

## TEMPORALITY IN NICK JOAQUIN'S *THE WOMAN WHO HAD TWO NAVELS*<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Nick Joaquin has been read as nostalgic of Filipino Hispanic culture. While it's true that most of Joaquin's works deal with the country's Hispanic past, his works account for more than just nostalgia. A lot of studies that make use of postcolonial theory show how this Filipino Hispanic culture as depicted in Joaquin's works can be construed as a form of resistance against US neocolonialism, on one hand, and nativist nationalism, on another. Using postcolonial and narrative theories, this paper argues that Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* should also be read as a strategy for resisting US neocolonialism and a critical view of nativism, shedding light on the disjunction among history, culture, and literary consciousness.

### Keywords

Joaquin, modernity, narrative form, postcolonial fiction, temporality

### About the Author

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Nick Joaquin is perfectly right in consistently resisting all attempts to deny history by extirpating the colonial past. It is not an accident that Joaquin demonstrates in his own work that it is in *being rooted in the colonial past* that his is *the most original voice in postcolonial Philippine writing* (Mojares, *Waiting* 305; emphasis added).

Most scholarship on Nick Joaquin focuses more on the formalistic merits of his novels, but critical works that contextualize Joaquin in our literary tradition are lately gaining ground, and this work aims to contribute to this growing interest. It is interesting how Joaquin's treatment of time in all his works tells us a lot about our nation and way of narration. Although there are already studies that deal with his use of narrative's dramatic time shifts (possibly referring to the novel's extensive use of flashbacks) (Bernad; San Juan), Joaquin's experiments with time in this novel have not been given much emphasis. This paper suggests that an analysis of the temporal strategies and techniques that he uses can help shed light on Joaquin's insights on the consequences of American-endorsed modernity and development, on one hand, and the nationalist quest for the authentic Filipino, on the other. Thus, this paper hopes to demonstrate the relationship between narrative structure and Joaquin's historical "re-vision" of the past.

Joaquin, in describing the period when he began writing, recalls:

When I started writing in the late 1930s I was aware enough of my milieu to know that it was missing from our writing in English. The Manila I had been born into and had grown up in had yet to appear in our English fiction .... [B]ack in the 1930s it was "modern" and even "nationalistic" to snub anything that wore the name of tradition. ("The Way We Were" 1–2)

Joaquin's sentiment is a common refrain from writers from countries with a similar history of colonization, even for writers from as far off as the other side of the Pacific like Carlos Fuentes. A Mexican writer and one of the names associated with the so-called Latin American Boom of the 1960s and 1970s, Fuentes echoes Joaquin when he writes in his essay "How I Started to Write," "For my generation in Mexico, the problem did not consist in discovering our modernity but in discovering our tradition" (23). For Fuentes, according to Susan Reid, this has translated to a "fluid concept of time" (723) in his novels. Some of Joaquin's own works have occasionally overlapped with what has now become synonymous with magical realist temporal experimentations such as those used by Fuentes. Similar to his Latin American contemporaries, Joaquin recognizes the rupture of the past from the present, out of which his own writing emerged, the kind of writing that sought to represent *his* time in *his* own vision.

In fact, Joaquin's historical re-vision in his first novel *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (1961) is anchored on a recuperation of the Hispanic aspect of Philippine history and culture because it was repressed by the American colonial presence and the subsequent nationalist/nativist agenda. Joaquin's desire to reverse the shame associated with overt signs of the Hispanic is clearly represented in his novel. His preoccupation with a historical re-vision of the past brings to mind what C.L. Innes observes about postcolonial writers: "They respond not only to written histories in terms of content and narrative form, but also to concepts of history. Their novels counterpose *memory and history*, and *myth and history*" (823, emphases added). This position is shown in Joaquin's temporal experimentations in his novel. I want to specifically examine the handling of time in the representation of events in Chapter 4 of *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*. In Joaquin's novel, this takes the form of the pseudo-repetition of events in the narrative present in the chapter that happens alongside a movement backwards (past) and forwards (future) in time. The novel's temporal structure, I suggest, is Joaquin's formal portrayal of Philippine historical and cultural disjunction. The novel's female protagonist, Connie Escobar, has to face her past and acknowledge its effect on her life in the same manner that Philippine history has to recognize its Hispanic aspect.

