The Square Root of Wonderful Study Guide

The Square Root of Wonderful by Carson McCullers

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Introduction

Carson McCullers's *The Square Root of Wonderful* opened to very poor reviews on Broadway on October 30, 1957. It closed a little over a month later, after only forty-.ve performances. In 1958, an edition of the play was published in the United States and Britain. In this edition, McCullers notes in the "Personal Preface" that, of all the various versions of the play, "the one which follows . . . is the most nearly the truth of what I want to say."

Today, the play is valued primarily as a window offering a view into the author's unusual personal life. In the "Personal Preface," McCullers writes that the play's origins can be found in the dif.cult relationship she had with her husband, Reeves McCullers, before he committed suicide in 1953. According to McCullers, the play also deals with her beloved mother, who died suddenly in 1955. "So, unconsciously, the life-death theme of *The Square Root of Wonderful* emerged," she writes.

The story takes place in a small town outside New York City during the 1950s. Phillip Lovejoy is an alcoholic writer whose early successes and more recent failures weigh heavily on his mind. He leaves the sanatorium where he has been recuperating from an attempted suicide and arrives at the house of his ex-wife, Mollie Lovejoy. Phillip is needy and in emotional pain. He soon discovers that Mollie is falling in love with John Tucker, an architect she recently rescued from car trouble, who is now living at the house. Phillip's mother and sister are also visiting; their characters provide background infor- mation about Mollie and Phillip's two marriages to each other as well as information about Phillip as a child in Georgia. Phillip, overcome by the probability of a life without Mollie, commits suicide by driving his car into a nearby pond. Mollie is now free to love John.

Author Biography

Carson McCullers was born Lula Carson Smith in Columbus, Georgia, on February 19, 1917. Like the adolescent girl Frankie in her novel, *The Member of the Wedding*, McCullers renamed herself at age thirteen, dropping her .rst name in favor of her middle name. Her parents, Lamar Smith, a jeweler, and Marguerite Waters Smith, provided their three children with a comfortable middle-class life. Carson was their .rst born child, and they considered her an artistic genius and encouraged her interests, especially music. Lynne Greeley, writing in *Theatre History Studies,* refers to Carson McCullers as "the preferred child" in her family.

McCullers is known primarily for her novels, but she also wrote two plays, a number of short stories, children's poetry, and other works. Most of her work is set in the American South and involves people struggling with loneliness and feelings of isolation. Many critics place her among the best southern writers, along with William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, and Tennessee Williams.

McCullers felt that she was an outsider and a loner. Her school days were marked by mediocre grades and the stares of fellow students at her eccentric dress and gangly height of nearly .ve feet, nine inches. When she was .fteen, she contracted rheumatic fever. From that point on, her life was a constant struggle with illness and physical discomfort. As soon as she graduated from high school, McCullers left Columbus and moved to New York City with plans to attend the Juilliard School of Music. Because of a lack of money□sources differ on whether her funds were mismanaged by a family friend or stolen□she ended up working various day jobs and attending night classes .rst at New York University and then at Columbia University during 1935 and 1936. In 1936, one of her professors at Columbia helped get her .rst short story, "Wunderkind," published in *Story* magazine.

During a trip back home in 1935, McCullers met Reeves McCullers. They were married in 1937. Their relationship "was not a traditional marriage," as Sara Nalley notes in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* and they lived together only on occasion. Historians have noted the author's deep and passionate friendships with other women as an inhibiting factor in her marriage. Others have described a marriage fraught with tension, violence, and substance abuse. According to McCullers in the introduction to her play *The Square Root of Wonderful*, her husband's disappointment in his own attempt to launch a literary career is echoed in the play's portrayal of Phillip Lovejoy. The couple divorced in 1941 but remarried in 1945. Reeves McCullers committed suicide in 1953.

With the 1940 publication of her .rst novel, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, McCullers became the toast of the literary scene. The novel was wildly successful, as were her next three works, all published before her thirtieth birthday: *Re.ections in a Golden Eye*, *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*, and *The Member of the Wedding*. McCullers adapted *The Member of the Wedding* for the stage in 1951, winning that year's New York Drama Critics Circle Award.

Her second play, *The Square Root of Wonderful*, did not fare as well. Produced in 1957 for Broadway, it played for only forty-.ve performances and received nearly unanimously poor reviews. The failure of this play crushed McCullers. Her health continued to diminish, and she never published another play. Her .nal novel, *Clock Without Hands*, received favorable reviews, but her great successes were behind her. She died on September 29, 1967, in Nyack, New York, after a stroke□one of many she had suffered throughout her life.

Plot Summary

Act 1

Act 1 begins after midnight in the living room. Mollie Lovejoy awakens and comforts her thirteenyear- old son, Paris, who has been having a nightmare in which his father, Phillip Lovejoy, is a burglar. Paris is sleeping on the couch because his grandmother, Mother Lovejoy, and his aunt, Loreena Lovejoy, also known as Sister, are visiting.

Mollie and John Tucker, an architect who is living at the house, have been in the kitchen talking and drinking tea. Mollie says that she will be "desolate" when John leaves. When Paris asks the architect, "Why do you keep your arms around my mother? Why do you look at her in that zany way?" John admits that he loves Mollie. Mollie has been divorced twice from Paris's father.

Mollie has received a phone call from Phillip and is worried that he is going to show up at the house, having checked himself out of a sanatorium after attempting suicide. Paris brags that his father is a famous author and warns that he is going to tell Phillip about John. John is de.ant, countering that he himself will tell Phillip that he loves Mollie. Mollie notes that Phillip's most recent work, a play, opened and closed very quickly. Mollie and John reminisce about how they met ten days earlier, when she picked him up on the road as he was repairing his car. Mollie brought him back to the house and, to his surprise, offered him room and board. He had assumed that she was offering him sex.

Mollie tells John that one of the things she loves about him is that he is interested in her for her mind and not for her body. She recalls meeting Phillip at a peach festival in her hometown when she was .fteen. They immediately had sex, and the next day they were married. Even though she is no longer married to Phillip, she admits to John that he has always cast a sort of spell over her. Even when Phillip was verbally and physically abusive during their two marriages, "he had a lot of charm," she says. They also talk about Sister and the disappointment the Lovejoy family feels about the fact that she was once a debutante but is now an old maid and a librarian.

Sister enters the room, and John leaves to .x a noisy garage door. Sister warns Mollie that Phillip is probably going to show up at the house soon and ask her to marry him for the third time. Mollie says she does not want to marry him again but expresses concern that she will be swayed by Phillip's charm. Answering Mollie's question as to whether she has ever been in love, Sister admits to numerous loves in places around the world, but these are men and events that live only in her imagination.

Mother Lovejoy enters the room looking for milk of magnesia, disappointed that Sister has already told Mollie about Phillip. Sister and Mother Lovejoy leave the room just as John comes back from .xing the door. He and Mollie discuss Phillip, John's numerous love affairs, and the possibility of their getting married.

After John goes to bed, Phillip appears holding a bouquet of .owers for Mollie. Phillip tries to get Mollie to remember what it was like when they were married. He adds that he knows his next book will be a success. He goes upstairs, expecting that Mollie will follow him. As Paris walks in, Mollie asks him, "My child, if your mother told you she is in love with two people, what would you think?" From upstairs, Phillip calls for Mollie as the curtain falls.

Act 2

The second act opens the next afternoon. Paris is talking to a school friend, Hattie, about a test they just took. The sounds of his father's typewriter come from the next room. Hattie admits that she is afraid of Phillip because he is "crazy." They brie.y talk about when they took their clothes off and looked at each other, but Hattie leaves abruptly when Phillip enters the room.

Phillip and Paris talk about their lives as father and son. Paris accuses his father of never remembering his age and never giving appropriate gifts. They have different recollections of their lives together on their apple farm: Phillip thinks only of how he wanted to buy a cow and milk it, work the land, and eat great country breakfasts, while Paris remembers that his father never liked milk, especially when compared with whisky, paid him to tend to the garden, and typically only had black coffee for breakfast.

Paris leaves the room as Mollie comes in with groceries, followed by Mother Lovejoy and Sister. The women chatter about a variety of topics. Mother Lovejoy says that Mollie is looking much more healthy and vibrant and attributes this to "S-E-X." Mother Lovejoy also concludes that the absence of sex is why Sister does not appear as beautiful as Mollie.

John enters the room, and Mother Lovejoy asks him if he is a "professional man," thinking that Sister may appeal to him and instructs Mollie to leave the two of them alone. Sister tells John that she has been searching for "the right man." After Sister leaves, Mollie enters the room. John expresses his love to Mollie, but she tells him that Phillip is back home.

