

Chapter 2

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The presence of alienation and escape from reality has been a dominant theme in American life and fiction as well. Specifically in the twentieth century, there were widespread feelings of desperation and hopelessness, confusion in American society. As Yuko Eguchi puts it,

“No other civilized, modern people seem to me to be so much confronted with the reality of human isolation and to suffer so much from their emotional void as present day Americans” (Eguchi, 1959: 146)

Modernization and industrialization had badly affected American life. It may be said that the causes of human isolation seems to lie in the highly mechanical and materialistic civilization. Communication, which is the main link between man and man, seems to have been damaged by the standardized lifestyle of mankind. Mechanization has badly affected human life and relations have become more and more mechanical and impersonal. These tendencies of dehumanization and impersonalization have generated a kind of loneliness and emotional void in modern man. Looking at American society, it seems that this feeling of emptiness or loneliness is so widespread that person feels unprotected and cut off from the rest of the society unless he holds membership in clubs, societies or some other voluntary associations. It seems to be the way for Americans to escape from his individual loneliness.

Southern writers like Eudora Welty, William Faulkner, Carson McCullers, Truman Capote, and Flannery O’Conner have explored the grotesque worlds of southern literature and depicted human condition as

essentially a condition of alienation. Carson McCullers's Worlds represent alienation, loneliness, and a lack of human communication and the failure of love. Her novels are reflections of Southern America's unquiet mind. The settings of her novels are Georgia mill towns, a dusty crossroads hamlet, and an army post in the Deep South. The characters in her novels are embodiments of the sense of isolation, of separation from the community.

The Heart is a Lonely Hunter (1940) is a novel about the loneliness of all men, abnormal or normal. People in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* are spiritually isolated from each other like they are far off and estranged from the rest of the world. The novel deals mainly with a modern literary theme. The author explores horrible spiritual isolation. It is a story of five people existing in a stagnant Southern town. Each of the novel's major figures- John Singer, Jake Blount, Dr. Copeland, Mick Kelly and Biff Brannon seek love and companionship of someone but because of their self-consciousness they can not communicate easily. As a result of this failure of communication, their frustration gets worse; their bodily gestures are directed more and more toward their own person. They find it difficult to engage in mutual relationships with other people. As Frances Freeman Paden describes it,

“The problem originated in the heart, which McCullers uses as a metaphor in the book's title and as a synecdoche within the novel. The heart as hunter (metaphor) searches for an ideal be it in love or politics, whereas the heart that represents the whole person (synecdoche) strives for balance and equilibrium” (Paden, 1982: 454)

Thus this conflict within one's heart to find love and ideal always ends in disequilibrium.

If we look at the novel and its characters- John Singer is certainly at its centre and other characters also represent spiritual isolation and loneliness of man. The author reveals the spiritual isolation of people living in stagnant atmosphere in the South- Mick, an imaginative young girl entering her teens; Biff Brannon, a café owner with a liking for freaks and the downtrodden; Jake Blount, a frustrated Marxian labour agitator; Dr. Copeland, a disillusioned champion of the rights of the Negro; and Singer, a deaf-mute who is all things to the other four. It is the story of five isolated, lonely people in their search for expression and spiritual integration with something greater than themselves.

John Singer:

John Singer, the deaf-mute as many critics view him, is a central figure in this novel- around him that all the characters revolve. Because of his capacity to listen to others, all the others attach him some kind of dignity and ascribe to him all the qualities which they would wish for him to have. Singer can read lips and understand what is said to him.

The novel opens on the passive Singer, who is a silverware engraver, and Antonapoulos, his Greek companion with whom he has lived for ten years. There is uninterrupted bond of friendship between them. Their routine of eating alone in their two-room dwelling in the upstairs of small house, going weekly to the library so that Singer could check out a mystery book, attending a Friday night movie, and having Antonapoulos' picture taken every payday in a ten-cent photograph shop reveals that their routine is carefully set. They sing "Love's Old Sweet Song" and "K-K-K-K-Katie", smoke Target tobacco and speak of Joe Louis and Man Mountain Dean. They were always together. Singer is the lover, Antonapoulos the beloved.

Antonapoulos accepts Singer because it is convenient and comfortable for him to do so.

However, suddenly Antonapoulos loses his intelligence and also his need of Singer. He begins stealing ridiculous objects that he does not need and his habits become obscene. He is committed to the state asylum by his cousin, in whose fruit store he works. Alone and desolate, Singer thinks only of his friend. Singer is left loveless. Still he retains his illusion that his love is understood and returned by Antonapoulos. Finally, the rooms they have shared become intolerable, and Singer moves to the Kelly family's boarding house near the centre of town and begins taking his meals at the New York Café. It is the point when the actual action rises.

Singer becomes "sort of home-made God" to the rest of characters. It is because Singer is a deaf-mute and a patient, considerate man. To Dr. Copeland, Singer is the only white man whom he likes, simply because Singer lacks the usual contemptuous arrogance of the white southerner. He can reveal his heart out to Singer, which he can never do with other persons.

