



A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CARSON McCullers'

« *The Member of the wedding* »

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Abstract: This Paper aims at showing how the Fictional aspect of the work of arts, can lead us to understand life, and to bring change in our way of interpreting any work of art, because the particularity of literature style seems to be neglected by secondary school teachers and students. So, when trying to talk about Carson McCullers's The Member of the Wedding, the objective is to show that this woman writer was too much preoccupied by her personal psychological problems.

For the sake of clarity and conciseness, the present study will be limited to the critical Analysis of Carson McCullers. We are going to provide the kind of fiction uses in her work. One has to keep in mind that we are not going to deal with all fictional aspects which exist in her works, that will be for us a hard task, but we are going to study only some aspects through The Member of the Wedding.

Index Terms - critical, analysis, Member, wedding.

I. Introduction

Carson McCullers may be considered as an important novelist, because she wrote more than ten short stories and novels which are considered as great literary works in American literature, dealing with human being, as seen in her The Member of the wedding. This justifies to a great extent our choice of this novel. Lula Carson Smith (Carson McCullers) was born in Columbia Georgia, as the daughter of a well-to-do watchmaker and jeweler of French Huguenot extraction. From the age of five she took piano lessons and at the age of 15 she received a typewriter from her father. She worked in menial jobs and devoted herself to writing. McCullers studied creative writing at Columbia and New York Universities and published in 1936 an autobiographical piece 'Wunderking' in story magazine.

In 1937 she married Reeves McCullers, they moved to North Carolina. During this time she wrote The Heart is a lonely Hunter her first novel. Her life was not a happy one, she suffered throughout her life from several illness. She had contracted rheumatic fever at the age of fifteen and a series of strokes left her a virtual invalid in her early 30's. This may explain why she is talking about man's loneliness in most of her works.

What we know is that Carson McCullers was an American writer whose psychological novels and stories describe the secrets of lonely, isolated people. Most of her works are set in the south. In the grotesque world of McCullers's fiction, her eccentric characters suffer from loneliness that she interprets with deep empathy.

To illustrate this, chosen to base our study on The Member of the Wedding, dealing with the feeling of a young girl at her brother's wedding. As a matter of fact, she has never believed that her brother could get married to another woman. So, her dream was to 'belong' to be a member. This gives the full sense to the title and even the very theme of this novel; we would like to analyze.

To succeed any criticism of a work of arts, and in our case, a literary one, both intrinsic and extrinsic methods will be used, because there is no scientific research without any methodology.

Our approaches will be analytical as it will be shown in chapter two of our paper. The guiding idea of such an approach is to prove that Carson McCullers is too involved in her work. She lived too isolated, too lonely, to the extent that these motifs recur in most of her work: Heart is a lonely Hunter, Reflexion in a Golden Eyes, The Ballad of the sad cafe, The Square wonderful, Clock without hands, etc.

Our analysis is subdivided into two parts, apart from the general introduction and conclusion. In the first part, we shall try to discuss some aspects of fictional aspects of the work of arts, we will talk about fact and truth and their relations in fiction. We are going to define the Spectrum of fiction and fictional modes and patterns. The second part will be about the nature of the novel. The first point defines the plot while the second point talks about the novel as a portrait of life.

II. Fictional aspects of the work of arts

Scholes, R. (1974) says that, a fiction is a made up story. This definition covers a lot of territory. It includes the home male lies we tell to protect ourselves from annoying scrutiny, and the casual jokes we hear and re-tell as polite or impolite conversation, as well as great visionary works of literary.

To enter in the concept of the definition, we can give the examples of Milton's 'Paradise Lost', because it is made up story. The relation between 'fact' and 'fiction' is simple in so far as fiction uses facts as they are viewed by the novelists.

We may confirm that 'fact' and 'fiction' come from the same Latin words. 'Fact' comes from 'facere' which means 'to make or do'. 'Fiction' comes from 'fingere', 'to make or shape'. As it may be noticed, the two notions maybe put together conceptually speaking.

