

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

A Georgia-born novelist renowned for her sensitive portrayal of southern people and their spiritual isolation, Carson McCullers, until recently, was predominantly regarded as a regional author whose concern with racism and homophobia reflects her daily witness of violence and injustice in the South.¹ Critics praise her use of Gothic symbolism and attribute this tendency to her southern inheritance; McCullers herself is also aware of her inheritance of this Gothic school of southern writing. As she wrote in 1940, the Gothic, a kin of the Russian realists' tradition of "moral realism," equipped southern writers to "transpose the painful substance of life around them as accurately as possible" (McCullers, 2005: 258). The surfeit of grotesques, eccentricities, loners and outcasts in her decadent tales has been interpreted as an epitome of the southern literary tradition's penchant for cruelty and depravity.² However, this emphasis on McCullers's regional

¹ For instance, McCullers's biographer, Virginia Spencer Carr, considered to be an authority on McCullers studies, remarks that critics tend to compare and contrast McCullers's work with other southern or regional writers such as Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe and Sherwood Anderson. For details, see the first chapter in her *Understanding Carson McCullers* (1990). In *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens* (1985), Louise Westling explores how southern writers such as McCullers, O'Connor, and Welty reacted to the violent and hypocritical world of patriarchy. Another specialist in McCullers criticism is Jan Whitt, who analyzes the religious backdrop (i.e. southern Protestantism) in McCullers's works in *Allegory and the Modern Southern Novel* (1994). In this book she engages with Faulkner, McCullers and O'Connor, pointing out the importance of Christian symbolism in a study of the literature of the American South. All these critics rely heavily on regionalism to explore McCullers's fiction.

² Tennessee Williams has linked McCullers's use of "symbols of the grotesque and the violent" to her affinity with the Gothic school of southern writing. In defense of McCullers's "morbid" taste, he writes: "*Reflections in a Golden Eye* is one of the purest and most powerful of those works which are conceived in that Sense of The Awful which is the desperate black root of nearly all significant modern art" (1986: 15). Virginia Spencer Carr has likewise noted McCullers's penchant for grotesques. She interprets the novelist's preoccupation with freaks and misfits as a kind of existential angst, a sense of alienation and the profound anguish experienced by McCullers and her characters in the specifically southern setting

color has given way, in recent scholarship, to an acknowledgement of her equal attention to international themes and affairs. Writing in the turbulent era of the Great Depression and the following period of international fascism that led to World War II, McCullers was sensitive to political issues both at home and abroad. Cosmopolitan imaginaries can be tracked in her fiction. For example, in the short story “Correspondence,” a teenage girl pours out her heart to a Brazilian pen pal who never replies. In “The Aliens,” a story set in 1935, a Jewish refugee arrives in the South after fleeing the increasing persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany.³ In *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (2001a), she creates a Greek character—a deaf-mute named Antonapoulos who looks dumb and coarse, but for some mysterious reason receives the unfailing devotion and love of the central character, John Singer, a refined and sophisticated gentleman who is a deaf-mute as well. Another foreign presence in the nation’s borders is Anacleto, an intriguing Filipino character who appears in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (2001c). In *The Member of the Wedding* (2001b), a 12-year-old tomboyish girl, Frankie Addams, dreams of joining the globetrotting U.S. Army to fight the Germans and Japanese. These imaginative capacities to visualize transnational spaces and characters are important proofs of McCullers’s cosmopolitanism and bespeak the inadequacy of southern regionalism as the dominant model to interpret her fiction. We need to seriously consider the geopolitical significance of McCullers’s characters and arrive at a more nuanced and expansive method of interpreting how the supposedly remote region functions as a suggestive index that unsettles the normative thinking so often used to theorize her novels.

In fact, recent works on American regionalism have focused on the much ignored (at least, in the majority of criticisms in the

(1990: 38).
³ These two short stories are included in *Collected Stories of Carson McCullers* (McCullers, 1987).

1980s and 1990s) entanglement of the domestic and the foreign. The traditional notion of the region has been challenged and supplanted by more relevant global geographic formations. For instance, Tom Lutz's *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value* (2004) emphasizes the "cosmopolitan openness" that characterizes regional literature. In *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (2005), Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse approach regionalism through the lens of feminism, and provide us with an alternative vantage point from which to consider questions of regionalism in a global setting. Philip Joseph's *American Literary Regionalism in a Global Age* (2007) is another endeavor to bridge regionalism and cosmopolitanism. Examining the works of Hamlin Garland, Sarah Orne Jewett, Willa Cather, Zora Neale Hurston, William Faulkner and others, Joseph argues that these regionalist writers demonstrate regionalism's "interlocutory potential" and its capacity to engage actively with external cultural worlds other than the one of origin. Harilaos Stecopoulos's book, *Reconstructing the World* (2008), calls for a new "post-nationalist" and "post-regionalist" study of U.S. empire. These post-regionalist American studies inform much of this paper, which benefits a great deal from these scholars' expanding and illuminating readings of questions of regions and regionalism. Although Stecopoulos, in Chapter Four of *Reconstructing the World*, reads McCullers's military fictions as a critique of American empire from a regional perspective, he devotes most of the chapter to an examination of *The Member of the Wedding*. Like Stecopoulos, I emphasize the relationship of the U.S. South and the U.S. empire; indeed, my in-depth analysis of *Reflections in a Golden Eye* complements Stecopoulos's reading of McCullers's military themes, in which *Reflections* is mentioned merely in passing.

Therefore, this paper will focus on McCullers's second novel, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, a strange tale that received accusations

of morbidity when it was published in 1941.⁴ Originally entitled “Army Post,” the novel takes place on a military base in Georgia and centers on Captain Weldon Penderton’s obsession with Private Ellegee Williams, a pagan beauty who has “the strange, rapt face of a Gauguin primitive” (McCullers, 2001c: 338). As a quintessentially male arena, the Army offers a fraternal ambience that is congenial to the cultivation of a warrior’s psyche fortified with authority and respect, and to the promotion of the brotherhood between men. Brave, noble, manly men form a kind of kinship, united in devotion to their military calling. Hence the title of my paper “desiring brotherhood” indicates such a yearning for the male ideal of military life that supposedly needs to keep femininity and homosexuality at bay; even so, this kind of male bonding is not without ambivalence or perversion. As psychoanalysis and sexuality studies inform us, the nature of desire itself remains radically indeterminate. Despite the regulatory pressures that aim at subduing sexual feelings and expressions, they continue to emerge in unpredictable forms that reveal their subversive force. The powerful communal feelings passing between men can become charged with homoeroticism, escaping rigid categorization and containment.

