The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter Study Guide

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter by Carson McCullers

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter was Carson Mc- Cullers' first novel, published in 1940, when the author was just twenty-three years old. It started out as a short story in a creative writing class, and an early, working draft of the novel, then called *The Mute,* was submitted for a Houghton Mifflin Fiction Fellowship, for which McCullers won a cash prize and a publishing contract. Her editors at Houghton Mifflin convinced her to change the title. Upon its publication, the book was received positively by reviewers, who were all the more enthusiastic about it because of the author's young age. The book introduced themes that stayed with McCullers throughout her lifetime and appeared in all of her works, such as "spiritual isolation" and her notion of "the grotesque," which she used to define characters who found themselves excluded from society because of one outstanding feature, physical or mental. The story takes place in a small town in the South in the late 1930s. The five central characters cross paths continually throughout the course of about a year, but due to the imbalances in their personalities they are not able to connect with one another, and are doomed to carry on the loneliness indicated in the title. An indication of their lack of coping mechanisms is that the one character that the other four confide their hopes and aspirations and theories to is a deaf mute, who cannot fully understand them nor communicate back to them anything more than his nodding acceptance of what they tell him. Throughout her short career, McCullers' novels continued to present characters who were cut off from mankind, although, many critics believe, never as successfully as in this first, brilliant stroke.

Author Biography

McCullers was born Lulu Carson Smith on February 19, 1917, in Columbus, Georgia. Her family had deep roots in the South: her great-grandfather, Major John Carson, owned a two-thousand acre plantation with seventy-five slaves before the Northern army burned the plantation and freed the slaves during the Civil War. Her father, Lamar Smith, was a watchmaker, like Mick Kelly's father, and owned a jewelry shop like the one John Singer works in. From early childhood, Lulu Carson was expected to achieve great fame, and while she was growing up her parents did what they could to encourage her interest in music. She started formal piano lessons at age ten, and progressed swiftly through her studies in music, which were intense and consuming. After a bout with pneumonia at age fifteen, she started to question whether she had the stamina to be a concert pianist, and turned her attention to writing. She kept her parents believing that she was interested in music, and so when she was seventeen she was sent to New York to study at the Juilliard School, but when she arrived, she enrolled at Columbia University, which had better creative writing teachers, including Sylvia Chatfield Bates, who was a major influence. While home for the summer in 1936 she met Jim Mc-Cullers, an army corporal who was also interested in writing, and the following summer they were married. Living in North Carolina with him, Mc- Cullers was able to devote all of her time to writing: in a few months, she developed an outline and the first chapters of a novel she called *The Mute,* which Bates suggested she submit to a writing competition. It won a $1500 Houghton Mifflin fellowship and a publishing contract, and was published as *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* the following year, when the author was twenty-three years old.

Soon after the novel's publication, McCullers and her husband separated. She and *Harper's Bazaar* editor George Davis moved into a house in Brooklyn Heights, where an eccentric cast of famous boarders came and went, among them Christopher Isherwood, Richard Wright, Paul Bowles, Oliver Smith, Benjamin Britten, Gypsy Rose Lee, and W. H. Auden, who oversaw the housekeeping. Visitors included Anais Nin, Leonard Bernstein, Salvador and Gala Dali, Aaron Copeland, Muriel Rukeyser, Granville Hicks, and Truman Capote. McCullers became attached to Swiss novelist Annemarie Larac-Schwarzenbach, and her husband fell in love with the couple's best friend, David Diamond. The couple divorced in 1940, but they stayed in contact, remarrying in 1945. When they were considering divorcing again in 1953, he committed suicide in Paris. During the early 1940s McCullers published a succession of books that made their mark on American literature: *Reflections in a Golden Eye* in 1941; *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe,* a novella, in 1943; and *The Member of the Wedding* in 1946. Tennessee Williams liked *The Member of the Wedding* so much that he helped McCullers develop a script for it, and it opened with great success on Broadway in 1950. As her career accelerated, though, her health deteriorated rapidly. In 1940 she suffered a minor stroke that left her vision temporarily impaired, and strokes in August and November of 1947 left her blind, unable to speak, and permanently paralyzed on her left side at the age of thirty. McCullers had operations for numerous problems: the muscles of her left hand atrophied, her hip was fractured and had to be set twice, and she had a mastectomy

after being diagnosed with breast cancer. For the rest of her life she continued writing; creating stage and film adap- tations of works already done and producing just one major new work, a play, *Clock without Hands,* in 1961. McCullers died in 1967.

Plot Summary

Part One

The first section of this novel has six chapters one chapter focused on each of the five main characters, and then the sixth concerning their continuing relationship to one another. The first two chapters take place much earlier than the continuing action of the rest of the novel. The first chapter introduces John Singer, the deaf mute, and it is written in the vague, fable-like tone that all of the parts concerning Singer are told in. His relationship with another mute, Antonapoulos, is explained: they live together and spend their free time together, but after ten years Antonapoulos starts showing erratic behavior stealing from the cousin he works for, exposing himself in public, etc. Singer spends all of his money trying to make restitution for his friend's crimes, but the cousin has Antonapoulos committed to the state insane asylum two hundred miles away. Singer moves into the boarding house owned by the Kelly family and begins eating his meals at the New York Cafe. The second chapter takes place one night at the cafe: all of the five main characters pass through this chapter, but it is primarily about the cafe owner, Biff Brannon. When he is coming off of his shift and going to bed, his wife is rising to go to work. Brannon admits to his wife that he has a fondness for what he calls "freaks." Their conversation is about how to handle a third main character, Jake Blount, who has spent every night at the cafe since arriving in town twelve days earlier: he gets drunk, doesn't pay his bills, and terrorizes the customers. Mick Kelly, a twelve-year-old girl from town, comes in to buy a pack of cigarettes. Blount leaves briefly and returns with Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland, a black physician, insisting that he will buy him a drink in defiance of segregation laws, until Dr. Copeland shakes his grip and leaves. Singer, the deaf mute, takes Blount home to sleep off his drunkenness.

Throughout the rest of this section the backgrounds of the characters are revealed. Mick Kelly watches after her younger brothers throughout the summer, and she is obsessed with music. She recalls a Mozart melody she heard and she tries to make a violin out of an old ukulele. She is also brash, offensive, and vulgar to the other members of her family. Jake Blount takes a job with the carnival that moves around town, and he dreams of leading a revolution against social injustice. He strongly opposes racism and holds Marxist views about economic inequality, but he distances himself from everybody except Singer because of his tendency to get drunk and argue. Dr. Copeland does not get along with his children as an educated black man in the South, he feels that blacks have to rise above their station, and he is disappointed that his children are average. When Singer goes away for a week to visit his friend at the end of this section, all of these characters are worried, because they each feel that he is the one person who understands them.

Part Two

Most of the action in the book takes place in the long middle section, which spans fifteen chapters. Mick enters Vocational High School, and, in order to get to know her new classmates, she throws a party, dressing in girl clothes for the first time; she is disappointed when the rowdy neighborhood children crash the party, although her new classmates do not seem to mind. Biff's wife dies, and he becomes more withdrawn, more self-involved, and he takes on effeminate traits such as wearing perfume. Doctor Copeland's son William is arrested and sent to prison, and, at the request of his daughter, Portia, the doctor attends a family function, at which his father-in-law, a farmer, angers him by talking about God: he lets his anger show, alienating his family further. Mick's younger brother, playing with a rifle, shoots Baby, who is Biff Brannon's niece: her mother agrees to not press charges if the Kelly family will pay for Baby's first-class hospital treatment, but the bills destroy the Kellys financially. In the middle of this section is a chapter about Singer visiting his friend at the asylum, and then writing him a letter. It is through this letter that readers find out what Singer thinks of all of the people who confide in him: he does not generally understand what they are talking about, and thinks they are foolish and crazy. Mick takes piano lessons from a girl at school, practicing in the gymnasium while the boys play basketball.

After weeks of being out of contact, William comes home: due to torture and abuse at the prison farm, he has lost his feet to gangrene. Dr. Copeland, going to see a judge he knows about the matter, is mocked and beaten by a deputy sheriff and thrown in jail for the night, crushing his dignity. Jake, who has seen racial tensions flaring at the carnival, goes to see the doctor upon hearing about these mistreatments: the two of them cordially agree to form an alliance to demand social justice, but they disagree about how to reach their goal, and the argument flares until racial insults are thrown. At the end of this section Singer goes to see Antonapoulos again, only to be told that his friend is dead. He goes home and kills himself.

Part Three

The last section is about what happens after Singer's death and how it affects the surviving characters, who counted on him to be their moral compass whether he understood them or not. This section is divided into four chapters labeled *Morning, Afternoon, Evening,* and *Night,* respectively, of August 21, 1939. Doctor Copeland, the proud, educated man who could not tolerate his father-inlaw's simplistic religious groveling, is too ill to care for himself, and so he is taken away to the country, lying in the back of the farmer's old mulewagon. Jake Blount, who meant to be the man who could bring the races and classes together, takes part in a race riot at the carnival: after holding back at first, he finds himself joining in and swinging his fists ferociously. He leaves town with a sense of having accomplished nothing, but with hope for the next town he will end up in. Mick takes a job at Woolworth's in order to help with the family's mounting bills. It means giving up her dream of studying music. In the end she stops at the New York Cafe to have a beer and a sundae, indicating the mixture of child and

adult at which she is frozen. Biff Brannon spends his time in the basement among the newspapers he has collected over the past twenty years, isolated from his customers and employees, living in his own world.

Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

As the story begins, we are introduced to two friends. Spiros Antonapoulous is an overweight Greek with a round face and dreamy eyes. He always seems to wear a stupid smile. The other man is John Singer, a tall man with an intelligent face. He always dresses conservatively and is very clean and neat. They are opposites in every way except they are both mute.

The Greek man works for his cousin in a fruit store, and his job is to uncrate the fruit and make candy. Singer works as a silverware engraver. Each morning they leave their boardinghouse and walk to their jobs together. They are only apart when they are at work. They live together, and Spiro does all the cooking while Singer cleans. This arrangement has lasted for ten years.

Their friendship and living arrangement continues until Spiro gets sick. Singer nurses him back to health in a week, but he isn't the same after that. He begins to exhibit erratic behavior, such as stealing restaurant silverware and urinating on buildings. Singer has a hard time with his friend's new behavior but bails him out just the same. One day, Spiro's cousin tells Singer that he has admitted his Greek friend to an insane asylum. He will leave immediately. John has no way to fight this decision, and he tells his friend goodbye. He tries to make a new life, which seems much quieter now that Spiro is gone.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

The book opens with a study in contrasts. The lazy, obese Greek man contrasts with the very proper Singer, but they seem to have a bond between them that surpasses their physical affliction. It may have been nothing more than the fact that Singer is a caregiver, and the other man is needy. Did Singer stay because he needed to be needed, or were they alike at some core level that no one else could see? Singer suffers a period of melancholy when Spiro leaves, but he faces his new life with the coming of the spring and the hope it brings.

Part 1, Chapter 2

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

In the early hours of a Sunday morning, Biff Brannon looks out over his customers at the New York Café. John Singer is there, a regular customer since Spiro left, but the most obvious character is Jake Blount, a boisterous drunk that extends his credit with each drink. Alice, Biff's wife, has warned him that if Jake isn't gone by tomorrow, Biff should pack his things and go. She is weary of this life and her marriage and is in no mood to suffer this fool any longer.

Jake thinks he has found a captive audience in John Singer, who is paying rapt attention to him. He doesn't know that Singer can't hear a word he says. Jake thinks he has made a new friend and seems pleased.

Fourteen-year old Mick Kelly struts in out of the blue. No one seems to think it odd that she's in a restaurant in the middle of the night to buy cigarettes. She is her own person and doesn't answer to anyone. Biff sells her the cigarettes and she stuffs them into her pocket.

Then it looks like Biff's problem of removing Jake will be solved for him. A group of angry men who are fed up with his drunken behavior beat him up in a side alley. Singer rescues him and takes him home to sleep and recover. Biff can go upstairs and tell Alice that the drunk is gone. She doesn't need to know that he wasn't the one who did it.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

The author introduces us to three more important characters, Biff, Jake and Mick. At this point, we only know that they seem lonely or alienated in some way. Contented people don't prefer bars to their homes in the middle of the night. Visually, the eerie lighting and setting of the restaurant seems appropriate for a group of loners and misfits. They seem comfortable with the situation, as if their loneliness is more bearable when the rest of the world can't see it.

Part 1, Chapter 3

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

Mick is spending a typical Sunday with her two younger brothers, Ralph and Bubber. She has a lot of responsibility for a girl of her age, and pulling them in a wagon around the neighborhood seems to be a normal routine. She doesn't mind watching them, but her main interest this morning is climbing to the top of the roof of a nearby house under construction. All the kids in the neighborhood have written graffiti on the walls inside. Mick wants to top them. She wants to stand on the highest point of the roof and sing. She manages to climb to the top, but she is afraid of the height and can't squeak out a note. She climbs down and compensates for her defeat by kicking around inside with her dreams while her brothers bake in the hot sun outside.

Mick's life doesn't improve much at home, a ramshackle three-story building which now holds 14 people. Her older sisters dream of Hollywood careers and don't see room for Mick in their lives, then or now. Her brother Bill is good company sometimes, but at the moment he is engrossed in his copy of *Popular Mechanics* and doesn't want to be disturbed. His quiet won't last, because Mick has brought in her big hat box, and she produces a homemade violin that she has patched together from scraps. Bill has no tolerance for her version of a musical instrument and says she is stupid to think she could ever make something as fine as a violin.