### COLONIAL STAIN IN THE DISCOURSE OF PHILIPPINE MODERNITY

In her essay "Temporality and Postcolonial Critique," Keya Ganguly examines the role of temporality in postcolonial studies. She notes that while the notion of time did not originate out of postcolonial studies, it has however expanded the debate to highlight postcolonial issues. Ganguly writes, "the most useful way to provide concrete form to the abstract issue of temporality is by looking at the central position given to the problem of being modern within the purview of postcolonial analysis" (163). The colonial discourse around modernity and tradition is conventionally one that runs parallel to the discussion of notions of progress and stagnation or, worse, regression. Consider the following words taken from the pamphlet "The Philippine Islands: Information for Americans Thinking of Entering the Philippine Teaching Service" published by the Department of Public Instruction in 1925:

Brusque American methods frequently clashed with the *more suave and easy-going ways of the country*. But intense earnestness on the part of the American teacher and keen desire for education on the part of the Filipino soon *brought order out of chaos*, and it was not long before a smooth-running system of education, *free from hampering traditions*, cleared the way for *definite progress*. (13; emphases added)

This short document, made to entice American citizens to join the troop of dedicated teachers in the Philippines, is littered with praise for “the unselfish devotion of the American[s]” (14) to the “suave and easy-going” (13) Philippines who “have made rapid strides along the road of progress” (10). Three insights from this document are relevant to the current discussion. First, the downplaying of the Spanish contribution to Philippine society, as highlighted by phrases “brought order out of chaos” or “free from hampering traditions” is meant to paint Filipinos under Spain as nothing but disorderly wards of the state. This myth, of the Spanish colonial administration’s disorganized and brutal occupation of the Philippines, was perpetuated by the Americans as early as the Spanish-American War. It is the same line of propaganda used in the now oft-cited multivolume work *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898* by Americans Emma Blair and James Robertson. Gloria Cano claims that the work has “became the standard reference work for all books devoted to the Spanish regime;” a work that has contributed to the “stereotyped images of the Spanish regime by abusing the [primary] sources” (28–29). This concerted effort on the part of the Americans to discredit the Spanish colonial government was meant to garner the support of their citizens of its continued presence in the Philippines and its dreams of territorial expansion. This is not to say that the Spanish colonial government was faultless. But by highlighting the regressive nature of the Spanish administration in the colonies and, by extension, the Filipinos under their rule, the Americans sought to emphasize the modernity of theirs.

The second insight from the pamphlet is closely related to the narrative of American modernity. By exaggerating the role of the American government in the supposed progress of the Philippines, the pamphlet reiterates the American claim of being the purveyors of this development. The third insight brings to the forefront the American imperial project of benevolent assimilation. Phrases such as “a smooth-running system of education” (13) and “the consuming thirst for knowledge on the part of the Filipinos” (14) are meant to convey not only the modernity of the American as bearer of “education” and “knowledge” but also the submissive and tolerant attitude of the Filipinos toward their presence.

These insights suggest that the time of the colonizer is split from the time of the colonized. This notion of an *Other* time—that is, the “denial” by the colonizer that he and his subject belong to the same time—is taken up by Johannes Fabian in *Time and the Other* (1983). This imaginary gap not only perpetuates the myth of an *Other* time, it also reinforces the split between tradition and modernity. As Susan Friedman astutely points out about the problem with the “periodization” of modernism, “Modernity invents tradition, *suppresses its own continuities with the past*, and often produces nostalgia for what has been seemingly lost. Tradition forms at the moment those who perceive it regard themselves as cut off from it” (434, emphases added). This idea coincides with how Joaquin examines modernity

in his novel, that is, modernity is not the rejection of the past but a recognition of how “each person is a sort of unconscious anthology of all the epochs of man; and that he may at times be moving simultaneously among different epochs” (Joaquin, *Culture and History* 51).

### RIZAL'S NARRATOR: A FORMAL MODE OF RESISTANCE

Joaquin, however, is not the first Filipino writer to question colonial attempts to narrativize the Philippine nation. The most famous of Joaquin's predecessors is Jose Rizal. Joaquin, like Rizal, translates his resistance by turning to the novel. Thus, it is not surprising to locate a formal mode of resistance in Rizal's novels, specifically the novels' narrative authority. The dominant mode of narration in the early Filipino novels (this would span three areas: novels written in Spanish, vernacular languages including the *Tagalog*-based national language Filipino, and English) has not been given much attention in Philippine literary studies. Mojares is probably the first scholar to seriously examine Rizal's novels within the Philippine novelistic tradition in his seminal work on the origins and rise of the Filipino novel, where he comments about how the novels are “filtered through the consciousness of a native artist” (150). Although Mojares' comment is about Rizal as the author, the same can be said about the omniscient narrator employed in the novel. In his short work *Why Counting Counts: A Study of Forms of Consciousness and Problems of Language in Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo*, Benedict Anderson embarks on the tedious task of going over every line of the two novels in order to tag the words to its correct “speaker.” One of his key findings shows that the narrators in both *Noli* and *Fili* are the principal users of Tagalog words in both novels. According to Anderson, this “heavy use of Tagalog was a way of expressing his [Rizal's] indigenous and authentic identity as Tagalog, and maybe Filipino” (70). Clearly, Rizal's narrator is a “Filipino” narrator. Mojares' observation is important because it coincides with what N.V.M. Gonzalez notes about omniscience:

What we must remember, then, is that the singular voice of the narrator grew out of a long process, *authority assuming omniscience* and control at the start. It is this voice that has been with us in nearly all these years under colonialism. Sacramentalized into myth, stories depended all the more on the leverage of ‘Once upon a time ...’ (124; emphasis added).

Both Mojares and Gonzalez locate this narrative authority in the voice/s of the author/narrator, and both also recognize the master's/colonizer's authority over the native/Filipino.

Although Rizal's choice to use an omniscient narrator coincides with the popular use of this kind of narration in the nineteenth-century novel in Europe (which he used as a model for his own novel), his use of the "consciousness of a native" is a significant alteration because at a time when nearly all of the publications about the Philippines were written by Spanish authorities, at a time when "*omniscience* conveyed *authority*," Rizal endows his native (Indio) narrator the ultimate narrative power, that is, to *finally* let the indio tell the story of the indio. This strategy is especially telling in postcolonial novels, as Monika Fludernik notes, because "omniscient 'authorial' fiction" shows how the colonized "write[s] back to the empire with a vengeance, either in the authentic utterance of the colonized who has found his voice and is now telling the story in his own words and from his own point of view; or in the style of a trustworthy narrator fully in control of the storyworld" (913). Which is why Rizal's *Noli*, despite the use of Spanish (Castilian), has been tagged by Mojares as the "first Filipino novel" (146).

What is interesting in the works of Filipino novelists in English such as Joaquin, and even in that of his contemporaries, Gonzalez and Kerima Polotan, is the departure from what Mojares refers to as "conventional" representation of time "where time is parceled into discrete blocks of past, present and future" (348). Even in Rizal's novels these "discrete blocks" are noticeable. According to Mojares, the "impressionistic handling of sensations and memory" in Gonzalez's first novel, *The Winds of April*, "conjures a fluid time continuum" (348). Mojares here is referring to the narrative's movement backwards and forwards in time. The same can be said about the handling of time in *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*, and it is this "fluid time continuum" that I want to examine in this paper. This fluid time continuum, in Joaquin's novel, refers to the movement from the narrative present to both Connie's frenzied hallucinations of her future or hypothetical deaths and her memories.

### TEMPORAL FRENZY IN JOAQUIN'S *THE WOMAN WHO HAD TWO NAVELS*

One of the first scholars to review Joaquin's work was Miguel Bernad. In "Haunted Intensity," Bernad is especially critical of the "hysterical conduct of the characters" because they lead to a "distortion ... of ideas and moral perspective" (61) in Joaquin's work. I will return to this comment about hysteria later, but for now it is his suggestion that Joaquin's stories in *Prose and Poems* (including the first chapter of *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*) are the product of his anti-American ideology that is significant. Bernad notes, "Joaquin's aversions are intense. He *dislikes modernity*. He *dislikes Americans and things American*. He *dislikes them intensely*" (66; emphases added). The line of argument that Bernad takes here is influenced by the same context that compelled Joaquin to write his stories in



the manner that Bernad found questionable. Bernard associates modernity with the Americans, a claim that Joaquin questions. At the start of his writing career Joaquin was clearly dismayed by the absence of the Hispanic aspect in Philippine fiction. He observes, "The result was a fiction so strictly contemporary that both the authors and their characters seemed to be, as I put it once, 'without grandfathers.' ... I realize now that what impelled me to start writing was a *desire to bring in the perspective*, to bring in the *grandfathers*, to manifest roots" (Joaquin, "The Way We Were" 1–2; emphases added). This "desire to bring in the perspective" of the nation's "grandfathers" figures prominently in Joaquin's novel.

