# BEYOND THE GROTESQUE: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ANDERSON'S *WINESBURG, OHIO* AND MCCULLERS' *THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER*

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# PREFACE

The few critics who have commented on a possible link between *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* and *Winesburg, Ohio* only go so far as to say that McCullers' use of the grotesque is in the same tradition as Anderson's; however, I believe the relationship between the two works is much stronger. McCullers is known to have been influenced in some of her writings by other works. For example, her reading of D. H. Lawrence's "The Prussian Officer" led her a few years later to write *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, according to many critics and biographers. My intention is to show the numerous parallels between *Heart* and *Winesburg* and, in doing this, suggest that Anderson's *Winesburg* may have been the dominant influence on McCullers' composition of *Heart*. Even if one remains unconvinced of the existence of any direct influence on McCullers by Anderson, the study of the relationships between the two novels does allow for a richer understanding of McCullers' *Heart*.

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# BEYOND THE GROTESQUE: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ANDERSON'S WINESBURG, OHIO AND MCCULLERS' THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER

Carson McCullers' significant contribution to the rise of twentieth-century Southern American fiction as a potent literary force is seldom disputed. The intricately drawn characters in The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, her earliest major work, exemplify her skill as a writer, and the depiction of the complex relationships between these characters is equally laudable. In examining her evolvement as a writer, Virginia Spencer Carr has indicated the apparent influence of other writers on McCullers' fiction, for she was a prolific reader, especially during her early years.[1] One pronounced influence on character development in Reflections in a Golden Eye, for example, was D. H. Lawrence's "The Prussian Officer" which McCullers read in the early 1930's--an influence pointed out by Carr[2] as well as by Frederick J. Hoffman.[3] Because her writing often reflects the writings of others, it would seem only natural to assume that McCullers may have been influenced in writing Heart; yet, the unmasking of any influence on this novel has been for the most part virtually nonexistent or else quite vague. Too often overlooked are the parallels--both in terms of overall structure and character development--between Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio and McCullers' Heart.

Walter Allen perceptively notes that McCullers' "deeper affinities" are with Anderson, particularly in terms of theme, since each "explores the twin themes of human alienation and incommunicableness";[4] however, he does not elaborate upon this point. While Allen's comment does draw Anderson and McCullers closer, any relationship between Winesburg and Heart based upon theme alone remains exceedingly tenuous. This becomes obvious when Leslie A. Fiedler, in his comprehensive study, Love and Death in the American Novel, asserts that "McCullers' themes are common to the whole group to which she belongs: the impossibility of reciprocal love, the sadness of a world in which growing up means only learning that isolation is the lot of everyone."[5] Thus, more than common theme is needed to establish a stronger relationship between Winesburg and Heart.

The significance of setting has been mentioned briefly by William Van O'Connor[6] and John W. Aldridge,[7] but again this by itself does not necessarily indicate any close relationship between the two novels. Numerous writers have chosen similar settings. Commenting on Anderson's choice of a small town setting for his characters in Winesburg, O'Connor states, "Presumably a village setting, which ordinarily suggests peaceful simplicity, gave these figures more dramatic contrast than Chicago would have provided."[8] McCullers' choice of a small town setting in the South for Heart is equally commendable. As Aldridge explains, "The girl Mick [Kelly] is not only anchored; she is hemmed in on all sides by characters out of native Southern life. . . . The stage for her is crowded with people, and around and behind them she has the great vitality, richness, and oddity of the Southern spirit and environment to react to and escape from."[9]

Chester E. Eisinger in Fiction of the Forties willingly asserts that "the general ambience of tone and feeling in [Heart] reminds one of Sherwood Anderson."[10] The status of this similarity between the two novels, however, is later relegated to mere coincidence when Eisinger blunts--indeed almost negates--the relationship by remarking that McCullers did not include Anderson in listing the writers she admired.[11] The fact that she did not specifically include Anderson in her listing of "admired writers" proves nothing, for influence is not dependent upon one's admiration of others. Eisinger does not indicate whether this listing was oral or written, nor does he mention when the listing occurred. In any case, it is doubtful that McCullers' listing of "admired writers" would not have fluctuated throughout her lengthy career.[12]

One element which pervades both novels is the utilization of "grotesque" characters. Anderson treats the subject in the opening section of Winesburg, "The Book of the Grotesque," in which an old writer's theory as to how one becomes a grotesque is explained: "It was his notion that the moment one of [the] people took one of the [many] truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood."[13] This theory is not really worked out, according to O'Connor,[14] but it does suggest what Anderson believed to cause one to become a grotesque. Allen agrees with O'Connor that the theory is not thoroughly worked out; yet, he makes the distinction--without sufficient explanation--that whereas Anderson's characters are grotesques, McCullers' are merely freaks.[15] Although opinions frequently vary as to what constitutes the grotesque, a good general definition for its use in modern fiction is the following: "Whenever in modern fiction characters appear who are either physically or spiritually deformed and perform actions that are clearly intended by the author to be abnormal, the work can be called grotesque."[16] While biographers Oliver Evans[17] and Richard M. Cook[18] refer to the peculiar incapacities or deformities of the characters in Heart as dramatizations of human loneliness and incompletion, their labels for these characters differ. Evans calls them "freakist"[19] and Cook calls them "grotesque,"[20] but both are referring to the same characteristics.

