

Review Article

## Isolation and Loneliness as the Human Condition in Modern Times: A Study of Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding*

Dr.T.Deivasigamani

Associate Professor of English, Department of English, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu, India

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**Abstract:** Carson McCullers was an American novelist, short story writer, dramatist, essayist, and poet. Her writings often centered on the lives of ordinary people who struggle both physically and mentally. Her writings generally portray the inner longings; she wants to protect her characters from loneliness, confusion, and frustration. Through her characters, McCullers depicts her early days struggle through her characters. As a young girl, McCullers faced many problems; she has three times suffered from heart attacks. Her characters are longing to wander for true love from any one of their surroundings. They are unable to get it and come to a state of loneliness. McCullers's writings also attempt to reconnect the emotional and physical conflicts of common people. She has explored her character's confusion and loneliness in her novel. Her characters attempt to make various conscious efforts to overcome the problem of the people and to get betterment in their lives. This paper mainly focuses on how McCullers's novel *The Member of the Wedding* highlights the theme of isolation and loneliness and how her characters are struggling in a small town is about primitive religion, adolescent hope, the silence of deaf-mutes, and all of these give the violent colours of the life. It is also focused on spiritual isolation and loneliness as the human condition in modern times, and her identification and compassion for the underdogs and outcasts of society.

**Keywords:** physically, mentally, loneliness, isolation, frustration, primitive, compassion.

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## INTRODUCTION:

Carson McCullers was born on Feb 19, 1917, in Columbus, Georgia, and was named as Lula Carson Smith. Her Father was Lamar Smith, a watchmaker, and Jeweller and her mother, Vera Marguerite Waters. As a little girl, she aspired to be a musician, and her parents arranged for her to receive Piano classes from the age of ten. She attended Columbus High School. In September 1934, at the age of 17, she left home on a steamship bound for New York, planning to study piano at the Juilliard School of Music Studies and Health. She divided her time between Columbus and New York from 1935 to 1937, as she travelled to New York City where she returned home and feel ill with rheumatic fever. The illness left her unable to pursue a career as a professional musician, and she was forced to consider other professions. Although McCullers's style is often described as "Southern Gothic," she produced her famous works after leaving the South. Her eccentric characters suffer from isolation and loneliness that is interpreted with deep empathy. McCullers suffered throughout her life from several illnesses from alcoholism. Her famous novel, *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), won high critical acclaim. She adapted the novel for the stage where it became a Broadway hit in 1950, running fourteen and a half

months and winning the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Donaldson Award.

McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* opened at the Empire Theatre in New York to the extravagant praise of the audience and newspaper critics. Though she touches upon these last two tragedies, McCullers does not build them up. Instead, she throws them away, treating them with a wasteful casualness. Character and mood are her substitutes for plot and admirable and absorbing substitutes they prove to be when she is writing at her best. In this novel, the intentional use of the adolescent is a symbol for that sense of inadequacy and helplessness. The novel's title, *The Member of the Wedding*, refers to Frankie Addams, a sensitive and fearful child whose thirteenth summer is the subject of the novel. Frankie's fears are the fears of all human beings, and the last name Addams indicates her archetypal function in her initiation into worldly knowledge. The self-chosen nickname of Frankie (like the name Mick Kelly) is a feeble effort on the part of the adolescent to assert his individuality in a patriarchal culture, as is the crew cut, which makes her a Neuter being.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Alice Hamilton, in her article "Loneliness and Alienation: The Life and Work of Carson McCullers," highlights that the alienation is the cry of our age, and the jargon associated with the word covers much lack of thought. McCullers is quite specific in her use of loneliness. She is writing about the inner isolation that man feels when he is frustrated by expressing himself as fully as possible. Then, loneliness is tied to the self that demands room to realize its dreams and to find an object in which these dreams may be embodied. It is an eminently subjective state, one demanding freedom for each self to see itself in the world. There is no objective freedom allowed for another person to be himself in his own right. Hence, the dreamer of dreams seeks an object to love, which is the product of his own dream-image. Therefore, the beloved, at the same moment, hate being created in the image of the lover and resists the love. The lover finds himself turned back into his inner room of dreams. It develops emotionally, such lovers grow "warts on themselves the size of gobers, and dream themselves into a dangerous inward world.

