where she begins struggling with her identity and self-esteem.

Frankie reads about the events of World War II and imagines the adventures of soldiers all over the world. She wants to be a part of it because she desperately wants to be a part of something she can easily define. Her brother, Jarvis, is stationed in Alaska in the army. When he returns home briefly to announce his upcoming wedding, Frankie is elated. Through a combination of wishful thinking and youthful naiveté, she becomes convinced that she will go with her brother and his bride on their honeymoon, then live with them wherever they go afterward. Believing that she has solved the problem of not belonging anywhere, she begins planning for her new life.

Part Two

The day before the wedding, Frankie puts on her pink dress, stockings, lipstick, and perfume and goes into town. Instead of Frankie, she starts calling herself F. Jasmine. She feels the need to see all the familiar sights for the last time, and along the way she tells everyone who will listen about her plans to leave the town and live with her brother. When she meets a red-haired soldier, he invites her to the Blue Moon, a local bar and hotel. He does not seem to realize how young she is, and he buys her a beer. As she is leaving, he asks her for a date that night, and she hesitantly agrees. Before returning home, she stops to buy a dress to wear to the wedding after visiting her father in his jewelry store.

Frankie learns that her Uncle Charles has died but is relieved that this will not change her family's plans to attend the wedding the next day. Later, she and Berenice and John Henry sit at the table eating dinner and playing cards, and they begin talking about Berenice's life, love, and the pains of growing older. Frankie decides to visit Berenice's mother, Big Mama, who is a fortuneteller, and then goes to meet the soldier. When he sees her, he suggests that they go up to his room. Frankie is uneasy but agrees. When the soldier makes advances toward her, she hits him over the head with a glass pitcher and escapes. When she arrives home, she says nothing of the incident and is sent to bed. The family must rise early the next morning to catch a bus to the wedding.

Part Three

The day of the wedding goes by in a blur for Frankie. She never has a chance to talk to her brother or to his bride about her desire to go with them, and when she gets in the honeymoon car after the wedding, her father pulls her out. Frankie screams after the car, "Take me! Take me!" When she gets home, Frankie makes a half-hearted attempt to run away, but her father finds her.

A year later, Frankie (who is now called Frances) is helping her family prepare to move to another house. Berenice will not be going with them, as she has decided to marry her suitor, T. T.; and John Henry has died of meningitis. Frankie is now more mature, however, and is able to handle unexpected changes. She has a new friend named Mary, a girl her own age with similar interests.

Part 1

Part 1 Summary

It is mid-August in Alabama. Frankie Addams, age 12, is not a member of anything. She has spent most of her summer in the kitchen with her 6-year-old cousin John Henry and the cook, Bernice, feeling hot, bored, and afraid.

Frankie has a number of fears. For one thing, Frankie is sincerely afraid that she is going to grow to be over 9 feet tall. This summer, she's grown 4 inches, and she won't be 13 until November. If she keeps growing until she's 18, Frankie thinks, she'll be a circus freak.

Until April of this year, Frankie had been like other people. She belonged to a club and was in the 7th grade. She worked at her father's jewelry shop on Saturday mornings and went to the show on Saturday afternoon. She used to sleep in bed with her father, but it wasn't because she was afraid. Until April, she wasn't the kind of person to think of being afraid.

In April, though, Frankie became concerned about the world, which was embroiled in World War II. It seemed to her cracked and broken beyond repair. She was sorry she couldn't be a Marine. She tried to donate blood, but they said she was too young. Frankie wasn't afraid of the German or Japanese, but she was upset because the war didn't include her. It made her feel separate from the whole world. After she couldn't donate blood, Frankie knew that she ought to leave town and go far away.

Another day in April, Frankie's father teased her and said she was too big to sleep with him anymore. She began sleeping in her own room upstairs, but it hurt her feelings. Now, she and her father are awkward with each other, and she has a little grudge against him.

That spring, all kinds of things had begun to hurt Frankie that never used to hurt her before. Just seeing a sunset or hearing a voice call outdoors after dark caused an aching feeling. It was an ache that left her wondering who she was and what she would grow up to be. First, she tried being silly and playful, but it did not relieve the ache.

Frankie then became a criminal. She carried her father's pistol all over town and shot up his cartridges in an empty lot. She even shoplifted a pocketknife from Sears and Roebuck. One Saturday, she committed a strange "sin" with Barney MacKean in his garage. Frankie didn't know exactly what it was, but afterward, she couldn't look anyone in the eye and wanted to kill Barney.

By the end of the summer, Frankie no longer thinks of the war, and she doesn't leave home very much. She's afraid of Barney, her father and the Law, but she tries not to think about them. She's determined not to hurt anymore. She spends her days eating,

writing shows, playing bridge with Bernice and John Henry, and throwing knives against the side of the garage.

There's really no one else to play with. Frankie's best friend, Evelyn Owen, has moved to Florida. A group of older girls that used to include Frankie have formed a club that doesn't include her. Even her cat Charlie has run away. Frankie has no one left and no reason to stay in town. She packed her suitcase weeks ago, but can't think where to go.

Now, however, something has Frankie's interest and attention. She has learned that her brother Jarvis is to be married in Winter Hill this Sunday, and she and her father are going to the wedding. Jarvis, a soldier, has come back from a 2-year stint in Alaska. He brought his fiancée Janice to the house to make the announcement. Frankie thinks they are meant to be because both their names begin with JA. She wishes her name began that way, too, so she could be one of them.

To think of Jarvis and Janice driving away from her gives Frankie a pain. Even though they left hours ago after making their announcement, Frankie can still feel them going away from her. She remembers her cat Charlie and says to Bernice, "It looks to me like everything has just walked off and left me."

Suddenly, Frankie announces to Bernice that she is going to run away. After the wedding, Frankie says, she'll not come back here to live. Bernice doesn't take this announcement very seriously and teases Frankie about having a crush on the wedding. Once Frankie has this idea, though, it relieves the ache in her heart, and she feels she knows where she belongs. She belongs with Jarvis and Janice.

When Bernice leaves for the evening, and the house is quiet, Frankie remembers the Marlowes. Frankie's mother had died when she was born, and Frankie's grandmother came and took care of her. When Frankie was 9, her grandmother died, and Frankie's father rented the extra bedroom to Mr. and Mrs. Marlowe. This couple fascinated Frankie. When they were away from home, she used to go look at all their belongings.

One Sunday afternoon, however, Frankie saw Mr. Marlowe having some sort of fit next to Mrs. Marlowe's corset on the bed. She ran to tell Bernice, who slammed the bedroom door and said the Marlowes were common people. Mr. Addams evicted them, and Frankie didn't understand why, although she knew it had something to do with the fit.

Remembering all this, Frankie is walking over to John Henry's house after dark, when she suddenly finds words for how she feels about her brother and the bride. "They are the we of me," she tells herself. Frankie feels that she has spent all of her life alone, as an "I," but now that she has seen the wedding couple, she feels that she is a member of a "we."

Once at John Henry's, Frankie becomes angry, because he doesn't feel like sleeping over at her house. She screams that she only invited him because he looked "so ugly and lonesome." This surprises John Henry, because he doesn't feel a bit lonesome. Frankie wants to leave when she hears this, but instead, begins jabbering about her wedding plans. Then, a horn begins to play. First it plays sad and low, then a jazzy tune,

and then the blues song again. It hurts Frankie when the horn breaks off its playing in the middle of the tune. It squeezes her heart until John Henry asks her where she intends to go after the wedding. Frankie feels her heart break open into two wings, and she finally knows. She will go with her brother and the bride wherever they go. "I love the two of them so much," she tells John Henry. Frankie feels that the questions about what will become of her and who she is are solved. She is no longer afraid.

Part 1 Analysis

Frankie Addams is introduced to the reader as a young girl at the very end of her childhood. Her fear of being 9 feet tall shows how young and innocent she is. While innocence is sweet, it causes Frankie some pain. For instance, the girls she used to play with, ages 13-15, have begun to talk about sex. She refuses to believe what she calls their nasty lies, and so she is left out of their club on the grounds that she is still a baby.

The feeling that Frankie is alone in the world, not included in anything, is the major theme of this story. Frankie is suffering a typical adolescent crisis. She is too young to help the war effort, but at the same time she's too big to sleep with papa anymore. She is an outsider no matter what she does, so Frankie has become angry and afraid. She feels disconnected from the whole world.

While Frankie's crisis is typical of adolescence, there are some factors that complicate her grief over the end of her childhood. She has had a lot of losses this year. She's lost the old comfortable relationship with her father, her best friend, and even her cat. Although these losses happened just last spring, Frankie feels that she has always been alone. There is some truth to that. Because her mother died in childbirth, Frankie never had the newborn experience of being a "we." The world has always been a place where she felt cut loose.

On top of everything else, Frankie has been exposed to sexuality in some way that has left her feeling ashamed and angry. Her throwing the knives against her garage seems to be evidence of her rage against Barney's actions in his garage. The reader never knows exactly what happened, because Frankie doesn't like to think about it.

Frankie's memories of the Marlowes are more evidence of her innocence. Through these memories, the reader also sees that Frankie has been fascinated with couples for a long time, not just Jarvis and Janice. This makes sense because she's never lived with a couple, although she has seen them in other people's houses. When Frankie cooks up the idea of going off with Jarvis and Janice, the reader experiences dread, because it's inevitable that Frankie will be disappointed and feel left out once again.

The author, Carson MacCullers, uses music in an interesting way to set the scene for this story. Music is always broken off in the middle of a melody. There is the radio that used to play all summer, but which Jarvis suddenly turned off to make his

announcement. There is the horn with its broken song. These are symbols of all the losses and broken relationships that Frankie has faced this year.

MacCullers pays a lot of attention to time in this story, too. The description of the clock's ticking, as well as the frequent mention of what time it is, helps to convey how hot, lazy, and slow this summer has been for Frankie.

The setting of the story is a small town in Alabama during World War II. Because there is no air-conditioning and no television, Frankie can hear music and conversations going on outside her house. She hears people talking, playing, and working. To the modern reader, this may seem like a portrait of idea communal life, but being surrounded by people never spared anyone from isolation, and it doesn't save Frankie from the loneliness of being 12.

Part 2, Chapter 1

Part 2, Chapter 1 Summary

The old Frankie, who wasn't a member of anything, is gone. She has become F. Jasmine, who is a member of the wedding. F. Jasmine makes her plans to join the JA wedding party of Jarvis and Janice in Winter Hill, and she will go with them wherever they go. She will travel with them wherever her brother may be stationed, all over the world.

F. Jasmine spends Saturday before the wedding saying goodbye to her hometown. She wears her best pink organdy dress instead of the shorts and Mexican hat she wore all summer. F. Jasmine is such a new person that she no longer carries a grudge against her father for saying she was too big to sleep with him. She tries to tell her papa that she won't be back after the wedding, but he doesn't listen. F. Jasmine feels a little sorry for him. She realizes how lonesome he will be after she's gone, and he doesn't even know it.

In addition to saying goodbye to familiar places, F. Jasmine goes into places the old Frankie has never been, including a place called the Blue Moon. F. Jasmine comes to the Blue Moon by following the sounds of the monkey and the monkey man. She has not seen them all summer, but she loves them and wants to tell them goodbye. She follows the sound of the organ, but it suddenly stops before F. Jasmine can follow its sound to them, so she goes into the Blue Moon instead. There, a bartender is the first in town to hear F. Jasmine tell about her wedding plans.

After telling her story, F. Jasmine looks down toward the end of the bar and sees a red-haired soldier looking at her. For the first time, she is able to look a soldier in the eye and not feel jealous. The old Frankie envied soldiers because they could go places and were included in the war. Now that F. Jasmine has plans of her own, she can look upon the soldier as a fellow traveler. She sees no hint of danger in him.

The red-haired soldier doesn't speak, and F. Jasmine leaves the Blue Moon. She walks all over town and tells her plans to anyone who will listen. In the back of her mind, F. Jasmine imagines how surprised Bernice will be to hear of her striking up conversations with strangers.

At 11:30 a.m., F. Jasmine stops at her father's jewelry store. Mr. Addams directs Frankie to go home because Bernice has been looking for her. He also tells her that Uncle Charles died this morning. Uncle Charles was not really F. Jasmine's uncle. He was John Henry's uncle from the other side of John Henry's family. Therefore, F. Jasmine is sorry to hear the news, but not terribly sad about it. Her wedding plans push it aside.