Therefore, the desire to conform to the dominant form of masculinity carries within it the seeds of its destruction and the possibility of transgression. As a brave and provocative novel, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* refuses to view the army post from a single perspective and endeavors to lay bare what otherwise remains occluded. Exposing the fault lines of masculinity, patriotism and empire, McCullers resists conforming to traditional belief systems, whether they be doctrines of the military, the nation-state, subjectivity, or sexuality. In the novel, the protagonist Captain Penderton is a closeted gay man; his wife Leonora is a

⁴ See Virginia Spencer Carr’s discussion of McCullers’s contemporary reviews of her second novel in *Understanding Carson McCullers* (1990: 50-51).

frivolous young woman who takes in many lovers. Her current lover is Major Morris Langdon, who lives with his neurasthenic wife, Alison, and her Filipino houseboy, Anacleto, near the Pendertons. The novel is written in clean, sparse prose and narrated from an impersonal point of view. The opening few sentences establish the tale's austere setting in a repressive mood: "An Army Post in peacetime is a dull place. Things happen, but then they happen over and over again" (McCullers, 2001c: 309). The military quarters are built on the principle of strict discipline and uniform repetitiveness: "the huge concrete barracks, the neat rows of officers' homes built one precisely like the other, the gym, the chapel, the golf course and the swimming pools—all is designed according to a certain rigid pattern" (309). Words such as "dull," "monotony," and "insularity" accentuate the dismal and stifling mood of this isolated environment. Military service demands regularity and conformity, "for once a man enters the army he is expected only to follow the heels ahead of him" (309). Yet irregular or extraordinary things "do occasionally happen on an army post that are not likely to re-occur" (309). The savvy narrator continues in her cold, detached manner: "There is a fort in the South where a few years ago a murder was committed. The participants of this tragedy were: two officers, a soldier, two women, a Filipino, and a horse" (309).

According to Michael Bronski, McCullers engages with the sexually intrepid topics of "homosexuality, sadism, voyeurism, and fetishism [while exploring] the boundaries of eroticism, outsider status, and the fragility of 'normal' in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*" (Bronski, 2003: 339). These are, of course, pertinent descriptions of the novel, but they fail to take into account the novel's worldwide implications, particularly McCullers's critique of the U.S. Army, its promotion of hegemonic masculinity, and its colonialism at home and abroad. One of the essential clues to the author'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. While Bronski's comment on the novel's focus on deviant desire is astute, further extending his discerning observation and linking McCullers's challenge of hegemonic gender models to her political critique of U.S. military aggression are my major concerns of this paper. *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, I argue, is a complex exploration of how political and national identities are constructed around and shored up by particular sexual identities. My primary questions are as follows: What purposes does the theme of sexual deviation serve for McCullers at the very time when the United States was taking on the role of global hegemon? Why were standards of sexual normality and deviation pivotal in the construction of respectability and national identity? How can the novel's preoccupation with antisocial *jouissance* enable a critique of a nationalist identity based on the sovereign and masculinist notion of self?

In her groundbreaking book *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U. S. Culture* (2002), Amy Kaplan reveals how American overseas expansion, as demonstrated in the war with Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century and later wars against Spain, Cuba, and the Philippines, influences domestic issues such as segregation, the ideology of womanhood or domesticity, and the gender ideals of manhood. She argues that a conventional understanding of American identity as separate from imperial crimes abroad has been illusory and an attempt to draw a firm line demarcating the domestic and the foreign self-debunking. McCullers could not agree with Kaplan more; throughout her life, the writer had intimate experiences with the U.S. Army, which attuned her to the geopolitical significance of the U.S. military expansion, its global deployment, territorial acquisitions, and impact on domestic affairs. Spending much of her youth taking piano lessons from Mary Tucker, an officer's wife at Fort Benning, McCullers had a longstanding interaction with members of the U.S. armed forces and their families. In 1937, she married Reeves McCullers, a Fort

Benning soldier from Alabama. In 1939, they moved to Fayetteville, North Carolina, a small army town in which the writer created the setting and plot of *Reflections in a Golden Eye*.

According to Kaplan, the assumption that the American struggle for independence from the British Empire makes the U.S. essentially anti-imperialist has been an enduring paradigm of studies of American culture. This ideology of “American exceptionalism” has contributed to three notable omissions that characterize the discourse of American studies: “the absence of culture from the history of U. S. imperialism; the absence of empire from the study of American culture; and the absence of the United States from the postcolonial study of imperialism” (Kaplan, 1993: 11). As a key figure of post-Americanist studies, Kaplan critiques the ethnocentrism of the previous generation of Americanists and aims at “relating those internal categories of gender, race, and ethnicity to the global dynamics of empire-building” (16). In her efforts to link the global to those mundane fields of the everyday and the affective, Kaplan exposes American national identity’s imperial unconscious, and explores the infiltration of this unconscious into multiple facets of American culture to become “a way of life” (14). Taking cues from Kaplan, I argue that *Reflections in a Golden Eye* needs to be read as a cultural text entangled with American imperialism. Although the period between World Wars I and II is generally referred to as a period of isolationism, this is not to say that the U.S. ceased her project of expansion and aggrandizement in the 1920s and 1930s. According to the anti-imperialist historian, Charles Austin Beard, this period witnessed a “return to the more aggressive ways . . . to protect and advance the claims of American business enterprise” (Buzzanco, 2014). As Robert Buzzanco writes: “In addition to reestablishing and augmenting economic ties to a rebuilding Europe and pressing for a greater opening of Asian markets, American officials and corporations continued to move into Latin America in pursuit of expanded business opportunities” (Buzzanco,

2014). That notwithstanding, power is relational; that is, resistance and domination coexist. As America was emerging as a new empire, protest and opposition abounded. Dissenters, who can be called anti-imperialists, were critical of the expansion of American power.⁵ To be sure, McCullers shared this anti-imperialist sentiment when she was writing in the late 1930s and early 1940s. During the late 1930s, the federal militarization of the South was intensified, preparing for the U.S. entry into World War II. McCullers's exposure to the army base in her adolescence and adulthood sensitized her to the nation's imperial unconscious. In *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, life in the southern army base in terms of its hierarchy, repression, and rigidity becomes a microcosm of the rising American Empire, which is closely linked to a particular gender ideology that promotes patriotic manliness.

