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Intersectional Identities in Carson McCullers' *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*

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1. Introduction

He had known the identity of the author before he turned the last sheet over and saw the signature. ... His older sister had gone out to work as a servant when she was eleven years old and she had been raped by her employer, a white man past middle age. (McCullers 163)

The epigraph for this essay is from *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, the novel which will be treated in this essay. Lancy Davis, writer of a text on the subject “My Ambition: How I Can Better the Position of the Negro Race in Society” (162), is a minor character in the novel. Although this excerpt is the only detail provided about his older sister, it represents how Carson McCullers manages to portray the power structures of race, gender, and class in the society of her time, where African-American women as low-paid domestic workers constantly were under the threat of sexual harassment (Collins 54). Moreover, it illustrates her awareness of how those systems of power intertwine and are at work simultaneously. This is thus a mere example of how the novel is concerned with intersecting power structures and their effects in the lives of the novel’s characters.

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter takes place in an unnamed town in the Deep South of the United States during the late 1930s. At that time, relationships between white Americans and African-Americans were regulated by the Jim Crow laws which were laws legislating *de jure* segregation and thus enforcing white supremacy and race control of African-Americans. The Jim Crow laws were enacted in the Southern states from 1881 into the 1940s and regulated racial segregation in practically all aspects of life (Newman 7), and “white supremacy, racial segregation, disfranchisement, lynching and the denial of all economic and civil rights to blacks” were all legally justified (González Groba 120).

Constante González Groba describes how sexism and racism intersected and produced notions of African-American men and white women:

Gender is intricately related to race in the re-writing of southern history. The white version of southern history created a new enemy, the black male. This enemy enabled white men to fulfil their role as guardians of white women ... The sublimation of the pure white woman elevated the white man to the noble role of protector, at the same time establishing the necessity to keep blacks “in their place”. Sexuality connected gender and race: white men became the defenders of innocent white women threatened by sexually aggressive black males. (121)

In the rape myth, the African-American man epitomized the rapist and the beast, the white woman

the chaste victim, and the white man guardian of the white woman and also upholder of white superiority (Gonzalez Groba 121).

Race, class, and gender intersected also in the notion of the southern belle and lady: “The image of the southern belle and lady ruled all notions of white southern womanhood and femininity ... ” (Gleeson-White, “Revisiting” 113). This patriarchal, racial, and classist image regulated ideal femininity in the South and was restricted to white, wealthy women who conformed to certain rules of behavior. Similarly, notions of African-American women were practiced in order to justify their objectification, and one of them was the notion of “the faithful obedient domestic servant” (Collins 72). As a result, myths, notions and controlling images all provided justification for maintaining intersecting power structures based on race, class, and gender. In *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, McCullers illustrates the effects of these myths and notions in the lives of the characters, and also how they either conform to them, or challenge and thus subvert them.

Before continuing on, however, it is important that I point out my position within the feminist tradition, which I will do in relation to Elaine Showalter’s essay “Toward a Feminist Poetics”. Showalter divides feminist criticism into two categories: the first one, the *feminist critique*, is concerned with *women as reader*;

... with woman as the consumer of male-produced literature, and with the way the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its sexual codes. ... Its subjects include the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions of and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history. (Showalter 128)

Showalter states that “one of the problems of the feminist critique is that it is male-oriented” (130). By studying stereotypes of women, women’s limited roles in literary history and male critics’ sexism, we only learn “what men have thought women should be” (130), not women’s feelings and experiences.

The other category of feminist criticism, *la gynocritique*, is concerned with *woman as writer*; “with woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, theme, genres, and structures of literature by women” (128):

... the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women

between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture. (131)

By studying the work of a woman writer and focusing on female experience, taking gender, race, and class into account, but also by studying the objectification and stereotyping of women in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, this essay crosses the boundary between what Showalter calls feminist critique and la gynocritique.

1.2 Aim and Scope

Critics have argued that *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* is apolitical, on one hand, while many of those who have focused on the novel's political and social themes only have focused on specific themes without looking at how those themes are connected and thus intersect. I argue that Carson McCullers, through the novel's social and political themes, manages to portray race, gender, and class oppression and that the text thus is a strong critique towards certain intersecting power structures in the 1930s South society of her time.

In my analysis, I will use intersectional theory in order to analyze the intersecting power structures of race, class, and gender that are at work in shaping the experiences' of Portia and Mick: whether those power structures restrain or privilege them and how the two characters resist or accept them, and I will thus suggest why intersectionality theory is crucial in order to account for how power is structured in society. For my account of the theoretical framework, I will use Kimberlé Crenshaw's and Patricia Hill Collins' works on intersectionality.

2. Previous research

In this section I will present how Carson McCullers' works generally, and her debut novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* more specifically, have been read by literary critics: what the most common tendencies within the literary critique are, and also what sources I have chosen to refer to in my analysis.

Shortly after its publication in 1940, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* became highly acclaimed and reviewers have often combined their praise with comments on Carson McCullers' young age (Logan 2): she was twenty-three when the novel was published. Since then, literary critics have examined the novel on different levels, many of them focusing on its symbolism and allegories, and in some cases the relation of symbolism to the context of the novel. Oliver Evans, author of the 1966 biography *The Ballad of Carson McCullers*, writes:

It is impossible to understand Mrs. McCullers' work unless one realizes that she conceives of fiction chiefly as parable. The reader who concerns himself exclusively with the realistic level of her stories will never fully appreciate them, though he may be momentarily diverted. The narrative burden of her work is always secondary to the allegorical: she is in this sense a didactic writer, for she does not write to entertain but to teach, and what she has to teach are those truths about human nature that she has learned from her experience, which is profound, and from her observation, which, at the same time that it is compassionate, is penetrating to the point of clairvoyance. (Evans, "The Achievement" 301)

Evans, and most other critics too, state that the main themes of McCullers' works are loneliness caused by spiritual isolation and lack of love. In the search for ideal love, the lover sees the beloved according to his/her own wishes, just as John Singer's visitors (except for Biff Brannon) ascribe him certain qualities which he never proves himself to have. This would then also explain the relationship between Singer (the lover) and Antonapoulos (the beloved). McCullers uses allegory to portray an abstract, symbolic picture of life, according to Evans, and her message is that "while love is the only force that can unite men, love is never completely mutual and is subject to time, diminishing with the death of the love-object. The single consolation is that love, while it lasts, is beneficial to the lover, affording him temporary relief from his solitude" ("The Achievement" 303). However, Evans claims that her allegory is neither political nor religious, and that the elements of social reform are there because they characterize southern novels from the thirties (*The Ballad* 48). Her depiction of the oppression of African-Americans, or of the conditions of millworkers, are only symbols of the novel's humanitarianism and not idealizations of the social victims, according to Evans (49).