This aspect of Joaquin's stories, however, is often read as his nostalgic representation of the Hispanic aspect of Philippine culture. In a rare interview with Roger Bresnahan, who asked him about his "appreciation for the Spanish heritage which *exists in the present*," Joaquin replies, "The same appreciation that an American would have, say, for the period of the Revolution, the period in New England under the Puritans, the period of Emerson. In other words, that's all part of the culture. If you don't appreciate it, you're dead" (73–74; emphases added). This appreciation for the Hispanic past is evident in his writing because, as Joaquin notes, this past still "exists in the present." It seems that every time a critic would consider Joaquin's works as a romantic nostalgia for the Spanish period, the implicit suggestion is for Joaquin to write about something else more important, more modern, more nationalistic.

There are several reasons that can explain the kind of criticism that Joaquin's works had received, but it can be summed up in the social, political, and historical circumstances of his writing milieu. Most significantly, at the time Joaquin wrote and published his works, two divergent schools of thought emerged in Philippine literary criticism. On the one hand, influenced by the American New Criticism in the 1960s, formalist approaches portrayed Joaquin's experimentations as a failure to follow conventions of realism. On the other hand, inspired by the clamor for (nativist) nationalism in the 1970s, Marxist approaches criticized Joaquin's propensity to glorify the Hispanic aspect in Philippine culture for its implicit dismissal of the pre-colonial aspect of Philippine history.

For instance, the shadow of realism is quite resonant in Regina Garcia-Groyon's essay, "Joaquin's Connie Escobar: Fall and Rise." She is critical of Joaquin's treatment of Chapter 4, "The Chinese Moon." For Garcia-Groyon, the "realistic treatment of events [is] an indication of Nick Joaquin's intention to make his story credible," but "the dream sequences are perfectly incredible when treated on the literal level" (40). She does concede that "an *air of unreality* characterizes the other events, an atmosphere created by Joaquin's prose style with its hypnotic *enumeration of details*" (41; emphases added). What becomes evident here is the framing of her analysis of

Joaquin's novel within the conventions of realism. But if there was one thing that Joaquin was never good at, it was following conventions. As I noted earlier, Joaquin was highly skeptical of the erasure of the Hispanic aspect of Philippine culture by both American and nationalist authorities. This, I suggest, ushered in Joaquin's historical re-vision.

In his study of Joaquin's short fiction from the collection *Tropical Gothic* (1972), Philip Holden examines the Gothic in a postcolonial context. His analysis of "Guardia de Honor" and "The Summer Solstice" is based on what I earlier referred to as Bernad's criticism of Joaquin's penchant for hysterics. According to Holden, these stories "express excess, are infused with the hauntings of the past, and are often incomplete" (368). Although Holden is more concerned with these two stories, his exploration of this aspect of Joaquin's writing provides a good starting point for my own argument. Joaquin's novel, I argue, can be understood to reflect his examination of the disjunction of Philippine history and culture; one that simultaneously registers the problems associated with either the uncritical acceptance of American influence or the zealous nostalgia for the Hispanic period. I want to suggest that Joaquin deploys Gothic tropes such as "the disturbing return of pasts upon presents," "imaginative excesses and delusions," "mental disintegration and spiritual corruption," and "tales of darkness, desire and power" (Botting 1). The two temporal strategies Joaquin deploys in Chapter 4 of the novel complement this appropriation of the Gothic: first, the pseudo-repetition of Connie's drive towards the monastery and second, the subsequent movement backwards (Connie's past) and forwards (Connie's frenzied hallucinations of her death) in time.

*The Woman Who Had Two Navels* is composed of five chapters told by a third person narrator. Four chapters bear the names of the novel's characters—Chapter 1 (Paco), Chapter 2 (Macho), Chapter 3 (La Vidal), and Chapter 5 (Doctor Monson)—and it is only Chapter 4 (The Chinese Moon) that does not. In Chapter 1, the opening scene takes place in Hong Kong where Pepe Monson, the son of a former Filipino revolutionary in self-imposed exile, is having a discussion in his home-office in Kowloon with Connie Escobar, a Filipina visiting from Manila. The meeting is quite farcical because Connie, a human, is asking Pepe, a horse doctor, to surgically remove her second navel. The absurdity of her request is heightened by the circumstances of her arrival in Hong Kong and the subsequent quest to find a "Doctor Monson." The reader later learns from Pepe (196) that when Connie arrived at the door, she had asked for a Doctor Monson, an ambiguous request considering that there are two "Doctor" Monsons in the premises—the human doctor (the Monson patriarch) and the horse doctor (Pepe). I will return to this point later because Pepe's observation is important in understanding the turn of events that leads to the novel's climactic scene between Connie and the real Doctor Monson.



