

As Tragic-Figures: A Lacanian Psychoanalytic Investigation of the Fragmented Self and the other in Albert Camus's *the Stranger* and Carson McCullers' *the Heart is a Lonely Hunter*

Thulfiqar Abdulameer Sulaiman Alhmdni

Ministry of Education, Open Educational College, Najaf Governorate, Iraq.

ABSTRACT: This study analyzes *The Stranger* (1942) by Albert Camus alongside *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) by Carson McCullers through a psychoanalytic lens of Lacan to examine self-fragmentation and connections with the Other. Through an evaluation of Meursault and John Singer as tragic figures the study explains how Lacan's mirror stage and Symbolic Order and Real concepts shape their development. The characters demonstrate internal self-breakup along with an exhausting fight to align their interior turmoil with external social rules. Their detached expressions which mirror the needs of others serve as examples of Lacanian identity theory where people create internal divisions because others observe and judge them. When an individual fights against societal norms the result shows broad existential tension and psychological isolation. The academic research gives new insights into twentieth-century identity conflicts and existential perspectives by applying Lacanian theory.

KEYWORDS: Tragic-Figures, The Stranger, Fragmented Self, the Other, The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter

INTRODUCTION

Two significant 20th-century literary masterpieces, *The Stranger* (1942) by Albert Camus and *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) by Carson McCullers analyze the concepts of isolation as well as personal identity and human state of being. The two novels follow tragic heroes Meursault and John Singer because these characters display fragmented psychological identities while remaining disconnected from their social environment. The main characters in these novels face similar difficulties because they cannot match their internal essence against external societal expectations and the requirements of Others. Through an application of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic thought this study analyzes the characters' experience of existential and social alienation using his three main theoretical frameworks - fragmented self-theory and the Symbolic Order framework alongside the Other theory framework. Through an analysis of Meursault's existential lack of interest and John Singer's reflective nature toward others' desires this research demonstrates the tragic aspects of the fragmented self-combined with the deceptive nature of the Other in forming human identity.

Throughout the mid-twentieth century writers along with thinkers performed thorough investigations into both existential philosophy and psychological responses to the post-World War II world and modernization and growing isolation in a fragmented society. Albert Camus as a central existentialist thinker met Carson McCullers who established Southern Gothic literature by exploring identity in their literary works. *The Stranger* by Albert Camus receives primarily existential absurdity analysis yet *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullers probes the lonely human experience through psychological and social elements. Their origins in separate literary traditions do not diminish the central focus on self-fragmentation and Other-relationships in these novels which justify psychoanalytic analysis through the theory of Lacan.

Meanwhile his revision of Freudian psychoanalysis Jacques Lacan establishes an advanced method to study self-fragmentation together with the Other relation. According to Lacan, the mirror stage represents an essential component of his theory because it describes how infants recognize their reflections which leads to the emergence of fragmented self-images that remain alienated from their core identities (Lacan 76). Following the mirror stage discovery infants experience an additional fragmentation which intensifies during their admission to the Symbolic Order because the imposed sense of identity remains perpetually lacking. Through this ontological model the Real encompasses all unreachable aspects and symbolically unknowable truths which transcend linguistic definitions and social arrangements. The analysis of Meursault and Singer demonstrates how their billions with identity and alienation match these particular concepts and how Symbolic order creates irreconcilable self-disconnection.

The main character in *The Stranger* displays existential detachment along with societal norm irrelevance which serves as evidence that he is cut off from the Symbolic Order. The lack of compassion toward his mother's passing together with his risky

As Tragic-Figures: A Lacanian Psychoanalytic Investigation of the Fragmented Self and the other in Albert Camus's the Stranger and Carson Mccullers' the Heart is a Lonely Hunter

actions prove that Meursault remains trapped within the Real because his connection with the Other has been severed. According to Sartre Meursault demonstrates “indifference to the social code” which identifies him as an outsider who exists “outside the boundaries of human society” (Sartre 32). His alienation reaches its peak at trial since society tries to create a storyline about what happened despite their lack of understanding. The prosecutor labels Meursault as a “monster” to authenticate the Symbolic Order's requirement for social conformity although Meursault cannot commit to its tailored expectations (Camus 98). Through his detachment toward Others he demonstrates the fragmented self of the Lacanian mold because he stays anchored in the Real where meaning continuously evades him.

The character John Singer in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* maintains his muteness which functions as an indicator of his Social Order exclusion and left him without identity. Singer's failure to express his internal crisis together with his inability to meet social expectations exemplifies a fragmented self-structure per Lacan which ends in his tragic death as a final acceptance of his irreconcilable self. The inability to speak prevents Singer from becoming a reflection for others which leads to his deep existential loneliness according to Westling (45). Within the Lacanian structure his intense desolation points to the complete failure of achieving self-cohesion because he remains permanently separated from the Other.