Paris enters with the blueprints of a house John intends to build. The three of them talk about what features might be included in the house. Paris tells John about having to beat up a fellow student who made fun of his name, and John admits to having had his feelings hurt by a girl who teased him about the acne he had when he was young. John talks about "the square root of sin. . . . The sin of hurting people's feelings. . . . It's the same as murder." Paris and John agree that they have enjoyed their "man-to-man talk."

Paris leaves just as his father enters the room. Phillip is obviously angry about John and Mollie's growing closeness and comments that everything at the farm is his, including "my wife." Phillip quizzes the couple on whether they have slept together, to which Mollie answers, "No." He goes on talking about how good the sex was between him and Mollie. Phillip leaves, looking for applejack to drink.

Various characters enter and leave the scene, discussing topics from chess playing to Mother Lovejoy's insistence that she always knew that Phillip would be a "great genius." Eventually, Phillip and John are left alone; Phillip lets drop that Mollie slept with him the previous night. When Mollie returns, John questions her about this, and she admits it, begging forgiveness and blaming her weakness. He asks her, "When will you be strong enough to love the strong?"

Phillip and his mother are left in the room, and they have a discussion that degenerates into an argument. She storms out. Mollie comes back and tells Phillip that she is leaving him for John. Phillip is disdainful of John but begins to plead with Mollie. He claims that "without you I will die," but Mollie remains adamant that she is leaving with John. Phillip grabs her arm, and Mollie picks up a knife. He continues begging Mollie to stay with him, even going so far as to suggest, "You can be in love with him, that's all right, but stay in love with me! Let me stay and I will write again." Mollie refuses, and they continue arguing. Phillip picks up the grandfather clock as it chimes the hour and smashes it. The chiming continues, frightening both of them.

Act 3, Scene 1

Early the next morning, Philip awakens Paris, suggesting that they both leave the house. Phillip tells his son, "I need you." When Paris asks his father where he is going, Phillip answers, "To zones and latitudes you never imagined." Phillip tells Paris a Bible story involving talents, an ancient form of money, but Paris keeps confusing it with the word used to denote a particular ability. Paris is frightened of the "creepy" way Phillip is behaving. He remembers he has planned to go .shing that day, so he tells his father he will go with him "some other time." Phillip leaves in his car just as Mollie comes down to check on Paris.

Act 3, Scene 2

A week has passed. From Paris and Hattie's conversation, it is apparent that Phillip is dead, having driven his car into a nearby pond. Paris refuses to believe that his father's actions were deliberate. "It was a defective steering wheel," he insists, noting that his father was a strong man and only weak people commit suicide. They leave the room as Mother Lovejoy and Sister enter with suitcases.

According to Sister, Mollie is going to get a job as a cosmetologist in New York City, but Mother Lovejoy remembers that Mollie made a woman bald the last time she worked as a cosmetologist. The two chatter about the limousine they have rented to get them to the train station for their trip back to Society City.

Mollie comes downstairs as the limousine arrives. Mollie tells John that she is responsible for Phillip's death. "Because I loved you, Phillip died," she claims. She wonders aloud why she could not have helped Phillip, but John assures her she did enough for Phillip during his life.

Paris enters, and John tells him that he is planning to marry Mollie and build the house he told Paris about. Paris responds that when John was describing the house, "it sounded wonderful; the square root of it, in fact." After he leaves, Mollie asks John what Paris meant by the "square root of wonderful," and John responds, "You." Mollie is confused, because, as she notes, "love multiplies." She ends the scene and the play talking about how, when she loves, everything is multiplied.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

"The Square Root of Wonderful" is the story of a woman, Mollie, who must choose between the renewed attentions of her ex-husband, Philip Lovejoy, and those of a new man in her life, John Tucker. The play takes place on an apple farm in New York in the 1950s and opens in the living room of the farmhouse where Mollie is comforting her son, Paris, who has cried out from a nightmare. The nightmare revolves around a burglar who is revealed to be Philip Lovejoy, Paris' father.

Mollie has been awake discussing plans with her new tenant, John, with whom she has recently fallen in love. Mollie had picked John up on the road where his car had broken down just ten days ago and Paris is aghast that John could have such feelings for Mollie in such a short time.

John admits to Mollie that he was struck instantly with love for her but Mollie holds him at bay because falling in love for her is not a casual affair. When Mollie first fell in love with Philip, all it took was one kiss and she was washed away with emotion. The two of them made love the day they met and her parents made them get married the following day. Mollie hopes to convince John that there is no such thing as a simple kiss where she is concerned; it always leads quickly to heavier emotional attachments.

John tries to glean whether Mollie is still in love with Philip and she hesitates, firmly believing that Philip had cast a spell on her and that she'll always love him even though they are now divorced. Philip had come from a prominent family and is the only son of a mother who had higher ambitions for him than he had for himself. Consequently, Philip always struggled emotionally with his goals of being a writer as opposed to those of his mother for him.

Philip's sister, Sister, has never married and works in the library where she met the only man she ever loved. Mollie loves Sister for her gentle ways, which are in stark contrast to Philip's violent tendencies. However, in spite of all his emotional and physical abuse toward her, Mollie always took Philip back because of his ultimately redemptive charm.

Mollie tells John that Philip is a writer and had been quite successful at one time with the publishing of a book. However, his later attempts were not as well received, precipitating long bouts of depression and a suicide attempt. Since that time, Philip has been in a sanatorium, from which he is being released tomorrow.

In anticipation of Philip's homecoming, his mother, Mother Lovejoy, and Sister have arrived to stay at Mollie's house. Sister interrupts John and Mollie's conversation and blatantly asks Mollie whether she still loves Philip and if she plans to marry him for the third time. Mollie doesn't want to re-marry Philip, but she cannot shake the spell he has on her.

Sister also realizes the feelings that Mollie seems to have for John and advises Mollie not to hurt him. Mollie replies that she couldn't because he's in love with her. Mother Lovejoy cannot sleep and has joined the two women to reiterate what Sister has said: that Philip still loves Mollie and wants to marry her again. Mother Lovejoy enjoys a comfortable financial situation but feels is would be much more economical for her if Philip were to re-marry Mollie instead of her paying for more time in the sanatorium in the future.

Mother Lovejoy and Sister leave the room to return to bed and John comes back into the house and asks Mollie to marry him. He had been married once before to a woman who was not faithful to him and he wants to establish a true love and secure family at this point in his life. Mollie is touched by John's proposal and his poetic notions of love. She asks to sleep on the question and that satisfies him enough so that he leaves to go to his sleeping quarters in the barn.

Mollie dreamily considers the conversation she just had with John, unaware that Philip has entered the house and is watching her from the doorway. He has walked from the train station in order to arrive home sooner. Startled at Philip's sudden appearance and questions about the man who just left, Mollie tries to recover and commends Philip on his personal progress at the sanatorium.

Philip is bored with talk of therapy. He wants only to feel and to live again, and he wants Mollie to be a part of that with him. He has plans to write another novel and even though he can't say that he loves her, he admits that he needs her in order to go on. Taken in by Philip's spell over her, Mollie retreats to the bedroom with him.

Act 1 Analysis

Mollie is faced with a situation where she will soon have to choose between her ex-husband and a new man in her life. Ultimately, the choice will be between that of total surrender to feed the emotional needs of an angst-ridden writer or the support of a nurturing man with a secure foundation for Mollie and Paris. Amazingly, the answer is not as obvious to Mollie as it may be to others because she also has a poetic soul. No matter how volatile her life with Philip, it was a life full of passion, and part of her still longs for that.

It could easily be argued that Mollie's picking up a stranger by the side of the road and bringing him to her home is not the best judgment call. However, Mollie acts strictly on instinct and she had a feeling about John that surpassed any potential threat. It's ironic that the relationship she had with Philip was so volatile, given his upper class upbringing, while her potential relationship with John, a stranger on the road, promises to be filled with every security she ever lacked. Paris' dream of his father being a burglar seems to foreshadow Philip's arrival and the threat to take away Mollie's new found hope of security.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

The act opens to the sound of a typewriter, indicating that Philip has resumed his writing. Paris's friend Hattie, who has come home from school with him, is unnerved to hear that Philip has returned. He has always scared her, plus there are rumors in town of his crazy emotional state. Hattie's fears get the best of her and she runs from the house when Philip comes into the room to speak to Paris.

The conversation between father and son is stilted as they struggle to get reacquainted. Paris doesn't have fond memories of his father lately because Philip has been away. In addition, while Philip was gone, he either forgot Paris's birthday or sent inappropriate gifts. Philip gives Paris a hand-carved chess set to try to make up for some of the neglect. He also apologizes for not following through on his plans to make the farm work and leaving so much of the work to Paris.

Unfortunately, Philip's enthusiasm for writing has not been reinvigorated by being back at the farm either, but he returns to his typewriter to try again just as Mollie returns with groceries. Paris leaves to go outside when he tires of his mother's attentions.

