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Our Heart as the Loneliest Hunter

A Close-Reading on Intimacy in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullers

“Paper ingediend voor het behalen van de graad van Bachelor in de Taal- en Letterkunde: Engels – Spaans”

Academiejaar 2013-2014



Ik verklaar plechtig dat ik de bachelorpaper, *Our Heart as the Loneliest Hunter*, zelf heb geschreven.

Ik ben op de hoogte van de regels i.v.m. plagiaat en heb erop toegezien om deze toe te passen in deze bachelorpaper.

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Acknowledgements

In the writing of this bachelor paper, I received a great amount of support. First of all, a thank you is due to my promoters Mr Douglas Atkinson and Dr Christophe Collard, for their guidance and patience. My Mom deserves special thanks as well, because her infinite faith in me is what kept me motivated. Lastly, I wish to thank my friends Rani Decock, Miriam Labidi, Sara Derongé, Andrea Gütter and Rani Clerdy, for revising my work, keeping me company in the library and giving me the necessary pep talks.

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Abstract

The starting point of this investigation is the idea of loneliness as a basic human condition which mankind is desperate to overcome. Lonesomeness as a concept can be rather arduous to grasp, but as I consider it closely related to a lack of intimacy, this will be the main focus. I examine this theme in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullers through a close-reading of the novel. Sharabany's eight markers of intimacy are used as the reference point in order to determine whether or not the relationships presented could be considered intimate and profound. Arguably, this is not the case because of the fundamental one-sidedness in every friendship in this narrative: while one person strongly invests in the bond, the other person remains indifferent. The situation may seem hopeless, but ultimately the characters continue their search for intimacy, in order to attempt to overcome loneliness in the end.

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Introduction

Loneliness could arguably be called the most universal human experience. Norman Cousins once said that “the eternal quest of the individual human being is to shatter his loneliness” (qtd. in Jarski 304), implying that loneliness is a state inherent to the whole human race. Mijuskovic takes this to the next level, stating that “loneliness is the most primary, universal and necessary condition of being human” (68). However, this ‘eternal quest’ results in a task which is impossible for man to fulfill, as one cannot negate one’s primary characteristic. Man is intrinsically lonely, and is faced with the Sisyphean task of trying to overcome this, yet all the while never actually succeeding. It is crucial to note that there are moments of relief –as to not be exceedingly pessimistic- but these, however, are brief (Mijuskovic 9). These sparks of hope are, in my opinion, what prevent man from giving up. Moustakas also offers this idea on loneliness: “it is necessary for every person to recognize his loneliness, to become intensely aware that [...] man is alone –terribly, utterly alone. Efforts to overcome or escape the existential experience of loneliness can result only in self-alienation” (qtd. in Mijuskovic 68). Then again, one wonders how man can even be lonely with seven billion people on this globe to build relationships with. However, in my opinion, loneliness is not the lack of social contact, but the lack of profoundly fulfilling social contact, in other words: the lack of intimacy.

According to Margulis et al., a distinction needs to be made between profound and mundane relationships. The latter would be relationships without emotional foundations, while profound ones are “deeply moving, caring, loving, and respectful”(137). These are not presented as the only two options, but as “ends of a continuum”(137). I believe that mundane relationships do not transcend man’s inherent solitude, but the profound ones -or the profound moments of a relationship- tend to offer short lasting relief. Although, as they solely crack the walls of loneliness and do not shatter them, and man is considered to be inherently lonely, it can be questioned how many of us actually participate in relationships which could be placed on the profound-end of the continuum. However, “there is a human need to belong in close relationships”(Brehm et al. 5), resulting in another Sisyphean mission for mankind: the search for profound intimacy while never quite encountering it.

As “loneliness universally forges its powerful expression in all great literature”(Mijuskovic 3), it should be interesting to look at these ideas from a literary perspective. Embodying the aforementioned philosophy perfectly in the title, I opted to study *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullers. The title implies that the heart -or man in general- is eternally ‘hunting’ to overcome its loneliness. Although no all too rapid conclusions should be drawn from this alone, it does offer the possibility that this work is yet another literary example of man’s quest for breaking out of his loneliness. In this research I will concentrate on the presence -or non presence- of intimacy in the novel, as to me all solitude and alienation is not the result of the lack of personal contact but of the absence of intimacy, which should hypothetically be omnipresent in this particular work.

First of all, the applied theory and the literary work itself need to be elaborated on, as to offer a solid basis for the investigation. Intimacy is not a straightforward concept with a simple, one-size-fits-all definition. Rather, it is a complex matter, subject to various interpretations. In order to address this topic, Sharabany’s (159-161) eight dimensions for intimacy in personal relations as described in “Continuities in the Development of Intimate Friendships: Object Relations, Interpersonal, and Attachment Perspectives” are used as a reference framework. In other words, the personal relationships in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* are probed according to this theory. First of all, she defines intimate friendship considering the notion of an intimate friend, “who is nominated and regarded so by the respondent. The partner returns both the degree of reciprocity of choice [...] of the friend, as well as the mutuality [...]”(Sharabany 159). She initially points out that this conception of the degree of intimacy is a personal notion and thus different for each individual. However, she assesses eight indicators of intimacy (Sharabany 160). Firstly, she offers “frankness and spontaneity” as a marker; revealing yourself to your friend. As a second dimension, Sharabany decides on “sensitivity and knowing”, which she claims is “a sense of [...] understanding [...] not necessarily achieved through talking” (160). A sense of attachment is offered as the third dimension, followed by the proposal that the relationship is exclusive and unique. It is also stated that in an intimate relationship the participants should not be afraid to show their vulnerability. Additionally, this

vulnerability should result in an interaction of sharing and helping. The researcher's penultimate element of intimacy is "common activities" (160), by which she simply means undertaking activities together. She states "trust and loyalty" (160) as the eighth and last dimension.

Of course, Sharabany has already clarified that intimacy is a fairly individual concept. Therefore her characterization of intimacy could also be regarded as being just one person's view on the matter. However, when consulting a secondary source, *Intimate Relationships* by Brehm et al., concordant views are perceptible. In the latter, intimacy is said to be based on "knowledge", "caring", "interdependence", "mutuality", "trust" and "commitment" (4). Sharabany also dwells on the notion of knowing, in the sense of frankness. Attachment can be compared to the mutuality and trust in the relationship. Trust also refers to vulnerability, because it evidently takes trust to allow yourself to open up to someone, to expose your vulnerability. The notions of caring and mutuality are reflected in Sharabany's mention of exclusiveness and uniqueness, basically referring to the fact that -for both 'participants'- the relationship is more special to them than other ones. There are significant overlaps, but Sharabany's dimensions of intimacy are slightly more elaborate, as she for example also includes "common activities" (160). The concurrences, however, do validate her theory, and make it a more solid and valuable fundament for this analysis, as well as less subjective.