Dayton Kohler's statement in his article, "Carson McCullers: Variations on a Theme," is somewhat more positive and direct in establishing a relationship between Winesburg and Heart, based on the utilization of the grotesque. He claims that "most of the men and women in her world are grotesques in the manner of Sherwood Anderson's people in Winesburg, Ohio: social misfits, psychological freaks. Many of them are maimed or deformed."[21] This observation is undeniable, but the relationship between the two works is not limited to Anderson's and McCullers' employment of grotesque characters. For example, Alwyn Berland's brief, thought-provoking study of the "crucifixion" of the grotesque characters in Winesburg provides an excellent basis for a similar study of Heart.[22] Along with such a parallel are several additional parallels, evidently unnoticed by scholars, which deserve closer examination and which suggest the distinct possibility of Anderson's influence on McCullers' Heart.

Carr's recent thorough biography of McCullers' life has established that Anderson's works were among those read by McCullers in the early 1930's, so she was most assuredly familiar with Winesburg.[23] Beyond Kohler's observation that the grotesques in Heart are in the same tradition as Anderson's in Winesburg, there are other marked resemblances between the two novels which draw them closer to each other. Chief among these are: (1) the gravitation of major characters toward a central figure who supposedly understands them; (2) the utilization of a "room" concept; (3) two characters who are "men of ideas"; (4) the eventual "crucifixion" of major characters; and (5) the significant development of the image of hands. Even if one remains unconvinced of the existence of any direct influence on McCullers by Anderson, the study of the relationships between the two novels does allow for a richer understanding of McCullers' Heart.

Although George Willard is not included in every tale compiled in Winesburg, he does appear most frequently of all the characters and functions as a unifier of the sometimes rather disparate tales. It is toward him that many of the subordinate characters are drawn. They believe he is the one who can understand what they feel, and so they confide their hopes and dreams in him; but often, as in the case of Tom Foster, Willard does not understand them. Enoch Robinson, who explains to Willard, "I have looked at you when you went past me on the street and I think you can understand" (Winesburg, p. 175), is representative of the desire to find someone who understands. Whether Willard understands is not clear or even too important; it is his interest and willingness to listen to their personal stories that maintains and strengthens the attraction.

John Singer, the central character or force toward which the others gravitate in Heart, is more clearly delineated. As a deaf-mute, he possesses the attributes which seem to make him an ideal confidant, one who must "listen" intently with his eyes, reading others' lips, and who never interrupts their talking. Mick Kelly, Jake Blount, Dr. Copeland, and Biff Brannon each see in him some special, inexplicable quality. The narrator discreetly suggests this when he states, "One by one they would come to Singer's room to spend the evening with him . . . and talk in the silent room--for they felt that the mute would always understand whatever they wanted to say to him. And maybe even more than that."[24] Each is able to give Singer all the qualities he wants the mute to have. When Mick, Blount, Copeland, and Brannon find themselves together in Singer's room, the four of them have little to say to one another. Instead of freely speaking among themselves, they direct their words to Singer, for "their thoughts . . . converge in him as the spokes of a wheel lead to the center hub" (Heart, p. 209). But Singer does not always understand them. This becomes apparent in the letters he writes (but never sends) to his institutionalized retarded friend, Spiros Antonapoulos. In one particular letter (Heart, pp. 211-15) Singer is quite candid about his relationships with his four new acquaintances and admits that there is much about them that he does not understand. Thus, just as Willard is sought out by many who think he understands them in Winesburg, so is Singer approached in Heart; nevertheless, the extent of their understanding is not so great as others believe.

A second element which strengthens the relationship between Winesburg and Heart is the concept of "rooms." This concept is expressed in Winesburg in the tale entitled "Loneliness" which presents the story of Enoch Robinson. The narrator states categorically that "the story of Enoch is in fact the story of a room almost more than it is the story of a man" (Winesburg, p. 168). Enoch's inability to express himself fluently is the reason that he no longer allows his artist friends to come to his New York apartment. Having wanted so much to communicate his ideas about art to them and yet constantly frustrated by his ineptitude, he withdraws into the room and creates a group of imaginary people. These are people whom he can dominate. The room becomes a retreat--the focal point of his existence--from the reality he must face each day in New York City. His happiness, however, is temporary, for his roomful of friends is soon destroyed. By allowing a woman who lives in the same building to enter his room, Enoch is faced with competition there, and he fears that her presence may diminish his power in the room. Since he fears her superiority, he drives her out, but much to his chagrin his imaginary friends exit with her, never to return. Enoch's basic problem is that he has never grown up; consequently, as a child, he is doomed to endure failure after failure until he allows himself to face the realities of the world. As the narrator states, "The child in him kept bumping against things, against actualities like money and sex and opinions" (Winesburg, p. 168). Enoch does invite George Willard to his room in Winesburg to tell him about the other room in New York, because he feels Willard will understand his sad story; but no one else is ever allowed there.