The military's promotion of hegemonic masculinity and its concomitant oppression of homosexuality and minority masculinities were keenly apparent and frequently noted by McCullers. In *The Members of the Wedding*, one character named Honey Brown is rejected by the Army because of his homosexuality. Moreover, his sexual nonconformity is inseparable from his racial difference and class marginality. In *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, Major Langdon epitomizes a military masculinity that, as Aaron Belkin argues, aligns white-male-straight-man with state-military-empire (Belkin, 2012: 58). Concerned himself with only two things—"a healthy body and patriotism" (McCullers, 2001c: 386), the Major is proud of his flawless masculinity and robust heroism.

Reckless and shameless, Langdon first made love to Leonora in a blackberry patch two hours after they met. He is described as

⁵ For example, one of the significant opponents of American expansion during this period is Marine General Smedley Butler, who, during his thirty-three years in the Marines, had participated in military actions in the Philippines, China, Central America, the Caribbean and France in WWI. He later became an outspoken critic of American imperialism. See Robert Buzzanco's "Anti-Imperialism" for details (2014).

having a great appetite for every activity—eating, drinking, gambling, riding, fornicating; this voracity suggests the aggressive rapacity of military manhood. Known around the stables as “The Buffalo . . . because when in the saddle he slumped his great heavy shoulders and lowered his head” (McCullers, 2001c: 323), Langdon is described as virile, agile, and hulky. Compared with Langdon’s excellent horsemanship, Captain Penderton is no rider at all. The soldiers snicker at him and give him the nickname “Captain Flap-Fanny” because when viewed from behind, “his buttocks spread and jounced flabbily in the saddle” (323). Penderton’s flabby, soft butt is vividly contrasted with Langdon’s impenetrable, taut body. In her feminization of Penderton’s butt, McCullers hints at his unorthodox sexuality. In fact, his marriage to Leonora seems to be an arranged one of appearances due to his latent homosexuality. As McCullers writes, when Leonora “married the Captain she had been a virgin. Four nights after her wedding she was still a virgin, and on the fifth night her status was changed only enough to leave her somewhat puzzled” (318). Heteronormativity underpins the concept of masculinity and, particularly in the Army, sustains the ideal of warrior masculinity that excludes nonnormative masculinities.⁶

In “Pleasures and Dangers of Shame,” queer scholar Michael

⁶ See Michael Warner’s discussion of the heteronormative in *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (2000). For discussions of World War II and American psychiatry’s joint effort with army to discriminate against homosexuals, see John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman’s *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (1988: 288-291). However, repression breeds resistance. Despite military psychiatrists’ prejudiced definitions of homosexuality in the 1940s, World War II also created an encouraging setting for a generation of young Americans to experience same-sex love and to participate in the emergence of a gay subculture. For many gay men, the military indeed provided entry into a world suffused with same-sex relationships. As D’Emilio and Freedman claim, “World War II was something of a nationwide ‘coming out’ experience” (1988: 289). D’Emilio’s another book, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (1983), also supplies a helpful analysis of the lesbian and gay movement in the U.S. from World War II to the historic Stonewall Riots.

Warner tries to understand masculinity in its relation to “shame.” While dominant masculinity is defined by its “immunity to shame,” “drag queens, sissies, and bottoms are virtuosi of shame.” When “shame” sticks to the masculine and becomes a scandal, it is always associated with “feminizing” (Warner, 2009: 290). In an incident that occurred soon after the Langdons married, McCullers illustrates how dominant masculinity hinges upon misogyny and homophobia. Taking his new bride out quail shooting, Langdon guns down one quail and “gallantly” presents the bird as a gift to Alison. However, upon discovering that the bird is still alive, Langdon kills it mercilessly and then hands it back to her. Holding “the little warm, ruffled body that had somehow become degraded in its fall,” Alison “looked into the dead little glassy black eyes” and “burst into tears” (McCullers, 2001c: 330). Being an insensitive and heartless brute, Langdon considers Alison’s softheartedness a personal failing and associates her emotional susceptibility with feebleness and her weaker gender: “That was the sort of thing the Major meant by ‘female’ and ‘morbid’; and it did a man no good to try to figure it all out” (330).

Another pertinent example that demonstrates the dependence of Langdon’s manhood on a repudiation against other sexually stigmatized identities is his negative opinion of Alison’s effeminate friend, Lieutenant Weincheck, who, according to Langdon, has the same “morbid” temperament as Alison and embodies the scandal of masculine shame. Nearing 50 years old and still living “in one of the apartment houses set aside for bachelor lieutenants” (McCullers, 2001c: 331), this old Lieutenant was frustrated in his military career because at his age he “had never yet earned his Captain’s bars” (331). Besides, within a heteropatriarchal culture that affirms its power in “the traffic in women,” as Gayle Rubin terms it in her landmark essay, Weincheck’s perpetual bachelorhood arouses suspicion and suggests something of his

deviation from normative masculinity.⁷ McCullers depicts him as a person with a passion for “highbrow things” (330), sewing, listening to Mozart, and maintains an apartment “crowded [with] an accumulation of a lifetime, including a grand piano, a shelf of phonograph albums, many hundreds of books, a big Angora cat, and about a dozen potted plants” (331). Unlike Langdon, who is robustly popular with his fellow officers, Weincheck, made effeminate by his investments in domesticity and dandified aestheticism, is perceived as an oddball in the Army: “In the service he cut a sorry figure” (331). The officers, passing along the corridor and hearing the “naked melody” of Weincheck’s violin playing, “scratch their heads and wink at each other” (331). This knowing wink indicates that Weincheck’s “secret” is known in the Army. Although McCullers does not specify Weincheck’s sexual identity, she does insinuate a certain aberration related to sexuality and gender. Moreover, Weincheck’s transgression of normative gender is linked to his interests toward the aesthetic, the delicate, and the private—things that have feminine underpinnings and are therefore denigrated as inauthentic and unmanly, especially in the male-centric military. In contrast, Langdon is unabashed in his vulgarity and lack of refinement. Abhorring ballet and classical music, the uncultured Major compares listening to Bach to “swallowing a bunch of angleworms” (358). Ironically, the authenticity of his manhood is further confirmed by his coarseness and lack of artistic cultivation.

Unlike her husband’s aversion to Weincheck, Alison appreciates the Lieutenant’s artistic expression and sophistication. Frequently visiting him in the late afternoon, “she and Lieutenant Weincheck would play Mozart sonatas, or drink coffee and eat crystallized ginger before the fire” (McCullers, 2001c: 331).

⁷ In her influential essay “The Traffic in Women” (2011), Gayle Rubin debunks the myth of marriage and its naturalization of kinship and heterosexuality. She claims that the essence of kinship systems lies in the traffic of women and the solidification of men’s privileges.