Mick is hurt by his remark, but there is no one to notice. Her mother is busy serving dinner to their boarders and guests. The house is too full for a gawky girl with a head full of silly dreams.

Hunger overtakes Mick, and she sits down in the kitchen to eat with her brothers and Portia, the colored girl who helps in the house. Portia is preaching more than usual today. It is Sunday, after all. She sees through Mick's rough exterior to her good heart, but she still wishes that Mick would go to church. Mick's patience wears thin, and she leaves to look for what the rest of the day will bring.

Mick situates herself at the top of the stairs to hear the classical music that sometimes comes from Miss Brown's room on Sunday afternoons. However, Miss Brown's room is quiet today, and she beats on her thighs with her fists and feels a hunger inside that is much worse than a hunger for food. Mr. Singer nods to her as he crosses to the bathroom from his room. She wonders what kind of music he hears, and what would he say if he could talk? She guesses she'll never solve that mystery.

Mick thinks again about the classical music and wishes she could have a quiet place to herself to hum it out loud. The music she hears inside herself is too private for a house full of people. She wonders how a person can be so lonesome in such a crowded house. As hard as she tries, she knows there is no private place for her and her music.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

Mick is lonesome in this full house. She yearns for things that she can't even name, and she knows that she is not like the rest of her family. There is an artistic longing inside her, and she finds so much satisfaction in classical music that even the memory of it brings tears to her eyes. This might explain her fascination with Singer. She can hear incredible things in her head, and she wonders what he must hear inside his. She may also be fascinated by him because he is all that she can't have. She would not choose to be a mute, but he is quiet and serene and seems to possess all the qualities that she desires.

Part 1, Chapter 4

Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

John Singer had taken Jake home with him the night before, and the man awakens in Singer's cool, dark and comfortable room. Singer provides water for a bath and makes him fresh coffee, but he never speaks, only smiles. Finally, Singer gives Jake a card that explains he is a deaf mute, he can read lips and there's no need to shout. Though the room is the most pleasant he has ever been in, Jake feels the overwhelming need to leave.

Jake refuses Singer's offer of a place to stay and leaves to find a job. He finds a newspaper ad for a mechanic. Since it is Sunday, he decides to walk and finds himself in the mill section of town where the houses and the children are equally thin. He finds the address for the job, which happens to be at a traveling carnival. He is hired and told to start work the next day. The owner also tells him to be wary of the tricks the colored people will use to get rides.

Jake encounters three colored men sitting at a house on his way back to town. They chew tobacco for awhile, and it soon becomes clear that these men don't share his passion for the injustices of the world. He feels that he would like to see Singer again. Perhaps Singer can understand his righteous anger.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

Jake's characteristics surface more in this chapter. He is not simply a drunk and a braggart. He has strong convictions about the injustices inflicted on the working poor and their children. He is baffled when the three men don't understand his rage over their plight. Injustice is new to him, but it has been a way of life for the men. The rantings of one man on a Sunday afternoon are nothing to get too worked up about. Jake feels drawn to the deaf mute man, who he believes will understand the inequities of life. He returns to see Singer and begins an odd relationship with the man.

Part 1, Chapter 5

Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

Portia, her husband Highboy and her brother William take their Sunday walk to visit their father, Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland. The two men leave her at the house, and Portia enters, greets her father and begins to fix dinner for them. The doctor is reminded of his sweet wife as Portia works in the kitchen. However, rather than settle for a peaceful evening, he tries as always to instill a sense of ambition in Portia. She is weary of having the topic thrust on her again and asks that they don't quarrel.

The doctor agrees, and only a few words pass between them. Portia feels the same old arguments pass between them in silence. The doctor feels obligated to improve the station of his family, and Negro people in general, and he regrets that his daughter has resigned herself to her station in life. His life will be remembered more for the babies that are named after him than any legacy his own children leave behind. They haven't absorbed any of his philosophies despite his years of teaching them.

The doctor knows that they were too afraid of him to listen to him. They would sit with him, but they would always look at their mother. He didn't know what he did to make them avoid him. Portia interrupts his thoughts by bemoaning her meager wages at the Kelly house, but she doesn't want her father to urge her to find more suitable employment.

Portia and the doctor turn their conversation to the topic of John Singer, a boarder in the Kelly house. The doctor met John at the New York Café the night before when he was called to tend to a drunken man who was hurt in a fight. After a moment of reflection, Dr. Copeland remembers seeing the deaf mute man one other time, when Singer had lit the doctor's cigarette on a rainy night. He clearly remembers the calmness in the man's eyes and being touched by his kindness.

When Highboy and Willie return to pick up Portia, she convinces them to visit their father. However, the doctor can't have a simple visit. He reprimands Willie for forgetting all the doctor had tried to teach him. The evening ends abruptly, and there is distance between the doctor and his children again. He thinks about Singer and the peace that emanated from the deaf mute man.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Analysis

The author portrays more loneliness in the company of others. The doctor has tried to connect with his children their entire lives but feels estranged from his them. All his good intentions have eluded them, and if anything he is driving them further away. He has recognition with his patients and in his community, but his own children don't see the real man. For some reason, his meeting John Singer has stayed in his mind. Maybe it

was the man's kindness that holds him. Perhaps there will be more encounters, and the old man will have his faith in humanity restored by the kind stranger.

Part 1, Chapter 6

Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

John Singer has become very popular in the boarding house. Jake Blount, Mick, Dr. Copeland and Biff Brannon visit him all the time,. They use the deaf man for a sounding board without considering his perspective as they crowd into his life. They take him for granted, until he leaves abruptly one day without warning.

Singer has decided to take his vacation and visit Spiro in the insane asylum. Little about his friend has changed other his increased size. Singer takes him fine gifts, but Spiro acts like a petulant child when he realizes that none of the boxes contain food. Singer tries to sign to him in a frantic attempt to speak to his friend, but the Greek man ignores him. Dejected, he returns home to the boardinghouse room, which quickly fills up with people spilling over with their own troubles.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Analysis

Spiro's behavior makes you want to shake him. He ignores Singer and tosses away his friendship and generosity. His emotional problems may explain his behavior, but your heart reaches out to Singer. Singer's plight doesn't improve when he returns to the boardinghouse. All his friends bombard him with their troubles and never ask about his own. It never occurs to them that he might be troubled by anything.

Part 2, Chapter 1

Part 2, Chapter 1 Summary

The summer has passed, and Mick is enrolled in the Vocational School. She is no longer considered a child, and she validates this by hosting her first party. She has high hopes that the party will bring her friends at the new school. She dresses in one of her sister's formals and tiara and listens with relish as the guests begin to arrive. The decorations are perfect and the refreshments just right. Awkward couples begin to dance, and she is filled with satisfaction.

Just when Mick thinks the evening can't get any better, Harry Minowitz from next door escorts her for a walk around the block. However, when they return, she sees that uninvited guests have crashed the party and ruined her perfect evening. She sheds her party clothes and ventures into the night where she always finds comfort. Her walk takes her to a house where she hears the most wonderful music.

When Mick hears the strains of Beethoven's Third Symphony for the first time, she is riveted. This music is the whole world to her, and she can't listen hard enough. "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."

Part 2, Chapter 1 Analysis

Mick never seems to fit in. She desperately wants to belong to a group at school, but her hopes are dashed as her party is crashed, and she is alone again. She walks into the night to find comfort where no one can see her loneliness. Classical music speaks to her unreleased emotion. It is the only thing she has found that is big enough to carry her feelings. It is a vital part of her, and she doesn't even know its name yet.

Part 2, Chapter 2

Part 2, Chapter 2 Summary

Mick continues to visit the New York Café. It is fall now, and Biff makes hot chocolate for her. At this time, Biff encounters more sorrow when his wife falls ill and dies unexpectedly. Apparently, she had a tumor the size of a newborn child but never sought the medical attention she needed.

Biff plans her funeral with detachment. He goes through the proper motions but is removed from the whole thing. He clears out her clothes and personal items to give them to her sister, Lucille. During the course of their few days together, he and Lucille talk about their lives. Neither one of them has had a grand love, but Lucille has a child, Baby, whom she spoils and adores.

Biff manages to get through the mourning period. Lucille accompanies him, and they try to console each other, but his odd little group of friends from the café provide him more comfort.

Part 2, Chapter 2 Analysis

Biff didn't really know his wife, and that sadness builds on the sadness of her death. Their marriage had deteriorated to such a degree that he didn't even know the severity of her illness. He tries to rouse some emotion after her death but finds that he is empty. He provides her a proper funeral, but he is simply going through the motions.

Even Alice's sister, Lucille, doesn't have much feeling, and that is a sadness for her too. Biff pushes down any feelings he has and reopens the café. There, he finds his comfort in the people he is closest to and gets his life back in order as quickly as possible.

Part 2, Chapter 3

Part 2, Chapter 3 Summary

Dr. Copeland and Singer forge a new friendship and begin to spend more time together. The doctor feels that Singer can understand him and his life's purpose unlike any other person. Singer is faithful to him during the doctor's bout with pneumonia. The doctor must deal with the fact that his son, Willie, has been sentenced for assault with a deadly weapon in addition to his illness.

While Willie is in prison, Portia tries to keep the family together and organizes a family reunion for her other two brothers, their grandfather, her father and her husband. Her good intentions fall flat for her father, who has nothing in common with the others and can't even believe that he fathered some of them. They are ignorant, and their conversation is banal. He's baffled to watch them hang on to their illiterate grandfather's every word while they ignore him. The doctor refuses to participate in their antics and leaves the party without saying goodbye.

Part 2, Chapter 3 Analysis

The doctor is plagued by more than the tuberculosis that wracks his body. His children have disappointed him. No amount of food, drink or party games will hide the fact that they are failures to him and to their race. The only man who seems to grasp his situation and frame of mind is a white man who cannot speak. He has tried and failed to understand his children, and he refuses to compromise what he feels has been his life's mission for them and himself.

Part 2, Chapter 4

Part 2, Chapter 4 Summary

The doctor can't get out of the way quickly enough to avoid the entrance of the boisterous Jake Blount. As usual, Jake is ranting about something. He tells Singer again that he has been all over the world and cannot get people to understand. He had tried to be an evangelist, and now his zeal takes the form of helping the working poor and their families. However, the very people he tries to help do not share his passion for their cause, and he is baffled and alone in his room every night. He can either drink until he falls asleep, or he can visit Singer. He has come to Singer's room again tonight because his cannot quiet his passions tonight.

One day, Jake sees a Bible passage written on the side of a building on his way home. He thinks the message is meant for him. He writes on the wall below the saying, asking the person who wrote it to meet him there the next day, but no one comes. He returns for a few days, but he meets only a winter rain that streaks and blurs the messages on the wall.

Part 2, Chapter 4 Analysis

Jake's desperation for validation is washed away with the rain that washes away the graffiti. He has no place to vent all his anger. He is passionate about his evangelism, about improving labor conditions and the spirit he had as a young boy that made him leave to find a better life. He appreciates Singer's understanding and kindness, but he thought he had found a true kindred spirit in the person who wrote on the side of the building. However, it was probably just a random act from someone passing by. It's just as well that the rain washes it away so it won't taunt Jake when he passes by.

Part 2, Chapter 5

Part 2, Chapter 5 Summary

Mick is staying over at school to practice the piano in the school gymnasium. The girls' basketball team shares the gym, and she risks getting hit with a ball, but she is willing to take the risk to practice her music. She gave up her lunch money for lessons from a girl who had taken piano for several years, but she is impatient to learn fundamentals and move on to create the music that she hears in her head.

When she finally gets home, Mick goes to her "inside" room, which contains all the things that no one can touch. School and family and everyday life were in the outside room. Her inside room contained things of mystery and intrigue like foreign countries, the future and especially her music, including songs she has heard and songs she creates on her own. Conveniently, she can visit her inside room and hear music while sitting in a room full of people.

Mick is jolted out of the inside room by a commotion from the neighborhood kids about Baby Wilson from across the street. She is leaving her house and walking down the street looking like a fairy in a dress and shoes she had worn to a soiree. She is walking in front of them, ensuring they see her, but she doesn't acknowledge them.

Suddenly, Baby Wilson drops to the ground, bleeding from a gunshot wound. Maybe it was her ignoring them that did it, or maybe Bubber's finger just slipped as he held Spareribs' rifle. Whatever the reason, everyone freezes in horror as they wait for the ambulance and then watch as it drives Baby away.

By this time, Bubber had run away and Mick thinks he may have gone to a tree house in the neighborhood. She had listened to the adults talking, and by this time she knows that Baby will live, but she wants to toy with Bubber. She finds him and tells him about prison and the child-sized electric chairs there. When she feels he has been satisfactorily scared to death, she leaves him with his thoughts. When she returns to get him, Bubber is gone.

Bubber is found walking by the side of the road, he says that he is going to Atlanta. He has a butcher knife in his pocket just in case. To say that Bubber changed forever that night is an understatement. From this point on, people call him by his adult name, George. Bubber's name vanishes with his innocence.

Part 2, Chapter 5 Analysis

December should be a festive month, but it not so for the Kelly family this year. The sight of Baby Wilson in her rows of ruffles is a point of distinction too great for the other children to watch. They'll never know the joy of abundance, but it is not resentment that pulls the trigger. It is an accident caused by the unsteady hand of a young boy.

Fortunately, the girl will live, but will the family survive when they learn that they have to pay for her medical expenses? It is ironic the her family receives only the questionable gift of Baby's life after having been shot in a month usually laden with gifts. Sometimes gifts have the strangest packaging.