For Mick, a sensitive, twelve year old girl, Singer's role is somewhat of a supporter. He serves as a kind of repository for her secret aspirations. For Jake Blount, the near insane man, Singer is the only person who does not ridicule his ideas about labour discrimination and equality. In spite of his curiosity for Singer, Biff Brannon is the least affected by the illusion of Singer. He is an objective observer and spectator of human relationships. He observes with interest the intricate relationships that Singer has with others. Out of his curiosity rather than from need, he too is caught up in the spell of Singer and goes up to Singer's room often. Each one of these people creates his understanding of the mute from his own desires. In his eternal silence there is something compelling. He becomes a repository of their illusions

and stored-up anguish. Although he appears to others characters as considerate, his inner life is inviolate. His emotional life is rooted firmly in his feelings for his insane friend.

The relationship between Antonapoulos and Singer is significant since it forms one of the basic links in the action of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. The relationship between Singer and other four characters has an exact parallel as in Singer and Antonapoulos. "Unknown to them Singer is as empty and as fearful as they, but because he is a mute and unable to express his equally terrible needs, they never recognize his loneliness. Moreover, Singer also has an emotional symbol which he clings to, his mute moronic friend, Antonapoulos." (Taylor, 1960: 155)

In his relationship with Antonapoulos, Singer always gives and Antonapoulos always receives. Antonapoulos gives almost nothing and Singer showers love on him without realizing passivity of Antonapoulos. In fact Singer never expects anything from Antonapoulos. A complete endomorph and moron Antonapoulos gives only passive silence in return. Even Singer's eloquent hand-talk is ignored by him. In spite of his passive silence, Antonapoulos is the perfect conversationalist for Singer. Singer feels greatly dejected when his beloved friend is placed in an insane asylum by his cousin for degeneracy. But he consoles himself with the thought that he can pay his friend occasional visits in the asylum. Thus Singer's self-deception in turn makes possible the deception of all the others. Other characters reveal their hearts out to Singer or they function as long as Singer will sit and listen to them. As Singer depends on lip-reading, he understands them only imperfectly. There are not initial dialogues between them and this irony suggests us the final outcome of all efforts to establish a communion is an end in itself. What makes Singer a sort of 'home-made God' is his

physical deformity. He depends upon lip-reading for what others are saying. He cannot carry on a dialogue or answer back and others take his passivity as his capacity to understand. In a way he fills the gap in their lives. In Singer's and Antonapoulos' relationship, Singer plays the role of lover and Antonapoulos that of beloved. But here Singer becomes beloved and everyone else as lovers and they want to share each and every thing with Singer. As Louis D. Rubin, Jr. puts it:

“In this respect, Singer fills the role of beloved; he allows himself to be loved, because he is insulated from the demands and the possessiveness of love by virtue of his deafness. If he were not deaf, and thus solitary in a world of talkers, he could never tolerate the others, of course, and this not because he is selfish or mean- he is neither –but because he is a human being.” (Rubin, 1979: 339)

Because of his deaf- mutism he is isolated from the ordinary emotions of other people. He himself is a symbol of isolation and thwarted expression. He appears as a symbol of tormented and lonely people. He asks nothing, listens endlessly to what he cannot hear. No one actually expects him to say something. No one understands him beyond his deformity. In his deep heart he is still attached to Antonapoulos. Antonapoulos has a special place in Singer's heart.

“Behind each waking moment there had always been his friend. And this submerged communion with Antonapoulos had grown and changed as though they were together in the flesh. Sometimes he thought of Antonapoulos with awe and self-abasement, sometimes with pride-always with love unchecked by criticism, freed of will. When he dreamed at night the face of his friend was always

before him, massive and wise and gentle. And in his waking thoughts they were eternally united.” (McCullers, 1940:245)

In the same way Singer has a special place in the hearts of Biff, Jake, Mick and Dr. Copeland. As Margaret B. McDowell puts it:

“If Singer creates in his mind an illusory Antonapoulos who is worthy of his great love and grief, Biff, Jake, Mick and Dr. Copeland create in Singer an illusory figure who possesses great virtue and wisdom. As such, he exists mostly in the imaginations of those who find in him solace and understanding. He is the God created as “unifying principle” and, as such, he is in McCullers’ words, “chimerical and fantastic”. ”

(McDowell, 1980: 33-34)

Singer is really unselfish to love others in spite of the fact that he himself is bereft of love. He is an archetype of the romantic lover and the objects of his love are unworthy of it. In a letter to Antonapoulos he expresses bewilderment at the interest these people have displayed in him.

Carson McCullers focuses upon characters that have some kind of deformity, maimed or misfits not only to show reality or normality but as exemplars of wretchedness of human condition. Ironically no true communication takes place between Singer and his disciples even between Singer and Antonapoulos. As Margaret B McDowell comments:

“The attention Singer offers to the other four characters appears to be love and is partly love, yet he does not comprehend their needs fully nor do they regard him as a person who might also need reassurance. They only “sing” of their needs and thoughts to Singer, who, in spite of his name, cannot really “sing” or express himself adequately.” (McDowell, 1980: 34)

This inability of Singer to “sing” or to speak and share his thoughts symbolizes the lack of understanding and the lack of communication. He

asks nothing, listens endlessly to what he cannot hear. When each one of these characters was able to talk endlessly with Singer, when he was all alone, none of them is able to do the same with the others present. They cannot say anything. Each of them regards the others as intruders and considers his own need of Singer as paramount. When they are finally able to talk it is about most superficial subject of all, the weather. What is revealed in the incident is the unconscious but utter selfishness of these people. Each of them is solely concerned with his need to communicate and considers Singer as the perfect outlet for pouring their hearts out.