On her way home, F. Jasmine is to stop by MacDougal's department store to charge a new dress and shoes for the wedding. She hears the monkey man's organ, however,

and follows the sound. When she finds the monkey and the monkey man, they are in a quarrel with the red-haired soldier. He angrily pushes a fistful of money at the monkey man, apparently trying to buy the monkey. He is drunk, but F. Jasmine does not know that.

After the monkey and monkey man leave the scene, the red-haired solder walks with F. Jasmine and takes her back to the Blue Moon, where he orders her a beer. She feels that she ought to be proud that he's mistaken her for an older girl, but she is uneasy in a way she can't explain. She drinks the beer and agrees to meet the soldier at 9 p.m. for a date.

Back out on the sidewalk, F. Jasmine sees a girl from school. The uneasy feeling suddenly disappears, and she brags to her schoolmate about having a date with a soldier. The girl goes with F. Jasmine to help her pick out her dress and shoes for the wedding, but this isn't exactly what brings the wedding feeling back.

What brings the wedding feeling back is what happens to F. Jasmine on her way home. Out of the corner of her eye, she see a pair of figures and feels strongly it must be Jarvis and Janice, even though she knows they are in Winter Hill preparing for the wedding. When she turns to face the figures, they are two young boys, the taller one resting his arm on the shoulder of the shorter boy. F. Jasmine arrives home at 2 p.m.

Part 2, Chapter 1 Analysis

In an attempt to give voice to her changing identity, as well as to include herself as part of Jarvis and Janice, Frankie renames herself F. Jasmine. Although F. Jasmine certainly has some childish ideas, we begin in this chapter to see some of the good things about her growing up. For the first time, she thinks of her father as a person with feelings. As the story progresses, F. Jasmine will exhibit other positive traits that result from her growing up.

The use of music and clocks continues. The music of the organ grinder lures F. Jasmine toward the Blue Moon, and it stops in the middle of its song, just like the horn did. The author continues to make frequent mention of the time to illustrate how slow it moves from F. Jasmine's perspective.

When F. Jasmine sees nothing dangerous about the red-haired soldier, she foreshadows for the reader that the soldier is dangerous to her. This lack of awareness on her part is one of the reasons that it's necessary for F. Jasmine to give up her childhood naiveté.

F. Jasmine is not as alone as she thinks is. As she goes about the town, feeling connected to strangers, she looks forward to telling Bernice about her morning, and she can imagine what Bernice will say. Bernice's voice lives in her head, just like other girls have mothers whose voices live in their heads. Bernice continues to call her Frankie. F. Jasmine's point of view is that Bernice doesn't recognize that Frankie is gone and that a new person, F. Jasmine, has joined the family. This is a very typical conflict between 12-

year-old girls and their mothers. This conflict, however, is partly what helps F. Jasmine articulate her growing consciousness, as the reader will see in the next chapter.

Part 2, Chapter 2

Part 2, Chapter 2 Summary

F. Jasmine's last dinner with Bernice and John Henry begins at about 4 p.m. and lasts until twilight. They eat a bit, argue a bit, eat some more and talk some more. Bernice tries to reason with Frankie about her plans for the wedding, but F. Jasmine won't listen and insists on being called by her new name.

To change the subject, Bernice asks F. Jasmine to model the dress for the wedding. It is an orange spaghetti-strapped gown that, judging from Bernice's reaction, is way too big for F. Jasmine. However, after her initial surprise has passed, Bernice lovingly helps F. Jasmine adjust and alter the dress to fit better.

A few minutes after 5 p.m., F. Jasmine tries to describe to Bernice her experience of seeing the two boys out of the corner of her eye. She wants to convey how eerie it was that two young black boys would remind her of Jarvis and Janice. To her surprise, Bernice grows excited, because she knows exactly what F. Jasmine is talking about. Bernice says this is how it is when people are in love. She has been having this experience all her life and never heard it put into words.

F. Jasmine is pleased and, for the first time, listens to Bernice discuss love without making fun of it. She even lights one of Bernice's cigarettes and sits smoking like a grown person, while Bernice tells the old familiar story of Ludie Freeman. Ludie Freeman was Bernice's first husband and the only one she truly loved. She met him 20 years ago, and after 8 years of happy marriage, Ludie died of pneumonia. He died the very month and year that Frankie was born. F. Jasmine thinks this must be some kind of sign. She finds it interesting that she feels sadder about the death of Ludie Freeman, even though she never met him, than she does about the death of Uncle Charles.

Bernice moves on to tell the stories of her other three marriages, all of which were disastrous attempts to recreate what she had with Ludie. Each time she met one of these men, she first saw him out of the corner of her eye and saw something that reminded her of Ludie. None of the three were anything like him, though. Bernice's second husband was an alcoholic, the third became a mental patient just weeks after they married, and the fourth was so violent Bernice had to call the law on him.

The point of Bernice's story, she explains, is that she tried to copy her first love. She wants to warn F. Jasmine against choosing a wedding as her first love, for fear she'll forever copy that love in all kinds of bizarre ways. Bernice wants F. Jasmine to channel her interest away from the wedding to the subject of attracting a beau of her own. F. Jasmine has no interest in beaus, and although she wants to tell Bernice about the soldier, something holds her back. She hangs on stubbornly to the fantasy that she'll go live with Jarvis and Janice after the wedding. In fact, she says that if her brother and the bride do not take her with them, she'll shoot herself in the head with her father's pistol.

Twilight, on the last day before the wedding, lasts a long time. F. Jasmine feels she should leave to prepare for her date, but now that it is her last evening in the kitchen, she feels there is something final she should say. Words rise up in her, but nothing she says is what she means to say. This frustrates and frightens F. Jasmine. She becomes very agitated and paces excitedly around the table, waving a knife, until Bernice grabs her by the petticoat and insists that she rest.

F. Jasmine sits down on Bernice's lap. After a few moments of silence, Bernice says that she think she understands what F. Jasmine has been trying to say. All of us, she says, are somehow caught in our identities, whether we want to be or not. This helps F. Jasmine articulate her feelings. She feels both caught and loose at the same time, even though those words sound like opposites. People come together and go away, and we can't see what connects us all. Bernice reassures F. Jasmine that no one expects her to solve the riddles of existence.

F. Jasmine is almost ready to go, but she has one more thing to say. This moment, she realizes, will never come back. Bernice, John Henry, and F. Jasmine sit in the darkening kitchen, silently watching this moment pass forever. Suddenly, the three of them begin to cry. They cry for about a minute, and then stop as suddenly as they began. Then they stand up around the table, turn on the kitchen light, and wash their faces. When they hear Mr. Addams come home from work through the front door, the last afternoon in the kitchen is over.

Part 2, Chapter 2 Analysis

The theme of connection continues. In trying to articulate her sense of disconnection, F. Jasmine is able to connect with Bernice on the subject of love in a way that Frankie never could. Also, it seems that the fact that Bernice's beloved husband died the same month that Frankie was born carries a lot of meaning. It is as if this is the first time that Frankie is able to imagine that the Bernice who takes care of her is the same Bernice that married Ludie Freeman. Her identity didn't change. F. Jasmine's new empathy is not limited to her father. Her ability to feel sadness on behalf of Bernice is more evidence of her maturation.

Throughout the dinner, a neighbor's tuning his piano carries out the theme of interrupted music. The music stops and starts repeatedly, and it is out of F. Jasmine's control. Her emotions are like that, too. The author compares the long dinner afternoon to the rich middle part of a fallen cake. It is as if the heavy kitchen mood and conversation gives F. Jasmine an anchor in the midst of her manically fluctuating emotions, even though she wants to break free.

John Henry is a mostly silent onlooker during all the conversation. The color gray is used in reference to him several times. He will soon fade from Frankie's life, and this foreshadowing is the only warning that the author gives the reader.

When F. Jasmine, Bernice, and John Henry cry together at the end of the afternoon, they really are saying goodbye to each other. They really will be separated, although that won't happen in the way F. Jasmine thinks it will.

Part 2, Chapter 3

Part 2, Chapter 3 Summary

F. Jasmine goes to Bernice's house in Sugarville to have her fortune told by Bernice's mother. On the way, she stops to look at the jail, which has haunted the old Frankie ever since she took the pocketknife from Sears and Roebuck last spring. F. Jasmine finds that the jail does not scare her now that she knows she is leaving.

It is after 8 o'clock when F. Jasmine reaches Sugarville. She asks Big Mama to tell her future. First, Big Mama asks to hear her most recent dream. F. Jasmine remembers a dream in which she faced an opening door. It gave her a funny feeling, and she woke up.

Big Mama says that a change is coming in F. Jasmine's life. She claims to see the wedding, with both a departure and a return. Later, Big Mama says, there will be roads, trains, and a sum of money in F. Jasmine's future.

F. Jasmine proceeds into town for her date with the red-haired soldier. Now that it's time, she feels it is a mistake, although she doesn't know why. They have a drink at a table, and then instead of taking her dancing, the soldier takes her up to his room. F. Jasmine has the feeling of being at the fair, on a ride that's too much for her, but being unable to get off until it's over. She recognizes a certain silence, although of course there is noise through the open window. The silence is threatening and somehow familiar, and F. Jasmine has already started toward the door when the soldier pulls her to him on the bed. She buys herself some time when she bites his tongue and knocks him out by breaking a glass water pitcher on his head.

F. Jasmine sneaks out by the fire escape and goes home. She asks her father if hitting someone over the head with a glass pitcher will kill him. Of course, he doesn't take her question seriously, and F. Jasmine angrily goes up to bed, glad to think that this is the last night she'll sleep in this house.

Part 2, Chapter 3 Analysis

Big Mama's words provide further foreshadowing that from F. Jasmine's point of view, the wedding will be a disappointment. However, Big Mama also offers F. Jasmine the hope that she will travel later in her life.

F. Jasmine senses danger in the red-haired soldier, but she's still too naïve to know why. At the table, she can sense the sexual tension in him, but she doesn't know what it is and can't relate or respond to it. After she hits him over the head with the pitcher, she has fleeting memories of Mr. Marlowe's "common fit," as well as the incident in Barney MacKean's garage, but she doesn't yet see these as parts of a whole. The reader can

see that F. Jasmine's mind is beginning to make the connection between all these events, but it's not there yet.

Though she actually handled the red-haired soldier very bravely, F. Jasmine came away with a new fear in addition to her others. Now, she's afraid she might be a murderer.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary

Frances said goodbye to her old town at 6:30 in the morning. She rode the bus sitting a little apart from Bernice, John Henry, and her father. They arrived at 11 a.m., and the author says, "the next hours were unexplainable." By mid-afternoon, it was all over. It ended with Frances being dragged out of the wedding couple's car, throwing herself down in the dust as the car sped away, crying, "Take me! Take me!"

Now Frances just hates everybody and herself worst of all. On the bus ride home, Bernice tries to console her by planning a party for Frances and some new friends after school starts in a few weeks, but Frances is too heartbroken and furious to talk about it. Even the wedding has not included her, just like the girls' club and the war, and Frances is determined to show them all.

That night, after everyone else has gone to bed, Frances tries to run away, carrying her father's pistol. She even puts the pistol to her head for a minute, but then she thinks that she might feel this nothingness forever, so she decides to change her mind at the last second. Finally, Frances has an idea to go to the Blue Moon and find out if the red-haired soldier is dead. She wants to know whether or not she is a murderer, before she leaves town. Then Frances decides that if he is not dead, she will marry him, since Big Mama predicted she would marry someone with light hair and blue eyes. Frances has finally admitted to herself that she is too scared to go out into the world alone.

On the way to the Blue Moon, the incident with the soldier, the Marlowes' common fit, and Barney's nasty remarks behind the garage come together in Frances' mind. She suddenly realizes that the stories about sex the older girls whispered were true. It was her unwillingness to believe these stories that made the other girls say that the old Frankie was too young for their club, but now Frances understands.

When Frances arrives, a police officer in the Blue Moon recognizes her as Royal Addams' daughter. He calls her father and waits with her, while Frances watches the red-haired soldier at the jukebox, apparently none the worse for being "brained" by her. She admits to the officer that she doesn't know what she was planning to do, and when her father arrives, Frances goes home with him willingly.

Months later, in November, Frances is now 13. She is in the kitchen with Bernice on what actually is their last day together. John Henry died in October, having battled meningitis for 10 days. His parents will now share a home with Frances and her father in a suburb outside of town. When this was decided, Bernice turned in her resignation and decided to marry T.T., the man she's been dating. He doesn't make her shiver the way Ludie Freeman did, but T.T. is a good, steady man who loves her.

Frances still feels John Henry's ghost-gray presence sometimes, especially now when she and Bernice are in the kitchen for the last time. Mostly, though, Frances' life is filled with school and her new best friend, Mary Littlejohn. When they graduate, the two girls plan to travel around the world together. When the doorbell rings at 5 o'clock, Frances feels a little thrill of joy.