Part 2, Chapter 6

Part 2, Chapter 6 Summary

Today is the day of Dr. Copeland's annual Christmas party. He rises early in anticipation of what the day may hold. Portia has come to help with the preparations, but instead of feeling grateful, he is annoyed with her chattering. He knows that she is concerned that she hasn't received a letter from Willie this week, but there are important things to be decided.

Each year there is an essay contest for a $5 prize. This year's theme is the topic of bettering the position of the Negro race in society, an issue at the core of the doctor's life. He has been unable to instill this fervor in his children, and he hopes that the annual contest will prove that all is not lost.

Dr. Copeland has a special appreciation for Karl Marx and even named one of his sons after him. He encourages people to understand Marx's teachings and the benefits of a socialist society. He is greatly fatigued from his bout with tuberculosis, but he continues with his speech as the party. He knows that if he has one more chance to address the people, there might be someone who will hear his words and bring meaning to his life.

There is a small sense of appreciation when the guests applaud the doctor's speech, but only Mr. Singer stays in the end. He is the only white person invited to the party, and he may be the only one who understands, though he didn't hear a word of the doctor's speech. He wants to share in the doctor's brief moment of hope before the doctor leaves to make his house calls.

Part 2, Chapter 6 Analysis

The doctor has always enjoyed the opportunity to see friends and patients on this day, but more importantly, he sees it as a chance to share his philosophies. Perhaps today, someone in his home will realize the importance of his words and take it to heart. It is fine that a young person will win the essay prize every year, but when will enough of his people understand that they need to do more? Why can't they share in his passion for something more? Perhaps they understand something that he doesn't. Maybe they don't want to give up what he has sacrificed. His children are not close to him. His wife was absent before she died. Now his health is poor, and he has nothing to show for all his angst. Can his lifelong passion be worth all this?

Part 2, Chapter 7

Part 2, Chapter 7 Summary

Singer is never at a loss for company, but he feels the loss of his friend. The holidays are over, and he restlessly walks the town and longs for the days with Spiro.

Oddly, Singer's hands begin to bother him. They often twitch, and sometimes he awakens to find that he is signing in his sleep. He had always been proud of his hands. They are strong and perfectly suited for work at the jeweler's shop. He used to take special care to oil the cuticles and file his nails perfectly, but now he simply scrubs them with a brush and shoves them in his pockets most of the time.

Singer thinks he should visit Spiro, takes a two-day vacation and rides the train to the asylum. He panics when Spiro isn't in his bed, but he calms down when he is informed that Spiro is in the infirmary because of nephritis. Spiro smiles when he sees him, but he has no concept of when he has last seen Singer. It could have been yesterday or a year.

Spiro seems more distant than the last time. He opens the gifts that Singer has brought for him, but he ignores any attempt at communication. Singer leaves dejected, returns to his life at the boarding house and continues to walk the streets alone.

Part 2, Chapter 7 Analysis

Singer is obsessed with his hands because they are his voice, but the only person he knows who can understand his signing is either too obtuse or too sick to try. He is overwhelmed with feelings of loneliness and isolation, and those feelings are exaggerated by the disastrous trip to see Spiro. He will shove his hands in his pockets and stay silent while this motley group of misfits parades in and out of his room like it is a shrine for acceptance.

Part 2, Chapter 8

Part 2, Chapter 8 Summary

Biff's life is filled with questions after Alice's death. He thinks about death, but he also thinks about the price of pork loin. He mostly thinks about death. The lingering scent of Alice's perfume in the bathroom closet takes him to the places they shared. He remembers when their life was good, and he wonders why he no longer loved her. All he can do to reconcile it in his mind is to picture her laughing in a field of flowers or on a canoe trip they had taken once.

Biff is also disturbed by his thoughts of Mick Kelly. He doesn't think inappropriate thoughts, but he looks forward to seeing her come into the café. He is full of love and generosity, and he wants to give her something, even if it's just hot chocolate or cigarettes. He wishes he could give her something important, but he doesn't know what that is.

Maybe he doesn't know that he's looking for a place to put his love. He thinks about adopting a couple of children, teaching them all he knows and watching them grow up. However, those are only dreams, and he has responsibilities at the café. He waits for Mick, but she doesn't show up on this night.

Part 2, Chapter 8 Analysis

Biff feels guilty because he doesn't really miss Alice. In fact, his life is much better now. He has redecorated his room, and he allows his mind to think thoughts that he never had the luxury of thinking before. He has so much love, but it has been trapped inside for so long that he's not sure what to do with it. He thinks about adopting children, because that is the natural extension for such love, but he doesn't act on this. He simply operates the café, talks with his customers and waits to see Mick. What is her pull on him? Maybe he senses and relates to her trapped passions for life. Perhaps he sees that she needs so much but has no way to get anything. For now, he is content to keep his questions to himself.

Part 2, Chapter 9

Part 2, Chapter 9 Summary

The Kelly family's responsibility for Baby Wilson's hospital bills has placed them in dire straits. They lost their house and have to pay rent to stay. All able members are forced to work to contribute to the family's keep. They maintain their boarders, but things are tighter than before.

Fortunately or unfortunately, Mick relegates all this frugality to her outside room. Hardship has no place in her inside room, where she spends the nights during this very cold winter. She stays warm with thoughts of symphonies, of how glamorous it will be when she can conduct an orchestra, and of taking Mr. Singer out for a fried chicken dinner. Of course, Mr. Singer is there. She is obsessed with him, possibly because he exists in both her inside and her outside rooms.

The only person her own age that Mick is interested in is Harry Minowitz, the Jewish boy from next door. He introduces her to a world that had been foreign to her and talks about Communism and Fascism as if they really matter. She lets him ramble on because he isn't in her inside room.

One day, things change between them. They horse around outside and she wrestles him to the ground and sits astride him. They both feel weird and excited, and they part quickly and go to their own homes for dinner.

Part 2, Chapter 9 Analysis

It's a cold, bleak winter for the Kelley family, but Mick keeps warm in her inside room with her visions of fame and her thoughts of Mr. Singer. He represents the ideal of rising above your circumstances and finding internal peace. She wishes she could capture the essence of his calm. Harry Minowitz has a strange new appeal, and it may not be long before he is allowed into the inside room too.

Part 2, Chapter 10

Part 2, Chapter 10 Summary

Portia has finally received word about Willie. He had gotten into trouble with two other prisoners, and they were all locked into a freezing room for three days and nights. When they were finally released, gangrene had set in and both of Willie's feet had to be amputated. Portia, who is close to Willie, is grief stricken with this news. She would prefer to drink the day away, but her father convinces her that she needs to go to work as usual. He plans to make his rounds and house calls. It is best to maintain order in circumstances like these.

However, instead of working, the doctor goes to the courthouse to see the judge. The white deputies deny him entrance. There is a brawl, and the doctor is thrown into jail. The doctor spends the night in misery, and, Portia and Mr. Singer arrive the next morning to bring him home.

Part 2, Chapter 10 Analysis

How many more insults can be piled on the distinguished doctor? The news about Willie is more than he can take, and he uncharacteristically revolts and demands to see a judge. His cause is thwarted by the white officers, and his misery is compounded by his overnight stint in jail. The wounds of his son feel like his own, but he is helpless to heal him. He has tried all his life to prevent just this sort of thing, but it has happened. His one true purpose has failed those closest to him.

Part 2, Chapter 11

Part 2, Chapter 11 Summary

Mick's life is even more complicated because her sister, Etta, is ill, and Mick has to sleep on the couch so that Etta can have the bed to herself. There's no end in sight. Etta needs a surgery that the family can't afford.

Mick spends more time away from the house with Harry. She's intrigued by the flirtations between them, and things take a more serious turn when they share their first sexual experience while on a picnic outing. Harry is wracked with guilt and makes immediate plans to leave town. Mick is less fazed by this life-altering moment and doesn't think much about it, especially when no one at home can see anything different about her.

Part 2, Chapter 11 Analysis

Mick's life is a series of inconveniences lately. She trudges on, living in her inside room where she has some control. As long as she has her box of private things and her inside room, she can persevere. Surprisingly, she's very blasé about her sexual encounter with Harry, especially for a person with high passions. She almost wishes that someone will see her drama and make note of it. However, she is destined to fight for everything she gets in order to survive and keep her dreams intact.

Part 2, Chapter 12

Part 2, Chapter 12 Summary

It is unseasonably warm for March, and Jake is already uncomfortable with the heat. He doesn't look forward to the summer. He has an alcoholic gut and has to leave the waist of his pants undone. He knows that he should stop drinking, but the alcohol helps his constant headache. He's not sleeping well either. He's kept awake by thoughts of his days of fights with carnival goers, the other employees' taunts. He's also having violent dreams. In addition, he has finally met Simms, the man who writes the messages on the walls of buildings as if they are from God. His life is one big argument. Everybody is on his nerves except John Singer, who is a center of calm. Ironically, he lashes out on his next crusade one night when he is with Singer. Singer tells him about Willie's tragedy in prison, and Jake is instantly outraged and moved to do something to help.

Part 2, Chapter 12 Analysis

A fire burns inside Jake. He has had it since he left the inequities of his childhood home to find something better. His fervor for others, mostly the working poor and their children, is noble. He is moved for the greater good rather than out of self-motivation. Unfortunately, he never seems to find the right forum for his grievances. He doesn't have the clout to take his anger beyond alley brawls and carnival fights. One wonders what he could do if he had the right social platform from which to operate. It takes a little bit of capitalism to enact a change to socialism, and Jake will always be relegated to preaching and fighting at the street level.

Part 2, Chapter 13

Part 2, Chapter 13 Summary

Singer takes Jake to Dr. Copeland's house to hear about Willie's misfortunes. Singer knows that the doctor has not yet recovered from tuberculosis and wants to visit him as well. They are the only two white men at the house that night, and the others are quiet in their deference to them. As expected, Jake rages at the horrific experience Willie has suffered but can't get a rise from the other visitors. They are sorry for Willie's plight, but they know that they are powerless to do anything.

Singer probably realizes the futility of Jake's ranting, finishes his visit with Dr. Copeland and leaves without Jake's knowledge. Jake's remaining audience is the ailing doctor, who is captive in his bed. Their conversation is contentious at first, but they find that they have many things in common related to social injustices. They spend hours disagreeing, but then they realize that they agree on the problems but disagree on the methods to fix the problems. Jake leaves the doctor as the sun rises on another day that will be just like the one before.

Part 2, Chapter 13 Analysis

Singer has compassion for the people in his immediate world, but he doesn't share Jake's fervor for righting the ills for the whole world. He leaves Jake at the doctor's house and quietly returns home. The fulcrum of social change is left to Jake and Dr. Copeland during their long night of discussions. They are a microcosm of the larger issues that they represent. Jake wants change at the grass roots level, but the doctor envisions a more massive show of support. They are each well intentioned on the subject but obstinate on the methodology, and they find themselves at an impasse. Perhaps the light of the new day will help the other to consider the other's point of view.

Part 2, Chapter 14

Part 2, Chapter 14 Summary

Mick is about to be pushed into the outside world for real. The family's situation is dire, and she takes a job at Woolworth's for $10 a week. They think she is fortunate to have this opportunity, but she sees it as a death sentence. Though they all say it is temporary to help the family, she knows deep down that it will extend for as long as she can see. Once they get used to her money, she can never stop bringing it home. She thinks about the clothes and music she could buy, but she doesn't let her mind linger there for long.

Instead, Mick obsesses about Mr. Singer. She follows him to work every day, and she waits to hear him come home at night. She even makes a nuisance of herself with too many visits to his room. She tries to busy her mind with other things, but it is a time to be in the outside world, and she can't even imagine her other world right now.

Part 2, Chapter 14 Analysis

Mick has literally been pushed to the outside room by her family's financial predicament. She's young but savvy, and she knows that this menial job will end her dreams of music and faraway places. However, she doesn't resign herself completely. Mr. Singer remains her beacon of hope. He represents her inside room. While he is still around, she has a flicker of hope, and she clings to his presence as to a life boat.

Part 2, Chapter 15

Part 2, Chapter 15 Summary

Singer is planning another trip to see Spiro. It has been six months since his last visit and he is filled with anticipation. He has prepared in his usual careful way. His bags are packed, and he has purchased gifts and special fruits to take to his friend.

When Singer's travel day arrives, he can neither see the scenery outside his train window, nor sleep. He even finds that his excitement makes it hard to breathe at times. It is as if his big Greek friend has blocked out his vision and his air. He projects that the visit will be successful. He hopes that Spiro will like his gifts and they can go to dinner at a nice restaurant.

There was nothing that could have prepared Singer for his discovery at the insane asylum. Spiro was dead. Because he is a deaf mute, no one could to talk to him properly, and he returns to his hotel. With uncharacteristic rage, he has an explosive incident at a slot machine in the hotel lobby and checks out of the hotel immediately.

Singer, depressed and exhausted, boards the train to return him home. In another uncharacteristic move, he leaves his bags in the middle of the station and walks to the jeweler's shop. He leaves again with something heavy in his pocket. He walks the streets in the glaring sun and finally returns to his room for some rest. He smokes a cigarette, drinks some iced coffee, washes the ashtray and then pulls a gun from his pocket and blows a hole in his chest.

Part 2, Chapter 15 Analysis

Singer is the most tragic of all the characters in this story. He has born the woes of everyone with no reciprocation. With Spiro's death, he sees no hope at any connection and ends his life. Why is it that the people who surrounded him were so self involved and shallow that not one of them thought to ask about his joys and sorrows? Did they consider him to be a sponge for all their pain because he was silent? They will probably soon learn that any trace of nobility and grace has left their lives, and they won't have anyone to tell.

