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Re-envisioning the Tropics
Nick Joaquin's Philippine Gothic

An Honors Paper for the Program of Asian Studies

By Ella Marie Jaman

Bowdoin College, 2022

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In memory of Lolo Radia and Lolo Eding.

Acknowledgments	<i>i</i>
INTRODUCTION	1
Works Cited	8
CHAPTER 1: The Woman Who Had Two Navels	9
Failed Family, Failed Nation: The National Allegory of <i>The Woman</i>	10
Critiques of the Nation: <i>The Woman</i> as Feminist, <i>The Woman</i> as Gothic	13
Breaking Fictions: The Immaterial and Vanishing Monster	19
Conclusion	24
Works Cited	25
CHAPTER 2: “The Mass of St. Sylvestre” and “Summer Solstice”	26
Temporality in “The Mass of St. Sylvestre”	27
The Mystical Woman in “Summer Solstice”	33
Conclusion	39
Works Cited	40
CHAPTER 3: “The Order of Melkizedek”	41
Exploring Class Difference in “The Order of Melkizedek”	42
Co-Opting Christian Lore	45
Conclusion	50
Works Cited	51
CONCLUSION	52
Works Cited	60
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	61

INTRODUCTION

International readers would have been hard-pressed to find Nick Joaquin's work on bookshelves until the recent Penguin Classics anthology, *The Woman Who Had Two Navels and Tales of the Tropical Gothic*, was published in 2017. Released in celebration of Joaquin's centennial, the anthology is the first U.S. publication of his work and has greatly contributed to his greater international visibility. However, perfectly packaged as a quick get-to-know version of Joaquin's most famous short stories, the anthology loses the initial grouping and pointed historical commentary of his work. Joaquin's short stories, for which he is most well-known, were written from 1946-66 and were published separately in his book *Prose and Poems* (1952) and in the *Philippine Free Press* (1965-66) as serials, respectively, until they were brought together as a collection titled *Tropical Gothic* in 1972.

Born into a financially comfortable family with a lawyer father and a school-teacher mother, Joaquin enjoyed a multilingual education at the apex of the Philippines' American colonial period. However, the family quickly fell into economic disrepair at the unexpected death of its patriarch, and Joaquin would eventually be forced to drop out of school at the age of fourteen. But despite this setback, he nurtured a love of reading that would follow him for life and developed an acute awareness of Manila society by engaging in frequent walks around the city and talking to various fellow residents. On this, Vincente L. Rafael, a foremost Joaquin scholar, wrote that for Nick, "his walking and thinking went hand in hand, affording him the chance to explore high and low cultures, traversing the boundaries between the sacred and profane, all the while living within the folds of two colonial powers and speaking their languages" (Rafael 126). Being educated in both the Spanish and the American

literary tradition, Joaquin found himself uniquely placed to tell the stories of his displaced generation, and to dig into both the Spanish and the American colonial legacies.

The exploration of various colonial influences through the use of the gothic is characteristic of Joaquin's writing. But, because Joaquin often draws on Spanish cultural legacies, he has often been read as a kind of Spanish apologist.¹ Recently, however, scholars such as Marie Rose Arong have argued against this characterization by stating that Filipino Hispanic culture, as depicted in Joaquin's work, can be construed as a form of resistance against both U.S. neocolonialism and nativist nationalism (457). In Arong's perspective, it is not that Joaquin uplifts Filipino Hispanic culture as an ideal to return to, but that he uses it as a way to engage with the two main cultural issues of his time: (1) the problem of American exploitation of the Philippines hidden by its claims to "modernize" religious cultures, and (2) the self-contradicting notion made by nativists that a Philippine identity can still be recovered after over 300 years of colonization by excavating a pre-colonial past.

Without specifically mentioning it, Arong's reading of Joaquin actually lines up with a postcolonial gothic framework. Colonization relies on European forgetfulness towards the violence associated with imperialism—of the deliberate destruction and loss of indigenous cultural forms. Originating in Britain to depict the connection between Britain and its "barbarian" colonies, the "imperial gothic" (explored by Patrick Brantlinger) is a distinctly historical narrative mode of inquiry. It is primarily concerned with the spatial relationships between the colony and the metropole. A prime example of imperial gothic would be a novel like *Jane Eyre*, where Thornfield Hall hides Mr.

¹ For similar critiques from one of Joaquin's contemporaries, see Lourdes B. Pablo's "The Spanish Tradition in Nick Joaquin"

Rochester's previous wife, Bertha Mason, a Creole woman, in a locked room on the top floor, where she becomes a potent symbol of the "mad" colonies. Another example is the Indian serpent in the Sherlock Holmes story "Speckled Band," which is used to evoke the "terrifying" colonies that threaten the imperial metropole (Punter and Byron 48). By coining the term "postcolonial gothic" scholars have attempted to highlight how these spatial relationships that were central to imperial gothic literature are now being renegotiated in post-colonial literature. William Hughes and Andrew Smith assert that traditional understandings of the Gothic as moody responses to Enlightenment rationality actually keep its imperialist urges hidden from view, obscuring how the gothic construction of difference between Self and Other (familiar and unfamiliar, civilized and barbarian) works hand in hand with colonialism (2). Examples given by the two include unacknowledged colonial resonances of the "the dark skin and unknown origins of Emily Brontë's Heathcliff," or "the sensuality, bisexuality and pallor of Richard Marsh's oriental (Hughes and Smith 2).

In my study, I have found postcolonial and "archipelagothic" (coined by Thomas Shaw) readings insightful in uncovering the layers of cultural and historical exchanges behind the construction of Joaquin's stories. The postcolonial gothic (a term coined by Judie Newman in *The Ballistic Bard*) refers to a genre of texts that reveal the collusion between the Gothic genre and empire. In Julie Hakim Azzam's study of the postcolonial gothic, she coins the term "gothic historical sensibility" to underscore how the postcolonial gothic can be used to contest the forgetfulness required of the colonial enterprise and uncover the hidden layers of the past (7). This "sense of pastness," which she describes, has the uncanny return in the present form to interrogate selective national historical narratives.

A newer development in the field of Gothic studies, the tropical gothic refers to both the transculturalization of gothic tradition in areas outside of Europe, and to the gothic literature written in the tropics under a new gothic tradition. “Transculturalization,” as defined by Fernando Ortiz, Angel Rama, and Mary Louis Pratt, “merges the acquisition of another culture (acculturation) with the uprooting of a previous culture (deculturation) to engender new cultural phenomena” (qtd. in Edwards and Vasconcelos 1). In this context, the newer gothic tradition adapts the “North Atlantic Gothic,” (i.e. imperial gothic) to fit it to a unique location (Edwards 2). In Latin American gothic, as in Philippine gothic, “the dark tropes of imperial Gothic tradition are replaced with sunlit and humid conditions, “where Gothic figures—ghosts, zombies, vampires—move freely through plantations, houses and tropical cities, haunting the bright landscape and forming the basis for tropical chills (Edwards and Vasconcelos 2). To apply this idea to the current study, if imperial gothic literature placed the colonies in the terror of the night to dehumanize, such reconfigurations use haunting to show ghosts of the colonial pasts (and their violence) that have not been exorcised. Such a strategy shows that though imperial powers may have left, it is the colonizer’s ghastly shadow that now hovers over contemporary political arrangements.

For a truly localized reading of the gothic in the Philippine context, I turn to Thomas Shaw’s proposed “archipelagothic” approach. This method first acknowledges that the “archipelago is home to hundreds of socio-linguistic” groups and views with suspicion “tropical” metaphors that view Philippines as a “seemingly unchanging and atemporal landmass” (Shaw 7). Instead, the archipelagothic takes thematic inspiration from “dynamic and constantly shifting tidalectics” to imagine various layers of dynamic exchange where assumptions of the tropics as either the “land of

paradise” or the “home of the savage” are challenged and subverted (Shaw 9). Citing David Arnold, Shaw emphasizes that “the act of naming the tropics ‘became a Western way of defining something environmentally and culturally distinct from Europe while also perceiving a high degree of common identity between the two constituent regions of the tropical world’” (qtd. in Shaw 9). Thus, by attending to the tropical gothic, we see how discourses of space, environment, and people are used to flatten a complex historical and social context. At the same time, images of the tropical gothic by Nick Joaquin are critical interventions, allowing us to interrogate such historical and cultural simplifications and to uncover the violence of colonial history.

Since a majority of the stories explored in this thesis are situated in cities, an introduction to urban gothic is also necessary. In reading Julian Wolfrey’s “Urban Gothic” (2020), Shaw speaks to “the urban as a consequence of geopolitical and economic transformations and the gothic as the articulation of social anxiety and of the ruptures of becoming” (14). Like the tropical gothic, the focus of the urban gothic is space, the making of that place, and the ways in which residents negotiate belonging to it. For Metro Manila, which is the focus of many of the works explored here, each resident’s connection to place is complicated by the city’s unique history of conquest and war during its different colonial periods, as well as the history of internal political corruption plaguing infrastructure development and exacerbating class inequality (Shaw 16). Though the city can sometimes be co-opted into nationalistic imaginings “unification projects and homogenous worldviews,” representations of Metro Manila in works such as *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (1961) and “The Order of Melkizedek” (1952) show how the violent struggles of the lower class and the delusions of the rich are ultimately rooted in the historical disjuncture and societal unrest that comes from Manila’s colonial

past. The urban gothic, also reveals how erasure is important to the national project, especially as it situates Metro Manila as home to “ideals of both economic progress and career opportunities,” while situating the rural as “antithetical to globality and development” (Shaw 17-18). In stories where dark forces visit the city, one can sense anxiety about the breakdown of the urban ideal. At the same time, it “allows a critique of a metropolitan-centric view” in which myths of classless homogeneity and erasures of histories of violence are allowed to flourish.

In Chapter 1, I discuss *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (1961) and how, rather than being an allegory of how one girl’s healing leads to the healing of a nation, Joaquin invites us to dig deeper into institutions like the family unit and the Church to see how they fit into the national framework. Turning to postcolonial gothic readings of Connie’s role as a “female monster,” I discuss how Connie’s two navels, as stand-ins for a return to a pre-Oedipal state, exhibit an intertwined desire and anxiety towards the Philippines’ pre-Catholic past (Delos Reyes and Selman 476). In this story, Joaquin uses a female monster to explore the idea of a repressed pre-Catholic Philippines and thus contend with postcolonial anxieties about unresolved historical tensions. At the same time, the “monstrous” Connie is able to mount a potent challenge to the domestication of women in the “national family” and question how gendered myths of the nation are reinforced by Church and state.

In Chapter 2, I investigate two of Joaquin’s short stories, “The Mass of St. Sylvestre” (1942) and “Summer Solstice” (1952) which both involve Philippine religious myths and practices. Branching off into newer conceptions of the Gothic, I pursue a postcolonial gothic reading of “The Mass of St. Sylvestre” by considering Joaquin’s constructions of temporality and his oscillation between Eurocentric and local interpretations of a Manila folk legend. Resisting colonial discourses of a timeless

Philippines steeped in Catholicism, Joaquin reminds readers of cultural hybridity by pointing to the persistence of native figures in Catholic ritual. At the same time, by showing how colonizers appropriate the legend, Joaquin lays bare the colonial mentality of seizing cultural artifacts during war. In “Summer Solstice,” I pursue a tropical gothic reading of the story, asserting that Joaquin uses the topos of the hot tropics to open up new arrangements of power within the protagonist’s family. Going against Imperial gothic tropes of the night as the site of the terrifying, in “Summer Solstice,” the disorienting heat is contrasted with the calm evening, when the indigenous Tadtarin festival takes place.

