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THE THEME OF LONELINESS  
IN  
THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER by Carson McCullers

T E S I S

QUE PARA OBTENER A LA:

LICENCIATURA EN LENGUA Y  
LITERATURA MODERNAS INGLESAS

PRESENTA:

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1.

The central theme in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, by Carson McCullers, is the loneliness felt by the five main characters. Through the portrayal of these five characters the author questions the social and economic conditions that produce their loneliness. She questions the solutions that their society offers them. This paper will analyze loneliness represented by her characters as a problem of American society.

Carson McCullers, in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, and in most of her other novels, was concerned with the portrayal of life in the South of the United States during the later years of the Depression. She was born and raised there. From the time of her pre-adolescence she felt apart from her peers because she did not belong to any group of friends in school. Music was her companion. McCullers hated racism, fascism, nazism. She sympathized with those who were oppressed, not only in her country, but in others,<sup>(1)</sup> and this motivated her to write about isolation, estrangement, and loneliness throughout her works.

Some of the problems the characters in McCullers' novel must face and which lead to their loneliness are: racism, poverty, ignorance, lack of goals which give meaning to their lives, and lack of communication. These problems are promulgated by the social and economic conditions in the society Carson McCullers mirrors in her book.

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1. Virginia Spencer Carr, The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers, (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1975), P.24.

Carson McCullers believes that one of the things man most fears is moral loneliness. She says that man can be physically alone without suffering if he is not morally alone. Man can achieve this by affirming identity in some way or another with the outside world.(2) All this is reflected throughout her novel in the lives of the characters. Erich Fromm, a psychoanalyst and philosopher of the 20th century who studies the social and economic conditions of our time and how they affect man's nature, concurs with McCullers. He says that moral loneliness is caused by the failure to relate to the world around us. This connection can be achieved through religion, nationalism, customs, or beliefs, as long as these link the individual with other people. He also states that to be physically alone can be tolerable if moral loneliness does not exist.(3)

An interesting question arises for someone living in a society similar to the one McCullers depicts in her novel: What causes moral loneliness in man? First, it is important to point out that man is the only living creature that is aware of his existence and everything around him. He is conscious of his insignificance within an immense universe. This self-conscious awareness of his smallness provokes moral loneliness, producing in him a need to be part of someone or something even if it means giving up his particular individuality

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2. Ibid, p.14.

3. Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom, (New York: The Hearst Corporation, 1969), pp.44-45.

in order to feel less alone. Spencer Carr's biography quotes McCullers:

"To the spectator, the amateur philosopher, no motive among the complex ricochets of our desires and rejections seems stronger or more enduring than the will of the individual to claim his identity and belong. From infancy to death, the human being is obsessed by these dual motives...After the first establishment of identity there comes the imperative need to lose this new found sense of separateness and to belong to something larger and more powerful than the weak, lonely self. The sense of moral isolation is intolerable to us."(4)

Fromm expresses a parallel idea that man's awareness of his separateness creates a feeling of futility:

"To the extent to which the child emerges from the world it becomes aware of being an entity separate from all others. This separation from a world, which in comparison with one's own individual existence is overwhelmingly strong and powerful, and often threatening and dangerous, creates a feeling of powerlessness and anxiety. As long as one was an integral part of that world unaware of the possibilities and responsibilities of individual action, one did not need to be afraid of it. When one has become an individual, one stands alone and faces the world in all its perilous and overpowering aspects."(5)

He explains how this feeling of powerlessness provokes loneliness and causes man to want to give up his individualism by submitting to social conformity.(6) The concept of man in search for something greater and more supreme than the lonely self is expressed by Margaret McDowell who states that one of

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4. Spencer Carr, loc. cit.
  5. Fromm, loc. cit.
  6. Ibid, p.45.

the themes in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter is the need "to create a unifying principle or god".(7)

The issue of man's alienation plays a vital part in the portrayal of McCullers' characters and their loneliness. The setting, which is important to consider, depicts an impoverished southern town. In The Heart is a Lonely Hunter McCullers describes the town:

"On the main street there were several blocks of two and three story shops and business offices. But the largest buildings in the town were the factories, which employed a large percentage of the population. These cotton mills were big and flourishing and most of the workers in the town were very poor. Often in the faces along the streets there was the desperate look of hunger and of loneliness."(8)

Lawrence Graver's opinion on The Heart is a Lonely Hunter is that "Few books of the 1930's communicate as well the stagnancy of life in a depressed textile community..."(9)

Existentialism, the philosophical and literary trend that arose in Europe after World War II, is concerned with the problem of alienation. According to existentialists the feeling of estrangement has augmented tremendously in the last hundred years. The reasons can be traced to several changes in human society: the Industrial Revolution, machine production, many people living together in cities. All these factors lead to

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7. Margaret McDowell, Carson McCullers, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), p.31.

8. Carson McCullers, The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, (England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1974), p.9.

