

speeches show, that he sees himself as the leader of the forces of freedom everywhere. To him the Americans are still the vanguard of liberty who have allowed the Communists to evict us from our rightful estate as the head of this world-wide revolution." The trouble with this picture is that it is quite unrecognizable to anyone outside the United States. To the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the United States is not a revolutionary power, but—although Americans can never believe this—the greatest and most powerful fulfillment of Western imperialism."

So now, when not only Western Europe but Asia, Africa, and Latin America are gravely threatened by the Communists—either through military attack or through infiltration, subversion, and sabotage—a particular type of intellectual in Europe and the United States pooh-poohs the threat. Not only that, but this element has managed to see to it that most European countries are doing far less than they should to prepare for the Communist onslaught.

At least one foreign journalist affirms that the West Europeans are lagging in their preparations. He is Peregrine Worthorne, chief political writer for the London *Sunday Telegraph*, who says: "America's allies do nothing positive to help. No wonder that Mr. Khrushchev, sensing her psychological isolation, feels sorely tempted to press home his advantage. But what could America's allies, particularly Britain and Western Europe, do to help? Part of the answer is that they could relieve the U.S. of some proportion of her present mammoth responsibility for the defense of Western Europe itself. At a time when American power is strained near to the breaking point by global commitments, it is surely wrong that so much of her attention goes to the one area that has the means of defending itself."

The United States is spending about \$1 out of each \$11 of total national income for defense, while Western Europe is spending only about \$1 of every \$20 for that purpose. Over against these figures is Soviet Russia's outlay of \$1 out of every \$5 on its military establishment.

The United States has a requirement of two years in the armed services for those who are drafted, whereas Great Britain has just abolished the draft, and most Western European countries have shorter terms for selective service than we do.

Yet despite the factors that indicate a lessening of American prestige and good will in Europe, a slight upward trend has been noted of late by some

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LITERARY HORIZONS

The Subtler Corruptions

By Granville Hicks

CARSON McCULLERS began her career at the age of twenty-two with the publication of one of the most remarkable novels of modern times, "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter." It is a work of the highest originality, strange, powerful, and profound. Like "Wuthering Heights," it makes the reader feel that the creative act is sometimes an inscrutable mystery.

In the twenty years since "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter" appeared, Mrs. McCullers has written comparatively little, and, not surprisingly, nothing she has done is quite so good as her first book. On the other hand,

everything she has written is distinguished, and if she has not reached that particular height again, she has soared higher than most contemporary writers of fiction. There is magic in many parts of "The Member of the Wedding," and great power in "The Ballad of the Sad Cafe."

"Clock Without Hands" (Houghton Mifflin, \$4) is her first novel in a long time, and many of us have been eagerly—and rather anxiously—waiting for it. Again one has to say that Mrs. McCullers has not equaled "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter," but this is nonetheless a fine novel. The familiar themes are here—identity, the meaning of life, the nature of love—and, as always, they



McCullers

THE AUTHOR: Ever since a novelist told me that the theatre was an art manqué, meaning something less than an art, and I got so mad that I nearly drove my car through the lowered gates of an Italian railroad crossing and smack into the *Rapido* from Naples to Rome, I have thought it best to limit my personal encounter with other writers almost as strictly as collisions should be limited between two speeding vehicles in any country. And yet somehow I have managed to make many close and deeply satisfying friendships with other writers, such as Paul and Jane Bowles, Gore Vidal, Truman Capote, Donald Windham, William Inge, Alberto Moravia, and, perhaps most of all, with Carson McCullers, despite the long periods in which we lived in very separate parts of the world. Let's face the fact that the almost constantly irritated sensibilities of writers make it difficult for them to get along together as well as they should. This is especially true between novelists and playwrights. Novelists have the idea that playwrights are the pecuniary favorites of fortune, and they have some justification in this suspicion. Novelists and poets seem to be expected to live on air and subsidies, usually meager, while it is embarrassingly true that playwrights are recipients of comparatively large royalties, have Diners' Club cards, eat at Sardi's, and can travel first class. And so, on the surface, which is always misleading, they appear to be the favorites of fortune, and it is quite understandable and forgivable that their poet and novelist friends are tempted to goad them about the impurities of their medium.

Yet when this invidious attitude is dispelled, it can be agreeable for them to get together. The playwright must put aside his envy of the poet's or novelist's connection with a purer medium, and the novelist or the poet must have the good sense and sensibility to see that the material advantages of the playwright are incidental.

Carson McCullers and I have never had this embarrassment between us, although she is more consistently a writer of fiction than a playwright. From the moment of our first meeting, Carson, with her phenomenal understanding of another vulnerable being, felt nothing for me but that affectionate compassion that I needed so much and that she can give so freely, more freely than anyone else I know in the world of letters.

On the island of Nantucket, the summer of 1946, we worked at op-

are dealt with perceptively. The difference between this and "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter" is that in the first novel everything that happens seems inevitable whereas here some things seem made up. But how many novels are wholly free from contrivance?