Singer is the most dejected character in this novel. Even his need for communion is ignored by Antonapoulos and other four characters as well. Singer cannot understand this situation; he is confused by the situation that these people talk endlessly when they are alone with Singer but fall short of words in the presence of other characters. When they had gone he confesses his bewilderment in a letter to Antonapoulos:

“That is the way they talk when they come to my room. Those words in their heart do not let them rest, so they are always very busy. ...they all came to my room at the same time today. They sat like they were from different cities. They were even rude, and you know how I have always said that to be rude and not attend to the feelings of others is wrong.” (McCullers, 1940: 165)

Antonapoulos is his own god-surrogate. When Antonapoulos dies, Singer experiences the ultimate thwarting. At his death a strange little note from the cousin of Antonapoulos is found in his pocket:

*“Dear Mr. Singer,
No address on corner of letters. They all sent back to me. Spiros
Antonapoulos died and was buried with his kidneys last month. Sorry
to tell same but no use writing letters to the dead.*

*Yours truly,
CHARLES PARKER*

As McCullers says in her outline,

“On the surface he is a model of kindness and cooperativeness- but nothing which goes on around him disturbs his inner self. All his deeper emotions are involved in the only friend to whom he can express himself, Antonapoulos.” (McCullers, 1971: 126)

Therefore, it is clear that Antonapoulos is the perfect vehicle for Singer through which he creates a dream world of imagined communication. His relationship to his Greek friend is based totally on his purpose because Antonapoulos can neither ask question nor understand him thoroughly. When Antonapoulos dies, Singer experiences the ultimate thwarting. Singer’s only alternative is to kill himself. Before Antonapoulos’ death itself, Singer is left adrift. His hands are especially important to him because they are the vehicles to communicate his inner feelings. However, when Antonapoulos leaves him or we can say his cousin commits him to the state asylum, Singer stuffs his hands into his pockets. It is a symbol of his failure to communicate with other people. The outer world is oblivious of his attachment or dependence on Antonapoulos.

The other very important aspect which has been stated by Frances Freeman Paden is that of Singer’s fragile ego. He states that:

“The separation from Antonapoulos is lethal to Singer’s already fragile ego. He had suffered an early defeat as a deaf child who tried to talk but was wounded by the blank expression on people’s faces. Concluding that his speech was disgusting, he reverted to sign language and thus rejected verbal communication.” (Paden, 1982: 455)

When Singer hears that Antonapoulos is dead, he tries, with great difficulty, to get his hands out of his pockets. When he arrives home, he goes directly from train to his shop rather than home, gets his pistol and thrusts it into his pocket. When he returns to his room, he withdraws the pistol and shoots himself. (pp.317-323)

Ihab H. Hassan states that:

“What the novel makes abundantly clear is that the charisma of Singer does not simply derive from his receptivity to the sorrows of others, nor from his own affliction and forbearance, but mainly from the fact that he alone in the novel is a lover, he alone loves. The object of his love is certain, a deaf-mute, Antonapoulos, who appears in the preceding passage sanctified, and who elsewhere appears “sitting motionless in his bright, rich garments...like some wise king from a legend”, but who is in the end simply Man, the Unlovable Creature, redeemable only by an impossible Lover.” (Hassan, 1959-60: 317)

Mick Kelly:

Mick is the most outstanding character in the book. It is a story of a tomboy and her violent struggle with life to fulfill her dreams. In the novel when Mick first appears, she is at the age of thirteen and many things happen in her journey from adolescence to maturity. As Lawrence Graver says:

“The portrait of Mick Kelly is a charming evocation of the sensitivity and thickness, the exuberance and boredom, the ease of flight and quickness of descent that marks a familiar period in early adolescence. Like so many characters in Mrs. McCullers’ books, Mick is defined by the extremity of her isolation and the fever of her fantasy life.” (Graver, 1969: 18-19)

She is the selfless seeker of love and happiness who longs to express herself and to communicate with others through music. We feel sad about her because her failure is not the result of any flaw in her but it is the result of her economic condition. She dominates part III of the novel with her rebellious and courageous spirit. Her pursuit of music symbolizes both her energy and her love of beauty. She listens to concerts on radios of families who happen to leave their windows open and later on she listens to the radio Singer buys for his friends’ pleasure. This music she stores in the “inner room” of her personality. Mick creates the “inner room”, a secret, imaginary place inside herself where she can be free to dream and to be happy. The inner room is ruled by her imagination with illusion and self-deception. It is a world in itself. Her first love is Mozart’s music and she is attracted towards Singer because he reminds her of the music of Mozart. Mozart and Singer are equated in her mind. His music is sad, soft and harmonious. It creates the effect of catharsis for Mick’s deep-rooted sadness. Through the book Mick’s pursuit of music symbolizes both her energy and her love of beauty. She keeps a safe distance between her “inner room” and “outer room”. In her “outer room” there are all mundane things. She dreams of becoming famous by the age of seventeen. She imagines herself as a great inventor of tiny radios and portable flying machines, but her most consistent ambitions are focused on Music. She plans to build her own violin from an old mandolin/ukulele, practices the piano in the school gym everyday

sacrificing her lunch tries to compose music in her secret notebook. All this is in her inner room.