9. Lawrence Graver, Carson McCullers, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1968), p.18.

the depersonalization of man.(10) This depersonalization of man is reflected in McCullers' book. The characters are involved with work that does not connect them with their needs or dreams, nor does it unite them spiritually with other human beings. Their jobs do not give them the feeling of a purpose in life. Singer's job as an engraver does not give him enough satisfaction and this is reflected in his unhealthy relationship with Antonapoulos. Biff sits behind a cash register in his own café and lapses into constant day-dreaming and fantasizing. Mick, as a ten cent clerk, cannot develop her musical interests. A hard-drinking, non-conformist Jake Blount goes from one job to the next, barely surviving. His job as a ferris-wheel mechanic does not provide an avenue for productivity, creativity, or self-expression in a gratifying way. The characters are not in touch with their inner feelings nor with the outside world. In other words, they are alienated from their inner selves and their outer surroundings.

The author's comments on social and economic issues are not revealed directly in the novel. They are illustrated subtly through the characters and incidents that take place.(11) The structure that McCullers employs in her book of dividing each character into separate chapters accentuates the tone of human isolation and loneliness. This similar technique will be utilized in displaying the main characters in the following analysis.

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10. F.H. Heinemann, Existentialism and the Modern Predicament, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958), p.9.

11. McDowell, loc. cit.



Mick Kelly

Mick Kelly is an adolescent 14 year old girl. She lives with her brothers and sisters, father and mother in a big house. Her parents rent out rooms to boarders. Mick has an affinity for music and yearns to play the piano and compose music someday. Her family cannot afford a piano, not even a radio, so she searches the neighborhood for a house where a radio can be heard playing classical music. More than anything, music stimulates her.

"She learned a lot about music during these free nights in the summer-time. When she walked out in the rich parts of town every house had a radio. All the windows were open and she could hear the music very marvellous. After a while she knew which houses tuned in for the programmes she wanted to hear. There was one special house that got all the good orchestras. And at night she would go to this house and sneak into the dark yard to listen. There was beautiful shrubbery around this house, and she would sit under a bush near the window. And after it was all over she would stand in the dark yard with her hands in her pockets and think for a long time. That was the realest part of all the summer—her listening to this music on the radio and studying about it."(12)

There are many ways for people to communicate and express themselves. Painters communicate through their paintings; writers through their literary works. Music would be Mick's way of communicating her inner feelings and emotions to the outer world. The fact that she is unable to develop her talents in this field produces such loneliness in Mick because her personal

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12. McCullers, op. cit., p.93.

way of communication is repressed. Music gives meaning to Mick and the fact that it remains blocked in her also increases her loneliness. Humans must have a sense of belonging to something or someone in order to combat loneliness. We know that man is conscious of his being and his surroundings. The self-awareness of his existence makes him feel little and insignificant in an enormous universe unless he has some purpose in life. Mick's energies and inner drives are not channeled in a way that fulfills her or develops her particular potentials. Her constant restlessness, her pent-up energy cannot be released because of the inability to gratify her life's goals.

Mick's loneliness is reinforced by poverty. She has no piano at her disposal and therefore she cannot develop her musical aspirations. She uses up her lunch money in order to pay for piano classes but the only teacher available for her has limited knowledge in music and the teacher cannot satisfy all of Mick's inquisitiveness toward music. Her sacrifice results in hunger. She is a victim of her family's poor financial situation. Together with her brothers and sisters, she must cooperate in order to fulfill her obligations and the family's needs (13) causing her own spiritual goals to become secondary.

"Bill had a job in a bottling plant and made ten dollars a week. Hazel worked as a helper in a beauty parlour for eight dollars. Etta sold tickets at a movie for five dollars. Each of them paid half of

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13. Frederick J. Hoffman, The Art of Southern Fiction, (London: Feffer and Simons, Inc., 1967), p.66.

what they earned for their keep. Then the house had six boarders at five dollars a head. And Mister Singer, who paid his rent very prompt. With what their Dad picked up it all came to about two hundred dollars a month—and out of that they had to feed six boarders pretty good and feed the family and pay rent for the whole house and keep up the payments on the furniture."(14)

All of Mick's time and energy must be spent helping her mother with her younger brothers or cleaning up around the house. When later she takes on a job, there is still no time for inner satisfactions or goals that are self-fulfilling.

"I want—I want—I want was all that she could think about but just what this real want was she did not know."(15)

Mick's attempts to change her fate is futile.

"It was money, money, money all the time. They owed to the grocery and they owed the last payment on some furniture..."(16)

Toward the end of the novel she says that she feels cheated but cannot put the blame on anybody.(p.308) At the time much poverty existed in the South of the United States. During the Depression salaries went way down. The mills, which were the major source of work, operated three days a week instead of the entire week. Farmers went to the cities to look for jobs, turning over their land to tenants. Many farmers starved. Any changes for improvement were suppressed. Strikers were

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14. McCullers, op. cit., p.210.