In Chapter 3, I read the lesser-known “The Order of Melkizedek,” (1952) focusing specifically on the recurring return of the Philippine’s religious past through the monstrous figure of Father Melchor, the Order of Melkizedek cult leader. Joaquin again undermines the story of an either purely Hispanic or purely indigenous Philippines projected in either colonial or nativist discourse by presenting religious hybridization within the cult. Told in the style of a detective story, “The Order of Melkizedek” involves a two-layered plot to critique the fashionable use of indigenous religion to imagine a homogenous nation—a tactic used by the elite to elide religious and class differences. What the elusive and monstrous Father Melchor reveals, however, are these deep differences in class as he exploits the rich for their donations, and rallies the poor with promises of an egalitarian society.

Rather than simply writing Joaquin off as a Hispanophile for his consistent use of Filipino Hispanic culture to explore the cultural and historical fragmentation within the archipelago, reading Joaquin’s work through the postcolonial and tropical gothic can allow us to discover how national frameworks and the ideologies involved with nation-building might be used to hide inequalities and

homogenize local histories.

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CHAPTER 1: *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*

Centered around Connie Vidal Escobar and her plight to break free from toxic family ties and societal expectations, *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (1961) is a story of negotiating one's identity in a world that is ultimately unaligned with one's values. Set in two locations, Manila and Hong Kong, the novel oscillates between the accommodations prominent families like the Vidals and the Escobars make with colonial powers, and the nostalgic longing that exiles in Hong Kong have for an anti-colonial Philippines past. For Dr. Monson, a former rebel living in Hong Kong, and his children Pepe Monson and Father Tony, their nation awaits their return, an idyllic image that persists despite Dr. Monson's visit that shows him otherwise. Yet, to the half-Portugese half-Filipino jazz musician Paco Texeira and his wife Mary, life is less about nationalistic longing than daily struggles to make ends meet in Hong Kong. The most significant turning point of the story, however, occurs when the protagonist, Connie, finds out that her husband, Macho, is her mother's, Concha's, ex-lover. After discovering this betrayal, Connie becomes convinced that she has two navels, flees Manila for Hong Kong, and seeks the help of Pepe to help remove her second navel. It is from here that the story radically unfolds into a quest for Connie to remove herself of her past and enter into the unknown.

Scholars have focused on the two navels as a way to explore the idea of the Philippines' fractured national consciousness. Rocio Davis, for example, has honed in on the navels as the symbolic interplay between the Philippines' "religiously oriented Spanish past and the pragmatic American-influenced present" (Davis 260). In my own reading of *The Woman* I will be reframing the

story's greater national story from one of a healed nation to one of a failed nation in order to emphasize its use of the gothic to question national frameworks.

Failed Family, Failed Nation: The National Allegory of *The Woman*

While some allegorical takes of *The Woman* have centered on Connie's resurrection (after her metaphorical deaths) as being symbolic of the healing of the nation in the postcolonial period, I argue that if one were to examine the underlying family structures within the story, one would quickly see that the story behind *The Woman* is actually that of a failed nation. If the heterosexual family is supposed to be an allegory for national unity—a well-oiled machine where each person plays a specific, gendered role—then the dysfunctional families within *The Woman* represent the Philippine nation as corrupt and divided. Conceptions of the family unit and romantic love within the ideology of nationhood in literature have been discussed at length by Doris Sommer, who draws on Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* to ultimately describe an “interlocking” relationship between erotics and politics within the allegory of Latin America's national novels (Sommer 43). She notes:

That the question of fatherhood follows directly on that of fatherland is neither a coincidence nor a pun, but a familiar metonymy in a tradition of populist discourse. In that tradition, legitimate fathers are—by extension—consorts of an entire Land, husbands who struggle against foreign or barbarous usurpers to establish proper dominion. She, by contrast, is not an extended figure but a displaced one, the result of a metaphoric move that has substituted mother for an ideal terrain—as extensive as a man can cover—for his reproduction (258).

In this, Sommer explains how men are conceived of as actors of a nation: their role as “man” and “father” is directly tied with their dominion of and protection of the physical land they reside in, which is symbolically tied to “woman” and “mother.” Their duties towards the land extend beyond just

protection and dominion, because their ultimate goal is to reproduce. Under this model, the role of women becomes that of faithful wife and dutiful mother, with a greater responsibility to produce obedient, patriotic citizens of the state. To further expand on the story of *The Woman* being the story of a failed nation, I will also turn to Mrinalini Sinha's writing on the ideological function of the family within the nation.

Although not writing about the representations of national belonging in literature specifically, scholars such as Mrinalini Sinha have expanded on the the ideological function of family within the national story. To Sinha, the ideological work of the family is “to make the various forms of hierarchies both within the nation and between nations seem ‘natural,’” such that “individual members willingly subsume their interests within the supposedly unified interests of the family (as represented by the male head of household)” (Sinha 234). The discourse of nationalism thus becomes an important site for the enactment of masculinity—the national project relates to its subjects differently as “men” and “women,” and casts men as “metonymic” (as causes of national history) and women as metaphorical” or “analogues of the national soul” (Sinha 236). The most direct example of this enactment is naturally the military, which for most of its history was an exclusively masculine arena wherein men perform their prescribed roles as protectors of the national soul. The construction of gender and gender roles is thus important to the national project because it encourages cohesion and makes natural the different hierarchies required to keep the elite in their stations.

In *The Woman*, however, we see this gender-based model challenged through the failure of the men to protect the integrity of their country and their families. There are three men of the “revolutionary” generation of the Philippines represented in the novel: Esteban Borromeo, Dr.

Monson, and Manolo Vidal. While Dr. Monson was the only one of the three to actually fight in the Philippine Revolution against Spain, both Esteban and Manolo were among the last of the Filipino men educated in Europe right before the beginning of American rule within the archipelago. For Dr. Monson, his fight to free the Philippines from all colonial powers ends in his self-exile to Hong Kong after the country was taken over by the United States. Despite this exile, however, Dr. Monson held on to the dream that even if he couldn't help liberate the Philippines during its revolution, he could return to his beloved homeland—once it was free—through his sons (Joaquin 15). The importance to Dr. Monson of having sons and not daughters to do this pilgrimage for him in the case of his death indicates that this wish too is a performance of masculinity for him. The myth of the nation as eternal, natural, and worthy of sacrifice plays out most clearly in his dream. The nation is the thing which generations of men have spilled blood and died for—and this hero's return for the self-exiled patriot would have also become a myth and encouraged the next generation to hold on to the same nationalist ideals, had it actually happened. *The Woman*, however, ultimately denies Dr. Monson this heroic self-image by having him die without Pepe and Tony fulfilling his request to visit the Philippines.

The novel also showcases the failures of would-be heroes through the two other men of Dr. Monson's generation. For example, Esteban Borrromeo passes away from an illness after a troubled marriage with Concha (who later marries Manolo Vidal) with nothing left of his legacy but two sons who were raised in the U.S. by his brothers, and some articles written in a long forgotten Spanish-language magazine column (Joaquin 176). Of all of the three men, Manolo is the only one who is able to survive into the American colonial period, but at the cost of abandoning his literary training and education in favor of a "more practical" career in politics. Even with his lofty position in

the government however, he is unable to save his wife from having to crawl out of the ruins of Manila during Japanese Occupation (Joaquin 117), or prevent her from having an affair that almost breaks their family structure (Joaquin 113). Thus, while some allegorical takes of *The Woman* have centered around Connie's personal struggle and therefore "healing of the nation," a closer inspection of the enacted gender roles within the text show the story of a "failed nation"—one in which the national family is fractured not only by colonial invasion, but also through the flawed choices of male leaders.

Critiques of the Nation: *The Woman as Feminist, The Woman as Gothic*

Going beyond readings of the novel within a national allegory, however, allows us to dig into critiques of the national framework. Filipino women writers have critiqued the nationalist reading of *The Woman* that is based on the family as the model for the nation. Thelma B. Kintanar has discussed the "formalist" versus the feminist reading of the novel at length in her article "From Formalism to Feminism: Rereading Nick Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*" (1992). Here, her use of the word "formalist" is in reference to traditional Formalism, which attempts to extract the meaning of a text through its form. In her summary of the formalist reading of *The Woman*, Connie's personal crisis "is seen as a part of the need of a people to work out their sense of history" (Kintanar 134) and the conclusion of the novel brings with it a clear-eyed reckoning of past history; the protagonist Connie becomes the mode through which an entire nation finds healing. Kintanar explains this reading in depth, honing in on how Connie's main issues come from the fact that her family is fundamentally broken: her mother has lived a turbulent life and is therefore unable to meet her emotional needs, and her father was a would-be revolutionary who sold out and became both a corrupt politician and an

abortionist (Joaquin 135). Tragically, Connie's problems do not end with her biological family, because she later discovers that her husband, Macho, has been her mother's lover. Eventually, Connie breaks free from her broken family and starts a life of her own, having reconciled her past through her meeting of Dr. Monson. Thus, the traditional formalist reading of *The Woman* ultimately searches for an overarching meaning to unify an otherwise confusing story. The focus is on how the novel's structure shows the confusion of a nation caught between longing for a revolutionary past and its accommodations with a materialistic present, a dilemma that is resolved by starting anew.

Stepping outside of reading *The Woman* through national allegory, however, allows us to examine how Joaquin explores and imagines women's roles within Filipino society. In Kintanar's feminist reading of the text, the relationship between Connie and Concha is of central importance because it most obviously shows how the novel is inscribed in patriarchy. For one, the relationship between Connie and Concha completely subverts the expected mother-daughter relationship in a literary text because it is mutually destructive. This unusual mother-daughter relationship is in part due to the fact that they are consistently defined by their relationships to men—and even worse, by the men that they share. In Kintanar's psychoanalysis, Connie's extra navel thus takes on a separate meaning, not one of a Filipino between two eras, struggling to reconcile its history. Rather, the navel takes on Connie's various psychic needs, the chief of which is her unrecognized desire to go back to her pre-oedipal period (143). Drawing upon Lacan's reformulation of Freud, Kintanar asserts that:

...the child, in this case, the female infant, "falls" from the blissful state of the unconscious where she enjoys oneness with the mother into the realm of the symbolic (language) which is a patriarchal state. Indeed, in the novel, Connie is bent on leaving her arrested pre-oedipal stage and completing her entry into the realm of the symbolic ...She is shown as completely

embracing the patriarchal order by appealing to her male advisors (142).

