

# THE FEMALE MONSTER

## The Pre-Catholic Manifestation as a Response to Modern Anxiety in Selected Stories by Nick Joaquin

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### Abstract

Scholarship on the writings of Nick Joaquin have mostly concerned themselves with either their postcolonial resonances or the gender politics abound in the text. *Tropical Gothic* (1972) is widely read as an ambiguous approach toward feminism because of the depiction of the female as monstrous which has been argued to problematize its feminist possibilities, whether this depiction empowers or suppresses women in the texts. Examining the criticism of Marie Arong, Philip Holden, and Epifanio San Juan Jr., this paper asserts how existing notions of gender are able to produce a more nuanced reading of Nick Joaquin's selected stories, specifically "Summer Solstice," "Doña Jerónima," and "The Order of Melkizedek." This paper argues that while the attention to gender in the text is necessary, an exclusive treatment of the text with such a framework in mind is unfaithful to issues of the pre-Catholic and the modern that are equally resonant in the text. By using Jeffrey Cohen's "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," we demonstrate how the female and the feminine, by undergoing the female sacrifice and transforming into the monstrous, become a reaction to a modern anxiety toward the re-emergence of the pre-Catholic, and we reconcile the image of the female monster with her bond to nature through Sherry Ortner's "Is Female to Nature as Male is to Culture?". By firstly deconstructing notions of inherent female subversion in Joaquin's selected texts, this paper is able to offer alternative ways of understanding the treatment of the female as the monster and, more importantly, see their transformation and self-sacrifice as a necessary element for the acceptance and understanding of the modern anxiety of the male characters around them, by becoming the monstrous hybrid of the pre-Catholic and the modern.

### **Keywords**

Filipino, Identity, Modernity, Monster, Monstrous female, Pagan, Pre-Catholic

### **About the Authors**

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Concerning the factors of silence, solitude, and darkness, we can only say that they are actually elements in the production of infantile anxiety from which the majority of human beings have never become quite free. (Freud 376)

While examinations of gender are unavoidable when reading Nick Joaquin, it is interesting to note that interpretations of Joaquin's writings remain fixated on issues of class, race, and gender, and have momentarily forgotten the "infantile anxiety" consistently present in Joaquin's stories. It is a neuroses 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, manifesting the uncanny monster that Freud highlighted: a fright generated by the strangely familiar.

The purpose for this manifestation of the monstrous being exclusive to the female has become simplified to, as observed by Philip Holden, a critical debate over whether it "represents a subversion of patriarchy or a subtle reinscription of patriarchal values in which 'feminism is ridiculed and made monstrous'" (363). Criticism around Joaquin takes for granted this opposition, in which the assumption must be made that the monstrous is a metaphor to empower or suppress the female in the story. However, what we would like to demonstrate is that the subversion of the female through the monstrous may actually be re-interpreted under a different light, by considering the monstrous as an empowering symbol for the female that is wholly unreliant on her subversion or lack of subversion to the male.

While this paper acknowledges the foundation of gender or feminist criticism present around Joaquin, it seeks to build upon this and offer an alternative understanding of the monstrous and its manifestation solely through the female. We argue that the depiction of the female as monstrous is not an image of female inferiority or a critique of the feminine, but is instead a space exclusive to her which the male seeks to enter but cannot, due to his maleness or lack of femaleness. The consistency as to which Joaquin uses the female (and the feminine, as in the case of Father Melchor in "The Order of Melkizedek") and not the male to represent the monstrous elements in his stories indicates a reaction to the anxieties, a purpose for the monstrous largely ignored. The modern anxieties mentioned is the anxieties displayed by the various modern characters to images and depictions of the pre-Catholic; it is then a conflict between the march to modernity and the inherent ties to pre-Catholicism that brings about these anxieties. This duality between the pre-Catholic and the modern is further discussed later on with Joaquin's *Culture and History* (1988).

Firstly, this paper will examine existing criticism on Joaquin concerning the pre-Catholic tradition, as in Marie Arong and Epifanio San Juan, Jr., and of gender, as in

Philip Holden, and see how these studies propel this paper's understanding of the monstrous in the female. Then to critically interpret the monster itself, we look at Jeffrey Cohen's "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" where he posits that the monster as a "pure cultural body" (3). Next we seek to understand the state of the female and the male and their respective roles in culture, by referring to Sherry Ortner's "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?", in which she explicates reasons for the unbreakable link of female to nature and male to culture.

We examine how the monster, emergent through the female, is actually a manifestation of pre-Catholic desires, and that its appearance through the modern woman is symptomatic of an ideological instability between pre-Catholicism and modernity. The female and feminine characters, depicted as monstrous through their actions, as amalgamations of the pre-Catholic and the modern incite a certain uncanniness as "a system allowing polyphony, mixed response (difference in sameness, repulsion in attraction), and resistance in integration..." (Cohen 7). Finally, we illustrate our points by situating this analysis in selected stories by Nick Joaquin, specifically "Summer Solstice," "Doña Jeronima," and "The Order of Melkizedek," and map out the transformations of the female characters from a modern woman to a hybrid of the pre-Catholic and the woman then finally explicate on the implications of these transformations toward the role and power of females in the stories.