Before coming to the investigation, a brief introduction to the novel in question and its author is essential. Carson McCullers, born in Columbus Georgia in 1917 as Lula Carson Smith (Whitt xv), would live to become a literary phenomenon. As a twenty-something student of writing in New York City, she entered a novel contest of the publishing company Houghton Mifflin with an outline and several chapters of "The Mute" in 1938. This short piece was later developed into her first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, published in 1940. She would continue to have a successful career, but unfortunately passed away at the early age of fifty (Boddy xi-xxviii). Concerning this present research project on *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, it is interesting to note that "feelings of isolation [...] plagued her" (Whitt xxi). Whitt even goes as far as stating that "[n]o possibility exists in McCullers's world

that one's love may be returned"(xxx), alluding once again to the failure of intimacy. Concerning these ideas, an investigation into intimacy in human relationships –although not romantic ones- in one of her novels is clearly a promising premise.

In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, McCullers portrays John Singer, a deaf-mute living in an unidentified town in the south of the United States, as he loses contact with his deaf-mute housemate and comes into contact with some of the town's inhabitants. The people in this story are not alone in a literal sense, but they feel intensely lonely nonetheless. This feeling is not only conveyed through the title (the first one –"The Mute"- as well as the official one), but also ubiquitous in the novel. McCullers manages to inflict this sense of alienation on the reader, although the characters themselves have the delusional conviction they are experiencing real friendship, in other words partaking in a "profound relationship" (Margulis et al. 137). In my opinion, the key to resolving this issue is discovering why they feel isolated, although -technically speaking- they are not. It seems to me that something always goes awry in their relationships, more specifically in their attempts to create intimacy. The intimacy is always one-sided, due to which some sort of chain reaction of 'unrequited kinship' is set in motion. Singer feels connected to the Greek (who may or may not return this feeling), but not to the other characters. They, however, only feel close to Singer. So instead of a circular movement, omnipresent and everlasting, at first sight intimacy appears to be presented as a dead-end street in this novel. The ultimate question, on which I will focus in this paper, then, is whether or not in the end intimacy seems possible, or remains an unattainable 'Holy Grail' for the characters, and mankind in general. Hypothetically, as man can only obtain brief moments of escape from his essential loneliness, man should also only be able to obtain brief moments of intimacy. Intimacy might not be a completely unobtainable 'Holy Grail', but holding on to that treasure is something mankind will probably never accomplish. Thus, the view on intimacy in this novel, as I present it, will not be an entirely pessimistic one, but a very realistic unromanticized take on the matter.

In this paper, several 'types' of relationships will be looked at through a close-reading of the novel, considering Sharabany's aforementioned criteria of intimacy. Obviously, not all eight characteristics can be discussed for each one, but the most prominent observations will be set forward. All chapters will involve general remarks as well as specific text examples. Firstly the relationship between John Singer and his roommate Antonapoulos -or simply 'the Greek'- is examined. In the book, the reader is presented with their situation and how they went from being roommates, to Antonapoulos' illness, his subsequent downfall and their separation as the Greek ends up in a mental hospital. These steps are all of significance to discuss the intimacy, or the lack thereof, in their bond. In the second chapter, Singer's so-called friendships with Biff Brannon (the widowed café owner), Mick Kelly (a teenage girl passionate about music), Doctor Copeland (a negro doctor estranged from his family) and Jake Blount (a drunk) will be discussed, as they all come to him to discuss their issues but never bother to consider that he might have his own troubles, or to what degree he understands them -being a deaf-mute-. Additionally, the third chapter will deal with the affiliations between the townspeople, that is, the contacts not involving Singer. These can also be considered influential in Carson McCullers' portrayal of intimacy, as none of the characters seem to actually succeed in connecting with anyone. This takes the attention away from Singer as well, because otherwise the lack of intimacy could be linked to his personality alone, instead of referring to humans in general. Lastly, a general conclusion will be drawn and an answer to the research question will be proposed.

1. A Close-Reading on Intimacy in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*

It seems as though in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* there is a certain possibility of intimacy, which unfortunately is never fulfilled. Subsequently, this narrative parallels man's eternal but fruitless search for overcoming loneliness. The depiction of the village only further elaborates this pervasive sense of solitude. On several occasions there is mention of the lonesome condition of the village and its people, such as Jake Blount's crystal clear statement that "[t]he town seemed more lonesome than any place he had ever known"(55). The villagers themselves are also presented in a lonesome light, with a "desperate look of hunger and of loneliness"(9) on their faces and "a look of sombre loneliness" (175) in their eyes. In my opinion, this increases the relevance of the story, as the ubiquitous solitude -this omnipresent atmosphere of lonesomeness- is of such a nature that the reader does not feel that the relationships focused on in the novel are out of the ordinary. To the contrary, they are the standard in the fictional society of the narrative, and could even be seen as the standard outside of the novel. Therefore, the studying of these so-called friendships has implications outside of the universe of the story, for example possibly offering an insight into human loneliness as a basic human condition, as a fundament of human nature.

All loneliness, in my opinion, is founded in a lack of intimacy. This failure in obtaining a profound bond is examined through the eight markers of intimacy of Sharabany; "frankness and spontaneity", "sensitivity and knowing", "attachment", "exclusiveness", "helping and sharing", "vulnerability", "common activities" and lastly "trust and loyalty"(160). Through the subsequent close-reading, I will examine whether or not these dimensions are demonstrated in the relationships in the novel. As aforementioned, not all of them will be discussed regarding each relationship as doing so would make this investigation too extensive. For each relationship, several of the most prominent aspects will be discussed.

1.1. Singer and Antonapoulos

The first relationship the reader is confronted with in the novel is the one between the two deaf-mutes of the village, Singer and Antonapoulos, the Greek: “in the town there were two mutes, and they were always together”(7). This depicts their initial situation, where they live together and have their daily routine of walking to and from work together and dividing the chores: the Greek always cooks and Singer always does the dishes. Their harmonious situation comes to a sudden end when, after Antonapoulos’ illness, “a change had come in him”(10). The Greek becomes more and more uncontrollable, eventually resulting in his cousin having him admitted into a mental hospital. Subsequently, Singer leaves their apartment and moves into a room at the Kelly residence. Singer keeps paying occasional visits to his deaf-mute friend, but not all of them are very successful. When Singer goes to see him near the end of the novel, the hospital personnel informs him that Antonapoulos is dead, driving Singer to commit suicide.

Throughout the story the reader is presented with the clear view that Singer considers this bond to be a profound and meaningful one. He describes, for example, that “he always felt a great need to write to his friend when he was bewildered or sad”(187), which makes the Greek an outlet for Singer’s feelings, or better yet, the only outlet for his feelings. However, as Antonapoulos’ point of view is not revealed, one cannot be sure how he feels. The scene where the Greek is put on the bus towards the mental hospital, however, speaks for itself: “[Singer’s] quick, intelligent face expressed great strain. Antonapoulos watched him drowsily [...]. Antonapoulos was so busy checking over the various items in his lunchbox that for a while he paid no attention. [...] His smile was very bland and remote – as though already they were many miles apart”(13). This is not the heartfelt goodbye one would expect between friends, as the Greek seems more interested with his snacks than with Singer. Antonapoulos’ attitude stands in stark contrast to Singer’s devastated reaction to his death: “His face was deathly pale and he was so beside himself that tears rolled down the ridges of his nose”(284). So before commencing the deeper analysis of their relationship, I conclude that

their bond is merely a one-sided relationship, as Singer seems to value it more than Antonapoulos does.