In Heart, Mick Kelly's "inside room," where foreign countries, music, and plans exist, is the equivalent of Enoch's room of imaginary people. Enoch's life outside his room closely parallels Mick's "outside room"; whereas he busies himself in studying French and going to art school, Mick's outside room encompasses school, her family, and every day happenings. Although the terminology used by McCullers is somewhat more specific than Anderson's, the idea remains the same.

Mick does include Singer in her inside room, but it is her idealized perception of him as the only one who understands her. Even he is never made aware of her personal dream-filled room. The same actualities which Enoch bumps against, bringing an end to his room, also signal the end of Mick's inside room. Her initial sexual experience with Harry Minowitz somehow changes her so that she can no longer retreat into her inside room of dreams. The other actuality which further locks her out of this deeply personal world is her new job at Woolworth's, which leaves her too tense and exhausted to spend time making plans or composing music. Her newly acquired association with actualities such as sex and money signifies her loss of childlike innocence as well as her initial into the realities of the adult world.

A third parallel between Winesburg and Heart involves the characterization of Anderson's Joe Welling and McCullers' Jake Blount. Both characters are similar in their intermittent, overly zealous explosions of ideas. The narrator's vivid description of Welling in Winesburg accurately encapsulates his unusual personality and mannerisms:

> He was like a tiny little volcano that lies silent for days and then suddenly spouts fire. No, he wasn't like that--he was like a man who is subject to fits, one who walks among his fellow men inspiring fear because a fit may come upon him suddenly and blow him away into a strange uncanny physical state in which his eyes roll and his legs and arms jerk. He was like that, only that the visitation that descended upon Joe Welling was a mental and not a physical thing. He was beset by ideas and in the throes of one of his ideas was uncontrollable. Words rolled and tumbled from his mouth. . . . Pouncing upon a bystander he began to talk. For the bystander there was no escape. The excited man breathed into his face, peered into his eyes, pounded upon his chest with a shaking forefinger, demanded, compelled attention (Winesburg, p. 103).

Obviously Welling is afraid of no one, and he does not hesitate to explain and enlarge on any new idea that has occurred to him.

Blount in Heart is much like Anderson's "man of ideas." He too is like a volcano spouting fire. Repeatedly the narrator describes how "the words swelled within him and gushed from his mouth" (Heart, p. 156) or how "the words came out as though a dam inside him had broken" (Heart, p. 24). Blount, so intent in wanting to correct the inequalities of society, is usually portrayed as a man about to explode. Attaching himself to Singer much of the time, he talks for hours, pounding his fist on the table as he attempts to explain his ideas. Like Welling "in the throes of one of his ideas," Blount is uncontrollable, talking "at such a violent pace that the sounds [are] all shaken up together" (Heart, pp. 24-25). And when he is drinking, his conduct is even more boisterous.

A fourth major parallel between Winesburg and Heart involves the development and subsequent "crucifixion" of the major characters. The message of Doctor Parcival that "everyone in the world is Christ and they are all crucified" (Winesburg, p. 57) is an accurate prophecy in Winesburg. This view is particularly valid if one accepts Berland's comment in his short, provocative article "Sherwood Anderson and the Pathetic Grotesque" that "in Anderson's world they [the characters] are crucified because real life is a trap from which none . . . can escape to the dream life they desire. . . . No one escapes. There are no alternatives; even death is pathetic. . . ."[25] As a result, each character fails in the quest to fulfill his dream and, furthermore, is defeated in his attempt to communicate his dream to others.

Jesse Bentley exemplifies this inability to realize one's dream or to communicate it to others in "Godliness." Here we are introduced to a man whose dream is to serve God in a special way: "It seemed to him that in his day as in those other and older days, kingdoms might be created and new impulses given to the lives of men by the power of God speaking through a chosen servant. He longed to be such a servant" (Winesburg, p. 70). He becomes increasingly possessed with the idea that all the land surrounding his farm should also be his. Moreover, he fears that the other farmers are enemies of God and may attempt to take his land and possessions from him. For this reason, he prays that his wife give birth to a son whom he will name David--a son who will help him turn the surrounding land to the service of God.[26] When Bentley's wife gives birth to a daughter, Louise, Jesse's dream is dealt a severe blow.