Mother Lovejoy and Sister again begin their subtle attempts to sway Mollie to re-marry Philip, telling her that Mollie has her beautiful glow back now that Philip has returned. Mother Lovejoy goes a step further and proclaims that it must be all the sex in their relationship. According to Mother Lovejoy, Sister has a more refined and noble bearing, yet no man will have her. Mollie, on the other hand, has the earthiness of the lower class and she has men of all classes competing for her attention.

Mollie will not agree to dismiss John from her life and Mother Lovejoy retreats to her room. Paris comes back in from the barn carrying blueprints of a house that John intends to build for himself, Mollie, and Paris. Buoyed up by the special attention and extra details in the house designed with Paris in mind, the boy confides some of the insecurities and humiliations he suffers as a thirteen-year-old boy. John talks to Paris about growing into manhood and the indignity of someone hurting your feelings, that it is really the square root of sin and the same as murder because humiliation kills a person's pride.

Mollie announces dinnertime and Philip and John meet for the first time. Philip immediately begins to dissuade John from making any further advances toward his ex-wife. Philip and Mollie had been intimate on Philip's first night home and John is upset to hear the news of what he considers to be a betrayal. Leaning toward the security of John's stalwart nature, Mollie tells Philip that she intends to leave with John. Philip threatens that she had better not consider doing that.

Philip's frail psyche is now challenged again and he looks to his mother for some answers to his madness. She can only reply that he is not the only one who suffers in life. Granted, Philip is a genius and that type of person is always more emotionally sensitive. However, Philip blames his mother for his angst and lashes out at her. She then leaves the room to pack her bags to go.

Philip continues to seek some answers and questions his sister about why no one ever tried to stop his destructive behavior. The failure of his second book has made him impotent in his craft and he berates the profession with which he has a love-hate relationship. Eventually, he concludes that he is the only one to blame for his failures, both personal and professional.

Mollie has come back in to tell Philip that she plans to leave with John. Philip immediately launches a guilt mechanism, telling Mollie that he will die if she leaves him. His violence rears and he grabs Mollie, tearing her dress. Witnessing the scene, Sister tries to calm Philip and reassure him that if he comes back home he could write in the quiet there and he would be healthy again. However, Philip will be satisfied only with a life with Mollie, and his emotional outbursts leave her paralyzed in fear once again.

Act 2 Analysis

There is a fine line between Philip's genius and his madness and not even he can control the direction in which it will be exhibited. His artistic genius has certainly cursed him and has been the backdrop for the lives of his family as well. In the past, those who loved him tended to forgive him for his emotional tirades and violence because he does have a brilliant mind and redemptive charm. Now, though, his family is weary and is not investing as much effort into buoying up Philip's vacillating state of mind. Mother Lovejoy, Sister, and Philip himself are now placing the onus of saving Philip upon Mollie. John is the only one who can see that it is Mollie who needs to be saved and who is strong enough to do that. John is a beacon of hope for Mollie and Paris, and even his profession as an architect symbolizes the restructuring and rebuilding of a new life for the two of them once the emotional debris left by Philip has been cleared away.

Act 3, Scene 1

Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

Just before dawn on the morning after his last tirade, Philip wakes Paris to inform him that Mollie has packed her things during the night to leave them. Philip wants Paris to dress and come with him because he can't live without her. Philip and Paris will go somewhere none of them has ever been. Philip has done everything he knows to do to convince Mollie that he loves her and nothing has worked. His only course of action is to leave and take Paris with him.

Paris strongly hesitates, stating that his father must be hung over: he is white as death. Paris refuses to leave with his father because he has already made plans to go fishing today. In almost a dream-like state, Philip recalls his boyhood and all the joys of fishing and wildflowers and the love that was not a struggle but a joy and that he thought would last forever. Now he prefers the darkness.

By the time Paris is able to rouse Mollie, Philip has left in the car and no one can reach him.

Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

What begins as a poignant scene between father and son turns horrific when it becomes clear that Philip intends to kill himself and is willing to take Paris with him. Philip's realization that Mollie does intend to leave him pushes him over the edge of despair, where rational thought has no place. He seeks only comfort and his efforts to get Paris to accompany him on his death wish do not stem from evil as much as they do from fear of being alone in the last act. Paris' statement that his father looks white as death clearly foreshadows the upcoming event and triggers something in Paris to decline his father's offer of a trip.

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

A week has passed and Hattie comments on how the white coverings over the furnishings in Paris' house make it look as if they're in mourning. Now that his father is dead, the house is being closed up and Paris and his mother are moving back to Brooklyn Heights. When Hattie wonders why Mr. Lovejoy committed suicide, Paris defends his father, saying that his car had an accident; his father was too brave to have committed such a weak act as suicide.

Mother Lovejoy and Sister are preparing to return home while Mollie stays paralyzed with grief in her room. Mother Lovejoy has called for a limousine to take them to the train station because you can cry in a limousine without being questioned, as opposed to a taxi where the driver wants to talk too much. Before she leaves, Mother Lovejoy tells Paris that he will inherit her estate when she dies and offers both Mollie and Paris a home with her should they ever require it.

Paris tries to console his mother the best he can but she can't get past the fact that Philip died because of her loving John. She and Philip had such a connection that at the moment of his death, he must have known that she was thinking of John. This knowledge killed him and now it's killing her with grief.

John is the voice of reason for Mollie, telling her that she did everything possible to keep alive a man who no longer wanted to live. When Paris confirms that Philip had wanted to take him along that night, Mollie is horror-stricken at the thought that Philip would have taken their only child with him to their deaths.

John relates the story of trying to save a sailor who had jumped overboard one day and the man's struggle kept pulling John down until the point where he had to let him go or risk drowning himself.

Mollie begins to understand Philip's fate now and brightens a bit when John reminds Paris of the new house and their new life together. Paris thinks it sounds like the square root of wonderful but Mollie doesn't understand. John explains to her that she is the square root of wonderful because she is the source of so much love that has grown exponentially. All she understands is that all the people she has loved in her past have brought her to this place where she can now love John more completely.

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

The ghosts of the past are symbolized by the white covered furniture waiting in exile to be resurrected at another time. The memory of Philip will haunt those who loved him and they will remember his genius and angst in the context of their own relationship with him. Mother Lovejoy has transferred her affections now to Paris and shows love in her

own way by promising him an inheritance. Her distaste for shows of personal affection is reflected also in her choice of hiring a limousine, where she can cry at a distance from anyone's intervention.

The analogy of John's struggle to save the drowning sailor mirrors Mollie's endless efforts to save Philip and she must choose to save herself from a similar fate.

John's profession as an architect is a metaphor for the rebuilding of Mollie's and Paris' lives. John will provide the firm foundation and the structure for their stability from this point on. John's penchant for math is the basis for his calculation of all human conditions, whether sin or love. Mollie doesn't quite grasp his explanation of the square root of wonderful, but John does and that is what matters now.

Characters

Hattie Brown

Hattie Brown is Paris Lovejoy's school friend. The stage directions note that she is "buxom" and a year older than thirteen-year-old Paris. Hattie is a plainspoken girl who is somewhat confused by the goings on at the Lovejoy house, but she still likes Paris and tells him so. She is afraid of Phillip, though, mostly because she has heard tales of his attempted suicide and that he has recently been in a sanatorium. Hattie's mother has told her never to go to the Lovejoy house, not because of Phillip but because Hattie told her about the time she and Paris took off their clothes and "looked at each other."

Loreena Lovejoy

See Sister

Mollie Lovejoy

Mollie Lovejoy has been married twice to Phillip but is currently divorced from him. A number of critics, including Sara Nalley writing in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* believe that Mollie is modeled after the playwright's mother, a woman who spent much of her life taking care of McCullers when she was ill. Mollie is described in the list of characters as "a beautiful young woman," and is in her thirties. Her attractiveness is noted in the play itself when she tells John that Phillip only wanted her for her looks. John assures her, after admitting that he *does* love her for her body, that he also loves her "for your wisdom of heart, and for your soul."

Mollie, though divorced from Phillip and dreading his return to the household, struggles during much of the play to separate herself emotionally from her ex-husband. She believes that ever since she met him at the age of .fteen and married him two days later, he has cast a spell over her. "I was under his spell," she says, and acknowledges that even as an adult, she still believes in spells. Halfway through the play, still entranced by Phillip but leaning toward John, she asks Paris, "If your mother told you she is in love with two people, what would you think?" She loves deeply and sees things with a "luminous" light because of the intensity of her love.

Mollie is a woman who does things on the spur of the moment, including picking up a stranger, John Tucker, on the road and bringing him back to the house. Ten days later, she is preparing to leave with John. Only after Phillip's suicide and John's gentle encouragement does she appear free of the power her ex-husband held over her.