1.1.1. Frankness and Spontaneity

Concerning Sharabany's dimensions of intimacy, the notion of "frankness and spontaneity"(160) surfaces first in my close-reading. This marker deals with one's ability to be honest, to reveal their inner self to someone. However, Singer and Antonapoulos do not seem to be a very frank couple. As only Singer talks about what is on his mind, there is a one-sided monologue of self-disclosure. The reader cannot even be sure if his honesty has any effects on the other party because whether or not the Greek actually understands what is said is left undecided: "Singer never knew just how much his friend understood of all the things he told him"(8). Singer does continue saying that "it does not matter"(8), possibly referring to the short relief the relationship brings him. He needs someone he can talk to in order to decrease his lonesomeness, but it seems that maybe this temporary feeling of intimacy does not call for actual intimacy. In other words, the sense of communication need not come from both sides, as sometimes people just want someone to listen to the feelings they are having.

Hence, Singer does not seem to care whether or not Antonapoulos understands. Not the actual understanding, but the possibility -however uncertain- of understanding is what is crucial here. This also becomes clear when Singer writes a letter to the Greek: "[t]he fact that Antonopoulos could not read did not prevent Singer from writing to him. [...] He began to imagine that perhaps he had been mistaken, that perhaps Antonopoulos only kept his knowledge of letters a secret from everyone"(187). The only reason to write to an illiterate would be to get something off your chest, and certainly not to establish successful communication with them. However, once again there is a slim chance that Antonapoulos can read, legitimizing Singer's writings. In sum, the self-disclosure is practically limited to one-way traffic with Singer as the emissary and is thus not representative of an intimate relationship.

1.1.2. Attachment, Exclusiveness and Uniqueness

Secondly, in analyzing the bond between Singer and the Greek it is interesting to look at the sense of “attachment” between both of them, together with the “degree of exclusiveness or uniqueness”(160). Since these concepts are not very different, I will consider them to be one marker of intimacy here. Or, in the case of Singer and Antonapoulos, the lack of reciprocal attachment is a marker of non-intimacy. With Sharabany’s reasoning that intimacy needs to be a mutual feeling in mind, the deaf-mutes cannot seem to fulfill this reciprocity concerning the principles above. Singer seems to have a strong feeling of attachment for his rather stoic roommate. One example, mentioned previously, is the comparison in their behavior in saying goodbye to each other. On the one hand, the Greek appears to be untouched by their parting, while on the other hand Singer is portrayed as very emotional after he hears of his friend’s passing. This can be seen as a prime example of their attachment to one another, ranging from a strong attachment on Singer’s side of the continuum to pertinent indifference on Antonapoulos’ side.

Singer makes his view on the exclusiveness of their relationship clear when he writes a letter to the Greek, addressing it to “[his] Only Friend”(188). This is all the more interesting because when he writes this letter he has, in fact, been receiving frequent visits from the other villagers –whom I will discuss later. So, although he could have made new friends, he stayed loyal to his ‘exclusive’ and ‘unique’ bond with Antonapoulos. Singer also thinks of them as “eternally united”(282), making their relationship all the more special to him; if -to him- their bond is indestructible, this showcases a unique situation in the novel because he does not show any sentiment even close to this towards any other person. Lastly, he also evokes the idea that they have something special in the way he describes his feelings when visiting the Greek: “The bliss of their reunion almost stifled him”(282). The usually calm and composed Singer offering a description with exalting words such as “bliss” or “stifled” displays a counterexample to his usually reserved nature, underlining his ‘attachment’ to Antonapoulos.

However, Singer expects the Greek to “be glad to see him”(282). Already a more careful approach to feelings, this proposes a reflexive comparison in language between Singer’s bombastic feelings towards the ‘blissful’ event, while Antonapoulos would just be ‘glad’, implying a more mundane view on the matter. Additionally, Singer mentions that “[Antonapoulos] would enjoy the fresh fruits and the presents”(282). All this becomes slightly ironic when taking into account that this is a tainted perception of their reunions. In my opinion, while Singer is extraordinarily excited to meet up with his friend, the Greek remains blatantly unmoved by the whole ordeal. In fact, his attention is centered on the gifts Singer kindly brought: “Singer had some packages in his arms and the big Greek gave them his first attention”(85). One could argue that the key to attachment is a special appreciation for a person, which I perceive to be lacking in the Greek and his materialistic pleasures. As the Greek was more focused on the packages -more specifically: the foods- than on the person, in my opinion this an example of ‘non-attachment’ and therefore non-intimacy.

Additionally, the fact that they are the only deaf-mutes in the village could be a contributor to their ‘attachment’, or even an essential factor. In my opinion, their bond is the best chance they have at intimacy, because they found the one person in their surroundings they have a chance of communicating with in a natural and spontaneous way. Therefore, I believe that -although maybe the degree of attachment is not optimal- in building some kind of relationship, the two deaf-mutes open up a window to the possibility of intimacy, instead of closing one. The simple fact that they encountered each other offers, I would argue, a more positive view on loneliness.

1.1.3. Helping and Common Activities

Thirdly and lastly, Sharabany’s mention of “helping” and of “common activities” (160) is an interesting angle to examine the bond between the two deaf-mutes. These two markers can be encountered in their living situation. The first impression of this is a rather positive one; they have their daily routine and they divide the household. In this way, the relationship seems more reciprocal, as they both offer a contribution. Their living together could be considered as what Sharabany calls “common activities” (160), as they voluntarily live together and undertake, for

example, the walks to work together. This kind of routine offers a fundament for their relationship in my opinion, and thus having 'common activities' could be considered to be one of the only markers of intimacy they reflect. However, a more nuanced vision is called for with regard to this element as well. Singer and Antonapoulos, aside from living together, "[o]nce a week [...] would go to the library for Singer to withdraw a mystery book and on Friday night they attended a movie"(9). But of course, these activities do not particularly require company nor do they ask for interaction. The only real common recreational activity they have is chess: "Sometimes in the evening the mutes would play chess. Singer had always greatly enjoyed this game [...]. At first his friend could not be interested [...] but he learned to make a few set, opening moves. [...] After the first moves Singer worked out the game by himself while his friend looked on drowsily"(9). However, this does not offer the image of two intimate friends doing something they love. I personally get the idea that Singer -who obviously does love to play chess- is in need of someone to play against. As he is alone with the Greek, the latter is the only partner available. Beggars cannot be choosers, so Antonapoulos ends up being his opposition. The Greek cannot be bothered with the intricacies of the game, but the simple illusion of playing against someone is what keeps Singer going. Although Antonapoulos does not contribute to the game, his mere presence is what makes the endeavor fulfilling to Singer. This situation can be seen as a parallel to the situation of human loneliness; the possibility of one day overcoming it is what keeps mankind going.