In the novel, Connie appeals to Dr. Monson to be the stable father-figure which she so longed for, and later appeals to Father Tony to absolve her of her guilt as she runs away with Paco, Mary's husband. Through her reconciliation with Dr. Monson and her letter to Father Tony, Connie manages to convince the other characters that her being able to choose to run away rather than to stay in a state of limbo meant that she would one day finally be able to choose to do the "right thing" and absolve herself of sin (Joaquin 320). In this analysis, Kintanar affirms that the view of women in *The Woman* is not so different from traditional stereotypes—Connie is "lost and helpless without the standards men have set for her, divided from other women instead of drawing support from them, able to find herself only in relationship with man (144). By pointing out Connie's dependence on male validation, Kintanar also underscores the personal cost that Connie bears in trying to redefine herself within patriarchal expectations—expectations that she cannot seem to imagine herself outside of as a result of being a woman of the elite. In her critique of Joaquin, Kintanar ultimately lands in a gray zone—disagreeing with his depiction of Connie as helpless, but also allowing sympathy for the way in which Joaquin himself might be blind to his characterizations as a member of a patriarchal society (144).

More recent scholars have turned to the post-colonial gothic to provide more pointed critiques on how Joaquin's novels discuss gender and other established hierarchies within the national project. Tyra Delos Reyes and Xavier Selman in their article "The Female Monster" (2018) have brought attention to the fact that people often miss gothic elements within Joaquin's stories, and point out the fact that most of his characters exhibit an intertwined desire and anxiety towards the Philippines'

pre-Catholic past (476). This “infantile anxiety,” Delos Reyes and Selman insist, is experienced and embodied differently within the text according to gender: the anxiety “is a neurosis shared between *both* male and female characters of a nascent pre-Catholic spirit or desire emerging from within, and yet this emergence is witnessed only through the female (476, emphasis added). Although Delos Reyes and Selman do not extend their analysis of the female monster to *The Woman*, in this section I will apply their concepts to the novel.

Delos Reyes and Selman’s discussion of the female monster and gothic haunting within Joaquin’s other works revolves around the dichotomy of the pre-Catholic and post-Catholic within Philippine history. The use of “pre-Catholic” as a specific historical marker in their work emphasizes that the Philippine archipelago had its own nascent cultures and religions before the arrival of its colonizers, that these nascent cultures’ “purest” forms were completely eradicated, and that the archipelago is now left with cultural hybrids from a simultaneously irrepressible and inaccessible past. In this, Delos Reyes and Selman cite E. San Juan’s discussion of the woman as a repository of the past in Joaquin’s canon. Reading Nick Joaquin’s “Culture As History” (1987), San Juan asserts that the individual is a synthesis of all the epochs of man, and thus, “the woman can never truly be repressed, because the past exists concurrently with the present which allows for the manifestation of the monstrous—a representation of the past breaking through the reality of the present” (cited in Delos Reyes and Selman 480). In summary, Delos Reyes and Selman view Joaquin’s use of the female monster as a way to insert and play with the idea of a hidden and repressed “pre-Catholic Philippines.” The female monster is thus positioned to strike out against the status quo.

And women *do* challenge the status quo in *The Woman*, despite Kintanar's reading of Connie as lost and helpless without men. In an argument with Macho, Connie rejects the image of herself as a pliant daughter and shows disdain for the way that infidelity and inauthenticity are normalized within her family unit. In her plan to vindicate herself she uses the weapons of those who hurt her to hurt them as well. The argument begins with Macho and her at odds about their sham marriage and with Macho admitting that he is using Connie for revenge against Concha. The argument ultimately ends with Connie's ominous words: "But you've had your revenge, Macho....Now it's my turn" (Joaquin 220). This statement within the context of Connie's relationship with her husband is particularly powerful because it is one of the only instances within the relationship when Connie exhibits agency, because Connie is so often infantilized by those closest to her. She is seen as someone to be coddled by her parents, someone to be healed by the Monson brothers, and someone to be used by Macho. But with this statement that it is now time for *her* revenge, Connie clues the reader into how she might be weaponizing her image of naivety to purposely unsettle and instill fear in those around her. Her role of monster by virtue of the two navels is ultimately tied to making her circle understand the "ugliness" that exists within themselves by using their own weapons of deceit against them.

Connie is thus a raging force of anger and disruption, simultaneously allowing her to inhabit the role of a repressed pre-Catholic past coming to the fore. As Delos Reyes and Selman note, Joaquin ties Connie to the land—the ultimate symbol of the nation—as well as to folk legend. Kintanar also goes into these associations in "Formalist to Feminist" by bringing up the use of "Inang Bayan" (the use of a woman or mother figure to symbolize the motherland, used by earlier Filipino writers) in *The Woman*. Though the feminine being tied to nature is not a concept that is unique to the Philippines,

as expanded upon by scholars such as Sherry Ortner and Doris Sommer, “Inang Bayan” is one of the ways in which Joaquin builds gothic tropes by linking the feminine to the mystical. Kintanar hones in on how Joaquin emphasizes the link between feminine power and legend within the story through the legend of the Sleeping Woman (Kintanar 138). The Sleeping Woman appears in the first chapter of the story as one of the only cultural legacies passed down to Paco Teixeira by his absent Filipino father. According to legend, the range of mountains seen across the sea in Manila was an ancient goddess of the land sleeping out a thousand years of bondage (Joaquin 41). When Paco stumbles into the city in shock after assaulting Connie, he is horrified to see her visage in the mountains: “for there she still was, stretched out under the sky; the sly look in her eyes and the bloody smile on her lips, and her breasts and shoulders naked” (Joaquin 61). As Kintanar points out, the association of women with nature in this passage is particularly linked to their sexuality, hence the emphasis on the lips, the breasts, and the shoulders (138). Ultimately, Connie’s connection to the Sleeping Woman, the ancient goddess, “allows her to become the vessel of the pre-Catholic precisely because the female body is perceived as more raw, more ‘natural.’” Thus the strange desire that Paco feels in seeing her visage in the mountains can be read as a greater desire and fear of the pre-Catholic (Delos Reyes 481).

These readings of the novel through a feminist and gothic lens allow readers to break away from seeing *The Woman* as a conclusive story about the healing of the national family. In Kintanar’s reading of the text, stepping away from traditional formalism gives us an opportunity to see how Joaquin uses Connie to challenge gender hierarchy. Through Connie’s enmeshment with her mother, we are taken out of the expected mother-daughter relationship to see the ways in which their patriarchal society pits women against each other and defines them solely through their relationship

with men. And although Delos Reyes and Selman do not directly apply their work on the monster to *The Woman*, their reading of the use of monsters in Joaquin's work informs readers of the novel to see Connie in a different light as well. Rather than just a victim of a dysfunctional family, a mad woman, or a transgressive woman, we see Connie as representative of a greater desire and fear of the past—a way to break a common national fiction.

Breaking Fictions: The Immaterial and Vanishing Monster

In the end, Connie's monstrosity is neither about the trouble within the national family (the allegorical reading) nor the desire to return to the unfractured self (the psycho-analytical reading). Rather, as Delos Reyes and Selman suggest, fracture is a given in a colonized space like the Philippines. In their explanation, the modern male Filipino subject experiences fear when he sees the irruption of the pre-Catholic in the modern, and as a result of that fear, they try to suppress and disavow these pre-Catholic elements but fail. The monstrous woman thus becomes a handy repository for male fears of such historical hybridization, while at the same time providing a bridge to the pre-Catholic self by metaphorically standing in for a pre-Hispanic past. By making the female figure monstrous, the male thus "makes peace with a pre-Catholic desire he could not understand" (Delos Reyes and Selman 495). Though Delos Reyes and Selman do not analyze *The Woman* directly, their reading would, by extension, render Connie a monstrous woman, whose two navels provide an opportunity to mediate male anxieties about a pre-Hispanic past in the contemporary present. Such a reading, however, tethers Connie to national frameworks, making her a repository of the national past. What I propose instead is a reading centered on Connie as someone who questions the norms of the key pillars of society, the

family and the church, and in doing so, breaks out of stifling choices offered to women in the name of the nation.

By being a bundle of contradictions and opposing impulses, Connie complicates a straight-forward national allegory. She represents the unsolvable nature of historical conflicts—something that cannot be solved through a national romance. Rather than wanting to return to her pre-oedipal period as scholars like Kintanar might suggest, Connie's end goal is to reach a dissolution of her unsatisfying relationship with others and with herself. The way in which she tries to break free from these relationships involves returning to the portion of her past that was most turbulent—her experience of her childhood ending with the Second World War. The thread that ultimately links adult and child Connie is Biliken, a Buddha statue she first encounters when she visits a carnival with her parents as a child. Her family acquires the statue during the onset of WWII when her father brings it home to preserve it. However, when Connie returns home after fleeing the Japanese Occupation of Manila, she finds Biliken much altered. From being the happy statue and playmate of her lonely childhood, she returns home to see him fallen back against the wall, his great belly thrust up, with “two small black holes [that] peered like eyes from the top of the great belly” (Joaquin 246). Shot twice in the stomach during the war, Biliken appeared to have two navels. Then in her adulthood, Connie suffers a black-out in memory after discovering her mother's and husband's love letters and finds herself standing before Biliken in the ruins of her childhood home (Joaquin 252). She then accepts herself as one with Biliken, and thereafter insists that she has two navels as she struggles to reconcile her disappointment with her adult life with what seemed to be the beauty of childhood peace. The

two-naveled Biliken is thus a representation of her own fracture and brokenness, a comforting figure turned monstrous.

Ultimately, the harm that Connie poses to others with her monstrosity is her ability to make them question the behaviors they have been socialized with. In Chapter 4, “The Chinese Moon,” Connie experiences metaphorical deaths through the four elements: earth, water, air, and finally, fire. In each of these deaths, she confronts different portions of her past through the lens of her closest relationships. In her confrontation with her father, for example, she is called out for refusing to accept her dysfunctional family. What follows is a heated conversation between Connie and her father for her inability to be complacent to personal injustice:

“... you take things too hard, your reactions are excessive, you make—”

“Excessive! Are you mad, Father—or am I? Have you lost all feeling?”

“I have lost all power to rage.”

“And is that what I must learn to do?”

“To take things as they come, yes... want heroes—and when you don’t get heroes you make up devils. But we’re not heroes and we’re not devils. We’re just people. And you’ll have to learn to accept us as we are.” (Joaquin 259)

By referring to Connie as a “child,” Manolo is suggesting that all people eventually learn to submit to the turbulence of life and the betrayals of others, but that Connie lacks something within her that allows her to do the same. Her two navels therefore emphasize and symbolize her arrested development. She is monstrous because she refuses to “grow up” in the traditional sense of becoming “less emotional” and of becoming more accepting of the world as it is. This conversation, however, is quickly contrasted by Manolo’s final call to Connie before their death by air to “go down raging,” and to not lose that ability to rage against the world like he did (261). “Take things hard,” Manolo calls, “make a fuss, and refuse to accept what we are—no not even now. Rage, rage against us—even now!”

His change in attitude during this episode shows his regret for allowing himself to become numb to the cruelty of the world, and in return, he comes to question why he blamed Connie for being disappointed in him in the first place. This change in mentality that Connie elicits in others is ultimately part of her greater role as a monster within a text, as she explores "new spirals, new and interconnected methods of perceiving the world" (Cohen 7).