Edward Richard Barkowsky, in his Dissertation entitled "The Theme of Spiritual Isolation in the Major Works of Carson McCullers Prior to 1962," discusses that Carson McCullers has engaged in particularly intensive scrutiny of the basic condition of spiritual isolation. Her preoccupation with loneliness has become almost the trademark of her fiction. McCullers has spiritually isolated and writes about the struggle to change their conditions. When Frankie Addams fails to make, herself understood, as she fails in *The Member of the Wedding* to make anyone know that she so desperately needs to belong to her brother's wedding party. Here, both brother and sister are lacking acceptance, and they must withdraw into a state of spiritual isolation. McCullers' characters are sometimes able to achieve harmony with others. Her character's failure to achieve satisfaction, love, understanding, and acceptance frequently brings loneliness to individuals whose misdirected and futile efforts must be in vain. In this novel, many characters achieve at least a marginal hope that may imply the possibility of overcoming a state of spiritual isolation and finally of making themselves an integral part of society.

### The theme of Isolation and Loneliness:

In *The Member of the Wedding*, Frankie Adams, twelve-year-old girl who is known to an insensitive world she lives with her widowed father and their old Negro Cook, Bernice Sadie Brown, has one bright-blue glass eye, in a small town in Georgia. Frankie has a great deal on her mind, but the real root of her unhappiness is her terrible sense of being alone, separated from everybody in the world, both children and adults. Frankie, McCullers's central character, dreams of going off with her brother and his bride on their honeymoon. When she learns that they do not want her, she runs away from home and comes near to

committing suicide with her father's pistol. The little boy who lives next door is stricken with meningitis and dies. The main characters of this novel, as noted, are three Frankie Addams, John Henry West, and Bernice Sadie Brown. Frankie, in love with Wedding, imagined that she was to go on the honeymoon with her brother and his bride, and Bernice is a mother figure, providing well-prepared food and kind-hearted and virtue. As her husband tortures her, she has been married four times, but she has not fulfilled in her married life, which exposes the injustices of males on the women society is revealed through her character in this novel. Bernice felt alone even though she is married. If Frankie's brother left her, then Frankie will be completely filled in loneliness and isolation. The characters involved in this novel, clash in the loneliness, Injustice, Pain, and frustration. The meaning of loneliness as revealed in the Free Encyclopedia:

Loneliness is a complex and usually unpleasant emotional response to isolation or lack of companionship. Loneliness typically includes anxious feelings about a lack of connection or communication with other beings, both in the present and extending into the future. As such, loneliness can be felt even when surrounded by other people. The causes of loneliness are varied and include social, mental, emotional or even physical factors. It is widely prevalent throughout society among people in marriages, relationships, families, veterans, and successful careers. It has been a long explored theme in the literature of human beings since classical antiquity (Wikipedia).

Carson McCullers said about loneliness, "The trouble with me is that for a long time I have just been a person. All people belong to a *We* except me. Not to belong to a *We* make you too lonesome" (*The Member of the Wedding* 24). In *The Member of the Wedding*, Frankie Addams is an adolescent who is on the cusp of sexual and emotional awakening. Her angst comes in the form of extreme isolation and loneliness because she feels disconnected from the world around her. She is not a member of any group. Hence, she becomes obsessed with the fact that she is to be a member of the Wedding of her brother Jarvis. She places all her hopes and dreams on this event. She hopes not only to make a connection with another group of human beings but also to shed herself of her childhood persona. The novel sets in a small Southern town, it concerns an awkward, lonely adolescent girl, Frankie Adams. She tries to become a member of her brother's wedding party to overcome her isolation, but her father prevents her from riding in the newlyweds' Car. More realistically, *The Member of the Wedding* is a sympathetic portrayal of adolescent misery. It is the story of the young adolescence girl Frankie, who is in the chaos of her age where she is unable to take the right decision. Her only companion is her brother. When she came to know that her brother is going to get married, a bored twelve-year-old madly jealous of her brother's impending marriage

continues to capture new generations of readers with its take on adolescent yearning for escape and belonging. She thought that the member of the Wedding, the writer has portrayed in her style of narration.

The novel extends parable on human failure in life. McCullers's characters become the embodiment of all men or women, who suffer in isolation and loneliness. The physical and mental defects of her characters are symbolic of the spiritual defects and loneliness. Her characters inhabit an unorthodox and ambiguous private world, McCullers implies, it as an "abnormal" in some manner. McCullers makes her characters grotesque to emphasize the differences in temperament, mentality, and physique that lead to loneliness. Besides, her characters entertain dreams and hallucinatory to escape what they feel is the absurdity of reality. She never says that man's existence is absurd; it seems only absurd because she cannot fathom its meaning. She attempts to learn her identity and discover the meaning of life either through the love of another person or through the pursuit of an ideal. But none of her characters comes to know himself or herself, nor does he or she uncover any absolute truths.