15. Ibid, p.50.

16. Ibid, p.270.

stopped because they were considered communist or alien plotters against the government. Unions collapsed and the majority of the people, both black and white, were destitute. According to W. J. Cash the Southerners had faith in their past and rejected any changes or innovations. Anything new in thought or behavior that came from the outside was considered alien or Yankee. The Southerners are known throughout their past as people who do not like to analyze. They do not like to think—they prefer to feel. They are a conservative people with a spirit of romanticism. They feel they have no need for changes and they have no desire for intellectual culture. Because of this lack of analysis and intellectual profundity the people were more frightened during the Depression. A loss of foreign market for cotton resulted in an increase in crimes; slums proliferated. Poverty increased due to the people's lack of a sense of reality and leadership to bring about improvements and changes. To this day the Southerners cling to their past and suffer from the same defects.(17) Mick's loneliness is symptomatic of her inability to resolve her economic situation within the described society. Her poverty intensifies her alienation. Poverty destroys the ability of people to communicate with each other since they are too preoccupied with fulfilling their own basic needs. Mick is frustrated by people too busy to heed to her needs. Her mother is too occupied

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17. W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South, (England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973), p.435.

with her household chores to pay attention to her.

"As she was dodging through the hall to get to the back yard she ran into her Mama. 'What's the matter with you? What have you been into now?'

Mick tried to jerk loose, but her Mama held on to her arm. Sullenly she wiped the tears from her face with the back of her hand. Her Mama had been in the kitchen and she wore her apron and house-shoes. As usual she looked as though she had a lot on her mind and didn't have time to ask her any more questions.

'Mr. Jackson has brought his two sisters to dinner and there won't be but just enough chairs so today you're to eat in the kitchen with Bubber.' "(18)

At the same time her father is absorbed in the effort to earn more money. Work in itself is not negative, but the jobs available to the working class, which the Kelly family represents in the society portrayed in the novel, do not give solutions to the problems of poverty. The Kelly family never seems to be able to catch up with payments on their debts. Their work only helps them to exist but not to improve; therefore, people like the Kelly family are overcome by feelings of resignation, hopelessness, disappointment. Thus their capacity to communicate is destroyed, and loneliness prevails. Mick must resign and give up her individuality to society's demand to earn enough money to help her family pay the bills. There is no time for personal achievement. Mick lives in a society which makes it difficult to earn a living doing what she really would enjoy.

Two important elements contribute to Mick's loneliness: poverty and the inability to realize her musical ambitions. Both factors are related in the sense that they restrict Mick's communication with her surroundings. She is surrounded by people but nonetheless she feels lonely because she does not communicate with others.

"It was funny, too, how lonesome a person could be in a crowded house."(19)

Mick's attempts to relate to members of her family and other people are unsuccessful and she feels tremendously alone. She seeks out one of the boarders to whom she can communicate her inner feelings. She reveals all of her dreams, aspirations, and desires to this one person, Mr. Singer. But it is very ironical that she chooses a person who is a deaf-mute. She thinks that he is the only one who understands her feelings. Her relationship with him reveals her need to identify with others and "to belong to something larger and more powerful than the weak, lonely self."(20)

"Was Mister Singer awake in his room upstairs? Did the ceiling creak because he was walking quietly up and down, drinking a cold orange crush and studying the chess-men laid out on the table? Had ever he felt a terrible afraidness like this one? No. He had never done anything wrong. He had never done wrong and his heart was quiet in the night-time. Yet at the same time he would understand."(21)

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19. Ibid, p.51.

20. Spencer Carr, op. cit., p.14.

21. McCullers, op. cit., p.274.

Nevertheless, it becomes a sick relationship because she deforms reality by believing he understands and "listens" to her. This provides a release for her loneliness. Ironically, Mick becomes more alienated from reality because of this relationship. When Mick begins working, her feeling for music and everything else that is found in her "inside room" become more repressed and her obsession for Singer increases. When she stealthily follows Singer all over town it makes her feel less alone.

"She wanted to follow him everywhere. In the morning she would watch him go down the front steps to work and then follow along a half a block behind him. Every afternoon as soon as school was over she hung around at the corner near the store where he worked. At four o'clock he went out to drink a Coca-Cola. She watched him finally come out again. She followed him home from work and sometimes even when he took walks. She always followed a long way behind him. And he did not know."(22)

This relationship with Singer does not cure Mick of her loneliness. Her obsession for the mute is a symptom of her loneliness.

Mick encapsulates herself in fantasy. She dreams about inventions, and songs, and music. She yearns for faraway places.

"...Maybe in a little Switzerland town with high glaciers and the mountains all around. Where rocks were on top of all the houses and the roofs were steep and pointed. Or in France where the people carried home bread from the store without its being wrapped. Or in the foreign country of Norway by the

grey winter ocean."(23)

Elsewhere McCullers talks about people's yearnings:

"All men are lonely. But sometimes it seems to me that we Americans are the loneliest of all. Our hunger for foreign places and new ways has been with us almost like a national disease."(24)

Mick escapes from her inevitable loneliness, even though temporarily, creating her own world of fantasies.

Another element that contributes to Mick's loneliness is the fact that she is neither a little girl nor a woman. She is in the process of completing her growth physically, and maturing mentally.(25) There is also very little she can do to improve her economic or social status because of her age. In this respect she is temporarily a victim of her youth.

Mick's struggle is one against repression. She needs to express herself. The frustration she feels in her life intensifies her estrangement. She feels fragmented by suppressing her inner needs and feelings, and she feels isolated by the futility to satisfy and realize these needs. But because of her adolescence Mick has hope and looks forward to the time when she will be able to communicate in her own individual way.

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23. Ibid, p.214.

24. Spencer Carr, op. cit., p.134.

25. Ihab Hassan, "The Individual Talent", Radical Innocence: Studies in Contemporary American Novel, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), p.208.