Part 3 Analysis

The first thing the reader notices is that F. Jasmine disappeared as soon as the wedding didn't include her. Now this story's protagonist goes by her grownup name, Frances.

When Part 3 begins, time continues to be Frances' enemy. All summer, it has dragged when she wanted it to be fast. Now, it speeds up. The wedding goes by so fast that she didn't get a chance to speak to her brother and the bride and explain that they all belonged together.

In trying to console Frances, Bernice offers to throw her a party after school starts. In fact, she offers to throw two simultaneous parties. One would be a proper indoor party with little olive sandwiches, and the other would be a rough outdoor party with hot dogs. Bernice's offer of a dual party pays tribute to both the child and the young woman that Frances is simultaneously.

Frances' recognition of sex comes to her as a surprise. While her loss of innocence is poignant, it is a good thing. She will not be so naïve about certain dangers now. It also allows her to feel connected to other teen-aged girls.

Frances was right about everything changing after the wedding. It turned out that her goodbye dinner with Bernice and John Henry was fitting. The change just didn't happen when or how Frances thought it would. John Henry died, Bernice leaves to get married and Frances gets to leave behind her old ugly house. Leaving her old house for the new one is a symbol that Frances has successfully made the transition from girlhood to adolescence.

Frances' dreams of travel are still alive and well, and now she has a friend to dream with her. She is finally a member of something, her friendship with Mary Littlejohn. More than that, she is also a member of a new family that includes her, her father, and John Henry's parents. She is connected and included.

Characters

Frances Addams

Frances, who is most often referred to as Frankie, is the main character and a twelve-yearold tomboy who feels that she does not belong anywhere. She is tall for her age and feels awkward and ugly. She keeps her hair short, wears boyish clothes, and enjoys knife-throwing.

Out of school for the summer, she spends most of her time at home with Berenice and John Henry. She is restless and bored with her hometown, and she dreams of a more exciting life. Wanting desperately to be a part of something, she wishes she could go fight in the war. When Frankie learns that her brother, who is in the army, is getting married, she sees the solution to her problems. She imagines that she will accompany the couple on their honeymoon and then live with them wherever they go afterward. Her limited experience of the world prevents her from understanding how inappropriate and impractical her plan is.

Frankie's relationships are atypical of those of a girl her age. Her relationship with Berenice is loving, but the two often argue. Even though Berenice is a mother figure, Frankie knows that she is hired help, which ultimately gives Frankie the upper hand. Her relationship with John Henry is superficial because of the difference in their ages. They are playmates, and she calls on him when she does not want to be alone. Her lack of genuine feeling for him is evident when he dies. She is surprised but not devastated. Frankie and her father have a friendly relationship, but they do not share a deep parent-child bond. It is obvious that her father does not discuss important issues such as sex, death, and love with her. Not until the end of the story, when Frankie begins a friendship with Mary, does Frankie enjoy a "normal" friendship.

Jarvis Addams

Jarvis is Frankie's older brother. He is described as blond and handsome. Jarvis is in the army and is stationed in Alaska but comes home briefly to announce his upcoming wedding. Jarvis is not a fully developed character; he is simply the vehicle in Frankie's fantasy about escaping her hometown.

Royal Quincy Addams

Royal Quincy Addams is Frankie's father. He owns a successful jewelry store in town and earns a middle-class living for himself and Frankie. He is seldom home, and, although a congenial man, he does not share a deep bond with Frankie. When Frankie attempts to go with the bride and groom by getting in the wedding car, it is Mr. Addams who pulls her out of the car.

Big Mama

Big Mama is Berenice's elderly mother. Bedridden since she hurt her back many years ago, she is said to have developed "second sight." People often come to her to have their fortunes told, and Frankie decides to visit her. Big Mama (who is actually a slight woman) tells Frankie that she will marry a light-haired, blue-eyed boy and that there is a trip in her near future. Frankie is upset to hear Big Mama say that this trip (which Frankie assumes means the trip to the wedding the next day) will end with Frankie back in her hometown.

Berenice Sadie Brown

Berenice has been the Addams' African-American cook for most of Frankie's life. Her skin is very dark, and she is short and broad. She wears her hair in greased plaits and has a glass eye that is bright blue. Because Frankie's mother is dead, Berenice develops a somewhat motherly relationship with the girl. She offers advice, tells stories, and puts up with Frankie's moodiness although her position as a servant prevents her from being much of a disciplinarian.

Berenice is open and reacts to questions and situations with homespun wisdom. She has been married four times (first when she was only thirteen), but she never loses her belief in love. Her first husband, Ludie Freedman, was the love of her life. When he died, she was devastated, and each of her subsequent marriages was an attempt to reclaim the happiness she once enjoyed with Ludie. Instead, she ended up in destructive relationships with abusive and alcoholic men, the last of whom gouged out her eye. At the time of the story, she is not married, although T. T. Williams is interested in her.

In a conversation with Frankie and John Henry, Berenice reveals how difficult it is to be an African-American woman of the time. She explains to the children that her options are limited and that she is constantly judged by her appearance. She dreams of a world in which everyone is the same color, and there is no war. This sense of optimism may be the reason why, in the end, she agrees to marry T. T. Williams.

Honey Camden Brown

Honey is Berenice's foster brother, who lives with Big Mama. When the army would not accept him, he took a job in a gravel pit until he suffered an internal injury; now he does not work. He is a stylish dresser who is intelligent and well spoken when he chooses to be. Because of his light skin, Frankie tells him he should go to Cuba and live there (apparently because he would face less prejudice there since he looks like most Cubans). Perhaps because he is unable to find a suitable place in the community, he is a rebel who is disrespectful. He eventually goes to jail when he threatens his marijuana dealer.

Uncle Charles

Uncle Charles is Frankie's uncle, who dies just before the wedding. Frankie remembers visiting him after he fell ill, and the sight of the sickly man frightened her. When he dies, Frankie is relieved that his death will not interfere with the wedding plans.

Frankie

See Frances Addams.

Janice

Janice is Jarvis's bride. She is a petite brunette, whom Frankie thinks is beautiful. On the day of the wedding, Janice tells Frankie how delighted she is to have a younger sister.

Mary Littlejohn

Introduced at the end of the book, Mary is Frankie's new best friend. They meet at a raffle and become instant friends. Mary has brown eyes and long blonde braids, and she loves art and poetry.

The Red-Haired Soldier

Frankie meets the red-haired soldier when she is dressed up in her pink dress and telling everyone in town about her plans to leave with her brother and his bride. The soldier is stationed nearby and is on a three-day pass. He does not seem to realize how young Frankie is; he may be drunk when Frankie first meets him, and it is dark the second time. He buys Frankie a beer and asks for a date. When Frankie meets him for the date, he asks her up to his room and makes advances. Confused and frightened, Frankie hits him over the head with a glass pitcher and escapes.

John Henry West

John Henry is Frankie's six-year-old cousin. He lives nearby and spends lots of time with Frankie and Berenice. He wears gold-rimmed glasses and a small lead donkey around his neck. John Henry is small yet unusually mature and sensitive for his age and is somewhat effeminate. He enjoys cooking with Berenice, and he likes to dress up in Frankie's costume dresses and heels. While most boys his age are playing in the dirt and roughhousing, John Henry is content to play cards or draw pictures.

In the last pages of the book (during the year that has passed unnarrated near the end of the book), McCullers explains that John Henry had a terrible headache one day.

Neither Berenice nor Frankie thought much of it, but within ten days John Henry is dead of meningitis. His last days are described as having been full of suffering. The character of John Henry, along with the character of Dill in *To Kill a Mockingbird,* has been the subject of some interesting speculation. Some critics and scholars suspect that both characters are based on the author Truman Capote as a child.

T. T. Williams

T. T. is Berenice's current suitor, a large man who is older than she is. He runs a successful restaurant and is a good man, but Berenice says he does not make her "shiver." He is polite and friendly, and in the end Berenice agrees to marry him.

Themes

Identity and Self

Twelve-year-old Frankie is entering the phase of her adolescence in which she undergoes dramatic changes and begins seriously considering who she is as a person and who she will become. McCullers describes Frankie's unrest in part one, writing:

> Very early in the morning she would sometimes go
> out into the yard and stand for a long time looking
> at the sunrise sky. And it was as though a question
> came into her heart, and the sky did not answer.
> Things she had never noticed much before began to
> hurt her: home lights watched from the evening sidewalks,
> an unknown voice in the alley. She would
> stare at the lights and listen to the voice, and something
> inside her stiffened and waited. But the lights
> would darken, the voice fall silent, and though she
> waited, that was all. She was afraid of these things
> that made her suddenly wonder who she was, and
> what she was going to be in the world, and why she
> was standing at that minute, seeing a light, or listening
> or staring up at the sky: alone.

Frankie is exceptionally tall for her age, which makes her feel gawky and clumsy. She is a tomboy who wears boyish clothes and has shortly cropped hair, and when she looks at herself in the mirror, she sees only ugliness. Her self-esteem is low, as indicated in the following excerpt from part one:

> This was the summer when Frankie was sick and tired
> of being Frankie. She hated herself, and had become
> a loafer and a big no-good who hung around the summer
> kitchen: dirty and greedy and mean and sad.

No longer interested in many of the activities that once entertained her, Frankie finds herself torn between the worlds of childhood and adulthood. As the story progresses, the reader can see how her sense of identity changes each time she changes her name. In the beginning, she is Frankie, which suits her tomboy identity. When she decides to join her brother and his bride, she decides to be F. Jasmine so that her name (Jasmine) will sound more like their names, Jarvis and Janice. She attempts to identify herself with them by changing her name. By the end, however, she has decided to be called Frances, her given name. This choice indicates her coming to terms with herself as a maturing young woman who can determine her own identity within the parameters of social expectations.

The Need to Belong

McCullers's theme of belonging is the other side of her theme of identity. While identity asks the question, "Who am I as an individual?" the need to belong asks the question, "Who am I in relation to others?" From the first paragraph, McCullers makes this theme clear:

> This was the summer when for a long time she had
> not been a member. She belonged to no club and was
> a member of nothing in the world. Frankie had become
> an unjoined person who hung around in doorways,
> and she was afraid.

She is not welcome in the summer club formed by a group of neighborhood girls who are a few years older. Although she was a sort of junior member of the group in the past, the older girls are no longer interested in having Frankie around them. In addition, she lacks the sense of family that often anchors adolescents as they navigate these troubling years. The closest thing she has to a family unit is the trio formed by herself, Berenice, and John Henry.

Frankie is disappointed that she cannot be a part of the war in some way. McCullers writes, "She wanted to be a boy and go to war as a Marine." Because of her age and gender, she cannot join the military. She plans to donate blood so that her blood will run in the veins of soldiers all over the world. By doing this, she thinks, she will feel like a part of the war. When the Red Cross refuses to take her blood because of her young age, Frankie is disappointed and angry, and she generalizes her feelings to include the rest of the world that "seemed somehow separate from herself."

When Frankie hears that her brother plans to marry a local girl, she imagines herself as a member of the wedding and of their new family. In her mind, she aligns herself with the bride and groom at such an intimate level that she plans to accompany them on their honeymoon and then go with them wherever they live. She believes that everyone is part of a "we," and she declares that Jarvis and Janice are "the we of me." Her desperation to belong somewhere and her naiveté prevent her from understanding the inappropriateness and impracticality of her plan.

Style

Similes

Part of the appeal of McCullers's writing style is her use of unexpected similes. As a pre-adolescent, Frankie looks for new ways to understand familiar things and also reaches for ways to understand and express experiences and feelings that are new to her. In this situation, similes are a natural form of expression.

Frankie associates her longing to go somewhere interesting with what she imagines her brother's life is like. In part one, McCullers writes, "Frankie had not seen her brother for a long, long time, and his face had become masked and changing, like a face seen under water." Later, Frankie thinks about the people at the freak show, and the Fat Lady is described as having fat that "was like loose-powdered dough which she kept slapping and working with her hands." This is a highly visual simile that is drawn from Frankie's domestic experience, as the reader soon encounters a scene in which Berenice and John Henry are working with biscuit dough. Similarly, in part two, the hot afternoon air is described as "thick and sticky as hot syrup." The fragility of John Henry is expressed in a scene in which Frankie goes to visit him in the evening, and he is standing on his porch. McCullers writes, "John Henry was leaning against the banisters of his front porch, with a lighted window behind him, so that he looked like a little black paper doll on a piece of yellow paper." In each case, McCullers is demonstrating Frankie's ability to see familiar things in new ways although she is forced to reinterpret sights and feelings in terms of her limited experiences.