Years later his dream is given new life, however, when Louise gives birth to a son named David. Still hopeful for a sign or message from God, Bentley eventually takes custody of the boy. The narrator observes, "For him the coming of the boy David did much to bring back with renewed force the old faith and it seemed to him that God had at last looked with favor upon him" (Winesburg, p. 82); but he is no more successful with David at his side than he had been before his grandson's arrival. Twice Bentley takes David to the woods where he hopes God will fulfill his dream of receiving some message from Him. On the first excursion, David runs away from his grandfather in fear as the old man prays for a sign. On the second occasion, David does not cooperate in Bentley's plan to offer a lamb as a burnt offering and again runs away from him in fear--this time never to return.[27] Thus, Bentley's dream is not fulfilled. According to the narrator,

> . . . his mind was confused and he was not surprised by the boy's disappearance. By the roadside he sat down on a log and began to talk about God. That is all they ever got out of

> him. Whenever David's name was mentioned he looked vaguely at the sky and said that a messenger from God had taken the boy. "It happened because I was too greedy for glory," he declared, and would have no more to say in the matter (Winesburg, p. 102).

Not only is Bentley unable to translate his dream into reality, but he is also unsuccessful in communicating to David what his dream has been. Therefore, he fails, having been frustrated in attempting to realize his dream.

Another character in Winesburg who is no more successful in achieving his dream is Elmer Cowley, the merchant's son, in "Queer." Elmer is ashamed of the fearful, backward way in which he has spent his life. He yearns to establish himself as an equal to George Willard, yet envisions Willard as the representative of the public opinion of Winesburg which has condemned the Cowleys to queerness: "He thought the boy who passed and repassed Cowley & Son's store and who stopped to talk to people in the street must be thinking of him and perhaps laughing at him. George Willard, he felt, belonged to the town, typified the town, represented in his person the spirit of the town" (Winesburg, p. 194). Elmer's first attempt to meet with Willard ends in total frustration, for he finds himself unable to express to George his determination not to be queer. His second attempt is actually no more successful than the first, although he does feel pride in having the courage to physically strike Willard. His violence, however, results from his inability to articulate his true feelings. All Elmer can mutter is "I'll be washed and ironed. I'll be washed and ironed and starched" (Winesburg, p. 200), an expression frequently used by his father and old, half-witted Mook, both of whom he considers to be queer. Thus, his use of the expression identifies him with them, despite the pride he feels in having struck Willard. It is also unlikely that Elmer will ever lose himself in Cleveland where he plans to escape to become indistinguishable in the crowds and no longer be considered queer.

Other characters in Winesburg are equally unable to realize or communicate their dreams, just as Jesse Bentley and Elmer Cowley fail, and fit into the crucifixion pattern suggested by Berland. Wing Biddlebaum is misunderstood, beaten, and chased from his town because the townspeople misinterpret the use of his hands in trying to communicate his dream to his students. Elizabeth Willard is constantly frustrated in her attempts to communicate to her son the dream she once had and now wants to transfer to him as his ambition. Enoch Robinson's childlike dream world of artists with whom he can communicate as well as flaunt his superiority is blasted in the face of reality; he is in control only in his dream and cannot compete with a member of the real world, such as the woman he allows into his room. In defeat and disillusionment he returns from New York to Winesburg. In each case the characters in Winesburg are crucified, for none is able to realize his dream, to translate the dream into reality.

This concept of crucifixion readily applies to the major characters in Heart. Just as Mick, Blount, Copeland, and Brannon find a sense of security and understanding in Singer, he is equally devoted to Antonapoulos. Singer's dream is to be with his retarded, deaf-mute friend as they once were before Antonapoulos was institutionalized. It is this which he most desires in life, although those around him are not aware of it. The initial separation of the two is devastating for Singer, for he no longer can express himself, but he manages to continue living day to day with the knowledge that he will at least be able to visit Antonapoulos periodically. This simple longing for his friend is powerfully expressed in one of Singer's letters to Antonapoulos in which he explains, "The way I need you is a loneliness I cannot bear. . . . I am not meant to be alone and without you who understand" (Heart, pp. 214-15). Consequently, upon learning of his friend's death, Singer commits suicide.

When Heart--first entitled The Mute--was in its preliminary outline stage, McCullers commented in her general remarks that society is often to blame for the denial of man's ability to express himself.[28] This accounts for the institutionalization of Antonapoulos by his Greek cousin, Charles Parker. The action hurts Antonapoulos very little, but it creates a desperate, futile situation for Singer, since he depends so much upon his friend. According to the narrator, "Charles Parker did not know much about the American language--but he understood the American dollar very well, and he had used his money and influence to admit his cousin to the asylum without delay. There was nothing Singer could do" (Heart, p. 9). Indeed Singer is frustrated by this, but he is so deeply committed to Antonapoulos that his infrequent visits with his friend at the asylum provide sufficient stimulus for him to remain hopeful of their being permanently reunited someday. Unfortunately, Antonapoulos' death shatters Singer's dreams of being with him; under the circumstances, he has no reason to live, unaware of his importance to those around him.

