

PHANTOM IN PARADISE: A PHILIPPINE PRESENCE IN HOLLYWOOD CINEMA

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Abstract

The Philippines' experience with its last foreign occupant, the US, resulted in an entire clutch of problematic "special relations" that, coupled with the country's responses to the challenges of self-government, ultimately led to a global dispersal of the population, effectively turning the Philippines into the major Asian nation arguably most reliant on its citizens' overseas remittances. This paper takes the position that diasporic Filipinos, for a variety of reasons starting with the effectiveness of maintaining unintrusive presences in alien cultures (including the acceptance of menial positions), have possibly developed and have enabled others to perceive them as silent and discreet figures once they step into the circuits of globalized labor exchanges. Not surprisingly, elements traceable to the Philippines and its fraught relationship with America show up in the output of Hollywood. The special instance of a transitional (late-Classical and early new-Hollywood) melodrama, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, adapted from a Southern Gothic novel by Carson McCullers, will be inspected for its pioneering depiction of queer postcoloniality in the transplantation of a Filipino male "housemaid" in the troubled middle-American home of a war returnee.

Keywords

globalization, novel-to-film adaptation, queerness, postcoloniality

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The whipping tail is not more still / Than when I smell the enemy
 Writhing in the essential blood / Or dangling from the friendly tree

.....
 Reflected from my golden eye.

T. S. Eliot, "Lines for an Old Man" (1939)

The Philippines has remained a presence in global culture, initially via its status as the first European colony in Asia, and later as the United States' first (and so-far only) colonial territory. The introduction of cinema to the country coincided with the period of transition from Spain to the US as colonial occupant, attended by a protracted, lethal, and ultimately unsuccessful war of resistance directed at the invaders' armies. Not surprisingly, early but still-accessible moving images of the country constituted exotic everyday scenes in the case of Spain, followed by often-doctored or restaged events in the Fil-American War—each type favoring the country that controlled access to the then-still nascent technology: Spain and its claims of colonial efficiency, and the US with its need to justify its acts of aggression. In the latter case, since the US film industry eventually took the lead in dominating world cinema after the first few years led by the French, the Philippines has been a recurring presence, sometimes too subtle to be recognized by anyone except Filipinos themselves.

Although granted formal independence in 1946, the Philippines is regarded by political economy experts, including Paul Krugman, as closer to the neocolonial "banana republic" model, more typical of Latin America than of postcolonial Southeast Asia (cf. Krugman et al.). Not surprisingly, the official native language, Filipino, has retained traces of Spanish and English words (consequently requiring the addition of several letters and abandonment of the phonetic principle in the original Tagalog orthography); just as significantly, a few Tagalog words such as "boondocks" and "amuck" have found their way into the English dictionary, just as unusual terms such as "comfort room" (referring to toilet) persist in Filipino English—with the aforementioned examples explicable only as century-old US military lingo. The significance of language will be brought up later, when one of the later technological innovations in the medium of film was the addition of synchronous sound. Far more relevant to the present paper's concerns is the fact that the Philippines—whether as geographic locale (including warfare territory), source of migrants, flashpoint in debates on Manifest Destiny and Benevolent Assimilation, and so on—had inevitably started showing up in popular culture texts, in varying degrees of straightforwardness, and may arguably have become American culture's gateway to Orientalist consciousness. The cataloguing of songs, literary works, and films has understandably tended to focus on direct references rather than metaphorical or atmospheric influences, and has yielded output that

had once been classified as “low” culture such as marching tunes, pulp fiction, and B-movies.

In this paper I will attempt to look at how what we may term a Philippine presence has become a more widespread phenomenon, owing to globalist consciousness bolstered by the government-supported dispersal of the country’s citizens in pursuit of gainful employment. The study will then propose a genealogical originary moment in tracing the roots of the Orientalist imaging of the diasporic helper from the perspective of a specialized realm of practice: a 1967 film, adapted from a 1941 novel, that inspects the consequences of American incursions in Asia, bearing with it all the ambivalence that such a project carried in the light of the US’s historical trajectory from former European colony to Asian colonizing power. The text, titled *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, is set mainly in an army post, during the time immediately before the eruption of the Second World War, when the colonial project was still in progress but the wider justification for stronger American presence in Asia, even after the vanquishing of European colonial forces, in the region, still had to be fought over. Significantly, the film’s time frame was transposed, mainly to accommodate limitations in production design (Thompson 49), to 1947, when the war had ended and, more relevant to the present study, the US had just granted political independence to its first (and so far only) formal colony—the same one that it had “liberated” twice, first from Spain, its European colonizer, and more recently from Japan, its wartime enemy.

Interest in the global aspects of Filipinos in relation to cinema has surged roughly since Andrew Higson’s prescription of integrating foreign (or “Hollywood”) film releases in studies of non-US national cinemas. Not surprisingly, the “globalization” of the Philippines can be traced in the country’s popular culture as far back as the earliest available samples (cf. *Cine* 3-22). Some studies related to this pursuit include: Bliss Cua Lim’s “American Pictures Made by Filipinos,” an article-length inspection of US drive-in movies produced in the Philippines; Jose B. Capino’s *Dream Factories of a Former Colony*, a coverage of American presences in Philippine cinema; and Andrew Leavold’s “Bamboo Gods & Bionic Boys,” his dissertation (in progress) on Philippine-made films exported to foreign markets. While these studies provide useful insights in terms of allowing access not only to more-or-less still-available material as well as the determination of the filmmakers’ avowed goals based on interviews and press statements, the gap that this study wishes to address covers the obverse: films that were made not by Filipinos, but concerned the nation anyway in terms of including references, images, and/or issues pertaining to the country and its inhabitants.¹

Indeterminate Figurations

The advantage available to scholars inspecting films produced in the Philippines, even by foreigners, will largely be diffused, occasionally opaque, and at worst

(apparently) irrelevant to anyone attempting to look at Philippine presences in overseas productions. The issue of Orientalism, if one were to date it according to Edward Said's fundamental text, would be over three decades old by now. By cultural studies standards, it would be old enough to have undergone the modifications and repudiations that usually render similar issues unrecognizable beside their original formulations. Yet the word itself continues to be encountered in a number of recent publications devoted to contemporary concerns, just as the concept of Oriental Studies, which Orientalism has made unacceptable, has been virtually replaced with Asian Studies and its variations in area studies (cf. Klein, Marchetti).