In the opening scene, Connie informs Pepe that she is thirty years old, recently married (as recent as that morning before she met Pepe), and on a desperate trip to get her extra navel removed before her new husband discovers it when they go off on their American honeymoon. Her mother, who comes to visit Pepe not long after Connie leaves, refutes her story. Her daughter, according to Concha, is really eighteen years old and has been married for over a year to Macho Escobar, an haciendero from the southern Philippines. Pepe's growing disorientation during his meeting with Connie is suggested by his odd "feeling [of] the room's furniture hovering vaguely" (4) and of the presence of fog and mist (4–5) outside the window. The occurrence of the mist or fog at specific points in the novel plays a significant role in understanding the events in Chapter 4. In Gothic literature, mist or fog is conventionally used to blur objects not only to reduce visibility but also to usher in terror, be it in the form of a person or a thing. In a way, the choice of Hong Kong as setting serves a dual purpose. First, Hong Kong is an important locale for Filipino revolutionaries and expatriates. Jose Rizal practiced as an ophthalmologist in Hong Kong prior to his exile in Dapitan, and the first Philippine republic led by General Emilio Aguinaldo used Hong Kong as its base for its government-in-exile. Doctor Monson's character is loosely based on another Filipino general—General Artemio Ricarte—who spent time as an exile in Hong Kong (Zialcita 222) after refusing to pledge allegiance to the U.S. and controversially returned to the Philippines at the request of the Japanese during the occupation of Manila. Secondly, Hong Kong's infamous fog, especially during winter, generates the ideal Gothic atmosphere for the novel.

In the novel, mist or fog appears twice before Chapter 4, where it is a recurring image during Connie's frenzied hallucinations of her deaths. The first time that mist or fog appears is when Connie shows up at Pepe's office; the second is later in the same chapter after Pepe leaves Paco at the park (43, 48–49). Just like in the opening event where fog marks the beginning of Pepe's involvement in the mystery of Connie and her two navels, the second time fog is mentioned is another sign of things to come: "The light fog, always a gleaming sheet a step away, made him feel like Alice, stepping through mirrors. But it wasn't I who stepped through the mirror, he thought. It was Father and Paco—and the glass broke" (43). Pepe is referring to the disappointing end to the recent trips to the Philippines by his father and Paco, a friend. For his father, it was supposed to be the fulfillment of his dream to go back to his motherland only to be disappointed by the Americanized state of the nation. For Paco, it was supposed to be only part of his job as a musician, but he ended up being embroiled in a scandal involving Concha and, later, Connie. In Chapter 2, Connie's husband Macho arrives in Hong Kong looking for her. Pepe helps her avoid him by letting her stay with his girlfriend Rita, as long as she promises to seek help regarding her situation by meeting his brother, Tony, a priest. Despite leaving Rita's place without an explanation, Connie keeps her promise and, in the

beginning of Chapter 3, drives up to the convent perched atop a hill where Father Tony is quartered. In an exchange that only adds to the novel's running mystery on the existence of Connie's two navels, Connie vehemently responds to Father Tony's characterization of her two navels as "the horrible idea": "It's *not* an idea! And what difference does it make if it's only in my head or actually *here* if I believe it's *actually* here?" After Connie abruptly leaves the convent and then reappears this time in the Monson residence, the brothers decide the only way to settle the mystery of whether Connie had two navels is to visually confirm it.

There is an implicit ellipsis between the end of Chapter 3 (where Pepe slowly approaches his room where Connie is waiting to reveal her two navels) and the start of Chapter 4 (where Connie drives toward the monastery). This temporal gap is not only meant to contrast Pepe's slow walk toward his room with the high speed at which Connie drives but also to confuse the reader. While it is implied later in Chapter 5 that Pepe does indeed enter the room and check whether Connie has two navels (198), Pepe's discovery is never revealed. At the start of Chapter 4, then, the reader, like Connie, becomes disoriented. The events in Chapter 4 have been described as "hysterical anticipations" (Casper 134), "frenzied hallucinations" (Mojares, "Formalistic Study" 62), a "dream sequence" (Garcia-Groyon 35), a "mnemonic production" (San Juan 145), or a symbolic regeneration (Davis 267). I borrow Mojares' term—frenzied hallucinations—because it best describes Connie's mental and spiritual turmoil after the events of Chapter 3.