Symbolism

McCullers's flair for allegory is evident in *The Member of the Wedding.* Readers looking for symbolism find the text rich with symbolic elements. The backdrop of the war symbolizes Frankie's inner turmoil as she is forced to leave childhood behind and enter adulthood. In part one, McCullers explains:

> Frankie stood looking up and down the four walls of the room. She thought of the world, and it was fast and loose and turning, faster and looser and bigger than ever it had been before. The pictures of the War sprang out and clashed together in her mind. She saw bright flowered islands and a land by the northern sea with the gray waves on the shore. Bombed eyes and the shuffle of soldiers' feet. Tanks and a plane, wing broken, burning and downward-falling in a desert sky. The world was cracked by the loud battles and turning a thousand miles a minute.

Frankie reads about the war in the newspapers and applies her active imagination to the events of the war. She wants to somehow be a part of it and plans to donate lots of blood so that her blood will be in soldiers all over the world. Frankie is too young, however, to realize that her preoccupation with the war is driven by her own uncertainty in how to handle the changes taking place in her and the unspoken expectations society places on her. She is unsettled, and her private pain is mirrored in the war efforts.

Frankie's closest relationships are with John Henry and Berenice, each of whom symbolizes an important aspect of the crossroads at which Frankie finds herself. John Henry is only six years old, yet he is her playmate. He represents the childhood simplicity she is uncomfortable leaving behind while Berenice represents the feminine wisdom and nurturing toward which Frankie feels she should be moving. Berenice is not an educated woman, rather her wisdom derives from life experience, something Frankie knows she lacks. Berenice's life experiences have been mostly difficult and painful, making Frankie less than enthusiastic about entering womanhood. At the same time, Berenice's unflagging optimism symbolizes hope for the future.

Historical Context

World War II

Although the exact date of the story is not given, the events described indicate that it takes place near the end of World War II. In part one, Berenice mentions to Frankie that she read that the French were driving the Germans out of Paris. The liberation of Paris took place on August 25, 1944. McCullers mentions that Frankie reads the war news as she thinks about the summer. Describing the summer, she writes, "It was the summer when Patton was chasing the Germans across France. And they were fighting, too, in Russia and Saipan." These references indicate the summer of 1944. Jarvis, Frankie's brother, is in the army and is stationed in Alaska. In 1942, while the Battle of Midway waged in the South Pacific, the Japanese took control of two Aleutian Islands (in southwest Alaska). This victory was less strategic than it was psychological, as the Americans were terrified at the prospect of having the enemy on the continent. In 1943, the American military began a fifteenmonth battle to reclaim the land, which they eventually won. There is also a reference to Jarvis and his bride going to Luxembourg, a formerly Nazioccupied country. After the Allies freed Luxembourg in September of 1944, American military personnel were sent to aid in peacekeeping. Because there is an army base near Frankie's hometown, she is accustomed to the sight of soldiers on leave. In part two, McCullers comments that when Frankie went into town during the summers, "she browsed the counters of the ten-cent store, or sat on the front row of the Palace show, or hung around her father's store, or stood on street corners watching soldiers." To Frankie, the presence of uniformed military men is a familiar sight. Her tendency to glamorize them, however, almost gets her into trouble when she goes to the redhaired soldier's room.

Southern Gothic

McCullers is among the writers associated with the southern gothic style of writing. This style features settings in the American South and characters that are bizarre, grotesque, and outcast. Although the novels do not take place in drafty castles, mazes, and dark woods (settings tied with gothic literature), the same themes derived from these settings appear in southern gothic writing. These themes include isolation, confusion, and the search for meaning. McCullers' *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* and *Reflections in a Golden Eye* are especially known for representing this sub-genre because of their unusual casts of characters. Although *The Member of the Wedding* is less strongly associated with southern gothic writing, certain elements (such as Frankie's interest in the people in the freak show) fit this writing style. Some critics note that McCullers' work differs somewhat from the writing of other southern gothic authors in that she portrays her misfit characters with sensitivity and compassion for their situations. She once said that spiritual isolation was at the center of her novels, and this theme, consistent with the southern gothic tradition, is apparent in *The Member of the Wedding.*

Other writers associated with southern gothic writing include Tennessee Williams, Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner, Katherine Anne Porter, and Truman Capote.

Critical Overview

McCullers is ranked among the most respected writers in the southern tradition. She is often compared with William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty, and Tennessee Williams. Today, critics continue to revisit her few novels as important writings. Critics consistently praise *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, The Ballad of the Sad Cafe,* and *The Member of the Wedding* as her best works.

While most critics praise *The Member of the Wedding,* others claim that McCullers ends the story with plot developments that are too convenient. Louis D. Rubin Jr. of the *Virginia Quarterly Review* finds Frankie's sudden acceptance of womanhood unrealistic and John Henry's death gratuitous and contrived. Edmund Wilson of the *New Yorker* writes in 1946 that the book was "utterly pointless" and lacked a sense of drama. It was this review that so incensed McCullers that she was inclined to take Tennessee Williams's advice and adapt the novel as a play.

Lawrence Graver, in *American Writers,* explores the structure of *The Member of the Wedding.* He observes that the novel is divided into three parts, a structure that calls attention to the rhythm of the novel. He explains,

> In Mrs. McCullers' book, the rhythm. . . follows the familiar journey of adolescent initiation: the stirrings of dissatisfaction, jubilant hope founded on misplaced idealism, and disillusionment accompanied by a new wisdom about the limits of human life.

Other critics have likened this three-part structure to that of a sonata, a type of musical piece that often has three parts. Based on biographical information about McCullers, these commentators believe that in *The Member of the Wedding* the author bridges her passion for music with her passion for writing.

The character of Frankie continues to be scrutinized as a portrayal of adolescent angst in the South. Judith Everson, in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 173: American Novelists Since World War II,* observes that Frankie is "an adolescent 'everyman' in her awkward, agonized movement toward maturation. Yet at the same time, as feminist critics remind readers, she bears the special burden of girlhood, which complicates her transition to adult status." In this respect especially, the book is often compared to *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,* a book that features another adolescent tomboy, Mick Kelly. According to Louise Westling of *Southern Humanities Review,* both characters dramatize "the crisis of identity which faces ambitious girls as they leave childhood and stumble into an understanding of what the world expects them to become."

Rubin writes that he finds the character of Frankie the more realistic of the two. He explains, "Frankie Addams is the most appealing of Mrs. McCullers' people; I like her better than Mick Kelly because she is less strident□less written, I think, to a thesis." He adds that "her struggles with pre-adolescence are entirely convincing and wondrously

done□up to a point." Rubin believes that when Frankie and Berenice have their "surrealistic, mystic visions of pain and misery" after the piano tuner begins working, Frankie's character loses her realism. He maintains that, at this point, the novel "drops off the deep end into distortion for the sake of distortion."

Most critics point to *The Member of the Wedding* as McCullers's most realistic and most accessible novel. The book is praised for its writing style, depth, tone, and insight. Graver declares, "The novel is one of the few sentimental comedies to escape the charge of being maudlin; stylistically, it is the freshest and most inventive of her novels and stories." A contributor to *Feminist Writers* explains the importance of the novel by praising Mc- Cullers for her "analysis of maturation, race, and gender in *The Member of the Wedding,* perhaps her most perfect novel. . . In *The Member of the Wedding,* McCullers brings to the forefront a world too often seen as unimportant□a black woman, a clumsy, masculine girl, and a young, feminine boy." In a 1946 article, George Dangerfield of *Saturday Review of Literature* comments on the book's "utmost delicacy and balance." In the *New York Times,* Isa Kapp expresses her delight in Mc- Cullers's language, citing its "freshness, quaintness, and gentleness." Fifteen years after the novel's publication, Rumer Godden, in *New York Herald Tribune Books,* calls it a masterpiece, adding that the book has retained its appeal and become "universally popular."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Bussey holds a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies and a bachelor's degree in English literature. She is an independent writer specializing in literature. In the following essay, she reviews six of the symbolic elements used by McCullers in her novel.

Carson McCullers's writing is often analyzed in terms of its symbolic content. In *The Member of the Wedding,* she relates an accessible story that is rich with symbolism, which gives the novel greater depth. Symbolic uses of colors, seasons, the family kitchen, the Frankie-Berenice-John Henry triad, names, and music give the reader greater insight into Frankie's character. McCullers uses these symbolic elements in such a way that they do not intrude upon the story or seem superimposed on the narrative; rather, they flow naturally from the story while encouraging the reader to investigate them further.

Throughout *The Member of the Wedding,* Mc- Cullers uses colors to describe sights, sounds, and feelings. Certain colors are used with greater frequency than others, however, and these colors are significant in the context of Frankie's perceptions. In part one, green is used to describe summer, trees, a dream, a distant island, moths, vines, and spring sweetness. The first line of the book reads, "It happened that green and crazy summer when Frankie was twelve years old." The color green comes to represent Frankie's experience of this awkward and uncomfortable summer; and she sees green everywhere. Green represents her dissatisfaction and her feelings of being stuck. She marvels at the pale green moths, which have the ability to go anywhere they like, yet continue to return to the same window every night.

In part two and to a lesser degree in part three, the color blue becomes significant. It describes windows, Frankie's pajamas, her father's shirt, evenings, the sky, Berenice's cigarette smoke, fields, and Berenice's wedding outfit. Also, the name of the bar where she meets with the red-haired soldier is the Blue Moon, and it is filled with blue neon lights. Blue represents Frankie's uneasy awareness that she is growing older. While it is familiar (pajamas, her father's shirt, the sky), it also is associated with new experiences (the bar, the conversation she has with Berenice when Berenice has a cigarette). Blue is a color of transition and of adulthood.

Finally, the color gray appears frequently in parts two and three. Besides Frankie's eyes, all of the following are gray: the ocean, Frankie's father's pants, dawn, sidewalks, streets, the kitchen, the curtain in her father's store, John Henry's finger, the air, and John Henry's presence in the kitchen after his death. Gray is drab and boring, which is how Frankie sees her hometown and her life in it. It is similar to green in that it represents the familiar trappings of her daily existence, but it has a more ethereal quality because it describes the distant ocean, the air, and John Henry's ghostly presence. Gray represents what Frankie leaves behind. At the end of the book, she is more likely to see the ocean as blue, the dawn in glowing colors, and the air as a refreshing, life-giving color.

McCullers's use of seasonal symbolism is unusual in that it reverses the usual portrayals of summer and winter. Frankie strongly dislikes summer and is drawn to the winter. She identifies the summer as the period in her life when she is most dissatisfied and confused. She calls it "crazy" and finds it stifling and restricting while most children find the summer liberating and fun. Frankie dreams about going to the wedding at Winter Hill and when she describes her version of a perfect world, she says she would change the seasons, "leaving out summer altogether, and adding much snow." Winter is normally associated with the final years of a person's life while summer represents youth and vitality. Here, however, Frankie is disgusted with summer because of her current unrest and frustration while winter seems distant and pleasant. Winter symbolizes where Frankie wants to go and who she wants to be, but her lack of reference to autumn suggests that she is uncertain how to get there from where she is.

Much of the book takes place in the Addams' small, square kitchen, which represents safety and security. The kitchen is normally the warmest, coziest part of a home. It is not only where Frankie eats meals with Berenice and John Henry, but it is also where they sit at the table and talk and play cards. Berenice is Frankie's maternal figure, and John Henry is her childish, non-threatening playmate. When she ventures out into town, she returns to the kitchen to talk to her "family." When she decides to go live with her brother, she tells of her plans while she is in the kitchen. The lengthy scene in which she and Berenice talk about life and love takes place in the kitchen, and at the end of this scene, Frankie climbs up into Berenice's lap for comfort. At the end of the novel, Frankie has established her own footing as she enters her teenage years, and she is able to leave the kitchen (and Berenice and John Henry) in her past.

The characters of Berenice and John Henry are symbolic as well. John Henry is six years old and relatively carefree so he represents childhood. Berenice is world-wise, having been married four times and lived with oppression. Still, she remains optimistic about the future, so she represents Frankie's future as a worldly woman with a life of possibilities before her. Frankie is struggling with the precarious transition from childhood to adulthood so her relationships with John Henry and Berenice are important. They represent the two stages of life she must bridge. In the end, she must let go of Berenice when she and her father move because Berenice has decided to marry T. T. Williams and get on with her own life. Frankie has also lost John Henry to meningitis. While many readers find his death unexpected, his passing is highly symbolic of the passing of Frankie's childhood years. Standing in the kitchen, she feels that she can sense his presence. She will not forget her childhood years, but she realizes that they are in her past.