This study examines how Meursault and Singer encounter psychological and existential difficulties through a Lacanian framework assessment. The analysis conducts a comparative examination of *The Stranger* and *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* to demonstrate how the main characters display the mature outcomes of self-division alongside the challenging connection with others. The research implements Lacanian principles and Camus and McCullers scholarship to add depth to discussions about 20th-century literature which investigates both identity and alienation together with the absurdity and how they challenge our understanding of human experiences in fragmented life.

Fragmented Self : An Investigation of the Other, Desire and Lack

According to Lacan, mirror stage, represents the self exists as multiple parts because people develop their personal identity by reflecting external reflections and cultural standards. The division between identity perception and societal norms becomes apparent in *The Stranger* and *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* because characters face difficulties uniting their true selves with external demands (Lacan 76). Through the Symbolic Order people find representation in language institutions along with social structures that dictate their personal identity attributes. The main characters in both novels exist outside their dominant social structures which creates within them yearning feelings for connection (Evans 45). Meanwhile, human beings experience a basic deficiency that causes them to pursue happiness through contact with others. Through their desires the characters in both texts apply their dreams onto representations such as Meursault and Singer but experience denial of fulfillment (Fink 89).

Meursault as a Tragic Figure and Existential Alienation

Meursault establishes himself as a tragic figure because he shows complete disregard for community standards along with his rejection of expected conduct. Through a lack of Symbolic Order commitment Meursault faces death by execution that ultimately demonstrates how humans stand distant from their shared reality (Camus 102). Throughout the novel Meursault demonstrates multiple fragmented aspects which manifest as his inability to communicate with others and his failure to discover purpose in existence. Through his state of disconnectedness Meursault represents the fundamental emptiness Lacan describes to be the essence of human nature (Lacan 112). The Others depicted in, *The Stranger*, include both social norms which judge Meursault for his nonconformity and the court system presiding over his trial. The court proceedings transform into a symbolic examination of the Symbolic Order and display the fictitious nature of societal standards (Camus 121).

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter by Carson McCullers investigates profound themes about feelings of loneliness as well as human identity and the fundamental requirement to connect with others. Through the narrative of John Singer and his surrounding marginalized characters McCullers explores the broken structure of self along with the deceptive nature of perceiving others. This part analyzes both Singer's position as the Silent Other and the fragmented nature of the marginalized figures together with the dominant themes of longing and isolation that exist throughout the book.

John Singer as the Silent Other

The main character John Singer plays a mute role which allows other characters to project their personal needs and battles through him. Through his quiet nature and inability to speak Singer allows people to reflect their own emotions onto him. This relationship pattern demonstrates Lacan's concept of fragmented identity because every person tries to find completion through their bond with Singer. The characters of McCullers's story each constructed the mute according to their personal preferences (McCullers 56). Singer maintains his silence which lets people around him create their own fantasies about what he thinks or wants despite making them feel like he understands them. The imagined relationship falls short of bringing satisfaction to these characters demonstrating that the Lacanian theory shows Others as false creations.

Singer emerges as the Silent Other most prominently when interacting with the three men who form his relationships: Mick, Jake and Dr. Copeland. All the characters observe their own goals and problems reflected through Singer's character. Singer

As Tragic-Figures: A Lacanian Psychoanalytic Investigation of the Fragmented Self and the other in Albert Camus's *the Stranger* and Carson McCullers' *the Heart is a Lonely Hunter*

serves as an aspirational escape route for Mick since the young character desires to leave his financially straitened and developing stages of life behind. Jake sees in Singer a viable model of compassionate understanding which exists among people who live with social disparities. The presence of Singer represents to Dr. Copeland a visionary symbol of achieving racial justice alongside recognition. Bruce Fink explains that “The Other is not a source of fulfilment but a site of perpetual lack” (Fink 95). Singer becomes a symbol of unfulfilled desire because none of the characters can project their desires onto him successfully thus exposing the tragic nature of fragmented self-experiences.

The Fragmented Selves of the Marginalized Characters

The characters in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* struggle to build unity within their fractured personalities because of racial distinctions along with social position and physical limitations. Mick aspires to be a musical performer even though her poor family background limits her possibilities. Her fragmented personality manifests itself as she tries to match her goals with the difficult things she encounters in her real world. The young character remains unaware about her heart functioning as a solitary hunting ground (McCullers 78). Mick finds a reflection of her emotional emptiness in her connection with Singer since he represents the sense of meaning and belonging she has never achieved.