It is worth repeating that the only chapter that does not use a character's name for its title is Chapter 4, "The Chinese Moon." This deviation ostensibly marks the significance of this chapter. The events in it finally shed light on the mystery of Connie's past that led her on the quest to rid her body of her imaginary (or is it?) second navel. The notion suggested by Holden, of "the place of the past in the modern world," is indeed not only a Gothic trope; it has also become synonymous with Joaquin's works examining Philippine historical and cultural disjunction. As Vicente Rafael astutely observes, "Joaquin kept to a notion of history where the past was always current, the present always haunted by the future becoming past, and where modernity was not the negation of tradition but its fictive kin, its *compadre*" (16; emphasis in the original). The importance of examining the order of events in Chapter 4 is not simply to demonstrate Joaquin's formal experimentations. If the past and the future events are clearly identified, the narrative is simply that of Connie driving toward the monastery. The narrative is moving forward, not repeating, because Connie is moving closer to her destination as the night progresses. This means that Chapter 4 is not entirely Connie's hallucination. Her mental and spiritual turmoil in the narrative present triggers the narrative of the past. The recollections become the catalyst of her hallucinations. By resorting to this temporal structure, I argue, Joaquin develops a formal way to problematize Philippine historical and

cultural disjunction. Connie has to face her past and acknowledge its effect on her current ordeal just as the rewriting of Philippine history has to include its Hispanic aspect, because, as the narrative demonstrates, erasing the past (in Connie's case, burying the trauma) can lead to serious consequences. In the remaining sections I discuss how the narrative formally portrays Philippine historical and cultural disjunction.

On the surface, the narrative seems to repeat a singular event—Connie's drive around the spiral road toward the monastery—four times. The narrative produces this illusion with the aid of three strategies. First, Joaquin's Gothic-inspired setting helps establish the blurring of real and fantastic time so that the reader is uncertain over what to make of Connie's hypothetical deaths. Second is the choice of the twisting road that creates the false impression that Connie's driving is recurring. Third, the consistent order in the narration of the four temporal sections tricks the reader into thinking that every time the narrative present "restarts" after each of Connie's hypothetical deaths, it is the same event as the beginning of the previous temporal section. Here, the first two strategies play a big part. Each temporal section begins in the present (Connie driving), goes back to the past (Connie's memory), and jumps to the future (Connie's hypothetical death). Each of these scenes—that is, each of the hypothetical death scenes—always begins with a narratorial description of the color of the sky (as a reference to the time of night) followed by a description of the monastery focalized through Connie (as a reference to her location).

In the first hypothetical death scene, the narrator indicates the time, "the air was brown with dusk as the Jaguar started uphill" (141) and as Connie looks up "she saw the monastery high overhead still in daylight, one side flat with sunshine, the trees round below like a tide swaying" (141), which indicates Connie's location, relative to her destination, the monastery. In the first recollection, Connie remembers the time when she was just five years old and had wanted the statue of the carnival god Biliken, but which her mother did not want her to have because she already had a doll named Minnie. In response, she tried to "drown" her doll by throwing it to their pond and then lied about it being stolen. Consider the following shift from this memory back to the narrative present:

"Minnie! Minnie's in my bed!"  
"But Minnie has been stolen."  
"No, no—she's drowned!"  
"Drowned?"  
"I threw her into the pond!"  
"So you were telling a lie?"

"Yes, yes—I was telling lies, nothing but lies!" cried Connie as the Jaguar shot up the dark hill, [...]

But "Lies! Lies! Lies!" sang the wind in her ears. (145)

This scene shows how an event from Connie's past continues to affect her present and how her past is still part of her present, that is, a past built on the foundation of one lie after another lie, not just regarding this specific event but also her family's past: her father's work as an abortionist and her mother's affair with Macho.

The complexity of the temporal structure in Chapter 4 reaches another level with an abrupt shift to the hypothetical death scenes. Consider the excerpt below, which immediately follows the one above. This excerpt shows where the narrative present dissolves into the first hypothetical death scene:

Orchard and high wall collapsed all about her. Here she was outside, alone, captive in the car, fugitive through the night, impelled towards that monastery on the hilltop to face her own lies.

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried, and wrenched at the wheel.