Mother Lovejoy

Mother Lovejoy is Phillip's bossy mother, originally from Society City, Georgia. She has always believed that her son was special and musically gifted. "You crawled before any other child, walked before any other child, talked before any other child," she remembers. Much of her focus is on encouraging Phillip and defending his behavior, but she has never understood why he wanted to be a writer. Mother Lovejoy's husband left the family when Phillip and his sister were children. She had to work as a seamstress to make ends meet, but more recently she has come into a sizeable amount of money left to her by her Uncle Willie.

Mother Lovejoy tells Mollie that she never liked the idea of her son being married to Mollie but that by their second marriage she was "resigned" to it. In fact, she wants Mollie and Phillip to marry for a third time, possibly to secure Phillip's economic future□although how that might work is unclear. "Economics and common sense," she tells Mollie, are the two reasons she wishes to see Mollie and Phillip together.

Mother Lovejoy acts in a .ighty and preoccupied manner about much of what goes on around the house. For example, she arranges for Sister and John to be alone together, even though John and Mollie are only hours away from running off together. However, there is the possibility that Mother Lovejoy is more devious than she immediately seems. Maybe she knows of the deepening relationship between John and Mollie and is simply trying to keep Mollie available for Phillip.

Paris Lovejoy

Paris Lovejoy is Mollie and Phillip's thirteenyear- old son. All during the play, he is forced to sleep on the living room couch because his aunt and grandmother are visiting and have taken his room. Twice he is woken up by one of his parents. The play opens with Mollie shaking him awake from a bad dream about his father as a burglar, and later in the play, Phillip wakes him up early in the morning.

Paris is more like a person the adult characters stumble upon than he is like a son or a grandson. His mother asks him for love advice, and Phillip comes to speak to Paris about ephemeral things early in the morning just minutes before he drives his car into the pond and dies. Paris does not have a strong relationship with his father and is especially sensitive to the fact that Phillip does not remember his age when sending him birthday gifts. In addition, he is resentful that all of the farm-related chores Phillip claims to look forward to doing around the house fall instead on his shoulders. He makes a deeper connection with John than with any of his relatives. Paris and John have a "man-to-man" talk in the play, and it is John, not Phillip, who expresses interest in Paris's new chess set.

Phillip Lovejoy

Phillip was a special child, according to his mother. When he was eighteen months old, he supposedly marched around the block waving an American .ag and singing the "Marseillaise" (the French national anthem). Phillip arrives at Mollie's house after a brief stay at a local sanatorium to recover from the poor reviews his most recent play has received and from his subsequent suicide attempt. Mother Lovejoy and others make comments in the play that refer to his having an alcohol problem.

Even after his rest at the sanatorium, Phillip acts agitated and angry about his life as a writer. He wounds everyone around him with his spiteful words and behaves as if the world centers on him and his struggle to become a more successful writer. Mollie has always been there for Phillip when he needed help. "Take care of me now. You have always loved me," he pleads to Mollie. When she tells him that she once loved him but no longer does, he tells her, "Without you there is nothing." Much of his dialogue has him dramatically begging Mollie to support him and take care of him. John sums up Mollie and Phillip's relationship after Phillip's death, telling Mollie, "You were responsible for keeping life in a man who no longer wanted to live."

In addition to the attempted and then the successful suicide, there is an atmosphere of violence surrounding the writer. Mollie admits that he has hit her in the past, and when they argue about her feelings toward John, Phillip grabs her and she responds by picking up a knife.

Sister

Sister, or Loreena Lovejoy, is Mother Lovejoy's daughter and Phillip's sister. She has never married, even though, as her mother notes, she had the "best prepared debut of any girl in Georgia" at the Peachtree Cotillion. According to Mother Lovejoy, Sister ruined her presentation to society by wearing glasses and vomiting at the debut ball. Sister works as a librarian and dreams of imaginary lovers she follows from one exotic country to another.

Sister has a gentle personality and often tries to soothe people's feelings after they have been hurt. Mother Lovejoy conspires to set her up with "that good-looking Mr. Tucker" by leaving the two of them alone with each other. Sister and John have a sympathetic conversation in which she asks him how to meet people.

John Tucker

John Tucker is a divorced architect and nearly the exact opposite of Phillip; he is very stable and not given to dramatic statements and actions. He is honest with his emotions, and it is very clear to everyone involved that he loves Mollie. John admits, though, that when Mollie picked him up on the road and brought him back to her house, he expected a night of sex instead of an offer of room and board. He explains to Mollie

that in such circumstances, "a man naturally anticipates." But after getting to know her, John appreciates Mollie's inner beauty as much as her outer beauty.

John's constancy is contrasted to Phillip's unreliability throughout the play. For example, when the two men meet for the .rst time, Mollie mentions that John was in the Navy. John adds information about the training he received, learning to "land on beachheads and slip into secret, dangerous places." Mollie mentions that Phillip was in the Army but had to leave after a "short time" because he had the mumps. Phillip claims that John is boring and that Mollie will lose interest in him very quickly.

In contrast to Phillip's obscure and self-centered statements, John shares painful past experiences with Mollie and with Paris, admitting that he has been hurt by love. In addition, he shares with Paris his theory of emotions, which involves calculating "the square root" of each one. John comforts Mollie after Phillip's death. He assures her that she is not responsible for her ex-husband's death, even though, as Mollie suggests, Phillip's suicide was in response to seeing her pack to leave with John.

Themes

Choice

Mollie is faced with a choice: return to the life she knows with Phillip, a life sure to include physical violence, alcoholism, and emotional trauma; or begin a new life with John, one that will include a nice house and a stable lifestyle. While such a choice for many people may be an easy one, for Mollie it is complicated by the fact that she still believes she loves Philip□in fact, she believes that he has, from the moment they met, cast some sort of spell over her. She loves Phillip, even though she does not want to love him. John mentions that when one is in love, ordinary things look "luminous." When Mollie uses that as a test to see if she loves John or Phillip, she concludes that she loves both. Her response is to spend the night with Phillip.

Whether Phillip loves Mollie□or anyone, for that matter□is not easily answered. In fact, when she asks him how he feels, he answers, "Love you? I feel surrounded by a zone of loneliness." Finally, he admits, "No, Mollie, it's not love," but he argues that he must still be with her and receive her love to survive and continue writing. Mollie's role, one she has played very well for many years and still struggles to play, is to take care of Phillip. It is this role she seeks to escape in the play.

Love associated with Phillip is immature and base. When Phillip shows up at her house from the sanatorium, Mollie is caught by his spell, but she steps back from his presence and says, "But now I have to be adult and practical." With Phillip, there has always been a strong physical attraction for Mollie. She slept with him when she was .fteen, the .rst day she knew him. Even after he abandoned her and Paris on numerous occasions, "when he comes in the door, when he looks into my eyes, and when he□I□I always know what he wants," she says.

Love with John is more solid and practical. John is a bit boring and much less romantic than Phillip. He acknowledges that he has never really written a poem, even when he was in love. When Phillip accuses Mollie of falling for a boring man and becoming boring herself, he suggests that she and John sleep together to make sure "he's as good as me in the nighttime, Butterduck." He also reminds Mollie that she "used to like it in the car, in ditches, in open .elds." But Phillip's ranting does not .uster John, for John is as solid and foursquare as the houses he builds. He has even translated his philosophy of life into mathematical calculations, stating that "the square root of sin" is humiliating someone and the square root of wonderful is Mollie.

Destruction and Death

Phillip is the perfect image of destruction, even though he is supposed to be someone who creates through his writing. His relationship with Mollie is destructive, for he thinks he can only feel secure after he has battered her with words, plates of spaghetti, or

his .sts. Phillip believes that he owns Mollie and tells John this within seconds of their first meeting.

Phillip's alcoholism is a hallmark of his selfdestructiveness. In a conversation with Phillip, Paris notes that his father never got much done on the apple farm except when he "worked the still . . . and made applejack." Mother Lovejoy reminisces about the days "before you discovered beer and spoiled your sweet tooth."

Death, darkness, and suicide color Phillip's character. The play opens with Paris waking up from a nightmare about a burglar in the house, and the burglar is his father. Phillip is in the sanatorium because he responded to his play's poor reviews by slashing his wrists. He continually tells Mollie that if she leaves with John, he will die. While his intentions are unclear, Phillip asks Paris to come with him when on his way to commit suicide. Phillip's destructiveness may extend to the desire to destroy his own child.