In terms of classical film theory, however, critiques of Orientalism could not have arrived at a more opportune moment as they did when Said's *Orientalism* was published in 1978. André Bazin's *What Is Cinema?* volumes had just been translated from the French and published in the US, constituting as it were the last major pieces of classical theorizing in film. A consideration of the intertextual tensions between Said's and Bazin's works took a little longer, however, owing perhaps to the initially compartmentalized nature of their fields —sociocultural history on the one hand and film studies on the other.

Orientalism in itself has proved to be still vital, notwithstanding the reservations expressed against it from within the ranks of cultural theorists, for three reasons: first, criticisms of Said's ideas may have centered on the contradictions in his positions or the ultimate futility of his visions, but all acknowledge the importance of his formulation of Orientalism as an instance of a more enlightened but still racially implicated view of the West's Other; second, as already mentioned, Said's call for a reinspection of writings and activities throughout history in the light of Orientalist thinking is far from having been definitively accomplished; and third, the notion of an apparently benevolent though no less insidious approach to the study of non-Western culture has been the key to further considerations of racism and its historical transformations.

Genealogizing the Specter

The fact that we are dealing with a film version of a work of fiction that has been considered an aberration in the usual deeply humanist output of novelist Carson McCullers clues us into the significance of the film adaptation (Fig.1). It will therefore also be necessary for any further expansion of this paper to trace the processes of thinking on Orientalism since the publication of Said's volume, with special focus on cinema, a realm of practice which, though passed over by Said in favor of critiquing literary texts, was regarded by then-contemporary philosophers as more vital in displaying social and historical modes of perception, proceeding from its effectiveness in articulating the perspectives of colonial power.



Fig. 1: *Reflections in a Golden Eye* book author Carson McCullers, as guest of the director of the film adaptation, John Huston, in St. Clerans, the latter's Irish residence.

In this respect, I would proffer a reconsideration of a much-cited text, Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, as the unexpected embodiment of an allegory for the Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) condition. Diasporic working-class subjects would not have much choice in configuring a strategy for survival in cultures that generally prove hostile toward them, whether by virtue of ideological difference or by the reality-based perception that the citizens of the host country may be deprived of work opportunities—a form of outsourcing of local industries without having to leave the corporation's country of origin, inasmuch as the members of the foreign labor force are conveniently within the host nation's borders. From the perspective of the overseas worker (of which the present author is classified as one), the required behavioral mode approximates that of the guerrilla confronted by a fascist regime, where the diasporic subject has to avoid standing out in public, pretend acquiescence or satisfaction even with oppressive conditions, assist compatriots whenever possible without drawing undue attention, and remain alert for opportunities either to effect pragmatic change or to escape to illicit sources of pleasure or legitimate vacations, reminiscent of an aspect of hauntology where the subject wishes to return but remains (cf. repetition and first/last time in Derrida 10). From the perspective of the host nation's security officials, such conduct resembles

that of the globalization-era radical-change agent, the terrorist interloper—a principle that demonstrates how “At a time when a new world disorder is attempting to install its neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism, no disavowal has managed to rid itself of all of Marx’s ghosts” (Derrida 37).

The Pinoy diasporic worker is marked by the terms of the euphemistically “special” RP-US relations, where the process of colonization and subsequent neo-colonization has succeeded so well that the Asian aspiration to attain modernity via development could only be fulfilled not by the standard industrialization procedure observed by the Philippines’ neighbors, but by externalizing, so to speak, the citizens’ colonial mentality in inciting them to seek new colonizers anywhere that these might exist and offering these new masters the possibility of owning new souls. The use of the metaphysical term “soul” herein is deliberate: the OFW, who (in more than half of cases) would be female and who, in all likelihood, performs in a foreign country’s service sector, toils at tasks that the host country’s citizens would be unable to assume in the present, whether these be triple-D (dirty, dangerous, difficult) industrial functions at less-than-minimal compensation, sexually demeaning tasks as wives or prostitutes, potentially exploitative labor as domestic help, and so on. By serving as reminders of their hosts’ impoverished past, the workers demonstrate how “there is never any becoming-specter of the spirit without at least an appearance of flesh” enacting the function of “autonomized spirit, as objectivizing expulsion of interior idea or thought” (Derrida 126). Tragically, this condition takes its toll first and foremost on the worker-as-specter, recultured and deracinated, alienated from both host country and home nation: “How do you recognize a ghost? By the fact that it does not recognize itself in a mirror” (Derrida 156).

Film as Colonial Tool

By way of further explication, film as a colonialist tool had proved to be hugely successful in the US’s imperialist adventure in the Philippines (de Pedro 26). Having purchased the rights to ownership of the country from Spain in the 1898 Treaty of Paris, the turn-of-the-century government proceeded to legitimize its claim by staging a mock battle, duly celebrated in early films by Thomas Edison, wherein American ships “defeated” the Spanish armada in Manila Bay. The US then was confronted by the anti-Spanish Philippine revolutionary army, in encounters, also celebrated in early American films, that decimated as much as a fourth of the country’s population, reminiscent of then-still-recent campaigns against Native Americans and foreshadowing accounts of atrocities decades later in Viet Nam; to defuse mounting opposition within the US itself, the colonial administration declared the Fil-American war over by 1902, despite the fact that waves of US regulars had to be sent over for the next two decades to suppress what the American government claimed were widespread instances of banditry.