Even though the mutes undertake activities together, nevertheless the enthusiasm and dedication are lacking, in my opinion. So to me, it is not only the "common activities" that create intimacy, but also a person's attitude towards these activities. Yet again, their relationship does not completely rule out intimacy, although it could be argued that even in their joint activities there is a fundamental lack of mutual engagement. Singer and Antonapoulos have some common activities, but the question remains if these bring them closer together.

According to Sharabany, another marker of intimacy is the “helping” of someone. When Antonopoulos becomes ill -a very literal example of a situation where someone needs help- “Singer nursed his friend so carefully that after a week Antonopoulos was able to return to his work”(10). But as one can expect from the ever indifferent Greek, he does not fully appreciate his roommate’s care: “The Greek was very fretful, and kept finding fault with the foods and drink that Singer prepared for him”(10). I believe that if helping someone is one sign of intimacy, appreciating the gesture is an indispensable reaction. But Singer’s efforts are not recognized by the Greek, and to an extent he even abuses them: “Constantly he made his friend help him out of bed so that he could pray”(10), obviously a strenuous task for Singer, considering the Greek’s obesity. Nor does Antonopoulos ever repay the favor, to the contrary in fact; after his illness he becomes quite rebellious, causing Singer to feel “great distress”(11). While this could mean a rupture in their bond, Singer surprisingly keeps helping his friend. He bails Antonopoulos out of jail, tries to make him understand his behavior is wrong and -most importantly- does not give up. Even when his cousin sends the Greek to an asylum, Singer tries to prevent his friend from leaving, disclaiming: “Antonopoulos must stay with me”(12). Singer does not only help but is also willing to take responsibility for the Greek. I believe that his conviction and will to continue is another indication that there is a possibility of intimacy. In my opinion, no one would go through all this trouble if there was no light at the end of the tunnel, if they did not believe in a faint promise -arguably an illusion- of a better situation.

In sum, a one-dimensional interpretation of the aforementioned elements of intimacy is impossible to offer. There seems to be a certain degree of intimacy, which I however perceive to be one-sided. Nonetheless, this at the same time demolishes the very notion of intimacy, because, as Sharabany states, it is by definition a reciprocal and mutual act (159). As such, they certainly have not overcome loneliness. But I believe they did experience a brief moment of relief, one they possibly thought was everlasting, as “the two mutes were not lonely at all”(10), in comparison to the other villagers with their “desperate look of [...] loneliness”(9). Although, in my opinion, Singer seems to be the only one with an emotional investment in this bond, the possibility of intimacy remains the

principle I want to extract from their relationship, as against all odds they found each other and lived together fraternally for a while. Although the Greek's role in the relationship is fairly minimal, and all the opportunities for intimacy seem to originate from Singer, a one-sided intimacy still offers a more positive outlook on the matter than an utter absence of intimacy does.

1.2. Singer and the Villagers

When Antonapoulos leaves for the mental asylum, Singer is left alone. He moves out of their apartment into a room at the Kelly family's house and replaces the Greek's cooking with meals at the local café. At this time Singer comes in contact with the four villagers (or three villagers and one visitor) who will later believe in the intimate nature of their relationship with him. All four of them are presented as lonely and as not really belonging to the larger community, but -to them- this situation is turned around by their encounter with the mute.

When the reader is introduced to the café owner, Biff Brannon, the idea surfaces that - although married- Biff is a lonesome man. The first time the reader is presented to Biff and his wife as a couple, it becomes clear that they fight abundantly: "[...] in one of their quarrels they had begun calling each other Mister and Misses, and since then they had never made it up enough to change it"(16). Instead of living together, the couple seems to lead separate lives. In addition, they do not sleep together, since she keeps the café open during the day and he works the nightshift: "Alice began dressing herself and Biff made up the bed. [...] When the bed was smoothly made he waited until Alice had left the room before he slipped off his trousers and crawled inside"(32). The fact that he waits for her to leave before he undresses may indicate that they are uncomfortable around each other. Furthermore, the couple does not even "talk except on matters of business"(110). When his wife dies, his solitude only increases.

Jake Blount, a travelling drunk staying in the village, is another one of Singer's newly acquainted friends. Besides the obvious indicators of loneliness, for instance that he travelled to the village by himself, and statements such as "he felt lonely in this unfamiliar town"(55), his rants also

reinforce this idea. Blount has strong beliefs and is not afraid to make these known, but he usually misses his goal of reaching an audience: "The drunk had not stopped talking. He was not addressing anyone around him in particular, nor was anyone listening"(19). In my opinion, this sums up Blount's solitude: he stands alone with his ideas, and while he is desperate to get people to support the same beliefs -or to even encounter people with the same mindset- this seems to fail.

The town's negro doctor, Benedict Copeland, also becomes involved with the mute. As a black man, he is alienated from the white population. He lives in "one of the Negro sections of the town"(65), but I believe he also sets himself apart from the negro population, or as his daughter Portia states it: "My Father not like other coloured mens"(47). Doctor Copeland himself asserts, for example, that "[t]he whole Negro race [is] sick"(75). In my opinion, this shows that he does not identify himself with that group, offering an opposition between 'them' and 'me'. In addition to being in no-man's land between the white and the black society, Copeland is also estranged from his family: "'Here Father,' she said. The voices stopped. [...] Karl Marx and Hamilton looked at each other, then down at the floor, and finally at their father. [...]They did not look him in the eye, and in their faces there was neither love nor hate"(129). This awkward meeting between the Doctor and his sons exemplifies their strained relationship, and amplifies the sentiment that Copeland stands alone in this world.

Lastly, Mick Kelly -a local teenage girl- also seeks to remedy her lonesomeness by bonding with Singer. Although she comes from a large family, she wonders that it "[is] funny [...] how lonesome a person could be in a crowded house"(51). Besides not feeling very connected to her family, school does not seem to be a kinder environment to her, also imposing on her a sense of not-belonging and alienation: "In the halls the people would walk up and down together and everybody seemed to belong to some special bunch. [...] She wasn't a member of any bunch"(95).

All these characters feel lonesome and alienated, until they meet up with Singer. They feel like he is an intimate friend, and therefore a possible escape from man's existential solitude.

However, I do not believe this is the case and I will argue this by examining their relationships through three of Sharabany's eight markers of intimacy. First of all I will address "sensitivity and knowing". Secondly, "attachment, exclusiveness and uniqueness" will be discussed, and finally I will consider "trust and loyalty"(160).