As opposed to Evans' simplistic view suggesting that McCullers did not have a political motive for writing *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, Nancy B. Rich suggests that there is significant evidence that "suggests the probability that politics was a motivating factor in the genesis of the novel" (Rich 108). Rich refers to McCullers' description of her novel as 'an ironic parable of fascism' and argues that critics have not taken that statement seriously. Evans, for instance, suggests that the description is misleading and that it might only be viewed in a sense of understanding Singer and Antonapoulos as leaders, and the absurdity of blindly following the leader. Neither does Ihab Hassan view the novel as a parable to fascism: he argues that the phrase "seems to have encrusted itself like a barnacle in all the standard reference works on contemporary novelists" (Hassan 214). Rich, on the other hand, argues that the novel *should* be approached as a parable in order to understand the novel's structure and also to clarify mysteries such as the function of

Antonapoulos (Rich 109). In the parable of fascism, Singer is the democratic but ineffectual government, and his muteness marks his distance from others. Antonapoulos is the ruling king, representing Greek democracy and Christian idealism. Singer's visitors represent different groups of people in the society whose chief problem is that they cannot unite (112-14). On this point, Rich and Evans agree, and both argue that in order to be able to unite for a useful purpose, people must speak as a majority (Rich 114, Evans *The Ballad* 51). This "failure of collectivity" (Spivak 131) is also examined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whom I will return to later on.

In contrast to Rich's reading of the novel as completely political and as a parable of fascism, critics such as Jan Whitt, Frank Durham, Mary A. Whitt, and Laurie Champion, have instead examined the religious allegory of the text. Whitt argues that by using Christian imagery, McCullers assigns Singer the role of a Christ figure depersonalized by his visitors and fellow townspeople, and "because Copeland, Mick, and Blount create Singer to meet their needs, their god is not divine. He is all too human. ... isolation damns Singer. His song is never heard" (Whitt 34-5). Whitt argues that this is what ultimately leads to Singer committing suicide – "the failure of self-expression" (34) – and he refers to him as "the loneliest hunter of them all" (29). However, it must be noted that Whitt does not mention the character of Antonapoulos at all. What role does Antonapoulos then have in relation to the Christ figure? By contrast, Joseph R. Millichap claims that Antonapoulos is the Christ symbol of the novel, whereas Singer assumes the role of John the Baptist. Nonetheless, it could be argued, as Evans does, that there is religious symbolism in the novel but only in the sense that Singer is considered god-like by the other characters.

In her article "Black and White Christs in Carson McCullers's 'The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter'", Laurie Champion also focuses on religious allegories, but in contrast to Whitt, she argues that Singer is a symbolic Christ only in regard to the novel's central theme – the spiritual isolation of the individual – and that the novel has several subordinate themes addressing political and social issues. This is supported by Ihab Hassan when he writes that "Despite its disconsolate title, the novel finds a way of acknowledging the social realities of its time. Its events hark back to the economic distress of the Thirties and reverberate with the distant echoes of Nazi tyranny, and its spirit shudders with the 'strangled South'" (211). Champion argues that there is an antiracist social theme, and in that theme it is instead Willie who assumes the role of the symbolic Christ. "Whereas McCullers's mythical characterization of Singer as Christ demonstrates the individual's isolation from humanity, her portrayal of Willie as Christ demonstrates humanity's persecution and betrayal of the Negro race" (51). Racism is the result of human isolation, and in the end, "all individuals are lonely hunters" (48).

According to Champion, the two Christs in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* only exist in

regard to the central theme and the antiracist social theme. However, the novel deals with other social and political themes as well, and those should not be referred to as subordinate, as Champion does, but as central and/or important themes that intertwine. I would therefore like to oppose the idea that the novel has one central, “universal” theme completely separated from politics and society, and other subordinated, peripheral themes dealing with social and political issues. Hence, I disagree with Evan’s claim that McCullers only portrays the society without including any personal values, because that would suggest that the novel is apolitical and that it is only concerned with universal themes such as love, loneliness and human isolation. On the contrary, I argue that McCullers manages to illustrate race, gender, and class oppression through her social and political themes, and thus puts forward a strong critique towards certain power structures in the society of her time.

Indeed, there are critics who have acknowledged and focused on McCullers’ political consciousness. In his essay “Carson McCullers and Lillian Smith: The Intersections of Gender and Race in the Jim Crow South”, Constante González Groba examines the connection between race and gender oppression in the 1930s South, as well as McCullers’ way of dealing with it in her fiction:

McCullers opposed the insistence of southern culture on racial “purity” and the oppression of blacks as adamantly as she did its demands for rigid sexual definition and the oppression of any deviant form of sexuality. She was persuaded that just as “blackness” and “whiteness” can coexist within individuals of both races, so too can femininity and masculinity be found equally within men and women. (124)

González Groba argues that this objection to set binary oppositions are due to McCullers’ own sexual ambivalence, anti-racism, and sensitivity to social reform. A few critics have therefore performed autobiographical readings of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, where the character of Mick symbolizes McCullers’ “own story of growing up in the thirties as a Southern female prodigy” (Perry 36), and of failing in love and art as an adolescent girl. However, Mick fails also where McCullers did succeed, and Perry asks: “Why would McCullers, a privileged young artist from Columbus, Georgia, compose a novel that features a heroine deprived of every opportunity to develop her talent?” (Perry 37). Since one difference between Mick and McCullers would be their class background, my attempt to answer Perry’s question is that McCullers wanted to depict a class struggle – in this case Mick’s. Yet, not many critics seem to have focused on the class issues of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* but the social issues referred to are mostly gender and/or race issues.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, however, does examine gender, class, and race struggle in the novel in her feminist reading of the text, and argues that the characters' "failure of collectivity" is due to separate race-, class-, and sex-struggles (Spivak 131). Consequently, she suggests that "a fully politicized feminism, far from being a special interest, can bring a consideration of the power-structure of the interstices of such a discussion¹ within reach of practical analyses" (Spivak 138). By leaving out a discussion on sexism and patriarchy in Copeland's and Blount's discussion, the text might suggest an alternative view to self-interest politics (such as identity politics), as Spivak argues, although it is not explicitly stated in the text. I therefore believe that an intersectional understanding of the power structures – such as race, class, and gender – in the novel is crucial.

An important aspect of McCullers' works is that she positions new understandings of race, gender, and sexuality, although this does not seem to have been acknowledged much by critics. Cynthia Wu examines how, in her short fiction, McCullers "interrogates white southern identity through means other than comparisons to black southern identity" (Wu 44). She argues that by introducing European immigrant characters, and also providing a functional absence of African-American characters in her short stories, McCullers proves that the concept of "white" can exist and be defined apart from the concept of "black". By presenting white male characters who "do not occupy a comfortable space in whiteness or in patriarchy" and white female characters who challenge "the South's ideals of white sexual propriety" (54), McCullers re-conceptualizes race, or more specifically; whiteness. I would also like to add gender and sexuality to that, even though Wu does not explicitly cover those concepts.

