CHAPTER II

A CRY FOR THE MOON

The publication of The Heart is a Lonely Hunter achieved for Carson McCullers the brilliant and early success almost traditional in the Southern school. It proved to be prodigious for an author of twenty-two. Written as 'The Mute', it carried an outline by the author of what was later to be evolved as a novel. One cannot but agree with the assessment of Kenneth John Atchitz that "The Mute is a fascinating and sobering documentary of the complex planning necessary to the undertaking" of this novel of great potential.

The outline of 'The Mute' needs to be studied as a signpost to the development of the theme of loneliness in McCullers' major works, for the outline of 'The Mute' can serve as a meaningful preface to her main thesis and the supplementary themes woven around it. Most of her novels are contrived deliberately to dramatize a thesis, not to imitate situations in real life in the manner of a naturalistic writer. Since most of the motives employed later in her major novels are set down in 'The Mute', the outline of 'The Mute' holds a key to the understanding of the novelist's major concern and about the specific technique and style she employs to fictionalize those concerns. McCullers remarks that, "the broad principal theme
of this book is indicated in the first dozen pages. This is the theme of man's revolt against his own inner isolation and his urge to express himself as fully as is possible.\textsuperscript{2} Several other themes to be exploited later in \textit{The Heart is a Lonely Hunter} were observed by McCullers as,

There is a deep need in man to express himself by creating some unifying principle or God. A personal God created by a man is a reflection of himself and in substance this God is most often inferior to his creator. (2) In a disorganised society these individual Gods or principles are likely to be chimerical and fantastic. (3) Each man must express himself in his own way -- but this is often denied to him by a wasteful, short sighted society. (4) Human beings are innately cooperative, but an unnatural social tradition makes them behave in ways that are not in accord with their deepest nature. (5) Some men are heroes by nature in that they will give all that is in them without regard to the effort or to the personal returns.\textsuperscript{3}

A study of McCullers' preliminary outline reveals that she did not make consequential changes in the novel except for a few minor and mechanical ones. She dropped one character 'Lily Mae' Jenkins all together and altered the circumstances in the lives of some of her minor characters. The publication of \textit{The Heart is a Lonely Hunter} in the spring of 1940 won a review lauding it to be "a book that brought down the house before it appeared on the stage."\textsuperscript{4} Critics were, by and large, kind to this twenty-two year old author who they felt had written a novel which deserved, "to rank
among the best (novels) that have been written in America in recent years." Amazed at the deep insight shown into the lives of her characters Catholic World reviewed the novel and observed: "It is astonishing that a twenty-two year old girl could produce a first novel so fraught with power and understanding, so adroitly selective and so technically competent," though the reviewer nevertheless felt that "the defeatist philosophy indicated in the book" could not be approved of. Another critic who felt that The Heart is a Lonely Hunter is "a back-breaking load of serious concern for one so young" was Elizabeth Cleveland. Perhaps unequalled in praise is this extract from Tennessee Williams's unpublished essay: "The great generation of writers that in the twenties, poets such as Eliot, Crane, Cummings and Wallace Stevens, prose writers such as Faulkner, Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Katherine Anne Porter, has not been succeeded or supplemented by any new figures of corresponding stature with the sole exception of this prodigious young talent that first appeared in 1940 with the publication of her first novel The Heart is a Lonely Hunter." McCullers also won a word of praise from Joseph A. Loewinsohn: "Utterly frank in her description of some of the intimate little details of her characters and yet unbelievably tender and touching, throughout the length of the book, The Heart is a Lonely Hunter will cast a spell on you and the magnificent story of the loneliness of the human spirit will hold you enthralled for a long, long time."
However, this is not to assume that The Heart is a Lonely Hunter did not receive criticism for either following a well-known pattern or for a defective style of presentation. Says Max Putzel, "This novel might be arresting if it didn't conform entirely to a tired formula. The people who live here inhabit an America clipped of beauty, humor, freedom and ethics." Lee Berry felt that though, "there are flaws in the book, of course, of which a tendency towards over-romanticization of the theme is most apparent, but by and large this is a superlative piece of story-telling, powerful, deeply moving and strikingly original."