1.2.1. Sensitivity and Knowing

When talking about "sensitivity and knowing", Sharabany describes these as a "sense of empathy or understanding not necessarily achieved through talking"(160). Concerning the relationships between Singer and Biff Brannon, Jake Blount, Doctor Copeland and Mick Kelly, I consider the notion of 'understanding' to be crucial. All of them have the feeling the deaf-mute - ironically- is the only person who understands them, as "Singer was always the same to everyone. He sat in a straight chair by the window with his hands stuffed tight into his pockets, and nodded or smiled to show his guests that he understood"(84). Although the mute merely wants to acknowledge that he comprehends what they are saying, literally, the characters interpret Singer's behavior as a deep sense of understanding, not only of what they are saying but of their inner being: "they felt that the mute would always understand whatever they wanted to say to him. And maybe even more than that"(87). Thus, his supposedly profound insight indicates a very intimate bond in their eyes.

One situation in which Singer shows understanding is when Biff Brannon comes to see him after his wife passed away: "Biff sat on the bed and they smoked a cigarette together. Singer looked at him now and then with his green observant eyes. Biff did not talk, and once the mute stopped to pat him on the shoulder and look for a second into his face"(112). Although the café owner does not actually say anything, great understanding speaks from this situation. However, in my opinion, there is not an actual sense of recognition of the whole person, but merely some sort of empathy with Biff Brannon. It is logical that the mute shows understanding specifically for this situation -the loss of a life companion- as he basically went through the same experience when Antonapoulos was obliged to go to the mental institution. This, however, is a singular occurrence, although the other characters think otherwise.

Jake Blount says that they “would sit across the table and I would look at him and he would look at me and we would both know that the other knew”(140). This implies Singer’s awareness and understanding of Blount’s philosophies, as the latter categorizes Singer with ‘the people who know’, people with the same ideals. He also lets Singer know how he feels: “‘You get it,’ he said in a blurred voice. ‘You know what I mean.’”(65). But of course, this is one man’s opinion on a concept that requires two interacting people, thus not offering a conclusive answer as to whether or not Singer actually understands.

Doctor Copeland also has the feeling Singer has a strong sense of understanding for his personal situation. In specific, when his son is mutilated in prison, he feels like Singer “alone understood this thing”(226). In stating that “[i]n his eyes there was no horror or pity or hate. Of all those who knew, his eyes alone did not express these reactions”(226), Copeland differentiates Singer from the rest of the people. While “horror or pity or hate”(226) seems like a correct reaction to the situation, he apparently feels like another response would be more appropriate. As it seems, the mute is aware of this, apparently he understands, and he responds accordingly. However, in my opinion, Singer’s reaction of nodding might be a more indifferent or impersonal approach -as to keep his distance- actually opposing the idea of intimacy.

Lastly, Mick Kelly also feels like Singer understands her better than anyone else, including her family. She feels like “they [have] a secret together. Or like they waited to tell each other things that had never been said before”(212). Mick exaggerates their bond, by declaring that “there was a secret feeling between them”(213), while there is no evidence of a ‘secret feeling’ from Singer’s side. This exaltation of their friendship might be a result of the crush she has on Singer, which is implied by her stating that “he [Harry] had a crush on Mister Blount and she knew how he felt”(217). Hence, it is not surprising that she places him on a pedestal by naming him the only person who truly understands her.

In sum, these four characters are all convinced that Singer is the only person who understands them, not only in the literal sense but also as a whole, since they think he understands their motivations, fears and feelings. However, when looking at Singer's view on the matter, the reader is presented with the opposite conclusion: "At first he had not understood the four people at all. They talked and they talked – and as the months went on they talked more and more. He became so used to their lips that he understood each word they said. And then after a while he knew what each one of them would say before he began, because the meaning was always the same"(181). Instead of maintaining this blissful idea of a perfect understanding, it is revealed that Singer, in fact, did not even understand what they were saying in the beginning, let alone grasp their entire being. Furthermore, as he points out the repetitiveness of what they are saying, I get the idea that -even though in the end he gets what they are saying- he does not recognize the importance of their chatter. He is not interested in what they have on their mind, and therefore I think he does not understand them, or he does not want to, contrary to the villagers' beliefs.

Just as throughout the story the characters keep mentioning the mute's extraordinary capability of understanding, Singer himself keeps reflecting on his lack of comprehension. He mentions that "[h]e had agreed with each of them in turn, though what it was they wanted him to sanction he did not know"(281), once again affirming that he has no clue what their ideas or beliefs are. The mute also realizes that Jake Blount believes that they "have a secret together"(190), but he himself, however, does "not know what it is"(190). As convinced as Jake Blount is of Singer's fundamental understanding of him and his thoughts, Singer is equally confused by the notion that they share a secret.

Mick Kelly also succeeds in making the mute feel quite lost, although she believes the opposite: "And Mick – her face was urgent and she said a good deal that he did not understand in the least"(281). Additionally, there is another dimension of non-understanding in their relationship. She is passionate about music and this is one of her favorite topics, which is tricky for a deaf-mute to

empathize with, as he cannot possibly begin to comprehend this. Mick, however, does not realize this: “She likes music. I wish I knew what it is she hears. She knows I am deaf but she thinks I know about music”(190). This not only shows that Singer does not understand her, it also demonstrates that she has no clue what life must be like for him, thus revealing a lack of understanding from both sides.

So, although Singer’s four visitors are sure that the deaf-mute is the person who understands them best, when you look from another perspective the opposite seems to be the case. As the situation with Mick Kelly suggest, this unconditional feeling of understanding is one-sided, as the deaf-mute himself does not express the feeling that the villagers empathize with him. Thus, ‘understanding’ and ‘empathy’ as a marker of intimacy is not fulfilled in these relationships, as there is only believed to be one-sided comprehension. In reality the situation is even darker, as this belief seems to be an illusion. In my opinion, genuine understanding seems to be something as scarce as water in a desert, in this novel.

1.2.2. Attachment, Exclusiveness and Uniqueness

Once more, like in the chapter on Singer and Antonapoulos, I will consider “attachment” and “uniqueness”(160) one marker, instead of two, as they are founded in the same notion: the value of a relationship. These ideas both offer a view on intimacy focusing on the special nature of it. In other words: intimate relationships can be considered rare, as we do not have them with just anyone and an extraordinary degree of appreciation is necessary to achieve them. However, Singer and his visitors already demonstrate an unbalanced relationship concerning the notion of understanding. This disequilibrium can be observed with regard to the markers examined in this chapter as well. While the deaf-mute can be seen as the catalyst for his visitors’ battle against loneliness, these people seem to be a mere diversion to him.