Part 3, Chapter 1

Part 3, Chapter 1 Summary

Dr. Copeland is realizing one of his worst fears today. He is leaving his beloved home to live with his sons on the farm. His health is weakening and he needs help, but his mind is still strong and he resists this change with every fiber of his being. He denies his need to leave though his belongings are packed in the waiting vehicles. As he rocks himself back and forth in his chair, he remembers the day he brought his bride to this house, and he can see each of his children playing there. However, he cannot conjure up one important satisfaction out of all these moments and becomes unbearably sad.

What future can there be when fine white men like Mr. Singer see no hope and end their own lives? The doctor had trusted this man like no other, and he mourns the loss of his friend. The only flicker of hope that he finds on this dark day is that men like Singer never really die. They live in the souls of those they have touched. He loads his melancholy into the car and rides off to start the next chapter of his life.

Part 3, Chapter 1 Analysis

The doctor suffers multiple sorrows today. His grief is almost palpable as you realize that he is not simply leaving behind a house, but all that he has strived for his entire life. He is not strong enough to continue his life's work, but his mind is still alive with his ideals. They might as well bury him today, because as far as he can see his life is over. The suicide of Mr. Singer adds to his suffering, and he feels that all has been for naught. If a noble man like Singer can see no hope, what can there be for the rest of them? Someday his heart will lighten and he will see that Singer touched other young lives as well. Singer's influence will have made a difference that will continue.

Part 3, Chapter 2

Part 3, Chapter 2 Summary

Jake's latest confrontation at the carnival leaves him waking up to see the face of a dead boy. He runs to the boardinghouse, where he learns that Singer is dead. His immediate reaction is anger that all the things he had shared with Singer are now gone forever. All his evangelism is lost.

Jake's thoughts then turned to his dead friend and the question of suicide. Had Singer gone insane? What happened that made him take such a drastic measure? He would never know. He knows only that the only constant in his life is gone. He is hurt that he had put his trust in a man who clearly didn't even value his own life. Ultimately, that's all Jake has to show for the past year. He must now let it go and start again.

Part 3, Chapter 2 Analysis

The reactions to Singer's death are viewed from the selfish perspectives of the people who called themselves his friends. Jake is no different. All he thinks about is how he had shared his very valuable ideas with this man, and now they are gone. It never enters his head to wonder if the angst that he continually pushed at Singer could have contributed to his suicide. He has no regard for Singer's hopelessness, only his own. He doesn't seem equipped to improve the next chapter of his life.

Part 3, Chapter 3

Part 3, Chapter 3 Summary

Mick finds his dead body when she enters his room to listen to his radio and is particularly haunted by Mr. Singer's death. She manages to go on with her life, but she feels as if she's moving through a fog. She can no longer go into her inside room. The outside room consumes her now, and there is no time for dreaming. She holds on in the only way she can and takes over the payments on Mr. Singer's radio. She vows to put money aside each week to buy a piano that she'll never have to share.

Part 3, Chapter 3 Analysis

Mick may be affected most directly by Singer's suicide. His absence from the house is glaring, and the hole in her heart is huge. He represented the hope of realizing her dreams, and he held the key to all things genteel. What would she do without this beacon? Will his influence be enough to sustain her until she can establish herself in her inside room again? Probably so. She is young and driven with a passionate spirit, and she will probably survive. She will keep a part of Singer inside herself out of need and respect.

Part 3, Chapter 4

Part 3, Chapter 4 Summary

The story ends at night. Biff is in the café. It is quiet with few customers, but he doesn't consider closing. He has always been and always will be open at night. People can count on that. Also, this is the time that he sees people that he would never see otherwise. The hours when other people sleep are the best time for him to reflect. He needs quiet to think about all the people who had come and gone from the café in the last year. Singer has been dead a month and Biff still has no insight into his suicide. He has high hopes for Mick, though she is working at the dime store. He sees a little bit of himself in her and silently cheers her on. He likes to compare his experiences to others. It's all just a big parade of characters struggling with conflict and valor, and the parade would continue long after he was gone. He thinks about how fleeting life really is, and he chokes back the terror that urges him to start a new life before it is too late. Above all else, he is a sensible man, and he won't let this terror choke any more life from him than it already has. He composes himself and goes outside to raise the café awning and wait for another day.

Part 3, Chapter 4 Analysis

Biff's café is a meeting place for the lonely and isolated. He stays open all night to provide a refuge for them. He feels like he serves up much more than blue plate specials. He offers a place for those who prefer the cover of darkness. If you want to be with kindred spirits, this is the place. However, Biff is not resigned to be like his night time patrons. He has more hope than the others and is willing to think about a different life He won't let the time slip away from him, and we hope that he makes it out in time.

Characters

Spiros Antonapoulos

Antonapoulos is the person that John Singer cares most about in the world, even though there is little evidence that he returned Singer's affection. The book's first chapter concentrates on their ten years of life together and how Antonapoulos behaved more and more badly as years passed stealing from the restaurant, urinating in public, pushing people around until his only relative, Charles Parker, has him committed to an insane asylum. Throughout the rest of the book Singer pines for his friend's companionship, even though most of his memories of him seem to involve Antonapoulos drinking or stealing money or in some other way taking advantage of his friendship.

Jake Blount

People in the town fear and mock Jake Blount because his behavior is wildly uneven, symbolized by the two sets of clothes that he owns: the white linen suit that he arrived in town wearing, and the filthy overalls that he wore for the twelve days following, during which he remained drunk. Blount is an educated and compassionate man, concerned about social equality and willing to fight for the rights of anybody, but his enthusiasm is tainted by the fact that he is so drunk most of the time that his anger and symbolic gestures appear to be just foolishness. The first time he meets Dr. Copeland, for instance, he is drunk and drags the doctor into the cafe, in defiance of the segregationist rules that forbade a black man from drinking in a white establishment: from the doctor's perspective, though, he had come expecting a medical emergency and the drunk who had him by the arm instead tried to buy him a drink. Before he left Biff saw him turn on Blount with "a look of quivering hatred." After sobering up, Blount takes a job as a mechanic at a carnival, working on the carousel, or "flying-jinny." He is well-educated in the literature of social revolution and Marxism, and when he visits Singer's room he brings liquor and talks most of the night about the things he would like to do to liberate the working class. Given the choice of living during any time in history, he tells Biff, he would live in 1775, presumably so that he could participate in the American Revolution. When he hears about Willie Copeland's mutilation in prison, Blount insists that Singer take him to see Willie, saying that he can help. While there he tells a long, complex story about the labor struggle and the ownership of factories, but it ends with him fighting with the doctor until they end up slinging racial slurs at each other. He writes out theories and treatises and manifestos, with titles like "The Affinity Between Our Democracy and Fascism," and distributes them around town. After Singer commits suicide, Blount feels empty and betrayed, and then a calamity happens: after all of his work toward racial understanding, he takes place in a riot between blacks and whites at the carnival. He decides to leave town, and is last seen walking through the cramped, rotting tenements on the outskirts of town: "There was one thing clear. There was hope in him, and soon perhaps the outline of his journey would take form."

Bartholomew Brannon

See Biff Brannon

Biff Brannon

Brannon is the calmest and most content character in the novel, although not in the beginning. At the start of the novel, Brannon works hard to run the New York Cafe and keep it open day and night. He does not appear to have a very good relationship with his wife of twenty-one years, Alice. They are seldom together because she sleeps while he works and he sleeps while she works, and when they are together they argue about how he treats the customers; she feels that he gives too much food and liquor away to strange people like Blount. "I like freaks," he explains. "I just reckon you certainly ought to, Mister Brannon," she replies, "being as you're one yourself." Later, thinking about that conversation, Biff thinks about his "special friendly feeling for sick people and cripples," and accepts it with neither pride nor disdain. As the novel develops, it becomes evident that Biff himself is androgynous, that he feels that he is part male and part female, which explains his disinterest in sleeping with Alice. He is a big, brutish man who wears his mother's wedding ring on his smallest finger, wears perfume, and arranges decorative baskets "with an eye for color and design." When his sister comes by with her daughter, she tells Biff, "Bartholomew, you'd make a mighty good mother," and he thanks her for the compliment. Locked in his cellar, Biff thinks about how nice it would be to adopt two children, a boy and a girl, but he does not dream of raising them with anyone else. Elsewhere in the book Biff reflects on "the part of him that sometimes wished he was a mother and that Mick and Baby were his kids." Writing to his friend, Singer expresses the opinion that Biff "is not like the others□. He watches. The others all have something they hate. And they all have something they love more than eating or sleeping or friendly company." Critics have suggested that it is Brannon, not Singer, who is the religious center of this novel because he lives by principles of love and acceptance. Like the rest, he is upset by Singer's death, and the novel ends with him sitting in the New York Cafe, keeping his mind occupied with crossword puzzles and flower arrangements, waiting for customers.

Doctor Benedict Copeland

Doctor Copeland is a black man raised in the South but educated in the North, so he sees the disgrace of the racism in the town better than anyone. He is respected by his patients, many of whom have named their children after him, but he has little re- spect for them. He feels that most of the people in town, his own children included, are allowing themselves to be taken advantage of, and he frowns upon gestures, even those made in friendship, that make his race look lazy or weak. The doctor has trouble relating with people. When his daughter tells him that the way he talks to people hurts their feelings, he says, "I am not interested in subterfuges. I am only interested in the truth." At a family reunion he sits by himself, sulking and grumbling and embarrassed that his father-in-law describes God's face as "a large white man's face with a white

beard and blue eyes." Doctor Copeland feels more involved with books than with people. He reads Spinoza and Thorstein Veblen and Karl Marx, whom he named one of his sons after (the son goes by the name "Buddy," just as the son he calls William goes by "Willie"). When Willie is tortured in jail and his feet have to be amputated, Dr. Copeland goes to see a judge he knows, but he is stopped in the hall of the courthouse by a deputy sheriff who insults him, accuses him of being drunk, beats him and arrests him, throwing him in a cell with the very lower-class blacks that he has spent his lifetime avoiding. Upon his release and after a long night of drinking and talking with Jake Blount, Dr. Copeland and Jake start planning ways to make people aware of society's injustices. Dr. Copeland is impatient with Jake's plan, which would take a long time, and demands that violent meetings in the street are in order. The two argue, and their discussion about promoting racial harmony dissolves into racial insults. In the end, Dr. Copeland, too sick with tuberculosis to care for himself, is taken off to his father-in-law's farm, riding in a wagon piled high with his possessions (his other option was to ride on his son's lap), feeling that his mission is uncompleted and still hungry for justice.

Willie Copeland

Willie is the cook at the New York Cafe, and as such is familiar with all of the main characters. His father is Dr. Benedict Copeland and his sister is Portia. One night, when Willie and his brotherin- law Highboy are drinking at a place called Madame Reba's Palace of Sweet Pleasure, he dances with a girl whose boyfriend starts a fight with him. Defending himself with a razor, he cuts the other man badly and is sent to prison for nine months. In prison, Willie is locked in a freezing shed and hung by his feet from a rope, and after three days he contracts gangrene and must have his feet amputated.

Portia Jones

Portia is the daughter of Dr. Copeland, the only one of his four children who visits with him□the other three, all boys, are constantly reminded of his disappointment with them because he wanted them to be a scientist, a teacher, and a lawyer, to help their race. Portia's husband is Highboy, and the two of them live with and spend their time with her brother, Willie: as Portia explains it to her father, "You see□us have our own way of living and our own plan. Highboy□he pay the rent. I buys all the food out of my money. And Willie□he tends to all of our church dues, insurance, lodge dues and Saturday Night. Us three haves our own plan and each one of us does our parts." Portia is also the housekeeper at the Kelly boarding house, and Mick sometimes explains her troubles to her. When Willie is sent away to prison, Portia writes to him dutifully, and when he comes back crippled she is distraught, but unlike her father she does not believe that there is a way to demand justice.

Bubber Kelly

Early in the novel Bubber is the little brother who tags around after Mick all day long throughout the summer. One day, when another boy from the neighborhood brings over a rifle that his recently deceased father left him, Bubber takes the rifle and points it at a neighbor girl and, after mentioning several times how cute and pretty she looks, fires the gun. The major separation between Bubber and Mick comes when she goes to his hiding place and, to teach him a lesson, tells him that the police will arrest him: "They got electric chairs there□just your size. And when they turn on the juice you fry up just like a piece of burnt bacon. Then you go to Hell." This frightens Bubber more than expected, and his feelings change, so that he is aloof to her. After the shooting incident, he is not known as Bubber anymore, but goes by his given name, George.

George Kelly

See Bubber Kelly

Mick Kelly

Mick is the character who is most like the author, growing up in a Southern town during the course of the novel. When she is first introduced, in the long chapter that brings all of the characters into the cafe, she is a "gangling, towheaded youngster, a girl of about twelve □ dressed in khaki shorts and, a blue shirt, and tennis shoes□so that at first glance she was like a very young boy." "I'd rather be a boy any day," she tells her older sister who criticizes her clothes. In contrast to this childish image is the fact that Mick has come to the cafe to purchase cigarettes. During the summer days, Mick is responsible for her younger brothers, Bubber and Ralph, and is constantly with them. Ralph is so young that he should be wheeled through town in a carriage or a stroller, but since the Kelly family is poor, they can afford neither, so Mick ties him down in an old wagon so that he won't fall out. Mick is fascinated with music, stopping when she hears a radio playing in a room in the boarding house or while passing someone's home, so interested that she knows exactly which yard to go to to hear music in a time of emotional distress. Early in the novel, Mick is trying to make her own violin with a broken, plastered ukulele body, a violin bridge, and strings from a violin, a guitar and a banjo; when her older brother Bill, whom she looks up to, tells her that it will not work she gives up in frustration. Although Mick does not have a wide circle of friends, due largely to her family responsibilities, she is also not a social outcast: when she throws a party for her new classmates at the technical school, wearing a dress and makeup for the first time to assert her sophistication, it is a reasonable success. She ends up disappointed, because the dirty, scruffy neighborhood kids whom she is trying to leave in her past come to the party and mingle with her new friends. Like the other major characters in the book, Mick goes to Singer's room to talk out her problems□he has a radio in his room, although he cannot hear it, and she listens to it when she visits. At the end, she has to give up her dream of studying for a career in music to take a job at Woolworth's. After Singer's death, she realizes that this job is not temporary, that it

marks a change in her personality: "But now no music was in her mind. It was like she was shut out from the inside room□. It was like she was too tense. Or maybe because it was like the store took all her energy and time." She tries to convince herself that she will return to music, but ends up repeating it and repeating it unconvincingly.