The labour organizer Jake Blount demonstrates the fight for social justice even as his existence is limited by alcohol use throughout a society defined by socioeconomic disparities. The brokenness in his personality develops from unsuccessful transformative efforts and his inability to connect with the working-class people he wants to lead. Dr. As an African American physician Dr. Copeland fights against the double oppression of racial discrimination together with his health problems. His fragmented identity develops from his fight to unite his academic ambitions with the institutional discrimination thanks to his racial background. Louise Westling points out how “These characters’ relationships with Singer expose the deep inner loneliness and social estrangement that prevails in their lives” (Westling 45). Through their encounters with Singer both characters discover ways to make sense of a fragmented society and the unrealistically optimistic expectations linked to encountering another person.

Every character tries to find spiritual meaning in Singer but he proves incapable of providing satisfaction. Lacan’s principle of desire as lacking emerges through the characters’ failed attempts to find satisfaction in their Singer-based fantasies. According to Fink desire operates through the Other yet no person can successfully satisfy the desired need (Fink 95). Through their behavior toward Singer the characters reveal their permanent state of dissatisfaction since their pursuit of personal significance does not succeed.

The fragmented self becomes tragic because Mick yearns for purpose while Jake seeks solidarity along with Dr. Copeland who desires justice yet all these desires go unfulfilled. Singer's fatal determination to end his life reveals to readers how impossible it is for the self to find peace with the conditions of relation to others. According to Elisabeth Roudinesco the fatal actions of Singer highlight the deep fear and absence of hope which exists as a fundamental aspect of being human (Roudinesco 210). The death of his character demonstrates the failure of the Symbolic Order when it comes to generating purposeful meaning and coherence for human existence.

Fragmented self-perception together with relationships with others represent the key thematic elements in both *The Stranger* by Camus alongside *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* written by McCullers. The two novels present contrasting perspectives for identity isolation yet both concentrate on learning the dark realities of being human. This section analyzes how Meursault and Singer represent tragic characters through their exploration of identity creation by the Other and their respective forms of alienation.

The Role of the Other in Shaping Identity

The characters of Meursault and Singer demonstrate existential and social alienation traits which make them tragic figures. Meursault’s tragic journey results from his refusal to participate in social structures because he holds no commitment to conventional norms and social standards. The way Meursault reacts to his mother's death coupled with his afterward actions demonstrate his inability to connect with others which leads to his tragic position in the real world. The line from Camus' novel states “Nothing, nothing mattered” (Camus 130). The absurd reality becomes clear to Meursault because he faces the Real through accepting that attaining coherent self-identity remains impossible in the Symbolic Order.

The critical flaw which makes Singer tragic stemmed from his lack of initiative to reflect his own desires but instead reflected the wants of those around him. Singer presents as a silent figure who attracts others to project their expectations and misinterpretations onto him thus becoming a blank surface. McCullers describes how every character described the mute according to his own self-image (McCullers 89). Singer's failure to match others' expectations reveals the tragic nature of fragmented personality since he leaves everyone who seeks meaning without resolution. His death in the novel's end illustrates how the human being cannot properly align their true nature with the expectations of society.

Both novels utilize the character of the Other to create fundamental effects on the development of their main characters. The judicial system presents Meursault with a strict demand for conformity which he fails to accept. Jean-Paul Sartre identifies the traits of alienation in Meursault through his “indifference to the social code” because it reveals him to be living “outside the

As Tragic-Figures: A Lacanian Psychoanalytic Investigation of the Fragmented Self and the other in Albert Camus's the Stranger and Carson Mccullers' the Heart is a Lonely Hunter

boundaries of human society” (Sartre 32). The Lacanian fragmented self-concept describes his condition since his stuckness in the Real prevents him from grasping any permanent meaning.

The Silent Other role played by Singer demonstrates how the Other cannot provide factual meaning in Lacanian theory. According to Dylan Evans “The Other functions not as a source of fulfilment yet represents an endless lack” (Evans 45). Through their interactions with Singer each character displays the deep isolation along with alienation which owns their existence because their pursuit of meaning lacks fulfilment. The novels demonstrate through their narratives that identity construction via the Other results in shattered selves which embody tragic elements.

Existential vs. Social Alienation

The Stranger deals with existential alienation and *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* analyzes social alienation to demonstrate distinct aspects of self-fragmentation in each work. The detached mindset of Meursault shows his unwillingness to participate in Symbolic Order through his lack of interest in following social norms. The absurd confrontations of the protagonist demonstrate existential disconnectedness because he understands no one can develop meaningful self-identity through the Symbolic Order (Camus 102).