As Frankie moves gradually toward accepting her own maturation, she changes her name twice. McCullers uses the words of Berenice to call attention to the importance of names: "Because things accumulate around your name. You have a name and one thing after another happens to you, and you behave in various ways and do things, so that soon the name begins to have a meaning." First, she is Frankie, the gawky tomboy who likes to throw knives and play with her teepee. When she puts on her pink dress to go into town, she becomes F. Jasmine. The name Jasmine sounds better with Jarvis and Janice, her brother and his bride, with whom she plans to live. It also sounds more

romantic and mature. When she is prevented from living with her brother, she comes to accept a more realistic view of herself and her life. At this point, she goes by Frances, her given name. It is a more feminine name than Frankie, and it is her real name; the decision to use it signifies her acceptance that she must be herself to be comfortable in the world, even if she is still in the process of exploring her identity.

Music figures prominently throughout the story, and its use is symbolic of Frankie's inner turmoil. Visiting John Henry one evening, she overhears someone playing blues on a horn. She is swept up in the music and is disturbed when the music suddenly stops. She tells John Henry that it will resume in a minute, but it never does. When she and Berenice and John Henry are talking in the kitchen, Frankie is torn apart by the incomplete scales of someone tuning a piano in a nearby house. The tuner keeps playing seven notes but never the eighth, and often strikes a single note several times. The cacophony of this is too much for Frankie to bear.

Unfinished music disturbs Frankie deeply because it seems to confirm her sense that the world is unpredictable and that is does not always finish things on its own. It mirrors the feelings she is unable to understand or express. The scene with the piano tuner comes the evening before the wedding and so foreshadows the ultimate incompleteness of Frankie's plans to leave home. Such musical references symbolize the confusion and chaos Frankie associates with the world to which she feels she does not belong.

In other instances, however, music has the ability to calm and reassure her. Describing the summertime interactions of Frankie, Berenice, and John Henry, McCullers writes in part two,

> Often in the dark, that August, they would all at once
> begin to sing a Christmas carol, or a song like the
> 'Slitbelly Blues.' Sometimes they knew in advance
> what they would sing, and they would agree on the
> tune among themselves. Or again, they would disagree
> and start off on three different songs at once,
> until at last the tunes began to merge and they sang
> a special music that the three of them made together.

Here, music clearly represents order and comfort for Frankie because even when she and her closest companions disagree, music enables them to harmonize.

McCullers's creation of the character of Frankie is thorough and artful. Not only does she present straightforward experiences, feelings, and reactions, but she also deepens her main character with her skillful use of symbolism. Each symbol colors, seasons, the kitchen, the Frankie-Berenice- John Henry triad, names, and music gives the reader another pathway of insight into Frankie's confused psyche. In the end, the reader not only understands the character better but also has a better idea of who she will become, which is what Frankie seeks to know herself. Further, a deeper understanding

of Frankie as a typical angst-ridden adolescent enables the reader to better understand the human experience in general.

Source: Jennifer Bussey, Critical Essay on *The Member of the Wedding,* in *Novels for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, White interprets The Member of the Wedding *within the contexts of gender and initiation into adolescence.*

Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) takes place in a small southern town where the protagonist, Frankie Addams, lives with her father. During the hot August of the novel Frankie spends her time in the Addamses' kitchen with the black cook, Berenice, and her six-year-old cousin, John Henry. She becomes enchanted with her brother's approaching wedding, decides to join the wedding and the honeymoon, and is disillusioned when her plan fails.

Although Frankie is only "twelve and fivesixths years old," there is much about her which will immediately seem familiar. She makes her appearance dressed as a boy, though she also douses herself with Sweet Serenade perfume; she hesitates on the threshold of the kitchen, being "an unjoined person who hung around in doorways." In the first few pages of the novel we learn that Frankie fears the future and resists even the knowledge of sex, which she calls "nasty lies about married people." Her hometown might just as well be North Dormer or Buena Vista, for Frankie wants out: "I've been ready to leave this town so long. . . . I wish I had a hundred dollars and could just light out and never see this town again."

In light of Frankie's resemblance to her predecessors in the novel of adolescence, it is surprising that a well-read critic like Edmund Wilson could not determine what the novel is about. Wilson, in a review which infuriated McCullers, declared that "the whole story seems utterly pointless." McCullers had the same problem when she tried to market her dramatic version of *Member:* "Few [producers] seemed to know what the play was really about." Subsequent readers have turned to her other works in attempt to explain *Member.* Since one of McCullers's continuing themes is spiritual isolation, most critics interpret Frankie's fear of the future as the universal fear of separate identity and her attempt to join her brother's wedding as representative of all people's struggle to overcome their final separateness from other humans. Thus Frankie becomes a "symbol of spiritual loneliness."

Alternatively, Frankie is thought to symbolize the grotesqueness of the human condition. If Carson McCullers writes about isolation, she also includes in her novels a large number of "freaks": deaf-mutes, alcoholics, idiots, hunch-backed dwarves, etc. Frankie, having seen such beings as the Giant, the Pin Head, and the Alligator Boy at the fair, worries that she herself may become a freak; she calculates that if she continues growing at her present rate she will be over nine feet tall. Some readers have taken Frankie's fear literally and regarded *Member* as another examination by McCullers of the "freakish and perverse." Frankie becomes a "little monster" illustrating the general wretchedness of humanity.

Neither the "freak" nor the "spiritual isolation" approach turns out to be helpful in interpreting *The Member of the Wedding.* It is difficult to understand just what is

"freakish" about Frankie; if she occasionally lies and steals and dresses up in garish costumes, so does Huckleberry Finn, nobody's idea of a freak. Frankie makes a more promising symbol of spiritual isolation, but isolation is only one theme of *Member* and does not in itself allow us to account for the rich detail of the novel. The eagerness of critics to make her symbolic suggests some anxiety over the subject of female adolescence. To some extent we can see this anxiety operating in critical reaction to Wharton's *Summer* and Suckow's fiction. *Summer* was thought to be about New England life or Lawyer Royall, anything but a girl growing up; Suckow's novels were labelled too domestic and too "intrinsically feminine." But *Summer* and Suckow could easily be ignored □*Summer* relegated to the position of a "minor" novel in Wharton's oeuvre and Suckow dismissed altogether. *The Member of the Wedding,* as the long-awaited novel of a young "genius," invited more extensive critical response. Interestingly, the major part of this response has been barely concealed disappointment at the subject of McCullers's novel, a feeling that it deals with only "a narrow corner of human existence." Although, as I noted in my preface, male initiation is considered a significant subject for novelists to treat, female initiation is not perceived as equally "universal." Thus most critics have tried to make *Member* about something other than female adolescence, such as isolation or freakdom; they have avoided any discussion of the gender of the protagonist.

Not surprisingly, it was Leslie Fiedler who introduced the question of gender when he characterized Frankie as one of McCullers's "boy-girls," her "transvestite Huckleberry Finns." Once we have seen how McCullers portrays Frankie's adolescence, I will return to criticism of *The Member of the Wedding* and show how Fiedler also set a precedent in sexist interpretation of McCullers's "boy-girls," whereby her literary reputation is disparaged; for now the point is that Frankie's gender has at least been admitted as relevant. Taking his cue from Fiedler, Chester Eisinger says:

The adolescent girl, in Mrs. McCullers's fiction, hasp
the problem not only of sex awareness but of sex determination.
It is not the responsibility of womanhood
that she reluctantly must take up but the decision
to be a woman at all that she must make. She
is, then sexless, hovering between the two sexes.

This decision which confronts her, "the decision to be a woman at all," accounts in large part for Frankie's fear and forms a major thematic concern of *The Member of the Wedding.* Eisinger's term "sexless" has no meaning, since Frankie's "sex determination" was made at birth; however, she is "hovering between the two sexes" in the sense that she is a girl who does not want to relinquish the privileges of boys. Like Ruth Suckow's heroines, Frankie exists in a divided state: while she hesitates to stay in childhood, she cannot fulfill her desire to be "grown-up" without accepting her identity as female, and she already suspects that her gender will be confining. Frankie thus vacillates between striving for adult status and resisting it.

Frankie's reluctance to remain a child is shown in her outrage at being given a doll by her brother Jarvis and his fiancée. She also resents being addressed as a child and

peppers her own language with such grown-up phrases as "sick unto death" and "irony of fate." The most obvious sign of Frankie's projected change of identity from child to adult is her revision of her name from "Frankie" to "F. Jasmine." While "Frankie" is a child's name, "F. Jasmine" sounds older. Frankie chooses "Jasmine" partly because the initial "Ja" matches the "Ja" of Jarvis and Janice, but "Jasmine," associated with sweet fragrance and pale yellow flowers, has obvious, romantic, "feminine" connotations. Growing up necessitates shedding a "masculine" name, clothing, and activities for "feminine" ones.

In many ways Frankie wants to make this change. When she becomes F. Jasmine she vows to give up being "rough and greedy." Most important, she attempts to change her appearance. Apart from her name, Frankie's most obvious "tomboy" badges are her crewcut and her typical costume of shorts, undervest, and cowboy hat. As F. Jasmine she wears a pink organdy dress, heavy lipstick, and Sweet Serenade perfume. She cannot alter her hair style immediately but she knows what women "should" look like; "I ought to have long bright yellow hair," Frankie thinks.

Frankie's avatar, Mick Kelly of McCullers's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), undergoes the same transformation. At first Mick resists her older sisters when they try to make her stop wearing "those silly boys' clothes." In a passage reminiscent of Jo March's pulling off her hair net, she exclaims:

"I wear shorts because I don't want to wear your old hand-me-downs. I don't want to be like either of you and I don't want to look like either of you. And I won't. That's why I wear shorts. I'd rather be a boy any day."

But eventually Mick practices dressing up in her older sisters' evening gowns. She decides she is too old to wear shorts and switches permanently to skirts.

Both Mick's and Frankie's attempts to imitate the dress of adult women are confused and naive. The pleats and hem of Mick's skirt have come out, and to other characters in the novel she still looks as much like a boy as a girl. For her brother's wedding Frankie buys a cheap orange satin evening dress and silver slippers, revealing that she does not yet understand society's division of women into "nice" (pink organdy) and "not nice" (orange satin). Furthermore, as Berenice points out, a woman's evening dress and the brown crust on Frankie's elbows do not mix. Even the new "feminine" name "F. Jasmine" is ambiguous because it is generally a male practice to use an initial and a middle name. One might conclude that Frankie is unconsciously subverting her outward attempt to become more womanly.

But even if Frankie approaches the "feminine" art of self-decoration with ambivalence, it is significant that she cares about her appearance. Frankie dislikes what she considers her "dark ugly mug"; as we noted earlier, she worries that she is too tall and will be a nine-foot freak. Her preoccupation with freaks has been linked to her fear of isolation; however, to Frankie the true horror of freakdom is the horror of being an *ugly woman,* of

not being able to live up to the name "Jasmine." Frankie's questions to Berenice "Do you think I will grow into a Freak?" and "Do you think I will be pretty?" are joined together, and her association of looks and male approval becomes clear when she tells Berenice she doubts that freaks ever get married.

Since marriage has traditionally been woman's fate, it is logical that in contemplating growing up Frankie should turn to thoughts of love, sex, and marriage. The younger Frankie had scorned love and left it out of her homemade shows; preferring movies about criminals, cowboys, and war, she caused a disturbance when the local theatre showed *Camille.* But now she recalls the time when she committed a "queer sin" with the neighbor boy Barney MacKean and the time when she surprised one of the Addams's boarders in bed with his wife "having a fit." She thinks about love and becomes fascinated with her brother's wedding. If the wedding provides an opportunity for Frankie to escape her loneliness and become a "member" of something, it is also the marriage of a man and a woman, and in her obsession with a wedding, Frankie anticipates her own destiny. Instead of stopping her ears as she used to when Berenice talked of love and marriage, Frankie now encourages Berenice and listens to her carefully.

Whatever difficulties Frankie has in making the "decision to be a woman" cannot be attributed to her lack of a mother because Berenice performs a motherly function in initiating Frankie into her expected role. Berenice correctly interprets Frankie's concern with the wedding as concern with her own future as a woman. Thus Berenice suggests that Frankie acquire a "nice little white boy beau." Berenice's advice to Frankie is a classic compression of traditional "womanly wisdom." She says: "Now you belong to change from being so rough and greedy and big. You ought to fix yourself up nice in your dresses. And speak sweetly and act sly." In three sentences Berenice has summarized the major traits girls are taught to cultivate in preparation for their relationships with men: "object" orientation ("fix yourself up nice"), passivity and submission ("speak sweetly"), and calculation and trickery ("act sly"). No real mother could do a more thorough job of socialization.