Harry Minowitz

Harry grew up next door to the Kelly boarding house, and while he is in vocational school he takes a job at the cafe. One summer afternoon, he and Mick go swimming, and the event progresses into a sexual encounter. Afterward, rather than going home, he tells Mick that he is leaving town because "If I stayed home mother could read this in my eyes." Mick discovers that he actually did leave later in the evening, when Mrs. Minowitz phones and asks where he is.

Simms

A sidewalk preacher who captures Jake Blount's attention and acts as his conscience, Simms offers to help Jake find religion, but he backs away when he sees the scar that Jake has given himself by driving a nail through his hand. As Jake leaves, Simms shouts at him that he is a blasphemer, and that God will get him. Later, when Jake is distraught about Singer's death, he goes to Simms and offers to bring interested people into Simms' religious meeting by drawing pictures of "some good-looking naked floozies" on the sidewalk, leading them to him. Simms is outraged and shouts curses at Jake, not forgetting to tell him to come back at "seven-fifteen sharp" to hear God's message.

John Singer

Singer is not the central character in the novel, although he is the central figure in the lives of the other characters. Being deaf and mute, he is forced to watch people carefully when they talk, and that concentration, combined with the fact that they can talk freely with him without fear of being interrupted, gives them the impression that he really understands them and cares about them. In fact, the only person Singer really cares about is the Greek Antonapoulos, another deaf mute who lived with Singer for ten years and never showed any sign of understanding him any more that Singer understands Mick, Dr. Copeland, Blount, or Brannon when they talk about their lives. Singer spends his life's savings to cover up for the petty thievery and destruction that Antonapoulos causes, and when his friend is sent away to a mental institution he is so lonely that he moves into the Kelly boarding house, because "he could no longer stand the rooms where Antonapoulos had lived." None of his friends in town know about Antonapoulos, and when Singer takes his vacation time to visit him at the asylum, the others are anxious for his return. Singer's reaction to this attention is conveyed in a letter that he sends to the Greek in which he discusses them all. "They are all very busy people," he explains. "I do not mean that they work at their jobs all day and night but

that they have much business in their minds that does not let them rest." The letter goes on to explain that he does not enjoy their company, as each of them thinks, but that he has feelings ranging from slight approval of Mick ("She likes music. I wish I knew what it is she hears.") to disgust with Blount ("The one with the moustache I think is crazy.") At the end of the letter about their obsessions he, without irony, goes into his own obsession, stating exactly how many days it has been since he and Antonapoulos were together: "All of that time I have been alone without you. The only thing I can imagine is when I will be with you again." When Singer goes to visit his friend and finds out that he has died, he wanders around in a stupor for half a day, then takes a pistol from the jewelry shop he works at and commits suicide.

Themes

Strength and Weakness

Very early in the book Biff Brannon announces to his wife, "I like freaks." Her response is "I reckon you ought to, Mister Brannon□being as you're one yourself." What Biff has in mind is the affinity he has for the struggling underdog, or, as the book puts it later, "a special feeling for sick people and cripples." Although Brannon himself is physically healthy, his connection to the physically deformed is an indication of the weakness that he sees within himself, a weakness that shows itself in his inability to connect to his wife when she is alive and is even more pronounced in his withdrawal from society after her death. The other main characters display signs of social weakness that range from the obvious to the sublime. Mick Kelly, the only female in the group, is a young girl, wielding no real authority but burdened with responsibility for her younger brothers. She tries to enhance her stature by acting tough, using a boy's name and dressing boyishly and smoking, but her false strength is revealed by the fear she has of being found out after her first sexual encounter. In the end, it is her family's financial vulnerability that dashes her dreams of pursuing a career in music. Jake Blount's weakness is alcoholism, which keeps him from following through with any plans he makes, confusing his thinking and driving him to rage when he has a point to make. Beside the social disadvantage of being black in the South in the 1930s, Dr. Copeland has to deal with the tuberculosis that is eating away his body. John Singer, though stable and respected about town, is shut off from humanity, both by his handicap and by his obsession with Antonapoulos. The novel uses these weaknesses to bring the characters together, both for practical reasons (Blount drinks at Brannon's cafe, Singer boards at the Kelly house) and for commiseration with one another. The other four are drawn to Singer because his weakness is openly displayed, and they feel that he can understand them.

Search for Self

To varying degrees, all of the main characters feel that they understand where they fit into society, but they all are actually missing something that would help them function in their world. This is a part of McCullers' concept of the grotesque: each character has an outstanding aspect that makes them different from the norm, and yet they keep looking for acceptance. The most obvious case of this is Dr. Copeland, who is so isolated by his concept of his intellectualism that he cannot even fit in with his own family, although he cannot give up his intellectualism, either, because it is what makes his illness and society's racism bearable. Similarly, Jake Blount is driven by intellect, except that his thoughts are often interrupted by flashes of anger. In anger, he once quit an organization that he himself had founded, unable to accept the behavior of the other members: "They had stole the fifty-seven dollars and thirty cents from the treasury to buy uniform caps and free Sunday suppers," he tells Singer indignantly. Biff Brannon has an identity problem while his wife Alice is around, because she is a constant reminder of his impotence, but when she dies he is able to incorporate female

personality traits in with his own, and he finds peace in that way. The most obvious case of one of the main characters searching for their identity is Mick, who, as an adolescent, has not yet found out who she really is: she throws a party for her new classmates in order to find her place, and explores sexuality with Harry Minowitz, and she gives in to what a career in music can tell her about herself, but ironically, after she has found a self that she is comfortable with, she is denied following the music career because of financial difficulty. Each of these characters goes to Singer because they think that he is like them: ironically, Singer does not identify with any of them, but with the Greek, Antonapoulos, but even though he is deaf Antonapoulos does not see much of himself in Singer. Some of the minor characters, too, bring out the theme of Search for Self, although they do not belong within the circle formed by the main characters. Mick's Dad, for instance, shows this theme by trying to acclimate to a new job after being injured as a roofer, while Portia and Willie and Highboy create an unusual composite identity by spending most of their free time as a threesome.

Race and Racism

This novel was praised by critics, both black and white, for the clear and honest way it dealt with the problems blacks were subjected to. The issue of race is approached slowly and carefully at first. The first black characters, Willie and Portia, are introduced in their menial positions as, respectively, fry cook and maid. To modern readers, their patterns of speech, their dialect, may seem offensive or comical. When Dr. Copeland is introduced, he seems to fit another stock type: that of the black intellectual who resents the social rewards that have not been available to blacks and resents his own people for accepting their second-class citizenship. It soon becomes apparent, however, that McCullers has created characters who are more rounded than stereotypes. Dr. Copeland's high-minded nobility is impressive, but Portia's capacity for love for her brother and for her grandfather when he comes to visit makes the doctor's studies of Marx and Spinoza seem small and unimpressive. The tragedy of what happens to Willie, losing both of his feet while jailed for defending himself in a fight, shocks his family, but it is not presented as being anything so unusual that the authorities would take action about it. When Dr. Copeland goes to speak with a judge of the Superior Court that he knows, he is stalled by a deputy sheriff, then verbally abused, then assaulted and arrested. When he resists arrest he is beaten merciless and tossed in jail. Upon his release he is admonished by his daughter, who explains to him, impatiently, "Father, don't you know that ain't no way to help our Willie? Messing around at the white folks' courthouse? Best thing we can do is keep our mouths shut and wait." On a personal level, there is mixing of races in this novel□Portia is treated like a wise older sister in the Kelly household, and Singer is waiting with Copeland's family when he is released from jail. On a larger level, though, relations between the races break down, as shown by the riot at the carnival or in the way that Dr. Copeland and Jake Blount, trying to form an organization to fight oppression, can only hold their alliance for a few minutes before they start arguing, and as soon as they start arguing racial insults are spoken.

Style

Grotesque

The idea of the grotesque has run throughout American literature, through the works of Melville, Hawthorne and Poe, and may in fact have to do with the democratic political system, which emphasizes the individual over the collective. In twentieth- century literature, it is usually associated with Southern writers such as William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor. Put simply, "grotesque" refers to work that portrays characters who each have an exaggerated trait or characteristic, which is used to symbolize their entire personality. McCullers once explained that "Love, and especially love of a person who is incapable of returning or receiving it, is at the heart of my selection of grotesque figures to write about□people whose physical incapacity is a symbol of their spiritual incapacity to love or receive love□their spiritual isolation." Clearly, this applies to John Singer in the novel, a character who is loved by all of the other main characters but who is only perplexed by their attentions. The first chapter establishes the world that Singer lives in□a world where he and his friend Antonapoulos live together, walk to and from work together, and spend their evenings quietly playing chess. Because of his "physical incapacity," his deafness, that world does not change much for Singer, even when his friend moves away and new characters come around. With Singer setting the tone as the most obvious example of the story's use of the grotesque, the other characters are given conditions that are less physically noticeable but hinder their emotional capacity just as badly: Dr. Copeland's tuberculosis makes him anxious that the work he finds important will be completed; Jake Blount's alcoholism causes every nearly-meaningful conversation to deteriorate into ranting; Biff Brannon's androgyny, which some critics have suggested is caused by impotence, makes him self-fulfilled, with no need to connect with anyone else; and Mick's budding adolescence suspends her in a void between childhood and womanhood, distracting her from her love of music until economic circumstances take away that choice, possibly forever.

Structure

This book is not structured like a traditional novel, which would use a more systematic method to follow the ways in which the events in the main characters' lives affect each others', and so by traditional standards it appears to be chaotic, even uncontrolled. The story lines of the five main characters are developed side-by-side with each other, so that readers would have difficulty picking one that is more important than the others. The shape of the novel is in fact based in musical theory, with the three parts organized as a fugue would be. The first section opens with Singer's story alone, like a musical solo, and then weaves in the other voices in balanced increments, playing off of each other and creating distinct harmonies, ending with Singer again□since words are not exchanged in Singer's sections, the story is told completely in narrative, giving these outside chapters a hushed, thoughtful feeling. The second section, fifteen chapters in total, is much busier, still concentrating on one character per chapter but complicating

their lives with struggles and misery, giving the full rich tone of an entire orchestra, still following various individual strands but doing so with greater fury. This section ends with the climactic event of the novel, John Singer's suicide. The third section is a coda that does not develop any new ideas but returns to each of the four remaining characters to confirm that they did in fact end up living the destinies that they seemed to be headed for earlier. This section is divided into quarters in a new way, dividing one day, August 21, 1939, into morning, afternoon, evening, and night, echoing Singer's isolation at the end as Biff Brannon shouts to his assistant and receives no response. Basing the design on a musical form reflects both the musical training that Carson Mc- Cullers had (and that Mick in the novel would like to have) and the irony that runs throughout of the music that plays on the radio in the room of the deaf man.

Historical Context

Fascism

The character of Mick is so politically naive early in the novel that when she is defacing the wall of a house under construction she includes the name Mussolini along with the comic-strip crime fighter Dick Tracy and the inventor of light bulbs, phonographs and moving pictures, Thomas Edison. At that time in world history, Fascism had reached its height as a political power. The word itself was coined by Benito Mussolini during his rise to power in Italy after World War I ended in 1818□he defined fascism as "organized concentrated authoritarian democracy on a national basis," although most other sources would not forget to include the words "totalitarianism" and "authoritarianism" in their definition. Fascism is unlike Democracy because it gives the government control over all aspects of its citizens' lives; it is unlike Communism because it emphasizes the nation, and not the worker, as being the most essential element in life. whites, drinking at fountains whites drank at, attending the same schools, etc., as long as there were equal facilities for them to use. In the South, states took advantage of this ruling to pass laws, called "Jim Crow laws," to ensure racial separation. The problem for blacks was that the "equal" part of the "separate but equal" doctrine was seldom enforced. Black schools received less funding, as did black medical facilities; theaters that allowed whites main-floor seats only allowed blacks to sit in the balcony, far from the stage; and the better restaurants and hotels excluded blacks. Famous and wealthy blacks were sent to ramshackle accommodations while watching any white who cared to walk in enter places that they were kept out of. Early in this novel, for instance, the drunken, disorderly Jake Blount believes that he is doing a big favor for Dr. Copeland, bringing him into the cafe and offering to buy him a drink even though, as one of the patrons tells him, "Don't you know you can't bring no nigger in a place where white men drink?" Dr. Copeland, for his part, is embarrassed to have a low-class wreck like Blount condescend to him. Enforcement of the laws that segregated the races was brutal. Blacks, with almost no political power in the South, had to suffer legal abuse by any whites, even those of the lowest level, as shown in this novel when Dr. Copeland, a respected man in his community, is beaten by a deputy sheriff who does not like his attitude. The legal system seldom sided with blacks, for fear that recognizing some civil rights would encourage them to want more. In 1848, when the Capitalist economic system had established roots all over the world and the Industrial Revolution had made it strong, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published *The Communist Manifesto.* Their fear was that the way the free-market economy divided the world between two groups□ the rich, who owned the means of production, and the workers who provided the labor□made slaves out of the laborers. They encouraged workers to unite. In the early twentieth century, Socialism was popular in many countries around the world, and in 1917 Russia was taken over by the Communist Revolution (in general, the distinction between the two is that Socialism advocates changing the government from within the system, while Communism supports revolutionary overthrow). In Italy, as elsewhere, Communism appealed to the poor, and many of the people were suffering in poverty after a post-war economic collapse that made their money practically worthless.