According to Sarah Gleeson-White, McCullers' positioning of new understandings of gender and sexual identity has been ignored by critics for the most part (*Strange Bodies* 2). As Carson McCullers is considered a Southern grotesque writer, Gleeson-White argues that Mikhail Bakhtin's account of the *grotesque* is the most appropriate concept to use when labeling McCullers as a writer of Southern grotesque, since the notion of the southern grotesque² does not correspond with her fiction. Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque emphasizes "corporeal contortion" (Gleeson-White "Revisiting" 110); the body questions borders and categories, it is non-static and always in reformation:

The grotesque, then, by its very nature, unnerves the world of classic identity and knowledge, for it

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- 1 She refers to a discussion between two of the novel's main characters, Blount and Copeland, in which none of them can agree on whether to focus on the devastating effects of capitalism or racism in their society, and how to empower people in order to resist those power structures. Both advocate their own interests without reaching any solution: Blount suggests Marxism and theoretical solutions, Copeland suggests antiracism and practical solutions.
 - 2 "The grotesque worlds of southern literature ... allegorize the human condition itself as existential alienation and angst" (Gleeson-White, "Revisiting" 108).

tests the very limits of the body and thus of being. Crucially, Bakhtin celebrates this strange body, for it is a site of production: “the grotesque . . . discloses the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life (*Rabelais* 48). This is the invigorating aspect of the Bakhtinian grotesque: it is transgressive because it challenges normative forms of representation and behavior; it disturbs because it loves the abject and will not rest; it is always in a state of becoming. (110)

The Bakhtinian grotesque is thus about the strangeness of embodiment and also about resistance, and that is how the grotesque emerges in McCullers’ fiction, according to Gleeson-White. Her deviant characters reflect her own exploration of gender and sexual identity throughout her life; they have unsettled identities and their resistance against normativities such as racial and/or gender roles is an opposition to the southern norms of behavior of her time. Accordingly, intersectionality theory can provide a useful tool in order to understand the identities of the character’s in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, as intersectionality problematizes the notion of people having one single identity and also examines how structures of power intersect.

3. Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality

Intersectional theory presupposes that human identities are multi-layered, consisting of several socially and culturally constructed categories such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality – categories which intersect and thus construct distinct experiences. Intersectionality can be applied as a method to analyze how different sociocultural categories intertwine and intersect, and thus construct different types of unequal, interrelating relations within society (Lykke 50). Depending on the theoretical framework used, those unequal relations, or *power differentials*, can be specified as power/disempowerment, recognition/misrecognition, dominance/subordination, in/exclusion, and so on (51). It is important to regard intersectionality “as a process rather than a structure” (51), which is to say that the intersections of sociocultural categories are processes of mutual influence and transformation rather than fixed identities.

The term *intersectionality* was coined by Law Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, and later developed in “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”. In “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex”, Crenshaw criticizes the single-axis framework which dominates anti-discrimination law and which is also a part of feminist theory and antiracist politics. Single-axis framework or analysis treats categories of experiences such as race

and gender “as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis” (383). With African-American women as a point of departure, she argues that African-American women’s intersectional experiences are marginalized by anti-discrimination law, which in cases of race and gender focus on the most privileged group members – in cases of race discrimination: sex- or class-privileged African-Americans, in cases of gender: sex- and class-privileged women (383).

Feminist theory is developed from a white context, Crenshaw states, and therefore it loses its value to black women: “Not only are women of color in fact overlooked, but their exclusion is reinforced when *white* women speak for and as *women*. The authoritative universal voice—usually white male subjectivity masquerading as non-racial, non-gendered objectivity—is merely transferred to those who, but for gender, share many of the same cultural, economic and social characteristics” (389). Feminism with *white* women’s experiences as its point of departure tends to overlook the issue of race when analyzing patriarchy or sexuality, for instance. In the same way, antiracism fails to acknowledge gender barriers which prevent African-American women from acquiring privileges that the African-American community have won on the basis of race, but not on the basis of sex (391).

Crenshaw concludes her article by arguing that in order for black people to free themselves from racial subordination, black liberationist politics must include analysis of sexism and patriarchy. Likewise, in order for feminism to incorporate the goals of non-white women, an analysis of race must be included. As long as these movements fail to acknowledge intersectional experiences, African-American women will continue to be marginalized by anti-discrimination politics (393-4)

The importance of intersectionality theory is once again demonstrated in “Mapping the Margins”, where Crenshaw examines the issue of violence against women of color whose intersectional identities are ignored by identity politics such as feminist and antiracist discourses; “Because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both” (“Mapping” 1244). Identity politics are limited because they fail to acknowledge differences within the group they represent; the parameters of antiracist and feminist discourses are drawn from either a male perspective or a white perspective.

Women of color frequently become vulnerable to men’s violence due to their intersectional identities leading to subordination and disempowerment in several aspects of life. Intersectionality is therefore crucial as a way to account for multiple identities and face the problem with identity politics. The limitations of identity politics and its failure to acknowledge the importance of the other lead to strengthening the power relations that each strive to challenge: “The failure of

feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women” (1252).

In her conclusion, Crenshaw emphasizes that intersectionality must be distinguished from anti-essentialism, and criticizes what she calls “the vulgarized social construction thesis”³ which suggests that because all categories are socially constructed, there is no need to reproduce them by organizing around them. However, since sociocultural categories are power-laden, causing processes of subordination or privileging, the importance is not the fact that categories exist but instead what they mean; what values are attached to them and what consequences they bring about. Therefore, Crenshaw argues that intersectionality must be seen as an important basis for reconceptualizing identity and challenging identity politics by opposing the internal excluding and marginalizing power structures within it. It is thus neither an alternative nor an opposition to group politics, but instead a means to acknowledge the differences among group members and letting those differences be expressed in constructing group politics.

Kimberlé Crenshaw works in the field of law, and she first developed intersectionality theory in order for it to operate in her field of work, where an intersectional understanding of African-American women’s experiences was needed. However, intersectionality occurs in other fields of study as well. Sociologists Patricia Hill Collins and Margaret L. Andersen have compiled *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*, grounded in a sociological perspective. They stress the importance of viewing race, class, and gender as socially and historically constructed categories that intersect and construct structures of inequality:

One of the most important things to learn about race, class, and gender is that they are *systematic forms of inequality*. Although most people tend to think of them as individual characteristics (or identities), they are built into the very structure of society—and it is this social fact that drives our analysis of race, class, and gender as *intersectional systems of inequality*. (61)

In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Collins develops how race, class, and gender oppression intersect and are “grounded in interdependent concepts of binary thinking, oppositional difference, objectification, and social hierarchy” (71). One way of objectifying and project one part of a power differential as the Other is through controlling images: “The dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of several

3 Crenshaw stresses that she does not suggest that all anti-essentialist critics are vulgar constructionists, but her use of the term ‘vulgar constructionism’ is instead a means “to distinguish between those antiessentialist critiques that leave room for identity politics and those that do not” (“Mapping” 1296).

interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination" (72). In my analysis, I will refer to certain controlling images and how they are used to objectify the Other.

As I mentioned in the introduction of this essay, my position within the feminist tradition crosses the boundary between what Showalter calls the feminist critique and *la gynocritique*. With the choice of novel, this essay is concerned with woman as writer instead of her role in the peripheries of the male literary tradition. However, the study of controlling images and stereotypes can be considered as a reproduction of male sexism since it studies "what men have thought women should be" (Showalter 130). Also, by exploring the margins in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, mainly regarding the choice of Portia as one of the two characters examined in this essay, I show how McCullers' novel is concerned with social and political themes to a great extent in the margins. With that said, I will continue on to the analysis section where I will focus on the novel's two characters Mick and Portia and use both Collins' and Crenshaw's works on intersectionality theory.

