

Desiring Brotherhood
—**Alternative Masculinities and a Critique**
of the American Empire in Carson
McCullers's *Reflections in a Golden Eye*

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Abstract

This paper examines Carson McCullers's second novel, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, a strange tale that received accusations of morbidity when it was published in 1941. Because of the novel's shocking homosexual theme, critics tend to read it as McCullers's inheritance of the Gothic school of southern writing. However, I argue that this paradigmatic use of southern regionalism as the singular model to interpret her novel is inadequate and ignores the transnational imaginary of the story. One of the essential clues to McCullers's awareness of the imperialist expansion of U.S. global power is the strange presence of the Filipino houseboy, who alerts us to the more disturbing aspects of American invasions into the international sphere. Set in a traditionally male domain of a military post, the novel explores the tensions and ambivalence inherent in a

patriarchal culture's reification of manhood. McCullers turns the army into a grotesque site of alternative masculinities and seething homoeroticism. Far from a discrete entity that has nothing to do with the political and the national, sexuality, I will show, is in fact a powerful critical lens through which we can peer into the ideological mechanism that produces meaning in a particular cultural moment of U.S. imperialist expansion. In her daring portrayal of masculinities that embrace castration and alterity, McCullers proves herself a courageous artist with a discerning eye for the oppressive nature of hegemonic masculinity and its affiliations with heteropatriarchy and imperial nationhood.

Key Words: Carson McCullers, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, homosexuality, nationalism, masculinity