Property owners, however, feared that Communism would take away what they had, and many middle-class people equated a Communist take-over with anarchy and chaos. Mussolini, a former Socialist, gained the support of people who had been made to feel powerless because of the economy's collapse and who liked the Fascist party's strong pro-Italy rhetoric. His rise to power was driven by a combination of the promise to restore order and the violence of Fascist thugs in black shirts who committed murder and arson against socialists. In 1922, violence against Socialists was so bad that they called a national strike against the transportation sector: Mussolini used this politically to take control of the government, gaining citizen support because he got the trains to run on time. Between 1925 and 1930 he turned his control of the government into a dictatorship, with absolute control over all media and all aspects of the people's lives. At the same time, the same elements that brought the Fascist party to government control were at work in Germany, where Hitler was using the promise of order, the threat of Communism and a hatred of people considered "outsiders" (in this case, Jews, blacks, Catholics and Gypsies) to build the Nazi empire.

Segregation

In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court, in a landmark case called *Plessy v. Ferguson,* ruled that it was legal for states and municipalities to keep blacks and whites apart from each other in public by offering "separate but equal" accommodations. The idea was that laws could be passed forbidding blacks from eating at restaurants frequented by Outside of the legal system was the Ku Klux Klan, an organization of native-born white Protestant men who hid their identities in robes and hoods while they perpetrated heinous crimes against nonwhites, non-Protestants and foreigners. The organization was started in Georgia in 1915, based on a similar organization that had existed after the Civil War. The tactics that they used to intimidate the people they considered undesirable were window- breaking, public cross-burnings, and kidnapping and hanging people, known as "lynching." Legal authorities claimed to be unable to stop the Klan, although in many cases they used their hidden identities as an excuse to let them run rampant. During World War II, from 1941 to 1945, Southern blacks received a taste of equality: they visited European countries where segregation laws did not exist, and the United States Armed Forces, though not completely equal, did have blacks and whites working alongside one another. By the 1950s, public sentiment against racism grew to an extent that the laws had to be changed: the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* found that separate schools could not be equal, and so all-white schools had to admit blacks. Integration was extended to other institutions, reversing the Plessy decision.

Critical Overview

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter was met with almost universal critical acclaim when it was published. Many reviewers found it to be an incredibly polished work, and they were flabbergasted that such a book could be written by an author who was only twenty-three. When Richard Wright, one of America's greatest novelists and the author of the classic *Native Son,* reviewed the book in the *New Republic,* he put its young author in the company of Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner. "Her quality of despair is unique and individual: it seems to me more natural and authentic than Faulkner," he told readers, adding that "she recounts incidents of death and attitudes of stoicism in sentences whose neutrality make Hemingway's terse prose seem warm and partisan by comparison." Wright, who was black, was especially impressed with Mc- Cullers' ability to handle black characters without being insulting or condescending. The thing that was most impressive to him was "the astonishing humanity that enables a white writer, for the first time in Southern fiction, to handle Negro characters with as much ease and justice as those of her own race." Novelist May Sarton reviewed the book in the *Boston Evening Telegraph* and found it to be such an incredible work of literature that minor flaws that would have been acceptable in other novels stood out here as being unnecessary. She found the inclusion of tragedies caused by accident and not by the lives of the main characters, such as Bubber shooting Baby and Mick's sexual encounter with Harry, to weaken the story. "Neither is false," Sarton quickly explains. "Both are believable but neither is necessary. The beauty of the book is that except for these, every action seems inevitable." Rose Feld praised the novel in *The New York Times Book Review,* finding that McCullers possessed a "rich and fearless" imagination and "an astonishing perception of humanity."

After the publication of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,* McCullers' reputation grew, as she continued to produce powerful works of literature that commanded serious consideration. Her next publication, the novel *Reflections in a Golden Eye,* was published in 1941: it was well-received, but it suffered by comparison to the surprise and delight critics had gotten from the first book. "[I]t was then regarded as somewhat disappointing in the way that second novels usually are," Tennessee Williams wrote in the introduction to the 1950 edition. "When the book preceding a second novel has been very highly acclaimed, as was *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,* there is an inclination on the part of critics to retrench their favor, so nearly automatic and invariable a tendency that it can almost be set down as a physical law." His essay goes on to look at aspects that could be seen as weak, and to explain how they had been misunderstood. Her third novel, *The Member of the Wedding,* was published in 1946, and it clearly established McCullers not only as a writer with control and skill, but as one with her own vision, as readers became accustomed to the solidity of her style. Now assured that her initial success was not just a fluke, her works received widespread analysis from literary critics. Marguerite Young's review in *The Kenyon Review* looks at the book as an intellectual piece, like a chess game or a modern poem. She explained that "Mrs. McCullers, sometimes depicted as a sensationalist reveling in the grotesque, is more

than that because she is first of all a poetic symbolist □ " Her only other major publication was the 1951 collection *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe and Other Works.* The novella in the title is considered one of her best works, but reviewers were divided about McCullers' short fiction. In a review of a book published after her death that collected poems, essays, and short stories, David Madden noted that comparing a timeless book like *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* to her short fiction shows readers "how poorly a first-rate talent can sometimes function."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

David J. Kelly is a literature and creative writing instructor at several colleges in Illinois. In this essay he sets the scene in which Baby is shot, and explains why it was necessary to add the scene to the novel's final draft even though it does not immediately involve any of the central characters.

One of the great things about a meticulouslycrafted novel like *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* is that readers get to watch it unravel slowly, feeling secure with its sense of order, knowing, even during those passages where they cannot see the grand scheme, that the author is in control and most likely is not wasting her readers' time. Another great thing about reading the work of a structure fanatic is that they often plan early what the novel is going to do, where it is going to go, what the characters are going to be like and what their significance will be. Writers usually have *some* idea of what is going to happen, and sometimes they write their ideas down, although they often, when asked, just tap their foreheads, nod, and say, "I've got the whole thing worked out up here□." I do not believe I have ever seen a set of notes as complete as Carson McCullers' "Author's Outline of *The Mute.*" I do not know the circumstances under which she would have written such a thorough treatment of the uncompleted book; she might have been just that conscientious, although I suspect that it was written to apply for the grant that eventually won her a publishing contract. I do know that the book that turned out to be *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* was very close to *The Mute* in symbolism, themes, and backgrounds of the main characters, but that there are enough differences to see that it was indeed a work in progress. In other words, this is not a summary of a work that is already completed, where the author just describes the actual and symbolic importance of what happened. This is a working plan for things that McCullers intended to happen in the book.

Most of the changes were incidental: Harry Minowitz was originally the non-Jewish Harry West, which would have left out the opportunity to bring up the war in Europe and the rampant anti- Semitism that defines it in this book; Willie Copeland was arrested as a white boy's dupe during a robbery in this version, rather than in a knife fight; Mr. Simms was originally a key player in Biff Brannon's life, not Jake Blount's. Any one of these changes is worth speculating about, because speculating offers readers some insight into the decision- making process, which itself opens the window to the author's intent just a little bit wider. The one that interests me most, though, is the absence of the shooting of Baby in the original plan. It clearly was not in the work at this stage□there is no mention of Baby or anyone like her with another name in the "Outline," and Bubber had no specific shining moment planned for him at that time. In fact, in the section named "Subordinate Characters," under "The Kelly Children," Mc- Cullers states directly, "No great interest is focussed on any of these children individually."

I would not presume to second-guess whether adding the "Bubber shooting Baby" episode was a good idea or not. Reviewers have pointed to this as one of the novel's (just slightly) weak points, and critics in general, when they single it out, mention this episode as something that does not fit cleanly into the grand scheme. But the book as a

whole works, and it works to an astounding degree, so I think it would just be rude without being productive to question the author's instincts. If I can't ask whether it works, I think my curiosity would be just as well served if I can ask *how* it works: what about the shooting of Baby adds just the right spice to this tale, and helps the novel define itself?

My first assumption is that Bubber's role would have been beefed up anyway, even without the shooting of Baby. In the "Outline," McCullers alludes to him while describing Mick: "Her family does not own a radio and in the summer she roams around the streets of the town pulling her two baby brothers in a wagon and listening to any music she can hear from other people's houses." There's nowhere but up for Bubber to go from this slight, vague inclusion as one of the baby brothers. Later in the "Outline," a distinction is made when talking about Mick's responsibility to watch over "Bubber and the baby," at least elevating him to individuality. That same section goes on to include a paragraph that actually made it into the finished book, about how hard it is for younger siblings, including the phrase, "Bubber□he looks sick but he's got guts underneath that." My assumption is that she was using her words loosely when she referred to seven-year-old Bubber as one of two baby brothers. Then, too, is the possibility that Bubber already started to develop a personality during the course of writing this outline. One can see how Mc- Cullers could write a paragraph that comes out so clean and solid that it deserves being kept, and how, from that paragraph, the seeds of identity can grow. A sickly-looking kid with guts can prove a useful tool in drawing out aspects of Mick's personality, given how much she puts into covering her artistic sensibilities up with toughness.

If Bubber, then, was to be a mirror for Mick, a good function□the function that he takes on in the finished work□would be to show how excessive swaggering can get him into trouble. In Mick's case, tough posturing only serves to make her obnoxious, alienating her further: real trouble would prevent the tragedy of her life, in the end, becoming mundane. In a secondary character, though, trouble could be made to stick, frightening her and softening her up. These facts, of course don't even take into consideration the fact that the author needed something to ruin the Kelly family financially.

Enter Baby. Four years old, Baby presents the unlikely hope of her mother, Lucile, for a better life: she plans to give Baby a permanent, gives her dancing and expression and piano lessons, and tells Biff, the child's uncle, "I feel like I got to push Baby all I can. Because the sooner she gets started on her career the better it'll be for both of us." At this point, Baby is a part of Biff's life, functioning to show us the kind of idealistic dreamer he would attach himself to□his fondness for Baby helps redefine just what kind of "freaks" he is attracted to. Baby is such a strange character in her physical beauty that it is plain to see this early that she will either succeed spectacularly, in a triumph of vacuous prettiness over the strong defeated characters with way more substance, or she will fail, flattening her mother's dreams in a town where dreams just get flattened. The potential for tragedy is heightened by the fact that Biff delights in her so much, which bodes poorly for Baby because this book is an exercise in the ways that its main characters, unable to express themselves, suffer. The tragedy that Baby Wilson seems headed for is one of her mother's doing, and it looks like one that we would look back on at the end and feel that Biff should have put a stop to things before they went so far.

The reason some critics disagree with the shooting is that it seems unprepared by the story. The point is well taken, considering that everything else is so carefully prepared and metered. A certain segment of the population would also say that the randomness of the act is good, that it mirrors the unpredictability of life, that it breathes some fresh air into a book too tightly woven. "Life-like" is not the virtue in a stylized piece like this that it would be in another piece of fiction, but the capacity to surprise readers should always be considered a good thing.

The surprising thing about the shooting is that it comes from a secondary character and draws more attention to Bubber than anyone but the five main characters generally earn in the novel. As I have mentioned, it is better for the book that a character near Mick plunge into trouble without the trouble actually threatening Mick's future bland career at Woolworth's. Bubber certainly jumps, with that one shot, from a tiny, nearly anonymous role, past Willie and even past Portia, to a status almost as vivid as the foggiest of the main characters, Biff. He introduces a scary element of violence in the book, and not even intentional violence, but a destructiveness that can well up in a child at the same time that he is admiring something's beauty. The same mixed emotions are alluded to earlier in the book, when Mick writes on a wall the names of the artist, Mozart, and the dictator Mussolini, and then "a very bad word□PUSSY, and beneath that she put her initials, too." Oddly, not much is made of the psychological aspect of Bubber raising a gun against another child, just of the social aspect, with the "end of childhood" that he undergoes by changing from his nickname to "George" foreshadowing the end, where Mick the tomboy worries over a run in her stockings. Some critics have referred to the shooting as "an accident," although it seems he had a good long time to put the gun down and it's clear that his finger went to the trigger deliberately. The book's about alienation, and the whole mood might be spoiled if anyone cared to find out what was running through someone else's mind, so Bubber's destructive impulse is written off as just one of those childhood things.

The last we see of Baby, we have come to understand what this incident means to her: she could not participate in the soiree, so she "began to yell and cut up during one of the dances" until she is taken outside and spanked. Finally, she seems to be finding her place in this miserable town, with Jake and Mick and Dr. Copeland, who all raise their voices in disappointment. There is no place in this town for the fortunate, the blessed, or the beautiful. Under other circumstances, she might have been a good character to have lurking around in the corners, just for contrast, to show that there are people who don't end up shouting to vent their souls, but this is the human condition that McCullers is examining here, and no one, especially not a little talent-show princess, is going to escape it.

Source: David J. Kelly, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Fuller explains how McCullers used the structures and patterns found in the musical conventions of counterpoint and fugue as the framework for her novel to successfully deliver and explicate the novel's theme the "insurmountable isolation of human beings."