She sometimes laments on the fact that she is not like her sisters. When her sister Etta tells her that she is sick of seeing her wear “those silly boy’s clothes,” Mick retorts: “I don’t want to be like either of you... I’d rather be a boy any day, and I wish I could move in the Bill.” (McCullers, 1940: 33) Though she tells her sister that she wants to be a boy, in her inner room she always longs to be a member of a bunch, to be like others. In order to cope up with the situation, she gives a prom party and invites twenty of her new classmates at Vocational High, but it also turns into fiasco. It is her journey from masculinity to femininity, from shorts to evening gown. When the party is broken up by a crowd of younger neighbourhood ragamuffins, all the guests explode outdoors, finding relief in wild games of chase. The crowd erupts toward a ditch where the city is digging up the street. For the first time, Mick realizes that she is crippled by the feminine clothes, when she jumps into the ditch. The high-heel shoes make her slip and her breath is knocked out. Her evening dress is torn, her rhinestone tiara lost. Mick returns home humiliated and decides not to wear shorts because she is too old to wear shorts. Her outer room is filled with frustration caused by failure to achieve her dreams. It is bitter and violent. But it seems that music always gives her a kind of solace. After the Prom Party, when her mind is full of feelings of loneliness and as she walks into the night, she chances to listen to the third symphony of Beethoven which moves her immensely. After that she thinks of the first part of the symphony and –

“Now she felt good. She whispered some words out loud: ‘Lord forgiveth me, for I knoweth not what I do’” (McCullers, 1940: 94)

This remembrance of God suggests Singer to her and she repeats these words as if she would speak to Singer: "*Lord forgiveth me, for I knoweth not what I do.*" (McCullers, 1940: 94) To escape from loneliness Mick climbs up to the roof of a house being built nearby and sits reflecting on the possibility of being celebrity and accumulating fortune. This kind of boiling imagination increases separateness though she wants to connect with other people. She spreads her arms like wings and she dreams of swimming through big crowds of people. Searching for privacy and recognition at the same time she moves outward from her "inner room". It is her journey towards maturation and self-awareness.

Thus these futile attempts of Mick to identify herself with others create a strong feeling of lonesomeness. Even her sex experience with Harry proves abortive. This premature experience affects both of them deeply. Mick is trapped into adult world. She leaves her adolescence behind. She fails to achieve integration of her fragmented self. She can not yet connect the inner world with the outer. Neither she nor Harry fully understands the magnetism or the mechanics that bring their bodies together. After this incident both are ashamed and Mick tells him plainly that she didn't like it. However, they both have a sense of guilt. Harry, out of this sense of guilt offers to marry her, but Mick refuses saying that she will never marry a boy. However, they both decide that they will never want to marry or have the same experience again. They decide that they will never see each other again- Harry goes to Birmingham where he hopes to find some sort of job. Mick, once she learns she is not pregnant, however, decides to work and help family survive. The loss of virginity greatly oppresses Mick and turns to music again. A part of Mick is now dead forever for her.

Mick's father is a watch repairman, who communicates with Mick but with inability to make meaningful connections. Her mother is too busy trying to satisfy the demands of her paying boarders. She longs to provide emotional nourishment for her children. Portia Copeland, family's black servant is also unable to save family from their misfortune. In these busy chores Mick is always busy in taking care of two younger children. She keeps her world aloof and isolated from the rest of the world. She takes up a job at dime store. She is paralyzed by the utter reality. Her dreams are shattered. As Louise Westling says:

“Her job at the dime store shuts out her private world of music and stifles her fantasies. The long days of work leave her feeling exhausted, caged and cheated, but she can find no clear cause of her frustration. At fourteen she is a grown woman whose life seems to have reached a dead end.” (Westling, 1985:118)

Mick at the same time finds her stature or height to be more specific as an obstacle to her social acceptance. Everyone treats her like a boy and she also finds comfort in her tomboy attitude. Compelled to act as nurse for her younger brothers, she lives most intensely in her daydreams and her passion for music.

She is like all the other characters, isolated and failed to communicate, full of dreams and aspirations. As Chester E. Eisinger puts it:

“In a word, she is the typical adolescent struggling blindly toward maturity, unaware that the pain of alienation she now endures is the proper preparation for later life. Her refuge in her loneliness is her inner room, where she may create her own world. But the unalterable condition of adolescence is insecurity, and it manifests itself in Mick in the terrible self-consciousness and the trembling uncertainties that overtake her. Stifled like

the other characters, she must in addition undergo the painful process of growth.” (Eisinger, 1980: 422)

Carson McCullers deals here with spiritual isolation. Any art form is the best instrument to depict the escapism. Here music is used as escape instrument. As Patricia S. Box says

“Only the androgyns are guided by music, and only they are capable of lifting themselves out of the world of superficiality and creating a universe in which people genuinely care about one another. The necessary ingredient for creating this human unity is love, not a sexual love, but a love that denies sex and strives to encompass everyone equally.”