### Dr. Copeland

Dr. Copeland is a black intellectual, a physician who serves his people not only by healing their physical illnesses but by playing an activist's role in fighting for their human rights. He is much more educated than most of his people and his knowledge of Marx and his strong convictions and beliefs that Marxism is the answer to his people's problems of oppression, injustice, and inequality motivates him to deliver lectures to them whenever he has the opportunity. In spite of the fact that he is suffering from tuberculosis, Dr. Copeland never stops working and helping the people of his community. But eventually he becomes sicker and because he lives alone, he is unable to continue physically without the help of his estranged family.

Part of Dr. Copeland's loneliness is rooted in the fact that he is black. Because of his broader education he can perceive the terrible oppression of his people with more clarity. In The Mind of the South, W. J. Cash states that after the Civil War the blacks were no longer valuable to the whites economically speaking; therefore, they not only lost the protection of the whites but racism grew stronger and the blacks became scapegoats for the whites' poor economic conditions. Dr. Copeland is in a perpetual struggle against this racism and he encourages his people to change their attitudes in order to produce changes and improvements for themselves. Dr. Copeland talks to his people:

" 'Attention!' he called. 'We will save ourselves. But not by prayers of mourning. Not by indolence or strong drink. Not by the pleasures of the body or by ignorance. Not by submission and humbleness. Put by pride. By dignity. By becoming hard and strong. We must build strength for our real true purpose.' "(26)

This struggle has alienated Dr. Copeland from his family because his struggle has become a hostile fight against everyone around him including his children.

"He married and made a home. He went endlessly from house to house and spoke the mission and the truth. The hopeless suffering of his people made him a madness, a wild and evil feeling of destruction. At times he drank strong liquor and beat his head against the floor. In his heart there was a savage violence, and once he grasped the poker from the hearth and struck down his wife. She took Hamilton, Karl Marx, William, and Portia with her to her father's home. He wrestled in his spirit and fought down the evil blackness. But Daisy did not come back to him. And eight years later when she died his sons were not children any more and they did not return to him."(27)

Most of his people adjust and conform to their situation, which is easier than rebelling, but that is precisely what Dr. Copeland is so earnestly fighting—the attitude of acceptance in his people. He is far more conscious of the reality of the situation of his people, which in itself is painful, but his attitude of not wanting to adjust, adapt, or accept his reality as a member of a minority group is even more harmful

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26. McCullers, op. cit., p.172.  
27. Ibid, p.128.

to him. This is demonstrated in the novel when he goes to see the judge of the Superior Court on the matter of his son, Willie, and then ends up in jail. Dr. Copeland's attitude is unrealistic because he expects too much from the other blacks. The experiences he suffers due to this racism is part of the reasons for Dr. Copeland's loneliness. He is discriminated by the whites because of his physical differences. He is unable to attend to his health also due to his color because a good hospital that admits blacks is not available.

Portia, William, and Highboy serve as a contrast to Dr. Copeland. Portia argues with her father:

" 'Hamilton or Buddy or Willie or me—none of us ever cares to talk like you. Us talk like our own Mama and her peoples and their peoples before them. You think out everything in your brain. While us rather talk from something in our hearts that has been there for a long time. That's one of them differences.' "(28)

Their attitudes are representative of the black people in a southern town in the United States. They feel hopeless toward their situation and they accept their position with resignation.(29) Dr. Copeland, on the contrary, strives to maintain his own individuality, his beliefs, and his convictions, so he must face the world on his own. Like many

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28. Ibid, pp.72-73.

29. McDowell, op. cit., p.41.

people in the world, the blacks give up their individuality so they do not have to suffer such tremendous loneliness, but in doing this, they become part of the mass.(30) It is easier for William to conform to his fate and lose his individuality than to fight for his rights. Dr. Copeland's fight against the injustice done to William calls for a more courageous attitude in life. It is a much more difficult path to follow because he has to stand alone but, he is unwilling to give up his struggle against injustice.

Another reason why Dr. Copeland suffers from loneliness is because of his beliefs and convictions. He is superior to his people intellectually and this makes him more aware of the reality of his people's situation. His convictions do not permit him to conform or adapt, and the system to which he belongs does not accept or understand his points of view. He believes that Marxism is the answer to the problems of oppression and inequality.

" 'Each year at this time we illustrate in our small way the first commandment from Karl Marx. Every one of you at this gathering has brought in advance some gift. Many of you have denied yourselves comfort that the needs of others may be lessened. Each of you has given according to his best ability, without thought to the value of the gift he will receive in return. It is natural for us to share with each other. We have long realized that it is more blessed to give than to receive. The words of Karl Marx have always been known in our hearts: "From each accord-

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30. Fromm, loc. cit.

ing to his ability, to each according to his needs." ' "(31)

Dr. Copeland believes the economic system of his country is the cause of this oppression. His goal to change the system and to change the attitude of conformity in his people to a revolutionary one, in order to get rid of injustice, is so far from being possible to achieve and so unrealistic that Dr. Copeland sometimes forgets what this purpose is:

"He would think of this purpose until sometimes, after a long day and night of work, he would become blank so that he would forget for a minute just what the purpose was."(32)

His strong ideals and his beliefs in ways to solve these problems drive the people to whom he is closest, his wife and children, away from him. This is why he lives alone.