Together with Alison's Filipino servant Anacleto, they like to go to concerts together. In fact, the trio bases their friendship on the sharing of their marginalized status in the Army.⁸ As a product of imperial conquest and colonial subjugation, Anacleto was brought back to the States from the Philippines seven years earlier. Remembering the time when the 17-year-old Anacleto first came to their household, Alison notes that his sissiness had made him a victim of bullying: "He was so tormented by the other houseboys that he dogged her footsteps all day long" (346). The dandified Anacleto walks "with grace and composure" and dresses in "sandals, soft gray trousers, and a blouse of aquamarine linen" (332). He loves feminine trinkets, fusses over minute household details, imitates the moves of a ballet dancer, has great talent in painting, and likes to intersperse his conversation with fancy French. As Alison's constant companion, Anacleto gradually becomes her double. According to Major Langdon's observation of this pair, he always feels "rather eerie" when "listen[ing] to them talking together in the quiet room. Their voices and enunciation were so precisely alike that they seemed to be softly echoing each other" (335). In the household of the Langdons, Anacleto is constantly bullied by his master with the threat of military service: "God! You're a rare bird! What I wouldn't do if I could get you in my battalion!" (333). However, Anacleto takes pride in his gender nonconformity. Adoring his mistress and thinking her perfect, Anacleto opines that "the Lord had blundered grossly in the making of everyone except himself and Madame Alison" (333-334).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sexology became a new field of science that examined and categorized

⁸ We can read this trio as a queer defiance against the Oedipal triangle of "mommy-daddy-me." It instantiates an interracial intimacy and an alternative form of sociality that does not conduce to Oedipal reproductivity. Another queer triangle that recurs throughout the novel is composed of Anacleto, Alison and her dead infant Catherine.

various sexual behaviors in human society. The term “sexual inversion” was coined and used by sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, and then by Freud to classify sexual behaviors that “deviated” from the presumed existence of a normative heterosexuality.⁹ As a quintessential form of sexual inversion, homosexuality was viewed as a form of arrested development or a failed Oedipalization. This clinical and scientific discourse on homosexuality surely influenced McCullers’s portrayals of her homosexual characters and their inverted desire. However, while drawing on the deprecatory association of homosexuality with inversion, McCullers struggles to deterritorialize and reterritorialize the meaning of effeminacy in homosexual men, exploring its powerful force in the expansion and transformation of the dominant masculine stereotype.

Masculinity as a regulatory ideal must guard against effeminacy and weakness. Gender differences have to be sharply demarcated and feminine traits kept firmly in their proper place: in men they are a sign of weakness and pathology. In his study of masculinity and modernity, George Mosse charts the rise and gradual erosion of what he variously calls “normative masculinity” or “the manly ideal” (Mosse, 1998: 4). In his book, Mosse argues that the manly ideal is partly defined by what it excludes, those dangerous, pathological, or unhealthy elements that are thought to pose a threat to the healthy body of masculinity and ought to be vigorously resisted. In *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, Langdon, as an epitome of this manly ideal, asserts his heterosexual, white, and

⁹ Despite Freud’s radical early thoughts on the inherent bisexuality of all men, psychoanalysis reverted to the views held by the sexologists, who saw homosexuality as a treatable disease. For a discussion of the documents of the pioneers of sexology, see *Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science* (1998), edited by Lucy Bland and Laura Doan. See also George Chauncey’s *Gay New York* (1994) for a historical account of words such as “inverts,” “perverts,” “degenerates,” “faggots,” “fairies” or “queens.” As Chauncey shows, these words were highly volatile and went beyond the conventional or homophobic understanding as terms of insult.

able-bodied superiority by casting the female and the feminized men as deficient, deviant, or inferior. This male-centered attitude is reflected in his demeaning representations of his frail wife Alison, his effeminate fellow officer Lieutenant Weincheck, and the eunuch-like houseboy Anacleto. “Morbidity” is the word that is conjured up in his mind when he thinks of Alison and Weincheck. A “big-nosed female Job” (McCullers, 2001c: 339), Alison suffers from diseases ranging from “empyema, kidney trouble . . . , and . . . heart disease” (361). However, her husband thinks that her pains are not real but instead result from a “hypochondriacal fake that she used in order to shirk her duties—that is, the routine of sports and parties which he thought suitable” (362). After discovering her husband’s affair with Leonora, Alison, frantic with anger and frustration, clips off her nipples with the garden shears (327). Although this “scandal” shocks everybody, it does not deter the affair, which continues in a more subdued way. A bizarre friendship even begins between “the wife who has been betrayed and the object of her husband’s love.” McCullers describes Alison’s strange emotional attachment to Leonora as “morbid”; it is a “bastard of shock and jealousy” (328). Throughout the novel, Alison lies in bed most of the time. She finally dies in an asylum to which she has been sent by her husband.

Since its publication, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* has been charged with “morbidity,” a word that in psychoanalytic parlance is closely related to the feminine gender. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word “morbid” is “characterized by an abnormal and unhealthy interest in disturbing and unpleasant subjects, especially death and disease.” Tethered to perversity and pathology, morbidity must be understood as an antisocial affect that is infused with the death drive. For McCullers’s contemporary critics, her depiction of her characters’ emotional perversities or failures has been interpreted as an indulgence in the vagaries of abnormal psychology. This unwholesome obsession with morbidity offers no redemption and proves a disappointing limitation in McCullers’s

artistic vision. However, I argue that it is precisely this focus on morbidity or negative transcendence that sets McCullers apart from other ordinary writers. She forces us to rethink a range of “morbid” affects such as masochism, pain, and failure. How can we imagine an identity that is not defined in terms of a humanist framework: a self-activating, voluntaristic, coherent, sovereign subject supposed to know and be in control? Can we allow for a different organization of subjectivity that is not based on mastery and a normative imagination of pleasure, gender, and sexuality? In what follows, I propose that McCullers’s focus on “morbidness” offers up a critique of the phallogocentric logic of agency and subjectivity itself, and this repudiation of masculine positivism becomes all the more suited for diagnosing the character of an American empire.