The four visitors all consider Singer to be someone special, the one person they can be themselves with. Jake Blount mentions that “[o]f all the places he had been this was the loneliest

town of all. Or it would be without Singer”(250), ascribing to the deaf-mute the capability to remedy solitude, placing him at the center of Blount’s brief relief from man’s eternal lonesomeness. Thus, to the drunk, Singer is of great importance. He even mentions the mute as the only one -besides himself- who “understood the truth”(250), placing the protagonist in a ‘unique’ position, and establishing a high degree of ‘attachment’. Biff Brannon does not state this as clearly, but again the scene in which he pays Singer a visit after the passing of his wife speaks for itself. He finds comfort in Singer, and only him, which marks his position as a ‘unique’ friend. Benedict Copeland emphasizes the ‘exclusiveness’ of his bond with Singer, as some sort of medicine against loneliness: “in the middle of the morning he went to Mr Singer’s room. The visit blunted the feeling of loneliness in him so that when he said good-bye he was at peace with himself once more”(133). Visiting the mute seems like a remedy against “the feeling of loneliness”(133), comparable to someone taking a pain-killer against a headache. Of course, it might be the case that any visit could have this effect, but Copeland had already pointed out the specific importance of Singer earlier in the story: “But peace would not come to him. [...] He remembered the white man’s face when he smiled behind the yellow match flame on that rainy night – and peace was in him”(83). This indicates that Singer, or “the white man”(83), is the sole bringer of peace -which I see as the contrary of loneliness- to the Doctor. Lastly, teenager Mick Kelly exposes a deeply ingrained feeling of ‘attachment’ to the mute as well. In addition to her intimate emotions towards him, she believes that he carries the same comportment towards her: “She talked to him more than she had ever talked to a person before. And if he could have talked he would have told her many things”(213). I believe that this is actually not the case at all, because -technically speaking- he has the ability to talk, but chooses not to. In my opinion, if their bond were as strong and unique as Mick Kelly suggests, Singer would find a way to express his feelings, either through talking -although he does not like this- or writing, as in his letters to the Greek. The girl, however, keeps believing in their relationship, and considers Singer to be the person she feels ‘most attached’ to: “She loved him better than anyone in the family [...]. It was a different love”(274).

All these views on Singer stand in stark contrast with his own observations on the matter. Although he allows these people into his life, there does not seem to be a special 'attachment' from his side, and these relationships are certainly not 'unique' or 'exclusive' to him, as they are to the four of them. Nonetheless, he looks forward to their visits: "Perhaps one of the people would come this evening to his room. He hoped so"(185). In my opinion, however, he sees their bonds in a more pragmatic light, as a diversion in order to kill time while he awaits his next trip to the Greek: "The want for A was always with him – just as it had been the first months after his friends had gone – and it was better to be with any person than to be too long alone"(181). What Singer is to his visitors -an intimate and unique source of comfort- the Greek is to him. There is an attachment between them - according to Singer- but of course their meetings are rare. Hence, he does not hold the four villagers in high esteem, but merely sees them as a pass-time: "He told his friend that they helped take his mind away from his lonesomeness"(85). Singer distinguishes between "his friend"(85), Antonapoulos, and the ones that distract him from the pain he feels from being away from the Greek. Additionally, he does not present them as individuals -which would instill a sense of 'uniqueness'- but as one homogenous group, thus reducing their importance. In sum, whereas his visitors feel like they have a special bond with Singer, and feel a great 'attachment' towards him, Singer remains quite indifferent. Instead of a reciprocal emotion, these markers once again result in a one-sided relationship.

1.2.3. Trust and Loyalty

The last topic to be discussed concerning Singer and the four villagers is "trust and loyalty"(160). With this, Sharabany means to bring up the "degree to which one can rely on the help and nonbetrayal of the friend"(160) as another marker of intimacy. In these relationships, they all depend on Singer, although it is questionable whether or not this is in their best interest. Not surprisingly, there is no mutual dependence, but additionally Singer does not seem to be very dependable in the end.

The villagers all display some sort of dependence on Singer, and often he fulfills this 'task' quite successfully. Jake Blount, for example, expects the mute to listen to him: "He wanted suddenly to return to the mute's quiet room and tell him of the thoughts that were in his mind"(60). Singer is compliant and always shows kindness: "His dinner had got cold because he couldn't look down to eat, but he was so polite that he let Blount go on talking"(118). When Biff Brannon's wife dies, Singer sends him "a letter of condolence"(112) and announces that he will be "a pallbearer at the funeral"(112). Although Brannon does not state his need for this explicitly, one can imagine that, in this situation, small gestures go a long way. Singer does not leave Benedict Copeland in the cold either, when he is suffering under the 'Willie-debacle': "'This here is Mr Singer that you heard Father speak about. [...] They just kindly come to inquire about us in our trouble'"(254). Also, when he spends the night in jail, Singer is there as well to pick him up: "A little group waited outside the jail for him. Mister Singer was there. Portia and Highboy and Marshall Nicolls were present also"(231). Doctor Copeland did not ask for any help, but nonetheless he receives some from Singer. Although these are just small acts of kindness, they transpose the idea that the mute can be counted on. In my opinion, Mick Kelly has the greatest expectations of Singer. An example of this is when she doubts whether or not to take a job, and she basically leaves the decision up to him: "She went up to see Mister Singer. The words came all in a rush. [...] Mister Singer considered. Then he nodded yes. She got the job"(279-280). She trusts his judgment concerning a life-changing decision, while -as usual- Singer is not all that sure what all the fuss is about.

Singer, however, does not rely on them, neither for help nor for advice. It seems like he does not trust them either, exemplified by this situation with Jake Blount: "'Find it lonesome?' The man shook his head in a way that might have meant either yes or no"(52). Instead of trusting his acquaintance and disclosing his state of loneliness, he keeps it to himself. To me, this indicates that he would not accept help either, but would prefer to keep a safe distance from others. After Singer commits suicide, it is also revealed that his "affairs were a mess"(311). This is surprising because he

seemed rock solid to everyone else. While he offered them support, he might have been able to use some help himself.

While people depend on Singer, I believe that either he does not realize to what extent, or he does not care and remains indifferent under this pressure. Throughout the story, he leaves the village several times for about a week, without notice: "He did not let anyone know of the trips beforehand"(192). His visitors are left baffled and confused: "When his visitors came and saw his empty room they went away with hurt surprise"(84-85). Mick Kelly, for example, is left with an "empty feeling" when "she saw that his door was open and his room dark"(220). Her reliance on him is once again made clear, just as is his indifference towards the matter.

As I find Singer's unannounced trips to Antonapoulos already a marker of non-intimacy, his suicide at the end of the novel, to me, is an undeniable confirmation of this. In my opinion, suicide can be seen as the ultimate betrayal of intimacy, and thus, of his 'friends'. Instead of allowing the possibility of an intimate relationship with his four visitors, he does not want to be helped and ends his suffering. With his death, any hopes for reciprocal intimacy in their relationships are shattered. As the villagers expected 'non-betrayal' from their 'intimate' friend, they were again left in a state of bafflement by Singer's action. Jake Blount did not feel "sad", but "angry"(297). "He remembered all the innermost thoughts that he had told to Singer, and with his death it seemed to him that they were lost. [...]But anyway he was dead, dead, dead. He could not be seen or spoken to [...]"(297). In my opinion, he fixates on the fact that Singer will no longer be there to listen to him, thus disappointing Blount as a friend. Benedict Copeland seems to reflect more on the trust he placed in Singer, which I believe he has lost now: "But truly with the death of that white man a dark sorrow had lain down in his heart. He had talked to him as to no other white man and had trusted him"(290). He further continues that "the mystery of his suicide had left him baffled and without support"(290), also reflecting on the help he got from the mute, which he will now have to do without.