Biff Brannon, owner of the New York Café, appears to suffer less outwardly than any of the other major characters in Heart; therefore, his "crucificion" may seem less poignant. But his inner suffering and turmoil are great. Although his heart is full of compassion for the less fortunate, he receives little or nothing in return. Almost every time he speaks to Mick Kelly, for example, his intentions are misunderstood. Brannon never denies his wife's complaint that he is too kind to the freaks who come into his business, for he does have special feelings for the sick and disabled. His hospitality is even extended to Jake Blount, though his cordiality is seldom returned. Brannon gives him forty dollars as Blount, who openly admits that the café owner will never be repaid, prepares to leave town. Brannon's external appearance gradually mirrors his internal feelings, especially after his wife's death, when he begins to effect a more feminine lifestyle, wearing her old perfume and often polishing his fingernails. In a sense, he is caught in the middle of two extremes--neither totally male nor female, happy nor sad. His life seems stagnant and any hope for a better future is only momentary. As the narrator proclaims, his "left eye delved narrowly into the past while the right gazed wide and affrighted into a future of blackness, error, and ruin. And he was suspended between radiance and darkness" (Heart, p. 356). His dreams cannot even be articulated. Indeed Brannon is doomed to a life of detachment--an objective observer but never an active participant in life.

Blount is headed for a future even less secure and with little or no promise of success in achieving his dream. Alternating between drunken violence and sullen quietness, he offends almost everyone except Singer who he believes is one of the chosen few who truly understand him. Relating the difficulty of his mission to Singer, Blount explains, "I go all around and try to tell them. And they laugh. I can't make them understand anything. No matter what I say I can't seem to make them see the truth" (Heart, p. 130). Earlier in his life Blount once became so possessed with his mission that he drove a nail through the palm of his hand; in fact, he still equates himself with Jesus. His strategy is to anger those who are unjustly treated--the poor factory workers, the blacks, etc.--so that they will band together and demand the freedom and equality rightfully theirs. But he fails to make anyone understand his dream, not even Singer, though Blount believes that he does. And after Singer's death, he is deprived of the only one in this small town who ever came close to understanding the true meaning of his mission. With the death of Singer, Blount leaves town, confused with what has happened, crucified, having failed to accomplish anything.

Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland, the black physician who desires his people to raise their standard of living and assume their rightful position in society, is no more successful in achieving his dreams. In this respect, Copeland even fails with his own family, for he is too formal, too rigid for them. His daughter, Portia, explains to him, "Us talk like our own Mama and her peoples and their peoples before them. You think out everthing in your brain. While us rather talk from something in our hearts that has been there for a long time" (Heart, p. 78). Separated from his family long ago, Copeland walks daily by himself from house to house, treating the sick and teaching them how to better themselves. He feels that it is his duty--his reason for working--to teach his people, and one of his dreams is that there will be someone to carry on his teaching long after he is gone. His hope is fruitless, however, for not even one of his own four children appears vaguely interested in continuing his mission. Despite his hard work, his diligence in attempting to educate his patients and their families, Copeland fails. Finally, too weakened by tuberculosis to take care of himself and to resist the urging of his children, he grudgingly assents to move from his house to the country where relatives can care for him. Contemplating his life's work, he sadly admits to himself that "for forty years his mission was his life and his life was his mission. And yet all remained to be done and nothing was completed" (Heart, p. 333). Copeland's dream has not been realized, and he too meets defeat.

Much of Mick Kelly's life revolves around her love of music. Early in the story she tells her younger brother, Bubber, that "there's one thing I would give anything for. And that's a piano. If we had a piano I'd practice every single night and learn every piece in the world. That's the thing I want more than anything else" (Heart, p. 40). Through music she is able to achieve the most fulfilling satisfaction in self-expression and temporarily escape from her mundane existence. Without a piano at home Mick often spends an hour after school practicing on the piano in the gymnasium while the girls' basketball team is noisily playing games. For a while she gives her lunch money to a girl who teaches her some piano basics. Sometimes she walks down the street late at night and hides in the shrubbery next to a house in which live a couple who play much classical music on their radio. There she sits alone, deeply swayed by the music and aware of the effects each symphonic movement has on her emotions. Singer eventually buys a radio to keep in his room; thus, Mick is provided with another source for listening to the classical music which she loves. Afterwards, she tries desperately to recall the music she has heard so she can write it down. She also creates songs of her own, an outlet for expressing the way she feels, but cannot communicate in any other way.

Mick's dreams, however, are dealt a severe jolt largely because of family economic problems. After Bubber accidentally shoots Baby Wilson, the Kelly family must pay for her private hospital room and nurse. This unfortunate occurrence, coupled with Mr. Kelly's inability to adequately support his family after his accident, forces each of the Kellys to contribute as much as possible for family living expenses. When Mick is given the opportunity to work at Woolworth's, she ambivalently accepts. She realizes it will probably mean an end to her education, but she wants to help her family. Her job drastically changes her way of life, as the narrator explains: "But now no music was in her mind. . . . It was like she was too tense. Or maybe because it was like the store took all her energy and time. Woolworth's wasn't the same as school. When she used to come home from school she felt good and was ready to start working on the music. But now she was always too tired. At home she just ate supper and slept and then ate breakfast and went off to the store again" (Heart, p. 350). Bereft of most of her dreams, Mick is reduced to convincing herself that all her dreaming has been in some way worthwhile. The reader is left with the impression, nonetheless, that she is doomed to working at Woolworth's for most of her life with little hope of fulfilling her dreams of a piano and the musical expression it would allow her. Thus, she too seems crucified.