In challenging the other characters' perceptions of their society, Connie also breaks expected national fictions by contesting its two main institutions: the family and the Church. These two institutions can be intertwined, particularly because of the focus on infidelity within this book. Connie's leaving with Paco, involves the breaking of two families. However, in escaping Hong Kong, Connie also rejects her prescribed roles as a wife and daughter within society, since she denounces all of her family—mother, father, and husband. In terms of challenging the Church, her denial of Catholic dogma is brought to the forefront in her last metaphorical death, her death-by-fire, wherein she confronts an unnamed Catholic Father. Here, the Father accuses her of being obsessed with evil because of how disgusted she is by the world and condemns her for convincing others to see the world with similarly disillusioned eyes. This death is the final opportunity for Connie to accept living life as others have, and the Father asks her to confess her sins and to join the rest of the world. "So you refuse to admit your sin?" he accuses, "I refuse to admit it was a sin." She insists (269). Connie thus, again, breaks from any structured mode of categorization—she insists that she is beyond sin, and thus, has done no wrong.

More importantly, in what is a complete upset of Catholic beliefs, rather than being condemned to eternal death by fire, Connie is instead resurrected into reality, finally free of the

emotional bondage of her past by completing her four elemental, metaphorical deaths. The description of Connie's death by fire sees fire not as a destructive force—the force to punish sinners—but as a cleansing force:

--and then it happened: the blast, the hot blaze, the illumination; and fire sprang up about her, fire crowded round her, fire enveloped her; she was clothed with fire, crowned and aureoled with fire, as she rose, transfigured, on wings of flame, on a chariot of fire...she was fire itself; beautiful blessed fire, the purifying element, the element of light, burning splendidly, burning exultantly, between the moon and the sea (273).

Here, fire becomes Connie's crown, a mode of transfiguration—though some might say it is undeserved. Exiting from her death sequences, Connie escapes the Catholic dichotomy of sinner/saint and Heaven versus Hell and is able to leave Hong Kong without the emotional baggage of her broken family and ruined childhood. Her end is far from clear, however, as her leaving does not necessarily mean the end of her troubles. In fact, Joaquin describes the youth dying in her and Paco's eyes as they muster the courage to run into the rain towards the port docking their escape boat to Macau (311). Connie remains, in the end, a runner—liminal in that she has broken the constraints of her past yet must still exist in the society which engendered her monstrosity in the first place.

In total, by consistently refusing to give into other's demands to accept life and people as they are, Connie challenges and breaks expected stories about family, its place in the nation, and the gendered modes of national belonging. Her role as monster within the text allows her to live within the space of difference, calling on others to question their worldviews and give into different modes of thinking. In refusing to play the role of tolerant wife to an unfaithful husband or a dutiful daughter to parents who neglected her, Connie breaks the fiction around the family teaching its members to be productive and obedient members to the state. Additionally, by remaining unpunished for refusing to

admit her “sins” and for committing adultery with Paco, Connie undermines the overarching role of religion within the novel as a morally guiding force. Connie’s consistent refusal to adhere to the standards of others and her propensity to cause others to question themselves, in tandem with her insistence of having two navels, marks her as a “monster” within the work, a word whose very etymology suggests a being “which reveals,” “which warns,” and which attracts others into the realm of the absurd (Cohen 6).

Conclusion

The Woman Who Has Two Navels is a complex work that is flattened by a strictly allegorical reading of its story. *The Woman* is not about a girl who, in healing herself, leads to the healing of her people. Instead, reading the story through its use of the gothic opens up its exploration of national ideology as it subverts the nation’s biggest institutions: the family and the Church, where members of the nation enact prescribed gender roles. Connie is central to this exploration on the gendered modes of national belonging as she takes on the role of female monster—emphasizing how characters fail to live up to their expected roles, and causing them to question both their connection to the nation they belong to as well as their relationships with each other. Her two navels being symbolic of her struggle to completely break free from the limits of her family and greater society, Connie ultimately becomes a transgressive subject. Unsuccessfully negotiating psychological, social, and/or cultural constraints, the transgressive subject is “at the same time left with no possibility of a return to the *status quo*” (Ng 19). She exists, then, entrapped within the limits which she so badly wanted to escape, as she is decisively tied now to a new broken family—Paco’s. Thus, Connie’s monstrosity functions in different ways,

allowing her to transgressively challenge gendered frameworks, to articulate that the Philippines is caught between the unresolved histories of two colonial powers, and to reveal how monstrous women are used to represent male fear about the stability of the national family.

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CHAPTER 2: “The Mass of St. Sylvestre” and “Summer Solstice”

The previous chapter considered the uncanny two-naveled figure of Connie as an exemplary gothic figure. A seductive, treacherous, and monstrous woman who challenges the Catholic institution, she is an ideal “terrifying” figure through whom Joaquin explores fears about the stability of the national family. By pursuing a gothic reading of the novel, I explored how the figure of the transgressive woman reveals underlying post-colonial cultural anxieties about the Philippines’ unresolved historical legacies. In this chapter, I now turn to two stories from Nick Joaquin that use the gothic mode in less terrorizing ways, even as they utilize the gothic’s fascination with traumatic histories.

In “The Mass of St. Sylvestre” (1942), I locate an intentionally post-colonial twist on the gothic preoccupation with the past. If colonial discourses emphasize the hallowed, almost timeless, presence of Catholic ritual in colonized Manila, Joaquin complicates narratives of a purely Hispanic Philippines by reminding readers of the ineradicable persistence of native figures in such rituals. Here, he touches on conceptions of religious hybridity, suggesting a mutual exchange between the “old religion” and the new by involving forgotten Philippine gods in a Catholic legend. Joaquin also plays with how the St. Sylvestre legend survives into the post-1945 world, but this time in white man’s fantasy of witnessing a vision denied to most locals. In the white tourist’s telling, the legend loses much of its local religious and cultural significance—and reveals the colonial mentality of seizing cultural artifacts as prizes of war.

“Summer Solstice ” (1952) likewise tackles a religious ritual, in this case an indigenous one called the “Tadtarin” which occurs in tandem with the Catholic feast of St. John. In this story, Joaquin explores the possibilities of a “tropical gothic” by using the topos of the hot tropics to open up new arrangements of power. The disorienting heat contrasted with the calm of evening subverts imperial gothic tropes of the night as the site of the terrifying. Furthermore, Joaquin undoes “tropical” images of “unruly” indigenous rituals, by revealing instead a stately and dignified female-led procession of the Tadtarin.

In both “The Mass of St. Sylvestre” and “Summer Solstice,” Joaquin pushes back against a narrative of a “hallowed past,” whether of Catholic religiosity or indigenous matrilineal authority. Instead, he locates in rituals vital traces of sustained questioning of dominant power arrangements.

Temporality in “The Mass of St. Sylvestre”

As a postcolonial story, the relationship between setting, culture, and identity is at the forefront of the plot of “The Mass of St. Sylvestre.” In the story, Manila is called “the noble and ever loyal city of Manila,” a signifier of its long history as not just a Catholic city but also a Spanish one. The city of Manila is first described as “a cathedral city almost from its foundation” (Joaquin 32). As one of the only two Christian cities within Asia (the other being Goa), Manila is therefore believed to be honored by the spirit of St. Sylvestre during the New Year. Additionally, Manila is also seen as the stronghold of Spanish influence in the Philippines—the “Walled City” being the fort of Spain within Asia. Mohammed Valoojerdi in his article on this work takes on a nostalgic and nationalistic view. He argues that setting the story in Manila “allows Joaquin to pursue two objectives: first, to show to what

extent Filipino identity is constructed upon Spanish cultural foundations...and second, to perpetuate a heritage that is being forgotten” (38). By contrast, I argue that the physical setting of Manila in the “present” of the rubble of WWII alerts readers to a more crucial point of the plot—now that the Spanish, the Americans, and the Japanese have left, to whom does Manila owe loyalty? To whom will its traditions be passed down? Thus, rather than just focusing on the past as “origin” stories of syncretic national identity, the story shows that colonial myths of evangelizing colonizers and unwelcome native aspirants are themselves in the rubble, ripe for questioning.

The first section of “The Mass of St. Sylvestre” is set in messianic or historically unmarked time of legends and told in the perspective of an omniscient narrator. This first half speaks to the origin of the St. Sylvestre legend, which, according to Joaquin, is actually tied back to the ancient Romans, who, during the New Year, invoked the God Janus for blessings. Joaquin describes this ancient god, now manifested as St. Sylvestre, as the “patron of doors and of beginnings, whose two faces (one staring forward and the other backward), to caricature man’s ability to dwell in the past while speeding into the future” (32). The immediate establishment of St. Sylvestre as both an accretion of different myths and as a symbol of the human relationship with time sets up the rest of the story’s discussion on how postcolonial nations negotiate their historical stories. In such nations, a usable past is extracted from the nation’s multilayered history to create national myths. The results are homogenous cultural practices which forward the rhetoric of national belonging through shared practice and folklore. The myth of St. Sylvestre, in this example, is initially pushed as a longstanding tradition from time immemorial with a rich European and Christian legacy. As one of the two cities in Asia to be visited by the saint, Manila is then set apart within its region as “civilized” and “modern” within the colonial lens.

However, we begin to see how this storied cultural artifact is complicated by pre-colonial influence with the introduction of Mateo the Maestro. Mateo is something of a legend himself, believed to be an ancient magic practitioner last seen in the 18th century. Joaquin gives insight on the local beliefs surrounding Mateo, with some describing him as “surviving...from the days before Conquista, when, being a priest of the ancient cults, he wielded great power” (34). In this section, we are still within the realm of messianic time when, shockingly, the mystery of Mateo is immediately dispelled in the next paragraph. It is clarified that Mateo was a man who was not even 80 at the time of his cursing by St. Sylvestre, and that he could not be remembered as a youth because he was a sojourner as he learned the magic arts (34). In these abrupt shifts within the introduction, readers are introduced to the disjointed nature of time characteristic of Joaquin’s stories. Opening with an omniscient, third-person narrator who goes through the different characters and their origins adds to the story-telling aspect of the legend, indicating to readers that the narrator is an insider with knowledge of the local legend, retelling the story for an unfamiliar audience. We begin to see how the legend might shift in different (local versus tourist) hands, as the storyteller is both sympathetic to and dismissive of the ancient practitioner.

To further confound the sense of time and cohesiveness of the plot, Joaquin then begins to give hints towards the ongoing existence of indigenous Philippine gods within the colonial and postcolonial cultural landscape. Mateo is mythicized as a champion of the old Philippine gods, plotting their restoration to glory as they are currently “living in exile on the mountaintops, and in dense forests, and out among the haunted islands of the south” (34). These ominous descriptors involving exiled gods bring tension within the narrative, causing readers and cultural insiders to question how much of the

past truly remains. Delving deeper into the gothic, Joaquin then writes that Mateo's success in seeing the mass can be attributed to his relationship with the pre-colonial, as he "had consulted the dark deities in exile" and was taught that "the holy mysteries (except by divine dispensation) could be observed only by the eyes of the dead" (35). Thus, Mateo grafts into his own eye-sockets "a pair of eyeballs ravished from the dead" in order to witness the Holy Mass (35). The old gods' participation in this Catholic myth is another example of how culture is presented as fluid, dynamic, and contradictory in influence in this story. The fact that the old gods are knowledgeable in methods of observing the Catholic rite suggests not just a coexistence between the two "separate" belief systems but also a mutual exchange. Thus, switching back and forth from legend to its annual local enactment allows Joaquin to present the St. Sylvestre story as a living cultural artifact—as part of a current discourse, a double-edged story about Catholicism and its silencing of native "interlopers" as well as the syncretic integration of old local gods in the lived practice of Christianity.