Lack of communication and the lack of identity with other people also produce loneliness in Dr. Copeland. Dr. Copeland feels no sense of solidarity or identity with his own people nor does he receive any understanding from anybody in his struggle for justice. His loneliness draws him to Mr. Singer. He sees in the deaf-mute what Mick sees in him—a "listener" and an understanding human being who can comprehend his beliefs and ideas, his rebellion, his non-conformity. With Singer, Dr. Copeland can alleviate the immense loneliness that invades his soul if only temporarily. Like Mick, he sees in

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31. McCullers, op. cit., p.172.

32. Ibid, p.125.

Singer a strong person, a self-confident man.

"He remembered the white man's face when he smiled behind the yellow match flame on that rainy night—and peace was in him."(33)

Being able to talk out his frustrations and dreams with Singer and the tremendous need to express them to someone makes Singer his "god". Dr. Copeland believes that Singer is also a member of a minority group, a Jew, and this makes his identification with Singer more comprehensible. But his relationship with Singer is similar to Mick's because it is not based on reality. He believes what he needs to believe about Singer.

Dr. Copeland ends his struggle against society and the system but only externally, due to his poor health. His health gets worse and he has no other choice but to surrender, permitting his family to take him away to live with them on their farm. He is no longer physically alone, but his moral loneliness will continue to prevail in him. When he goes off in the wagon he still feels the fight in him:

"He felt the fire in him and could not be still. He wanted to get up and speak in a loud voice—yet when he tried to raise himself he could not find the strength. The words in his heart grew big and they would not be silent. But the old man had ceased to listen and there was no one to hear him."(34)

The following elements contribute to Dr. Copeland's alienation: his fanaticism in his ideals and convictions, the fact that he is a member of a minority group, and his sick

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33. Ibid, p.83.

34. Ibid, p.293.

physical condition. What keeps him going is his belief and his identity with certain principles. His faith in Marxism gives him the moral strength that keeps him going until he collapses physically.

## Jake Blount

Jake Blount makes his first appearance in the novel in Biff's café.

"He ordered a pint of liquor and drank it straight in half an hour. Then he sat at one of the booths and ate a big chicken dinner. Later he read a book and drank beer. That was the beginning. And although Biff had noticed Blount very carefully he would never have guessed about the crazy things that happened later. Never had he seen a man change so many times in twelve days. Never had he seen a fellow drink so much, stay drunk so long."(35)

Jake Blount is similar to Dr. Copeland in many ways. He is extremely conscious of his surroundings, economically and politically. He is very much aware of the system's injustices. Being a non-conformist, he is unsatisfied with the social and economic conditions of his country, specifically of the South. However, racism does not play a part in his inner struggle with the world as it does in Dr. Copeland's case. As a radical agitator in the South among people who hate changes Jake is rejected, ostracized and ignored by the members of his society. For this reason he feels very lonely. To alleviate his unbearable loneliness he takes refuge in drinking. Unlike Dr. Copeland, who is able to resort to some productive solutions to help create changes (giving speeches to his people, curing among the sick, etc.,) Jake is unable to do anything to create changes that he feels need to take place.



The only thing he resorts to is making speeches in the street and passing out pamphlets which make him vulnerable to attacks and insults.

" 'I go around,' Blount said. He leaned earnestly across the table and kept his eyes on the mute's face. 'I go all around and try to tell them. And they laugh. I can't make them understand anything. No matter what I say I can't seem to make them see the truth.' "(36)

Both Jake and Dr. Copeland are unable to communicate their beliefs or identify with other people, not even with each other, although they have similar points of view. We can see this lack of communication when they have a discussion for the first and last time in Dr. Copeland's room. Jake says:

" 'But even if by some miracle you got to Washington it wouldn't do any good. Why the whole notion is crazy.' "

Dr. Copeland answer:

" 'As you are so quick to sneer and condemn what do you have to offer instead?' "

" 'I didn't sneer,' Jake said, 'I only remarked that your plan is crazy. I come here tonight with an idea much better than that. I wanted your son, Willie, and the other two boys to let me push them around in a wagon. They were to tell what happened to them and afterwards I was to tell why. In other words, I was to give a talk on the dialectics of capitalism—and show up all of its lies. I would explain so that everyone would understand why those boys' legs were cut off. And make everyone who saw them know.'

'Pshaw! Double pshaw!' said Doctor Copeland furiously. 'I do not believe you have good

sense...' "(37)

Like Dr. Copeland, Jake stands alone in his convictions. He maintains his individuality but, as Fromm says, he must stand alone and face the world by himself. Many people submit to the outside world by giving up their individuality, their convictions, their beliefs, in order to overcome their loneliness.(38) Jake only allows himself to find escape from loneliness in alcohol. By drinking, he alleviates this dreadful feeling of solitude, but in no way does he give up his convictions. His fanaticism drives people away from him just as it does in Dr. Copeland's case. McDowell says: "Their fanaticism undermines their sincere attempts to communicate with others and to influence them."(39) Singer is the only one Jake can identify with in his beliefs because he feels that Singer knows "the truth" about capitalism. Singer is the only one who "listens" and who understands Jake. This identity with Singer relieves Jake's loneliness to some extent since his loneliness is produced by the lack of communication or connection with others. He uses Singer as someone with whom he can talk out his fight against society. "For Jake Blount, a haggard radical agitator with a greater gift for talk than action, Singer is divine because he listens."(40)

Jake's frustration leads him to violence and aggression.