(Box, 1988: 230)

Here Patricia S. Box puts it that Mick is androgyn and is capable to escape isolation. Mick’s dependence on music is evident throughout most of the novel. The time comes when she actually faces reality and turns back to music is that when she moves from androgyny to womanhood.

Though Mick is not free in true sense or her energy is robbed off by an unprincipled society, she always has some kind of instrument or person to love and admire. Apart from music, she centers her undirected love on Singer. For her he is Mozart who can sing her emotions in spite of his inability to sing. He is the only person who can understand her feelings. He gives her a book about Beethoven on her birthday. He is everything for her, a teacher, a friend and sometimes he becomes a god figure for her. She is not close enough to her sisters and her mother, and she has no special friends of her own age. She wants to tell Mr. Singer everything even about her first sex experience. Mick Kelly becomes passionately devoted to Singer because he alone listens to her musical ambition. Her “inside room” with Singer is like safer place to hide from outer cruel world.

When Singer commits suicide, he destroys not only himself but also Mick's inside room. We find her alone and her fantasies and her dreams shattered. Her songs remain unsung. Still she retains some hope that her plans made in the "inside room" were worth something. Like other characters she does not entirely give up. She tries to fight hard and reconcile to the grim reality. When the novel starts, we find Mick with innocence. At the end of the story, we find her more matured but also deprived of imagination. Her feelings are thwarted now. Mick feels alone and defenseless. However she wouldn't resign herself to fate. Her courage and positive attitude make her feel that every bitter situation has something positive in it.

Biff Brannon:

The characters which surround Singer are interesting and least communicative of them is Biff Brannon, a forty-four year old café owner. Most interesting fact is that he is like Singer- disinterested and observant. In the early pages, Biff is described as thoughtful, inquisitive. He is observant who tells us about the action, but beyond that he is of little use. He can only tell us about the series of action but unable to tell us the reason behind the action. With Brannon the novel opens and also closes. He is coldly reflective. As a café owner, he can see more of the drama than anyone else and he is sympathetic to all freaks. He has systematically collected issues of the daily newspaper of the town, but he never analyses the news, only notices the day's happenings and then files each paper neatly. Similarly, he never analyses his life or integrates his past, present and future. He is passive observer of his own life as well. He does not relate incidents of his life to one another. It is seen as his failure to connect incidents and

emotions. A kind of disinterested life that he leads keeps him away from any active participation in the life surrounding him. Biff's failure to connect with outer world is also reflected through his relationship with his wife Alice. They address each other as 'Mr.' and 'Mrs.' Biff knows little about Alice. He is married to Alice for ten years but they are essentially strangers to each other. Even though she is his wife, she is nonentity for him. Horace Taylor comments on their relationship as:

“They have lived together for ten years, after which it is easier to maintain the status quo than to separate. Biff and Alice truly represent a death in life, going through the empty ritual of a marriage without affection.” (Taylor, 1960: 158-159)

In the early morning Biff closes the restaurant and goes upstairs and he communicates briefly with Alice. In the morning Alice works in the café, it seems that their lives are parallel that never merge. When in the day they work together Biff handles the cash register and menus while Alice supervises the workers. His alienation from Alice is a significant point of Brannon's social and moral separation. Moreover he is fascinated by freaks and especially deformed people that also is a symbol in itself of failure of communion.

“Whenever somebody with a harelip or T.B. came into the place he would set him up to beer. Or if the customer were a hunchback or a bad cripple, then it would be whiskey on the house. There was one fellow who had had his peter and left leg blown off in a boiler explosion, and whenever he came to town there was a free pint waiting for him.” (McCullers, 1940: 17-18)

From the beginning his marriage to Alice was a mistake and he endured it because of habit and also of economic necessity. That alienation

or disillusionment in marriage may have caused his premature impotence, at least for Alice only. Occasionally he wished they had had children.

Many critics have analyzed Biff's androgynous nature. Patricia S. Box says that Biff androgyny helps him to regain his perceptivity. She puts it as:

“Though he has been an androgyn throughout the novel, he has been forced by his wife to superficially assume the male role. His denial of that role is seen in his refusal to wash below his waist, a symbolic, and practical, method of avoiding sexual contact with Alice. After her death he takes a complete bath, an action which suggests his washing of the male role as well as his recognizing that he no longer needs to be physically repugnant.”

(Box, 1988: 231)

He is confused by his ambiguous sexuality. After Alice's death he renounces his ambiguous nature and reveals feminine qualities in him. He always plays the role of parent only in his fantasies. He sees himself as the adoptive father of a dark haired little boy who walks at his heels. He also fantasizes about Mick and Baby Wilson as his kids. Certain female elements become more significant after his wife Alice's death. He begins to rinse his hair in lemon juice and takes more care of his skin. He also starts to use Alice's perfume.