Rock swayed in her headlights as the car spun around, all the way around, and fled back down the road, the wind now rushing up to meet it. The lights below misted in her eyes as she sped down the dark hill, away from terror. The mist had jelled into fog when she reached the railway station in Kowloon. (145)

As I noted earlier, the fog plays a crucial role in the events of Chapter 4. To signal the shift from "real" time to fantastic time (hallucinations), the fog is mentioned. The fog only appears during Connie's hypothetical death scenes, not anywhere else in Chapter 4. Two more sections follow this order. In the second hypothetical death scene, the time seems to be later in the evening as indicated by "the brown sky *had darkened*" (151; emphasis added), and Connie's destination also seems to be closer, as "she saw the monastery emerging, again overhead, *nearer* now but dimmer, and sinking deeper into the mass of shadow round below" (151–52; emphasis added). Connie is clearly moving closer to the monastery as the night progresses. This progression is also mirrored in the chronology of the recalled memories. Connie is possibly eleven or twelve years old at the start of the past segment (153) and grows to become "taller and thinner and fourteen years old now" during the "last year of the war" (156). The shift back to the present is also becoming more seamless:

Leaning out to wave, she saw her mother standing on the veranda, her arms still held out before her, her turning face blurring as the car swung round the rose garden, where corn and squash now bloomed instead of roses; past the tall iron gates, where a Jap soldier now stood guard; down the lonely noon bright street, where the bombed

tenements lay in ruins; *and out into this cold night smelling of pines, this cold hill high above Hong Kong.* (157; emphasis added)

These seamless transitions seem to mirror the frenzy of Connie's hallucinations so when the narrative reaches the fourth temporal section of Chapter 4, Connie's hallucinations become intricately wound in the temporal frenzy of the narrated events.

Before I proceed to the discussion of the fourth hypothetical death scene, I digress to comment on a typographical peculiarity in this section of the novel. Joaquin, like most authors, uses the standard quotation marks to indicate dialogue, but in this specific section he turns to the quotation dash. It is almost similar to James Joyce's preferred typographical style in his works. But unlike Joyce who uses the dash to substitute for quotation marks in all of his characters' direct discourse, Joaquin only uses it in certain events that have special significance. Scholars seem to have overlooked this typographical style in Joaquin's works perhaps because he has only used it twice, in the novel and in the short story "Guardia de Honor." It is important to note that "Guardia de Honor" and the original short story "The Woman Who Had Two Navels" (Chapter 1 of the novel) were published as part of Joaquin's first collection of works *Prose and Poems*, which may explain Joaquin's typographical preference during this period. Whenever Joaquin turns to the quotation dash in an extended section, it is meant to convey a time outside the main narrative, specifically a future or hypothetical event.

In Chapter 4, Joaquin not only marks the shift to a future/hypothetical time by using this typographical style in the dialogue, he also signals it by using the future conditional tense in the section where Connie "meets" Father Prior. Joaquin uses a very cleverly worded lead-in to confuse the reader. The quote below is taken from the paragraph before the meeting between Connie and the priest takes place:

Still far away at the foot of the hill, but coming steadily towards her, was the post with twin lamps that marked where the road divided, half of it going on round the hill, the other half cutting right into the rock. When she entered the light of those twin lamps she *would turn* right, into that second road; *would vanish* inside the tiny canyon winding up through the rock...she *would look* down. (177; emphasis added)

Contrast this to the second narrated event. Even here the event is not repeated because the first one was merely a hallucination:

[Connie] saw the two eyes [Father Prior's eyes from the hypothetical encounter] up in the air turning into the twin lamps that marked where the road divided, half of it going on round the peak, the other half cutting a canyon into the rock....To her right she saw

the dark mouth of the canyon and felt its chillier breath on her face .... The Jaguar veered left. (183)

By this point in the narrative, it becomes nearly impossible to tell which events are part of “real” time and which are part of Connie’s hallucinations. The narrative temporality is well and truly in a frenzy. By taking into account what I earlier described as Joaquin’s typographical peculiarity, it can be inferred that the meeting between Connie and Father Prior is another hallucination. However, even after the narrative returns to “real” time, when Connie chooses to turn left instead of right, the narrative again goes back to show one more scene of Connie’s death (the fourth). The reader naturally thinks she has (finally) died as it is implied as much in the opening pages of Chapter 5. It is not until the middle of chapter 5 (200–201) that the reader (and the rest of the characters) find out what happened to Connie. She does turn left but, unlike the narrative, which shows her hypothetical death by fire, she manages to escape her car before it falls over the cliff and explodes.