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37. Ibid, p.266.  
 38. Fromm, loc.cit.  
 39. McDowell, op. cit., p.34.  
 40. Graver, op. cit., p.11.

He says to Singer:

" 'You see, it's like I'm two people. One of me is an educated man. I been in some of the biggest libraries in the country. I read. I read all the time. I read books that tell the pure honest truth. Over there in my suitcase I have books by Karl Marx and Thorstein Veblen and such writers as them. I read them over and over, and the more I study the madder I get...' "(41)

Jake talks and talks loud to compensate for his feeling of powerlessness. His struggle to get rid of the injustice of the system he lives in is futile. He is overpowered by the majority who surround him. Passing out pamphlets and announcements is useless. The battle is too much for one man alone. His non-conformity and the inability to identify this feeling of non-conformity with somebody produces his moral isolation.

"The loneliness in him was so keen that he was filled with terror. Usually he had a pint of bootleg white lightening. He drank the raw liquor and by daylight he was warm and relaxed..."(42)

Jake finds nothing in his society that can satisfy him. He is a failure as a person, economically and socially, in the eyes of his community. He feels alienated from his surrounding world. Alienation, according to Marx, is man's greatest psychic sickness which is caused by industrialization. He defines alienation as man estranged from nature, from his fellow man, from himself, and from his surroundings. Capitalism reinforces

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41. McCullers, op. cit., p.64.

42. Ibid, p.137.

alienation, one of its main characteristics being individualistic activity—every man for himself.(43) In the feudal system of the Middle Ages everyone had a proper place in society and could not change his position. This lack of mobility in society in which man was not free to choose took away the responsibility for his own success or failure. Marx says that nowadays in a capitalist system each person is expected to be responsible for his own self and what he does, how he does it, and if he he succeeds or fails.(44) Jake Blount is a wandering lost soul who feels so lonely because he has no proper or secure place in his society.

"...this principle [of individual activity] helped to sever all ties between the individual and the others and thereby isolated and separated the individual from his fellow man."(45)

Jake's knowledge through books has only offered him the ability to perceive the ugly truths about the system around him. This only leaves him more alienated than before. Finally Jake finds it difficult to cope in a society that goes completely against his ideals.

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43. Erich Fromm, "Alienation", Marx's Concept of Man, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1966), pp.43-58.

44. Ibid.

45. Fromm, Escape From Freedom, p.128.

## Biff Brannon

Biff Brannon runs the café that he owns. Of all the characters in the novel he is the most observant, perceptive, and sensitive. He studies the other characters:

"Biff narrowed his eyes. How Singer had been before was not important. The thing that mattered was the way Blount and Mick made him a sort of home-made God. Owing to the fact he was a mute they were able to give him all the qualities they wanted him to have. Yes. But how could such a strange thing come about? And why?"(46)

Biff is the only one who really questions the nature of the mute while the others take him for granted as a good listener and an understanding human being.

Biff identifies with "freaks". He is alienated from his real self because he is unable to express his innermost feelings to others but he feels he can identify with "freaks".

"What he had said to Alice was true—he did like freaks. He had a special friendly feeling for sick people and cripples. Whenever somebody with a harelip or T.B. came into the place he would set them up to beer. Or, if the customer were a hunchback or a bad cripple then it would be whiskey on the house..."(47)

Handicapped people are alienated from the rest of the world because of their physical differences. Biff is isolated from the outside world because of his internal differences. He is conscious of his abnormal feelings and therefore he is unable to identify or communicate with others. Biff is ashamed of

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46. McCullers, op. cit., p.294.

47. Ibid, p.23.

some of the feelings he discovers he has, such as wishing he were a mother.

"...By nature all people are of both sexes. So that marriage and the bed is not all by any means. The proof? Real youth and old age. Because often old man's voices grow high and reedy and they take on a mincing walk. And old women sometimes grow fat and their voices get rough and deep and they grow dark little moustaches. And he even proved ~~it~~ himself--the part of him that sometimes almost wished he was a mother and that Mick and Baby were his kids."(48)

Sometimes Biff has effeminate traits.

"In this room nothing reminded him of her. But often he would uncork the bottle of Agua Florida and touch the stopper to the lobes of his ears or to his wrists."(49)

Since Biff cannot uncover his true feelings and bring them out in the open he fantasizes relationships in his mind with people he can identify with. He never externalizes these imaginary relationships. Because they are products of his imagination, these fantasies of Mick, Baby and others relieve his loneliness superficially. They actually alienate him more from the outside world because they exist solely in his mind, and he is never able to realize them because of their sick nature.

Biff's consciousness of his sick fantasies and dreams contributes to his loneliness. The alienation of his true self leads him towards these sick fantasies. Society, with its many unwritten laws and demands on each individual, re-

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48. Ibid, p. 119.