Biff is greatly fascinated by two persons. These are Mick Kelly and of course Mr. Singer. He knows Mick since her childhood when she used to get candy with her brother and to play the slot machine. She is always friendly with Biff. Mick reminds him of his youth. She is in her teenage and she has all the qualities of a girl and a boy. Biff always wanted to have a little daughter like Mick.

We learn of his sexual views at many points. He has very keenly kept his social and private lives apart from each other. He has special emotions for women around him. He is impotent with his wife, but after her death he platonically enjoys Alice's sister's companionship. He remembers his 'godly' mother. He feels attracted towards Mick. There are situations when Biff's latent homosexual elements are disclosed. In spite of these paradoxical aspects of his personality, he is unable to cope up with these contrasting elements of his personality.

Brannon keeps the café open all night also to forget his loneliness. He is perhaps the most withdrawn of all characters. Although he is owner of 'New York Café', he is never able to engage a genuine communication. He offers help and charity to regulars but at superficial level. He also mismanages his affection toward Mick. Like many characters he is also unable to understand why everyone is attracted towards Singer.

Biff appears to recognize the need for religious experience to integrate human experience. He is not religious but objective throughout the novel. And he realizes that he will never love just one person. Unlike Singer he accepts and endures his suffering. He is a curious spectator of human relationships that Singer has with the others. He often goes to Singer, more from curiosity than from need.

Biff's alienation is a result of man's failure to master his environment in spite of his efforts. Biff has no special talents; he is clearly an average, middle class American. In the final chapter of *The Heart is a lonely Hunter* Biff like other characters is left alone. Nancy B Rich comments.

“(What) Carson McCullers is saying is that the average man's biggest problem is that he deceives himself. But he does have the intellectual and

moral possibility to be better than he is, and there are some grounds for optimism in a man he want to be” (Rich, 1979: 121-122)

Biff is the only man in addition to Mick who is sensible. He still wants to resolve the puzzle of singer. In the end he is thinking of Willie and Mick and himself and decides that money and profit are not important to him. He listens to the radio which is describing Hitler’s evil schemes in Danzig. Biff labels this as a crisis.

Nancy B Rich comments as,

“..... the parable implies, he will unite with others like himself to put a new image of government before the people’ just as surely as he puts fresh flowers in his display. The implication of Biff’s character thus suggests that the failure of democracy is itself an illusion that the nature of the democratic process is like that of Biff slow and the condition of freedom is perseverance.” (Rich, 1979:121)

Biff’s character is full if ironic elements. Even the name of his café ‘New York café is an ironic contrast between the outer world and its name. It mocks at the romantic dream, with its actuality. Situated at a commonplace and perhaps behind the modernization and civilization the name actually implies the illusions of café insiders in which they want themselves to inhabit. It Louis D. Rubin, JR comments....

“(The) inappropriateness of the name New York Café is meant by the author to convey a sense of cultural starvation, the provincial dreariness of the kind of city where the sidewalls as they used to say are rolled up each night at ten o’clock.” (Rubin, 1979: 338)

Jake Blount:

Jake Blount and Dr. Copeland are doomed to isolation because of defects in their own character. Jake Blount, the uncouth Marxist, 'Violent and rootless' has a spirit of revolution. He is seen forever crying out "your dumb bastards" to the entire world. He dreams of himself carrying on his shoulders a great burden which he can't put down. And that burden is of his deepest motive to change the predatory, unnatural social conditions. He feels that the present social condition is unjust and that has to be changed. Like other social reformers / thinkers, he knows something has to be changed but he doesn't know "what" and how." If he cannot act, he has to talk. This twenty-nine-year-old radical is a stranger on his first arrival; he leaves the town a year later, still a stranger. His origins are not conveyed to the reader by McCullers but we find suggestions of his past as his being outcast. He was born in a textile town in South Carolina. His childhood was poverty-stricken and of degradation. During the time of World War II, he was working fourteen hours a day in a cotton mill. After he became 12 years old, he left home and at one point he has worked in almost every section of society. His homelessness suggests his lack of affiliation with any community. As a die-hard communist, he hates bureaucracies. However, as a man of words and not of actions, he feels that even communist societies have turned into bureaucracies. Here he presents the confusion of his mind. The confusion is an ultimate result of his state of existence. He is volatile in his feelings towards his fellows. His emotions change continually from hatred to unselfish love and vice-versa, and he finds himself unable to respond positively towards another. This inner instability is also visible through his nature. He remains a sad, lonely character in the novel that irritates his

fellows and everyone wants to avoid him. In the outline Carson McCullers says:

“He is nervous and irritable. All of his life he has had difficulty in keeping his lips from betraying his emotions- in order to overcome this he has grown a flourishing mustache which only accentuate this weakness and gives him a comic jerky look. Because of his nervous whims it is hard for him to get along with his neighbors and people hold aloof from him. This causes him either to drop into self- conscious buffoonery or else to take on an exaggerated misplaced dignity.” (McCullers, 1971: 132)

