

The Carson McCullers Society proposes the following two panels for the 2027 American Literature Association conference to be held in Boston, Massachusetts, on May 26-29, 2027. The work of graduate students and early career scholars is particularly encouraged and welcomed.

Please send a 250-word abstract and a brief bio to Erin Bell at bellee@udmercy.edu and Melanie A. Marotta at mmarotta@georgiasouthern.edu by January 8, 2027 and include ALA Proposal in the email subject line. These panels will be in-person only. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by end of January 2027.

Panel One: Carson McCullers and Her Contemporaries

From her tumultuous marriage(s) to husband Reeves McCullers, to infatuations with Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach, Katherine Anne Porter, and Gypsy Lee Rose to name only a few, Carson McCullers' personal life often offered a complexity which was mirrored in the isolated and repressed lives of the characters in her fictional worlds.

McCullers' relationships with her literary contemporaries were also just as complicated. Tennessee Williams argued that McCullers was "the only real writer the South ever turned out," while Richard Wright applauded McCullers' "astonishing humanity," suggesting that she was the first white southern writer to present black characters "with as much ease and justice as those of her own race." Other writers drew McCullers in far less complimentary terms, with Flannery O'Connor famously writing, "I dislike intensely the work of Carson McCullers."

Drawing inspiration from the recent work of Carlos Dews, Mary Dearborn, and Jenn Shapland, that illuminates such relationships, the Carson McCullers Society invites projects that place McCullers in conversation with other writers and artists. Projects may be framed through comparative analysis, biographical or archival research, literary influence, intertextuality, or any other applicable lens.

Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

- McCullers and Richard Wright
- Tennessee Williams
- McCullers and Truman Capote

- McCullers and Harper Lee
- McCullers and William Faulkner
- McCullers and Flannery O'Connor
- McCullers and Eudora Welty
- McCullers and Katherine Anne Porter
- McCullers and Annemarie Schwarzenbach
- McCullers and other members of the mid-century New York literary and artistic community
- McCullers's reception among later writers such as Charles Bukowski and Edward Albee

Panel Two: Carson McCullers, Disability and Queerness

While earlier studies and reviews often situated Carson McCullers within the tradition of the Southern Gothic, contemporary scholarship has opened her work to a broader range of critical approaches, including disability studies and queer theory, among other interdisciplinary methodologies.

Indeed, McCullers' representations of outsiders, misfits, and bodies that challenge social expectations invite reconsideration of what constitutes normalcy and of the structures that determine who is permitted to belong. McCullers' own experiences in her increasingly disabled body provide the context for considering her sustained interest in bodily difference, vulnerability, and social exclusion.

Queer theory likewise offers opportunities to reconsider McCullers's representations of gender and sexuality. Archival materials as well as thematic content in her texts reveal a sustained engagement with gender nonconformity, same-sex desire, and identities that resist easy categorization.

Thus, the Carson McCullers Society invites proposals for a panel examining McCullers's work through the lenses of queerness and/or disability. Proposals may focus on any genre of McCullers's writing, including novels, short fiction, poetry, essays, letters, interviews, archival materials, and adaptations.

Possible topics and projects include, but are not limited to:

- Queer readings of any of McCullers' novels or short fiction
- Same-sex desire, female intimacy, friendship, and queer relationality in McCullers's life writing
- Disability, chronic illness, paralysis, and embodied experience in McCullers's life and work
- The Queer Child in McCullers
- McCullers and the queer form of short fiction
- Queer Time in McCullers Work
- Crip and queer approaches to McCullers's concept of the outsider
- Disability and the Southern Gothic tradition
- Mobility, immobility, space, architecture, and the disabled body
- Disability and belonging in McCullers's fictional communities
- Representations of mental illness, institutionalization, and intellectual disability
- McCullers's letters, therapy transcripts, interviews, and personal essays as sites for reconsidering identity and embodiment