The second section of the short story supports this critique of the colonizing force of religion by switching to a completely different voice—the first-person voice of a Filipino narrator coming back to his home city after WWII. The questioning of the future of the St. Sylvestre legend is discussed at length in the narrator's thoughts: "Into what city (I wondered) would St. Sylvestre now make his annual entry? In what cathedral would he say his Mass?" (35). The story of St. Sylvestre, a seemingly ancient legend, four centuries ago an import from colonizers, but now as part of the native culture as the old gods, is at danger of being forgotten in the rubble of war. At this vulnerable point, the story is taken up and appropriated by an outsider, switching hands from a local to a tourist. The unnamed Filipino narrator receives a letter from Brooklyn, from Francis Xavier Zhdolajcyk, an American soldier

who reportedly witnessed the mass during his deployment, detailing his experience of the mass. The short story thus brings to light a different kind of co-optation, one where a new colonial force (American) seizes the ritual for its own purposes.

In the account of the mass by Brooklyn-based Francis Xavier, the legend loses much of its cultural significance and instead becomes a white man's fantasy of privileged insider status. In his retelling, he and his battalion were camped outside of Manila's walls when he heard music and saw the inner city, risen from rubble and restored as in Spanish colonial times with the angelic procession of St. Sylvestre making its way along the walls (38). In recounting this experience, Francis incredulously comments: "I didn't know all that about living a thousand years or I might have acted otherwise. If that stuff is true—what a chance I missed!" (37). Francis is clearly writing as someone who does not believe in the tradition associated with the legend, nor does he seem to take part in its religious significance. The awe regularly associated with seeing such a spectacle is taken away from Francis' version—he notes that he was not surprised, but that he simply felt he should take a look (Joaquin 38). Eventually, Francis follows the procession into the revived Manila, sees St. Sylvestre himself saying mass, and decides to take evidence of his findings (Joaquin 38). But once he runs back to camp to retrieve his camera, the church bells cease to ring in the New Year, and he is left "standing on a stack of ruins...just blocks and blocks of ruins stretching around [him] in the silent moonlight" (38). Throughout the entire story, Francis Xavier behaves much like the Conquistadores of the past, with his name even recalling the famous Catholic missionary who was instrumental in bringing Catholicism to parts of Asia in the mid-1500s. He comes to the country as a part of the "Liberation" forces that seek to reclaim Manila for the Philippines (but really for U.S. interests), and on a night holy to the native

population, seeks to witness and claim part of the tradition for himself with first his camera, and now his storytelling. With no emotional connection to the religious and social context of the legend, Francis Xavier tells a story of a ruined Manila that allows him a privileged look into one of its oldest traditions. To him, this experience is a prize of war, for he only wrote the letter to the narrator when the story of his witnessing the mass passed by word-of-mouth.

Despite Francis' attempt at appropriation, however, "The Mass of St. Sylvestre" ultimately safeguards the legend and its dissemination from outsider eyes. Although Francis Xavier witnesses the mass, for example, he is not able to gather evidence of its existence. In fact, he is most clearly labeled as an outsider by the way that none of the legend's rules apply to him—Francis is alive, but he is still able to witness, unlike Mateo, who had to graft the eyeballs of the dead in order to see, and Francis is able to see St. Sylvestre without bodily harm, unlike Mateo who is turned into stone. Thus, even though Francis manages to intrude on the legend, he is not even acknowledged by the main powers associated with it, and is left standing in rubble with no clear evidence of his witnessing, unable to fully enter the world of the local myth.

Rather than being a story of nostalgia for a Filipino Hispanic culture, like Valerjoodi suggests, "The Mass of St. Sylvestre" is instead a story of cultural fragments. To a local reader, it opens the discussion on the lack of a truly "pure" religious and pre-colonial culture, as cultural practices are actively informed and influenced by the past. By exploring the ways in which myth can be shared and experienced by both tourists and locals, Joaquin lays bare the imperialist agenda of using myths to depict the indigenous as barbaric, and while also showing how this colonial mentality can exist even within the local psyche. Through the unnamed Filipino narrator, for example, we are introduced to the

greater story of the Mass and the religious significance of it as a Christian tradition. At the same time, however, the narrator also aligns with the colonial mentality towards the indigenous when they speak flippantly of Mateo, his magic, and his association with the old gods. By exploring the propagation of myths and legends, Joaquin appears to suggest that one can rediscover the secret and hidden pasts that linger beneath the surface accounting for the syncretic religiosity and cultural hybridity in the Philippines.

The Mystical Woman in “Summer Solstice”

In “Summer Solstice” (1952) Joaquin once again explores the ongoing influence of the precolonial through his rendition of a fertility rite, the Tadtarin. Hosted over three days in summer with the last day of the festival coinciding with both the summer solstice and the feast day of St. John, the Tadtarin is a woman-dominated ceremony where men may not enter unless they don women’s clothes. In this ceremony, the Old Philippine gods are invoked through dances and ritual sacrifice to bring fertility to the land through the vessel of a woman, who, on the first day is a young woman, on the second day is middle-aged, and on the third day is an elder. Encountering this sacred rite are the Moreta’s—Don Paeng and Doña Lupeng, respected upperclass members of the community who undergo a spiritual and sexual awakening after witnessing the third night of the Tadtarin. When Don Paeng is trampled to the ground by a mob of women as he tries to intrude on the festival without paying it due respect, he returns home looking to assert dominance over his wife, only to end up crawling across the floor like a “great agonized lizard” to kiss his wife’s feet (Joaquin 52). The

role-reversal ending, a point of great contention for the novel, is part of Joaquin's deliberate aim to confuse and resist strict definitions of power, culture, and temporality.

Discussions of "Summer Solstice" have focused primarily on its depiction of women, questioning whether the ending can be read as a story of women's triumph or as a re-inscription of patriarchal values. Teodoro M. Locsin in his introduction to *Prose and Poems*, where the story was initially published, ties the role reversal at the end to the "emergence in the [female] consciousness of her true nature as the source of life, maker, and therefore ruler of man" (qtd. in Ventura 149). Similarly, Resil B. Mojares complicates the story of female triumph by relating it to greater archetypes—Earth, God, and Death triumphing over the masculine, which in this case is "the mind that fragments" whereas the feminine is "the womb that devours" (qtd. in Ventura 149). Filipino women writers, however, have tended to reject this reading of the text in favor of a more critical one. Sylvia Mendez Ventura, in "Sexism and the Mythification of Woman," has denounced the role reversal ending for its pseudo-empowerment. According to Ventura's reading, most women in the text are not given agency or respect but are instead expected to weather abuse and neglect from their domineering husbands. Additionally, she believes the transformation of the women participating in the festival into mythical beings able to control and fight back against the men around them ridicules feminism and makes it monstrous, because "the goal of feminists is not to be feared or adored by men but to be treated as equals" (Ventura 154). There is thus a difference in opinion between scholars about the extent to which the story can be read to support female empowerment. But, while a feminist reading of the text might show how Joaquin reinscribes patriarchy even while "honoring women," a gothic reading—particularly a Tropical Gothic reading might uncover further complexities.

Although imperial gothic tropes of ghosts, zombies, and vampires do not make an appearance within “Summer Solstice,” the story uses the landscape and heat to defamiliarize fixed ways of seeing, disturbing what is considered ordinary. Heat is not only symptomatic of the tropical environment in the text, but is the vessel of chaos, universally affecting and ultimately reconfiguring the presented power dynamics. The association of the masculine with the sun and the feminine with the moon is central to the (superficial and immediately obvious) symbolic economy of “The Summer Solstice.” Descriptions of this association abound—for example, while the Moretas are traveling to pay a visit to Don Paeng’s father on the feast of St. John, they encounter a crowd of celebrants gathered along the wayside of the road, carrying an icon of “a fine, blonde, heroic St. John: very male, very arrogant, the Lord of Summer indeed; the Lord of Light and Heat—erect and goldly virile above the prone and female earth” (Joaquin 41). The connection of St. John with the Sun and heat and the emphasis of his virility above the female earth cements the day, the summer, and all their associated elements as archetypally masculine within the text. Meanwhile, in a later conversation between Doña Lupeng and her nephew Guido, the moon is classified as “the Lord of the women,” “because the tides of woman, like the tides of the sea, are the tides of the moon” and the Tadtarin festival happens under the moonlight as well (Joaquin 45). Ventura suggests that throughout the text, heat is a dominating force such that “even in the traditionally female moonscape, males have the upperhand” (151). Her reading is not unfounded—even the ending scene where Doña Lupeng gets her husband to submit to her ends in heat:

... [Doña Lupeng’s] loose hair streaming out the window—streaming fluid and black in the white night where the huge moon glowed like a sun and the dry air flamed into lightning and the pure heat burned with the immense intense fever of noon. (Joaquin 52)

In this, it is hard to deny the overpowering presence of the sun, and by extension, man, within the story. It would be tempting to dismiss the ending, therefore, as self-defeatist—for what is the point in allowing Doña Lupeng to wield power over her husband when the story's symbolic economy suggests its futility?

However, a gothic reading of the archetypes shows how these associations can be subversive because they associate the male with frenzy and irrationality, and the female with deliberateness and calm. In the procession of the St. John feast, for example, passion overtakes the male crowd:

... a concourse of young men clad in soggy trousers were carrying aloft an image of the Precursor. Their teeth flashed white and their laughing faces and hot bodies glowed crimson as they pranced past, shrouded in fiery dust, singing and dancing and waving their arms... (41)

In this depiction, the men are all direct participants in the feast—the distance between them and the icon of St. John lessened as they all carried it, prancing and laughing around, the icon itself even seeming to joyously partake.. In the procession of the Tadtarin, however, there is a clear separation between the spectators, the procession, and the Tadtarin.

The crowd parted and up the street came the prancing, screaming, and writhing women...But the Tadtarin, a small old woman, walked in calm dignity in the midst of the female tumult (48).

Here, the members of the procession act as precursor for the Tadtarin, writhing and screaming to contrast with her calm, and to warn the crowd to part for her. The crowd is physically separated from the center of the ceremony, and the Tadtarin as focus of the ceremony is clearly outlined. Far from the chaos of the St. John procession, the Tadtarin's dignified walk among her devotees connects the moon and night with rationality—the exact opposite of imperial gothic configurations which would have marked the night as the site of transgression and terror.

As an overpowering force in the story, heat can also be read as an equalizing force. Witnessing the procession for St. John, for example, causes Doña Lupeng to question the men's right to revelry: "For this arrogance, this pride, this bluff male health of theirs was (she told herself) founded on the impregnable virtue of generations of good women" (Joaquin 42). This bitterness comes to a near crescendo as Doña Lupeng ponders on the power of women to destroy "the poise of the male," when Don Paeng interrupts her thoughts and jokes: "Has the heat gone to your head, woman?" (Joaquin 43). In witnessing the men and being "touched by the heat" Doña Lupeng comes to question her position (and therefore, to realize her power) as a woman within her family. The story then of course ends in heat—the heat indiscriminately touching *both* Don Paeng and Doña Lupeng. When Don Paeng threatens to whip her (out of "love," out of "respect" of her so he could "correct" her behavior), Doña Lupeng questions his reasoning by uncovering his self-centered motivation. "And because if you ceased to respect me, you would cease to respect yourself?" she asked (Joaquin 51). Don Paeng continues to struggle against her but eventually becomes exhausted with heat, sinking heavily to his knees, streaming with sweat to confess his submission to his wife (52). In this sense, Doña Lupeng's "transformation" is less of a complete change than it is a realization that she does not have to automatically submit to her husband and can instead directly challenge his thinking. Heat, through this lens, causes both characters to question their prescribed ways of thinking, rather than simply overpowers just the feminine or the female.