The sincerity with which the book was written and the convictions of the author impel the reader's involvement with the fate of these lonely characters in the book, each trying to search for something beyond or greater than himself or herself.

Making a comparison of the qualities of The Heart is a Lonely Hunter with the certain qualities of the earlier writers like Sherwood Anderson, Dostoevsky, Proust, Joyce and Faulkner, Chester E. Eisinger finds that in the novel McCullers, bares the loneliness of each sentient human being whose need is to create an image of wisdom and receptivity which receives and resolves one's problems, providing release and fulfillment. And here, with magisterial firmness, she condemns her characters to failure. The image they create
out of their need has the same need they suffer from. They have wilfully obscured the fallibility of the image. They have stubbornly embarked upon a monologue in the mistaken notion that they have established the reciprocity necessary for dialogue. They are self-deluded in the conversation each holds with himself. And the dimensions of this failure of dialogue are in the collapse of the innerself and the frustration of the social being. Mrs. McCullers does not, in a kind of warmth generated by a barroom milieu, permit her characters to live by the illusions they create. Honesty, not harshness I think, triumphs over warmth when she strips the illusion to reveal its essential nothingness. 

Maybe, an instant feeling of an identification of the reader with the characters or situations in the novel is attributable to the fact that at one time or another in life each and every one is involved in a personal/private quest for meaning in life.

Set in a small southern town the novel takes us on a journey into the private world of her characters where we find them struggling to free themselves from the mesh of isolation, with no possible escape routes accessible to them. They are fated because of their inability to communicate with others. Their attempt to love which is an ideal form of communication is thwarted by factors both social, psychological and biological. Frustrated, they are thus bound to carry their own hell about them. As Father Zossima puts it in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*: 'Hell is our incapacity to love'. This theme as exploited by McCullers has a universal dimension to it in that loneliness is an essential aspect of human condition.
In other words, loneliness is a given condition and our one imperative need is love. It is because of the universality of the theme that McCullers' appeal to the reader will remain permanently valid.

A study of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* shows that one of its major thematic concerns is loneliness and love. McCullers had started work during the year she was resting in Columbus, but the novel she planned to write took shape only gradually. It was during the first year of her marriage when she and Reeves were living in Charlotte, that it suddenly struck her that the main protagonist of her book would be a deaf-mute, and immediately she changed his name from Harry Minowitz (as had been originally planned) to John Singer.

*The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* is a study of no fewer than six cases of isolated people seeking release through love and ending up frustrated. It treats the essential loneliness of individuals in a world full of other individuals as lonely as they themselves are. These individuals look for the ways and means to escape this world of loneliness and find their efforts frustrated due to circumstances beyond their control. Loneliness is the reality, love the great necessity. The basic question is:
how is love possible in a world of individuals imprisoned by their own private and unique consciousness? McCullers explores the all-important aspects of loneliness and the attempt to communicate and love which invariably proves illusory. Stated differently, the author seems concerned with the all-important question of human consciousness. Loneliness and lack of love are plausibly the end result of a state of stasis of the individual's consciousness. Unless the individual forges intimate relationship with another, with others, expansion of consciousness is not possible. The characters in the novel remain isolated and lonely because they do not become aware of the fact that they themselves are responsible for their imprisonment in the self. Probably, as McCullers views them, these characters are beset by overpowering limitations over which they have no control. Living in an atmosphere that is not always congenial to an individual, that is, in a milieu which has no generally accepted norms, values and codes, where there is no public agreement about what is significant in experience, the individual struggling against heavy odds often finds himself lonely and isolated from the world and the people around him. In conflict with natural and social forces which thwart him, the individual looks for avenues through which he can find expression of his isolation and thus escape it. Therefore the need to identify oneself with something more real, more permanent and more lasting than one's own self arises.
the lonesome person and the world. The lover responds in a new way to nature and to other human beings. "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."15

In other words love serves as a catalyst that leads one from the I sense to the We sense and therefore helps resolve the dilemma of oppressive loneliness.