4. Analysis

4.1. Mick Kelly

I introduced this essay by suggesting that Carson McCullers' *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* manages to criticize certain power structures in her society, such as sexism, patriarchy, capitalism, and racism, and that she does so through her social and political themes. An important way of raising her critique is through her depictions of the effects those multiple, interlocking systems produce in the lives of her characters. Mick Kelly, the female protagonist of the novel, is subject to the simultaneous operations of gender, class, and race. Critics have focused on her the most, mainly by examining her from a feminist perspective, and in a few instances also by combining class and thus looking at the intersections of gender and class. I argue that it is too simplistic to view Mick *only* from a feminist perspective, and thus ignore the power structures of class and race that shape her experiences. I will therefore use intersectionality theory as a tool for my analysis in order to examine the intersecting power structures that Mick is either restrained by or privileged by, to show how those structures shape her experiences, and to consider how she resists or accepts them.

4.1.1. Ideal Femininity and the Ideal Family

"A gangling, towheaded youngster, a girl of about twelve, stood looking in the doorway. She was dressed in khaki shorts, a blue shirt, and tennis shoes – so that at first glance she was like a very young boy" (20). In this first description of Mick's appearance, portrayed through the eyes of Biff

Brannon (the owner of the New York Café), Mick is depicted as a tall, adolescent tomboy. She is comfortable dressing as she does and is not interested in identifying with her “girly” sisters Hazel and Etta, whom she shares room with. They embody the notion of femininity in the novel, as Sarah Gleeson-White also argues (“Revisiting” 113), and when Etta complains about Mick’s “silly boy’s clothes” (41), Mick replies:

I wear shorts because I don’t want to wear your old hand-me-downs. I don’t want to be like either of you and I don’t want to look like either of you. And I won’t. That’s why I wear shorts. I’d rather be a boy any day (41)

Mick opposes notions of femininity by challenging the gender roles she is expected to conform to, she wears neither dresses nor skirts, she smokes cigarettes, and at high school she takes a mechanical course “like a boy” (94).

Moreover, by being a tomboy, Mick resists the notion of the Southern belle, an ideal for white, wealthy girls and women (Gleeson-White, “Revisiting” 114). Neither Mick nor her sisters are economically privileged, on the contrary her family is depicted as poor, but while Mick does not strive to be a Southern belle, her sisters (especially Etta) do. Etta “[primps] all the day long” and dreams about going to Hollywood and act in movies (40). However, because of the Kelly family’s bad economic situation, Etta’s hopes of becoming a true Southern belle can only remain a dream, and eventually, both she and her siblings are forced to work in order to provide for the family.

Apart from Mick’s sisters, Biff Brannon’s niece Baby Wilson is another archetype of femininity and the aspiration of becoming a Southern belle. She is four years old and is given beauty treatments and music- and dancing lessons in order to achieve a bright future as an actress. Her mother Lucile wants her to start working soon in order to improve their economic conditions: she wants to move out of the “common neighborhood” and says that she cannot “let [Baby] start to talk vulgar like these brats around here or run wild like they do” (113). She refers to Mick’s neighborhood, which Lucile and Baby live in too, and thinks that none of the children there are “up to Baby’s level” (114). And indeed, Mick does not live up to the standard of femininity that Baby’s mother expects from her own daughter: she does not dress like a girl “should” dress and she spends time roaming in the streets in her spare time. Neither does Mick, nor her family, live up to the class standards Lucile aspires for herself and her daughter. In the notion of the Southern belle, ideals of femininity intersect with ideals of class (wealth) and race (white), and even though Mick is advantaged by being white, she does not fit into neither ideal femininity nor ideal class. Consequently, she resists ideas of femininity, and more specifically, ideas of *white* femininity,

which she is subject to due to being a white woman.

In the introduction of this essay, I presented the rape myth which produced notions of white women, African-American men, and white men. White women were raised to “ideal levels of purity” (González Groba 121), and the following passage about Mick makes it clear that her characterization challenges how white women were represented in the myth:

Some kids were afraid to walk through strange places in the dark, but she wasn't. Girls were scared a man would come out from somewhere and put his teapot in them like they was married. Most girls were nuts. If a person the size of Joe Louis or Mountain Man Dean would jump out at her and want to fight she would run. But if it was somebody within twenty pounds her weight she would give him a good sock and go right on. (McCullers 93)

Mick does not conform to the weak and passive role of the white woman in the rape myth by asserting that she can resist sexual violence herself, as long as the rapist is her size. She thus subverts the myth by implicitly declaring that she is in no need of a white male protector, and also, by naming both an African-American boxer (Joe Louis) and a white wrestler (Mountain Man Dean) and suggesting the perpetrator being the size of any of them, Mick subverts the notion of the African-American rapist: the focus is on the fact that the potential rapist is a man stronger than herself, not an African-American man in particular but *any* man.

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins presents how the imagined, traditional, family ideal is defined regarding family values in the United States:

Formed through a combination of marital and blood ties, “normal” families should consist of heterosexual, racially homogeneous couples who produce their own biological children. Such families should have a specific authority structure, namely, a father-head earning an adequate family wage, a stay-at-home wife and mother, and children. (Collins 47)

Mick's family does not correspond to the 'ideal' family: her father is unemployed and desperate to take any job; instead, her mother is the main breadwinner of the family. She manages the boarders at the house by collecting rents, for instance, while the children, except from the smallest ones, work and participate in supporting the family. The traditional, ideal family is thus based on racial, patriarchal, and classist notions: the ideal is a racially homogenous, patriarchal, middle-class family, and since the Kelly family does not correspond to the ideal in several aspects, their family structure challenges the imagined ideal. Mick's father is obviously not the “father-head earning an adequate family wage” as expected by the ideal and Mick notes that he feels useless: “He was lonesome and

he was an old man. Because none of the kids went to him for anything and because he didn't earn much money he felt like he was cut off from the family" (McCullers 92). He does not live up to the ideal patriarchal role expected from him, and the Kelly family's authority structure is thus clearly different from the ideal. Furthermore, her mother is no stay-at-home wife, although her work at the house implies that she stays at home, however, she does it for work. The reason that she cannot stay at home solely to fulfill her "duties" as a wife and a mother is obviously the family's low wages: a poor working-class wife and mother cannot afford to be a housewife.

4.1.2. The Middle-Class Man's World

Mick's passion for classical music remains unchanged throughout the novel. She feels that her existence is divided into two separate "rooms", where music is restricted to the inside room:

With her it was like there was two places – the inside room and the outside room. School and the family and the things that happened every day were in the outside room. Mister Singer was in both rooms. Foreign countries and plans and music were in the inside room. (McCullers 145)

Due to her being economically disadvantaged, classical music is unreachable and is only available for her through other people's radios, since her economically disadvantaged family cannot afford and would prioritize buying neither radios nor musical instruments. She tries to make a violin of an old ukulele but fails, and when her brother Bill says that "That's one thing you don't sit down and make – you got to buy them" (44), Mick implicitly feels aggression and hatred towards her economic situation, and she aims her aggression at Bill and slams the instrument down on the floor. She listens to music from peoples' backyards in a wealthier neighborhood where she can hear their radios playing classical pieces of Beethoven and Mozart, and she dreams about buying herself a piano one day and also having her own space: "Next to a real piano I sure would rather have some place to myself than anything I know" (49). However, due to Mick's family being economically disadvantaged, a piano is not within reach of her. Also, for now, her own space exists only in the *inside* room: from where she can make plans on how to succeed in the outside room, where classical music is reachable solely for (white) middle-class men.