This questioning of gender hierarchy within the story is not limited to its symbolic economy. A postcolonial gothic reading of the text returns the focus to questions of class, race and governance within the context of the Philippines' layered and fragmented history and offers a more complicated

view of the role gender plays throughout the text. Julie Hakim Azzam's study of the postcolonial gothic "The Alien Within" quotes Winnifred Woodhull in her explanation of the symbolic role of women as both guarantors of national stability and the scapegoats for national collapses :

As the embodiment of conflicting forces that simultaneously compose and disrupt the nation, women are the guarantors of national identity, no longer simply as guardians of traditional values but as symbols that successfully contain the conflicts of the new historical situation. At the same time, women are the supreme threat to national identity insofar as its endemic instability can be assigned to them (40).

Thus, it is precisely because of women's stereotypical role as the dual embodiments of the traditional and the modern that positions them to challenge the identity of the nation. If women fail to guard against the discarded, irrational values and practices of the primordial past, then the ability of the nation to produce rational citizens or to stay "modern" is in jeopardy, an idea that the postcolonial gothic gleefully co-opts to disrupt "rational" order. That tension between the past and present is a focus in Delos Reyes and Selman reading of the female monster. To them, the introduction of the female monster in the story is a means of representing the modern's unwanted and unresolved desire for the precolonial (Delos Reyes and Selman 2018). In this reading, Doña Lupeng's awakening to her own sexual power over man is a sacrifice of her "modern" self to become an amalgamation of both the Catholic and pre-catholic. She is the unfamiliar transgressive woman of the past (*unheimlich*) who comes to life in the presence of the familiar "dutiful wife" of the present (*heimlich*), revealing repressed elements of pre-colonial religiosity. Delos Reyes and Selman's focus on the female monster in this story is a considerable contribution to its analysis within a postcolonial gothic framework. However, they also ultimately argue for the neat resolution of the past with the present with the role-reversal ending and also posit the existence of a "pure" pre colonial culture that may still be retrievable despite the

extended period of colonization faced by the Philippines. In my view, Joaquin is instead arguing for the acceptance of a disjointed history and disrupted society. Instead of imperial discourses that "tropicalize" the Tadtarin through stereotypes of exotic rituals, or nostalgic nationalistic discourses of the recovery of a past, the transgressive woman unsettles both narratives.

Conclusion

While Joaquin has been lauded as author for his unique writing style and plots, discussions of his work within the gothic framework have been scarce despite its wide-scale applicability to all of his texts. The focus of most critics tends to be on how Joaquin might further different agendas, whether that be that of the nostalgic nationalist, or the misogynist. Applying the postcolonial gothic to Joaquin, however, brings the focus back to questions of race, class, and gender within the context of the Philippine's historical and cultural disjuncture. In "The Mass of St. Sylvestre" we see Joaquin confound his reader's sense of linear time and argue for cultural syncretism through his inclusion of the "old" Philippine gods—the indigenous deities of precolonial times, within his depiction of a sacred Catholic ceremony. In "Summer Solstice," he again explores these complicated cultural histories through the Tadtarin and its encroachment into a Catholic feast day. Put together, Joaquin's particular brand of tropical gothic within "Summer Solstice" focuses on gender and class difference through its lived cultural practices. By contrast, in "The Mass of St. Sylvestre," Joaquin's gothic takes on a different form—challenging the notion of a "pure" culture, Catholic or otherwise, for which Filipinos should uphold as standard.

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CHAPTER 3: “The Order of Melkizedek”

Told in the style of a detective story, “The Order of Melkizedek” (1966) is Joaquin’s exploration into the irruptive return of the pre-Catholic Philippine past through the life of the Estiva family. Sid, the second child and only son, returns to Manila after 10 years in New York City to prevent his younger sister, Guia, from falling into the hands of a mysterious Christian cult. This cult—the Order of Melkizedek—aims to “revive” Catholicism by incorporating embodied worship practices and indigenous iconography into worship. The story takes a sudden turn, however, when the taxi driver who mistakes Sid for a member of the Order is murdered. Thus begins Sid’s race to find the murderer and to uncover the extent of Guia’s involvement with the Order before it is too late. Sid’s quest ultimately culminates in a tragic end when Guia is shot and killed by Father Lao, the excommunicated former priest whom she had recruited from abroad to serve in the cult.

The Gothic element in this story is the recurring return of the religious past, a solemn undercurrent in an otherwise comic story about self-important characters. The surface-level plot consists of Guia’s self-obsessed journey of self-discovery and Sid’s self-important savior plot to exorcize his sister of religious fanaticism. But woven into the story is a second plot in which seemingly immortal and elusive religious characters come back from the past and haunt the present. Joaquin uses these parallel plots to critique the fashionable use of indigenous religion to imagine a homogenous nation, a tactic that elides religious and class differences. And while he mocks the rich for their self-motivated reasonings about the “true” nature of Filipino religion, he also reveals the insurgent ideals within the Order that Dr. Lagman and those of his class espouse—ideals that would lead to a

more egalitarian and communitarian Philippines.

Exploring Class Difference in “The Order of Melkizedek”

In a typical story of the “imperial gothic” (first explored by Patrick Bratlinger), a figure or artifact from the colony shows up in the metropole as a menace, a colonial fantasy used to dehumanize colonized subjects as ghosts and vampires. Right from the outset, Nick Joaquin reverses this movement by having Sid come from the metropole (the United States) to the colony (the Philippines). Although the story is set in the post-colonial Philippines, American influence through cultural exports maintained a strong hold within the islands, as shown in Joaquin’s *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*. Living in the United States for a decade (working for the United Nations, no less) has made Sid feel like he is a “citizen of the world,” situated beyond national particularities and troublesome pasts. He thus experiences a double return—the popularity of Philippine folk practices in modern times as a reminder of the irrepressible past which he has been trying to outrun, and his return itself a reminder to the others of the pro-American past which they might wish to bury.

As landowning business owners, the Estivas and their friend circle benefited during the American and Spanish colonial times, leveraging allegiances to fill their own coffers. Sid’s own father was infamous for being a “sexual economist” and “sexual geographer,” for his strategic marriages: Adela’s mother, from the north of Manila, a tobacco heiress, Sid’s mother, from the South, a sugar heiress, and Guia’s mother, from Central Manila, a real estate heiress (Joaquin 170). Wealth was strategically built within the Estiva family, with Adela and Sid having agriculture-based inheritances in cash crops that are tied with the Philippines’ previous colonial economy. Therefore, as a result of their

close relationship with previous colonial powers, the Estivas are likely to see themselves as closer to the metropole than the colony, and by extension, as above the indigenous.

Beyond the family history of colonial collusion, Guia's journey through young adulthood is symptomatic of the detachment and disillusionment that upper-class members of society experience as a result of their privileged position. Flitting between different cliques and interests, Guia is ultimately searching for a meaning to her life when she finally settles on the Order. Guia describes her different phases of adulthood by adopting different names for the version of her at the time: Steve for when she co-owned a bookstore specializing in pornography, Ginny for when she was part of a teenage gang, Gigi for when she got a job with an ad agency, and Guiang for when she "marched with the nationalists" (Joaquin 193). Through all of these experiences, however, Guia was unable to find the meaning that she sought after. Expanding on her search for meaning, Guia explains:

Back to native roots, they said, and I was raring to go. But every time we started off, where we always ended up at was the American embassy or the American bases or some American firm. I got to thinking the way back to native roots must be through Washington, D.C. (Joaquin 193)

Guia's frustration at never being able to fully connect to a precolonial Philippine past is symptomatic of the violent erasure that must occur within the context of colonialism. Not only that, Joaquin points to the "absent presence"—bits of the past that are present yet unlocatable to Guia—to highlight "fashionable" attempts by the rich to reclaim the past. After all, Guia does not seek to recall struggles and confrontations, only to rebel against what she perceives as an inauthentic society that her wealth and status have given her access to. The pre-colonial culture which Guia desires to take part of is permanently gone. In its place is the object of her desire—a collection of various practices and cultures from different ethnic groups of the Philippines consolidated into what she imagines is a singular

“Philippine indigenous culture.”

Guia’s consolidation of moments of Philippines history into a timeless “indigenous culture” runs counter to how the past is remembered by locals. As Vicente L. Rafael notes in *Contracting Colonialism* (2008), local Philippines residents experience “remembering-by-haunting” because they have witnessed the different shifts of power in their regions. To them, “the past appears metonymically as a series of names, dates, and events interspersed by moments of visiting and being visited by the spirits of historical personages” (Rafael 11). This fragmented “local” history reveals how colonial traumas make it impossible to construct a smooth linear telling (Rafael 11). To remember the past is to see the vestiges of colonial violence that “stalk” the present as unresolved problems of power and privilege. Yet people like Guia imagine a mythical past to create a coherent national identity.

However, Joaquin challenges this longing for an idealized past in the form of Guia’s own mocking of her peers. In talking about her friend groups (“barkada”) at the different stages of her discovery era, Guia laments at their inauthenticity and privilege. “This barkada of mine,” she says to Sid,

...they could afford not to be bothered about anything except eating, sex, and action, but only because they have allowances... They said they wanted to be free, hah—their freedom was just freeloading. (Joaquin 191)

In the same breath, Guia also mentions: “That’s when I asked Adela to stop *my* allowance. I had begun to feel like a crook” (Joaquin 191, emphasis added). While this giving up of her allowance might be seen as a conscious act to stop participating in her peer’s hypocrisy, the act is only temporary. One of the main conflicts at the beginning of the story was Guia’s desire to donate her wealth to the Order to show her devotion to *their* cause. Thus, while Guia disapproves of her peers, she too benefits from the

wealth of her family and can choose which charitable cause she deems worthy of donation according to her current fancy. In Joaquin's characterization, Guia's attempt at authenticity is at its core inauthentic: not only is the premise of the self-discovery journey unfounded (a "pure" precolonial Philippine culture no longer exists), but her motivations are more so to flatter her own self-importance.

Co-Opting Christian Lore

The Melkizedek (also Melchizedek, or Melchisedech) of the Bible was a Canaanite priest-king of Salem who was revered by Abraham, the first of the Hebrew patriarchs. In his associated vignette in the book of Genesis, Melkizedek meets Abraham and blesses him under the name of "God Most High" (in Hebrew, "El Elyon") (Britannica, "Melchizedek"). The greater significance of Melkizedek in Christianity is that he is alluded to in Psalm 110 as the "prototype" to the messiah of the Davidic line. This later led to the name of Melkizedek being translated to "king of righteousness," and the order seen as "superior to that of the Levites [the designated tribe of priests from within the tribes of Israel]" ("Melchizedek"). In other words, with hallowed Christian credentials and a messianic lineage, the Order was ripe for picking by an opportunistic cult leader.