Disconnectedness

Everyone in the play has dif.culty overcoming loneliness and connecting with other human beings. Mollie and Phillip's history is .lled with clumsy attempts to connect with each other. When they met, her .rst attempt to reach out to him was to have sex with him; she then demanded that they get married immediately. Their relationship is based on Mollie's role as a helpmate, but she does not recognize Phillip as someone who cannot be helped. Phillip fails to connect with his son. Their conversations are disjointed and confusing, and Phillip tends to forget Paris's age and to send inappropriate birthday gifts.

Sister is an unmarried woman who does not understand quite how people get together, meet each other, and fall in love. Her loneliness has prompted her to create a series of imaginary lovers that she pretends to follow around the world to exotic locales. Mother Lovejoy does not listen to anyone and is oddly unaffected by her son's death. Paris does not understand any of the adults around him, and his relationships with most of his schoolmates seem to center on .ghts over the oddness of his name. The play ends on a note of success, though, when John and Mollie begin to make an honest connection with each other.

Style

Setting and Dialogue

The play is constructed of three acts, with the last act having two scenes. All of the action takes place in one room, the living room of a house on a small apple farm in New York. Because of this, the characters must go in and out of a scene, as opposed to a movie in which the camera typically moves from one place to another. Important activities and conversations happen away from the living room, and the play's readers and audience see only the results. For example, Phillip's suicide occurs offstage, at a nearby pond, but the result of his suicide is apparent in the third act's second scene. This restriction limits what is actually known about the suicide, as it limits what is known about many other things in the play.

It is also interesting to note that the .rst two acts are .lled with dialogue in which the characters reveal information about themselves: their fears, their histories, and their dreams. Only the third act is divided into two scenes, and it contains the most action. In act 3, Phillip's death is made known, Mollie's plans to move to New York are suggested, and she takes the .rst real steps away from her exhusband and into a more stable life with John.

Comedic Moments within Tragedy

Much has been made of McCullers's use of humor in a play that is essentially a tragedy, chronicling the dissolution of a family and a marriage, alcoholism, mental illness, and eventual suicide. Many critics have found the author's handling of the humor in the play clumsy. Certainly, it is interesting to see where she has placed comedic moments and how these moments may serve the play.

For example, in a tense discussion between Mother Lovejoy and Phillip, primarily focused on "what's the matter with" Phillip, she whines about his not having wanted to take a job she once found for him at the "Feed and Guano Store." When Mollie walks into the house carrying groceries and crying over the bind she .nds herself in with her exhusband, Paris asks why she is crying. Mollie denies her tears and, instead, begins to nag him about how eating pickles and cake together "give you that awful gas." The humor throughout the play is similar to these examples, in which a comedic moment is juxtaposed with an uncomfortable, even painful, moment. Possibly, McCullers inserted small moments of humor to blunt the pain of more dif.- cult ones.

Historical Context

Individualism versus Conformity

One of the primary complaints about American society in the 1950s was that people were experiencing severe pressure to conform to conventional values. The rugged individualist was a dying breed in the United States, according to some social theorists, replaced by men and women who wanted more to .t in than to stand out.

David Reisman, a University of Chicago sociologist, and Nathan Glazier published *The Lonely Crowd* in 1950, a book asserting that Americans were increasingly looking to social institutions and mass media to understand how to live their lives, versus looking inward at personal convictions. People wanted to belong to a group but ultimately felt lonely and could not honestly identify with the group. William Whyte's book, *The Organizational Man,* made a similar point. Americans during the post-World War II years worked primarily for the betterment of the corporation, he argued, diminishing creativity and innovation and the work ethic that had made America great. In *The Af.uent Society,* author John Kenneth Galbraith railed against an economy based on increased consumer spending. He was concerned that personal wealth could prevent improvements in schools, health care, and other social goods.

Sexual Values in the 1950s

In 1948, Alfred Kinsey, an Indiana University research scientist, published the results of his extensive survey of men and their sexual habits in an academic book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male.* To everyone's surprise, it became a huge bestseller. Its .ndings included numbers showing that premarital sex and homosexuality were much more common than previously thought. In 1953, Kinsey published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female.* Howls of protest sounded from many quarters, concerned that traditional sexual mores would fall away and Americans would become unhealthily preoccupied with sex.

The nation's comfort level with sexuality was, in fact, changing. Movies became more explicit; in 1956, the Motion Picture Association of American changed the code that regulated what could and could not be shown□a code that had been in effect since the 1920s. Movies were freer to address topics such as prostitution, abortion, and premarital sex. Novels also re.ected this change. *Peyton Place,* by Grace Metalious, supposedly detailed what went on behind the closed doors of a typical American small town. Rock and roll music celebrated sexuality through both the music and its performance. Elvis Presley's infamous gyrations being the epitome of the latter.

Critical Overview

McCullers's second play, *The Square Root of Wonderful*, was much anticipated before it opened on Broadway in 1957. Her stage adaptation of *The Member of the Wedding* had been a huge success, winning the 1951 New York Drama Critics Circle Award as well as other prestigious awards. *The Square Root of Wonderful*, however, did not fare as well. In fact, even with a well-known cast and a prominent director, the play closed in about six weeks.

Sara Nalley, in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* joins many other critics in calling the play "a dismal failure." She also notes that *The Member of the Wedding* can be described as "virtually plotless, consisting of a series of vignettes in which the three characters share their memories and fantasies." Much the same criticism was leveled at *The Square Root of Wonderful*, a play in which most of the dialogue is devoted less to moving the action along than to exposing how the characters came to be who they are.

Many critics have charged that the faults of *The Square Root of Wonderful* lie in its characters. Nalley writes that many of the play's failures can be blamed on its "lifeless characters." Margaret B. McDowell, writing in her book *Carson McCullers,* also criticizes the play's characters. Aside from Mollie, according to McDowell, they "reveal little emotion and psychic complexity."

Many critics suggest that the play's problems can be blamed on its clumsy effort to blend tragedy and comedy. Oliver Evans, in a collection of critical essays entitled *Carson McCullers,* argues that the play "has a good many faults," including "a rather low level" of humor and a reliance on too many "gag lines." Despite these problems, the play is not a total disaster, Evans concludes, writing, "It is a better play than the reviewers, by and large, gave her credit for . . . and very few of them bothered to look beneath its surface." According to Evans, the play stands out because its themes are different from those in McCullers's earlier work.

McDowell comes to a similar conclusion about the mix of tragedy and comedy. She notes that McCullers adapted the play from her short story entitled "Who Has Seen the Wind?" The short story focuses solely on how alcohol destroys a husband and his marriage and does not attempt to mix tragedy with comedy. Even more damaging than weak characterizations, McDowell writes, is that the play lacks "an adequate synthesis of the comic and the tragic elements that had been so insistent in her original conception of the work."

Evans also writes in his *The Ballad of Carson McCullers* that the play is McCullers's "weakest performance," primarily because "she is still too close to her materials." Phillip re.ects the life of Reeves McCullers; Mollie is based on McCullers's own mother, Marguerite Smith; and the author herself identi.es with both characters at various points in the play. The play's failure can be blamed on the fact that McCullers is writing not about a young girl with typical adolescent challenges (as in *The Member of the Wedding*) but about the pains of a writer□"too specialized an area of human interest

and experience" to capture the imagination of the typical theater audience, Evans claims.

Critics have noted a variety of themes in the play, including loneliness, love, and life and death. The theme of love is approached "rationalistically," according to McDowell. She asserts that John's character offers a love to Mollie that is logical, as opposed to the magical but destructive version of love Phillip has to give. Lynne Greeley's article in *Theatre History Studies* examines McCullers's life and how it is re.ected in her body of work. Greeley notes that the play is "dominated by a life and death theme" and is "generally seen by critics to be the expression of her grief about Reeves," the author's deceased husband.

Irving H. Buchen comments on an additional theme, void and nothingness. In his *Dalhousie Review* article, Buchen notes that John tells Mollie that his life had "no back or front or depth. No design or meaning" before he met her. Phillip, pleading with Mollie to stay with him, tells her that, "Without you, there is nothing. . . . And nothing resembles nothing. But nothing is not blank. It is con.gured hell." From this dialogue, Buchen asserts, it is obvious that "the great terror for McCullers is the void."

Ultimately, the play may be more a curiosity than a great piece of theater, according to Amy Verner. In the *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* Verner writes that the play "is notable not for its dramatic value but because of the insights it offers about McCullers's personal life."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Norvell is an independent educational writer who specializes in English and literature. In this essay, Norvell counters critics' assertions that Mollie is a re.ection of McCullers's own "bizarre nonsexuality."

McCullers was an eccentric, and nothing about her was more eccentric than her sexuality. Especially because McCullers was a woman and a southerner who lived in less liberal times than now, this eccentric sexuality has always loomed large in studies of McCullers's life and her work. ("Especially" because sexual experimentation has been, in general, more tolerated in men than in women and because southern culture, in general, has given women less latitude than they have had in other regions to explore various roles and lifestyles.) Readers and critics alike, of course, are always tempted to see literary characters as barely disguised incarnations of their creators. The temptation is particularly strong when everything that is known or suspected about an author's intimate life is offbeat and titillating.