II.1. Fact and Truth

The capacity of 'Fact' in our ordinary conversation is associated with the pillars of verbal society which are: 'reality' and 'truth'. Fiction, on the other hand, is known to consort with such suspicious characters as 'unreality' and 'false hood'. When we try to have a glance up on the matter, we can see that the relationship between 'Fact' and 'Fiction' with 'real' and 'true' is not exactly what appears, on the surface. Literally speaking, 'Fact' still means for us 'a thing done'. And 'Fiction' has never lost its meaning of 'a thing made'. But in what sense do things done or things made have a truth or reality? We know that a thing done has real existence once it has been done.

In focusing our attention on 'Fact' and 'Fiction', we can see this rather strange relation between 'Fact' and 'Fiction' more clearly if we call history; the word 'history' itself hides a double meaning. It comes from a Greek word, which originally meant 'Inquiry' or 'investigation'. But it's soon acquired the two meanings which interest us here: on the one hand history can mean 'things that have happened', on the other hand, it can refer to 'a recorded version of things that are supposed to have happened. That is, history can mean both events of the part and the story of these events: 'Fact' or 'Fiction'. In this angle, the word 'story' remains hidden in the word 'History' and is derived from it. We see

that history begins as investigation, and ends as a story. Fact, in order to survive, must become fiction, because, seen in this way, fiction is not the opposite of fact, but its complement.

The main part in 'Fact' and 'Fiction' is to break hindrances which do not allow a reader to understand well novels. Because the reader is the only one who tries to give life to the novel. The writer may write consciously or unconsciously, it is up to the reader to find what the writer tried to say. While reading The Member of the Wedding by Carson McCullers, with the experience of fiction that the reader has, it will be easy to discover what the writer wants to say in this novel with some fictional techniques.

II.2. The Spectrum of Fiction

'Spectrum is the series of colored bands diffracted and arranged in the order of their respective waves lengths by the passage of white light through a prism or other diffracting medium and shading continuously from red to violet (Webster's New world dictionary, 1962).

The spectrum that we mention here is just a metaphor, a handy linguistic tool to take away when it becomes more of hindrance to understand than a help. In terms of this metaphor, we will remember it was possible to think of fiction as resembling the spectrum of color to be found in ordinary light, but in the fictional spectrum the ends are not infra-red and ultra-violet but history and fantasy.

Scholes, R. (1974, p. 7), puts things as follow:

Now only a recording angle, taking not of all the deeds of men without distorting anything, could be called a 'pure' historian. And only a kind of deity, creating a world out of his own imaginations, could be called a 'pure' fantasist. Both ends of the spectrum are invisible to mortal eyes. All history recorded by men becomes fictional. All human fantasy involves some resemblance. For the student of fiction, then, the combination of historical and imaginative materials become crucial.

Scholes wants to demonstrate us this, our understanding of fiction depends on our grasping the way in which any particular work is related to life. If we try to analyze deeply this passage, we see that life itself is neither 'Tragic' nor 'Comic', neither 'Sentimental' nor 'Ironic'. It's only a sequence of sensations, actions, thoughts, and events which try to tame with language. Every time we say a word about our existence, we are engaged in this taming process. Edward, M., Forster (1927, p. 288), says:

An art like fiction is a very highly developed method of domestication, in which life is not merely subdued but is asked to perform tricks as well. The tricks, if well done, please me in a very complicated way. In the first place they please because their order and intelligibility are a welcome relief from the confusion and pressure of daily existence. And in the second place this artificial order can be mastered by us and used to help make sense of our own experience.

Trying to read McCullers' work, we will begin to recognize certain situation in our existence as having a family resemblance to situation we have encountered in our daily life, as if it is put in The Member of the Wedding:

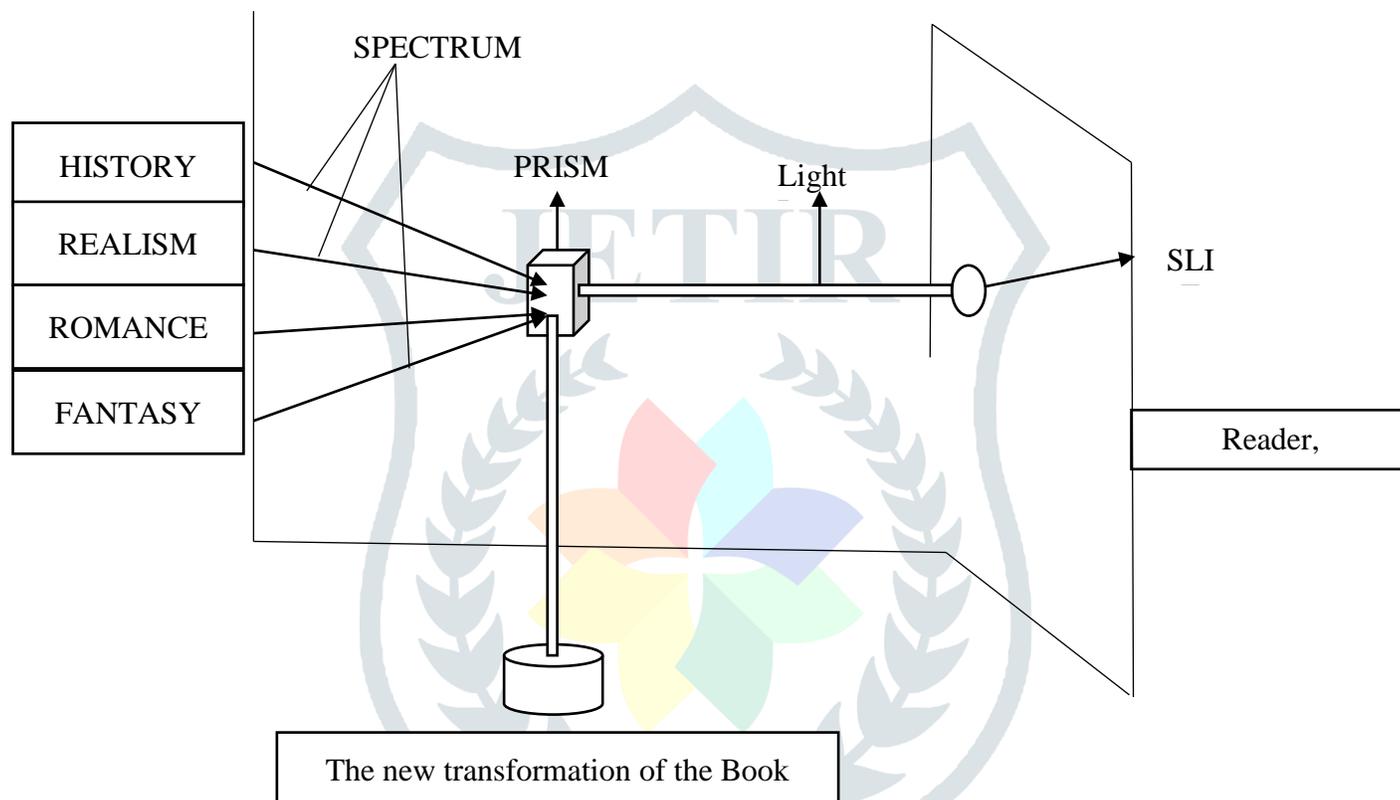
It all happened that green and crazy summer when Frankie or F. Jasmine Addams as she liked to call herself was going on thirteen. Much of it happened in a sultry Georgia Kitchen while Berenice Sadi Brown, the Negro cook, reminisced about her four husbands, and John Henry West, Frankie's six year-old cousin, drew queer child drawings over the kitchen walls. The catalyst of Frankie's lonely summer was the marriage of her brother.

This way of viewing things by Carson McCullers, offers an escape out of life, but also provides us with new equipment for a good understanding.

In this fact we must imitate the way of understanding life through this author because the presentation of fiction which relates a life of a given society is a way of advising people. It helps us understand life and life helps us understand fiction. We recognize aspects of ourselves and we also see ideal and debased extremes of existence.

As far as we are concerned, we may say that our experience of fiction, then involves excitement, pleasure and understanding. The excitement means the need of reading, understanding is a result and the pleasure is an experience of fiction. But here we may find a relationship between pleasure and understanding, because the two are inseparable in the reading of fiction. But in our study, we have more to do with understanding, because understanding a work of fiction begins with recognizing what kind of fiction it is. This is where the notion of 'spectrum' becomes useful. If there is a shade or hindrance of fiction, the understanding will be cumbersome and misleading.