49. Ibid, p. 198.

presses Biff's true nature and inner needs or his libido, forcing him to resort to deviant behavior reflected in the ways he must satisfy these needs. According to Freud in primitive times man's libido (man's instincts and sexual energy) was free to be expressed spontaneously and in a natural way. In the course of the development of man and civilization, the libido became frustrated because mental and physical energies were diverted to non-sexual activity wherein needs and desires became repressed. This repression led to neurosis.(50) Man became less in touch with his inner feelings. Biff does not have the courage to express his true nature for fear of being rejected, criticized, ostracized or ridiculed. His sick fixation on Mick is a defense for his loneliness. Focusing his attention on a certain person, such as Mick, helps to ease the unbearable loneliness that he feels since he cannot relate to anyone in a natural way.

"For the past four Sundays he had walked in the neighborhood where he might see Mick. And there was something about it that was—not quite right. Yes. Wrong."(51)

Biff's relationships with others are superficial. He does not get along at all with his wife, Alice. She does not understand Biff. They both live in two separate worlds. No communication exists between the two of them. His relationship with Singer is not as important as it is with the rest

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50. Erich Fromm, "The Sick Individual and the Sick Society", Beyond the Chains of Illusion, (U.S.A: Simon and Schuster, 1980), p.41.

51. McCullers, op. cit., p.205.

of the characters. He is drawn to Singer as he is to many of the other people who enter the café but he does not have the need to talk to him as the others do. He sees Singer more objectively. Biff's failure to relate to others in a satisfying way foments his loneliness.

Another factor that produces Biff's loneliness is the fact that he leads an empty life. He has no constructive or meaningful goal in his life. His life is full of empty dreams that are impossible to realize. He knows they are unrealistic and wrong. Since he is aware of this, he knows he must keep them to himself. His communication, consequently, is blocked.

"What did he understand? Nothing. Where was he headed? Nowhere. What did he want? To know. What? A meaning. Why? A riddle."(52)

Biff questions the real meaning of his life but has no answer. He has no purpose in his life.

Biff Brannon is the character who least communicates. His mind is always at work recalling the same memories but never relating them with his present life.

"Broken pictures lay like a scattered jigsaw puzzle in his head. Alice soaping in the bathtub. Mussolini's mug. Mick pulling the baby in a wagon. A roast turkey on display. Blount's mouth. The face of Singer..."(53)

Biff sees everything as something separate. Biff's inner life consists of separate parts that do not fit together.(54) He

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52. Ibid, p.209.

53. Ibid.

54. McDowell, op. cit., p.36.



is a fragmented human being. He cannot find harmony between his feelings and inner drives and the society he lives in. His society is incapable of satisfying his needs or connecting his inner self with the outer world, and this leads to his loneliness.

### Mr. Singer

Mr. Singer is a deaf-mute who, with his gentle look and nice smile, attracts people to him. Jake Blount is captivated by his magnetic character when he wakes up from his drunkenness in Singer's room. Dr. Copeland is attracted to him the first moment he meets him on the street when he lights his cigarette for him. Mick develops an obsession for the mute as he becomes her "magic helper". Biff is attracted to handicapped people and he is drawn to him ever since he appears in his café. Singer works as a silverware engraver in a jewelry store. At the beginning of the novel, he lives with his Greek friend, Antonapoulos, who is also a deaf-mute. Later, his friend is taken to a sanatorium due to his anti-social conduct. Singer is left alone and he moves to a room at the Kelly's boarding house. His life changes after his friend leaves and he must adjust to a new life.

Singer is more similar to Biff than the other characters in the sense that he also lacks satisfying goals in his life. His job as an engraver does not satisfy his inner drives. He directs all of his spiritual energy and emotions to his Greek friend, Antonapoulos. His relationship with Antonapoulos is dependent and unrealistic.

"For as the year went on his thoughts of his friend spiraled deeper until he dwelt only with the Antonapoulos whom he alone could know.

This was the friend to whom he told all that was in his heart. This was the Antonapoulos who no one knew was wise but him. As the

year passed his friend seemed to grow larger in his mind and his face looked out in every grave and subtle way from the darkness at night. The memories of his friend changed in his mind so that he remembered nothing that was wrong or foolish—only the wise and good."(55)

When Antonapoulos, Singer's roommate and best friend, begins acquiring strange and anti-social behavior his boss and cousin, Charles Parker, does not want to help him. Parker waits until he is able to make arrangements to send Antonapoulos to an insane asylum.

"Charles Parker did not know much about the American language—but he understood the American dollar very well, and he had used his money and influence to admit his cousin to the asylum without delay."(56)

Antonapoulos, as an employee, is no longer a profitable element to his cousin's economical interests. This shows how the exploitation of the worker leads to increased feelings of powerlessness and isolation of man. Alfred Kazin states that McCullers' novel is concerned with the powerlessness of people and the cruel powers of their government.(57) Those in control, such as Charles Parker, are dedicated to self-gain and therefore the working class is victimized and manipulated. This victimization and manipulation make relationships with the working class less personal.(58)

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55. McCullers, op. cit., p.48.

56. Ibid, p.12.

57. Alfred Kazin, Bright Book of Life: American Novelists and Storytellers From Hemingway to Mailer, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971), p.52.