It is not surprising, then, that those who comment on McCullers's work often analyze the sexual attitudes and behaviors of her characters and assume that these are an undistorted re.ection of the author's attitudes and behaviors. It is also not surprising that *The Square Root of Wonderful* would come in for more than its share of such analysis, since the play is all about love and sex. Hence, Lynne Greeley, in a recent article in *Theatre History Studies,* declares that in *The Square Root of Wonderful* and other works, McCullers "decapitates sex totally and retreats into a kind of bizarre nonsexualilty." Greeley's thesis is that McCullers, profoundly uncomfortable with her own sexuality, created characters, including Mollie in *The Square Root of Wonderful*, who are sexually dysfunctional and stories that portray sex as base or even pathological.

Well-known facts about McCullers provide the starting point for such analysis. The author dressed androgynously and chose to use her gender-neutral middle name in place of her .rst name, Lula. In addition, she had a troubled marriage; a cadre of gay male friends, including playwright Tennessee Williams; and exceptionally close (though not necessarily sexual) relationships with women. For Greeley and some other critics, these facts add up to a .ight from sexuality that, they believe, is clearly mirrored in *The Square Root of Wonderful* and other works.

The Square Root of Wonderful does, indeed, portray love as more elevated than sex. Mollie tells John that Phillip wanted her for her body but that John loves her for her mind, which clearly makes her happy. The play's symbolism links love to light and luminosity, while through characterization, the point is driven home that love and sex are two separate entities. John, who loves Mollie, does not have sex with her; Phillip, who does not love her, seduces her one last time. Mollie tells John that "a kiss that is warm can lead to sin and sorrow." She refuses to have sex with John, although readers can reasonably assume that she plans to have a sexual relationship with him in the future.

When Phillip reminds Mollie that "you used to like it in the car, in ditches, in open .elds," Mollie is embarrassed.

Mollie's words and actions certainly show a change in her attitudes about sex between her adolescence, when she .rst met Phillip, and the time of the play's action. This hardly is tantamount to a rejection of sexuality. In Mollie's life, impulsive indulgence of physical desire has cost her dearly. It has led her to marry, twice, a man who does not love her but who nevertheless expects her to ful.ll his needs and desires. Phillip is an unstable, abusive alcoholic who, according to Mollie, has used physical attraction to cast a spell over her and draw her into physically satisfying but emotionally destructive encounters. Mollie's withdrawal from Phillip, and her unwillingness to immediately enter into a sexual relationship with John, represent not a desperate, unhealthy .ight from sexuality but a shift from immature, impulsive sexuality to a more mature handling of this challenging area of life. The older, wiser Mollie is more strongly attracted to John, a stable and loving man, than she is to Phillip. Her words and actions imply that she expects to have a physical relationship with John in the future. The fact that she is not willing to initiate this when she has known John only brie.y, and when they are sharing the house with her ex-husband, his mother and sister, and Mollie's son, hardly seems unreasonable. Simply put, Mollie has learned through hard experience to take care of herself□to protect her heart, her feelings, and her well-being□by controlling her impulses and choosing her lovers wisely. She is committed to expressing her sexuality in a way that is not self-destructive.

Critics who cast the change in Mollie as a rejection of sexuality are seeing in black and white; they seem to conclude that any limit placed on sexual behavior represents an unhealthy denial of a natural instinct. Both life and literature prove them wrong. Prudence is one of the age-old cardinal virtues; it is rare in the young, and its mastery is considered an important part of the maturation process. Young people are often rash and moved by impulses. More often than not, impulsive behavior brings suffering, and suffering leads eventually to the development of prudence, which simply means the wisdom to stop and think of the possible consequences before acting. This is what Mollie is .nally learning to do.

Most readers can think of people they have known in their own lives who have succeeded in learning prudence and, unfortunately, of those who have failed to do so. Literature, too, offers many stories built around the lesson of prudence: the tragedies of characters who fail to acquire it (the title character in *Madame Bovary,* for example) and the comedies of those who, after youthful errors and the resulting suffering, succeed (Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*). This theme is far from unique to McCullers; in fact, it is universal.

Critics who interpret Mollie's transformation negatively are predisposed to do so because they interpret McCullers's life as a failure to come to grips with her own sexuality. But, they are wrong about Mollie, and they are quite possibly wrong about McCullers as well. Wearing pants and refusing to settle into conventional gender roles are not symptoms of a retreat into "bizarre nonsexuality." McCullers had a famous contemporary who gives the lie to such notions. Actress Katharine Hepburn, like

McCullers, has always been known for her androgynous dress and her complete lack of interest in traditional female roles. Hepburn, like McCullers, prefers to live alone. The great love affair of Hepburn's life, with alcoholic Spencer Tracy, was a relationship in which she loved much more than he and acted as caretaker and lover to a married man who gave her virtually nothing, emotionally or otherwise. In this way, Hepburn is reminiscent of Mollie. Further, since Tracy's death in 1967, Hepburn, who is still living as of this writing, has remained unattached. That in itself might seem to be grounds for a charge that Hepburn retreated from sexuality.

It is interesting, then, that Hepburn shares so much with McCullers and Mollie and yet, unlike them, has never been accused of being maladjusted, sexually or otherwise. In fact, Hepburn has been admired throughout her life for her determination to be her own person regardless of convention.

The question of why Hepburn is judged so favorably while McCullers and her characters are labeled pathological is beyond the scope of this essay. Perhaps eccentricity is more tolerated in a New England woman than in a southern one, or in an actress than in an author. Perhaps McCullers's physical illnesses colored opinions of her emotional health. In any case, the diagnosis of McCullers as having been a dysfunctional woman who wrote about dysfunctional women is far from certain, and it is a diagnosis that requires something in addition to the facts.

Source: Candyce Norvell, Critical Essay on *The Square Root of Wonderful,* in *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

Goldfarb has a Ph.D. in English and has published two books on the Victorian author William Makepeace Thackeray. In the following essay, Goldfarb explores the different types of love portrayed in McCullers's play.

In her discussion of *The Square Root of Wonderful* in her book on Carson McCullers, Margaret B. McDowell says that in this play McCullers "approaches love rationalistically," meaning that the lesson she is conveying is that love is a matter of logic rather than magic. This interpretation of McDowell's gets to the central issue of the play, and yet it is not quite accurate to say McCullers condemns magic and promotes rationality in love. It would be truer to say that she presents two sorts of magic, clearly indicating that one is preferable to the other. As to rationality, that is more present in the play as a refusal of love than as a way to get to it.

It is true that the love McCullers promotes is the love offered by John Tucker, an unpoetical, scienti.c man, an architect who never wrote a poem in his life, a man who talks of the "logic" of love and who even uses the mathematical term "square root" in discussing the subject. Still, the logic that John talks of bears closer examination. When Mollie, in the middle of act 2, asks John what he means by the logic of love, he tells her it means, in effect, that they were fated to meet. If they had not met on the road where they did, they would have met somewhere else: in the Statue of Liberty or at the Panama Canal.

This sounds more magical than logical, and indeed John goes on to say that the logic of love is "zany" and "crazy," which sounds a long way from rationalistic. Moreover, near the beginning of the play, when he describes his relationship with Mollie, he calls it a "crazy time" in which "something magical happened." He also says love can happen almost instantly, or at .rst sight. And near the end of act 1, he says that you cannot plan love; it arrives totally unexpectedly, and when it does, it puts a light in a person's eyes and makes objects, such as the chair and table in Mollie's house, shine like a watch dial. None of this sounds very scienti.c or rationalistic.

The task for Mollie in this play is not to learn to reject love's magic in favor of a more rational sort of love, but to learn to choose good magic over bad. John's love is based on good magic; it is the magical coming together of people who are good for each other, who support each other. When John and Mollie magically meet, it brings order to John's life; it gives him what he calls "color, pulse . . . [and] form." As for Mollie, what John offers her is protection, affection, and collaboration. He wants her to help him with the house he plans to build for them, and it will be a strong house, a protective house. When Mollie says she will be desolate if he goes to San Francisco, he gently puts his arms around her. When she repeats a cruel thing Mother Lovejoy said to her, he has an angry word for Mother Lovejoy.

This is all quite different from the sort of love Mollie had previously with her ex-husband, Phillip. Phillip was an abusive husband. He beat Mollie, made fun of the way she talked,

and one time even threw her naked out of the house. He also had affairs with other women. Yet, Mollie loved him and loved him in a magical way. She tells John that she was under Phillip's spell, drawn as if by an irresistible force, as if they were two magnets. Love with Phillip, which she says was like "witches and ghosts," made her powerless, swirled her head, and turned her legs to macaroni.