The most fascinating and complicated character in the novel is Captain Penderton, who, as a closeted gay man, has a “sad penchant for becoming enamoured of his wife’s lovers” (McCullers, 2001c: 314). McCullers writes of his attraction to Leonora’s lover, Major Morris Langdon, in the following way:

Indeed [Captain Penderton’s] torment had been a rather special one, as he was just as jealous of his wife as he was of her love. In the last year he had come to feel an emotional regard for the Major that was the nearest thing to love that he had ever known. More than anything else he longed to distinguish himself in the eyes of this man. (327)

In this strange triangle, Penderton seems to be more interested in the Major than in his own wife. Unlike typical men who cannot tolerate their wives’ faithlessness, he is described as “carry[ing] his cuckoldry with a cynical good grace that was respected on the post” (327). In “The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing,” an essay published in 1959, McCullers declares that Penderton’s homosexuality “is . . . a symbol . . . of handicap and impotence” (McCullers, 2005: 276). At first glance, McCullers’s association of

homosexuality with impotence seems to be a dangerous stereotyping, in which negative images such as sterility, unproductiveness, and, ultimately, death, are linked with homosexuality. However, in reaction to a positivist paradigm of liberal humanism, recent theories on gender and queer sexuality attempt to chart a new course beyond the valorization of positivist ideas, such as agency, power, and autonomy. For example, in “Shadow Feminisms: Queer Negativity and Radical Passivity,” Judith Halberstam identifies with a genealogy of “shadow” feminist and queer art that “thinks in terms of the negation of the subject rather than her formation, the disruption of lineage rather than its continuation, the undoing of self rather than its activation” (Halberstam, 2011: 126). Through strategies of refusal, radical passivity, masochism, and “unbecoming” (129), Halberstam suggests that such practices contest the political foundations of humanist selfhood in which “‘being’ has already been defined in terms of a self-activating, self-knowing, liberal subject” (126). Similarly, in their influential and daring reconsideration of masochism and the death drive, Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman also interrogate the concept of identity politics buttressed by a mastering idea of agency and subjectivity.¹⁰ These anti-social and anti-humanist queer feminist theories are compelling and inspire us to think outside the tyranny of selfhood and its complacency. In light of these queer theorists’ provocative rethinking of the negative, Penderton’s affinity to impotence and passivity can be interpreted in a new way. A more nuanced understanding of the discourses of gender, sexuality, and nationalism can also be distilled from this critique of masculine/self-validating connection.

Wrestling with his homosexuality, Penderton has no sexual desire for women and is even repulsed by the female body. Confronted with a wife with strong sexual desires and ambitions,

¹⁰ See Bersani’s *Homos* (1995) and Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004).

he is, in a way, castrated and impotent. Early in the novel, McCullers depicts an incident in which Penderton is paralyzed and emasculated by his voluptuous and tempestuous wife. The incident begins with Penderton's reprimand of his wife for her lounging downstairs without her shoes or boots ("You look like a slattern going around the house like this"). When being asked if she intends to sit down to dine with the Langdons in such a fashion, Leonora replies, "And why not, you old prissy?" (McCullers, 2001c: 316). Then, to ridicule his impotence, she strips herself naked before going upstairs to dress. Penderton follows her to the foot of the stairs and threatens to kill her for her insolence, whereupon she taunts him again. She asks: "Son, have you ever been collared and dragged out in the street and thrashed by a naked woman?" (317).

McCullers describes Penderton's unorthodox sexuality in the following way: "Sexually the Captain obtained within himself a delicate balance between the male and female elements, with the susceptibilities of both the sexes and the active powers of neither" (McCullers, 2001c: 314). His predilection for passivity is further linked to the death drive: "In his balance between the two great instincts, toward life and toward death, the scale was heavily weighted to one side—to death" (314-315). Against a U. S. imperialist project of a forward-looking positivity and heteronormative manhood, Penderton's impotence and radical negativity contribute to an anti-imperialist, queer, counterhegemonic imaginary. Through his openness to death, Penderton is able to reach a new level of experience and existence unbound by mastery and heroism. This dispossession of the autonomous self through its self-shattering desire bespeaks masochism. Indeed, besides being impotent and homosexual, Penderton also indulges in masochism. As a seven-year-old boy, he fell in love with "the school-yard bully who had once beaten him"; he even stole his aunt's "old-fashioned hair-receiver" as a "love offering" to his persecutor. Always afraid of horses, "he only rode because it was the thing to do, and because this was another one of his ways of tormenting himself"

(352). He chooses a “clumsy” saddle instead of his wife’s more comfortable one to further his masochistic pleasure. As he goads a stallion called “Firebird” into a frenzy gallop through the forest, Penderton has a near-death experience. Barely able to whisper “I am lost” and ready to give up life, Penderton “suddenly began to live. A great mad joy surged through him” (354). As “in delirium,” this ecstatic horse riding helps him achieve an orgasmic state and makes him experience a kaleidoscopic vision. He feels as if “he had soared to that rare level of consciousness where the mystic feels that the earth is he and that he is the earth. Clinging crabwise to the runaway horse, there was a grin of rapture on his bloody mouth” (354). The macabre horse ride thereby becomes the occasion for an extraordinary rapture.

This terrifying horse riding is illuminating because it signifies Jean-Luc Nancy’s notion of “ex-stasy”—a passion of being outside of oneself (1991: 6-7, 19-21). In writing about masochism, queer theorists such as Leo Bersani and Kaja Silverman attempt to explore its liberating possibilities. In reclaiming “masochism” as a privileged sexuality for the production of a new subjectivity, Bersani deconstructs Freud and finds in him his most original and subversive argument (“sexuality . . . as a tautology for masochism”) that Freud fails to repress in his Oedipalized, heterosexualized, and teleologically driven model of sexuality (Bersani, 1986: 39).¹¹ Silverman also sees in masochism a powerful occasion for creativity. In *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, she is interested in anatomizing the kinds of male subjectivities that embrace femininity, castration, alterity, and masochism. She links masochism to ecstasy—“an identification which is a ‘rapture’ or ‘transport,’ the condition of

¹¹ For Bersani, masochism is constitutive of sexuality (see Bersani, *Freudian Body* [1986], especially 34-47). The constitutive nature of masochism can be traced back to the infant’s susceptibility to being violently but pleurably overwhelmed by stimuli. Accordingly, all of adult sexuality, not just some presumably marginal “perversion,” is structured around the urge masochistically to repeat such pleasurable self-shattering.

being ‘beside oneself’” (Silverman, 1992: 263). In the novel, Penderton’s masochistic ecstasy enacts a transgression of individuality, brings about a grotesque transformation of the self, and catapults the body to reach that level at which the divine might be glimpsed.