The influence of music manifests itself in a number of ways in Carson McCullers' fiction. While critics in general note the frequent direct references to music in her works, most of them focus on the way music functions as a "minor symbol" and as an "extended correlative" or mirror of theme and character. Few critics, however, have examined music's role as "architectural framework," as Barbara Nauer Folk [in "The Sad Sweet Music of Carson McCullers," *Georgia Review,* 16, 1962.] calls it. This omission is surprising since, as Virginia Spencer Carr [in her book *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers,* 1975] points out, McCullers herself in later life came to acknowledge her musical studies as the source of the excellent "sense of form and structure" admired by students of her fiction.□

The work by McCullers in which the sense of musical form seems strongest is *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,* a novel in which direct references to music abound Willie's harmonica tunes, the music from Biff's mandolin, the mechanical music of the flying-jinny, and the "singing moan" of Doctor Copeland's voice accompany the classical music Mick enjoys in the dark and composes in her "in- ner room." To speak of the novel's structure using the analogy of music does not seem unreasonable since in her outline for "The Mute" (later published as *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*) McCullers herself [as recorded in her book *The Mortgaged Heart,* 1971] employs musical terminology in discussing her plans for the novel's form:

This book is planned according to a definite and balanced
design. The form is contrapuntal throughout.
Like a voice in a fugue each one of the main characters
is an entirety in himself□but his personality
takes on a new richness when contrasted and woven
in with the other characters in the book.

In using technical language to refer to counterpoint in general and the fugue as a more specific pattern or style of counterpoint, McCullers sets up certain expectations. Counterpoint, based upon a Latin phrase meaning "note against note" or "melody against melody," consists of two or more melodic lines that are played at the same time. Fugue, a more specific term, refers to the "mature form of imitative counterpoint" perfected by J. S. Bach [Willi Apel, *The Harvard Dictionary of Music,* 1972]. Counterpoint and the fugue, in particular, are associated with a number of conventions. When the completed novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* is considered in light of these conventions, it is clear that McCullers, for the most part, faithfully followed the original plan of her outline. In fact, the novel's conformity to many of the conventions provides a key to the structure and meaning of the novel.□

Perhaps the most obvious convention of counterpoint followed in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* is the independence of musical voices. Counterpoint, including the fugue, consists of a number of separate voices or melodic lines. Each of these lines must be musically sound, interesting and, most importantly, independent in terms of rhythm and movement. In *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,* each of the five main characters or "voices"□John Singer, Biff Brannon, Jake Blount, Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland, and Mick Kelly□is interesting enough and his story complete enough to have been developed into its own novella. For example, the story of Dr. Copeland's struggle to lead his people out of oppression and face the reality of his own children's fates does not depend upon the other characters' stories for its development. Instead, it stands as an intriguing tale in its own right. Furthermore, McCullers gives each of the five individuals a unique character that goes beyond the obvious differences of race, age, profession, sex, and physical ability. Such distinctness of characterization is evident in idiosyncrasies such as Dr. Copeland's studying the philosopher Spinoza and Biff's wearing his deceased wife's perfume. The uniqueness of the five characters is underscored by the distinct narrative styles McCullers develops to suggest the "inner psychic rhythms of the character" [as recorded in her book *The Mortgaged Heart,* 1971]. Biff's "voice," for instance, can be heard in the section in which McCullers introduces him:

> The place was still not crowded□it was the hour when men who have been up all night meet those who are freshly wakened and ready to start a new day.□ The mutual distrust betwen the men who were just awakened and those who were ending a long night gave everyone a feeling of estrangement.

The style of this passage could hardly be mistaken for that used by McCullers to focus on Mick:

> When Mick had finished half of the cigarette she smashed it dead and flipped the butt down the slant of the roof. Then she leaned forward so that her head rested on her arms and began to hum to herself.

The distinctness and independence of each character are also ensured by McCullers' introducing each character individually in the novel's first part. Like the staggered entrances of voices typically used in counterpoint, each character, beginning with John Singer, is introduced in a separate chapter, which, as McCullers' outline suggests, presents the "salient points of each person." Mc- Cullers conforms to this contrapuntal convention of independence of voices in order to emphasize and even enact her theme of the insurmountable isolation of human beings. Thus, from the outset of the novel through its concluding treatment of the surviving four characters in isolated chapters in part three, McCullers, as Richard Cook [in his book *Carson McCullers,* 1975] suggests, "preserves the separateness of each person even as she holds them together in a lonely community of suspicion and misunderstanding."

Conventional counterpoint is also characterized by imitation among voices. In the fugue, this imitation involves recurrent motifs as well as the imitation of the subject or

theme—that is, a short melody introduced by "one voice alone, being taken up ('imitated') by the other voices in close succession and reappearing throughout the entire piece in all voices at different places" [Willi Apel, *The Harvard Dictionary of Music,* 1972]. Such an imitative technique occurs in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,* in which, as Dayton Kohler suggests, "themes and character motifs appear early in the novel, only to be dropped and later resume." In the first chapter of the novel, McCullers uses John Singer's relationship with Antonapoulous to introduce the novel's central theme—the persistent attempt by the individual, in the face of the one-sided nature of love, to overcome the isolation of the self. In the next four chapters of Part One, McCullers "imitates" this theme by presenting the reader's first glimpses of Biff, Mick, Jake and Dr. Copeland in the context of their failed relationships and their resulting states of isolation. The theme reappears in all the "voices" throughout the rest of the novel as the various characters unsuccessfully attempt to communicate with other human beings. Of course, the most exact imitation in the novel results from the way in which each of the four characters' onesided relationship with John Singer mirrors Singer's relationship with Antonapoulous. As Mc- Cullers herself suggests in her outline for the novel, the way each of the four characters creates an understanding of Singer "from his own desires" and makes Singer "the repository of his most personal feelings and ideas" has an "exact parallel" in Singer's imputing great dignity and wisdom to Antonapoulous.

McCullers also uses imitation in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* by associating distinctive motifs with certain characters and causing those motifs to reappear in other "voices." For example, Dr. Copeland's blindness to the potential for human communion in the form of Portia as he attempts to reach all of the black community is echoed in Mick's desire to bring her brother Bill and John Singer into her "inner room" while letting her potential relationship with "Bubber" be destroyed. This motif reappears in Singer's failure to take advantage of the accessible and potentially gratifying relationships with his four "disciples" because of his obsession with Antonapoulos. McCullers introduces another motif through Mick's figurative movement back and forth between her "inner room" of the self and the outer world of human interaction. This motif is repeated and objectified in Biff's movement between the upper room where he reads and plays his mandolin and the public café as well as in Singer's wanderings from his boarding-house room through the streets of the town. These motifs and the imitation of the central subject or theme unify the novel and give universality to the independent characters of the novel by suggesting that the continued struggle to break out of the isolation of the self is part of the human condition.

Despite the existence of both social and individual considerations in the novel, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* is also analogous to counterpoint in its emphasis on the horizontal rather than the vertical elements of structure. While homophonic or harmonic music focuses primarily on the simultaneous occurrence of sounds in pleasing and harmonious combinations, counterpoint is more concerned with the melodic line of each voice. Thus, vertical relationships among notes are incidental. Dissonance or clashing of notes occurs as often as consonance and harmony. In the same way, Mc- Cullers focuses on the actions and perceptions of individual characters rather than their collective attempts at interaction or communion. Except for those occasions when other characters seek out Singer for "conversation," the encounters between the central

characters are random, as when Jake and Dr. Copeland collide and exchange angry glances on the stairs. The encounters that do occur□Biff's attempts to talk to Mick in the café, the bedroom confrontation between Jake and Dr. Copeland□are generally discordant. In fact, the two occasions in which all five of the "voices" are brought together□ their first meeting in Biff's café in Part One and their later accidental meeting in Singer's room□are among the most tense and dissonant scenes in the novel. Even the interaction between Singer and the other four characters, whether in Singer's room, in the café, or at Dr. Copeland's party, is markedly one-sided, more like unison music than harmony among separate voices. This linear focus, in which each "voice" remains a "stranger in a strange land," underscores a pervasive loneliness in the novel.□

Perhaps because of this linear structure, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* has a texture that resembles the typical texture of four-and five-voice counterpoint. Because the listener is unable to follow four or five lines of equal importance for any length of time, the composer of counterpoint uses a variety of strategies to vary the texture of the music: temporarily eliminating or subordinating one or more voices and shifting the focus of attention from one voice to another. In a similar way, each chapter of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* centers on one of the five central characters, the focal character being indicated not only by the character's name being mentioned normally within the first sentence or paragraph and the action's centering around him but also by a shift to the narrative style associated with that character. But, like most contrapuntal music, McCullers' novel does not (except possibly in Singer's chapters) allow the texture to be reduced to a single "voice." Even when the action centers on a single character, the reader gets enough glimpses of other central characters□through Harry Minowitz's mentioning Jake Blount to Mick or Singer's appearing at Dr. Copeland's party or Mick's stopping by Biff's café for a sundae□to remind him that their lives or "melodies" are continuing, though temporarily subordinated, in the background.□

In describing the form of McCullers' novels in general, Marvin Felheim [in "Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers," *Contemporary American Novelists,* 1964] speaks of a typical movement from order□ through an opening that is an "exact, economical" statement of "what is going on"□to disorder. This disorder, which occurs in Part Two of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,* corresponds in musical terms to the development section of the fugue□generally a freer, longer section in which episodes alternate with complete or partial restatements of the theme and, thus, heighten the listener's interest. In Part Two, which is nearly three times longer than Part One, the length of the chapters and the appearance of the five central "voices" follow no regular pattern. Furthermore, the actions of outside forces□Harry Minowitz, Baby Wilson, the prison officials guarding Willie□intrude upon the lives of the central characters and often increase their sense of alienation. In the face of this greater loneliness, the central characters continue vainly to reach out to other people, most often John Singer.

Part Three of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,* while not a full recapitulation of Part One, creates a return through a sense of balance and completion. True to the plan of McCullers' outline for the novel, the "technical treatment" of the final section is quite similar to that of the first part. Each of the four surviving characters is allowed a chapter to restate his or her variation of the subject or theme, and, as Edgar MacDonald [in "The

Symbolic Unity of *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter,*" in *A Festschrift for Professor Marguerite Roberts on the Occasion of Her Retirement from Weshampton College University of Richmond, Virginia,* 1976] points out, these final chapters precisely reverse the Part I order of appearance of the four mourners." Smith [in "A Voice in a Fugue," *Modern Fiction Studies,* 1979] goes even further to suggest that the brevity of each chapter and, thus, the "rapid succession" of "voices" as they repeat the theme are analogous to *stretto,* a technique often successfully used in the concluding sections of fugues.□

The particular ways in which McCullers deals with the demands and conventions of counterpoint and the fugue make *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* a less than pessimistic treatment of man's struggle as a "lonely hunter" to come to terms with his inevitable isolation and disillusionment. Through the use of the contrapuntal fugue with its linear but imitative treatment of individual voices and its varied texture, McCullers is able to represent five distinct characters struggling in touchingly similar ways to break out of the lonely inner room of the self.

Source: Janice Fuller, "The Conventions of Counterpoint and Fugue in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,*" in *The Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Culture,* edited by Robert L. Phillips Jr., Mississippi State University, 1987-88, pp. 55-67.

Critical Essay #3

In this excerpt, Madden examines the parallel positions of Mick Kelly and Doctor Copeland. He describes how each character finds relief in solitude yet desires connection with others. However, the others are also beset by the same personal dilemma of opposing needs, thus everyone remains solitary and misunderstood.

The theme of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* could hardly be more vital and universal: the immemorial, individual dilemma of loneliness, the spiritual isolation of human beings. It is not a realistic novel about the modern South, nor is it, despite certain critics or whatever McCullers' original intention may have been, a political polemic against capitalism and racism. The memorable characters are all exruciatingly real, but they retain a poetic simplicity which raises them to the level of universal significance. I do not mean "spiritual" in either the religious or even the mystical sense. I, and I think McCullers, mean that inexplicable force in each man which makes him ask why, which compels him to go deeply beneath the surface complex of himself into a more intensive, extensive reality. The validity of McCullers' vision of the psychic realm of her characters, or of man, depends a great deal upon the accuracy and consistency with which she achieves a very acute psychological understanding of her characters and of nature of loneliness which moves them so grotesquely.□

McCullers was only 21 when she wrote this book, but she was too mature to condemn abstractions either, although it is a rather abstract, paradoxical conflict that she is primarily concerned with: everyone hungers for human understanding while simultaneously desiring an inviolable privacy.

The need for privacy is no less crucial than the need for understanding, but in the context of society both needs are frustrated, or, in the desperate attempt to satiate one, the other is neglected or deprived.□

Mick [Kelly] is a unique, individual adolescent and will be a neurotic, bitter woman; Biff is already neurotic. Copeland, obsessed with the one true purpose, and Blount, obsessed with the gospel of social reform, are both subject to monomania, and it is in this light that we see them.

The portrait of Mick is complete. We see her in various situations, reacting variously, exhibiting in her own eccentric way all the characteristics of an adolescent girl trying to achieve womanhood, but fearing to succeed. Unable to identify with her unsympathetic, older sisters, who ignore her, Mick used to follow, take her cues from her older brother Bill. But when the novel opens, she realizes, "Sometimes she hated Bill more than anyone else in the world. He was different entirely from what he used to be." In growing up, he has failed her. The mother is too busy to answer questions, and one assumes that Portia, the Negro cook, is the only adult female from whom Mick can learn what a girl must do.□

But Mick knows "that always there had been one person after another But she had always kept it to herself and no person had ever known." There had been male and female schoolmates and female teachers whom she had secretly loved. Now all she has is Bubber, her little brother, Mr. Singer, and her father. There is a fine scene between Mick and her father in which their mutual longing for familial love and sympathy very nearly achieves satisfaction. "Yet for some reason she couldn't tell him about the things in her mind about the hot, dark nights."