In this novel, Biff Brannon is another important character who keeps on working at the New York Café, pondering the patrons as he always has. At the Café late that night, Biff thinks that Singer's death is a riddle that could remain a mystery for a long time. Biff experienced a brief epiphany about the meaning of life, and Frankie Addams is living the dog days of the summer of her life. She is stuck in the discomfort that exists between childhood and adulthood. She does not fit anywhere, and when she realizes this, she begins to long for something unnameable. When her brother comes home with his fiancée to announce their Wedding the next Sunday, Frankie finds an answer to her dilemma. A wedding is the most startling symbol of belonging of two people joining their lives together to make one life, Frankie falls in love with the Wedding and wants to be a member of it as if it were a club in which she can fit. McCullers locates all of Frankie's tortured imagination and longing. In this section of the novel, McCullers implies the reader in the world of adolescence. Her character Frankie is curious but gets only hints at answers and a world in which Frankie longs to do. A world in which no one takes Frankie seriously for any length of time because she alienates them as quickly as she attracts them.

Frankie wants to light out, but she immediately considers the problems of where she will go, how she will get there, and where she will stay once she's there. Instead of getting to light out, Frankie has to stay and live with the angst of adolescent powerlessness. The novel takes place during the Second World War; McCullers maintains her child's point of view as she includes this historical detail. Frankie thinks of the War in a handful of images; she is gathered from the radio.

At one point, Berenice mentions hearing on the radio that the French had chased the Germans from Paris. Frankie only responds by repeating the word "Paris" and then continuing with her monologue about changing her name to Jasmine; the name would match the first two letters of her brother and his fiancée's names. The War is something that Frankie experiences cosmically. It is an epic dislocation of her world. A world that once was neatly mapped on her school's globe in different colors is now loose and wild and changeable. One of the events of Frankie's summer that throws her into her August funk is that in April, she commits "a queer sin" with Barney Mackean, which makes her hate him and want to kill him. McCullers represents this first sexual encounter as Frankie has experienced it. She has named it a huge and unfathomable sin, and she has repressed it as much as possible. She has felt anger and rage about it, but these emotions by August have subsided, and she has begun to forget about it. The reader should note that McCullers was breaking new ground in representing adolescent sexuality in non-condemnatory ways. The reader gets the impression that Frankie is rather too hard on herself for simple sexual exploration. It is a shame she does not have anyone to discuss it.

Frances "Frankie," "F.Jasmine," Addams is a twelve-year-old girl who is going through the rites of passage, which can take her from girlhood to womanhood. The in-between time of adolescence, Frankie is neither a child nor a woman at this point in her life and experiences the discomfort and anxiety of not belonging. Frankie encounters adult sexuality when she has her date with the red-haired soldier. Frankie grows up as a result of her humiliating experience at the Wedding, and her later attempt is to run away. She becomes thirteen and gets a new friend.

The major theme of the novel is about the loneliness of people and their search for love and acceptance to correct the condition. The visions of musical greatness in the life of McCullers collapsed as Frankie's dreams of fame also fall a mirage. Frankie, in love with the Wedding, imagined that she was to go on the honeymoon with her brother and his bride, and keep moving, the three of us. The main characters form a curious love group at the evanescent moment of life when Frankie is experiencing her twelfth summer. Frankie belonged to no club and was a member of nothing in the world. She had become an unjoined person who hung around doorways, and she was afraid. Bernice is very black and broad-shouldered and short and remains eternally thirty-five years old. She has been married four times, and her left eye has been scratched out by one of her husbands. Bernice is a mother figure, providing well-cooked food and representing virtue and kind-heartedness. Still, diverging enough from the norm-as also do Frankie and John Henry to capture attention. Her blue glass eye symbolizes the heaven of race relations, of which she

dreams a terrible commentary on the color line and the arbitrary divisions which shut people off from one another. Frankie has a new friend, Sunaler. John Henry has died of Meningitis after screaming with pain for three days. Bernice is spending the last afternoon with Frankie. The Addams family is to move to a new home. Frankie's new friend, who is accompanying them to the new home, rings the doorbell to announce her arrival.