Although Singer helped these people, I believe that, in the end, he left them alone with their troubles. Helping someone should not be examined through very specific situations, I think, but seen as a permanent state of willingness to help. This is lacking in the mute's comportment towards the four others, I believe, as he has fundamentally let them down, first by not being there for them when they needed him and then by fleeing from life -and thus also his needy friends- by committing suicide. So although these people originally experience a sense of trust in Singer, this trust is blemished by the end of the novel. Thus, this already one-sided intimacy is further diminished.

In short, the bonds between these five people were an example of distorted intimacy, concerning three different markers. Just like the relationship between Singer and Antonopoulos, all the effort and intimacy seems to be one-sided. The four people who visit Singer have a strong intimate feeling concerning their bond, as they feel Singer understands them, they feel they have a 'unique' and 'exclusive' attachment and they strongly rely on the mute for help. Once again the idea of reciprocity in intimacy is not achieved, resulting in non-intimate relationships. As Jake Blount states it: "Nothing had happened except that he had made a friend and lost him"(300). They all thought they made a friend, relieving them from their loneliness for a short while, but in the end they are right back where they started.

1.3. The Villagers

The main focus of the story is on Singer, the Greek, and on Singer's visitors. These visitors, however, also come into contact with other people; other friends of Singer and other villagers. As the aforementioned relationships did not appear to qualify as intimate, maybe other bonds can. Therefore, in this last chapter the potential intimacy between the villagers is examined. It is apparent that they are all lonely and thus do not experience intimacy. Therefore, the nuance of the possibility, and not necessarily the completion of intimacy, is crucial.

I perceive a potential development of friendship between Singer's four visitors, and in my opinion, so does Singer. This becomes clear when the four of them accidentally decided to visit him

at the same time, while usually “[t]hey never came together – always alone”(181). The mute had “[i]n a vague way [...] expected this to be the end of something”(186), which I interpret as him expecting them to hit it off. These people all need someone to talk to, and Singer ended up fulfilling this need. Therefore, they have a kind of common core which could facilitate a connection. However, to Singer’s amazement this bonding does not take place: “Singer was bewildered. Always each of them had so much to say. Yet now that they were together they were silent. [...] [T]here was only a feeling of strain”(186). Instead of kindling friendships, the visitors remain closed off and do not interact; a true missed opportunity.

Throughout the story, I remarked a special focus on two potential relationships. Firstly, their similar views on society suggest a possible friendship between Doctor Benedict Copeland and Jake Blount. Secondly, Biff Brannon’s special interest in Mick Kelly indicates a potential spark between them as well. Of course, the main characters also interact with other villagers, and out of these interactions develop possible bonds as well. For example, Mick Kelly and Harry, whose friendship seems to be blossoming at one point: “lately she and Harry had been right good friends”(144). They even become some kind of lovers, but precisely because of this their bond is shattered. However, the relationships between the four aforementioned protagonists remain the focus in this chapter, in order to set some boundaries. Obviously, an examination of the relationships between all the major and minor characters in the book would be too elaborate. First of all the bond between Jake Blount and Benedict Copeland is investigated concerning Sharabany’s indicator of intimacy: “frankness and spontaneity”(160). Then, through her marker “sensitivity and knowing”(160), a study of the intimacy between Biff Brannon and Mick Kelly is conducted.

1.3.1. Frankness and Spontaneity

Sharabany’s notion of “frankness and spontaneity”, or “self-disclosure”(160), is an interesting one to scrutinize concerning the potential intimacy between Mick Kelly and Biff Brannon. Ideally, in an intimate relationship they would get to know each other, and they would feel comfortable

revealing themselves to one another. Yet again, a disequilibrium in effort can be observed as only one person is interested in the other one's self-disclosure.

Biff Brannon clearly wants to get to know Mick Kelly: "He had walked in the neighbourhood where he might see Mick"(205). Throughout the story, it becomes clear that he does not long for a simple, or "mundane" relationship, but a more "profound"(Margulis et al. 137) one. Evidence for this can be found in his intention of establishing 'frankness and spontaneity' between him and Mick Kelly. This relationship, however, is not to be seen in a sexual light: "[Biff Brannon] wanted to reach out his hand and touch her sunburned, tousled hair – but not as he had ever touched a woman"(109). To the contrary, it seems like he feels a fatherly sentiment towards her, proposing some sort of father-daughter relationship. This idea is especially underlined when the café owner is daydreaming on having a baby: "To adopt a couple of children. [...] About three or four years old so they would always feel like he was their own father. Their Dad. Our Father. The little girl like Mick (or Baby?) at that age"(207). Hence, an intimate bond with Mick could fill the void he feels, and thus remedy his loneliness.

However, the reciprocity of self-disclosure is crucial in order to establish an intimate relationship, and this does not seem to be the case here. While Biff Brannon intends to get to know Mick Kelly, she is far more reluctant and fends off his attempts to get closer. While he is genuinely intrigued, she remains uninterested: "'And how are you getting on with your business now?' 'What business?' Mick asked suspiciously. 'Just the business of living,' he said. 'School – and so forth.' 'O.K., I reckon,' she said"(186). He gives her the opportunity to start talking -which she does to Mr Singer- but she does not respond in a way that nurtures this possibility of intimacy. Quite to the contrary, it is clear from her answer that she is not open to 'frank and spontaneous' conversation with the man. When she talks to Harry about him, it is immediately clear that she will never open up to him: "'I hate Mister Brannon,' Mick said"(216). The one-sidedness of their bond becomes all the more apparent when contrasting her statement with the way Biff Brannon feels about seeing her: "He remembered

that perhaps Mick would come. [...] A warmth and liveliness returned to him”(209). Her hatred towards him could not be more different from the warm sentiment he feels towards her.

I believe that the main interest of Biff Brannon in Mick Kelly was to establish some kind of self-disclosure. If he had succeeded, this one marker could have possibly formed the basis of an intimate relationship, but because of a lack of reciprocity, this failed. As in the other relationships in the novel, the essence here is the possibility of intimacy and not the actuality of it. Biff Brannon tries to bond with her, but not in the way Singer’s visitors bond with him. In the previous friendships, the self-disclosure was always one-sided: someone wanted to be listened to, without having to return the favor. In this case, however, Brannon is desperate to listen to her. Perhaps his intention is even to establish a two-way conversation, in my opinion showing a possibility of intimacy. Nonetheless, Mick Kelly diminishes this by displaying a strong dislike for the café owner and by not giving in to his attempts. At the end of the novel, it is made clear that he will never succeed, as he no longer has these kindly feelings for her: “For a year this love had blossomed strangely. He had questioned it a hundred times and found no answer. And now, as a summer flower shatters in September, it was finished. There was no one”(311). Although there was a chance of developing a friendship, Biff Brannon ends up by himself again, as does Mick Kelly. Thus he was unable to overcome his loneliness: “Loneliness gripped him so that his breath quickened”(311).