After arrival in the town he resides in Biff's café and his drunkenness and living on credit makes himself an object of observation for Biff. He is also fascinated immediately by the deaf-mute. Singer attracts him because of his ability to listen to others silently and Jake finds in him an excellent storehouse for conversation. He hopes to find in Singer a friend to whom he can open his heart out and confides in him every secret or every thought that comes in his mind. His utter loneliness in this town makes him to find a friend in Singer and it becomes his habit to talk to Singer and go everyday to spend time with him. Jake feels cheated after the death of Singer. He feels that he has lost his visions and all the conclusions that he shared with Singer. Pratibha Nagpal puts it as:

“The illusory God that had been created by Blount had failed him by taking his own life leaving Jake feeling as if he was before a wall, a dead end with everything lost.” (Nagpal, 2003: 40)

As his homelessness or rootlessness Jake's stay in this town also turns into a fiasco. On one Saturday late at night there is a wild brawl between Negro workers and all the white workers who patronize the show. Everyone is seen fighting for his own purposes. Jake also loses control and engages

himself in the brawl. He escapes when finally police arrive and it signifies his own life. Though he assumes the role of social reformer and wants to change social injustice, but like every person in the brawl, Jake is fighting the battle of life for his own survival. Singer is dead and he leaves the town as a stranger. Jake comes in the town as a stranger and leaves the town as stranger only.

Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland:

Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland, the Negro doctor, is too obsessed like Jake with his ideas. Jake sees labour exploitation as the basic problem of society while Dr. Copeland considers the racial discrimination and down-trodden Negro as the basic problem. Everyone has his own perspective to look at the society. Both Dr. Copeland and Blount are frustrated idealists who cling to their visions with fanaticism. He is alienated even from his family. His children are strangers to him. He is born in the South but educated in the North. He has a great impact of Marx and Spinoza. Copeland had named his children for them and planned their lives according to his dreams. But adding to his disillusion his children has not followed the career he wanted. He dreams of racial equality but at home even his own children can not understand his fanaticism. He blames his own race for most of its problems. He is plagued by an inability to communicate. Like Blount he is trapped in his moral isolation and estranged from society. His children are afraid of him because of his harsh and inflexible behaviour. Only Portia visits him but that too out of pity and not out of love. His kins don't understand his philosophy. In a way his own temperament becomes the instrument in alienating himself from his family and from his own race.

In his illness when he is suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis, his sitting alone in his darkened house, shaking with fever symbolizes his loneliness, he is even more frustrated when he finds that no one from black society understands his innermost feelings for them.

Adding to this his economic situation is very uncertain. His house and most of his medical equipments are mortgaged. Even he has lost his post as a member of the staff of the city hospital which gave him a small but steady income. He was accused of performing abortions in certain cases because the family can not rear another child owing to their economic condition. He is a firm believer in birth control. He even distributes contraceptives that he pays for himself. Willie, Doctor's son was punished by having his feet tied for three days to a rope and his feet had to be amputated. This enrages Dr. and Jake. Jake even thinks of publicizing his mistreatment by exhibiting him in a wheelbarrow and urges Willie to give the names of the other two convicts. Nevertheless, Willie refuses to co-operate fearing further imprisonment. Oliver Evans comments:

“Mrs. McCullers’ moral here is very plain: individuals are prevented from uniting for a useful purpose by fear and by petty differences which divide them and weaken their force, driving them deeper than ever into the isolation which is the result their failure to achieve harmonious social union.” (Evans, 1966: 51)

He visits Singer's room habitually and lays bare the innermost feelings and thoughts before the deaf-mute Singer. Singer's politeness and consideration make him drawn more towards Singer. All of his life Dr. Copeland has suffered humiliations from white race. But Singer's simple act of offering a lighted match appears to him an action of confirming their bond of brotherhood. He takes him to be a Jew. He has always been

interested in Jewish community because Benedict Spinoza and Karl Marx – his two heroes were Jews. Dr. Copeland imagined that Singer is gifted with wisdom and understanding. He finds peace and comfort in Singer’s company.

“Truly he was not like other white men. He was a wise-man and he understood the strong, true purpose in a way that other white man could not. He listened, and in his face, there was something gentle and Jewish, the knowledge of one who belongs to a race that is oppressed.” (McCullers, 1940: 114)

Dr. Copeland understands fully that his life work has been a failure. In Singer he has found a soul mate, a person from a community who is itself oppressed can understand his feelings more clearly. But with Singer’s death, there is a death also of his dream; a dream that can’t be fulfilled but can give only loneliness and frustration. In an analysis why social reformers fail, Horace Taylor puts it as:

“Jake and Dr. Copeland never once suspect that their passionate championing of economic and social justice is but a psychological revolt against the death of clasp of society... One can not correct the abuses of a society by agitation for social reforms when that society is dead or dying. Thus the Jakes and Dr. Copeland are always frustrated in their railing against social and economic abuses. Reform is a shortsighted expedient, since it deals at the best only with the more superficial layers of the social organism and does not penetrate to its psychological core.”