One of the first characters introduced in Winesburg is Wing Biddlebaum, and it is in his chapter that we initially become acquainted with the fifth major relationship between Winesburg and Heart, the importance of hand imagery. The tale is entitled "Hands," and the reader is explicitly told that this is to be a story of hands

(Winesburg, p. 28). Because of his hands, Biddlebaum is forced to leave his position as a school teacher in a small town in Pennsylvania and to change his name from Adolph Myers. His major mode of expression is his hands, as the narrator relates, "Wing Biddlebaum talked much with his hands. The slender expressive fingers, forever active, forever striving to conceal themselves in his pockets or behind his back, came forth and became the piston rods of his machinery of expression" (Winesburg, p. 28). These same hands which aided tremendously in teaching, however, are the cause of his conscious repression of their use in Winesburg.

Biddlebaum was eventually driven from Pennsylvania because he was accused of too much physical--possibly intimate--contact with some of his young male students by their parents. After a half-witted boy started the rumor and his irate parents stirred other parents to action, nothing could stop them from judging Biddlebaum guilty. When a few of the other young boys began to mention how he had occasionally touched them with his hands, Biddlebaum was driven from the town, finally settling in Winesburg where his aunt lived. At this point, according to the narrator, "Although he [Biddlebaum] did not understand what had happened he felt that the hands must be to blame" (Winesburg, p. 33); consequently, he strives to conceal his hands in public. This also explains why he has never felt like a part of Winesburg even after having lived there for twenty years. Biddlebaum's fear of being misunderstood again, indeed the fear of using his hands when talking, severely limits his communication with others in Winesburg. Under these circumstances, his only protection from being misunderstood once more is to suppress the use of his hands, and this is ordinarily accomplished by thrusting his hands deep into his trouser pockets.

The reaction of the Winesburg townspeople to Biddlebaum's hands--now used to pick berries--is different from that of the people who chased him out of their small Pennsylvania town, but he is still quite self-conscious of his hands and does not understand why they are unlike those of others. This is emphasized when the narrator explains, "The hands alarmed their owner. He wanted to keep them hidden away and looked with amazement at the quiet inexpressive hands of other men who worked beside him in the fields, or passed, driving sleepy teams on country roads" (Winesburg, pp. 28-29). The only person in Winesburg who is close to Biddlebaum is George Willard, and he senses something unusual about his friend's hands. Willard "felt that there must be a reason for their strange activity and their inclination to keep hidden away and only a growing respect for Wing Biddlebaum kept him from blurting out the questions that were often in his mind" (Winesburg, p. 29). Finally, the one time when Biddlebaum forgets his hands and reaches out to touch Willard in the same manner as he used to touch his students, he suddenly backs off in horror and fear, undoubtedly remembering what forced him to leave Pennsylvania. The look of horror on his face is so great that Willard is frightened and decides to himself that "there's something wrong, but I don't want to know what it is. His hands have something to do with his fear of me and of everyone" (Winesburg, p. 31). In this manner, we are shown the torment which Biddlebaum's hands cause him as well as his secret past, which is unknown to everyone in Winesburg. The repression of his hands is quite understandable.

The recurrent observation of a character's hands being in his pockets functions subtly in Heart; yet, it plays a dominant role in suggesting the repression undergone by the character as it does in Winesburg. Almost every time that Singer is seen, he is described at some point as having his hands in his pockets. In the opening characterization of Singer and his friend Antonapoulos, Singer is embarrassed when Antonapoulos is caught stealing pieces of candy, fruit, and cheese from his Greek cousin's fruit store. The narrator observes, "During these times Singer stood very straight with his hands in his pockets and looked in another direction. He did not like to watch this little scene between the two Greeks" (Heart, p. 4). This simple, minor observation is merely the beginning of McCullers' attempt to show the initial unhappiness Singer occasionally feels.

After Antonapoulos is committed by his cousin to the state insane asylum over two hundred miles away, Singer is lost. In his loneliness he walks alone for hours, "his gait . . . agitated and . . . his hands stuffed tight into the pockets of his trousers" (Heart, p. 12). This time Singer's hands assume additional significance, for they not only show his deep-seated loneliness, but also his conscious endeavor to limit the action of his hands, much like Biddlebaum's. No longer is he able to eagerly communicate his ideas and feelings to Antonapoulos through the use of sign language; instead, he forces himself to repress these feelings, and the only way to accomplish this is to confine the use of his hands. Singer does not simply place his hands into his pockets. He stuffs them there.

When Biff Brannon, the New York Café owner, takes time to appraise the mute sitting quietly at his table, one of the first things he notices is that Singer "sat with his hands in his pockets and that the half-finished glass of beer before him had become warm and stagnant"

(Heart, p. 22). The term stagnant is particularly applicable because it is suggestive of the current state of Singer's mind. Without his friend he is miserable, and he has nothing to fill the hours he formerly spent with Antonapoulos.