More than any of the other characters, Mick needs solitude, privacy. "Some things you just naturally want to keep private. Not because they are bad, but because you just want them secret." But when they are about to "poison" her, she "throws" them at her "idea" of Singer; she responds to his impersonal air as she could not respond to her father's intense personal need. Having no physical room of her own, she imagines one as existing in her own mind. The only person allowed in that room is Mister Singer. It is filled with dreams of the future, with music she has heard or imagined herself.

Mick not only writes music and spends her lunch money for private piano lessons, but she also paints very imaginatively. She is trying to make a violin, which, along with other fragments of things, she keeps in a special box. (When she is famous, she will print M. K. on all her possessions.) She takes long walks at night, where ordinary girls would be afraid to go, and one time she sits under a window, thrills to a Beethoven symphony, coming over the radio. "Wonderful music like this was the worst hurt there could be." To divert herself from it, she subjects herself to physical pain by scraping rocks against her thigh until her hand is bloody.

Always now she is aware of a feeling of change. "All the time she was excited. In the morning, she couldn't wait to get out of bed and start going for the day. And at night she hated like hell to have to sleep again." She daydreams of herself as a heroine, saving Mr. Singer from disaster, conducting an orchestra with all her heroes and friends in the audience. Refusing to wear her sister's castoff clothes, she also refuses to take the same courses in school; she takes mechanical shop. She has in her mind plans (as strong as those for music) for belonging to one of the "bunches" of kids in school. She decides that a party will help. She is surprised when the seemingly grown-up kids respond gaily to the party-crashing antics of the younger kids in the neighborhood, but relieved, too. "And about the bunch she wanted to be with everyday. She would feel different in the halls now, knowing that they were not something special but like any other kids. It was O.K. about the ruined party. But it was all over. It was the end." Realizing this night that she has changed, she dismisses the party and dresses for the last time in her tomboy clothes.

"Mick, I come to believe we all gonna drown," says Bubber, watching the relentless rain. What he says is very true, certainly; this is what is happening to all Mick's plans. First, she loses Bubber's companionship when, with childlike cruelty but more out of her extravagant imagination, she frightens him with the prospect of the electric chair in Sing Sing for having shot Baby Wilson. That night, Mick, sorry, kisses his little body desperately. But "After he shot Baby the kid was not ever like little Bubber again." Everyone began to call him by his right name, George. McCullers' insight into George's

behavior, his change suddenly from a quiet, sweet child to an introverted, solitary premature adolescent, is frighteningly real. "But he was a different kid□George□going around by himself always like a person much older and with nobody, not even her, knowing what was really in his mind." She retreats further into the "inside room."

Mick's self-respect becomes insidiously impaired as the family grows poorer. "They were nearly as poor as factory workers. Only nobody could look down on them." She follows Mr. Singer, talks to him. "For some reason it was like they had a secret together. Or like they waited to tell each other things that had never been said before", except that he tells her nothing. She imitates his habits. Ironically, she believes that Brannon hates her because she and Bubber once stole some candy from the café. Actually, he is one of the few people with whom she might have freely, naturally talked. Harry, her Jewish neighbor, is her friend; they talk, play together and plot to kill Hitler. Harry has a crush on Jake Blount, whose raging against society gives Harry, who is hypersensitive about his Jewishness, new ideas.

McCullers subtly builds up the process of sexual awakening. Sitting on the steps talking to Harry, Mick notices that "There was a warm boy smell about him." Confused, she reverts to their early childhood horse-play, but in the midst of it they become aware of each other's bodies.□

When they go swimming in the country, Mick suggests that they swim naked. Facing each other's nudity, they are suddenly very bashful. But lying on the grass, they naturally succumb to the urges within them. Afterwards, Harry thinks they have sinned, so he runs away to work in Birmingham. "She felt very old, and it was like something was heavy inside her. She was a grown person now, whether she wanted to be or not."

Later, although her family kindly forbids it, she is obliged to work in the ten-cent store. Once, in need of Mr. Singer, she goes to look for him but is frightened by the darkness that as a child she had loved. After Singer's suicide, she feels trapped into womanhood and servitude.□

Educated in the North, Doctor Copeland returned to the South to lead his people out of sickness and servitude. He has read the great writers on spiritual and economic freedom and named his children after them. To them, "He would talk and talk, but none of them wanted to understand." He was almost Calvinistic in the way of life he wanted to prescribe for his family: "He knew how the house should be. There could be no fanciness□no gaudy calendars or lace pillows or knick-knacks□ but everything in the house must be plain and dark and indicative of work and the real true purpose." But his wife, Daisy, taught them meekness, submission, superstition. Years later, Portia says,

"Us talk like our own Mama and her peoples and
their peoples before them. You think out everything
in your brain. While us rather talk from something
in our hearts that has been there for a long time.
That's one of them [our] differences."
"You all the time using that word□Negro," said Portia.

"And that word haves a way of hurting peoples'
feelings □"

When *her* talk hurts *his* feelings, he refuses her gentleness: "No. It is foolish and primitive to keep repeating this about hurt feelings." His stern dedication to his "true purpose" has alienated all his children but Portia; yet between them no understanding and mutual sympathy is possible.

Meeting his son for the first time in a long time, he can not submit to his desire for common emotional expression, can only reproach him for not becoming the ideal leader of his people Copeland had tried to teach him to be. All his life Copeland has carried within him the hurt and humiliation of the white man's domination. To protect himself from the excessive emotional responses he naturally feels compelled to make, he has adopted a stoic attitude. The fervor of his dedication to ideas, "to the one strong true purpose," his obsession with his mission, his really valiant devotion to his duty as a doctor, divert his thoughts and energies and become media for sublimation of violence and forces of repression upon the real violence, the genuine Negro feelings smouldering inside him, that cause him such frustration and anxiety. Dying of TB, he realizes that he has failed, but actually he has probably saved himself from the gallows. When he was young,

The feeling that would come on him was a black, terrible,
Negro feeling. He would try to sit in his office
and read and meditate until he could be calm and start
again.□ But sometimes this calmness would not
come. He was young and the terrible feeling would
not go away with study.

When he is old, the Negro blues of his people, that wonderful emotional cathartic, tries to come out of him: "it happened that he began swaying slowly from side to side and from his throat there came a sound like a kind of singing moan." But even the singing he suppresses, does not surrender to. One time, years ago, he struck down his wife with a poker. Then "He wrestled in his spirit and fought down the evil blackness" with very hard work and a lofty, impossible ideal. When, with the dignity of a white man, he goes to the court house to object to the atrocity perpetrated upon his son, Willie, in prison, he is beaten as though he were a lowly "nigger."

He waited for the terrible anger and felt it arise in
him □ he broke loose suddenly from their grasp. In
a corner he was surrounded. They struck him on the
head and shoulders with their clubs. A glorious
strength was in him and he heard himself laughing
aloud as he fought.□ He kicked wildly with his feet
□ even struck at them with his head □ Someone behind
kicked him in the groin and he fell to his knees
on the floor.

The old, suppressed violence finally came out and was suppressed again by other forces.

Copeland and Blount are afflicted with the same problem. They try to sublimate their personal frustrations into public causes and their manner of fighting for these causes further intensifies their neuroses by alienating the very people they wish to convince; this increases their own loneliness, and the poison of narcissism festers in their spirits. Copeland is happiest when he is being listened to even though he knows it will do no good; his joy comes from the feeling of being respected, of being unlike other Negroes, of having a part of himself become absorbed into the minds of his listeners. "In the room there was a murmur. Hysteria mounted. Doctor Copeland choked and clinched his fists. He felt as though he had swelled up to the size of a giant. The love in him made his chest a dynamo, and he wanted to shout so that his voice could be heard throughout the town."

That he might have found a friend in Blount is indicated in the scene in which they talk all night, but finally end in disagreement. Although the torment in their souls is similar, their ideas and their race ultimately conflict. More than the success of their reform programs, they need friendship, an end to loneliness. "Yet now he [Copeland] could not clearly recall those issues which were the cause of their dispute." Copeland was more at peace when he could talk to the uncomprehending deaf-mute, Singer. Even when men have the opportunity to admit into their solitude a kindred spirit, the habit and nature of introversion prevent it. Copeland goes, a sick, broken failure, to his wife's father's farm where he will die alone in a house full of his own people. Hope, a feeble hope that the future will be better is all any of them have. "I will return soon," Doctor Copeland says. The reader is less optimistic.□

Source: David Madden, "The Paradox of the Need for Privacy and the Need for Understanding in Carson McCullers' *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,*" in *Literature and Psychology,* edited by Leonard F. Manheim and Morton Kaplan, University of Hartford, Connecticut, 1967, pp. 128-140.

Adaptations

The 1968 film adaptation of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,* with a screenplay by Thomas C. Ryan and directed by Robert Ellis Miller, was released on video by Warner Brothers in 1985.

A recording entitled *Carson McCullers Reads from The Member of the Wedding and Other of Her Works* was released on audio LP disc by MGM Records in 1952.

Topics for Further Study

World War II had started in Europe when this novel took place, although America did not enter it until a year and a half later. Examine the effect that the war had on race relations in the South: did things get better or worse? Did the war affect the situation at all?

What kind of music would have been on the jukebox at the New York Cafe? Find out what songs were popular in 1938-40 and make up a soundtrack for this novel.

Using the details given from the novel, draw a diagram of the Kelly house, showing where each character's room would be.

Research the laws that are in place today that are meant to prevent the abuses that cost Willy his feet. What legal recourse would he have today? Who would he take his case to? What authorities would be responsible for punishing the offenders?

Compare and Contrast

1940: England and France were at war with Germany, Italy and Japan: later that year France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway, and Romania fell to the Germans, but the United States did not join World War II until Pearl Harbor was bombed in December of 1941.

Today: Having been elevated to the status of world power as an outcome of World War II, the United States is almost certain to be involved in any major worldwide conflict.

1940: The first Social Security checks were mailed out to Americans. The first payout to American pensioners totaled $75,844.

Today: After decades of workers paying into the system, the amount paid out annually by the Social Security Administration is nearly $400 billion.

1940: Plutonium, the radioactive element that fueled the nuclear bombs used in 1945 to end World War II, was first discovered.

Today: Now that the Soviet Union has disbanded, there are fears that the nuclear bombs they stockpiled between the 1940s and 1990s might fall into the hands of terrorists.

1940: In the South, blacks and whites were not allowed to eat or drink at the same establishments, stay at the same hotels, or ride on public transportation together. At the same time, the persecution of European Jews by the Nazis made government support of racial hatred conspicuous.

Today: Because of progress made toward civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s, some groups argue that minorities are over-privileged.

1940: Most Americans had radio receivers that provided them with news and entertainment; television broadcasting had been introduced during the 1939 Wold's Fair in New York, but there were only about 100 to 200 sets to receive it. During World War II little was done to expand on the television experiment. Ten years later, just nine percent of U.S. households had television sets, but twenty years later, that number had jumped to 85 percent.

Today: Television's immense popularity has created a market for literally hundreds of networks, catering to diversified tastes.

What Do I Read Next?

Many of McCullers' other significant works are collected in one volume, called *The Collected Stories of Carson McCullers, Including The Member of the Wedding and The Ballad of the Sad Cafe.* The latest reissue is from Mariner Books in 1998.

Truman Capote was a friend of McCullers', and many of the characters in his works seem as though they would fit perfectly into her books. One collection that particularly resembles hers is *The Grass Harp,,* reissued in 1993 by Vintage Books. Included in this volume is his acclaimed novella *A Tree of Night.*

Flannery O'Connor once said, "I have found that anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic." O'Connor was a Southern woman writer in the 1950s and 1960s, like Carson McCullers, and like McCullers she was ill most of her life and died young. Her novels are interesting, but O'Connor's most polished work is in her short stories, compiled in *The Collected Stories of Flannery O'Connor.*

The town described in this book resembles the southern towns in the work of William Faulkner, a Mississippi writer of the generation before Mc- Cullers'. Its fragmented style, looking from one character to the next, resembles one of Faulkner's most successful works, *The Sound and the Fury,* published in 1939.

The name that Sherwood Anderson originally gave to his 1919 book *Winesburg Ohio* was *The Book of Grotesques:* like McCullers' book, it is about different characters in a town who sometimes interact and sometimes do not, but all have distinguishing exaggerated characteristics that affect the ways they exist in their world.

Further Study

Richard M. Cook, *Carson McCullers,* Ungar, 1975.

The twenty-five pages that Cook devotes to the novel cover all of the major themes and characters.

Oliver Evans, *The Ballad of Carson McCullers: A Biography,* Coward McCann, 1966.

Published during McCullers' lifetime, this book contains the early synopsis of the novel, "Author's Outline of *The Mute*" (which was the original title of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*). Invaluable to students of this book.

Lawrence Graver, "Penumbral Insistence: McCullers's Early Novels," in *Carson McCullers,* edited and with an introduction by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, pp. 53-67.

In a few pages, Graver gives a concrete understanding of the characters in this novel and of the characters in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* and *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe.*

Margaret McDowell, *Carson McCullers,* Twayne, 1980.

McDowell's analysis of this novel is divided into themes: "Isolation as Man's Fate," "The Quartet the "Spokes of the Wheel,'" "The Use of Black Characters," "A 'Contrapuntal' Novel," and "The Sense of Violence Held Tenuously in Check."

Louise Westling, *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor,* University of Georgia Press, 1985.

This book explores the influence of Southern culture on the writings of women, an aspect that is often ignored in male-oriented literary criticism.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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