In order to understand well fiction we may give the extremes of history and fantasy on such a scale:



In this scale, romance and realism can be related to life. Realism is a matter of perception. The Realist presents his impressions of the world of experience. The Realistic writer seeks always to give the reader a sense of the way things are, but he feels that a made-up structure of character and event can do better justice to the way things are than any attempt to copy reality directly. This realist's truth is a bit more general and typical than the reporter's fact.

Romance is a matter of vision. The romancer presents no so much his impression of the world as his ideas about it. The ordinary world is seen at greater distance, and its shape and color are deliberately altered by lens and filters of philosophy and fantasy. In the world of romance, ideas are allowed to play less encumbered by data.

Realism and Romance are colors which allow fiction to give a light to the readers or the community. But these two words are not absolutely different. They share some qualities between them. Realism itself is more romantic than history. And Romance is more realistic than fantasy. We must know that many important works of fiction are rich and complicated blends of romance and realism.

In fact, it is possible to say that the greatest works are those which succeed in blending the realist's perception and the romancer's vision, giving us fictional worlds remarkably shaped so as to make us intensely aware of the meaningful potential of existence.

The prism is anything that refracts light, as a drop of water. Thus in our context, prism is the work of art, the material or the book (novel) presented by the writer. Huxley (1928, p. 47) says that:

While writing, the writer knows that, in order to give a great value to his novel, he can assume the god-like creative privilege and simply elect to consider the events of the story in their various aspects: Emotional, scientific, economic, religious, metaphysical, etc. He will modulate from one to the other.

By the Slit, the novelist wants to see story as it really is.

If we take into account Robert Scholes's thought, the usefulness of the concept of fictional spectrum will depend upon our ability to adapt it to various works of fiction. Such adaptation will inevitably require a certain amount of complication. The additional concepts of fictional modes and patterns will be a step in that direction. The spectrum assumed that romance diverges from realism in one way only, along that line which leads from history to fantasy. But it's possible to see this divergence in more complete way by observing that there are actually two quite different modes of what we have been called romance.