Within the story, the Order of Melkizedek presents itself to the rich class as an alternative and more authentic form of Filipino religious nationalism. Not just a movement to return to "pure worship," the Order positions itself within the theology of struggle, co-opting Christian lore for a greater call to national reform. In reality, this positioning manifests itself differently depending on the Order's audience. In one conversation with Adela and Sid, Guia goes into detail about the Order of Melkizedek's mission to make Christian worship more relevant to modern times. Guia and her fellow

Order member, Sister Juana, believe that the key to revitalizing Christian worship in the Philippines is to turn away from “stuffy” Catholic traditions and turn towards the “spontaneous,” which to them means embracing embodied worship through dance and music as in indigenous ceremonies such as the Tadtarin of “Summer Solstice.” In this, Guia and Sister Juana insist on the connection between their religious movement and a return to the Philippine indigenous:

“We try to direct their taste. The Philippine look and all that.”

“Oh we don’t mean,” laughed Sister Juana, “anything so superficial as putting a barong tagalog on Christ or a kimona on Our Lady.”

“Just following the line,” said Guia, “of our native statuary, from the pagan carvings to the santos. And *that’s* our line, Sid: continuation (Joaquin 185, emphasis in original).

The emphasis on the *line* of spirituality alludes to their belief that the indigenous and the Catholic can merge. Rather than following the typical messages of the “native” as “nonbelievers,” Guia and Sister Juana insist that Catholicism was hybridized by indigenous spirituality.

Filipino scholars have agreed with this view of hybridization as well. Citing Vicente Rafael, Gemma Tulud Cruz in her chapter, “Weaving Oppression and Liberation: Postcolonial Theology as Theology of Struggle” argues that translating Christianity into the Filipino vernaculars created a uniquely Filipino expression of Catholicism that “was neither a replica of the European model nor a baptism of native practices” (26). The process of conversion to Catholicism involved a “reinvention of symbols and signs, an interpretation of events and symbols through local categories, and resistance to colonial authority through slippages of meaning in colonial power relations” (Cruz 26). That is, converting the Filipino masses into Catholicism can be described as neither the “Catholicization” of the Filipino’s native religion, nor the “Filipinization” of Spanish Catholicism, but that Catholic symbols and concepts were reborn into new expressive modes—ones that combined and agreed with

the existing Filipino theological framework. An example of this would be the acceptance of Catholic saints as a replacement of Filipino *anitos*, which were spirits including native spirits and ancestors that were traditionally worshiped through statues, just as Catholic saints were.

Cruz takes this even further to say that these uniquely Filipino concepts and practices were formed within and in opposition to Spanish rule. The widespread acceptance of the *pasyon*, for example, was not an acceptance of suffering and oppression for the “greater good” as first encouraged by Spanish clerics, but was the effort of Filipino natives to keep alive anti-colonial sentiment. As Cruz states:

The narratives of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection provided powerful images and moving drama to the Filipino peasantry. The images of transition from one state to another, for example, from darkness to light, misery to joy, despair to hope, oppression to liberation, and death to life, as well as the image of Jesus, who chose to be in solidarity with the poor and suffered and died at the hands of the wealthy and aristocratic class, served as inspiration for their struggle (28).

Thus, Jesus’ death read within the lens of class struggle re-imagines the cross as the symbol of struggling against suffering and not the passive acceptance of Christian iconography.

Enterprising cult leaders like Father Melchor knew that this theme of an indigenous reformulation (and resistance) of Christian religiosity would sell well with the rich. According to Father Melchor, the Order’s leader, to forward the agenda of Philippine independence, nationalism must start as a spiritual practice that reflects the indigenous Philippine culture of worship so that the public can become more personally involved. This is the way in which he presented the movement to Mrs. Banaag, a member of the Estiva family’s circle, whose husband is a nationalist. Mrs. Banaag reveals the story of her involvement with the Order during Sid’s interview with her. In this interview,

she explains how Father Melchor appealed to her with his repositioning of religion to serve nationalism:

“It seemed to make sense, what he said—that nationalism was not a political, but a spiritual problem. Our people had to be renewed in spirit. They were not really political...nationalism as a political movement, like Recto’s would never reach them. But they were deeply religious in the sense that they believed in *magical forces*. And the nationalist movement could reach them only if it came in the guise of religion, a magical nature religion, but with the Christian forms familiar to them.” (Joaquin 202-203, emphasis added)

The “Recto” that Mrs. Banaag refers to in this paragraph is the famous Filipino statesman, Claro M. Recto Jr., who was active in the years 1919-1960. He presided over the assembly that drafted the Philippine constitution in accordance with the Tydings-McDuffie Act—the act that set up provisions for the Philippines’ independence from the U.S. within 10 years of its passing in 1934. His political platform was complete Philippine independence from the United States, a position that Mrs. Banaag derides as being inaccessible to the uninvolved, apolitical general public. We see the Order play on gothic tropes of “mystical natives” in Mrs. Banaag’s discussion. What Mrs. Banaag ultimately reveals, however, is how elites like her believe that ordinary people need notions of “magic” to become involved in what is considered the higher ideal of national sovereignty.

Father Melchor positions himself as a figure of the indigenous affiliated with a long history of challenges against mainstream Christianity. According to Dr. Lagman, the self-appointed historian of the Order, Father Melchor, was actually named “Baltazar,” and originally “appeared during the Revolution [from Spain] in the Central Plain, exhorting peasants, but in the name of his religion.” Baltazar evidently caused enough problems to both the Filipino revolutionaries and the Americans that his flock was targeted by American forces in 1901 (Joaquin 206). Then, when Sid consults a Spanish

friar with access to historical records of the men of the different Catholic orders in the Philippines, we come to understand the exact line of the Father Melchor myth. This same figure of Father Melchor is reported to have appeared (1) in the late 1500s as an unnamed high priest of the old religion during the Spanish Conquista, (2) in the 1690s under the name Gaspar as another high priest of the “old cults,” (3) in 1776 as an indigenous friar of a Catholic order under the name Melchor, and (4) finally, as we already knew, in the Philippine Revolution of 1898 as Baltazar (Joaquin 208). Under this legend, the Order of Melkizedek thus traces its lineage back four centuries to key conflict points in Philippine history, as an unbroken line of “indigenous” resistance against full incorporation into Catholicism.

While the idea of such resistance appeals to the rich, we also see how this insurgent history of the Order appears to the less wealthy such as Dr. Lagman. In Dr. Lagman’s testimony, we can see the Order’s greater tie to insurgent ideals as he discusses the last iteration of the Order’s movement that occurred when he was a young boy. Dr. Lagman describes the religious movement that occurred in 1901 as an exodus of peasants fleeing from landlords and colonial rulers to a “New Jerusalem” in Pangasinan, a province north of Manila, where all members contributed cattle and grain “to the commonwealth” (Joaquin 205). Lagman himself uses the term “Christian communism” to define this intentional community that breaks away from colonial governance. There is an interesting change in tone, however, once Lagman describes the inner structure of the Order.

“All houses were equal, but there were special houses,” he explained, “In one dwelt Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, in another, the Holy Ghost, in a third, the Twelve Apostles...But one house, a little apart from the settlement, was the most special of all, for in it dwelt God.” (Joaquin 206)

The phrase that Lagman uses to describe the houses immediately evokes a saying that should be familiar to most readers—George Orwell’s famous line in *Animal Farm* (1954), written just a little over a decade before “The Order of Melkizedek”: “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.” Just like the line in *Animal Farm*, Lagman’s description of the community indicates something different from the idealistic egalitarian society that he attempted to portray in the beginning. In this New Jerusalem, there were still special members in positions of leadership who were revered by the greater community, and some, like Father Melchor, were even elevated to the level of God.

Conclusion

Ultimately, what is striking about the use of The Order throughout the text is its proclivity to be used by its different audiences to fulfill their own motivations. Taking on Christian lore, the Order supplies a comfortable myth to the rich of renegade messiahs of indigenous spirituality persistently challenging colonial Catholicism. At the same time, the same history includes the theology of struggle that reveals how peasants can challenge settled political arrangements established by the rich. For the self-important elite, the Order is seen as either a way to further the cause of nationalism as a political movement, or as a way to discover “Filipino authenticity” in postcolonial times. However, for the working class who seek a better life for themselves, the Order offered a way to escape the cycle of poverty by rallying together with other working-class people into communes. Though characters like the Father Melchor might suppress the egalitarian ideals that Dr. Lagman and his class might espouse

in favor of recruiting the rich, Lagman and others reveal the hybridity of religious belonging and communitarian ethos underlying blasé beliefs of a Catholic Philippines.

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CONCLUSION

I didn't start this project with Nick Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*. I started with F. Sionil Jose's *Po-on* (*Dusk* in the U.S. title). I was captivated by Istak's journey as an indigenous priest turned Philippine revolutionary. As he began asking himself if he was just Ilocano or if he was also willing to imagine himself as Filipino, I began to ask what goes into the making of a national identity. How do you take an archipelago of over 7,000 islands and 134 ethnic groups and inspire them to rally under the same national banner? For a country whose revolution started with the pen of Jose Rizal, I thought literature would be a good place to look for an answer. But the more that I read, the more I realized that the answer to my question was a non-answer. You *can't* take that many people with various local histories and cultures and force them to wholly accept a single identity. The evidence is as surface level as the *Tagalog* versus *Bisayan* rivalry, and as deep as the *Bangsamoro* secession movements in the southern Philippines. I began to read for what I couldn't see—the local cultures, foreign residents, and indigenous minorities underrepresented in some of the most visible Filipino stories accessible in the United States.

I chose Nick Joaquin's name off of a syllabus I found for a Philippine Literature in English course taught at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. He appeared under "Literature under the Republic (1946-1971)," with the selected reading being his story titled "Three Generations." Funnily enough, I never read that short story. Instead, as part of the "1.5" generation of my family to come to the United States, I found myself relating to the exiles of Nick Joaquin's *The Woman*. When Paco Teixeira visits Manila for the first time, he finds himself a tourist to his father's homeland in the

same way that I found myself needing my parents to act as translators whenever we visited my grandparents back “home.” How I would position myself as a scholar was one of the main things that agonized me about taking on this project. I was young when I left the Philippines, but I was old enough to remember commuting to school on a *traysikad*, and to remember the sound of the street vendor yelling “Ta-ho!” as he passed by my street. Being educated mostly in the U.S., I wonder how much of my memory of my homeland has been tainted by colonial conceptions of the tropics. The memories of childhood are usually golden, but as I look through my memories of the coconut trees, the green, lush mountains, and the stifling heat, I often ask myself: to what extent is my longing for home based on stereotypes of the tropics? I was fortunate to have a mother who was able to emigrate and to bring our family to a place where we could be better provided for, but I feel that I lost much of my connection to my heritage in chasing her American dream. I feel unmoored, like Connie. I feel interstitial, caught between two navels (origin myths) myself.