Moreover, Penderton’s masochism concludes with his sadistic treatment of Firebird. Upon finally bringing Firebird to a halt and dismounting, he “broke off a long switch, and with the last of his spent strength he began to beat the horse savagely. . . . The Captain kept on beating him. Then at last the horse stood motionless and gave a broken sigh” (McCullers, 2001c: 355). This sadistic frenzy is set against an affective amalgam of shame, frustration, agony, loneliness, alienation, powerlessness, unworthiness, and abjection. After abusing the horse, Penderton “sank down on the ground and . . . looked like a broken doll that has been thrown away” (355). Sobbing aloud, he remembers his lonely boyhood; brought up by five old-maid aunts, he “had never known real love” (355). Descending from the antebellum southern aristocracy, Penderton’s family members were planters in Georgia before the Civil War. However, the family had fallen on hard times: “Behind him was a history of barbarous splendor, ruined poverty, and family hauteur” (355). Besieged by an avalanche of ignoble feelings, Penderton abuses the horse and experiences vicarious pain and vulnerability from the act. As Bersani has noted, sadism is defined in Freud’s “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” as a “masochistic identification with the suffering object” (Bersani, 1986: 41). In other words, rather than enacting an expansion or mastery of the “I,” Penderton’s sadism is the result of an identification with his suffering victim and a desire for self-shattering experience that tears down ego-boundaries and releases the individual into a kind of bliss, or masochistic *jouissance*.¹²

¹² For the reversibility of roles in S/M and the permeability of the boundaries separating the two, see Bersani’s essay “Shame on You” (2011) and his book *Homos* (1995, especially 77-112 in his provocative and fascinating study of

Thoroughly imbued with an affective cocktail composed of shame, pain, pleasure, ambivalence, and ecstasy, Penderton then encounters the young private Williams naked in the woods. Lying on the ground and weeping aloud, Penderton is suddenly aware of someone near him:

He [Williams] was completely naked. His slim body glistened in the late sun. . . . The naked man did not bother to walk around his [Penderton's] outstretched body. He left his place by the tree and lightly stepped over the officer. The Captain had a close swift view of the young soldier's bare foot: it was slim and delicately built, with a high instep marked by blue veins. (McCullers, 2001c: 356)

Baring his back, Penderton is rendered in an utter degradation that is quickly charged with erotic intensity. Long after Williams leaves, Penderton dwells “on the pure-cut lines of the young man's body” and at last realizes that he feels for Williams a “hatred, passionate as love, [that] would be with him all the remaining days of his life” (356).

Later in the novel, Penderton's infatuation with Williams grows to such an intensified degree that he feels “an aching want for contact between them of some sort.” He visits the stables where Williams is assigned to work “as often as he could reasonably do so.” Obsessively in love, Penderton suffers exquisite torments:

When the Captain knew in advance that he would meet the soldier, he felt himself grow dizzy. During their brief, impersonal meetings he suffered a curious lapse of sensory

Foucault and Freud). In his defense of S/M, Bersani celebrates its formation of a new economy of bodily pleasure that destabilizes Oedipalized sexuality. Here is what he has to say about Foucault's discovery of the radical potential in S/M: “For Foucault, gay S/M—partly due to the frequent reversibility of roles in gay S/M, partly as a result of the demonstration S/M provides of the power of bottoms—has ‘helped to alleviate this problem’ [i.e. being the passive partner in a love relationship is in some way demeaning] by empowering ‘a position traditionally associated with female sexuality’” (Bersani, 2011: 92).

impressions; when he was near the soldier he found himself unable to see or to hear properly, and it was only after he had ridden away and was alone again that the scene developed itself for the first time in his mind. The thought of the young man's face—the dumb eyes, the heavy sensual lips that were often wet, the childish page-boy bangs—this image was intolerable to him. (McCullers, 2001c: 370)

This attraction is indeed fatal. When Penderton finds out that the person who sneaks into Leonora's bedroom to worship her while she sleeps is Williams himself, he murders him: "The Captain was a good marksman, and although he shot twice only one raw hole was left in the center of the soldier's chest" (393). Penetrating the soldier's body with his bullets, Penderton symbolically gratifies his sexual desire, which in real life can only exist in an unrequited form.

It is commonly held that the Army builds men. The linkage between manhood and military service has rarely been challenged, even across cultures. The military's vast production of cultural propaganda hinges on the promotion of patriotic brotherhood and ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Desiring this cultural imagery put forth by the U.S. military, young men yearn for the chances to join the Army and to develop its version of "soldiering masculinity" that involves them testing and proving themselves.¹³ Nevertheless, queer theorists have informed us that normalization takes a lot of effort to shore up and, in that effort, fissures and ambivalences lead desires into unexpected terrains. In other words, lurking behind the patriotic ideal of desiring brotherhood is the disavowed knowledge of homosexuality; the idealized and sanitized fraternity turns out to be haunted by varieties of alternative desires. In *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, McCullers lays bare the tensions and ambivalence that are inherent in the reification of manhood; the Army becomes a grotesque site of alternative masculinities and seething homoe-

¹³ For the gendered seduction of military masculinity, see Melissa T. Brown's *Enlisting Masculinity* (2012).

roticism. In Penderton's sexual fantasies, he creates a mental picture in which the barracks are the homoerotic background: "the hubbub of young male voices, the genial loafing in the sun, the irresponsible shenanigans of camaraderie" plague him with longing and desire (McCullers, 2001c: 381). In his queer imagination, the seemingly scrupulous rigor of the Army contains a repressed and disavowed side. Put differently, his eroticization of a traditional male zone exposes the dominant masculinity's hidden relation with the disavowal of homosexuality. It is only through that disavowal that hegemonic masculinity, as epitomized by militarism, is constituted, and through the institutionalization of that disavowal that the idea of manhood and its heterosexual assumption are perpetually—but anxiously—reconstituted.

Heterosexism as a prescriptive norm of manhood is denaturalized by Penderton's queer rearticulation of desire and fantasies. Moreover, his critique of heteropatriarchy and his Unmaking of the social construction of American masculinity are further illustrated in his bold and outspoken defense of Anacleto's effeminacy. In response to Major Langdon's insistence that Anacleto should join the Army that "might have made a man of him" and thus stop this "dancing around to music and messing with water-colors" (McCullers, 2001c: 384), Penderton responds:

You mean . . . that any fulfillment obtained at the expense of normalcy is wrong, and should not be allowed to bring happiness. In short, it is better, because it is morally honorable, for the square peg to keep scraping about the round hole rather than to discover and use the unorthodox square that would fit it? (384)