She lay on her stomach on the cold floor and thought. Later on – when she was twenty – she would be a great world-famous composer. She would have a whole symphony orchestra and conduct all of her music herself. She would stand up on the platform in front of the big crowds of people. To conduct the orchestra she would wear either a real man's

evening suit or else a red dress spangled with rhinestones. The curtains of the stage would be velvet and M.K. would be printed on them in gold. (212)

Mick's first choice of attire is "a real man's evening suit", which might either indicate that she relates the world of music to the world of men, in which she can only succeed by dressing in the attire of "a real man". On the other hand, it might indicate that that she, despite her abandoning her tomboyish clothing, still is more comfortable dressing in "boy's clothes". Dressing as a tomboy was according to society not an acceptable behavior for her as an adolescent female; thus, it is only in the world of music (as it exists in her mind) that she will finally be able to dress however she prefers to dress. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes that though Mick places music in the inside room, it is through music that she will be able to reach the outside world: "Yet music, she hopes, will also get her to the great outside world: to foreign countries of splendid opulence. It will give her class mobility and thus launch her into the 'outside' world It will permit her to place her unique name within the hierarchy of power" (Spivak 132). Classical music can be accessed only by the bourgeoisie and being a composer is a profession occupied chiefly by privileged (white) men, and although Mick has the "right" racial belonging, she remains marginalized in the intersection of gender and class. Crenshaw argues:

the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and ... these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism. Because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both. ("Mapping" 1243-4)

In a similar way, readings of Mick done through one certain framework focusing merely on her experiences as *either* a woman *or* working-class will most likely lead to marginalizing her intersectional experiences as a working-class woman.

Mick recognizes her position in the middle-class man's world. Early in the novel, she writes on the walls of a newly built house:

Mick drew the big block letters very slowly. At the top she wrote EDISON, and under that she drew the names of DICK TRACY and MUSSOLINI. Then in each corner with the largest letters of all ... she wrote her initials – M.K. When that was done she crossed over to the opposite wall and wrote a very bad word – PUSSY – and beneath that she put her initials, too. (37)

The list of names (Mick later adds Mozart to the list, too) consists of white men – an inventor, a cartoon police detective, a politician and a musician – indicating the fact that white and economically privileged men are the ones most socially advantaged in the outside room. There, men can possess and commodify qualities such as intelligence, strength, courage, and rationality, while women only can possess and thus commodify sex: in a man's world, “the only viable female commodity is sex” (Spivak 132). By writing “pussy” on the opposite wall, Mick positions supposed femaleness and maleness as binaries or power differentials. Also, as Gleeson-White writes, by emphasizing that “pussy” is “a very bad word”, she “[makes] a connection between the unclean female body and sexuality” (Gleeson-White, “Revisiting” 114), also, “she has internalized cultural perceptions which construct femaleness as obscene, as pornographic: sex *is* womanliness” (114). Consequently, the obscene female body and sexuality become incompatible with male characteristics and masculinity, with strength, courage, and rationality.

4.1.3. The Final Defeat

Mick's tomboyishness is not long-lived. When she arranges a party at her house for her fellow high school students, she borrows a dress, pumps, a rhinestone tiara and a bra from her sisters. “She didn't feel like herself at all. She was somebody different from Mick Kelly entirely” (97). When the party has finished, she feels grown and decides to never wear shorts again, and from then on she does indeed never wear “boy's clothes” again. Nancy B. Rich claims that Mick only *appears* to be a nonconformist in the beginning of the novel, but that she, in reality, conforms only in order to gain acceptance from the students at her high school and to join the ranks of her sisters (115). Rich believes that Mick, in the parable of fascism, symbolizes “public apathy” (115), and that criticism of Mick's character has been vague because of critics “[blaming] Mick's failure on social and economic factors ...” (115). On the contrary, it is clear that Mick's “failure” *is* due to social and economic factors: she does not conform to southern feminine ideals because she is indifferent, immature, irrational, and lacks moral, as Rich argues, but because society and its intersecting power structures work against her resistance. Also, although Mick tries to fulfill society's demands on her as an adolescent female, she “unwittingly undermine[s] the notion of ideal womanhood” (Gleeson-White, *Strange Bodies* 14). An example of this is, as Gleeson-White mentions, when Mick plays during her party and jumps into a ditch but hurts herself because she is wearing pumps: “With her tennis shoes she would have landed like a cat ...” (McCullers 105). Femininity, as regarded in the South, is thus praised by neither Mick nor the text itself, but instead it is depicted as both impractical and abnormal – or as Gleeson-White writes (*Strange Bodies*): as *freakish*.

Towards the final section of the novel, Mick and Harry take a short bicycle trip together and

end up having sex for the first time. According to Rich, Mick “uses [Harry] to satisfy her own need to experiment with sex (it was her idea to swim naked) and does not really understand him, which makes his position so uncomfortable that he leaves town” (116). Rich’s critical evaluation of the scene reproduces sexist stereotyping: Mick is depicted as the evil seductress, unwilling to understand her rational lover, and above that, *she* is responsible for his feelings and for him finally leaving town. In my view, however, Mick only suggests that they swim naked. Shortly after they have dressed and eaten their picnic dinner in silence, Harry takes the initiative by complimenting her on her appearance – “I think you’re so pretty, Mick” (McCullers 240) – and when she suggests that they should head back home, Harry says no: “Let’s lie down. Just for a minute” (240). According to Rich’s evaluation, the negative outcome is Mick’s fault, the negative outcome in this case being Harry’s feelings of guilt: he considers “adultery” (he is two years older than her) a “terrible sin” (242), and therefore decides to leave town and find a job elsewhere. He does say that the situation was his fault, and even though Mick does not appear to be ashamed initially, Harry’s frightened face scares her and when he claims that he can “see the difference” just by looking at her (242), she starts to worry: “She felt very old, and it was like something was heavy inside her. She was a grown person now, whether she wanted to be or not” (243). She feels that she has become a grown-up, a *woman*, and it burdens her and makes her feel uncomfortable.

According to Constance M. Perry, Mick’s feeling is not really of adulthood, “for that implies status and privilege. Rather, she is experiencing what it means to be female and inferior in her culture” (43). Harry plants guilt feelings in her, he makes her believe that she has committed a sin:

Harry’s guilty flight from his sexual intimacy with Mick, and indeed from the town itself, forces Mick to realize that to be female is to be somehow shameful and obscene. McCullers suggests that this identity has been symbolically awaiting Mick from the novel’s beginning ... where she ironically prophesies her fate as “PUSSY M.K.” (Perry 43)

She has learnt what it means to be a woman, sexist forces have once again taught her that female sexuality is sinful, offensive, and disgraceful. Mick does not make Harry’s position uncomfortable, as Rich claims, instead Harry makes *her* position uncomfortable: he makes her aware of her “sin” and reminds her of the shamefulness in being a woman. And in accordance with Perry’s analysis, Mick does not benefit from the privileges of adulthood, but instead only gets to experience the inferiority of being a woman. This becomes clear when Mick returns home and her mother tells her to “Quit frowning like that ... You’re coming to the age where you ought to fix up and try to look the best you can” (McCullers 244). Becoming a grown woman implies fulfilling ideal femininity

and thus being ashamed of one's sexuality.