As McCullers views it, the effort to strike a personal relationship, the endeavor to belong intimately to another is beset with illusions and failure. Most of the characters in the novel find their efforts frustrated. Communication in the sense of Martin Buber's 'dialogue' is hard to achieve. Apart from these characters' incapacity to enter into a meaningful relationship with others, there are the inhibitive social pressures imposed on them from without. Their efforts to rally around Singer could possibly be interpreted as an innate need to discover a unifying principle so that they could be at peace with themselves and the world around. Singer, who symbolically represents the sense of harmony, exercises for them all a gravitational pull because none of them wants their fragmented existence perpetuated. They feel the dire need for self-integration which is denied to them — such is the paradoxical nature of
their dilemma. Maybe these characters fail because they seek things as individuals alone. The spirit of individualism, deeply rooted in the unconscious, makes it impossible for them to enter into any meaningful relationship with others. Some of them seem alienated even from their own functions and needs. Nonetheless, the quest for overcoming loneliness (not unlike the biological need to survive) persists. The lonesome individual characters must contend with the hazards of human existence and the imponderables of human condition. McCullers seems to suggest that love and perfect communication will always prove chimerical but the struggle will always continue. As Walter Allen remarks, "The Heart is a Lonely Hunter is a parable of human condition, of human isolation, of the craving to communicate and also perhaps of the inescapable delusions attendant upon the inescapable human need to love." 16

II

McCullers remarked that the "general outline of this book (The Heart is a Lonely Hunter) can be expressed simply. It is the story of five isolated, lonely people in their search for expression and spiritual integration with something greater than themselves. One of these five persons is a deaf-mute, John Singer, and it is around him that the whole book pivots." 17 Perhaps not so simply expressible is the
turmoil of each of its five main characters as they struggle to seek spiritual integration.

The book opens with John Singer and Spiros Antonapoulos, two deaf-mutes who have been together for ten years in a close but enigmatic friendship. An intelligent and quick-witted man, Singer finds himself infatuated with his impassive and feeble minded Greek friend. Living in a town where, "often in the faces along the streets there was a desperate look of hunger and of loneliness," the two deaf-mutes never seem lonely. The two in the role of the lover and the beloved — with Singer giving and Antonapoulos receiving — appear content. But suddenly Antonapoulos becomes mysteriously sick and a social menace, stealing silverware, jostling strangers and urinating in public. Charles Parker, the Greek cousin for whom Antonapoulos works, makes arrangements for him to be taken away to a mental asylum. Despite his distress and passionate concern for his friend, Singer is unable to do anything and the deranged Greek is packed off to the mental asylum two hundred miles away. At this stage, still very early in the story Singer unknowingly becomes a part of the life of the community by renting a room in the Kelly house and taking his meals regularly at the New York Café.
It is during the course of the next few months that Singer, unwittingly becomes the focal point of the lives of four other people, who visiting his room from time to time, see in him a mysterious figure to complete their own obsessive but fragmentary dreams. Mick, "a gangling, towheaded youngster, a girl of about twelve" sees in Singer an imagined harmony of spirit that brings Mozart to her mind. Jake Blount "a haggard radical agitator with a greater gift for talk than action" finds an avid listener in Singer and is immediately drawn to him. Biff Brannon, the café owner who is a self-conscious observer of humanity finds Singer worthy of contemplation because of the interest shown by the others in him. And last of all, Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland, the negro doctor who is actively crusading against the oppression of the negroes, finds Singer an all-too-rare instance of white compassion. Singer (early in the book) becomes the idol of these people and they visit his room and open their hearts to him, laying bare their dreams, ideals and fears. In other words, they attempt to 'Sing' and convey their 'Song' to John Singer. None of these people is aware of the love Singer cherishes for his friend Antonapoulos; nor are they aware of the bewilderment they cause Singer by the interest they show in him.
Part III of the novel covers a period of fourteen months. Singer, who lives in the shabby boarding house run by Mick Kelly's parents, keeps on receiving his four visitors, (who always visit him separately) and he always has a smile or nod "to show his guests that he understood" what they wished to convey to him. During these fourteen months Singer keeps on visiting Antonapoulos in the asylum only to be informed of his death in the end. Crestfallen at his friend's death, Singer commits suicide. And "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 and spiritual understanding which eludes them."22