1.3.2. Sensitivity and Knowing

Lastly, the possible friendship between Jake Blount and Benedict Copeland is discussed, with regard to Sharabany’s second indicator of intimacy, “sensitivity and knowing”(160). Throughout the story it becomes clear that they share the same philosophies -countering the capitalist system- which could obviously form a basis of a mutual understanding, thus fulfilling the aforementioned principle. However, the situation does not appear all that promising in the beginning of the novel: “Before he left, Biff saw [Doctor Copeland] turn on Blount with a look of quivering hatred”(24). Anyone would agree that ‘hatred’ is not the ideal start of an intimate bond. Especially not in their case, when this feeling comes from Jake Blount dragging the doctor -“a nigger”- “in[to] a place where white men

drink”(24). Although he did not mean any harm, it is clearly an uncomfortable and embarrassing situation.

When Singer’s visitors all visit him at the same time, Blount encounters Copeland again, and starts talking to him: “Jake Blount stood beside Doctor Copeland. ‘I know your face. We run into each other once before – on the steps outside.’ [...] ‘I was not aware that we were acquainted,’ he said. Then his stiff body seemed to shrink. He stepped back until he was just outside the threshold of the room”(186). Benedict Copeland is clearly reluctant to converse with the drunk who shamed him, and thus breaks off the communication. This lasts until Copeland’s son is mutilated in prison, and Blount decides to pay him a visit with Singer: “‘This here is Mr Singer that you heard Father speak about. And this other white gentleman is Mr Blount and he is a very close friend of Mr Singer. They just kindly come to inquire about us in our trouble.’”(254). There is an apparent change of mood, going from a hateful atmosphere to -in Portia’s words- a more ‘kindly’ ambience.

When they finally start talking, in the first instance they seem to agree, comprehending each other’s view points and seeing eye to eye: “‘So far as I and my people are concerned the South is Fascist now and always has been.’ ‘Yeah. [...] That’s the system,’ Jake said”(262-263). However, this situation of a sufficiently harmonious understanding is quickly turned around. Despite the fact that Copeland is determined to “not quarrel”(263), they end up doing exactly this. Although they seem to be the only people with the same standpoints in the village, they do not manage to fully realize nor appreciate this. While fundamentally they are saying the same thing, they lack an understanding of this fact. Unfortunately, they do not realize that this is the one person they could experience a deep sense of understanding with. They end their conversation “in bitter disappointment and anger”(267), swearing and shouting at each other. This time it is Blount who takes off, leaving a possibly enriching encounter behind.

Nonetheless, Blount eventually realizes that they are like-minded souls: “Copeland [...] was a fanatic, so that it was maddening to reason with him. Still the terrible anger that they had felt that

night had later been hard to understand. Copeland *knew*. [...] [O]n some points they might be able to work together after all.”(298). Lamentably, this realization comes too late, as Benedict Copeland is already gone and Portia refuses to tell Blount where he has gone. Although in the end Jake Blount understands Doctor Copeland, the opportunity has passed and he is left alone, with the hope of establishing an intimate relationship based on ‘sensitivity and knowing’ with Copeland reduced to zero. Devastated, Blount is left with an “emptiness in him”(300), and “want[ing] to look neither backwards nor forwards”(300), possibly indicating a loss of hope. For a slight moment, at least, the possibility of intimacy had stood before him.

As expected, there is a fundamental lack of intimacy in the relationships between the villagers, comparable to the non-intimacy between Singer and the Greek and Singer and his visitors. Once again an absence of reciprocity proved to be a pressure point. In the end, they all end up alone -without Singer, but also without their potential friend- but I do not believe intimacy as a concept should be placed in an exclusively negative light. For example, Jake Blount’s sudden grasp of the situation at the end shows that there is hope, although, tragically, for this specific relationship it has been lost.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to look at the theme of loneliness in Carson McCullers' novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. Lonesomeness can be seen as a basic human condition, thus unavoidable. Nonetheless mankind desperately attempts to overcome it (cf. Mijuskovic 3, Cousins qtd. in Jarski 304). Of course, 'solitude' in itself is not a straightforward concept. In order to resolve this, I narrowed the study down to 'intimacy', something essential to breaking out of loneliness, in my opinion. Sharabany proposed eight markers of intimate relationships, which were selectively used in the investigation. The most interesting ones -concerning specific bonds- were elected and linked to the novel. With these markers I examined whether or not the friendships presented in the story could be considered genuinely intimate. In other words, whether they were "profound" or "mundane" bonds (cf. Margulis et al.).

In my examination on whether or not there is a presence of intimacy in the book, we saw that -clearly- there is a lack of it. It was exemplified that this failure of intimacy is due to a prominent one-sidedness in the behavior of the characters. In every relationship in this novel, one person seems to experience an intimate or profound relationship, but this sentiment is never reciprocated. This stands in stark contrast to two basic principles of intimacy; "mutuality" and "reciprocity" (Sharabany 160). In the relationship between Singer and the Greek, for example, the latter remains rather indifferent, while Singer is convinced of their intimate friendship: he keeps talking to Antonapoulos, all the while receiving basically no response. The villagers have the same kind of bond with Singer, as they believe he profoundly understands them. When examining this situation through Singer's viewpoint, however, it becomes clear that this is not the case. Amongst themselves, the mute's visitors also try to establish a friendship, but again these efforts are not reciprocal. Thus, in all these friendships, there is a disequilibrium in their consideration: while 'profound' to one person, the other considers it as a merely 'mundane' kinship. Of course, there are other relationships to be encountered in the novel that have not yet been investigated, so these open up an interesting window for follow-up research. But for the scrutinized bonds, I conclude that the movement of

intimacy can be seen as some sort of hierarchy; Antonapoulos stands on top, adored by Singer. He, in his turn, is exalted by his four visitors, who fill up the bottom ranks. This does not concord to the principle of reciprocity, in which everyone would be on the same level.

In this narrative, the idea comes forward that man is not able to overcome his loneliness. The studied relationships may offer a brief relief (cf. Mijuskovic 9), but they all terminate at one point, leaving the 'participants' in the same situation as before. The fact that they are not able to establish intimate bonds -which could diminish their sense of isolation and loneliness- reflects an utter failure of intimacy in this novel, which equals a failure in overcoming solitude. Nonetheless, the characters keep trying, they refuse to give up, which breaks through the pessimism as a ray of sunshine through the clouds. It seems that Norman Cousins was right in stating that "the eternal quest of the individual human being is to shatter his loneliness" (qtd. in Jarski 304). Mankind courageously takes up the Sisyphean task of attempting to overcome his loneliness, opening up the possibility of intimacy. If no one kept trying, a failure of intimacy would be certain from the start. However, together with man's effort comes hope. Although -as man can never completely overcome his lonesomeness- it is plausible that McCullers' solution to this dilemma is the simple and honest acceptance of this state of affairs. But, as apparent from this novel, although intimacy seems like an unobtainable good, man must continue the quest for this Holy Grail.

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