Although the Kellys' house "was one of the biggest houses on the whole north side of town ..." (39), Mick's family is considered poor in relation to other white families and their economic situation is constantly worsening throughout the novel: "They were that poor. Money was the main thing. All the time it was money, money, money" (209). All her older siblings work, her father is desperate to get any job, her mother is busy working in the house and managing the boarders, while Mick is responsible for her two baby brothers, at least when she does not sleep or study. Despite their bad economy, they keep their cook Portia and the reason for this is clearly, as Hazel indicates (278), that African-Americans are not paid much.

In order to help her family economically, Mick decides to get a job at Woolworth's. It is supposed to be for the summer only, but Mick understands that the decision has far-reaching consequences: "The job wouldn't be just for the summer – but for a long time, as long a time as she could see ahead. Once they were used to the money coming in it would be impossible to do without again. That was the way things were" (279). Mick realizes that her family will get used to her income and an improved economy, and it will therefore be more difficult for her to return to high school once summer vacation is over. She is also conscious of the additional marginalizing structures that girls and women have to cope with: when Harry starts working part-time at the New York Café while studying at high school, Mick says:

A boy has a better advantage like that than a girl. I mean a boy can usually get some part-time job that don't take him out of school and leaves him time for other things. But there're not jobs like that for girls. When a girl wants a job she has to quit school and work full time. I'd sure like to earn a couple of bucks a week like you do, but there's just not any way. (McCullers 216)

Accordingly, Mick later suspects that she will have to continue working full-time at Woolworth's and quit school, simply because no part-time jobs are offered for girls.

In the end, Mick feels trapped, and the trap is clearly located at the intersection of her class and sex:

What good was it? That was the question she would like to know. What the hell good it was. All the plans she had made, and the music. When all that came of it was this trap – the store, then home to sleep, and back to the store again. (305)

According to Perry, Mick is defeated because of her sexual initiation – that is when she realizes that

the artistic world is a man's world and that it is "impossible to be both a confident artist and a sexually adult female because in her culture female sexuality is shameful and dirty, meant to be mocked in graffiti" (44). Perry thus argues that Mick is defeated because of her becoming a woman: by realizing the shameful of female sexuality, she loses her artistic ambitions. Spivak, on the other hand, argues that "It is not her sex-predicament but her class-predicament that finally defeats her. The book laments not so much her loss of innocence as her entry into the work force" (133). However, as I have demonstrated earlier in the analysis, the reason that the artistic world is unreachable for Mick is not simply either because she is a woman, or because she is economically disadvantaged, but because she is a woman who is economically disadvantaged. If we claim that Mick is marginalized exclusively on the basis of her class, we would fail to acknowledge the fact that her being a woman matters in a world where patriarchy and sexism exist. Similarly, by ignoring the fact that Mick belongs to a disadvantaged class and solely focusing on Mick being marginalized by patriarchal and sexist forces, we would not acknowledge the fact that her class belonging matters in a world where capitalism and classism exist. Consequently, as Crenshaw writes: "when one discourse fails to acknowledge the significance of the other, the power relations that each attempts to challenge are strengthened" ("Mapping" 1282). What must not be overlooked, either, is the fact that Mick is white and therefore has a privileged racial belonging in a society where non-whites are subject to racism. Her whiteness gives her access to the choice of education or work, and theoretically also to classical music. As a result, Mick is positioned in the intersection of race, class, and gender, where she is marginalized by the intersecting power structures of class and gender, and that is what finally leads to what I see as her defeat.

In her last thoughts Mick reveals her anger, but she does not know what or whom she is mad at: "She was mad all the time ... Only there was nothing to be mad at ... It was like she was cheated. Only nobody had cheated her ..." (308). Most likely, she is mad at the power structures she is subject to, she is mad at the fact that she *has* been cheated, she has been cheated in the intersection of class, gender, and race: being an economically disadvantaged woman has prevented her from fulfilling her artistic aspirations. She has been forced to conform herself to white ideals of femininity in a society where tomboyishness and female sexuality is considered shameful. Sex and class expectations has forced her to let go of her musical aspirations, and furthermore, because of her class and sex, she must help support her family instead of studying or developing her artistic talent.

4.2. Portia Copeland Jones

According to Nancy B. Rich, "Mick represents both the white population in general ... and *most*

women” (Rich 114, my italics). However, Mick is not African-American: she is white and thus belongs to a race privileged by both laws and notions that controlled power differentials in the 1930s South. One might be able to argue that Mick is somewhat representative of white, economically disadvantaged women in the 1930s South, and how their identities might be shaped by power structures of race, class, and gender. However, she can certainly not represent an African-American, economically disadvantaged woman such as Portia:

When feminist theory and politics that claim to reflect *women's* experience and *women's* aspirations do not include or speak to Black women, Black women must ask: “Ain’t We Women?” If this is so, how can the claims that “women are,” “women believe” and “women need” be made when such claims are inapplicable or unresponsive to the needs, interests and experiences of Black women? (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing” 388)

Although Mick and Portia both are women with working-class background, they do not share the same racial background. Consequently, by assuming that Mick is representative for “most women”, Portia’s intersectional experiences as an African-American woman are neglected: “Not only are women of color in fact overlooked, but their exclusion is reinforced when *white* women speak for and as *women*” (389). When white women, such as Mick, are claimed to represent most or all women, African-American women are marginalized on the basis of the race, and while anti-racism recognizes the experiences of African-Americans, race discrimination “tends to be viewed in terms of race- or class-privileged Blacks” (383). Both feminist and antiracist analyses will thus fail to acknowledge Portia’s distinct experiences as an African-American woman, since both have frameworks drawn from the experiences of those most privileged. Obviously, the same can be stated regarding Marxist analysis, in which the intersecting experiences of both women and non-whites may be neglected.

Not many literary critics, if any, have focused on Portia in their criticism. Although she is not one of the main characters, she does appear much more frequently than any other minor characters in the novel. Carson McCullers writes in her outline of *The Mute* (which was later published as *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*) that “In actual space she occupies almost as much of the book as any one of the main characters, except Mick—but she is always placed in a subordinate position” (Evans 206). She does not have any chapter of “her own”, but instead she occupies parts of Doctor Copeland’s (her father’s) or Mick’s chapters. Due to the absence of Portia in the readings of the novel, and also her subordinate position as a character in the novel itself, she is marginalized not only by the readings but also, deliberately, in the novel.

The kind of margins that McCullers explores by portraying a character such as Portia could

be seen as a precursor to the African-American literary tradition including writers such as Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and Alice Walker. Their works focus on African-American women and thus depict the effects of the power structures of race, class, and gender: marginalized characters are brought in to focus to tell the story instead of the privileged ones. Similarly, McCullers lets Portia take up as much space as any main character, however, she still occupies a subordinate position in relation to the main characters, and the marginalized characters telling the story are not African-American women. Nevertheless, the focus on isolation and marginalized characters is a similarity between McCullers's works and Toni Morrison's, for instance. Just as Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* tells the story of Pecola and deals with issues of race, gender, and also class, McCullers's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* tells the story of Mick – and Portia, however in the margins – and thus deals with issues of race, gender, and class. In the following section, I will examine the intersecting power structures that Portia is either restrained by or privileged by, how those structures shape her experiences, how she resists or accepts them, and also how her experiences differ from those of Mick.