McCullers creates a sharp contrast in forms of communication moments later when Singer and Blount are brought together for the first time in the café. Whereas Singer is almost motionless as well as silent, Blount is loud, drunk, sometimes disoriented, and quite physically active. Although Blount sits down at Singer's table and talks wildly to him for an hour, believing and even occasionally stating that he is one of the few who truly understands, Singer is able to understand hardly anything he says. Indeed Blount does not even realize that Singer is a mute. When Singer leaves the café, he merely nods his head toward the clock, and the narrator carefully notes, "His hands stayed stuffed in his pockets as always" (Heart, p. 25). Not once has he allowed himself to use his hands as a means of communication; even when he intimates that it is late and he must leave, he nods his head toward the clock, refusing to free his hands as he would have done with Antonapoulos.

Singer's hands also serve as a means for identifying him, just as Biddlebaum is identifiable by his hands. For instance, Willie, the young black working in Brannon's kitchen, describes him to Brannon as "this here dumb gentleman--hands in pockets" (Heart, p. 26). Brannon's observations that "in nearly every person there was some special physical part kept always guarded" (Heart, p. 28) and that the mute carefully protected his hands again emphasize Singer's cautious regard for his hands.

The hands are not mentioned again until the scene in which Singer has taken Blount to his room at his boarding house in order to recover, and then they are pointed out three times by the narrator in a rather short interval, as if McCullers is impressing upon us the importance of Singer's hands. Apparently Singer keeps his hands in his pockets, only removing them in order to eat, to write a short message when he must communicate with someone, or to perform some other necessary act. Immediately following this, his hands are speedily returned to his pockets.

McCullers continually reinforces the repressive actions of Singer each time she returns to him as the focal point of the story, usually when he is being visited by one of his friends. In each case his guests are treated much the same: Singer sits in a straight chair near the window in his room with his hands stuffed tight into his pockets. To communicate that he understands what each is saying, he only nods or smiles.

The description of Singer's second visit to Antonapoulos at the asylum is significant in that it presents a moment when Singer does not feel it necessary to keep his hands in his pockets, even if it is only for a brief period. The narrator remarks, "The minutes slipped by quickly. Singer's hands talked desperately and his narrow face was very pale. At last it was time for him to go. He held his friend by the arm and looked into his face in the way that he used to do when they parted each day before work. Antonapoulos stared at him drowsily and did not move. Singer left the room with his hands stuffed hard into his pockets" (Heart, p. 93). The relationship between Singer and Antonapoulos leaves many unanswered questions. From this particular scene it seems that Singer's hands are part of the intimate relationship between the two mutes, since it is only when he is with Antonapoulos that he uses them freely.

Being away from his friend is agonizing for Singer. In no better way could the agony of his loneliness be expressed than by the action of his hands. In the following excerpt, the narrator effectively describes Singer's changing attitude toward his hands:

> His hands were a torment to him. They would not rest. They twitched in his sleep, and sometimes he awoke to find them shaping the words in his dreams before his face. He did not like to look at his hands or to think about them. They were slender and brown and very strong. In the years before he had always tended them with care. In the winter he used oil to prevent chapping, and he kept the cuticles pushed down and his nails always filed to the shape of his finger-tips. He had loved to wash and tend his hands. But now he only scrubbed them roughly with a brush two times a day and stuffed them back into his pockets.
>
> When he walked up and down the floor of his room he would crack the joints of his fingers and jerk at them until they ached. Or he would strike the palm of one hand with the fist of the other. And then sometimes when he was alone and his thoughts were with his friend his hands would begin to shape the words before he knew about it. Then when he realized he was like a man caught talking aloud to himself. It was almost as though he had done some moral wrong. The shame and the sorrow mixed together and he doubled his hands and put them behind him. But they would not let him rest (Heart, pp. 203-04).

These two paragraphs heighten the turbulent emotions felt by Singer in the absence of Antonapoulos. His mental agony is vividly mirrored by the frenzied movement of his two hands.

The constant reminder throughout Heart that Singer keeps his hands "stuffed tight" in his pockets builds climactically to the scene in which he encounters the three mutes shortly after he has been told that Antonapoulos is dead. Dazed by the sudden loss of his friend, he chances upon three mutes who are excitedly talking among themselves using sign language. Singer, who is so accustomed to having to restrain from using his hands except in the presence of Antonapoulos, suddenly finds himself in a situation in which he can use sign language; nevertheless, even this proves troublesome for him. He finds it difficult at first to simply remove his hand from his pocket so that he can greet the three mutes, and still too overcome by shock and grief, Singer can think of nothing to say after telling them his name and where he lives. His striving to communicate with others in the same manner in which he spoke with Antonapoulos is futile. In a final desperate attempt to effect a conversation with the mutes and possibly establish a link between them and Antonapoulos, Singer asks if they knew Antonapoulos. The narrator pointedly notes, "They did not know him. Singer stood with his hands dangling loose" (Heart, pp. 322-23). The image of Singer standing next to the three mutes with his hands "dangling loose" is significant, for he no longer finds it necessary to hide his hands out of the presence of Antonapoulos. Unable to effectively communicate with other mutes and no longer able to communicate with his friend, Singer has no need for his hands. His hands are merely "dangling loose," as if drained of any purpose they might have once had. Not surprisingly, in this state of mind he kills himself after returning home. As Biddlebaum separates himself--in life--from others in Winesburg, Singer chooses a more permanent solution to his problem in Heart. In both cases, the hand imagery is employed to mirror the thoughts of the character.