Cinema, introduced in prototypical form in 1897 (*Cine* 37-44), fit in propitiously in this schema, since there was in practice no national language to speak of: the official ones, circa the 1936 Constitution, were English, which was imposed as a medium of instruction; Spanish, which was resented by the populace due to the refusal of Catholic and colonial authorities to allow the natives to learn the language during the Spanish regime; and Tagalog, which was the language of the Manila-based collaborationist region (cf. “Sharon’s Noranian Turn” 323-31; see also *Cine* 30-37). Despite the specificities of the Philippine cultural situation, the success of film in assuming the dimensions of a national language may have served to confirm convictions in the West (as well as among the local Westernized elite) that the medium had essentially universalistic properties. In fact, the other then-emerging superpower, the USSR (Lenin n.p.), formalized a decision that mirrored the plan of the American colony’s interior secretary, Dean Conant Worcester, in legislating film as a primary propaganda tool (Deocampo, *Film* 29-64; see also San Andres interview). And inasmuch as hauntology spectralizes itself in media (Derrida 50-51), we turn to a ghostly text, one in which virtually all the players are gone, and which had also been largely overlooked for most of the time since its emergence.

Reflections in a Golden Eye (hereafter *Reflections*) was adopted for film in 1967, over a quarter-century since the novel’s publication in 1941. Significantly, this was the year when the French New Wave’s impact on the rest of Europe had finally managed to overthrow the only remaining stronghold of Classical Hollywood cinema—within the US itself, via the box-office success of and critical controversy over Arthur Penn’s *Bonnie and Clyde*.² Director John Huston, who shared Irish roots with and displayed deep personal affection for Carson McCullers, invited her to his home in Ireland, where McCullers visited after the movie’s release; she was then already in declining health, and died just after returning to the US.³ In cognizance of the then-brewing ferment in film expression, Huston had selected the singular McCullers novel that dwelled on psychosexual symbolism (Fig. 2); he cast then-voguish performers such as Marlon Brando and Elizabeth Taylor, and insisted, though unsuccessfully, on a literal application of the title by tinting the entire film in a golden hue. More in the spirit of the 1960s cultural upheavals, Huston not only convinced Brando, who was initially resistant to the role, to play a closeted homosexual military officer; he also cast a non-white performer, Zorro David, to play the effeminate and unruly domestic helper that a homecoming American military couple would bring from the Philippines.



Fig. 2: Belgian film poster of *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, with title translated into French and Dutch.

Unfortunately for Huston, reception to his adaptation was generally hostile, and though he was no longer a blockbuster talent, the film stands as one of his rare box-office failures.⁴ Critics were divided on the merits of the stars' performances, but were unanimous in expressing disapproval, if not disgust, over David's character, Anacleto, as well as David's performance (Fig. 3). This has led to a film-and-novel Othering that remains exceptional in the body of work of both the author, McCullers, and the auteur, Huston. An additional historical irony for Huston is that he had built a reputation for expert adaptations and would continue to do so even after the failure of *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, and some of his most admired projects dwelled precisely on the issue of territorial expansion and colonization, as evidenced in his earlier adaptations of B. Traven's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, C. S. Forester's *The African Queen*, and James Helvick's *Beat the Devil* (screenplay by McCullers' nemesis, Truman Capote); and in his later adaptations of Rudyard Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King* as well as Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*.



Fig. 3: Anacleto (Zorro David) demonstrates to his employer an expression for “grotesque.”

There would be further resonances in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*'s record of its star performers—i.e., in Brando's subsequent defense of his bisexual experimentation,⁵ and in Taylor's devotion to her gay male admirers, solidified in her position as leading supporter for AIDS research. These adjustments in celebrity lifestyles were consistent with the times and would probably have emerged regardless of what film projects Brando

and Taylor were associated with. The more significant, and probably indexical, consideration is the obscurity that befell Zorro David (Fig. 4), not to mention his character. I have been attempting to track down the Filipino performer since my graduate studies years in the 1990s, and the most I have come up with is a name associated with a few performances at the LaMama Experimental Theater in New York City, and some information that this individual, who might not even be the same person as the one in Huston's film, had moved to Florida, leaving no contact information available from the usual internet sources. Considering that all of the major celebrity talents behind the movie are no longer alive, it might be possible to speculate that David (unrelated to the present author) would be of an age too advanced to be requested to sit for an interview, and to discuss a possibly unpleasant, or even traumatic, showbiz experience.