The story is skilfully designed to be a generalized parable on the illusory nature of human love. All attempts at breaking away from spiritual stagnation and vacuity are fated to end in frustration. In the words of Lawrence Graver, "few books of the 1930's communicate as well the stagnancy of life in a depressed community and the inevitable frustration for those who try to stir free from it."23 **The Heart is a Lonely Hunter** is a contrapuntal novel and the four characters who surround John Singer constitute, as the novelist puts it 'The Spokes of the Wheel' with Singer acting as the 'hub' the structural center for the novel. All of them feel drawn to the deaf-mute because each one of them instinctively feels that
Singer possesses what they lack — the disinterested composure and a dispassionate equilibrium which results from either an intense experience of sorrow or from an intuitive interior wisdom. As McCullers observes, "In his face there came to be a brooding peace that is seen most often in the faces of the very sorrowful or the very wise." For each one of them, Singer symbolized harmony which Mick finds expressed in the fugue of Mozart or the symphony of Beethoven. He seemed to hold out a promise of love experience to them, so that they could understand what ails them and why; and thereafter be able to achieve relationship with others. In other words, they would gain freedom from the tormenting state of loneliness.

Evidently, McCullers has built him up into an enigmatic symbol. He is capable of multiple interpretations. For Mick Kelly, Mister Singer was at home in both the rooms; 'the inside room and the outside room'. She found him free from any Hamlet-like conflict or mental tensions peculiar to an average man. He seemed to symbolize for her the harmony of a classical musical composition. He became an ideal figure for her. Metaphorically speaking, she raised him to the status of a God.

It is a tribute to McCullers' skill at characterization that Singer is not reduced to a mere abstraction. Very early in the novel, she gives a short but realistic background of Singer's childhood: how he had been deaf since his infancy,
and he had not always been a real mute. Since he was nurtured in an orphanage, in an institution for the deaf, he had learnt to read and to talk with hands: "It was painful for him to try to talk with his mouth, but his hands were always ready to shape the words he wished to say." In common parlance he was eager to communicate with others. In spite the adverse circumstances and deprivation, Singer was able to maintain his balance and especially, when he came South from Chicago he struck immediate friendship with another deaf-mute Spiros Antonapoulos. The friendship strangely enough endures for ten long years. McCullers makes this relationship suggestively enigmatic in that the Greek Antonapoulos is invariably at the receiving end and Singer at the giving. In psychological terms, Antonapoulos becomes the female analogue of John Singer's personality. He does all the cooking and they share "a large double bed covered with an eiderdown comforter for the big Greek and a narrow iron cot for Singer." The implication is, the Greek revives the center of affection for Singer who has all along suffered from loneliness and deprivation. Viewed from a different (Freudian) perspective, there is a suggestive undertone of homosexual relationship between the two. It is not for nothing that Antonapoulos is a Greek. For instance, when he falls ill, Singer 'nurses him' with all the tender care of an affectionate lover and when Antonapoulos is consigned to
the asylum, Singer in his half dreams would often see his friend very vividly and when "he awakened a great aching loneliness would be in him." One can only infer that, metaphorically speaking, Antonapoulos constituted the other half of Singer's personality; it was he who had aroused in Singer his primary affections, so that when in the Greek's company, Singer found his life less lonesome.

Since this friendship with the other deaf-mute had struck deep roots in Singer's psyche, he was able to overcome a sense of lonesomeness and regain some sort of a poise and equilibrium. No wonder the other four characters, the lonely hunters like Mick Kelly, Jake Blount, Biff Brannon and Dr. Benedict Copeland come to him for solace find in him an idolized figure. For them he seems to be love incarnate. Little do they realize that it is his deep love for Antonapoulos which gave his personality the magnetic charm which he seemed to radiate for each one of them. The act of his committing suicide is but indicative of the fact that after the death of Antonapoulos who constituted the affective center of his personality and therefore the sole raison d'etre of his existence, his equipoise was rudely shaken. Life without the vitalizing force would have been an intolerable burden for him. The seeming idol of the lonely hunters was himself in need of love.