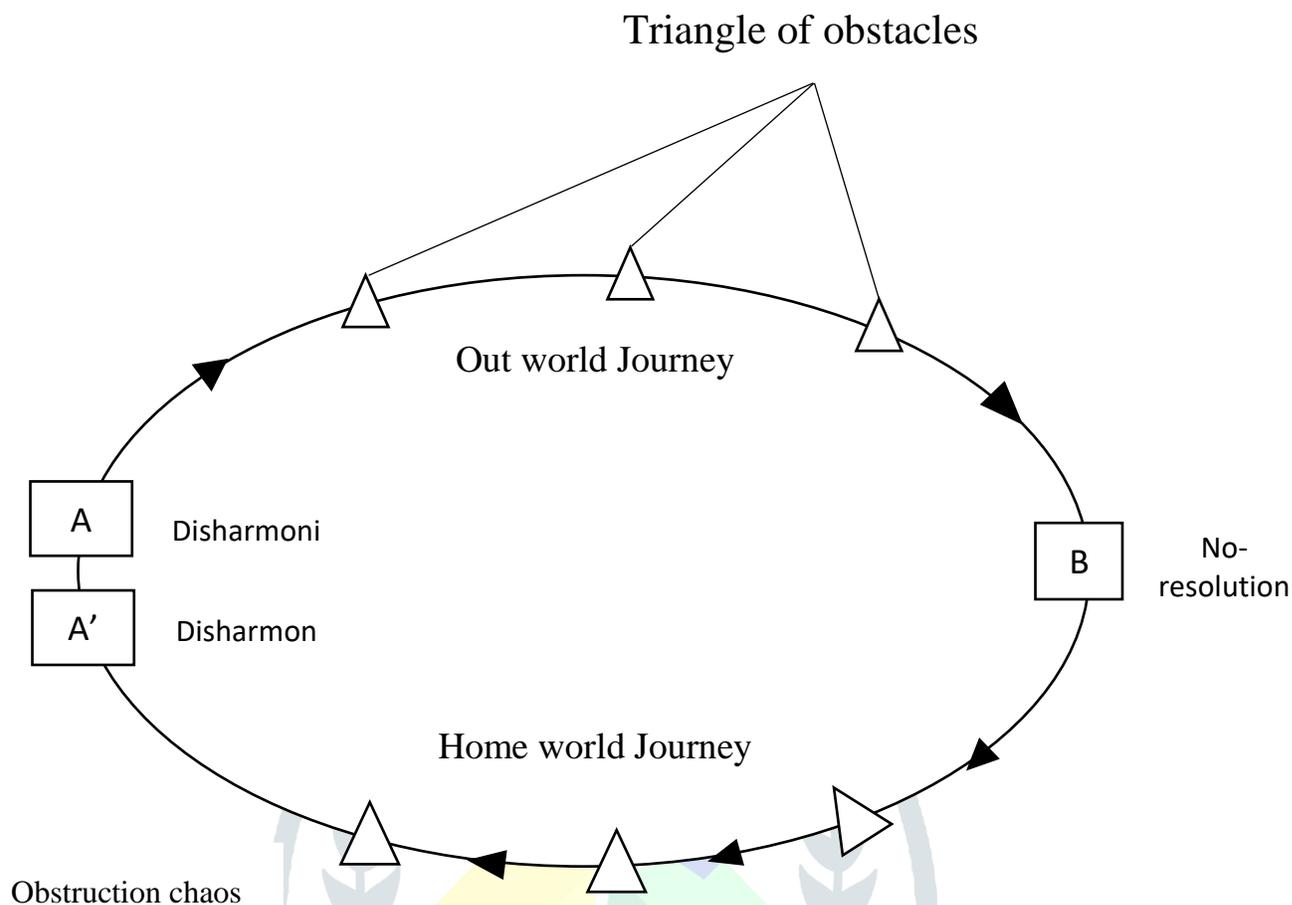
First, reality can be made to appear better or worse than we actually believe it to be. This change is a way of seeing certain aspects of reality more clearly at the expense of others. They can present a 'true' picture of either the heroic or debased side of human existence. Fictional work which presents a world better than the real world is in the mode of romance. A work which presents a fictional world worse than the real world is the mode of anti-romance or satire. Because these modes represent certain potentialities that we recognize as present in our world, both these changed views depend on our sense of the actual to make their effects (Scholes, op. Cit. p. 11).

To sum up the idea of Scholes, we may say that, the world of 'romance' emphasizes beauty and order. The world of 'satire' emphasizes ugliness and disorder. The relationships between individual characters and those changed worlds constitute a crucial element of fiction, for these relationships determine certain patterns or master plots which affect the shaping of the particular plot of every story.

One of the master patterns deals with the kind of character who begins in out of harmony with his world and is gradually educated or initiated into a harmonious situation in it. This pattern can operate in either the ordered world of romance or chaotic world of satire, but the same pattern will have a quite different effect on us who are living in the Macrocosm.

Another master pattern reverses this process of accumulation and presents us with change of another sort:

The character who begins in harmony with his world but is rejected or destroyed; we can illustrate this with Kunene's diagram in his journey as Metaphor:

Eg. Carson McCullers' The Member of the Wedding

KUNENE's theory in journey as a Metaphor is based on the fact that the Hero undertakes a journey because there is disorder in the village. He has to restore order after his journey. But here in our novel there is one other pair of fictional patterns which can be added to the two already considered. When characters begin in and end in disharmonious relationship to their worlds. This means that the hero begins in disharmony and ends in disharmony. According to KUNENE's theory this diagram fits because, it has not brought harmony or good solution. And this is the case in The Member of the Wedding in so far as we are shown a girl who does not really adapt herself to her world. She lives alone. Referring to fig. 1, we can say that this work is a satire.

What we have tried to show in this chapter concerned the worlds of fantasy and satire; leaving open the question of what happens as here the reader of contemporary fiction in particular will require that flexibility of response which can be attained by careful attention to the workings of traditional patterns in any work of fiction will depend on our grasp of specific elements of that work. We must be alerted to the way that its characters, its plots, and its point of view adapt the traditional elements we considered.