In the admittedly morbid “celebrity deathwatch” website *Is X Dead?*, Zorro David’s date of birth is given as 23 June 1932, which would make him about 80 years old as of the early 2010s. In the shorter of two readily available literary texts referencing him, David’s misarranged name figures in a poem titled “Singaw” [Vapor], written by E. San Juan, Jr. The poem’s subtitle states, originally in Taglish (a linguistic blend of Tagalog and English): “A playful invention of David Zorro, ‘houseboy’ in *Reflections of a Golden Eye* by Carson McCullers” (n.p.). The poem, also in Taglish, does not mention David or his personal circumstances beyond the title, but instead devotes itself to anti-colonial material such as verbatim quotes from the most devastating and/or deceitful orders made by American military commanders during the Fil-American War. The other text partakes of a deliberate unreliability by virtue of its status as an overtly satirical letter, published on a humor website, addressed to “Dr. Dean Chair, School of Underfunded Liberal Arts, Cash Strap State College,... Middle America,” by a self-described “independent scholar.” Nevertheless the author relates how he



Fig. 4: Zorro David publicity still for *Reflections in a Golden Eye*.

spent a day at the Harry Ransom Center (University of Texas, Austin) examining the Carson McCullers Collection. I looked for any evidence to the origins of Anacleto, or to the whereabouts of Zorro David.... What I found was shocking, or epiphanic—a letter from Zorro David to Carson McCullers thanking her for the role. Before immigrating to the United States after World War Two and later working for Saks [Fifth Avenue] in New York City, the orphan Zorro David had lived in Orani, a small town on the Bataan peninsula. (Labrador y Manzano n.p.)⁶

A Fort in the South

There is a movie version of a novella filmed a few years ago that was murdered by the critics. Besides the author, the participants of this travesty included a legendary director, two major Oscar-winning film stars, two notable costars, a few untried actors, and a horse.... (Russo and Merlin 9)

On the other hand, we have the character John Huston had fleshed out, from Carson McCullers's still-unfathomed inspiration. The links between the author and her character are more direct than we might be led to expect, with their homosexuality as just the starting point.⁷ Although openly admitting to the influence of D. H. Lawrence's short story "The Prussian Officer" as well as Isak Dinesen's memoir *Out of Africa* (Russo and Merlin 9-13), McCullers had never been to the Philippines, as far as anyone, including herself, has recounted, yet her understanding of Anacleto displays not just empathy, but also appreciation of his role as postcolonial intruder. There are acts and lines of dialog in the novel, some of them omitted in the course of streamlining the film adaptation, that indicate how she relished the cadence and humor of Anacleto's mannerisms. In one telling example, where the film has Anacleto substitute the word "suddenly" for soon, with his mistress, Alison, correcting him immediately, the novel has Anacleto deliberately use the wrong word in talking to Alison's husband, Morris, with the knowledge that it would confuse and possibly annoy him, and with no one correcting him in this instance. In this and several other minor details the novel accumulates more transgressive gestures than the filmscript, none more pointedly ironic and darkly humorous (in more ways than one) than Leonora's complaint about undertaking (and failing at) a literacy challenge, writing invitations for her party; she remarks, in the film, "I've been working like a fool for three days gettin' everything ready," whereas in the novel the word she uses instead of fool is "nigger."

At this point it would be necessary to outline the main players in the narrative, duly announced in the opening of the novel but truncated in the film's quotation. In fact, the movie opens and closes with a superimposed intertitle of the same 16-word sentence, culled from the novel's first paragraph, which says: "There is a fort in the South where a few years ago a murder was committed." Significantly, the novel's next sentence, which lists the main characters, is dropped in the film: "The participants of this tragedy were: two officers, a soldier, two women, a Filipino, and a horse." McCullers's formulation signifies that her text will be multiple-character in nature (David 72), indicating a plot that will operate with three or more equally significant protagonists and that will resist conflation into either the traditional heroic narrative or the dual hero-antihero or hero-romantic interest structure.

In John Huston's film version this narratological configuration could not be carried over. The stylistic innovations of the French New Wave and the resultant intensification of European art cinema would be initially manifested in the US via

the choice of themes as well as in audiovisual subversions of Classical Hollywood film language, including the recuperation of formerly derided commercial genres. The deconstruction of linear plot mechanics, or what I would call the delinearization of character-based storylines, would not occur in American cinema until much later, with the narrative experimentations impressively realized by Robert Altman, culminating in *Nashville* (David 76-79). In *Reflections*, the production process operated on the assumption that the production had two stars, Brando and Taylor, as well as two supporting performers, Brian Keith and Julie Harris, with Zorro David listed ahead of the rest of the cast. Robert Forster was introduced, so to speak, and effectively distracted audience attention from the horse by appearing stark naked with the animal in several of their scenes together (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5: Pvt. L. G. ["Ellgee" in the novel] Williams (Robert Forster) on Firebird, both au naturel (DVD frame capture).

Brando and Taylor essay the roles of Major (a Captain in the novel) Weldon Penderton and his wife Leonora, while Brian Keith and Julie Harris play Major Morris Langdon and his wife Alison, both couples living in residences adjacent to each other. Forster plays Private Williams, caretaker of Leonora Penderton's horse, Firebird. It is the Langdons, played by supporting performers, who bring back the Filipino houseboy, Anacleto, after Morris's tour in the Pacific. Weldon Penderton displays symptoms of self-homophobia, which are manifested in his excessively masculine role-playing and his oppression of the effete Captain Weincheck, a classical-music appreciating bachelor and close friend of Alison Langdon and Anacleto.

The obvious primary corroborator of her husband's desperate attempts to compensate for his sexual impotence, Leonora mocks Weldon with what he calls

her slatternly behavior and carries on a fairly indiscreet affair with Morris Langdon (Fig. 6). At one point she takes off all her clothes and climbs the staircase while calling her husband a prissy, saying “Son, have you ever been collared and dragged out into the street and thrashed by a naked woman?” Weldon screams “I’ll kill you” a few times but crumples eventually in abject resignation. It is during this incident that Private Williams, whom Weldon had scolded for failing to follow his instructions in clearing the backyard for Leonora’s annual party, peers into the house and gets fixated on her soft and curvaceous figure. Huston underlines this moment by providing an extreme close-up of Private Williams’ eye, with Leonora reflected in it. With the movie’s intended gold tinting, restored in the DVD version (initially exclusively available on Warner Home Video’s Marlon Brando Collection), Leonora—as played by Taylor (effectively reprising her Oscar-winning turn in Mike Nichols’s adaptation of Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*) and her body double—becomes the first reflection in his golden eye.⁸



Fig. 6: The sexually repressed Maj. Weldon Penderton (Marlon Brando) and his earthy wife Leonora (Elizabeth Taylor).