This novel consists of three basic parts and a short conclusion. The three-part structure suggests adolescent Frankie's movement toward adulthood by stages. It is designed to call special attention to the rhythmical quality of the action and to parallel the stages of "Frankie's adolescent initiation." The musical under and overtones continue throughout the novel as Frankie matures, in alternating waves of pain and joyful anticipation. Through the restless, bored tomboy stage the F. Jasmine Addams stage in which she has become, in imagination, *The Member of the Wedding* has assumed the role of erotic femme fatale, and the final stage in which she has become Frances, the young lady. Thus, the structure in every sense becomes a function of them; in fulfillment of McCullers's own belief, the material dictates the form in which it is to be cast.

In dealing with the themes of loneliness McCullers is less somber, *The Member of the Wedding* represented a new apogee of achievement in McCullers's literary career with impressive sensitivity. She explored in this novel the strange, frightening period of life when childhood is waning, and adulthood looms as an inevitable next stage of growth when illusion can become a delusion when yearnings for fuller identity can lead to almost involuntary experimentation. Significantly, the author has researched her adolescent reactions and sensibilities. The novel has the ring of complete personal truth. McCullers has produced some autobiographical recreation. McCullers's immense capacity for empathy bordering as God-like love underlay her success in writing. The novel can be seen as the farewell to that youthful period when the grass was greener, the pitch of voices truer, the need for love, and identity almost unbearably acute. Even McCullers's personal life seemed momentary to stabilize; her recently widowed mother bought a house in Nyack New York, into which Carson was later to move; and she began once again to correspond with Reeves, who was wounded fighting in Europe. Shortly after his return to the United States in February 1945, they were married for a second time. The novel centers on the emotional turmoil and confusion of an adolescent girl in the twilight period when the anarchy of tomboy childhood has ceased, but a somewhat more decorous life of girlhood has not yet begun. Frankie Addams, caught in this period, is not a member of anything; and so she decides that, of her brother's wedding, she will become a "Member" of the bridal party and travel away with them.

The first description of Frankie that is given of her through a "watery kitchen mirror" (MW121). The description of the mirror suggests that the description of Frankie is distorted. When Frankie looks in the mirror, she is told to do by Bernice, the housekeeper, who claims that she can see Jealousy in Frankie's Eye color. However, Frankie looks in the mirror. She only sees that "her eyes were gray as they always were" (MW 122). There are several important details about Frankie's description. First, she is wearing track shorts. The track shorts suggest that Frankie is on active youth, and her activities require her to wear something that allows her to move around freely. Finally, Frankie's hair has been cut like a boy's. Her hair cut will cause her much grief as she attempts to perform a more feminine gender role. Frankie's conflict between what she feels; she should become the identity that she has taken on through her physical appearance causes her to seek resolution. Her resolution comes as a result of unity between "Maleness" and "femaleness" or, in other words maintaining the identity of a tomboy Frankie's brother comes home with his fiancé and announces that there will be a wedding. Bernice initially identifies Frankie's obsession with the Wedding as Jealousy, but later she claims that Frankie. The Wedding serves as a symbol for a legal joining of male and female. Frankie's desires is not a legal union of man and woman but reconciliation with both her male and female impulses and tendencies.

Frankie is sorting through her dissatisfaction with her gender and age. She cannot dream of becoming a marine because she is female, and she cannot donate her blood to assist those who are fighting for her country because she is too young. In other words, even when Frankie is trying to live through someone else by donating her blood, she is still unable to do so successfully because of her age. She is being restricted by circumstances that are beyond her control. She occupies two liminal spaces by being a tomboy on the cusp of puberty, and she is still trapped and unable to move forward with her ambitions. To take more control of her life, and attempt to move out of the trapped space that she is in, Frankie chooses to tag along with her brother and sister-in-law. She is allowing herself the freedom of choice by deciding her destiny. McCullers takes care to portray Frankie's view of gender fluidity. Her purpose in doing so is to show that, as a tomboy, Frankie engages with two different gender identities, but she does not unify them or successfully find a way to present both gender identities at one time. F. Jasmine observes one way in which Frankie's world differs greatly from that of Bernice, gender expression. F. Jasmine notes that "Bernice would argue with (Frankie) about this, insisting that the law of human sex was exactly right just as it was and could in no way be improved" (MW151).