2. Nature of the work

2.1. Plot

Among the most important element which are taken into account to investigate into a work of fiction, literary critics concentrate themselves on point of view, story, characterization, plot, themes, etc.

Our concern in this section is about 'plot'. Traditionally, 'plot' was looked at as sequence of causes and effects. Modern theories of literature, without rejecting this view based mainly on the linearity composition (Webster's English dictionary).

Let us see how Carson McCullers has, in her The Member of the Wedding, conceived her main story:

- Frankie Adams, a twelve years old, orphan of mother lives with her father and Berenice... she feels always lonely. She hears about the marriage of her brother who will come with his bride to present her to the family, her brother and his bride come home and invite the family to their marriage – then she believes that she will belong and will be the member of the wedding. They move to Alaska and the marriage takes place. After the ceremony, her brother and his bride go on their bridal journey and leave her alone. Her loneliness is strengthened by this fact.

The plot as it may be seen, turns around the theme of loneliness which is the concern of most of Carson McCullers's work. This is the characteristic of most of western civilizations, different from African literature, which is based on the effort of community. Summarized, this plot is Frankie's loneliness → desire to belong – loneliness.

2.2. The novel as a portrait of life

John Huston in An open book (1980, p. 72), says that : « *in order to create the illusion of reality which gratifying our love of the uncommon in human experience, Carson McCullers, holds to the Aristotelian view that she must make us believe in the 'probability' of her characters and events* ». He adds: « *every good author will confine himself within the bound of probability* ».

2.2.1. The bounds of probability

The actions should be such as it may not be within the compass of human agency and which human agents may probably be supposed to do; but they should be likely for the very actors and characters themselves to have performed; for what may be only wonderful and surprising in one man, may become improbable or even impossible, when related to another:

- Berenice waited, and when she did not speak again, she asked: « what on earth is wrong with you? » F. Jasmine could not speak the unknown words, so after a minute she knocked her head a last time on the door and then began to walk in a stiff – legged delicate way, as she felt sick, and did not wish to joggle the different foods... (p. 96)

It can be remarked that zeal cannot force an individual to behave contrarily to what he has to do in his life, for as in this case a stream can carry a boat against its own current. We can venture to say that Frankie is acting against her own nature. Should the best parts of the story of Frankie be ascribed to Carson McCullers, or should the worst incident of Carson shocking to belief than either instance? These questions are worth asking so far her work is concerned. Reading Carson McCullers, is like, reading Camera Layer. Both of them are confined in their characters.

2.2.2. The offspring of nature

According to many writers, a novel is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. With The member of the wedding, McCullers is opposed to the theories of scientific realism. She emphasizes nevertheless that the principal effect which the novelist seeks is the feeling of simple reality:

- The next minute was like a minute in the fair crazy – house, or real Milledgeville. Already F. Jasmine had started for the door, for she could no longer stand the silence. But as she passed the soldier, he grasped her skirt – and, limped by fright, she was pulled down beside him on the bed... (p., 112).

Carson McCullers reminds us of things we know and must not forget again. We have found in her work such intensity and nobility of spirit as authors have not had in their prose writing. She should be reassured by the constantly more abundant evidence that the work she has already accomplished is not eclipsed by time but further illumed.

2.2.3. The art of novel

The art of novels is to present nature, as it is the case with ‘a Rock, a tree, a cloud’, by Carson McCullers:

- It was raining that morning, and still very dark. When the boy reached the street car cafe’ he had almost finished his route and he went in for a cup of coffee...
The old man reached over and grasped the boy by the collar of this leather jacket.
Son, do you know how love should began? The boy sat small and listening and still slowly he shook his head.
The old man leaned closer and whispered: ‘A tree, a rock, A Cloud’ (p. 24)

The art of novels is also to convey as strongly as possible the sentiment of reality. This, may also be seen in The Member of the wedding in which McCullers presents the nature through Frankie’s thoughts, when she says; ‘It happened that green and crazy summer when Frankie was twelve years old’. (p. 3). According to McCullers, life is not the subject of novels, but the inexhaustible magazine from which subjects are to be selected. We may say, it is passion which gives to author the opportunity to write about nature.