Meanwhile, in the other household: as a result of Morris’s negligence and owing to the trauma of losing her daughter before the baby had turned a year old, the increasingly emotionally unstable Alison had cut her nipples off with a pair of garden shears. This act, depicted in clinical detail in the novel, is brought up only verbally, as a pre-narrative development in the film during a conversation between Leonora and Morris prior to one of their illicit encounters; this was due to impositions by a studio censor, who also attempted to discourage the novel’s scenes of masturbation and overt expressions of homosexual desire, as well as Weldon’s sadistic stuffing of a wet kitten in a mailbox (Russo and Merlin 60). Weldon decides to take up Leonora’s challenge that he is not man enough to ride her horse, Firebird. When the animal races through the forest and throws him off, Weldon whips it savagely, then finally breaks down and cries; whereupon Private Williams literally crosses his path to comfort Firebird, and Morris watches, his crying interrupted, as the unclothed assistant performs his duties as stable hand. Leonora learns of Weldon’s abuse of

Firebird during her party, takes her riding whip, and beats her husband with it in front of their visitors.

Double Whammy

At this point two parallel tragedies, centered in each of the households, build up to their tipping point. Alison notices a man sneaking into the Penderton home, and thinking her husband has become too bold about his adulterous behavior, she heads to Leonora's bedroom, only to find Private Williams crouched by the sleeping woman's bedside, sniffing her clothes. She goes home to her husband, escorted by Weldon, as Private Williams sneaks out, and declares that she wants a divorce and will be leaving next morning with Anacleto. Morris becomes more despondent with the departure of his wife and her helper, exacerbated when he learns that Alison had died after only a few days on her own, and Leonora once more falls into a sulking and quarrelsome mood, this time with her lover.

Weldon, meanwhile, seems to have finally attained a state of equanimity and contentment, and we eventually realize this is because he has admitted his weakness for other men, particularly for Private Williams. This results in a triangulated state of secret desires—Weldon for Private Williams, and the latter for Leonora, for whose clothes he has developed a fetish. During the movie's climactic evening Weldon sees Private Williams attempting to sneak into his home, and thinking that the enlisted man has come to express a similar attraction and possibly consummate their mutual desire, he waits in his bedroom. When he sees Private Williams go into Leonora's room instead, he takes a gun and shoots the intruder, thus waking up his wife and alerting her lover to the incident.

The story, as I have just told it, would also be the way that critics have recounted it. Yet in subsequent re-viewings, with cross-references to the novel, it became evident to me that Anacleto, although dismissed by most of the characters—most resoundingly by the guests in Leonora's party—is actually the presence on which the plot's themes and developments turn. His initial appearance instantly foregrounds the very element that Major Weldon denies in himself—an assertion of a state of queerness, defiant in the conservative context of a military camp.⁹ He serves as a source of amusement for Alison (Fig. 7), in much the same way that Firebird arouses both pleasure and tenderness in Leonora; both horse and Filipino, it may be noted, are the elements enumerated in the novel's first paragraph (starting with "There is a fort in the South," used as the film's prologue and epilogue) known to the rest of the characters by only one name. Most significantly, Anacleto serves as the Other of an Other—i.e., the civilian, colonial, racial, and sexual counterpart of Private Williams. Being male and lower-class, both of them serve their military officers' families devotedly, with Private Williams enjoying the additional privilege of being straight, white, and uniformed.



Fig. 7: Anacleto (Zorro David) amuses Alison (Julie Harris), as much as he annoys her husband, Lt. Col. Morris Langdon (Brian Keith).

In an earlier draft of the script, by openly gay novelist Christopher Isherwood, Langdon winds up chasing Anacleto (a nonextant scene in the novel); Isherwood also updated the setting to the mid-1960s Vietnam War era and described the character as a “gook houseboy” (Russo and Merlin 59).

Yet it is Anacleto who enacts the final, perplexing act of anarchic subversion—by disappearing completely, and mysteriously, once Alison has died. In doing so, his presence in the narrative becomes ironically more powerful. The same way that Derrida remarks that phantom limbs make “the non-sensuous

sensuous” (151), or that the home country marks its citizens’ absence by insisting on their presence via their infusion of material support, Weldon virtually becomes Anacleto, by virtue of his readiness to come out (at least to Private Williams), but Morris, the true-blooded American male who had served in the colonial outpost, begins expressing a disturbing fondness for his now-missing servant. Perhaps in doing so Morris may be displacing his desire for Alison without admitting his error in neglecting her, as a standard psychoanalytic reading might suggest; but closer to McCullers’s personal circumstance would be the possibility of Morris finally realizing, and accepting, that Anacleto combines what had been for him physically impossible despite his heteronormative condition: Alison’s cultured gentility and Leonora’s free-spirited openness, necessarily irreconcilable according to social convention because of the subversive rupture that their combination could engender.

