

Betty D. Berne/Carson McCullers Collection (MC 408)

Biographical Note

Betty Berne was born March 16, 1912, in New York City, and died September 23, 2011. Because she grew up in foster homes and institutions, she was mostly self-educated, teaching herself typing and shorthand and attending evening classes in philosophy and literature at the New School. As a young woman, she lived in Greenwich Village, where she met Lewis Berne while taking art classes. They married in 1945, after Lewis' army service in World War II. After a few years they moved to the Bronx and then, in the early 1950s, to Nyack, a village about 20 miles from New York City.

In Nyack, Mrs. Berne raised three daughters and became active in community and school affairs. She was the first woman to run for mayor of Nyack. Eventually she began working outside the home, and in the mid-1960s, she took a job as personal assistant/secretary to Carson McCullers. At the time, Carson was working on a musical version of *Member of the Wedding*, with music to be written by Mary Rodgers. Mrs. Berne took dictation from Carson in shorthand and then transcribed the pages at home. She produced a completed typescript, which has been donated to the archive. They also worked on a play entitled *The Exquisite Psycho*, about a sadistic teenage drug addict, and on Carson's memoirs. In addition, Mrs. Berne helped with Carson's correspondence and handled communications with Mary Rodgers and Carson's agent, among others.

Scope and Content

This material includes typescript drafts of the musical version of McCullers' Broadway play, *The Member of the Wedding*, as well as versions of a one act play, titled variously *The Exquisite Psycho* and the *Sunless Sea*. In addition there is a draft, with heavy editing in Berne's handwriting (much of which is in shorthand) of McCullers' unfinished memoirs. Also included is a text-sm amount of correspondence. Finally there is a folder relating to Virginia Spenser Carr and her biography of McCullers.

Permission to Publish

Permission to publish material from the Carol Berne/McCullers Collection must be obtained from the Columbus State University Archives at Columbus State University. Use of the following credit line for publication or exhibit is required:

Betty D. Berne/McCullers Collection (MC 408) Columbus State University Archives Columbus, Georgia

Provenance

Donated by Joan and Carol Berne in memory of Betty D. Berne.

Note to Researchers

See also: Other Collections/Other repositories

[Ballad of the Sad Cafe Playbill \(SMC 60\)](#)[The Bradley Memorial Library Carson McCullers Collection \(MC 184\)](#)[Virginia Spenser Carr Collection \(MC 23\)](#)[Carson McCullers Center for Writers and MusiciansCarson McCullers Society Records \(MC 192\)](#)[Loretto Chappell Collection \(MC 29\)](#)[Carlos Dews Collection \(MC 175\)](#)[Mary Martha Johnson Photograph Collection \(SMC 53\)](#)[Clason Kyle Collection \(MC 86\)](#)[Jordan Massee—Carson McCullers Collection \(MC 170\)](#)[Mary Mercer/Carson McCullers Collection \(MC 296\)](#)[Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas-Austin, Carson McCullers finding aid](#)[Margaret Sullivan Papers \(MC 298\)](#)[The Valley Reads: The Heart is a Lonely Hunter Collection \(MC 179\)](#)[John Zeigler and Edwin Peacock Collection \(MC 182\)](#)

Box and Folder List

Box 1

Folder 1 - Correspondence, 1966 & nd

This folder contains 4 items:

A note from Oliver Evans to Carson McCullers attached to the *London Magazine* review of Evan's biography titled **Carson McCullers, Her Life and Work**. It mentions the positive reviews he has received on this biography, and also how depressed Tennessee Williams is about his latest reviews. The note is dated April 26, 1966.

A note [draft with corrections] from Carson to Andre Girard on McCullers' stationary. It mentioned her shyness in the face of his artistic genius, as well as how much she is looking forward to seeing him and his wife Marielle Bancou. It is dated May 10, 1966.

An undated note [draft with correction] to Tennessee Williams concerning a recent biography of Ernest Hemingway.

An undated draft note to Mr. Freedley concerning her work on a musical version of *The Member of the Wedding* and her new novel. She also asks for a copy of his review for the *Morning Telegraph* on the **Ballad of Carson McCullers**. On the other side is what appears to be a fragment of dialog from *The Exquisite Psycho*, dated May 5, 1966.

Folder 2 - Two drafts of *The Exquisite Psycho*, a one act play, 1965. One draft is a carbon copy typescript on onion skin paper with a postal receipt indicating that it was mailed to Floria Lasky on June 10, 1965. The other is an undated draft typed on regular paper and has various corrections, deletions and additions.

Folder 3 - Drafts of *The Sunless Sea*, 1966 Related to the above this folder contains multiple drafts of the same play, but here titled *The Sunless Sea*. The drafts have various dates, but all in May of 1966. These are heavily edited, some in shorthand.

Folder 4 - *The Member of the Wedding (A Musical)* by Carson McCullers. Dedicated to Floria and David Altman. This is a carbon copy of the script with no corrections.

Folder 5 - Draft of unfinished memoirs, 1966 This consists of typed and handwritten versions with heavy editing, some in handwriting and some in shorthand. There are various dates, but all in 1966. There is also a copy of the *New York Times* review of Carlos Dews' publication of **Illuminations and Night Glare: the Unfinished Autobiography of Carson McCullers**.

Folder 6 - Virginia Carr Correspondence, 1976 This folder contains two notes from Virginia Carr to "Betty and Lou", presumably Betty Berne and her husband. There are also copies of several pieces of fan mail written to Carr after the publication of **The Lonely Hunter**, her biography of McCullers.