Critics have been unanimous in viewing Berenice as a positive influence on Frankie. They consider her wise and spiritual, a mouthpiece for McCullers and the "Socrates of the novel." However, McCullers presents Berenice as a completely man-oriented woman. For her to talk about her life means to talk about her four previous husbands and current beau. Berenice communicates to Frankie pride in the number of men one can attract. When John Henry asks her how many beaus she "caught," she replies: "Lamb, how many hairs is in these plaits? You talking to Berenice Sadie Brown." Berenice feels proud that men "treat" her, that she doesn't have to "pay her own way." Besides, the company of men is preferable to that of women; she proclaims, "I'm not the kind of person to go around with crowds of womens."

It is surprising how much Berenice resembles a mother who has been the object of much vituperation from critics, Amanda Wingfield of Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1944). In this play by McCullers's close friend, Amanda tries to transform her shy daughter into a southern belle. Berenice is in most ways a more attractive

character than Amanda; yet her cataloging of her past in terms of beaus is much like Amanda's in terms of "gentlemen callers," and her advice to her reluctant young charge is exactly the same as Amanda's to her daughter.

Much of the humor in *The Member of the Wedding* involves the young and unworldly Frankie and John Henry, but we are not allowed to forget that Berenice also is limited in her perceptions. For instance, Frankie asks Berenice why she married at the youthful age of thirteen (Frankie is almost thirteen herself). Berenice responds, "Because I wanted to. I were thirteen years old and I haven't growed a inch since." Frankie, who we know worries about her height, asks, "Does marrying really stop your growth?" "It certainy [sic] do," replies Berenice, unaware of the implications of her statement. In this case, the author has distanced herself from Berenice, creating an irony involving her.

Furthermore, the Berenice who in the middle of the novel rejects Frankie's advice that she marry her latest beau, T. T. Williams, ends up by taking it. Frankie tells Berenice to "quit worrying about beaus and be content with T. T. I bet you are forty years old. It is time for you to settle down." Berenice asserts that she will not marry T. T. be- cause he doesn't "make her shiver." She rebukes Frankie, saying, "I got many a long year ahead of me before I resign myself to a corner." But finally Berenice decides that she "might as well" marry T. T. In other words, her experience in the novel is not at a level above Frankie's but parallels it. Berenice, like Frankie, hates sleeping alone, and she submits, resigning herself to a corner, just as Frankie finally gives up her dreams and accepts the role marked out for her.

Even with Berenice's tutelage and her own desire to be treated as an adult, Frankie fears growing up. It is not simply that she might fail to meet the standards of womanhood (be the proper height, be pretty, etc.)□Frankie feels especially afraid when she "thinks about the world." She reads the war news in the paper and wants

> to be a boy and go to war as a Marine. She thought about flying aeroplanes and winning gold medals for bravery. But she could not join the war, and this made her sometimes feel restless and blue. . . .To think about the world for very long made her afraid. She was not afraid of Germans or bombs or Japanese. She was afraid because in the war they would not include her, and because the world seemed somehow separate from herself.

She envies the soldiers she sees in town for their mobility, the opportunity they have to travel and see the world□in other words, to gain experience. Frankie feels left out. When she wonders "who she was, and what she was going to be in the world," she gets a "queer tightness in her chest."

No doubt many a boy has had the same thirst for adventure and felt frustrated by his youth. But it is not just a question of youth for Frankie, any more than it is for Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas. When he sees a plane overhead, Bigger tells his friend Gus, "I

could fly one of them things if I had a chance." "If you wasn't black and if you had some money and if they'd let you go to that aviation school," replies Gus. The youthful Bigger feels the same tightness as Frankie, "like somebody's poking a red-hot iron down my throat. . . . It's just like living in jail. Half the time I feel like I'm on the outside of the world peeping in."

One might conclude that Wright's novel is a "parable of the essential loneliness of man," but, so far as I know, no one has ventured this interpretation of *Native Son.* Bigger's problem, like Frankie's, is not isolation but exclusion. It is true that Frankie resolves her "sexual ambiguity," as one critic puts it, and takes a "definite step toward assuming her feminine nature" when she finally gives up wanting to be a pilot. The question is why "feminine nature" (or dark skin) precludes being a pilot. Whenever Frankie senses that becoming a woman entails renunciation, she feels the tightness in her chest and rebels.

McCullers endows Mick Kelly with the same desires as Frankie. Mick would also like to fight the Fascists□she imagines dressing as a boy and being accepted in the army. Like Frankie, Mick wants to see the world; she spends her time at the library poring over *National Geographic* magazines. But Mick's first love is music, and above all things she wants to be a composer. It seems initially that she has to give up her goal for purely economic reasons: her parents cannot afford a piano or music lessons, and she must work to help support the family. However, just as Bigger's friend Gus puts race first and money second in listing the obstacles to Bigger's becoming a pilot, Mc- Cullers reveals that the primary check to Mick's dream is her gender.

Mick has a friend, Harry Minowitz, whose function in the novel is to serve both as the agent of her sexual initiation and as a contrast to her. Mick and Harry, as a poor girl and a poor boy, resemble Ruth Suckow's Daisy and Gerald with their very different prospects for the future. Although Harry must work to support his widowed mother, he can find a high-paying part-time job; thus he can finish studying mechanics at the local high school. Mick comments:

> "A boy has a better advantage like that than a girl. I mean a boy can usually get some part-time job that don't take him out of school and leaves him time for other things. But the're [sic] not jobs like that for girls. When a girl wants a job she has to quit school and work full-time."

After Harry and Mick have sex, Harry leaves town, either because he feels guilty or because he wants to avoid being "tied down." We are not informed of Harry's ultimate fate, but he can support himself as a skilled mechanic and has at least escaped the small town to which Mick feels bound. Mick's tiring full-time job at Woolworth's puts an end to her dreams of a musical career. She is cut off from her "inner room," the "good private place where she could go and be by herself and study. . . music," and feels trapped and cheated.

This sense of being trapped is developed in greater detail in *The Member of the Wedding* where the very setting of the novel is designed to reflect Frankie's feelings of being limited and restricted. The Addamses' kitchen, where Frankie spends most of her time, seems to her "sad and ugly" and is most often described by McCullers as "gray." The walls are covered with John Henry's "queer" drawings which no one can decipher. The kitchen is a place where "nothing happens" and, often, nothing even moves. Time passes slowly there (McCullers reinforces this impression by noting frequently that "it was only six" or "only half-past six"), and Frankie, Berenice, and John Henry "say the same things over and over" until the words seem to rhyme. In attempt to classify *Member* as a Gothic novel one critic contends that the Addamses' kitchen parallels the "old dank dungeon" of the classic Gothic romance. Certainly to Frankie it seems a kind of prison.

Frankie cannot find relief beyond the kitchen, for the outside atmosphere is just as stifling. The connotations of hot and cold in Wharton's *Summer* are reversed in *The Member of the Wedding.* In *Member,* as in her other novels, McCullers uses heat to suggest boredom and restriction and cold to suggest liberation. Frankie dreams of snow and ice; Jarvis and Janice blend with her ideals because he was stationed in Alaska and she comes from a town called Winter Hill. But the reality of Frankie's environment is deadening heat. The town turns "black and shrunken under the glare of the sun," and the sidewalks seem to be on fire. The atmosphere is motionless as well as hot. "The world seemed to die each afternoon and nothing moved any longer. At last the summer was like a green sick dream, or like a silent crazy jungle under glass." McCullers's references to heat and stasis create an effect of constriction, almost suffocation, that parallels Frankie's feeling of tightness in her chest. Even the sunlight crosses her backyard "like the bars of a bright, strange jail."

Frankie tries to communicate her feeling of being trapped to Berenice, who expresses it eloquently:

"We all of us somehow caught. We born this way or
that way and we don't know why. But we caught anyhow.
I born Berenice. You born Frankie. John Henry
born John Henry. And maybe we wants to widen and
bust free. But no matter what we do we still caught."

Almost everyone who has written about *Member* notes that Berenice is describing people being "caught" in their own individual identities and being ultimately isolated. It is usually forgotten, however, that Berenice goes on to define a special way of being caught. She says she is caught worse

"because I'm black. . . .Because I am colored. Everybody
is caught one way or another, but they done
drawn completely extra bounds around all colored
people. They done squeezed us off in one corner by
ourself. So we caught that firstway I was telling you,
as all human beings is caught. And we caught as colored

people also. Sometimes a boy like Honey
[Berenice's foster brother] feel like he just can't
breathe no more. He feel like he got to break something
or break himself. Sometimes it just about more
than he can stand. He just feels desperate like."

Frankie's responses to Berenice are significant. To the first statement she says she "doesn't know" but to the second that she knows how Honey feels. "Sometimes I feel like I want to break something, too. I feel like I wish I could just tear down the whole town." In other words, Frankie believes she is caught in a special way other than the first one Berenice explained. Berenice, having accepted the female role, does not mention the "extra bounds" drawn around women, but Frankie feels them keenly.

Honey Brown, who "just can't breathe no more," is Frankie's double in the novel. Frankie feels a kinship with him because she senses that he is in the same divided state that she is. On the one hand, Honey works hard studying music and French; on the other, he "suddenly run[s] hog-wild all over Sugarville and tear[s] around for several days, until his friends bring him home more dead than living." Although he can talk "like a white schoolteacher," he often adopts his expected role with a vengeance, speaking in a "colored jumble" that even his family cannot understand. Honey spends only part of his energy trying to overcome or protesting the limitations placed on him; the rest of the time he accepts society's label of "inferior" and punishes himself.

Frankie exhibits this same psychology. She frequently "hates herself," and her attempts at rebellion against the female role are mainly symbolic. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it, the young girl "is too much divided against herself to join battle with the world; she limits herself to a flight from reality or a symbolic struggle against it." De Beauvoir mentions four common forms of "symbolic struggle": odd eating habits, kleptomania, selfmutilation, and running away from home. While Frankie never carries these behaviors to extremes, she indulges in all four types. She eats "greedily," pilfers from the five-and-ten, hacks at her foot with a knife, and tries to run away. It is characteristic of these acts that, like Honey's rampages, they are ineffective □the young girl is "struggling in her cage rather than trying to get out of it." At the end of the novel we find Honey in an actual prison and Frankie in a jail of her own.

Frankie's principal "flight from reality" is her creation of a fantasy world. The adult Honey laughs at her solution to racism, that he go to Cuba and pass as a Cuban. But Frankie still deals with her feeling of being trapped by escaping to the haven of her dreams where she can fly airplanes and see the whole world. Her favorite pastime with Berenice and John Henry is their game of criticizing God and putting themselves in the position of creator. Frankie agrees with the basic modifications Berenice would make. The world would be "just and reasonable": there would be no separate colored people, no killed Jews, and no hunger. Frankie makes a major addition, however. "She planned it so that people could instantly change back and forth from boys to girls, whichever way they felt like and wanted." This plan provides a neat symbolic solution to Frankie's conflicts.

To many commentators on McCullers's work, however, Frankie's dream is an "abnormal" one; a product of the author's "homosexual sensibility." We saw earlier that Leslie Fiedler initiated discussion of gender in McCullers's fiction when he referred to Frankie and Mick as "boy-girl" characters. This point might have led to recognition of McCullers's portrayal of the conflict between a woman's humanity and her destiny as a woman; but Fiedler went on, in a disapproving tone, to call the "tomboy image" "lesbian" and argue that Mc- Cullers is "projecting in her neo-tomboys, ambiguous and epicene, the homosexual's. . . uneasiness before heterosexual passion." Fiedler ends up in the absurd position of contending that Frankie and Berenice are having a "homosexual romance."

Some critics have tried to preserve Fiedler's basic argument by giving Frankie a more appropriate lover. They see her relationship at the end of the novel with her newfound friend, Mary Littlejohn, as "latently homosexual"; Mary's name fits conveniently with this theory□she is a "little John," a "surrogate male lover." Other critics influenced by Fiedler take Frankie's refusal to recognize "the facts of life" as evidence of different sexual "abnormalities." Perhaps she wants to join her brother's wedding so that she can commit incest; perhaps she is really "asexual" (to Ihab Hassan, McCullers's "men-women freaks" are "all bisexual, which is to say a-sexual"). The critics who have followed Fiedler's lead leave as many questions unanswered as he does. We never learn what a "homosexual sensibility" might be and how it is "abnormal," what the "tomboy image" has to do with lesbianism, how "bisexual" and "a-sexual" are the same. Because so many terms remain undefined, discussion of sex and gender in McCullers's fiction has been hopelessly confused.