4.2.1. Reproducing Racist, Classist, and Sexist Notions

Portia's family members are devout Christians – except from her father – so when Portia's grandfather (Grandpapa) relates about his destined meeting with Jesus, they all listen devotedly and concur:

I reason I will get to stand before Jesus with all my childrens and grandchildrens and great grandchildrens and kinfolks and friends and I say to Him, "Jesus Christ, us is all sad coloured peoples." And then he will place His holy hand upon our heads and straightway us will be white as cotton. (131)

The only one reacting to Grandpapa's, and the rest of the family's, internalized racism is Doctor Copeland, who feels anger towards their ignorance. Highboy relates about seeing God's face: "a large white man's face with a white beard and blue eyes" (131), and Grandpapa relates about "a little white girl angel ... with yellow hair and a white robe" (131). All that is holy – God, His angels, and Jesus – is white, which implies that all that is unholy is black. Racism is justified by religious teachings, and in order for Portia (and the rest of her family) to be accepted by God and succeed in religion, in which notions of white supremacy occur, they need to become white themselves.

Quite early in the novel, William is arrested for attempted murder in a fight over a girl after

visiting a strip club. Portia disdains the “strutting, bad-blood, tail-shaking nigger gals” (123), who presumably are the strippers working at the club. They represent unholiness and filth, they are both African-American women *and* economically disadvantaged, they are openly sexual, and they work at an ungodly place. Portia, on the other hand, works amongst white people, she is a devout Christian and she is married, which she considers raises her status, even though she, too, is socioeconomically disadvantaged. When her father uses the word ‘Negro’, she gets angry and replies:

Take Willie and me. Us aren’t all the way coloured. Our Mama was real light and both of us have a good deal of white folks’ blood in us. ... None of us is pure coloured and the word you all the time using have a way of hurting peoples’ feelings. (72)

However, when describing the strippers, Portia uses the word ‘nigger’, although she does say that “polite peoples – no matter what shade they is – always say coloured” (72). Strippers, and particularly African-American strippers, are the embodiment of “bad girls” while Portia is the opposite. Nonetheless, she is African-American, and society will not recognize her as a “good girl” until she becomes as white as the angel Grandpapa describes. Consequently, she stresses that she has white blood in her, and when she describes Love (the girl whom William fights over at the strip club), she says: “She at least ten shades blacker than I is and she the ugliest nigger I ever seen” (123). Comparing the two, Portia is more angel-like than Love will ever be, that is if angels look like Grandpapa believes. Portia’s intra-racial racism is a result of her having internalized notions of whiteness and blackness. She values her light skin and her working position in a white family’s house highly, and thus considers herself to acquire a higher status based on that and also based on her qualities as a “good girl”; her maternal qualities and her involvement in a monogamous marriage. Her disdain of the strippers is due to them being positioned in the lowest layer of the intersection of race, class, and gender; they are subject to racist, sexist, and classist notions that Portia takes part in reproducing and according to which she defines them and herself.

When William is arrested, Portia tells her father: “Seems to me ... if us can just get a lot of white peoples to write letters about Willie it might help out some” (124). Laws and courts will not acknowledge the demands of African-Americans, and in order for them to make their voices heard, they need white people as spokespersons. Portia summarizes Biff Brannon’s letter:

It tell how Willie is one fine upstanding coloured boy and how he hasn’t ever been in no trouble before now. It tell how he always had plenty chances to take things in the café if he were like some other type of coloured boy and how—? (124)

Brannon depicts William as an economically disadvantaged African-American who is an exception to other African-Americans like him. In a similar way, Mick says that: “That Portia had a certain kind of niggery craziness, but she was O.K. She never would do anything mean to Bubber or Ralph on the sly like some coloured girls” (49). By depicting both Portia and William as exceptions, Mick and Brannon generalize African-Americans and reproduce certain notions about them, in Mick’s case: African-American women, and in Brannon’s case: economically disadvantaged African-Americans.

When Doctor Copeland is at the Kellys house with Portia, shortly after they have heard the news about the amputation of William’s feet, Mick first addresses Copeland by calling him “Uncle”, and when he does not reply, she calls him by his first name: “Benedict”. Although Mick is sympathetic to both Portia and Copeland and wants to revenge the prison guards who have tortured William, she is conscious of her white privilege and thus uses the derogatory title “Uncle” when addressing Copeland. The power differential of white dominance/black subordination is thus reproduced and no one seems to oppose it, other than Copeland himself who decides not to respond.

4.2.2. The Ideal Family

Neither Mick’s nor Portia’s family corresponds to the traditional family ideal that Patricia Hill Collins presents, an ideal which I have mentioned earlier in the analysis. Portia lives with her husband Highboy Jones and her younger brother William:

Highboy and Willie and me gets along just fine. ... us haves our own way of living and our own plan. Highboy – he pay the rent. I buys all the food out of my money. And Willie – he tends to all of our church dues, insurance, lodge dues, and Saturday Night. Us three haves our own plan and each one of us does our parts. (McCullers 67)

There is no single patriarchal authority; instead, Portia’s family is an alternative family where she, Highboy, and William together are breadwinners. The fact that the ideal family includes a stay-at-home wife suggests that the model is shaped to correspond neither to economically disadvantaged families, as Micks’ analysis demonstrates, nor to African-American families. Crenshaw writes that African-American women traditionally have worked outside the home far more than white women:

“An analysis of patriarchy that highlights the history of white women’s exclusion from the workplace might permit the inference that Black women have not been burdened by this particular gender-based expectation. Yet the very fact that Black women must work

conflicts with norms that women should not" ("Demarginalizing" 390)

Accordingly, a feminist analysis based on white experiences might suggest that Portia is not subject to patriarchal forces since she is not excluded from working (Crenshaw 390). Collins argues that the family ideal is "especially problematic for African-American women" (47), partly because traditionally, African-American women have not enjoyed a split between the public and the private sphere, and also, because "they work outside the home, work for pay and thus compete with men ..." (47), African-American women have therefore been considered as less "feminine" and consequently challenged traditional gender roles. Portia is thus unable to conform to ideal femininity because of her husband's low wages which oblige her to work too.

As a result, since Portia is an African-American, economically disadvantaged woman, the possibilities for her to be a stay-at-home wife are very unlikely: "Denying U.S. Black men a family wage meant that Black women continued working for pay. Motherhood as a privatized, female "occupation" never predominated in Black civil society because no social class foundation could be had to support it" (Collins 53). Highboy's presumably low wage is not enough to provide for the family and thus, Portia has no option of staying at home.

4.2.3. The Domestic Servant

To Doctor Copeland's great disappointment, none of his children are educated, and as many other African-American women in the South during the 1930s, Portia is a domestic worker in the Kellys' household. Portia, however, is content with her life as long as she, Highboy, and William get along well in accordance with their plan. She considers herself to be "a whole lot more fortunate than most coloured girls" (45), partly because her Grandpapa has a great farm in the countryside where she has grown up and where she can return whenever she has a problem. However, she has a low-income job and earns only three dollars a week, far less than Mick's ten dollars each week. When Mick comments on this, Hazel only answers "Oh, coloured people –" (278). Furthermore, it is possible assuming that being a cook in a household predominantly was (and is) a female occupation and thus a low-income occupation. Portia is therefore not paid a low wage exclusively because she is a woman, as a feminist analysis might suggest; nor is she paid a low wage only because she is African-American, as an antiracist analysis might suggest. The reason that she is paid a lower wage than a white woman and presumably also than an African-American man is that she is an African-American woman.