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter concentrates on social aspects of alienation when its characters face barriers due to racial discrimination alongside social position and physical limitations. In their interactions with Singer the main characters highlight the quest for significance in an environment without unity along with their unsatisfying experiences with the other (McCullers 56). The books exhibit how a torn self creates devastating outcomes when interacting with others while giving an intricate portrayal of human existence.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals *The Stranger* and *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* as tragic testimonials about fragmented selves in their complex encounters with the Other by using Lacanian psychoanalysis. The novels demonstrate the core elements of human condition through characters Meursault and John Singer who expose false meanings and social connection as illusions due to their fragmented selves and their social interactions with other people. This research demonstrates that the selected works match their common thematic interests and operate separately in portraying human identity and psychological isolation.

Both Meursault and Singer display Lacanian fragmentation of their selves as they attempt to match their psychological battles with Symbolic Order guidelines. The extreme detachment of Meursault and Singer together portrays their fate as doomed characters stuck within the realm of the Real since they both exist outside the Symbolic Order. Both characters fail to establish a whole self-image because alienation marks the core experience of being human.

In both novels the social group functions as the principal source which forms the development of character identities. The way Meursault faces the judicial system alongside Singer's reflective behaviour towards others' wants shows readers how the Other functions based on Lacanian principles. Character relationships with the Other demonstrate the deep isolation which distracts their lives while their purposeful search for meaning ends unfulfilled. *The Stranger* deals with existential alienation yet *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* examines social alienation by showing dissimilar aspects of self-fragmentation in these literary works. Meursault's rejection of social norms combined with Singer's willingness to let others impose goals upon him leads to tragic outcomes which expose the disruptive relationship between self and other people. Meursault and Singer face tragic ends that expose the natural conflict of self against Other preventing successful interaction with the outside world which mirrors universal human emotional distress. Meursault's acceptance of absurdity and Singer's self-execution stand as fundamental demonstrations that self-confrontation with otherhood demands remains impossible.

The scrutinize shows how *The Stranger* by Camus and *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* by McCullers analyze the composite self during its interactions with the external world. The analytic approach that combines Lacanian psychoanalysis reveals both Meursault and Singer's tragic path as well as significant aspects for studying alienation in modern literature. The two novels demonstrate how identity gets constructed through deceiving relationships with the Other by displaying despair as the universal human experience.

Through the application of Lacanian Theory this research investigation provides readers with enhanced insights into the complex mental and philosophical matters affecting the lead characters. Meursault faces the absurd reality while Singer remains an object to which others project their ideas which together produce the broken nature of personal identity that shows individuals cannot acquire consistent self-identity within the Symbolic Order. These tragic endings remind researchers about the fundamental traits of modern societal structure that lead people to become emotionally detached from one another thus remaining relevant across both literary analysis and present-day psychoanalytic interpretation.

The research investigates broader meaning about identity and alienation as well as the absurd elements in 20th century literature by examining how Camus and McCullers explore deep aspects of human psychology. This analysis demonstrates through

As Tragic-Figures: A Lacanian Psychoanalytic Investigation of the Fragmented Self and the other in Albert Camus's the Stranger and Carson Mccullers' the Heart is a Lonely Hunter

Lacanian scholarship and theory that the disintegration of self and challenges between self and Other remain crucial issues which continue to matter in literary and human understanding.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Thulficar Abdulameer Sulaiman Alhmdni is a faculty member at the Open Educational College, Najaf Center, Department of English Language. He serves as the Head of Department and a lecturer specializing in English Language and Literature, with over 17 published research papers in international and local scientific journals. He has participated in numerous scientific conferences as a member of scientific committees and is recognised as an educational leader in teaching English language methodologies for updated curricula in secondary schools. Dr. Alhmdni has both participated in and led several training courses within and outside Iraq. He authored the curriculum for a play textbook for the third stage. Currently, he holds positions such as Secretary-General of the Educational Competencies Foundation, member of the Teachers' Union, member of the Iraqi Teachers' Syndicate, Secretary of the Iraqi Translators Association, and a judicial expert in translation. Additionally, he is a literary critic and researcher, with numerous academic and research translations to his name. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6884-7609>

REFERENCES

- 1) Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Translated by Justin O'Brien, Vintage International, 1991.
- 2) Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. Translated by Matthew Ward, Vintage International, 1989.
- 3) Evans, Dylan. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. Routledge, 1996.
- 4) Fink, Bruce. *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton University Press, 1995.
- 5) Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Translated by Bruce Fink, W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.
- 6) McCullers, Carson. *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. Mariner Books, 2000.
- 7) Roudinesco, Elisabeth. *Jacques Lacan: An Outline of a Life and a History of a System of Thought*. Translated by Barbara Bray, Columbia University Press, 1997.
- 8) Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Camus' *The Stranger*." *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, translated by Annette Michelson, Criterion Books, 1955, pp. 24–41.
- 9) Westling, Louise. *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor*. University of Georgia Press, 1985.



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.