At issue seems to be McCullers's endorsement of androgyny in her fiction. Frankie and Mick are only two among many androgynous characters, including Singer and Biff Brannon in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,* Captain Penderton in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941), and Amelia in *Ballad of the Sad Café* (1943). These characters are McCullers's most sympathetic, and they often seem to speak for her. Biff Brannon, when he sees Mick looking as much like a boy as a girl, thinks to himself:

> And on that subject why was it that the smartest people
> mostly missed that point? 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 reedy
> and they take on a mincing walk. And old women
> sometimes grow fat and their voices get rough and
> deep and they grow dark little mustaches. And he
> even proved it himself□the part of him that sometimes
> wished he was a mother and that Mick and
> Baby were his kids.

Biff, who is one of the strongest and most selfsufficient characters in McCullers's fiction, is shown becoming so after his wife dies. He takes over some of her "feminine" habits, discarding the clearly defined role which had previously confined him. If McCullers

implies any solution besides racial equality to the social injustice and personal isolation and despair she portrays in her novels, it is a move toward the loosening of conventional gender roles, toward the more androgynous world Frankie envisions when she wishes people could "change back and forth from boys to girls."

But the critics who discuss McCullers's androgynous characters conclude that "there is something frightening about them." McCullers fails to present women who are happily female and "men who are men (i.e., Gary Cooper)," and Biff Brannon is a "sexual deviate." The next step is devaluation of McCullers's reputation as a writer. Fiedler dismisses her as a "chic" writer supported by New York homosexuals. A. S. Knowles less readily equates androgyny and homosexuality but finds either one "frightening." In his reassessment of Mc- Cullers's literary reputation Knowles expresses distaste for the "By nature all people are of both sexes" passage quoted above; he is horrified that Mc-Cullers actually "means what she seems to be saying" in this passage. He concludes that McCullers links "sensitivity" with "sexual abnormality" and is thus a less important novelist than she first appeared to be.

Ironically, the recognition of the importance of gender in McCullers's fiction has been no more productive than the ignoring of gender and search for "universal" themes we noted earlier. The main import of the Fiedler approach is a sinister message for potential novelists. If the "universalist" critics imply that novelists should avoid writing about female adolescence because it is not universal enough, the Fiedlerites proclaim loudly, "Do not write about female adolescence if you criticize the current gender system. Those who criticize the gender system are homosexuals, and homosexuals cannot be important novelists."

The universalists have tried to produce comprehensive interpretations of *The Member of the Wedding,* but to the Fiedlerites a fuller understanding of the novel seems to have been a secondary concern. The readings they have come up with are distorted and partial; we are left to figure out for ourselves why Frankie Addams should be lusting after Berenice or her brother. Frankie's attitude toward sex provides a specific example where both critical approaches have resulted in misreadings. Everyone recognizes that Frankie resists even the knowledge of sexual intercourse. It is not only that she does not understand, or try to understand, such incidents mentioned earlier as her "sin" with Barney MacKean and her glimpse of the boarder "having a fit"; she also conveniently "forgets" both incidents. After Frankie has misinterpreted the purpose of her date with a soldier and has had to fend off his advances, she fleetingly remembers these earlier bits of knowledge. But, significantly, she does not "let these separate glimpses fall together"; she prefers to think of the soldier as an anomaly, a "crazy man."

To the Fiedlerites, as we have seen, Frankie's resistance means that she is a lesbian or a "deviate." To the universalists it is either "pointless" or symbolic of the course of initiation in the modern world□Frankie's failure to gain "insight into sexual experience" shows that initiation no longer entails knowledge and commitment. In fact, there is no evidence in *The Member of the Wedding* that Frankie is homosexual (or heterosexual, bisexual, or asexual). In the play she adapted from the novel McCullers presents Frankie in the last scene swooning over Barney MacKean, the boy she previously

hated. In the novel we are given no clue as to what her sexual preference will eventually be. But Frankie does not fail to gain insight into heterosexual experience. Although she manages for a while to keep her "separate glimpses" of sex from falling together, near the end of the novel she gets a sudden flash of understanding. Significantly, her moment of recognition comes after her plan to join the wedding has failed; it is associated with her consequent feelings of helplessness and resignation□she "might as well" ask the soldier to marry her.

Frankie's attitude toward sex is not unusual. The adolescent heroines we have met [throughout *Growing Up Female*], even the sensuous Charity Royall, fear and resist sexual experience; as we will see, resistance to sex is almost universal in novels of female adolescence. The reason is always the same: adolescent heroines view sex as domination by a man (not until very recently are they even aware of the possibility of sex with women). They may, like Mick Kelly, worry about losing their virginity (the woman is traditionally spoken of as "losing" her virginity when she "submits" or "yields" to a man); but they fear most strongly, as Mick does, losing their autonomy.

In his survey of novels of adolescence James Johnson puzzles over Frankie's encounter with the soldier, wondering why her experience lacks the "positive quality" of Stephen Dedalus's sexual initiation. If we look at Stephen's first sexual experience in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* we find that his behavior is the opposite of Frankie's. Stephen, hardly the "man's man," Gary Cooper, "suddenly become[s] strong and fearless and sure of himself." Frankie, on the other hand, does not "know how to refuse" the soldier's invitation to his room; she thinks she is unable to leave, and when he grabs her, she feels "paralyzed." In other words, Stephen receives a sudden influx of power, while Frankie feels loss of power.

McCullers treats an adolescent girl's association of sexual intercourse with male domination and loss of personal choice and power in an early short story entitled "Like That." The thirteen-yearold narrator of the story, an early version of Mick and Frankie, bemoans the change that has come over her older sister. Previously she and Sis had had fun together, but one night after a date with her boyfriend, Sis began to act differently. The present Sis has lost weight, cries a lot, and spends her time sitting by herself or writing her boyfriend. The unnamed narrator, whom I will call N., declares, "I wouldn't like any boy in the world as much as she does Tuck. I'd never let any boy or any thing make me act like she does." She thinks of Sis as "dead."

Although N. does not understand the cause of Sis's behavior, she associates the change with her sister's first menstruation which she had "forgotten" for several years because she "hadn't wanted to remember." N. thus connects becoming a woman with giving up of self and being oriented toward and dominated by a man. N. does not want to let "anything really change me," so she either conveniently "forgets" or refuses to listen to information about sex. N. concludes:

One afternoon the kids all got quiet in the gym basement
and then started telling certain things□about
being married and all□I got up quick so I wouldn't

hear and went up and played basketball. And when some of the kids said they were going to start wearing lipstick and stockings I said I wouldn't for a hundred dollars. You see I'd never be like Sis is now. I wouldn't. Anybody could know that if they knew me. I just wouldn't, that's all. I don't want to grow up□ if it's like that.

N. seems more conscious than Frankie of her motives in avoiding discussion of sexual facts and "forgetting" those facts she cannot avoid. Mc- Cullers has Frankie express her conflicts in fantasies, as with her dream of a world where people could instantly change sexes. Frankie knows this dream is impossible. She finds society's condemnation of androgyny, which we saw expressed by literary critics, reflected in her own world; after all, one of the freaks at the fair is the Half-Man Half- Woman. Frankie thus projects all her desires and fears into a fantasy that she imagines might be more socially acceptable□she will join her brother and his fiancée and become "a member of the wedding." Those readers who have stressed the theme of spiritual isolation in McCullers's works have noted that joining the wedding would allow Frankie to escape her own separate identity, to become, as Frankie says, a "we" person instead of an "I" person. But paradoxically, Frankie's plan to join the wedding is also a desperate attempt to *preserve* her identity. Her wedding fantasy is a symbolic way of resolving her conflict of wanting to be an adult but not wanting to be a woman, not wanting to "grow up□if it's like that."

Weddings are, traditionally, the destiny of girls, and with marriage a girl officially becomes an adult. But Frankie has changed her female destiny, for this wedding does not entail any of the restrictions that she has perceived in womanhood. Her proposed marriage is not to one man because in her society that implies submission; the marriage is for the same reason sexless. Nor does Frankie attempt to acquire in her brother and sister-in-law a new set of parents, for then she would be a child again. Frankie dreams of being neither a *wife* nor a *child* but an adult *equal.* In reality Frankie is already a member of something□she has "the terrible summer *we* of her and John Henry and Berenice"; but "that was the last *we* in the world she wanted," because a black woman and a child do not raise her status. Her brother Jarvis is a soldier, one of those envied beings who gets to see the world; his fiancée, whom Frankie has met only briefly, at least has the distinction of being "small and pretty." According to Frankie's plan, the three JA's will travel together. She will no longer be trapped in her kitchen but can climb glaciers in Alaska and ride camels in Africa. Frankie will be able to fly planes and win medals, and all three JA's will be equally famous and successful. This fantasy makes Frankie feel "lightness" in place of that old constriction in her chest; it gives her a sense of "power" and "entitlement."

But Frankie's plan to join the wedding is a nonrealistic way of solving her conflict, a "flight from reality" more elaborately imagined than the ones Simone de Beauvoir describes. When Frankie is dragged screaming from the honeymoon car, her dream is crushed. She realizes that "all that came about [at the wedding] occurred in a world beyond her power"; she feels powerless. When she runs away from home after the

wedding, Frankie merely goes through the motions of protest and attempted escape. She knows before she reaches the street corner that her father has awakened and will soon be after her. Her plan of hopping a box-car seems unreal even to her. "It is easy to talk about hopping a freight train, but how did bums and people really do it?" She admits to herself that she is "too scared to go into the world alone."

Frankie now resigns herself□the world seems too "enormous" and "powerful" for her to fight. "Between herself and all the places there was a space like an enormous canyon she could not hope to bridge or cross." When Frankie suddenly puts together the sexual facts she previously refused to connect and thinks she might as well ask the soldier to marry her, we realize that she is giving up her rebellion and submitting to her female fate. At this point the jail image, part of the motif of constriction in the novel, recurs. Frankie wishes the policeman who comes to fetch her would take her to jail, for "it was better to be in a jail where you could bang the walls than in a jail you could not see."

Had McCullers ended *The Member of the Wedding* here, it would have been difficult for anyone to see the novel as "cute" and "sentimental," a *Tom Sawyer* as opposed to McCullers's *Huckleberry Finn, The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter.* However, she includes a few pages showing Frankie several months later. John Henry has died of meningitis, Honey is in jail, Berenice plans to marry T. T., but Frankie is content. She has found a friend and model in the older Mary Littlejohn, a modern good good girl with long blonde hair, pale white complexion, and ladylike habits; Mary encourages Frankie to collect paintings by Michelangelo and read Tennyson. The novel ends as Frankie, with "an instant shock of happiness," hears Mary at the front door.

Twentieth-century novelists rarely leave their characters in a state of euphoria, and those critics who have not thereby consigned *Member* to the rank of sentimental popular novels about adolescence have tended to focus on Frankie's "successful" initiation. That is, the "happy ending" means that Frankie is "accepting reality and responsibility." Louise Gossett contends that McCullers often leaves adults "physically and emotionally ruined" but "brings her adolescents to a healthy measure of maturity." Her adolescents'

> ability to achieve wholeness distinguishes their growth from that of many young people in twentieth century literature about the suffering adolescent. The struggle of the adolescent who appears in the fiction of William Goyen or Truman Capote injures or defeats him with a deadly finality. Mrs. McCullers prefers to educate rather than to destroy her adolescents.

Unlike these other adolescent protagonists, Frankie is not "injured or crippled emotionally" by her experiences.

Indeed, Frankie does not retreat to a fantasy world (Joel Knox of Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*), end up in a mental institution (Holden Caulfield), or commit suicide (Peyton Loftis of Styron's *Lie Down in Darkness*). But the very point of

McCullers's epilogue is to show that, while Frankie has "adjusted" to growing up and is undergoing a "normal" adolescence, she has been severely "crippled." Frankie has not merely replaced her old aspirations with new ones just as impossible; she has changed the very nature of her dreams. Frankie's old dreams, of flying planes, of being able to switch genders whenever she wished, of joining the wedding, were protests against the secondary status of women. They were projections of her desire to be an autonomous adult. Now Frankie, or Frances, as she is finally called, wants to write poetry and travel with Mary Littlejohn. Her new dreams are socially acceptable and easily within her reach. Although she will not climb glaciers and ride camels with Mary Littlejohn, she may tour Europe under the aegis of Mary and her mother. It is permissible for Frankie to go "around the world" but not into it.