In Addition to Bernice and story about Lily Mae Jenkins, are significant to gender themes within



the novel. Because they not only offer different models of gender, but they confirm that gender models are, in fact, a theme of the novel. McCullers uses gender models in these scenes, but rather than viewing them as multiple solutions of gender presentation; Lily Mae Jenkins simply views it as McCullers continuing with her theme of abnormality and isolation. Bernice's critique of the dress suggests several things about F. Jasmine states that Frankie is a middle-class girl who last buys her dress from the clearance room. Her short hair and crusty Elbows are physical indications of F. Jasmine is articulating her misunderstanding of marriage. She understands it as a union of two people who are becoming one another. She is beginning to see that the unity of marriage is not one that allows both parties to adopt the physical characteristics of the other. Instead, it has to do with being in a partnership where each person contributes his or her unique identity to complement the other person in the relationship. McCullers chooses when describing Frankie's desired involvement in the Wedding is of utmost importance. *The Member of the Wedding* could constitute any position, from the bride and groom to the bridal party, and so on. The Transformation of Frankie/F. Jasmine/Frances, throughout the novel, reveals the complexity of gender Frankie is the adolescent tomboy who is afraid of men and male authority. F. Jasmine is Frankie's attempt at being of a higher class; it is her attempt at being a southern belle. F. Jasmine engages with Bernice in a conversation about love. The narrator observes, "the old Frankie had laughed at love, maintained it was fake and did not believe in it...(MW 338 ).

Frankie has been growing too tall for a girl, and her bodily excess makes her afraid of becoming a freak like those she sees at the fair. Pressured by the role that a female is expected to play in her culture, she feels ambivalence toward a restrictive role, one which curtails her freedom and restraints her individuality. She wants to be either neither a sexual other nor a traditional female. In the summer of her twelfth year, she feels "like an unjoined person" excluded from having any real connection with the larger world. Frankie's unwillingness to enter the restrictive world of southern womanhood manifested through the dream of androgyny, frequent in female protagonists. They are no longer allowed a tomboy's freedom to transgress gender boundaries and to display "male" attitudes. When Frankie plays at being creators with her black nanny Bernice and her cousin John Henry. She projects a world where people could instantly change back and forth from boys to girls, whichever would acknowledge and allow the vacillation between one sex and the other that McCullers believes takes place, to different degrees, in every human being. But Bernice insists that "the low of human sex was exactly right just as it was and could in no way be improved" (MW116).

Frankie has a great deal on her mind, but the red root for her unhappiness is her terrible sense of being alone. Separate from everybody else in the world, both children and adults. Primarily this feeling is a symptom of her age, but as it happens she really has not much of a social life, since the slightly older girls in the neighborhood have banned her from their club, and her only companions are Bernice and a Cousin some years her junior, who is moderately silly even as little boy go. At this point, when Frankie's need to attach herself to something or somebody is almost unbearable, her brother drops in with his fiancé. They seem to her the two most beautiful people who ever live, and she decides to join them on their honeymoon, which she vaguely pictures as a triumphal tour around the world, going a forever. In the end, she left behind, and though the bridal pair to do their best to spare her feelings, for a time, she is desolate, even to the point of attempting suicide. Sad as it is, this disillusionment has the effect of putting an end to Frankie's childhood. In the last scene, we find her reasonably adjusted to her surroundings being, in fact, about to go for a ride a moving van with a young football player and his girl.

## CONCLUSION:

*The Member of the Wedding*, is a very intentional use of the adolescent as a symbol for that sense of inadequacy and helplessness. The cast of characters is very small. Frankie primarily associates with only two other people and the study of her loneliness and isolation. Frankie's fears are the fears of all human beings, and the last name of Addams indicates her archetypal function in her initiation into worldly knowledge. The self-chosen nickname of Frankie (like the name Mick Kelly) is a feeble effort on the part of the adolescent to assert her individuality in a patriarchal culture. Frankie's search then is for the end of spiritual isolation and for completeness of the soul, which she never finds in the course of the book. She feels more comfortable in cut-off jeans and even tries on the hat of her father with whom she identifies. Frankie's story begins and ends, significantly, in the Kitchen. The Kitchen is Frankie's childhood world created by her, John Henry and Bernice, who may be looked upon as ironic Gods. But in the meantime, Frankie, like Mick, has dreamed of snow, the coal north and foreign places, all recurring symbols of beauty and escape. Frankie wants to give her blood so that she will feel a kinship, oneness, with all people in the world. Nonetheless, she begins to realize that the world is not as she has dreamed. And, it was though a question came into her heart, and the sky did not answer. Frankie also has a room, similar to Mick's "inner room," to which she retreats to dream and escape the boredom. Frankie's life has become like the old blundered mules going round and round in the same circle.

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