

Page Five: Carson McCullers letters to Sidney Isenberg

Letter III: same addresses, typed, postmarked Apr 14, 1948

text: 131 South B'way  
Nyack, N.Y.

Dear Sidney,

Your charming letter reached me when it was a propos in a dismal way. I could not answer it at once, for any letter I might have written then would have been a cry for salvation. I was in Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic-- where I remained for ~~a~~ 3 dreadful weeks. You see these last exhausting months of illness had got me into an emotional, unhinged state. One ~~n~~ night, in a fit of transient melancholy I slashed my wrist. My medical doctor thought I ~~sh~~ needed hospitalization. So I had to go to Payne Whitney.

There I was fixed in a vacuum, unable to try to help myself. I could not write, or read undisturbed, and was allowed no veil of privacy. It was like Kaffka (cq) without the hope of ultimate salvation. I suffered intensely until finally a ~~a~~ great dear friend of mine who is a psychiatrist decided my mother to take me away.

I have no suicidal tendencies and I will never hurt myself again. I was just over strained and fearful after this long illness. I had a vascular spasm that hs left me still pretty paralyzed. I long to be strong and well. I have had so much illness, and have almost lost the hope of health.

I wonder how it would feel to be a psychiatrist. The responsibility is so immense. Are you ever afraid of this power? I had an excellent, kind doctor at Payne Whitney, but the head doctor is a Swiss peasant without a spark of insight--I dreaded talking with him. I had never known such a feeling of helplessness as I had there. I think I don't believe very much in psycho therapy for creative people. The artist's hallmark is the product of his inner conflicts. I do not want my internal chemistry changed, even though I may suffer.

It is absurd to say I don't believe in psychotherapy--I mean that I intend to maintain my grasp, of my own soul-- however fragile that grasp might be as long as possible.

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The head doctor at the clinic said I was not "facing" my ill health and questioned me about my defenses. When I said that writing was my bastion there, he insisted that work was not enough. To him writing is (sylogistically) as neurosis. While to me, the act of artistic creation, is the prime expression of health that I recognize.

My ~~sp~~ psychiatrist friend, William Mayer, understands me. And has been my guardian angel for ten years.

You might call my condition a somatic-psycho state. But, since my emotional attitude, will not possibly alter my vascular defects, I think it best to forget my infirmities and concentrate on something responsive that offers the possibility of some solace--work.

I am sorry you are unable to accept the Boston appointment. How long will you be in the army-- and what will you be doing the re?

The true artist and the psychiatrist are concerned with the same subject--man in his relation to the human condition. ~~In~~ On this subject--psychiatrist regard anxiety as an individual, neurotic "problem--while I believe anxiety is an essential basic part of the conditions of human existence. We fear the acknowledgemen of finity. There is always a tendency to reclaim the state of non-responsibility, the animal infinity that we lose when staking our claims to a soul.

Does this have meaning to you?

(letter unsigned)