As I noted earlier, the progression of Connie’s driving is paralleled in the chronology of the recalled memories. The linear progression of the recalled memories is significant because it fills in all the narrative gaps about Connie and her navels. By the end of the third death scene, Connie’s two navels can be traced to Biliken. After the Japanese occupation of Manila, when Connie and her family revisit their house, she finds that Biliken is now marked with “two small black holes” (166) from gunshots. To her mother Biliken is a grisly figure that no child should own. It is not clear if Joaquin patterns Biliken after the American creation of the same name that is now popular in Japan with its own shrine in Osaka or the more common (in the Philippines at least) laughing Buddha. Despite its frightening appearance, Biliken becomes Connie’s source of comfort during her troubled life: her discovery that her father was an abortionist (one of his patients was actually Concha before they got married), her own mother’s constant abandonment, and finally her discovery of the letters between Macho and Concha. This pattern of trauma is again mirrored in the first three hypothetical death scenes, but this time it is in reverse, from the most recent traumatic life event to the least recent: first, Connie encounters Macho and they both die by land (on a train under attack from the border by communist troops from China); second, she encounters her mother and they both die by water (onboard a sinking ship); and third, she encounters her father and they both die by air (in a plane crash). Connie’s recollections thus play an important part in the narrative because, as the catalyst of her hallucinations, without them, Connie’s choice and subsequent actions at the end of the novel would not have been possible.



## A POSTCOLONIAL PHILIPPINES IN JOAQUIN'S HISTORICAL RE-VISION

The significance of the narrative's temporal frenzy therefore rests on the functions of recollection and repetition. By underscoring the past in the chapter, Joaquin suggests its importance in his own historical re-vision. Connie's memories have to be revisited in order for her cathartic hypothetical deaths to take place. That is why it is crucial to locate the temporal position of the hypothetical death scenes as hallucinations brought about by Connie's recollection. By turning to this temporal frenzy in Chapter 4, Joaquin develops a formal way to problematize Philippine historical and cultural disjunction. Connie has to confront her past and recognize how much it is disturbing her present state of mind in the same manner that a rewriting of Philippine history needs to incorporate its Hispanic aspect. But the narrative also cautions against the dangers of glorifying the past. Indeed, the narrative's temporal frenzy becomes part of the formal portrayal of this warning. The repetitive jumps to these frenzied hallucinations show that despite the recognition of the past, Connie still has to repeatedly experience her hypothetical deaths; she still has to work her way out of her moral and spiritual turmoil. In the final temporal section, the narrative no longer invokes the past; this future, hypothetical encounter with Father Prior corresponds with the role of the memories in the previous three temporal sections. This time, it is her imagined future that becomes the catalyst for her final death.

The implication of Connie's "enlightenment" is only fully explained in the final chapter, when she ends up back in the Monson residence and finally meets the dying Monson patriarch. As I mentioned before, Pepe had observed that when she first arrived, she had been looking for a "Doctor Monson:" "You know, Tony," he said, "I have the strangest feeling it was Father she was looking for, all the time" (193). Connie becomes the catalyst for Doctor Monson's own epiphany. He finally acknowledges the futility of his exile and realizes that the Hispanic past is not lost after all: "It had not been lost; he had been foolish to think it could ever be lost ... Here is was before him ... in the faces of his sons ... it was now in the present, alive now everywhere in the present" (222). Thus, contrary to criticisms of Hispanic nostalgia leveled against the novel, its complex temporal structure is actually Joaquin's way of examining nostalgia. In the climactic Chapter 4, time not only shifts between the narrative present (of Connie driving toward the monastery) and her past but also jumps to imagined futures or Connie's hypothetical deaths. Thus, the fluidity of this temporal structure suggests a seamless relationship between tradition and modernity.

In my discussion, I have focused primarily on the temporal strategies used in Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*. I have suggested that such a reading highlights his historical re-vision of the past. Joaquin's project of historical re-vision

in his novel is motivated by his desire to represent the Hispanic aspect of Philippine history and culture in his fiction because it was repressed by American colonial presence and the subsequent nationalist/nativist agenda. Joaquin's desire to reverse the shame that accompanied overt signs of the Hispanic is formally portrayed through the temporal frenzy of Chapter 4. Although the narrative suggests that a recognition of the Philippine historical and cultural disjunction with the Hispanic past is critical for the nation's future, it also warns against the repercussions of zealously glorifying that past. Indeed, Mojares reminds us about Joaquin's, to borrow Édouard Glissant's words, "prophetic visions of the past," when he notes, "it is in *being rooted in the colonial past* that [Joaquin's] is *the most original voice in postcolonial Philippine writing*" (Mojares, *Waiting* 305; emphases added).

## Note

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