Delusion of Religion

Yi Feng

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Mr. Pandoflini

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Throughout human history, religion has always placed a big role. Religion was originally invented to explain natural phenomenon that primitive humans did not understand, such as rain, snow, day, and night. In the modern world, people practice religion for various reasons depending on their beliefs. Some people might practice religion because they believe in an afterlife, some people believe in spiritual salvation, or they might practice religion to cope with real life problems. Carson McCullers’ book, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, the theme asserts that people self-delude themselves with religion in order to cope with real life problems.

Dr. Copeland sees John Singer as an enlightened or Christ like figure is an obvious example of delusion. In the time frame of which this book takes place, African Americans were still segregated, and they often received poor treatment from Caucasians. “The white man smiled at him and lighted his cigarette. He did not know what to say, for nothing like that has ever happened to him before” (73). Because of the mistreatments Dr. Copeland received throughout his life time, it was shocking to him that a white man showed him an act of courtesy. Therefore, he concluded that this man must be enlightened since he was able to look pass Dr. Copeland’s skin color, which shows Dr. Copeland’s delusion. Despite the fact that African Americans were mistreated by most Caucasians, it deems ridiculous that Dr. Copeland postulate John Singer was enlightened simply base on this single act of kindness. To further demonstrate Dr. Copeland’s delusion, he makes the assumption that John Singer is Jewish despite the lack of evidence that proves John Singer’s faith. “Dr. Copeland thinks that he is a Jew because his heroes are secular Jews – Benedict Spinoza and Karl Marx” (Hershon 1). This shows Dr. Copeland’s delusion because he assumes that his heroes and John Singer are all enlightened. So therefore, if his heroes were Jewish, John Singer must be as well. Overall, Dr. Copeland assuming that John Singer is enlightened based on a single act of kindness is an obvious example of people deluding themselves with religion in order to cope with real life problems, and John Singer’s action also lures Jake Blount into thinking that John Singer has infinite wisdom.

Jake Blount assumes that John Singer have infinite wisdom because John Singer listens to Jake Blount’s rants and gives the illusion that John Singer understands him. Jake Blount is a socialist who strongly advocate against capitalism because he firmly believes that it is the root of evil. He believes that capitalism keeps workers poor while they make the upper classes rich. He tries to give speeches and lectures that explain the evils of capitalism and hopes that one day the working class will rise up in revolt. Despite his best efforts, nobody seems to understand him, and the only person that gives the illusion of comprehension is John Singer. “But the main thing he sees is that the whole system of the world is built on a lie, and although it’s plain as the shining sun – the don’t-knows have lived with that lie so long they just can’t see it” (129). Jake Blount explains that people fall into two categories, the do-knows and the don’t-knows. The don’t-knows, or the working classes are the people that are ignorant to the evils of capitalism. The do-knows are the people that realizes the evils of capitalism; the people that are gifted of knowledge by some kind of divine being. He puts John Singer into this category because John Singer gives the illusion of understanding Jake Blount’s point despite John Singer’s lack of understanding on the subject. “John Singer at least grants Jake Blount the illusion of understanding by being a quiet listener who lets Jake Blount rant and rave free from judgment” (Greeley 1). Therefore, the only reason that Jake Blount assumes John Singer falls into the category of the do-knows is because he is a mute; he is unable to interrupt Jake Blount when he is lecturing. Thus, this grants Jake Blount the illusion of John Singer understanding his point about the how capitalism is evil when all John Singer is doing is quietly listening to him rant. Through Jake Blount’s assumption of John Singer having infinite wisdom because of the illusion of understanding that John Singer provides shows Jake Blount’s delusion of assuming there are divine beings with infinite wisdom. In addition to John Singer being a Christ like figure to others, the lack of confidence also make people delude themselves with religion.

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All characters in the novel have some sort of physical or mental disability that results in lack confidence in the character. A clear example of disability can be seen on African American characters like Portia, Dr. Copeland, and Willie. In the timeframe of which this book takes place, African Americans were still segregated, and they were still considered inferior. Thus, they received poor treatments from Caucasians. This type of poor treatment can be seen when Dr. Copeland was thrown in jail for protesting Willie’s amputation. “Father, don’t you know that ain’t no way to help our Willie? Messing around at a white folks’ courthouse? Best thing us can do is keep our mouth shut and wait” (225). The poor treatment that African Americans received led up to the lack of confidence, which made Portia believe in the notion of their inability to do anything about the injustice they face. “Being African American in the South during the 1930s was a definite social disadvantage” (Napierkowski 108). Being African American in the South was a social disadvantage because they were inferior during that time frame, and this will lead to their lack of confidence when they are faced with injustice. Because of this, people like Portia, Willie, and Highboy will turn to religion to make up for that lack of confidence, and when they are faced with injustice, they will turn to religion for an answer. Although turning to religion makes the problems bearable, it does not necessary solve the injustice they face. Due to this factor, they are essentially turning to religion to delude themselves with real life problems. Overall, African Americans face a lot of injustice which results in lack of confidence, but the lack of confidence does not only root from facing injustice.

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Mick Kelly is an example of an unconfident character; her lack of confidence can be seen through her family’s economic status and her behavior. Music symbolizes Mick Kelly’s energy and pursuit of beauty. However, she is not able to pursuit her dream of becoming a musician due to her family’s economic difficulties. Being in a family with economic difficulties makes her an unconfident character which she tries to make up for by acting tough. She does this by dressing like a boy, using a boy’s name, and smoking. “She took from her pocket of her shorts the package of smoke she had brought the night before. She breathed in the smoke slowly. The cigarette gave her a drunk feeling so that her head seemed heavy and loose on her shoulder, but she had to finish it” (29). It is apparent that she does not enjoy smoking, but she feels obligated to keep up the tough imagine to make up for her lack of confidence. Despite her best efforts of trying to be tough, she is basically just deluding herself from reality. “Mick Kelly wields no real authority but burdened with responsibility for her younger brothers. She tries to enhance her stature by acting tough, using a boy's name and dressing boyishly and smoking, but her false strength is revealed by the fear she has of being found out after her first sexual encounter” (Napierkowski 108). Her false strength is revealed when she starts to fear that people will find out that she had sex with Harry, the boy next door. This completely shatters her whole imagine of being tough, and it reveals her false strength that she has been deluding herself with all this time. This shows how she deludes herself with an ideology in order to cope with real life problems like her family’s financial difficulties. In the end, Mick Kelly turns to a “religion” to make up for her lack of confidence just like Portia, Willie, and Highboy but turning to a religion to make up for the lack of confidence was only a delusion since it only helps them cope with their problems instead of actually solving them.

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In Carson McCullers’ book, the Heart is a Lonely Hunter, the theme asserts that people self-delude themselves with religion in order to cope with real life problems. Fundamentally, all characters in this book delude themselves with religion, rather it was thinking John Singer was a Chris like figure or turning to religion to make up for the lack of confidence. However, this does not actually help them solve the issue they face; it merely makes it easier to cope with the issue. Instead of just deluding themselves with religion, people should seek more realistic ways when it comes to problems. Instead of just using religion to cope with an issue, they should seek ways to solve the issue so that it is no longer a problem.

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