If John Singer is essential to the central structure of the novel, Mick Kelly with her positively
conceived character is one of the principal personages of the novel. When the book opens, Mick Kelly is shown visiting the New York Café for a packet of cigarettes. She is involved in "the violent struggle of a gifted child to get what she wants from an unyielding environment." She is seen pursuing her heart's desire; she loves music which shows her love of harmony. Music, for Mick, symbolizes the freedom she seeks from the world around her, and beauty that she can find in it. Belonging to a not well-to-do family, Mick's opportunities for educating herself are limited. The family is without a radio and one finds Mick roaming around the streets, pulling her two baby brothers in a wagon; and hearing any music coming from other peoples houses is a great comfort to her. At night time, with the family in bed, Mick finds herself free to be by herself and thinking of music. She walks out in the rich parts of the town where there are radios in almost all houses. After a while she comes to know where the people tune their radios for the programmes she wants to hear. Mozart's music is her first love and she immediately takes to Singer because somehow he reminds her of the music of Mozart, "The fellow Mozart's music was in her mind again. It was funny, but Mister Singer reminded her of this music." 

This is a very astute symbolic suggestion on the part of the author, that Mozart and Singer are equated in the mind of Mick. Mozart's music is both sad, soft and harmonious
and so is the face of Mr. Singer: "Mick looked up quickly and it was Mister Singer. He stood in the hall for a few minutes and his face was sad and calm." The implication is that just as Mozart's music effects catharsis for Mick's deep rooted sadness, in the same way the presence of Singer radiates to her a sense of calm, all sadness gone. Through the music of Mozart, Mick achieves a surrogate relationship with Singer who appears calm and integrated. It is a tribute to the artistic skill of McCullers that she very adroitly manipulates Mick's attraction to Mozart's music -- a symbolic device to indicate the deep aspiration in her unconscious to achieve harmony and integration. Only music, she feels, can rescue her from her estrangement. Only through music can she be at peace with herself. She seeks solitude so that she can absorb the music of Mozart. Mere socialization or domestic company cannot rid her of her feeling of loneliness, "It was funny, too, how lonesome a person could be in a crowded house. Mick tried to think of some good private place where she could go and be by herself and study about this music. But though she thought about this a long time she knew in the beginning that there was no good place." 

However, a fortuitous experience of listening to Beethoven's third symphony proves to be the most intense experience she has ever had. After the Prom Party, she is overwhelmed with a feeling of loneliness. And as she walks
into the night, she chances to listen to the third symphony of Beethoven which moves her immensely. The first and the immediate effect is the 'worst hurt' and a blankness:
"Wonderful music like this was the worst hurt there could be. The whole world was this symphony and there was not enough of her to listen... Now that it was over there was only her heart like a rabbit and this terrible hurt."32 But as she lay pondering thereafter, the first part of the symphony happened in her mind as in a flash: "Now she felt good. She whispered some words out loud: 'Lord Forgiveth me, for I knoweth not what I do'."33 This abrupt remembrance of God suggests Mister Singer to her. She said the words again as she would speak them to Mister Singer: "Lord Forgiveth me, for I knoweth not what I do."34

The subtle suggestive shift from Mozart to Beethoven is indicative of Mick's achieving more intense experience and a higher degree of consciousness. The third symphony of Beethoven moves her to experience the cycle of life — origin, death and rebirth. Her repetition of the Biblical invocation to God for forgiveness is indicative of a deepening of her understanding of the working of life's processes. Only in God is peace and the harmony and calm which she so ardently yearns for. The structural significance of this experience lies in her realization that Singer though
silent and mute is a God-figure, that is, he becomes a symbolic sign-post for her. The function of a symbol is primarily one of illumination. For the first time perhaps she realizes why Singer exercises a magnetic pull on her. She also wants to achieve the symphonic harmony so that she can accept life as it is. This is not, however, to suggest that Mick has accomplished full consciousness, but only to indicate that from now on she will no longer be enchaincd in her own narrow lonely self.