Frankie now lives in a permanent "daytime" state, or what Mick Kelly would call the "outside room." To Mick her "outside room" is "school and the family and the things that happened every day" and her "inside room" a "very private place" full of "plans" and "music"□in other words, her inner self. When Mick gives up composing to work at the five-and-ten and stops resisting womanhood to become "ladylike and delicate," she is barred from the inside room: she loses her self. Although we leave Frankie at a younger age, it is clear that she has already sacrificed her "inner room." Her life is "filled with. . . school and Mary Littlejohn" (the outside room), and her summer of plans is almost forgotten. The very kitchen where Frankie thought about "who she was" and resisted "what she was going to be in the world" has been whitewashed.

Immediately after Honey's imprisonment and John Henry's death Frankie would feel a "hush" when she thought of them, and she had nightmares about John Henry. "But the dreams came only once or twice" and "it was seldom now that she felt his presence." Although Berenice appears in the last few pages of the novel, Frankie hardly feels her presence either; she ignores her in anticipation of being with Mary Littlejohn and seems indifferent to Berenice's departure. The fates of Berenice, Honey, and John Henry reflect on Frankie's own situation. The formerly lively Berenice, who once towered over the Addamses' kitchen, is subdued; she sits sad and "idle" in a chair, "her limp arms hanging at her sides." Honey is in prison as the result of drugging himself. John Henry's death seems fitting. Through most of the novel, as Frankie vacillated between childhood and adulthood, she alternately avoided and clung to him. Now, as part of her childhood and her "inner room," he is appropriately dead.

In reporting John Henry's death McCullers juxtaposes accounts of his terrible suffering with descriptions of the "golden" autumn weather□the chilled air and the clear green-blue sky filled with light. The effect is to make Frankie seem a bit callous, for the cool weather reflects her joyous mood; she can hardly feel John Henry's death. Like Edith Wharton's *Summer, The Member of the Wedding* portrays an adolescent girl's hot summer, which at the very end of the novel gives way to a chilly autumn. But the passage to autumn has a different import in McCullers's novel. Although Frankie, unlike Charity, loves the cold, there is no glimmer of promise in *Member* because Frankie has not experienced any of the positive growth Charity has. The seasonal motif suggests the possibility of renewal; perhaps "spring will return" for Frankie as well as Charity, but Berenice, Honey, and John Henry are irrevocably lost. At the end of *The Member of the*

Wedding Frankie seems better off than Charity. She is certainly happy, having released the tension of not "belonging"; but the final irony of the novel is that having gained her membership, Frankie has lost her self.

McCullers does not blame Frankie, any more than she does Mick, for this loss of self. As the critical comments stressing her new "maturity" imply, Frankie has done exactly what has been expected of her, what she has been educated to do. In this context Louise Gossett's remarks on her environment seem ironic. Frankie's environment, says Gossett, is less menacing than Holden Caulfield's:

> His displacement is more radical than Frankie's because
> his society has no place for him, whereas the
> community of Frankie or of Mick, less large and competitive,
> defines what is acceptable in the stages
> through which the girls grow and also superintends
> their progress.

It is, of course, the problem rather than the solution that Frankie's and Mick's society has a "place" for them and "superintends" them into it. That same society has a place for Honey Brown.

The Member of the Wedding is less a novel of initiation into "acceptance of *human* limits" than a novel of initiation into acceptance of *female* limits. Frankie's desire to be a soldier or a pilot, or Mick's to be an inventor or a composer, could be fulfilled by a boy; these goals are simply defined as unacceptable for girls. Nor is Frankie's ambition to travel and gain experience in the world unattainable for a boy. Gossett's comparison of Frankie with Holden Caulfield has relevance here. Holden's basic conflict resembles Frankie's—he does not want to remain a child but has reservations about the "phoniness" of adults (he projects these doubts into his dream of being "catcher in the rye" and catching children before they fall over the "cliff" into adulthood). But if Holden's "displacement" appears greater than Frankie's, it is merely a measure of his greater freedom. He can at least venture into the world and test it by experience. James Johnson includes Frankie and Holden as examples of modern adolescent characters who flee their homes and undertake journeys. Yet Frankie's hour of running away hardly measures up to Holden's experience or that of Johnson's other examples, Eugene Gant, Nick Adams, or Stephen Dedalus, all inveterate wanderers.

The barriers to Frankie's entering the world are not solely external, any more than they are for Ruth Suckow's adolescent heroines. Frankie and Mick are "protected" (that is, banned) from experience in the way of Suckow's "nice girls," and Mick especially is expected to preserve close ties to the family. But, in large part, the girls fail to journey into the world because of their own passivity. Frankie and Mick, like Marjorie Schoessel, wait for "something to happen" to them—they do not think in terms of making something happen. They dream but seldom act. Even Frankie's desire to be a "member" stresses identification with the world rather than participation in it. When Frankie tries to run away from home, she discovers that she does not have the necessary resources to leave by herself. The details of "hopping a freight," for instance, lie outside the realm of her

preparatory experience. She does not have to be prevented from hopping freights; her greatest restriction is that she does not know how or really want to.

Frankie's and Mick's passivity becomes striking when we compare them with the male adolescent protagonist of one of McCullers's early versions of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter.* Andrew has the same background as Frankie and Mick; he lives in a small Georgia town with a jeweller father, a sister Sara, a little sister Mick, and a black cook Vitalis. Interestingly, much of this draft deals with Andrew's recollections of his sister Sara's troubled adolescence and her attempts to "try to act like a boy" and run away from home. McCullers had not yet determined her true focus, the adolescent girl, and this early draft is confused because the protagonist, Andrew, is not really the center of interest. We discover enough about him, however, to see how his character and fate differ from that of Sara-Mick-Frankie.

Andrew resembles the female adolescent in being "lonesome" and apprehensive about the future. "He was getting to be a man and he did not know what was going to come. And always he was hungry and always he felt that something was just about to happen." The difference is that Andrew himself causes the event to happen. He takes a walk by Vitalis's house, says he is hungry, follows her into the house, and seduces her. Afterwards, Andrew feels guilty and leaves town permanently for New York City. It seems to him that his experience with Vitalis was "accidental," but it is clear from his seeking her out and claiming to be hungry that he at least unconsciously sought sexual contact. Although Andrew's experience involves some loss of control, as his bodily desires overcome his con- scious plans, it contrasts with Mick's and Frankie's in that Andrew acts throughout. It is he who has the desire, seeks out Vitalis, and initiates the sexual encounter. He makes a decision to leave town and then follows through with his decision.

Andrew is an early version of Harry Minowitz, and his two sisters later merge into the figure of Mick Kelly. In *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* Harry will be presented as more active than Mick; his situation will also differ from hers in terms of his greater economic opportunity and freedom of movement. Still, Harry ends up a minor character, his function being to highlight the restrictions placed on Mick. Like Ruth Suckow, McCullers includes male adolescents in her fiction but reserves center stage for girls. Not until their last novels, Suckow's *The John Wood Case* (1959) and Mc- Cullers's *Clock Without Hands* (1961), do they make a boy the protagonist, and they do not provide him with a female counterpart.

Source: Barbara A. White, "Loss of Self in *The Member of the Wedding,*" in *Carson McCullers,* edited by Harold Bloom, Modern Critical Views, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, pp. 125-42.

Adaptations

At the encouragement of Tennessee Williams, McCullers adapted *The Member of the Wedding* for the stage. The play opened on Broadway in 1950 and was very successful. It ran for fourteen months and over five hundred performances. For this play, McCullers won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, the Donaldson Award for Best Drama of the Year, and the Gold Medal of the Theatre Club.

A film adaptation was made in 1952. Produced by Columbia Pictures, it earned a 1953 Academy Award nomination for best actress for Julie Harris (who played Frankie). Brandon de Wilde (who played John Henry) won a 1953 Special Golden Globe for best juvenile actor.

Two television movies have been based on the novel. A 1982 version was performed on "NBC Live Theater," and, in 1997, Hallmark Home Entertainment produced a television movie starring Anna Paquin as Frankie and Alfre Woodard as Berenice.

In 1987, DH Audio released an audio adaptation with Tammy Grimes as the reader.

Topics for Further Study

Read what three major psychologists have to say about adolescence. Apply these theories to the character of Frankie to determine in what ways she fits the patterns suggested by psychologists and in what ways she is unusual.

Research the role of African-American servants in white Southern households in the early-to mid-twentieth century. Create a class presentation to relate your findings and personal comments. Lead a discussion about the progress against discrimination made by African Americans in the latter half of the century.

Compare the African-American characters in *The Member of the Wedding* with African-American characters in one of the following: *Gone with the Wind, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Huckleberry Finn,* or *To Kill a Mockingbird.*

Music was an important part of McCullers's life, and she uses musical references and imagery throughout the novel. Imagine that you are a guest lecturer at a school for music, and your objective is to interest the students in literature. Prepare a lecture in which you use *The Member of the Wedding* to teach students how music and literature can complement each other. Be sure to demonstrate how an understanding of music gives insight into the book.

Compare and Contrast

1942: In small towns, boys and girls amuse themselves by playing with friends and family members of about the same age. They often play outdoor games such as softball, tag, and hideand- seek. Other common pastimes include performing skits; dressing up in silly outfits or grownups' clothing; exploring nearby trails, woods, or creeks; and setting up lemonade or snow-cone stands to make a little money.

Today: In small towns and big cities alike, children and adolescents entertain themselves with television, videos, computers, video games, music, and reading.

1942: Many middle-class white families employ African Americans as domestic help. Women are often housekeepers who also help with child rearing and thus become a part of the family dynamics. For many African-American women (like Berenice), this is their best opportunity for work. Men are employed less frequently but are sometimes paid to perform tasks such as household repairs, yard work, and wood chopping.

Today: Only the wealthiest households employ servants, and they may be of any race. While many people hire maid services, the relationship is nothing at all like the relationships with livein housekeepers of the past. African Americans have opportunities to work in all types of jobs, and the law protects their right to do so.

1942: Adolescents in small- to medium-sized towns look forward to growing old enough to leave their hometowns and see what life is like in the larger world. Having grown up in communities where everyone knows them and they know everyone, they look forward to meeting new people and experiencing new things.

Today: Adolescents in small- to medium-sized towns feel the same way adolescents in the past felt about their hometowns. The modern media make life outside small-town city limits seem glamorous and exciting, and the ability to communicate with people all over the world via the Internet intensifies the desire to see the world. In addition, bigger cities often offer more opportunities for advanced education, better careers, and higher pay. Among teenagers, it is considered very sophisticated to be bored and frustrated by their hometowns.

What Do I Read Next?

Noted literary scholar Harold Bloom and William Golding compiled *Carson McCullers (Modern Critical Views)* (1986) to provide a wide range of critical viewpoints for students of McCullers's work. In addition to considering her career as a whole, the authors comment on individual works.

In the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), Harper Lee tells the story of eight-year-old Scout and her older brother Jem growing up in the South during the Depression. Their attorney father takes an unpopular stance when he agrees to represent an African-American man accused of raping a poor white woman.

McCullers's critically acclaimed *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) is the story of John Singer, a deaf-mute living in a southern mill town in the 1930s. The novel explores themes of loneliness, morality, and intolerance as it presents the lives of five characters.

Tennessee Williams's play *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) tells the story of the members of a southern family who are facing their individual problems along with the problems of modern life.

Further Study

Andrews, William L., ed., *The Literature of the American South: A Norton Anthology,* W. W. Norton & Co., 1997.

Andrews collects writing of the American South from the seventeenth century to the present. This anthology contains poetry, sermons, short fiction, songs, excerpts from novels, criticism, and nonfiction.

Carr, Virginia Spence, *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers,* Carroll & Graf, 1985.

Originally published in 1975, this biography presents the tragic events and circumstances of McCullers's life. Carr demonstrates how these events influenced McCullers's fiction.

McCullers, Carson, *Collected Stories: Including "The Member of the Wedding" and "The Ballad of the Sad Cafe,"* Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

This book contains McCullers's short works including the short novel *The Member of the Wedding.* At more than four hundred pages, this book allows the student of McCullers's writing to compare and contrast the author's works.

O'Connor, Flannery, *The Complete Stories,* Noonday Press, 1996.

Flannery O'Connor is an important female writer in the southern tradition. Although she wrote novels, she is best known for her short stories, which are collected fully in this book.

Welty, Eudora, *Collected Stories of Eudora Welty,* Harcourt Brace, 1982.

Eudora Welty remains one of the dominant literary figures of the American South. She is known primarily for her short fiction, and this collection provides a thorough introduction to Welty's writing.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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