58. Fromm, Escape From Freedom, pp.130-132.

Singer's dependence on Antonapoulos is so great that when his friend leaves Singer still depends on him if only in his imagination.

"Antonapoulos! Within Singer there was always the memory of his friend. At night when he closed his eyes the Greek's face was there in the darkness, round and oily, with a wise and gentle smile. In his dreams they were always together."(59)

His memories relieve his loneliness. The dependence on his friend is so extreme that when he learns of Antonapoulos' death Singer has no more reason to live and he commits suicide.

Singer's attitude toward his friend is similar to the attitude most of the other characters have toward him. His relationship with the other characters is not reciprocal. He does not understand them as they think he does. For Singer, Antonapoulos is the only channel for communication with the outside world. The person with whom Singer uses sign language to communicate is his friend, Antonapoulos. Likewise, his relationship with his friend is not reciprocal. It is extremely ironic that the one character to whom all the others turn to for reassurance and comfort depends on someone whose mental aptitude is greatly to be doubted.

Singer's society cannot offer him any fulfilling purpose that gives meaning to his life. Without Antonapoulos Singer feels completely empty and insignificant. Antonapoulos is the center of all of Singer's needs and feelings.

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59. McCullers, op. cit., p.177.

Singer's deafness adds to his alienation from the rest of the world. Singer's silence accentuates other voices and dramatizes the lack of comprehension and communication among the characters.(60) Singer is also able to identify more with Antonapoulos because they share the same handicap. His deafness gives a certain quality of security to the people who confide their secrets to him. This is part of the reason why Mick, Jake, and Dr. Copeland open up to him.

Singer represents a god-like figure to the main characters in the novel as Antonapoulos does to Singer.(61) This worship relieves them from their loneliness temporarily. Man finds the need to look up to someone or something to feel less lonely. This is the reason why man creates gods, heroes, leaders, and celebrities:

"One by one they would come to Singer's room to spend the evening with him. The mute was always thoughtful and composed. His many-tinted gentle eyes were grave as a sorcerer's. Mick Kelly and Jake Blount and Dr. Copeland would come and talk in the silent room—for they felt that the mute would always understand whatever they wanted to say to him. And maybe even more than that."(62)

Margaret McDowell points out that Singer functions as a mirror where the rest of the characters see themselves as they talk to him.(63) Singer gives the impression of confidence and well-being, unlike the other characters who are constantly

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60. McDowell, op. cit., p.34.  
 61. Graver, op. cit., p.17.  
 62. McCullers, op. cit., p.86.  
 63. McDowell, loc.cit.

looking for reassurance. But the alienation generated from his abnormal relationship with Antonapoulos, together with his physical handicap actually prevent him from being a self-secure man. Instead, they leave him with a sense of loneliness so great that he becomes a shattered person overwhelmed by a loneliness he cannot avoid.

Singer's suicide bewilders the characters of the novel.

McDowell comments on Singer:

"His suicide harmonizes with no one's previous conception of him. No one knew the single-mindedness of his love for Antonapoulos or his longing for understanding."(64)

The god-like image of Singer as perceived by the other characters is radically different from his final and fatal action of suicide.

The main theme that emerges from the characters in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter is the one of loneliness that results from alienation.

One of the main factors that lead to the characters' alienation is the economic conditions of the struggling working class. Most of the characters in McCullers' novel represent the working class. They are dehumanized by their monotonous work.(65) The problem of the working class is that they are unable to accumulate enough profit to invest and therefore have to sell their labor making them depend on the entrepreneur who has capital and power in their community. The rich become richer and more powerful. The poor become poorer. The working class has few alternatives to solve their economic problems as we see in McCullers' characters. Rich people control education, the media, and politics. Carson McCullers was aware of the weaknesses of a capitalist society.(66) Many of her feelings involving capitalism are mirrored in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter. A few examples are: the fate of Antonapoulos, Singer's best friend, Mick's frustrated economic situation, Jake Blount's futile struggle for equal rights and opportunities among the working class.

Certain social conditions reflected in McCullers' novel also lead to the alienation of the characters. The society

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65. Ibid, p.146.

66. Spencer Carr, op. cit., p.24.

portrayed in the novel does not offer them constructive goals that give meaning to their lives, as in Biff's case. Ignorance and racism are two social factors that produce alienation in Dr. Copeland's life.

The lack of communication, generated by social and economic conditions, is an important element that contributes to the alienation of McCullers' characters. In Mick's situation communication is lacking mostly because of an economic factor—poverty. Dr. Copeland has problems with communication because of several social reasons—racism and ignorance not only among his people but among other people. Jake Blount's lack of communication is due to his fanaticism and his battle against the system. Biff cannot communicate with the outside world because he has socially abnormal emotions. Finally, Singer's physical handicap symbolizes the lack of communication so strongly present in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter.

Carson McCullers manages to transmit a very deep understanding of the period and people in which The Heart is a Lonely Hunter takes place. Through the portrayal of her characters she allows us to understand the problem that affects a large group of people in the United States. She does it brilliantly in a convincing and realistic manner. This book transcends its setting and time because it permits us to understand the universal problem of loneliness when it is provoked by socio-economic situations that exist throughout the world.



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