This desire to escape from loneliness prompts Mick to climb up to the roof of a house being built nearby and sit thinking about the possibility of achieving fame and fortune through music. The desire to reach out to people makes her "spread out her arms like wings"\textsuperscript{35} and she dreams of swimming through big crowds of people:

\textit{This is a funny thing -- the dreams I've been having lately. It's like I'm swimming. But instead of water I'm pushing out my arms and swimming through great big crowds of people. The crowd is hundred times bigger than in Kresses' store on Saturday afternoon. The biggest crowd in the world. And sometimes I'm yelling and swimming through people, knocking them all down wherever I go.}\textsuperscript{36}

Perhaps subconsciously, Mick is aware of the conflict between the world and her imagination as she continues later: "Other times I'm on the ground and people are trompling all over me..."
and my insides are oozing out on the side walk. I guess it's more like a nightmare than a plain dream.\(^ {37} \) The awareness of the futility of the realization of her dreams forces Mick to set up a most elaborate personal defense dividing her world into two different compartments:

> With her it was like there was two places — the inside room and the outside room. School and the family and the things that happened everyday were in the outside room. Mister Singer was in both rooms. The songs she thought about were there. And the symphony... The inside room was a very private place. She could be in the middle of a house full of people and still feel like she was locked up by herself.\(^ {38} \)

This creation of a world totally personal and private and the strong feeling of lonesomeness makes futile the attempts of Mick to identify herself with others.

> There is schism in her psyche. Even sex experience, her first encounter with a shy neighbour Harry Minowitz, proves abortive. She fails to achieve integration of her fragmented self. She cannot yet connect the inner world with the outer. This is McCullers' way of suggesting the inadequacy of this experience. Sex experience at its intensest, is a sure means to the realization of the otherness of the other. As Margaret B. McDowell puts it "the exuberant Mick who savours life fully when she opens the door dividing her inner room from the outside room, is not to be found at the moment she loses her virginity."\(^ {39} \)

In Joycean language she fails to achieve an epiphany. The impact which this experience could have produced on the growth and development of her personality is quickly wiped out from her memory after Harry goes to a job in Birmingham. "It seemed like a very long time had passed since they went to the woods
together." What adds poignancy to her mood of disillusionment as a sequel to this experience, is the death of Singer, with whom she had wanted to share her experience. This encounter with death, quick on the heels of her disillusionment with Harry, is a tour-de-force of artistic suggestion. McCullers seems to imply that a questor has to forge a lonely furrow. Epiphanic experience alone matters, no outside help will do.

Though she reveals many complicating limitations, Mick is a positively conceived character; as the novel closes, we find her alone and lonely, her fantasies and her dreams have not come true. Her song remains unsung (Mister Singer is dead) and she has to take up a salesman's job at Woolworth's store: It is soul-killing. However, her inner world remains intact. She does not let loose her hold on her "ongoing sense that a meaningful pattern underlies the bitterness of her recent experiences." She would not resign herself to fate although she feels "it was like she was cheated." She had to be some good to be struggling. "It had to be some good if anything made sense. And it was too and it was too and it was too and it was too. It was some good."

Another important figure in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, who is able to attain self expression towards the end of the novel is Biff Brannon, the forty-four years old café-owner. Although known for collecting systematically the issues of daily newspapers in the back room of his café, Biff Brannon never, in fact, analyzes the news. Without the inclination to
integrate past, present and future and to relate the incidents of his life in the past to his life in the present, he responds only to separate occurrences and shows no desire to participate actively in the world around him. Living at an impersonal level with his wife Alice (they have been addressing each other as "Mr" and "Mrs" over a period of years, after a trivial argument) Biff is seen more as a keen observer of the world than an active participant.

Biff evinces keen interest in Singer who is for him a fit subject for contemplation mainly because of the attention paid to him by others. He is the first to wonder why Mick and Jake Blount make Singer into a God-figure. Although he proffers no answer, the implied suggestion is obvious that Biff Brannon is involved with the on-goings of the enigmatic Singer. After the death of his wife, he received a letter of condolence from Singer. He was to be the pall bearer at the funeral. Singer seemed to be concerned about the emotional well-being of Biff Brannon. He encouraged him to have a smoke together and offered him a drink of coffee. This deceptively simple act is emblematic of the deep feeling Singer has for Biff in the hour of his bereavement. It hardly need to be stressed that Singer emerges as a friend in need, "Singer looked at him now and then with his green observant eyes."
He offered him a drink of coffee. Biff did not talk, and once the mute stopped to pat him on the shoulder and look for a second into his face. By implication it suggests that Biff recognizes Singer to be a man capable of understanding another man's distress and offering consolation in the hour of his need. Otherwise too the deaf-mute seems to have taken deep roots in his psyche. He has to do with the nagging feeling how this deaf-mute could become the focus of other people's attention. He feels an instinctive desire to unravel this mystery, "After they were gone he still wondered what it was about this mute — and in the early dawn when he lay in bed he turned over questions and solutions in his mind without satisfaction. The puzzle had taken deep root in him, it worried him in the back of his mind and left him uneasy."