In "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex", Crenshaw argues:

If any real efforts are to be made to free Black people of the constraints and conditions that characterize racial subordination, then theories and strategies purporting to reflect the Black community's needs must include an analysis of sexism and patriarchy. Similarly, feminism must include an analysis of race if it hopes to express the aspirations of none-white women. Neither Black liberationist politics nor feminist theory can ignore the intersectional experiences of those whom the movements claim as their respective constituents. (394)

By examining Portia solely from a feminist perspective or from an antiracist perspective, her intersectional experiences will be ignored. Crenshaw emphasizes “the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (“Mapping” 1245) and refers to Professor Mari Matsuda who calls that inquiry “asking the other question” (1245, note 10). Thus, by “asking the other question”, one is able to see that power structures do not work independently from each other, but instead that they are connected and intersect.

In his Christmas speech, Doctor Copeland equates Portia's work with slavery because her work could easily be replaced with the Kellys' own effort to cook:

Many of us cook for those who are incompetent to prepare the food that they themselves eat. ... We spend our lives doing thousands of jobs that are of no real use to anybody. We labour and all of our labour is wasted. Is that service? No, that is slavery. (170-1)

Although the Kellys are depicted as a poor, working-class family, it is important to stress that this is considering that they are white. In contrast to Portia and other African-Americans, they would most likely not be considered poor. “Historically, many White families in both the middle class and working class were able to maintain their class position because they used Black women domestic workers as a source of cheap labour” (Collins 74). Therefore, considering that the Kellys still afford having a cook despite their poverty, it becomes clear once again that African-American labour, and especially African-American women's labour, is worth little in the intersection of capitalism, racism, and patriarchy.

The work is hard and it always take me a long time to get through. However, that don't bother me none. It about the pay I worries about. I suppose to get three dollars a week – but sometimes Mrs Kelly likes a dollar or fifty cents of paying me the full amount. Course she always catches up on it soon as she able. But it haves a way of leaving me in a pinch. ... But the Kellys is really grand white peoples to work for. I really fond of them as I can be. (76-77)

Despite her father's advice that she should "look out for [her] own livelihood first" (77), the hard work, and the late payments, Portia is content working for the Kellys. As I have earlier described, working for white people is a position of status for Portia even though her father compares her kind of work to slavery. Her unreturned regard for the family is made visible when Mick's younger brother Bubber steals her gold earrings when escaping from home: "I never thought my Bubber would have done such a thing to me" (157) says Portia to Mick, and Mick's silence might indicate that she would have done the same if she had needed to.

Patricia Hill Collins presents several stereotypes, or *controlling images*, of African-American women, based on racial, sexist, and classist notions. She explains how controlling images are used in order to objectify "the Other" (70). One of them is "that of the mammy—the faithful, obedient, domestic servant. Created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and ... to explain Black women's long-standing restriction to house slaves" (72):

By loving, nurturing, and caring for her White children and "family" better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group's perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite White male power. Even though she may be well loved and may wield considerable authority in her White "family," the mammy still knows her "place" as obedient servant. She has accepted her subordination. ... The mammy image is central to intersecting oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class. (72-73)

Portia's role in the Kellys' household evokes the role of the mammy: she accepts and respects them despite Mrs Kelly paying her late, Bubber stealing from her, and Mick addressing her father in a disrespectful way. She portrays "the faithful, obedient domestic servant" (72) and when her father tells her to think of herself and possibly find another job due to the hard work in the Kellys' household, Portia defends them and tells him how fond she is of the children, and of the sympathy she has for Mrs Kelly (McCullers 77). However, Portia's characterization does not fully respond to the image of the mammy: "... the mammy image is one of an asexual woman, a surrogate mother in blackface whose historical devotion to her White family is now giving way to new expectations. Contemporary mammies should be completely committed to their jobs" (Hill Collins 74). Portia is instead portrayed as very feminine: she wears colorful dresses, hats, and high heels, and although she is committed to her job on the one hand, she is also very committed to her family and to her plan with Highboy and William on the other. Consequently, the characterization of Portia as a young, feminine, married woman devoted to her own family, subverts the image of the mammy and thus challenges the traditional objectification of the Other.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to examine how *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, through its characterization of Mick and Portia, can be seen as a critique towards certain intersecting power structures of the 1930s South, and by that demonstrate the crucial need of intersectionality theory when examining those power structures in the characterization of the two characters. With my account of previous research on both Carson McCullers' works in general, and her novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* more specifically, I have found that the novel has been read both as apolitical and also as a text concerned with the social and political issues of its time. However, its social and political issues have in many cases been regarded as subordinate, peripheral themes, and there has thus not been much focus on how the power structures at work in the novel intersect and thus create individual experiences. Race, class, and gender have often been treated as independent and exclusive sociocultural categories and many times, critics have ignored the fact that those categories intersect.

In the first part of the analysis I have focused on Mick: what intersecting power structures she is either restrained or privileged by, how those structures shape her experiences, and how she resists or accepts them. I have found that Mick is restrained by notions of femininity based on racial, classist, and sexist notions, and that her characterization challenges them through her "inappropriate" modes of behavior. She is also restrained to fulfill her artistic aspirations due to her unprivileged position in the intersection of class and gender. Ultimately, Mick is defeated by the intersecting power structures of race, class, and gender, and not solely because she is a woman or because she is economically disadvantaged, but because of her position as an economically disadvantaged woman.

In the second part of the analysis I have focused on Portia, a character who hardly any critics have even mentioned. I have examined what intersecting power structures she is either restrained or privileged by, how those structures shape her experiences, and how she resists or accepts them. I have found that Portia is part of reproducing intersecting notions of race, class, and gender due to her having internalized racist, classist, and sexist notions, but that her characterization also challenges and subverts notions such as the ideal family. By examining Portia's characterization through an intersectional framework, it has been possible to see how race, class, and gender intersect and thus create notions which she either challenges or internalizes.

By using intersectionality theory as a theoretical framework, I have been able to trace how race, class, and gender intersect and together shape power structures in form of notions and ideals, for instance and how those power structures are at work and shape the experiences of Mick and

Portia. As I have mentioned in the section on intersectionality theory, Kimberlé Crenshaw argues that single-axis framework or analysis treats categories of experiences such as race and gender “as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis” (“Demarginalizing” 383). Therefore, I have argued that an analysis of Mick and Portia focusing merely on their experiences in regard to gender, for instance, would have been too simplistic. An intersectional analysis provides an understanding of how gender together with race and/or class forms power structures and thus shapes Mick’s and Portia’s experiences. Although I have treated the two characters separately, it is clear that even though Mick and Portia both are economically disadvantaged women, their racial background also matters in a society where notions and ideals are different for white women and African-American women.

As a result, my conclusion is that both Mick and Portia are marginalized in their society, but often on different basis. Their marginalized and intersectional identities are too complex to be examined through one “single-axis framework” (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing” 383), and I believe that by presenting a set of characters challenging intersectional notions and normativities, Carson McCullers suggests an intersectional understanding of identity and of the power aspects presented in the novel.

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