Ironies

Without Alison to confide in, Leonora has to contend with her husband’s excessive admiration for life in the barracks, among enlisted men (side by side of course with the unmentioned and unmentionable Private Williams); then with Morris, she has to listen to how he wishes to have made a man out of Anacleto, so he could have saved the Filipino from what he described as “that other mess,” meaning high European culture, specifically ballet and painting. With Anacleto’s disappearance, the triangle mentioned earlier transmutes into a broken chain of desire: Weldon for Private Williams, who in turn desires Leonora, who desires Morris, who desires the invisible, idealized Anacleto.¹⁰

In this sense, the mutual affection between Alison and Anacleto, mistress and servant, is extended after Alison's death, but with only Alison's survivor, Morris, expressing desire, and the object, Anacleto, now gone. In this respect, Anacleto at last becomes the repository of the narrative's Others—the biological females (Alison and Leonora), the servant (Private Williams), the men with masculine lack (Weincheck and Weldon)—and is thus configured by the narrative as the symbolic counterweight to the increasingly isolated straight white male authority figure of Morris; in Derrida's eerie formulation (originally intended for a different context), "The one who disappeared appears still to be *there*, and his apparition is not nothing. . . . We know better than ever today that the dead must be able to work" (97). In fact, following the social protocol of the period, Zorro David had initially attempted to "act straight," much to the disapproval of Huston, who (also in observance of old-school masculine protocol) could not inform the actor the kind of performance he wanted until the latter managed to figure it out for himself (Russo and Merlin 88). It would not be far-fetched to conclude that Huston's insistence on queer performativity in David's reading of the role has turned out to be more feminist than critics were able to anticipate, not only from providing the twist in Morris's longing for the colonial subject, but also in upsetting the standard perception that the later arrival of women from the colonizing center disrupted the supposedly paradisiacal relations between masculine colonizers and female colonized subjects (cf. the phenomena of interracial marriage, concubinage, and *métissage*, among others, subsequently discussed in studies of the Dutch East Indies by Ann Laura Stoler, especially *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*).

In (the admittedly now-limited) terms of political economy, Anacleto's physical disappearance holds additional import in terms of his relation to the exploitative nature of capital. Having started from a characterization that may be most accurately described as "queer" only via exclusionary logic—i.e., not definitively straight, gay, asexual, or transgender—he may be seen as navigating/negotiating the rigid binaries of American gender relations, but rather than maintaining this unsatisfactory-because-unresolvable arrangement by either engaging in perpetual motion or surrendering to a fixed category, he elected (or allowed the author, as well as reader, to elect) a haunting option that dumped the onus of mourning, per the full title of *Specters of Marx*, on his masters rather than on his people, thereby anticipating the then-still-unformulated response to Derrida's text:

How does one circulate within this new determination of being? At this crucial point, deconstruction refers back to a radical questioning of the problem of life and death, the opening of an experience of ethics and community. It's at this crucial point that a discourse on ethical resistance unravels, one that reflects on the experience of the gift and of friendship, that feels a certain affinity with the messianic spirit and reaffirms the undeconstructability of the idea of justice. (Negri 9-10)

The narrative ends with the killing of Private Williams by the sexually scorned Major Weldon Penderton. The terrible irony here is that Penderton will win the war of the sexes, if he retreats once more into the closet, which would be not just the likeliest but also the only available recourse for him. One of Alison's last declarations was that Leonora was sleeping with an enlisted man, in addition to her affair with Morris—an observation which had led people around Alison to believe that she was heading once more for another nervous breakdown. By permanently silencing Private Williams, Penderton will be able to parlay Alison's misperception into a condemnation, a reverse outing in effect, of the affair between Leonora and Morris, thus ridding himself of his castrating wife and duplicitous neighbor, as well as punishing his object of desire for betraying him, as it were, for his own wife.

The only ghost that remains, with the true potential for haunting Weldon Penderton as the narrative's only clear victor, is that of Anacleto. Although the Major has effectively discredited Leonora and is positioned to expose Morris as an adulterer, Anacleto's specter could serve to remind him of a past that would be impossible to shake off: his homosexuality, his envy and hatred of men who had arrogated such freedom (to the point in which he wound up stealing a precious collectible, a phallic silver spoon, from Captain Weincheck), the devil-may-care capacity to enjoy life displayed by Leonora, who may as well be the woman that Anacleto sees when he looks at his reflection in the mirror, and most of all his similarity (as now-invisible servant) and difference (as still-living and therefore threatening presence) with Penderton's murder victim. Just as Anacleto, platonically desired by Alison, had frustrated (by his absence) Morris's desire to possess his spirit, and Private Williams, sexually desiring Leonora, had frustrated (by his inadvertent refusal) Weldon's desire to possess his body, so, in a larger political analogy, has the development of a global underclass—in the US via the propagation of capitalism over the likes of Williams, and outside it via (neo)colonization—proved to be the element that serves to disrupt the continual deployment of masculinity, even an upright, racially uncontaminated, and militarized version of it.

The Continuing Past

In the narrative text of *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, we are proffered an example of how the civilizing and Christianizing motives of colonization have been transmuted by history into a masculinizing project imbued with Freud's formulation of the predicament of desire (cf. Young). By providing a resistant subject who accommodates his masters' peculiar demands yet triumphs via disappearing into a faceless social system, the text serves to recall the standard response of natives forced into a state of submission: accept the terms of surrender dictated by the colonizers, then conduct guerrilla warfare when the opportunity to do so arises. It should come as no surprise to recall that, during the Filipino-American War,

the Filipino revolutionaries' greatest military triumph (and the US Army's worst overseas defeat, up to that point) was when they managed to overrun a local town occupied by American troops by dressing as women in mourning and concealing their weapons in the coffins they bore, assisted in their mission by at least one houseboy employed by a US Captain (Dumindin n.p.). The Americans declared victory not long afterward by the expedient process of exterminating nearly the entire population of the island as a form of retaliation, but the mark of distressed special relations, where the desired native lass could turn out to be a male assassin in disguise, had been able to facilitate a queering of the struggle, a condition that testified as much to the ambiguity of Americans' investment in their country's colonial expansion as well as the creativity of the response of their Oriental targets.