He comes close to unraveling the enigma when, preparing her lesson for the Sunday School his wife Alice Brannon chooses the biblical text "All men seek for Thee" and he immediately reflects on the gathering of the disciples idealizing the mute. There is an equivocal suggestion here that Singer has an appeal for these characters because they look upon him as a God-figure. It is the love of the ideal which makes these characters rally around the deaf-mute. The love of an ideal has its value for the lover in that it affords him release, however partial and temporary, from his cell.
Also, the wish to love tends to join men together, often without their realizing it. In the very effort to love man finds a measure of relief from his loneliness.

Biff is the least ardent of all the lovers. He is conscious of Singer's charm but he does not depend on him as do the others and because he has less need of him, Biff is the only one who does not fashion the mute after his heart's desire, and who can see him with anything approaching objectivity. Another character who exemplifies the obsessive theme of alienation in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* is Jake Blount, a twenty-nine year old radical. A stranger in the town on his first arrival, he leaves the town a year later, still a stranger. His origins are not conveyed to the reader by McCullers and in this vagueness we find the suggestion of Jake Blount being a gallivant and an outcast. The homelessness of Jake Blount (not merely in the literal sense) suggests his lack of affiliation with any community. A man confused in his socialist engagements, Blount represents the confusion of his mind, a confusion caused by a state of existence where he finds himself unable to respond positively towards another. With altruistic plans of social reform, Blount never rises above his "one-man organization, a leader without a following, a true 'minority of one'."
After his arrival in the town Blount takes up residence in Biff Brannon's New Café and makes himself the object of Biff's attention by staying drunk and living on credit (after giving them rent for the initial one week). Biff finds this man funny yet sad:

There were many things about the fellow that seemed contrary. His head was very large and well shaped, but his neck was soft and slender as a boy's. His moustache looked false, as if it had been stuck on for a costume party and would fall off if he talked too fast. It made him seem almost middle-aged, although his face with its high, smooth forehead and wide open eyes was young. His hands were huge, stained and calloused, and he was dressed in a cheap white-linen suit. There was something very funny about the man, yet at the same time another feeling would not let you laugh.

Jake too, like the other characters, is fascinated immediately by the deaf-mute and hopes to find in Singer a friend and a confidant. He finds himself "almost hypnotized" by Singer's eyes and loses "the urge to be riotous and felt calm again. The eyes seemed to understand all that he had meant to say and to hold some message for him." Jake too feels cheated after the death of Singer. The illusory God that had been created by Blount had failed him by taking his own life. He felt lost without Singer: "He was before a wall. He remembered all the innermost thoughts that he had told to Singer, and with his death it seemed to him that they were
lost." Singer had represented for Blount all the understanding and compassion that he could not find in others and the sudden shock of being faced with the fact that Singer may not have been any of these, predicts trouble for Jake Blount. He leaves the town after Singer's death and after participating actively in a drunken brawl (which is indicative of the fact that Jake has lost the calm and sense of peace he had felt after meeting Singer) without the slightest idea of where he is bound. He is still sure of his hope to get people to rise up against the sordid social order and hangs on to this vision which will eventually lead him to a dead end as his vision of Singer had led him to.

Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland, a proud and embittered black physician who seeks to raise the status of blacks through staunch support of marxism, also finds in Singer an image of the unity and oneness of human beings. A man alienated from his family (his children are afraid of him; they find him too harsh, stern and inflexible) and friends, Dr. Copeland fails at any attempt made either by his daughter Portia or by himself to bridge the gap between himself and his kin. His sitting all alone in his darkened house, shaking with fever only highlights his loneliness. His abstract love for the working class, and for blacks in particular, and his efforts to secure social justice for them are doomed to failure as they are not even appreciated
or understood by the very people for whom he is struggling. His political talk at his Christmas party for blacks further increases his frustration when he finds them unable to understand what he is so desperately trying to convey. Sharing a similar philosophy as Blount, Dr. Copeland nevertheless does not approve of the clumsy and emotional methods of Blount. In his passion to be able to convey his philosophy to blacks, Dr. Copeland himself is instrumental in alienating himself from them and even from his own family. It is only in Singer that he thinks he can find peace: "He remembered the white man's face when he smiled behind the yellow match flame on that rainy day — and peace was in him." The simple act of Singer in holding for him (Copeland) a lighted match appears to Copeland an action confirming their common bond of brotherhood, of oneness of their human heritage. Like the others, Dr. Copeland finds himself drawn unwittingly into a habit of visiting Singer's room and laying bare the innermost recesses of his heart before the deaf-mute. Dr. Copeland imagined that Singer was vested with wisdom and understanding found lacking in other men: "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 men 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."
Singer, he felt, would understand, "his heart turned with this angry, restless love" for his people and in Singer will he find his peace of mind. The death of Singer symbolizes the death of a dream for him, but a dream that would always remain in his soul: "and how can the dead be truly dead when they still live in the souls of those who are left behind?" a dream that would only keep alive the loneliness and the search of love in the heart of Dr. Copeland.

III

McCullers used musical terms to describe the style of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* as "contrapuntal throughout" each character as schematized by her would be "a voice in a fugue," a voice complete in itself but also enriched by contrast with the voices of other characters and by the subtle interweaving of all the varied voices tending towards a harmonious whole. The contrapuntal effect arises from the distinct style of the voices of the four characters who sought inspiration and support from Singer. Singer would possess the harmonious tone which is the end result of a fugue. The distinctive tone and rhythm in the dialogue of each one of the principal characters is a tour de force of McCullers' artistic excellence. The style used for each character is subtly suggestive of his or her inner psychic
rhythm. This device makes it unnecessary for the author to psychologically analyze the unconscious of each of the five main characters. It is a tribute to her artistic craft that the psychologist disappears in the artist (as Turgenev suggests should happen in a novel). Immost thoughts and feelings are revealed to the reader almost entirely through explicit action and direct dialogue. Only very little, if at all of their past is enlarged upon. Since the past only minimally informs or conditions them, the fictional present of the five characters acquires great dimensional magnitude. Probably McCullers did this deliberately, because her intention was not to write a naturalistic or even a realistic novel. She was to present a parable on the human condition and its basic salient feature of loneliness and the lack of human communication. May be this accounts for the universality of her theme.

However, it is difficult to assert that the novel achieves a dramatic finale as a musical fugue does. At the end of the novel it remains uncertain whether Singer's suicidal death achieves illumination on the part of the four characters leading to the sense of community among them. Singer, living or dead, fails to achieve their integration. "His suicide" as Margaret B. McDowell puts it, "harmonized with no one's previous conception of him. No one knew the single-mindedness
of his love for Antonapoulos or his longing for understanding. Singer, locked into his world of silence, actually is a static character, he does not respond to the other characters, whom he regards with eyes 'cold and gentle as a cat's'. The puzzling question remains; Singer suggests no final answer to the human enigma. One has to bear the burden of loneliness and the utter lack of communication as one possibly can.

In the end it must be said to her credit that McCullers makes the reader hear silence, which few authors with all their sensitivity to music can achieve. The deep silence which fills the night after Singer's death quickens a startling radiance of illumination to Biff while he is meditating over the puzzle concerning Singer and his magnetic appeal to the strangers. A truth, as in a flash, is vouchsafed to him as McCullers puts it. "For in a swift radiance of illumination he saw a glimpse of human struggle and of valor, of the endless fluid passage of humanity through endless time. And of those who labor and of those who — one word — love. His Soul expanded" (emphasis mine). Despite the uncertainty which Biff still experiences as he feels suspended between radiance and darkness, between bitter irony and faith, he "awaits the morning sun." The final hope
which McCullers sounds at the end of the novel may not be construed as a note of affirmation but it definitely is not a note of dark despair or even cynicism. This is how the book ends: "As he [fifth] went to the door his walk gained steadiness. And when at last he was inside again he composed himself soberly to await the morning sun."61
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