In this crucial passage, Penderton debunks normalcy's claims to universality and points out that normalcy obliges itself to the regulatory and exclusionary imperative of those claims. Normalcy suppresses heterogeneity in the name of universality; it dictates the rules of legitimacy, happiness, morality and fulfillment. Normalcy aligns itself with the regulatory imperatives of the state against

racial and sexual differences. Here, Anacleto offers Penderton an opportunity of disidentification with the white heteropatriarchal ideals promoted by the state to interrogate their categories and how they might conceal the heterogeneity of race, gender, and sexuality. Things considered as normal or normative demand destabilization and possible undoing. In heterosexual patriarchy's normative understanding, reproductive sexuality (the penis as "the square peg" is expected to keep "scraping about" the conventional orifice of the vagina) is the putative norm; anything that deviates from that which appears self-evident and unquestionable is linked with pathology and shame. However, Penderton defiantly questions any supposed normality or normativity; he allies himself with Anacleto to try to "discover and use the unorthodox square" that would fit the square peg.¹⁴ Instead of acquiescing to Langdon's hegemonic model of gender conformity, he will look for an alternative "fulfillment" in a sexuality that is conventionally perceived as tainted by humiliation and abjection. Paradoxically, Penderton's affirmation of repudiation and shame precipitates him into a sea change of self-realization and even empowerment. Embracing debasement and impotence in a supreme and defiant way, he experiences flashes of insight. For the first time he accepts his shame-inflected self, "with neither alteration nor excuse":

With gruesome vividness the Captain suddenly looked into his soul and saw himself. For once he did not see himself as others saw him; there came to him a distorted doll-like image, mean of countenance and grotesque in form. The Captain dwelt on this vision without compassion. (McCullers, 2001c: 384)

In this epiphanic moment, his true self leaps in front of him as a "distorted doll-like image." In fact, the doll-like image recurs

¹⁴ As Sarah Gleeson-White argues, the "unorthodox square" might conjure the impossible orifice of "the rectum as the site that affects the feminizing corruption of the masculine self" (2003: 66).

in the novel whenever Penderton obtains a clearer insight into his self and the reality that surrounds him. Naked in raw emotion, he is compared to a “broken doll” after his sadomasochistic experience with Firebird (McCullers, 2001c: 355). Literalizing the fears and fantasies of life-in-death and death-in-life, the doll is a quintessential epitome of the uncanny. Caught in an uncanny place between life and death, it unsettles the boundaries necessary for the establishment of order, convention, and categories. Moreover, a doll carries a powerful connotation of femininity and impotence. By identifying with the doll in its “grotesque” form, Penderton challenges the military’s claims to gender normalcy and its promotion of a paradigmatic masculinity based on virility, belligerence, and heroism. The distorted, broken image of the doll also upsets the logic and integrity of the “normal” body. In other words, Penderton’s identification with the doll establishes a resistant, disidentificatory form of identity.

In fact, the “golden eye” of the novel’s title belongs to a peacock. Frightened by a premonition that she is dying, Alison is sleepless and stirs the peace of her devoted houseboy Anacleto, who decides to take his painting and to sit up with the sick woman. Throwing his unfinished painting into the burning fireplace, Anacleto stares at the embers of the fire and gushes: “A peacock of a sort of ghastly green. With one immense golden eye. And in it these reflections of something tiny and—’. . . ‘Grotesque,’ [Alison] finished for him” (McCullers, 2001c: 366). This “grotesque” reflection from a peacock’s golden eye is Anacleto’s self-reflection, which is not unlike the “distorted” doll image that Penderton sees as his soul-image. Anti-mimetic and anti-essentialist, this grotesque reflection, as Gleeson-White puts it, “suggests a kaleidoscopic fluidity and excess, beyond stagnant self-identity” (Gleeson-White, 2003: 56).¹⁵ In other words, the grotesque is the shared attribute

¹⁵ In *Unmaking Mimesis* (1997), Elin Diamond, influenced by Derrida and Irigaray, critiques the phallogocentric tendency in the Platonic model of mimesis or representation. Mimesis occurs in the process of reflection in which difference is

of Anacleto and Penderton; their camaraderie, as shown in Penderton's defense of Anacleto's effeminacy, is built on their recognition of the "unorthodox" in a world of normalcy. As a result, these two most heterogeneous people are brought into some sort of intimacy by their common experience of being despised and rejected in a world of norms that they both recognize as false morality.

In opposition to some critics who dismiss Anacleto as a shadowy figure who plays a marginal role in the novel, I argue that Anacleto is in fact the key to understanding McCullers's feminist and antinationalist project in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*.¹⁶ Written just before the U.S. entered into the war against Japan and asserted army control over the Pacific, the novel's inclusion of a

made to submit to the hegemony of representation and the social and political domination that it naturalizes. As Diamond writes, "mimesis patterns difference into sameness" (iii). She continues: "Mimesis . . . posits a *truthful* relation between world and word, model and copy, nature and image [. . .] referent and sign in which potential difference is subsumed by sameness" (iii). In other words, mimesis proposes a "truth" which in itself is inseparable from a gender/race-biased epistemology. In *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, Anacleto, as a victim oppressed by hegemonic representations of gender and race, unmasks this Platonic idealism of mimesis and indulges in a subversive mimicry of it. The "grotesque" image that Anacleto sees reflected in the peacock's golden eye bespeaks his perverse desire, an excessive sexuality that refuses to be contained by Plato's ideal of the unity of self. Also, as a bird with brilliantly colored feathers and showy strut, a peacock is a slang term for gays who like to dress in fancy clothes and show them off. Anacleto, with his proud and vain air, fits perfectly with this image of narcissistic and vainglorious peacock.

¹⁶ Regarded by Lawrence Graver as "the most pompous and disagreeable of all her books," *Reflections* is thereby read as "true not to the real world but to the vagaries of abnormal psychology" (1986: 60). In such a dismissive reading, Anacleto is never mentioned, to say nothing of further examination. Although Jan Whitt, in "Living and Writing in the Margins" (2008), draws our attention to various homosexual attractions in *Reflections*, she ignores Anacleto's pivotal role in the novel's link of sexuality and nationalism. Gary Richards, in *Lovers and Beloveds* (2005), has given Anacleto the critical attention he deserves. Yet his reading of Anacleto's sexual nonconformity is confined by the regional category of the Southern Renaissance, which sets him apart from my take of Anacleto's transnational importance in the novel.

Filipino can hardly be innocent. In McCullers's many works, she is interested in black-white relations in the South; however, this time her interest in an Asian rather than an African American servant indicates her cosmopolitan concern and her awareness of the rise of the United States as a world power. Not merely a Southern writer, McCullers, aware of American colonialism in the Pacific between 1898 and 1945, creates this fascinating character Anacleto to allow her to critically engage the interrelations of nationalism and sexuality. The presence of a Filipino in the incipency of America's nation building discloses the empire's ambivalence and menaces the authoritative discourse of colonialism that entails an investment in heterosexual patriarchy as the signature of hegemonic whiteness.