Motivated by the feeling of community I found with these characters, I started looking for threads that would weave Joaquin’s stories and writing style together. At first I was interested in representations of religion within the stories as I realized how he played on the Spanish Catholic legacy and hybridized it with the Philippine indigenous, but later I saw that it wasn’t just in religion that Joaquin explored colonial fragments. Joaquin exposes the colonial within the Philippine *psyche*—not just the Spanish influence, but the American as well. In a passage within *The Woman*, Joaquin draws parallels between the “avenue matrons” of Manila’s elite, who “might not get up from a mahjong session for days and nights except to eat and relieve nature,” and the “gutter matrons” of the slums who “breakfasted, lunched, supped, and suckled their babies right at the gaming tables” (45). Both classes

are stuck in a place of denial, trying to mimic the American dream that they have been sold through colonization:

for in the world of their minds, they moved with cool expertness, rich and poor, among marble halls and ivory baths...through streets that were all Park Avenues, where the men were all Pierpont Morgans, and all the women unaging, unfading movie queens (47).

The phrase “in the world of their minds” especially emphasizes the idea that this American dream is a delusion in Paco’s perspective. Starting off the description in this way primes the reader to imagine the Manileños as chasing a wholly inappropriate dream—for America cannot be fully recreated in the Philippines. The dirt and high winds of the tropics would always move to stain marble halls and ivory baths. The skyscrapers of Park Avenue would always look out of place in a nation plagued by humidity. But the pervasiveness of that dream can be traced to the present day. In fact, it can also be traced through me.

I stumbled upon the postcolonial and the tropical gothic as a way to question these colonial legacies towards the very end of my project. By then, I had been exploring strictly feminist or strictly postcolonial frameworks to critique Joaquin’s stories. But when I came across Tyra Delos Reyes and Xavier Selman’s “The Female Monster: The Pre-Catholic Manifestation as a Result of Modern Anxieties in Selected Stories by Nick Joaquin,” I was drawn in by a framework that seemed to encompass it all: the postcolonial gothic. I had come across imperial gothic in my English classes at school, reading *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, but I never imagined that the tradition had spread beyond that region. From what I could access, writings on the Philippine gothic seemed scarce. It was only through the mentorship of my faculty advisors at Bowdoin that I was able to dig into the Asian gothic, and eventually the Tropical Gothic. Then, two weeks before my full honors paper was due, one

of my advisors alerted me to an upcoming book published by Anthem called *Archipelagothic: Studies in the Philippine Gothic*. This book will be published in the fall after I graduate, but through the kindness of one of the contributors, Thomas Shaw, who gave me access to a draft of his article, I was able to get a sneak peek into the theoretical framework that I had been looking for all along.

I came to understand that Gothic is a genre that can capture anxieties about unresolved historical and social issues that “haunt” the present. In his archipelagothic approach, Thomas Shaw calls the study of these violent colonial specters a “hauntology,” a description that he borrows from David Punter, who viewed the gothic as “history written according to a certain logic: a logic of the phantom, the revenant, a logic of haunting” where the connection with the post colonial most clearly comes to view (quoted in Shaw 3). Showcasing transgressive and monstrous elements, the gothic challenges fixed categories and often lays bare the problematic nature of the myths of the nation. As I read Joaquin’s stories, I found national myths evoked and challenged through his fragmentary representations of family, history, and belonging. Combined with his comedic presentation on the attitudes of the rich, Joaquin offers serious commentary mingled with snappy quips about the unresolved tensions hidden in Philippine society.

In *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*, the myth of the family as the microcosm of the nation was challenged through the deterioration of each main characters’ family structures. The Vidals are the foremost example, with Connie and Concha being enmeshed in a romantic struggle over Connie’s husband, Macho, and with the patriarch, Manolo, being unable to rescue his family from the tragedy of war. Even the Monson family, which never suffered internal conflict due to extramarital affairs, still collapsed under Dr. Monson’s inability to ever reconcile the fall of the Philippines to various colonial

powers. Men within this story are thus left unable to perform their roles as protectors of the land and the national soul. Not only this, but the overarching role of the Church as a cultural glue is challenged in *The Woman* with Connie's last metaphorical death, when she confronts an unnamed Father who tries to force her to admit to her sins of deceiving others and taking away their hope. While fire within the Christian tradition is connected to punishment for sinners, Connie's death-by-fire culminates in her resurrection back into the real world, where she is finally able to escape the confines of her toxic family and her past. In reading this story through the postcolonial gothic, I discovered how Joaquin ultimately positions Connie to challenge the domestication of women in the "national family" and brings to light how gendered myths of the nation are reinforced by church and state.

At first glance, Mass of St. Sylvestre appeared to be a cautionary tale about a man who went against Catholic tradition and was punished by being turned into stone. On repeated re-readings, however, I discovered the layers of colonial domination embedded in the propagation of the St. Sylvestre myth. I began to wonder about the gothic elements in two ways. First, why does the story have a gothic figure (Mateo, the native priest) who, when denied entry to a closed Catholic ritual, resorts to the "dark arts" of grafting in the eyeballs of the dead into his own eye sockets to witness the tradition anyway? Second, why is the ritual included in a frame story shared by an American soldier, who, unlike the cursed priest, is able to witness this "phantom" event with his naked eyes? "Mass of St. Sylvestre," like *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*, also had an image of doubleness, with the figure of Janus, who had two faces looking at the past and future, associated with the Catholic priest leading the mass. Seeing this trope repeated made me think more deeply about how the gothic elements of the story underscore the cultural hybridity of the Philippines and its disjointed history as a result of its

violent colonial past. Mateo consulting with the old Philippine gods to “break into” the Catholic ritual seems to suggest that the pre-Catholic and the Catholic exist together in the Philippine cultural fabric and actively exchange and interact. The gothically outer Mateo drove home the supremacist logic that denied Filipinos entry into elite circles and rituals as well as the stubborn resistance to such whitewashing.

“Summer Solstice” also reminded me of the patriarchal complacency that was a key theme in *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*. The gothic element of the story is that of the Tadtarin, an enduring remnant of Philippine folk spirituality competing with the Catholic feast of St. John. In *The Woman*, as well as in “Summer Solstice,” the transgressive woman challenges gendered myths of the nation and the gender hierarchies created to keep women as submissive child-bearers. Here, Joaquin uncovers an underlying rage in Doña Lupeng, revealed in her thoughts about the dancing male participants in the St. John feast. “For this arrogance, this pride, this bluff male health of theirs was (she told herself) founded on the impregnable virtue of generations of good women” (Joaquin 42). I could feel Doña Lupeng’s dissatisfaction with being forced to be a “well-behaved” and “virtuous” mother build up throughout the text. For me, this came to a boiling point when her cousin Guido asks her why she thinks she is no longer beautiful just because she has become a mother. It was as if Lupeng believed she had an expiration date—that because she was a mother, she had to give up her sexuality and self-esteem. The role-reversal ending, however, has Lupeng reclaim her personal power by having her stand-up against her husband. In the end, she has him crawling on his knees. The gothic irruption of the little known indigenous ritual in the middle of a Catholic feast allows for ordered hierarchies of gender, class, and religion to be overturned.

In the last story discussed in this paper, “The Order of Melkizedek,” we see Joaquin once again use the gothic theme of the return of the repressed to deliver a critique of Philippine nativism and the growing class divide. The surface story is about a clueless rich girl caught in a cult and her equally clueless older brother caught in a murder plot. Embedded within this story is a story about the cult she joins, in which a native Filipino priest, who defying all natural laws of aging, resurfaces in the esteemed Judaeo-Christian biblical order at times of historical conflict in the nation. The cult is thus the pivot around which the story develops, exposing the pretensions of the rich as well as the activism of native Filipino priests within the Catholic church. While the rich may co-opt the indigenous to claim a “pure” pre-colonial culture and heritage, the recurring return of Father Melchor instead argues for a religious hybridity, for a “pure” culture on either end of the spectrum cannot exist. Meanwhile for the less fortunate, the cult’s history was an opportunity for challenging the status quo and fighting for a more communitarian Philippines in the wake of increasing corruption. The story’s gothic element of recurrent return thus challenges the national myths of a singular indigenous heritage untouched by colonialism, as well as challenges the certainties of religion as unifying force in nation-building as we see characters of different social classes pit against each other for their own individual motives.

Nick Joaquin’s Philippine gothic is thus infused with imperial gothic tropes of monsters and the recurring past, but these tropes are applied in unconventional ways. The transgressive and monstrous woman is always positioned towards uncovering a modern anxiety towards a pre-modern past, and also challenges the gendered modes of belonging within the national project. The topos of the tropical heat and frenzy is used to reconfigure the balance of power and to critique the stereotypical and colonial view of the tropics as both “land of paradise” and “home of the savage.” Styling himself as

a new gothic writer by re-publishing his short stories in a collection titled *Tropical Gothic* (1972), Joaquin acknowledged his unique positioning to tell the stories of his displaced generation, and to dig into both the Spanish and the American colonial legacies.

I found this academic project infiltrating my personal life in even the smallest ways. After reading articles on the *uncanny* and the use of *doppelgangers* in literature, I began to dream of monsters and see figures in the corner of the bathroom mirror. One night I dreamt of being trapped in a monster house, where the rules of engagement were very specific. Rule 1: there are dedicated safe spaces in the home where the monsters cannot touch you. Rule 2: you can only move freely around the house during night time. Rule 3: if you cannot find your way out of the monster house in a week, you join the ranks of the wall-stalkers with human faces, trapped in the house forever. Studying the gothic and its various forms has not only informed my dreams—it has changed the way I view the world. Media representations of zombies, vampires, and other terrors will never be the same to me. In my future research, I hope to uncover the unique characteristics of the Philippine gothic and all the variations within it: tropical, urban, or otherwise. As I build up my repertoire of Philippine English writers, I hope to keep the process of transculturalization in mind. These writers are not simply mimicking an imperial gothic tradition, but forging their own. In this sense, the “gothic” can simply be used as a translation term for a new and unique Philippine tradition.

But ultimately, this project will always be about home for me. This project truly began in the room of Connie and Pepe Monson’s first meeting, in the first chapter of *The Woman*. In that room, there were two small Filipino flags crossed under a picture of General Aguinaldo, the bust of the Sacred Heart on the bookshelf, and a tamaraw head between two brass candlesticks—all symbols of Philippine

history and culture (Joaquin 7). In my dorm room, a large Filipino flag hangs on the wall to the left of my desk, on my windowsill, there are books by Nick Joaquin, F. Sionil Jose, and Bienvenido Santos, and on my desk in a small white jewelry tray, there are two brass *lingling-o* earrings. I recall that during their first meeting, Connie asks Pepe: “...you’re a fellow countryman. You are, aren’t you?” and he replies: “My father is a Filipino, and so was my mother. I suppose I am too, though I was born over here and have never been over there” (Joaquin 8). When people ask me where I’m from, I always say: “I was born in the Philippines, but I live in New York.” But what does it mean to be Filipino outside of the Philippines? Are my flags enough? I wonder if I will ever be Filipino enough for You—you who were born There and have stayed There. I wonder if, when I struggle with my Tagalog and Bisaya, You will still call me *kababayan*. There is a mourning within me that I know You can sense although I am Here and You are There. Unlike Connie or Pepe or Paco, I am not a motherless daughter or a fatherless son, but I feel like a displaced wanderer—always longing for a home that I didn’t choose to leave. It is why I write. It is why this project will always be about home for me.

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