Beyond these major relationships, other parallels abound in Winesburg and Heart. Both central characters have a room upstairs in a boarding house. The unhappiness and frustrations of these two characters go largely undetected by those around them. Both novels have a small town setting. Both have a café or lunch room run by a man named Biff. Both are permeated by a common theme of isolation, an aura of loneliness. Yet the question remains: Are these similarities merely coincidental? The evidence suggests otherwise. That McCullers was familiar with Anderson's writings is certain, and the numerous parallels between the two novels indicate a strong likelihood that she was influenced by *Winesburg*. Comparing these numerous similarities serves to strengthen the probability that *Winesburg* was, indeed, a dominant influence on McCullers' *Heart*.

# NOTES

[1] Virginia Spencer Carr, The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1975), p. 39.

[2] Carr, p. 39.

[3] Frederick J. Hoffman, The Art of Southern Fiction: A Study of Some Modern Novelists (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1967), p. 67.

[4] Walter Allen, The Modern Novel in Britain and the United States (New York: Dutton, 1964), p. 81.

[5] Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, rev. ed. (1960; rpt. New York: Stein and Day, 1975), pp. 478-79. Fiedler includes William Faulkner, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Truman Capote, Elizabeth Spencer, and Flannery O'Connor in the "group" to which McCullers belongs.

[6] William Van O'Connor, The Grotesque: An American Genre and Other Essays (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1962), p. 47.

[7] John W. Aldridge, In Search of Heresy: American Literature in an Age of Conformity (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), p. 145.

[8] O'Connor, p. 47. The comparison with Chicago is made because Anderson was living there in a crowded tenement district when he wrote Winesburg.

[9] Aldridge, p. 145.

[10] Chester E. Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 246.

[11] Eisinger, p. 246.

[12] Too much significance should not be placed on any one particular "listing." Eisinger's specification of Dostoevski, Proust, Joyce, and Faulkner varies somewhat from another McCullers' listing in Esquire, December 1959, of O'Neill, the Russians, Faulkner, and Flaubert. McCullers' literary tastes fluctuated throughout her life.

[13] Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio, ed. John H. Ferres (1919; rpt. New York: Viking, 1966), p. 26. Subsequent quotations from Winesburg are taken from this edition and will be noted parenthetically in the text by page number.

[14] O'Connor, p. 7.

[15] Allen, p. 81.

[16] C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature, 3rd ed., based on the original by William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard (1936; rpt. Indianapolis: Odyssey, 1972), p. 246.

[17] Oliver Evans, The Ballad of Carson McCullers: A Biography (New York: Coward-McCann, 1965), p. 51.

[18] Richard M. Cook, Carson McCullers (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1975), p. 20.

[19] Evans, p. 51.

[20] Cook, p. 20.

[21] Dayton Kohler, "Carson McCullers: Variations on a Theme," College English, 13 (Oct. 1951), 3.

[22] Alwyn Berland, "Sherwood Anderson and the Pathetic Grotesque," Western Review, 15 (1951), 138.

[23] Carr, p. 33.

[24] Carson McCullers, The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940, pp. 93-94. Subsequent quotations from Heart are taken from this edition and will be noted parenthetically in the text by page number.

[25] Berland, p. 138.

[26] Jesse Bentley draws an analogy between himself and the biblical Jesse, whose son, David, is called upon by the Lord to help the men of Israel fight the Philistines in the Valley of Elah (1 Sam. 16.1-18). To complete the analogy, Bentley needs a son named David to help fight the surrounding Ohio farmers in the valley of Wine Creek whom Jesse considers to be Philistines, enemies of God, and among whom might live a "Goliath" who could defeat him and take away his land and possessions.

[27] As David fearfully runs away from his grandfather, he pulls out a sling from his back pocket, stops to pick up a stone, hurriedly placing it in the sling, and hurls it at the old man, hitting him squarely on the head and dropping him to the ground. This is a continuation of the biblical analogy begun by Bentley, but ironically it is he who functions as Goliath rather than one of the farmers owning land in the valley of Wine Creek.

[28] Carson McCullers, The Mortgaged Heart, ed. Margarita G. Smith (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), p. 124.

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2

# VITA

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Master of Arts

**Thesis:** BEYOND THE GROTESQUE: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ANDERSON'S *WINESBURG, OHIO* AND MCCULLERS' *THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER*

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