Depicted as a perpetual boy who looks supernaturally ageless, Anacleto exhibits a certain stage of arrested development and, in a symbolic sense, can never obtain full citizenship insofar as the idea of citizenship is based on the white norm of heterosexuality. In the eyes of U.S. imperialism, the Philippines constituted a queer nation, in the sense that it could not be articulated by dominant definitions of nationhood as the product of militarism and virility. As a diasporic queer of color shamed every day for being a subjugated and racialized subject, Anacleto, however, refuses to lose his self-respect. He delights in embracing his role as a queen to provoke the men around him. His artistic sensitivity and involvement with high culture set him apart from the vulgar, masculine society around him. Although Michael Bronski argues that gay men's involvement with high culture (opera, ballet, painting, literature) is a way to gain some acceptance by the mainstream society, we cannot deny the fact that culture is attractive for queers because it provides a way out of the dreary, heteronormative reality (Bronski, 1984: 12). Culture is beautiful, sensuous, and fun; it, as David Halperin puts it, affords gay men "an imaginative point of entry into a queer utopia, somewhere over the rainbow, which is not entirely of their own making"

(Halperin, 2012: 422). Anacleto's involvement in high culture certainly includes enjoyment and escape; being a "highbrow" and enjoying highbrow things with his mistress also enhance his sense of being "different." As McCullers writes: "It was common knowledge that [Anacleto] thought the Lord had blundered grossly in the making of everyone except himself and Madame Alison—the sole exceptions to this were people behind footlights, midgets, great artists, and such-like fabulous folk" (McCullers, 2001c: 333-334).

Moreover, Anacleto's delight in highbrow culture is slightly different from that of Lieutenant Weincheck. We have Anacleto with brown skin dance, speak, and paint under his white mask. In other words, his race complicates his adoration of Western high culture, in which the master paradigm becomes a site of hybridity and mimicry. His use of the master language overthrows the colonists' myth of the authenticity of "origins" and debunks the Christian belief of logocentrism. This split identity embodies Homi Bhabha's "colonial mimicry" that works to lay bare the ambivalence of colonial discourse and to disrupt its authority. Almost the same but not quite, the ambivalence of mimicry is "potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal" (Bhabha, 2004: 91). As Bhabha puts it: "Under cover of camouflage, mimicry, like the fetish, is a part-object that radically revalues the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, history. For the fetish mimes the forms of authority at the point at which it deauthorizes them" (91). Therefore, the rational, enlightened claims of the colonists' enunciatory authority are continuously violated. This is revealed in the anger and frantic disturbances of Langdon whenever he finds Anacleto walking as a ballet dancer or speaking in French. When Anacleto makes these intercultural, hybrid enunciations, he both challenges the boundaries of colonial discourse, and subtly changes its terms by setting up another specifically colonial space of the negotiations and interrogations of cultural authority. The master language/culture is now ready for a

specific colonial appropriation; the texts of the master become the site of hybridity. It is in this sense that the hegemonic discourse loses its representational authority.

Furthermore, Anacleto, as a queer rebel of color, incites Alison's dreams of escaping from heterosexual marriage and of leading a romantic life at sea. Here McCullers challenges American society's insistence on the inviolable sanctity of heterosexual marriage by imagining an alternative queer lifestyle composed of a woman and her doted servant. Her critique of heteropatriarchy is also shown in her depiction of a carefree Alison before she marries Langdon. Once a schoolteacher in Vermont, Alison lived happily with her cats and dogs. Independent and self-sufficient, she served herself hot chili, tea, and zwieback, and chopped her own wood (McCullers, 2001c: 362-363). In a society of what Adrienne Rich termed compulsory heterosexuality, Alison has no choice but to submit to marriage, which, as McCullers acutely points out, ends her happy days and renders her psychologically and physically invalid.¹⁷

In conclusion, *The Reflections in a Golden Eye* is not merely a grotesque domestic drama; it is also not simply a circumscribed vision of a human life bordering on abnormal psychology. On the contrary, McCullers wants to engage nonheteronormative racial and gender formations as the site of ruptures, critiques, and alternatives of imperial manhood. As I have argued, sexuality and national identity cannot be treated as discrete and autonomous entities; the formation of sexual, gendered, racial, and class identities have intimate relations with the formation of national identities, and vice-versa. By rewriting the region within the imperial framework, McCullers exposes regionalism's hidden ties to global politics. As shown in Penderton's queer camaraderie with Anacleto in their disclosure of the grandiose illusions of normalcy as forms of oppression and McCullers's unfavorable depiction of

¹⁷ See Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1993).

Langdon's imperial manhood, alternative masculinities are not merely figures of morbidity or perversity, but instead index a critique of heteropatriarchal conformity and national authority. Sexuality 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. imperial expansion. In this novel, vulnerability and powerlessness are made to sway toward ecstasy and a certain kind of epiphany. 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 patriarchy and imperial nationhood.

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慾望袍澤：
卡森·麥可考勒絲《金眼的反射》中的
另類陽剛氣質與對美帝的批判

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摘 要

本文探討卡森·麥可考勒絲的第二本小說《金眼的反射》。此書於1941年出版時，由於處理同性戀題材及一些在當時被認為病態的心理症候，評論家多傾向將此書閱讀為美國南方歌德式書寫的典型代表。本文嘗試跳脫以南方區域主義來閱讀麥可考勒絲的舊典範，指出作為南方作家的她，作品中其實有很多跨國想像。以《金眼的反射》為例，小說中有個邊緣角色是菲律賓男僕，這個角色的存在，指出了麥可考勒絲對於美國在東亞擴張野心的察覺。小說的場景是軍營，然而麥可考勒絲的主要男性角色卻是溢出常態性別框架的詭態人物，呈現出的性別氣質卻是擁抱閹割及另類性的非常模陽剛，故論文主張從性向來管窺及拆解異性戀父權的正當性及美國國族主義的霸權性。小說批判主流陽剛的壓迫性、指出恐同的霸權陽剛，是與異性戀父權及帝國風崇拜牽連在一起的，對父權恐同與帝國主義之間相互勾連的洞悉力，顯示出麥可考勒絲的慧眼獨具，她對另類陽剛氣質的大膽描繪及探索，也成就了令人佩服的藝術家勇氣。

關鍵詞：卡森·麥可考勒絲、《金眼的反射》、同性戀、國族主義、陽剛氣質