2. 3. The Novelist’s Approach and Equipment

We emphasize that the novelist starts from experience, from some direct impression or perfection of life, but the apparent dilemma exists for every creative writer, it especially concerns the problem of the correspondence between the literary work and the reality which it imitates. The dilemma is more apparent than real because a particular novelist will incline one way or the other in « accordance » with his temperament. Most the time when you read Camera Laye, you will discover his temperament, and the extent to which he can consciously modify. In this angle we can express the idea of Carson McCullers, in The Member of the wedding. Frankie Addams is a creative and imaginative twelve year – old girl. Yet, this summer, she has lost the ability to entertain herself and has grown too tall. Her legs are so long that she finds it difficult to participate in her usual summer activities, such as putting on plays in the grape arbor, because she can no longer fit underneath it. She feels like a freak and has a wish to be anybody else except herself.

Carson McCullers lives as much as possible according to her nature. Because what makes this story so unusual is the fact that most of it takes place through the medium of desultory conversations between three really weirder people sitting in an even weirder kitchen. Nothing or almost considerable nothing happening, is happening, and about to happen. This in itself is a considerable technical feat, and beyond that, there is magic in it.

Stevenson, R., L. (1919), says that:

In all works of art, widely speaking, it is first of all the author’s attitude that is narrated, though in the attitude there be implied a whole experience and a theory of life. An author who has begged the question and responses in some narrow faith whole or even many of the sides of this various existence. For, his own life being main, some of them are not admitted in this theory, and were only dimly and unwillingly recognized in his experience. Hence the smallness, the triteness, and the inhumanity in works of merely sectarian religion; and hence we find equal although unsimilar limitation in inspired by the spirit of the flesh or the despicable taste for high society.

So that the first duty of any man who is to write, is intellectual. Designedly or not, he has so far set himself up for a leader of the minds of men; and he must see that his own mind is kept supple, charitable and bright. Everything but prejudice should find a voice through him; he should see the good in all things ; where he has even a fear that he does not wholly understand, there he should be wholly silent ; and he should recognize one tool in his workshop, and that tool is sympathy.

In this research, everything contains some element of the unexplored, because we are accustomed to use our eyes only with the memory of what other people before us have thought about the object we are looking at. The least thing has a bit of the unknown in it. Let us find this, in order to describe a fire burning or a tree in a field, let us stand in front of that fire and that tree until they no longer look at us like any other fire or any other tree. Here we want to say that the practice of self – discipline can create talent. We stress how long and attentively Carson McCullers was looking at everything around her, in order to be like a movie camera which takes all events which gives a good or a bad vision to her eyes. She was bringing out what she had as originality in her life.

With regard to this, we can say that, the author is the creator of everything. Through him, everything but prejudice should find a voice. He can see the good or evil managements of characters, while in his workshop.

However, some references to *The Member of the wedding* show that C. McCullers is to some extent involved in her work. One would say that the main character, Frankie, is a parody of herself – McCullers.

Conclusion

To sum up, let us say that, our work was based on the critical analysis of Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding*. We discussed some aspects of fictional aspects of the work of art. We talked about fact and truth and their relations in fiction. We defined the spectrum of fiction and fictional modes and patterns. We showed through our analysis that the story discusses an adolescents (Frankie) misunderstanding of the adult world, the lack of communication between her and adults and her spiritual loneliness. Our study of point of view and type of narrator showed that the story is told from the point of view of Frankie herself. With the implication that Frankie's misunderstanding of the world becomes as pathetic as her defeat is tragic. This analysis made us put forward that Carson McCullers is discussing the problem of « the lost generation ». We defended our point of view by comparing Carson McCullers's works of fiction to especially Camera Laye's works and Hemingway's *The Sun also rises*, and by the fact that Carson McCullers is a contemporary of « the lost generation ».

Nevertheless, we recognized that Carson McCullers views the origin of that tragedy in a slightly different way from people as Gertrude Stein and Hemingway for example. And we showed how.

And finally we discussed the location. In relation to incidents we said that the story occurs in a dreary and lonely southern town. And that the central location of the story was the Kitchen.

This kitchen functions as a private confessional where Frankie, Berenice and John reveal their complexes and frustrations. In relation to characters that there was an opposition between the town and the far away.

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