There are only four important characters, all of them male. We begin with J. T. Malone, a forty-year-old druggist in Milan, Georgia, who, in 1953, has just learned that he has leukemia. He cannot believe that he is going to die, but he comes to perceive that life had begun to slip away from him long before he was stricken with disease. ("Unable to think of the reality of his own death, he was thrown back into the tedious labyrinth of his life. He had lost himself . . . he realized that surely. But how? When?") In the end he finds himself—"He was no longer a man watching a clock without hands"—and is able to face death.

Malone's friend, a man he greatly admires, is Judge Clane, a former Con-

gressman and, as he frequently finds occasion to point out, a leading citizen of Milan and of the state. At eighty-five the Judge is eager for more of life, just as much more as possible, but at the same time infirmities have come upon him, and his days and nights are full of weariness. Boredom and the will to live, as Mrs. McCullers delicately shows, march side by side. The old man, a lifelong advocate of white supremacy and the Southern cause, pins his senile hopes on a scheme for the redemption of the Confederate currency.

LIVING with the judge is his seventeen-year-old grandson, Jester, whose father committed suicide before he was born. Handsome, intelligent, popular, Jester is nevertheless full of problems. The mystery of his father's death erodes his sense of his own identity, and though he has already begun to challenge his grandfather's dogmas, he does not know what he believes. Like so many of Mrs. McCullers's characters,

he is longing for love—not to be loved but to love.

The fourth and the most important character is a blue-eyed Negro of about Jester's age, Sherman Pew. A founding, Sherman has his own problem of identity, which in a sad fashion he solves, but Mrs. McCullers is less concerned with that than she is with his effect on other characters. He is only marginal in Malone's life, though from the beginning he is a disturbing presence and in the end he is, by accident, the means of Malone's redemption. To Judge Clane and Jester he is central. The Judge hires him as houseboy, but he really serves, for a time, as substitute son, to be alienated by the Judge's blind prejudices, just as Jester's father was alienated. As for Jester, he falls in love with Sherman. ("The passion of first youth is lightly sown but strong.")

In an important sense this is a novel about the race problem. His views on race color the whole of Judge Clane's life and are responsible for a good share of his sorrows. It is these views that stand between him and his grandson, as they stood between him and his son, and one has no doubt that Jester's whole life will be affected by his rejection of them. As for Sherman Pew, the race problem is necessarily his life, and it turns out to be his death. Even J. T. Malone, who has a weighty problem of his own, cannot escape from the burden of responsibility that injustice imposes.

But Mrs. McCullers is not trying to underline the obvious fact that there is a problem, nor has she a solution she wants to thrust upon us; her purpose is to show the problem at the deepest possible level, as it penetrates the secret recesses of human souls. As she demonstrates in her account of the off-hand killing of a Negro known as Crown Boy, she is sensitive to injustice and hates the casual brutality that prejudice engenders, but her real concern is with subtler kinds of corruption.

As always, she writes about the mysterious operations of love. Singer in "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter" is transformed by his love for Antonapoulos, who is both indifferent and unworthy. Frankie in "The Member of the Wedding" becomes a different person when she decides that her brother and his bride are "the we of me." No one could be more grotesque than Cousin Lymon in "The Ballad of the Sad Cafe," but Miss Amelia loves him with a mighty passion. So here Jester's love for Sherman Pew is unsuitable and unreciprocated, but its importance for him is incalculable. (Characteristically,

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posite ends of a table, she on a dramatization of "The Member of the Wedding" and I on "Summer and Smoke," and for the first time I found it completely comfortable to work in the same room with another writer. We read each other our day's work over our after-dinner drinks, and she gave me the heart to continue a play that I feared was hopeless.

When I told her that I thought my creative powers were exhausted, she said to me, wisely and truly, an artist always feels that dread, that terror, when he has completed a work to which his heart has been so totally committed that the finishing of it seems to have finished him too, that what he lives for is gone like yesteryear's snow.

At the end of that summer's work I became very ill, and only a few months later so did she, with a mysterious paralysis of her right arm. I have such a fierce resistance to physical illness that I continually push it back; Carson's strength is enormous but primarily exists in her spirit. From 1947 to the present year she has been, as many interested in American writing know, a gallant invalid. She has lived with that paralysis of the right arm and with an excruciating series of operations to correct it, yet all the while she has never surrendered to it. During those fourteen years she has kept on working steadily and with all the creative and personal distinction that makes her an inspiring figure to us relative weaklings. She has completed two plays of the most impressive quality, and at the same time she has given us stories and poems of the purest distinction.

And all this time, these fourteen years, she has also been working on her fifth novel, "Clock Without Hands."

Before I went abroad last spring, she told me that she felt she couldn't complete it, that she had paid out all her strength. Then I reminded her of what she had told me, those fourteen years ago, that at the end, or near it, of a work to which the artist's heart is totally committed, he always feels that dread, that terror which is greater than the fear of death.

When I returned from abroad, two and a half months later, an advance copy of the completed novel was waiting for me in Key West.

If I hadn't known before that Carson is a worker of miracles, this work would surely have convinced me of it, for without any sign of the dreadful circumstances under which she accomplished it, this work was once again a thing set on paper as indelibly as if it had been carved onto stone. Here was all the stature, nobility of spirit, and profound understanding of the lonely, searching heart that make her, in my opinion, the greatest living writer of our country, if not of the world.

—TENNESSEE WILLIAMS.