Remembering this sort of love with Phillip, Mollie at .rst will not even let John kiss her. Kissing, she tells him, leads to the dark and to sin, as if there was a sort of black magic associated with it, the bad sort of magic that weakens a person and binds them in an unhappy relationship like hers with Phillip. Thus, she tells John she cannot kiss him; instead she must "think and be practical." Similarly, when Phillip returns bringing .owers and asking for love, Mollie tries to push him away by saying she has to be "adult and practical." Later, when John is telling her lovingly about the dream house he is planning for the two of them, she interrupts to do something practical: she goes off to .x dinner. It is as if she is pushing away both good love and bad love, good magic and bad magic, by trying to be down to earth, practical, rational. What she has to learn is to distinguish between good and bad love, good and bad magic.

She does learn this. It is a gradual process. At the end of act 1, she is able to say that John is her moral support. At the end of act 2, she realizes that looking at John makes her strong. At the end of the play, Mollie is able to open herself to loving John, and as a result, loves everybody.

Actually, even when Mollie loved Phillip she loved everybody, she tells John. There is something positive about Mollie's love even when directed at someone who is no good for her. This can be seen at the end of act 1 when she tries out John's theory that love makes objects shine. She is able to make the table and chair shine for both Phillip and John, for the two men she loves.

Interestingly, when Phillip sees the same table and chair, they do not shine for him. Quite the contrary. They stand out as a sort of reproach to him, in his eyes; he thinks they will outlast him and is angry with them. There is no love in Phillip, one might conclude, at least not love of a positive sort. The table and chair can shine for John and Mollie, but not for him. Indeed, when Phillip returns, although he asks for Mollie's love, he tells her he cannot love her back. All he is really focused on is his writing. He thinks that if Mollie will love him again and protect him like a cocoon, then he will be able to write again. But cocoons are dead, Mollie says, a point Phillip seems indifferent to. He does not care if their relationship leaves her feeling dead. He does not care if it gives her nothing. He just wants it for what it can give him.

To be fair to Phillip, he too seems in the grip of an irresistible force. In reciting the poem by Rainer Maria Rilke about the violin and the bow, he seems to be saying that he would rather keep to himself, only something makes the two of them "twin." He is able to remind Mollie of the lovemaking they used to engage in: they had that physical sort of love together. He says she needs him just as he needs her, which may be true in a way. They seem to have developed what a later era would call a pattern of co-dependency; they are both dependent on each other in an unhealthy way.

Mutual desire and dependence is the nature of the love between Phillip and Mollie. It seems the sort of love it would be a good idea to escape. Mollie at .rst tries to escape through rationality and practicality, but this seems to have little effect. When Phillip returns, she is drawn to him again. Another sort of escape is the one practiced by Sister. Avoiding love in the real world, Sister indulges in all sorts of love fantasies about men who never existed. This seems a sad sort of solution, and quite unfulfilling.

The only effective escape from the unhealthy love relationship with Phillip seems to be another love relationship, the one with John. Only by connecting romantically to John can Mollie free herself from Phillip. Only by indulging in John's good magic can she free herself from Phillip's bad sort. The play is not recommending a rejection of love's magic in favor of rationality, nor is it questioning all heterosexual love as suggested by Brooke Horvath and Lisa Logan in their *Southern Quarterly* article "Nobody Knows Best: Carson McCullers's Plays as Social Criticism."

The play is condemning the hypnotic sort of magic that forces a person to do demeaning things against their will, as in the hypnotist's show that John remembers, in which old ladies were made to ride bicycles and a digni.ed gentleman was made to stand on his head. What the play is recommending is the sort of magic that brings together a man and a woman who support each other and make each other strong, who literally light up each other's life.

This sort of magic transforms Mollie when John comes to live with her. Mother Lovejoy notes it in act 2, saying that when Mollie last lived with Phillip she lost her looks, but now she has got her old .gure, her old color, and her old life back. Sister agrees, saying Mollie looks radiant. Mother Lovejoy attributes the transformation to sex, but what it really has to do with must be Mollie's new love for John, which has not yet become sexual. Sex is what Mollie had with Phillip, and it made her sad and did not save her looks. What Mollie has with John is something much deeper, a magical love that makes her strong.

Source: Sheldon Goldfarb, Critical Essay on *The Square Root of Wonderful,* in *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #3

In the following chapter excerpt, Carr examines how the politics and artistry of play-production challenged McCullers, leaving her humiliated after the negative critical reception of The Square Root of Wonderful.

Carson McCullers was the author, too, of a littleknown, second play, *The Square Root of Wonderful*, which opened on Broadway nearly eight years after the premiere of *The Member of the Wedding*. The reception of *this* play, however (by audiences and critics alike), was anything but enthusiastic.

McCullers conceived the piece originally as a play and worked on it sporadically from 1952 until 1956, along with her novel, *Clock Without Hands*. This four-year period was scarred by McCullers's continued ill health, the suicide of her husband, and perhaps the most devastating single event in her life, the death of her mother. Sick of heart yet salved by the will to keep writing, McCullers retained the essential features of the story line that eventually became *The Square Root of Wonderful*, but altered the characterization (and certain other features of the tale) suf.ciently to cast its disparate parts into a long short story entitled "Who Has Seen the Wind?" Yet she could not abandon altogether her original plan to make a play of the story and soon resurrected her several scripts.

In a preface to the published version of *The Square Root of Wonderful*, McCullers commented upon its autobiographical roots: "I recognized many of the compulsions that made me write this play. My husband wanted to be a writer and his failure in that was one of the disappointments that led to his death. When I started *The Square Root of Wonderful* my mother was very ill and after a few months she died. I wanted to re-create my mother□to remember her tranquil beauty and sense of joy in life. So, unconsciously, the life-death theme of *The Square Root of Wonderful* emerged."

The play went through more than a dozen drafts, six or eight by McCullers alone and a handful of assorted other scripts written in collaboration with her several producers and directors. The play's .rst director was Albert Marre, who, having successfully directed *Kismet, Saint Joan, The Chalk Garden,* and a number of other plays, was invited by producer Arnold Saint Suber to direct *The Square Root of Wonderful*. Marre, along with Saint Suber, worked intensively with McCullers through six different scripts for over a year, but when Saint Suber announced that the script was ready to be cast and produced, Marre was on the West Coast and unavailable. Jose Quintero, who was selected to replace Marre, worked with McCullers and Saint Suber until the play's disastrous opening at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton on October 10, 1957, then left the play (though his name stayed on the credits for the Broadway opening).

The afternoon that Quintero resigned, McCullers called the cast together and told them: "I have never directed a play, and I have never seen anyone direct a play, but I wrote this play, and I know what the characters are and what I want them to be. Now you can

go home if you want, but if you'd like to stay, I'll take over and do the best I can." No one left. As though a single voice, the cast sang out: "We want you. We'll stay!"

According to Anne Baxter, who played Mollie Lovejoy, the lead role, "Carson's play□the child□ was dying, and she knew it." Baxter believed that the chief problem was that McCullers "simply could not rewrite." Albert Marre was convinced, however, that McCullers "*could* rewrite, but not the kind of square, so-called theatrical craftsman writing that the others tried to require of her."

George Keathley, Quintero's eventual replacement, took the play from Princeton to Philadelphia for a nine-day run in an attempt to work out its problems, while the playwright herself and others assisted in major revisions. In a statement to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* just before the play's opening in Philadelphia, McCullers told a reporter that one of the main dif.culties for a writer was "to handle tragedy and comedy almost simultaneously," but that the two elements had to be present "with the proper emotional progression." McCullers wrote later (in her preface to the published version of *The Square Root of Wonderful*) of the emotional .exibility that a reader of novels has□with "time to re.ect before he is pushed on to the next action"□ in contrast to the *lack* of that kind of .exibility on the part of the theater-goer, who must respond immediately to the "absurd and painful truths of life" in a single line. "I have learned this in my work in the theater: the author must work alone until the intentions of his play are ful.lled□until the play is as .nished as the author can make it. Once a play is in rehearsal, a playwright must write under unaccustomed pressure, and alas, what he had in mind is often compromised. That is why of the .ve or six evolutions this play went through I prefer to publish the one which follows. It is the last one I wrote before the production was set in motion and is the most nearly the truth of what I want to say in *The Square Root of Wonderful*."