(Taylor, 1960: 159-160)

Minor Characters:

There are several minor characters that play important roles in the story. Though Singer is protagonist the real centre is Spiros Antonapoulos. All the other characters revolve around Singer but Singer is attracted to Antonapoulos. Singer stands in the same relation to Antonapoulos as the other do to Singer. Antonapoulos' defects, mental as well as physical make him a grotesque figure in the story. The relation between Antonapoulos and Singer forms basic links in the action of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. In this relationship Antonapoulos, a moron and endomorph is at receiving end and Singer is the lover. In return to Singer's love he gives only passive silence. As the fact of the story is that Singer's four friends take him as they wish to or as they imagine him to be. Similarly Singer does not see Antonapoulos as he really is but as he imagines him. Though Singer's eloquent hand-talk is ignored by Antonapoulos, he is perfect conversationalist for Singer. He says nothing but allows Singer to express himself. When Antonapoulos is placed in asylum for degeneracy, Singer is really dejected. Thus Antonapoulos is the real centre of the novel who forms the base.

A young black woman Portia, her husband Highboy and her brother Willie are just opposites of Dr. Copeland. They make no efforts to go against the circumstances. The brutal tragedy with Willie shows their acceptance to fate because of inner fear. Women characters are depicted without hope to the future. Portia tries to bridge the gap between her father and rest of the community but fails due to Dr. Copeland's obstinate nature.

She says,

“Us talk like our 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.”

This shows that Copeland never allows himself to understand his daughter and his people.

Harry experiences with Mick premature sex. As a result of this he is obsessed greatly with a sense of guilt that he leaves the town then after. He is also of brooding nature. He blames himself for the entire action. This premature sex with Mick leaves its mark on him.

Bubber Kelly, Mick's younger brother who on an impulse wounds with his gun a little girl. In Mick's frustration she tortures Bubber after that incident that anytime police will catch him up and throw into jail. She also hits him often that after that night he never peed like normal children. The big kids started calling him 'Baby killer Kelly' and family called him by his real name- George. He didn't speak much to any person. That failure of communication again suggests alienation. After the experience, Bubber is never again trusting. It is the same condition like that of Willie Copeland after his feet are cut off. Here Bubber is mentally cut off. Mick yearns later for his companionship and loyalty that she has destroyed.

It is the moral and spiritual isolation of each character that make *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* so appealing. The spiritual blindness of Jake, Dr. Copeland, Mick and Brannon leads them to strained silence. The four people who have made Singer their confidant adjust to his death, still isolated from one another and still lonely Hunters for a selfless love. McCullers described them as 'spokes' in a wheel. They create an illusory figure in Singer. He is the God created as unifying principle.

For the first time when they all arrive at Singer's room at the same time by co-incidence, no one wants to speak. Everyone takes other as intruder in his space. The initial result is strained silence. Singer was bewildered by their behaviour. Each one considers his own need of Singer as essential. After some time they finally are able to talk but only about superficial subjects. Each one seemed to be waiting for the other to go. Then on an impulse they all leave the place at the same time. This incident shows utter selfishness of these people. Each of these people is a kind of universe but that too incomplete. Everyone needs another person to express himself. Through these characters Carson McCullers has drawn a picture of Southern Waste land. They are all spiritually dead. They have lost ties of society and spirituality that binds men together. They go through empty rituals of friendship and love and relations but without any feeling. These hollow relations or feelings symbolize dead society. There is a 'death in life'. This psycho-spiritual isolation drives not only Singer but also other characters to suicide. Only Singer commits suicide, others are psychologically dead with the death of their 'God'.

Singer of course appears as the centre of these sad, tormented and lonely people. He becomes the legend. Each man described him as he wished him to be. At times he appears playing the role of unwilling Christ. The story symbolizes an emotional conflict where psychic dependence is highlighted. Singer's important position is not only a coincidence or because of his physical deformity, but it is because of the fact that he is receptive not only of his sorrows but also to the sorrows of others. In the novel he is only the lover who knows to love others whereas others are at receiving end. They forever want someone to listen to their sorrows and to be loved. The deaf-mute Singer is a symbol of imperfection who loves a person who is

incapable of receiving his love. Loneliness is a feeling pervasive and permanent in every character. Antonapoulos always remains out of view of major characters. He is impractical Greek. The society portrayed in the novel seems to be a dead society. In spite of all incidents of violence, emotional incision, sensitive people nothing actually happens. All characters are living within an indeterminate state or in a world closed for others. They are bound up within themselves and this recognition leads Singer to commit suicide whereas others are protected by their illusions from this reality. All struggle to find an answer to their isolation by trying to communicate which results in failure. The only people who have the capacity to love others can realize their isolation and can come out of their imprisonment caused by their private consciousness. Love is a kind of key that opens a new world for a lonesome person. Here love plays a role of catalyst and author finds an ultimate answer in love to man's alienation. Carson McCullers comments in this sense:

“Love is affirmation: it motivates the yes responses and the sense of wider communication. Love casts out fear, and in the security of this togetherness we find contentment, courage.” (McCullers, 1971: 260)

Four related stories reveal various aspects of human isolation. Various characters unsuccessfully attempt to communicate with other human beings. Several times in the novel people express frustration and rage. They hit their heads against walls, fists against tables, thighs against stones. Because these people do not communicate easily, they have difficulties in achieving their goals and because of this they can't express their difficulties. As a result of failure of communication they talk with their bodies, and bodily gestures. Thus their frustration increases. The idea of moral isolation is represented through these characters. It is a result of

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