In this respect, the monologue that Anacleto utters (the character's most extensive), in the days before the relationship between his masters and their lover/rival next door deteriorated beyond repair, turns out to be more than just the expression of (from the military camp's viewpoint) a harmless though slightly loony desexualized servant. He begins by telling Alison that he dreamt about Catherine, whom we surmise is Alison's dead baby, "holding a butterfly in my hands." Then he becomes increasingly perturbed, saying that the insect turned into Morris's riding boot with newborn mice inside, trying to climb all over him.¹¹ Then he just as suddenly eases into his earlier state of tranquillity and provides a seemingly inchoate series of observations, the entire outburst marked by a remarkable degree of uncanny derangement, demonstrating Warren Montag's comment that linear time "has no place in the hauntic," and hence "To speak of specters, the lexicon of ontology is insufficient" (71):

Dreams, they are strange things to think about. In the afternoons in the Philippines, when the pillow is damp and the sun shines in the room, the dream is of another sort than in the North. At night, when it is snowing, then it is—Look, a peacock. A sort of ghastly green with one immense golden eye, and in it, these reflections of something tiny and—tiny and [*he makes a face and Alison says "Grotesque"*—exactly.

Notes

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1. A prototype would be Rolando B. Tolentino’s article, titled “‘Subcontracting’ Imagination and Imaginaries of Bodies and Nations,” tackling “internal transnational developments between the Philippines and Asia Pacific” (148), focusing specifically on a Hong Kong and a Japanese film produced during the 1990s.
2. In 1967, when both *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Reflections in a Golden Eye* were released, Arthur Penn was a ripe 45-year-old who nevertheless would have been young enough to have appreciated the emergence and heyday of the French New Wave in the 1950s. John Huston, who ironically would continue to be fairly active into the late 1980s as a Hollywood filmmaker, was already over 60 that year. Per the Internet Movie Database, *Reflections* cost an estimated \$4.5 million but yielded, as of 1968, only \$2.1 million in US rentals.
3. A shot (Fig. 1) in Ireland of Huston with McCullers radiantly smiling from her sickbed was used for the publicity of *Reflections*. Nevertheless the notoriously manipulative director’s admiration and concern for his guest was effusive and sincere, and spanned the decades since he first met her until he was able to adapt her novel and invite her to Ireland (*An Open Book* 330-35). Beyond *Reflections*’ release schedule and McCullers’s lifetime, Huston kept in mind her appreciation of James Joyce’s “The Dead” as her all-time favorite short story and, at eighty years of age, strove to complete a well-received adaptation of it as his very last directorial output.
4. In his autobiography, Huston defensively described *Reflections* as “one of my best pictures. The entire cast [including Zorro David] . . . turned in beautiful performances, even better than I had hoped for. And *Reflections* is a well-constructed picture. Scene by scene—in my humble estimation—it is pretty hard to fault” (*An Open Book* 333). Beyond this comment, he made no mention of the generally hostile response to the finished project, much of which may have been influenced by the original critical reaction to McCullers’s novella; even in written

form, for example, the character of Anacleto was singled out in the *New Yorker's* review (which also insinuated that the author had plagiarized D. H. Lawrence's "The Prussian Officer") as "an aesthetic Filipino houseboy, one of the most preposterous characters I have met in modern fiction" (Fadiman 67) itself a preposterous example of class and cultural racism that relies on the premise that the words aesthetic, Filipino, and houseboy are incompatible with one another.

5. A relatively recent book by Darwin Porter is cited by observers as "proof" that Brando remained bisexual for most of his youth; it also contains visual "evidence" of Brando (or someone similar-looking) fellating an unidentifiable partner, supposedly his long-term friend Wally Cox (404). *Village Voice* columnist Michael Musto, an authority on American celebrities and queer lifestyles, cautioned in an email message that "Porter (if that's even his real name) isn't reliable at all. His books make outrageous claims about dead stars and to me, they seem either based on hearsay or completely made up" (reply to author's query, 28 Jan. 2012). A more sober (than Porter's) critical appreciation of Brando after his death cites the way he inhabited the role of the closeted gay major . . . not through a surface mincing around but by hinting at the foiled machismo of the man (although the provenance of the major's strangled, half Southern drawl and half plummy British lisp as Brando devised it correlates with no known geographical locale on this earth) (Merkin, n.p.).

By way of demonstrating Brando's advanced (for its time) perspective on identity politics, his guest appearance on the Dick Cavett Show's 12 June 1973 episode, several years after completing *Reflections*, had him condemning several examples of stereotyping in Hollywood, including "the leering Filipino houseboy."

6. In fact a belated behind-the-scenes volume titled *Troubles in a Golden Eye* provided then-available background information on Zorro David's participation in *Reflections*; the authors claim to have tracked David to his home in Florida but reported that the "poignant Filipino," already reclusive, did not wish to talk about the movie (Russo and Merlin 137). The book was co-written by Jan Merlin, who had performed in several TV and B-film projects, including Eddie Romero's Philippine-shot "blood island" entry *The Twilight People*, and who wrote a story titled "The Bakla's Cross" [The Gay Man's Cross], whose cover description enumerates its cast of characters as follows: "Angel Butol, ex-guerilla, ex-policeman, and former supplier of film extras and other delights, gets involved with an American treasure hunter, a retired Japanese Major, and a Filipina 'bomba' [soft-porn] star." Jaime Sanchez, a Puerto Rican actor who had appeared as Chino in the original Broadway production of *West Side Story*, was initially cast as Anacleto; a Warner Bros. production memo to Huston's assistants told them that "perhaps you can make him into a Filipino fag" (Russo and Merlin 70). Interestingly, the film version of *West Side Story* featured a Filipino, Jose de Vega, in the Puerto Rican role of Chino. The then-acceptable slur "fag" repeatedly comes up in reference to both the character and the performer, with even Huston himself, realizing that Sanchez would cost more than the budget could afford after Elizabeth Taylor and Marlon Brando had negotiated their salaries, telling his production assistant to "Find us a Filipino fag"; indicative of Huston's