In the play, McCullers paints a dramatic portrait (as highly charged autobiographically as the one revealed in *The Member of the Wedding*) in which the protagonist is a woman named Mollie Lovejoy, whose alcoholic husband (Philip) is a failed writer of one successful novel. They have been married twice to each other and have been twice divorced. At the play's opening, Philip has just been released from a mental hospital. He still adores Mollie and goes to see her and their twelveyear- old son, Paris. But when he learns that Mollie has fallen in love with someone else (an architect named John Tucker), a man she hardly knows□ who is already ensconced in her home□Philip commits suicide. Tucker plans to build for Mollie and her son a new house (in effect, a new life) and gives evidence of becoming the reliable and nurturing father .gure to her son that Philip was not.

The Square Root of Wonderful was soundly drubbed upon its opening on Broadway at the National Theatre on October 30, 1957, and it closed after forty-.ve performances. Whereas .rst-night critics commended Baxter for her brilliant performance as Mollie Lovejoy, the consensus was that the play could not survive its "stilted dialogue," "wooden action," and "unconvincing characters" (especially the young Paris Lovejoy). McCullers conceded that the child changed little during the course of the play, but defended her conceptualization of Paris in that it was primarily through him that the

"proper emotional progression" of the other characters could be seen. The play demonstrated that it was the adults in the tale who had to gain emotional maturity, that, in effect, it was they□not Paris□who were the children.

Reviewers agreed that comparisons of McCullers's new play with *The Member of the Wedding* were inevitable, and it seemed to those who knew McCullers personally (and of her increasingly debilitating illnesses) that writing for the theater was not her force. The production of *The Square Root of Wonderful* taught the playwright what she perceived to be a bitter lesson, and she vowed never again to attempt anything for the theater. In her preface to the published version of *The Square Root of Wonderful*, McCullers said that she found the "picayune last-minute changes" irritating, although she admitted that they were important since every weakness in the script becomes "magni.ed on the stage."

John Leggett, who edited the hardcopy edition for Houghton Mif.in, recalled that McCullers was deeply resentful of the rewrites that had been made without her permission in the acting version of *The Square Root of Wonderful:* "In working with her, I made several suggestions for minor changes, and she nodded, saying 'Yes, that's .ne, Jack. Put it in like that.' When I protested that these were *my* words, that I didn't presume to write the play for her, she said ruefully, 'Why not? Everybody else has?'"

More than a curtain dropped when the play closed on December 7, 1957. McCullers had failed to work out in it the ambivalent love/hatred emotions kindled repeatedly, both in actuality and memory, by her husband and mother. Unlike *The Member of the Wedding*, which had given McCullers emotional release as well as extraordinary acclaim and .nancial security, *The Square Root of Wonderful* had become its opposite for the dejected playwright□"the square root of humiliation." Coping with a collaborator on *The Member of the Wedding* before producing a script that was, .nally, wholly hers, and that became a prizewinning play with a long run was one thing; but to have *The Square Root of Wonderful* carved up beyond recognition by the play's producers and directors was quite another, a dejection from which McCullers never quite recovered. Tennessee Williams once told her in speaking of his own career as a playwright: "It takes a tough old bird to work in the theater." "Carson *was* tough," said Williams, "like this marble-topped table," he added, pounding it for emphasis, but he knew, too, that she had no intention of submitting herself wittingly ever again to the hazards and "bolts of chance" by writing for the theater.

Source: Virginia Spencer Carr, "*The Square Root of Wonderful,*" in *Understanding Carson McCullers,* University of South Carolina Press, 1990, pp. 99-105.

Topics for Further Study

All of the play's action and dialogue occur within the con.nes of the living room, but the characters refer to numerous conversations and events that take place offstage. Why do you think McCullers chose to limit the play's setting to the living room? Do you think this is effective, or would the play be stronger if some events that are only referred to were actually dramatized?

Many critics have complained about McCullers's handling of humor in the play. List some examples of humor (or attempts at humor) in the play and discuss their effectiveness and impact.

Much of the play is autobiographical. McCullers notes in the introduction to the 1958 published version that she gave Mollie many of the features her own mother possessed and that Phillip reflects many of the personality traits of her husband, Reeves. Critics have also suggested that McCullers's own experiences and struggles are re.ected in the play's characters. Learn more about the author's life and then make a case that the play is or is not autobiographical.

In the 1950s, many issues that appear in the play, such as sex, alcoholism, suicide, and mental illness, were viewed differently than they are today. Pick one of these topics and research how people viewed it in the 1950s. Compare this with how the issue is viewed with today. Do you think today's attitudes are an improvement or not?

Write an epilogue for the play telling what you think the future will bring for Mollie, John, and Paris. Will they be happy? What challenges might each of them face?

Compare and Contrast

1950s: Most middle-class families who buy new homes buy them in the suburbs. Eighty-.ve percent of the thirteen million homes built in the 1950s are in suburbs.

Today: The 2000 United States Census shows a slight shift in American population patterns. While there has been a 14 percent increase in suburban population over the last decade, growth was not consistent across all suburbs; 37 percent of suburbs either lost residents or did not change in population. In fact, many cities seem to be on the rebound, population-wise; nearly three-quarters of American cities grew during the 1990s.

1950s: *Peyton Place* (1956) is not only a huge best-seller but also a social phenomenon. Grace Metalious's novel exposes the secrets and scandals of a .ctional small town in New England. For the time, the novel's relatively candid presentation of teenage and adult sex is groundbreaking. The .lm adaptation of the novel also causes a stir at the box office.

Today: The inclusion of sexual issues or material in books and .lms is much more common than it was in the 1950s. Entertainment featuring extramarital sex and homosexuality are becoming more common.

1950s: The number of cars on the road grows from 40 million in 1950 to 60 million in 1960.

Today: The number of registered cars in the United States surpasses 132.4 million, more than double the number on the road in 1960.

1950s: The United States birth rate peaks in 1957, when a baby is born every seven seconds, for a total of about 4.3 million babies.

Today: Four million babies are born in the United States in 2000, an increase of 3 percent from the previous year.

1950s: More and more women are entering the job market. By 1960, almost two out of .ve women with school-age children hold jobs.

Today: Forty-six percent of the workforce in the United States is female; this .gure is expected to increase to 48 percent by 2008. Women's participation in the American labor force has steadily increased since the 1950s, with a short reversal period in the early 1990s.

What Do I Read Next?

Illuminations and Night Glare (1999) is McCullers's un.nished autobiography. The book features letters between the author and her husband, the outline for *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,* stories of her relationships with such famous people as Richard Wright, Gypsy Rose Lee, and Tennessee Williams, and memories of the psychiatrist she consulted after the failure of *The Square Root of Wonderful.*

McCullers's second novel *Re.ections in a Golden Eye* (1941) is set at a southern military base in the 1930s and shocked audiences with its depiction of a bisexual army captain and his .irtatious wife. Just before McCullers's death, it was adapted to the screen starring Elizabeth Taylor and Marlon Brando.

Susie Mee's *Downhome: An Anthology of Southern Women Writers* (1995) features twenty-one stories written by a variety of authors ranging from Zora Neale Hurston to Alice Walker, but it does not include McCullers. The stories were chosen based on the theme of memories about home in the South.

McCullers has often been compared to Flannery O'Connor for her depictions of odd-ball characters in the American South. O'Connor's short stories have been collected in *The Complete Stories* (1971). The stories blend tragedy and comedy while revealing the darker side of human nature.

One of McCullers's closest friends was playwright Tennessee Williams. His play *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), an intense tale of familial relations, won the Pulitzer Prize for drama for that year.

Further Study

Bloom, Harold, ed., *Carson McCullers,* Modern Critical Views Series, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986.

Bloom, respected Yale University professor and literary critic, provides the introduction to this collection of twelve academic articles dealing with McCullers's work. Also included in the volume is a chronology of the writer's life and an extensive bibliography.

Carr, Virginia Spencer, *The Lonely Hunter,* Doubleday, 1975.

Carr has written an especially detailed biography of McCullers, beginning with her childhood days in Georgia to her death at age .fty in New York. The book also contains numerous photographs, a preface by Tennessee Williams, and a chronology of McCullers's life.

Entzminger, Betina, *The Belle Gone Bad: White Southern Women Writers and the Dark Seductress,* Louisiana State University Press, 2002.

Entzminger looks at images of southern womanhood in the .ction of southern white writers from before the Civil War through the present. She argues that interpreting these female characters through a lens of domesticity and conservatism is too super.cial and that a certain darkness and power exists beneath their surface.

Savigneau, Josyane, *Carson McCullers: A Life,* Houghton Mif.in, 2001.

The author uses a variety of sources, including unpublished manuscripts and letters as well as critical works previously available only in French, to uncover many of the private aspects of McCullers's life.

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Project Editor
David Galens

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Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

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Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) 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, DfS 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 DfS 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 DfS 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 DfS 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 DfS 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

DfS 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 Drama 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 DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS 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.

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

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama 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 DfS, 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 Drama 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 DfS, 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 Drama 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:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535