protectiveness toward his acting discovery Zorro David, he announced to an interviewer that “There’s more show business in some hair parlors than in a good many theaters” (Russo and Merlin 84, 136). Having migrated to the US in 1957 and finding success as a hairdresser first at Beverly Hills and then at Saks Fifth Avenue, Rosauro David was inspired to adopt as his name the title of a then-popular Disney TV series, *Zorro*. When one of his customers heard that Huston’s production was searching for an “Asiatic homosexual,” she enthusiastically recommended David; Ray Stark then informed him about the project and the director, whereupon David remarked, “I thought Mr. Stark said [Huston lived on] Fire Island, but it turned out to be Ireland” (84).

7. Most biographies of Carson McCullers acknowledge the author’s bisexuality, proceeding from a stormy marriage with a man (also bisexual, and a US Army officer, significantly) whom she divorced, then remarried, and who then subsequently committed suicide partly because of his inability to launch a parallel writing career – an event that traumatized her. Regarding her writing of *Reflections*, which she had feverishly drafted in two months in 1939 (the fastest writing she had ever done), she stated: I am so immersed in my characters that their motives are my own. When I write about a thief, I become one; when I write about Captain Penderton, I become a homosexual man. I become the characters I write about and I bless the Latin poet Terence who said “Nothing human is alien to me.” (Carr 91)



Fig. 8: Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach (1908-42), photo on dedication page of the German edition of *Reflections in a Golden Eye*.

By way of illustration, Figure 8 shows McCuller’s then-lover Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach, the Swiss dedicatee of *Reflections*, whom McCullers met via Thomas Mann (Carr 100); described as the “little man” of her exiled family and, like McCullers, constantly ill and trapped in an unhappy heterosexual marriage (103), Clarac-Schwarzenbach died one year after the book was published.

8. Huston’s extended account of the coloring process was as follows:
The Italian Technicolor lab exerted every effort to come up with what I wanted. . . . Weeks and months of experimentation were involved, starting well before the commencement of the picture and continuing after the final shots. What we achieved was a golden effect—a diffuse amber color—that was quite beautiful and matched the mood of the picture. . . . Warner Brothers thought differently; they . . . ordered prints to be made in straight Technicolor. I fought this, and finally, using every threat, contract, and

influence I could muster, I got the studio to agree to make fifty prints in the amber color. . . . So far as I'm concerned . . . the sales department of Warners was headed by a man whose taste in color had been shaped by early "B" pirate films: "The more color per square foot of screen the better the picture." (332-33)

9. Although Sean Labrador y Manzano admits "Do I secretly wish McCullers left a note: 'Anacleto is straight!' Yes. Because that would establish again the complexity and fluidity of Pinoy, of Pilipino culture, of Asian culture, and how American culture is fixated on inexplicable boundaries," a closer inspection of the character's social figurations reveals "its" capacity to encompass an entire range of sexual possibilities: from asexual (no lover in the narrative), to queer (in "open" contrast with Weldon), to straight (as desired by Alison, to the point of excluding her own husband), to polymorphously perverse (as a colonized subject who had succeeded in surviving in the colonizer's army).
10. Further evidence of what we might provisionally term Morris's Anacleto obsession plays out in two scenes: the first, occurring in the novel but not in the film, is when Susie, Alison's black maid, offers to replace Anacleto with her own brother to which Morris responds coldly; this might be at least partly owing to a question of ownership (Susie, unlike Anacleto, does not belong to him), but in both novel and film, Morris enacts a more "out" (to use queer-activist terminology) expression of his desire when he relates to his lover Alison about how he could not endure Alison's thirty-three hours of labor over Catherine, except for the fact that "The little Filipino was there, sweat pouring down his face. Doctor told her she wasn't bearing down hard enough so he'd he'd bear down right along with her, bendin' his knees, screamin' when she'd scream." Morris sobs after this confession and says that he would now be good for only two things keeping himself fit and serving his country; when Alison teasingly responds "Only two things?" Morris picks up the suggestion and they initiate a lovemaking session which Morris eventually fails to consummate, thus effectively tripling Alison's repertory of impotent performers (recognized or otherwise by her), in addition to the male-desiring Weldon and the fetishistic Pvt. Williams.
11. A reverse-racist (over-)reading of this passage would turn on the still-prevalent racial categories, premised on skin color, proposed by eighteenth-century taxonomists: just as the actual color of blacks is deep brown, and the yellow of the so-called Mongoloid race is white, the Caucasoid is arguably "white" in the sense of the absence of color (or actually of melanin) – occasionally resulting in a pinkish hue from blood coursing beneath the skin. Newborn mice, also known as pinkies, possess the same skin quality. The character's strange, halting monologue may have been developed by Huston with his awareness of the actor's quirky-thought-moving command of English. The two-page letter Zorro David had sent to "Mrs. Carson McCuller" contained passages [printed as is] such as "I am an orphan with two sisters and two brothers. . . . I am a poor boy and struggle so hard for education. I learn the trade as a hairstylist when I was very young. . . . Fate brought me in some countries and make America my permanent

recidence. . . . I would never know what acting would mean to me until I became 'Anacleto.' And because of him I was deeply touch and fall in love. I would not mine doing it over and over again. . . . I wishes you the best of everything but most of all, Love and Health" (Russo and Merlin 108-09).

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