The three stories selected from *Tropical Gothic* (1972) were chosen specifically for their representation of the monstrous, as is embodied by female and feminine characters through the personalities of Doña Lupeng in "Summer Solstice," Doña Jerónima in "Doña Jerónima," and Father Melchor and his female followers in "The Order of Melkizedek." While previous scholarship has been ambivalent toward Joaquin's feminist potential, this paper's aim is to study stories wherein the female was depicted as a monster and use that element to illustrate the very feminist potential previous scholars have problematized.

### **READING THE PRE-CATHOLIC AND THE MODERN WITH GENDER AND TIME**

In Nick Joaquin's "Culture and History" (1988), he offers the argument that the "Filipino" identity as it is known fails to represent our ancestors before the arrival of the Spanish in 1521. The combined ideologies that define the "Filipino" has since its inception been representative of the product of our colonizers' influence instead of the possibilities in our identities—who we once were or who we could have been—and Joaquin summarizes this aptly with the line, "Before 1521 we could have been anything and everything not Filipino; after 1565 we can be nothing but Filipino" (21). Thus the anxieties that are featured in Joaquin's stories are not simply a reaction to the glimpses of the pre-Catholic (what we once were but can no longer be) but are

also further agitated by the modern Filipino's unconscious understanding that he is unable to progress toward modernity without situating himself in the beginning, as an authentic "Filipino."

Joaquin's argument is also important in establishing the lines between the pre-Catholic and the modern. It is this arrival and influence of the Spanish, the categorization of the Filipino people as Filipino, and, most importantly, the Catholic baptism of the Filipino race that separates the pre-Catholic and the modern. As Joaquin argues, this separation was such a crucial event in our history that it shaped the very way that we saw ourselves, creating two different sides of the Filipino people: the pre-Catholic (culture, tradition, religion, and beliefs before the arrival of the Spanish and Catholicism, also linked to nature and the natural) and the modern (Western culture and behavior, Catholic beliefs, and the general march toward modernity). While Joaquin refrains from using the term "pre-Catholic" in his discussion, the major shift in the timeline of the Filipino people is distinctly attributed to the introduction of Catholicism or Christianity. For example, he muses how the cultural introductions of Catholicism would render us unable to communicate with our pre-Spanish forefathers, as they would not be familiar with our adoption of Faustian time as compared to the traditional "'timelessness' of our old culture" (8). Joaquin makes it clear that the introduction of Christianity impacted the Filipino people to such a degree that it changed our soul: "1521 marked a *deviation* from what might have been our true history; or when they fume that we were Christianized at the cost of our 'Asian' soul" (16).

In this section we will attempt to map out the role of literature and criticism surrounding Joaquin in developing this paper's thesis; namely, understanding how Joaquin's characters and narratives, which are generally studied for their postcolonial elements can be alternatively understood by focusing on the monstrous and the feminine. In particular, we engage with Arong's discussion on the comic in Joaquin's Gothic fiction, with Holden's commitment to historicism in studying postcolonial Gothic, and finally with E. San Juan's examination on the hybridization of the past and present in Joaquin's fiction and nonfiction. In this specific order we can see how these critical arguments consequently allow for our reading.

Marie Arong in "Nick Joaquin's *Cándido's* Apocalypse: Re-imagining the Gothic in a Postcolonial Philippines" offers a highly nuanced analysis of Joaquin's *Cándido's Apocalypse*, emphasizing Joaquin's purpose for bringing the past to the forefront by delving in Joaquin's assertion "to bring in the grandfather" (Joaquin) in Filipino fiction as well as a unique discussion on his usage of the comic to employ a criticism toward modernity as well as the fanatical nostalgia for the past, specifically by painting it as comical. Arong argues that Joaquin "problematize[s] the notion of an 'authentic Filipino'" while simultaneously "questions the excessive nostalgia for the

very Hispanic past he was trying to recover” (118). While Arong offers a convincing analysis of *Cándido’s Apocalypse* in support of her argument, we question the root of the argument itself, particularly her decision to oppose modernity with the Hispanic past, rather than the pre-Hispanic past (later analysis on Joaquin’s other works draws us to the latter); Bobby’s adoption of *Cándido* comes from a tradition whose origin is unclear, whether pre-Hispanic or Hispanic, as Arong herself concedes. Despite this, Arong manages to successfully convey the notion that there is firstly within the text a level of discontentment from Joaquin toward modernity and the pre-Hispanic past, and secondly that the modern Filipino is unable to cope with the simultaneous discord between modernity and the pre-Hispanic when he directly acknowledges it. However, Arong’s conclusion as to why these two struggles exist feels incomplete due to its reliance on her own subjective decisions—that excessive nostalgia for nativism is comical and the adoption of modern culture is “fake”—suggesting that the opposition of the modern and past should be analyzed with a broader theoretical framework in mind.

With Philip Holden’s “The ‘Postcolonial Gothic’: Absent Histories, Present Contexts”, we encounter an argument that emphasizes the importance of historicism when reading Joaquin. Holden’s insistence on historical specificity rises as a reaction to the tendency for other critics of postcolonial Gothic fiction—specifically Smith and Hughes—to incorrectly generalize all postcolonial texts as being primarily concerned with colonialism and its legacy. This weakness is exacerbated in postcolonial Gothic literature, because the role of Gothic elements is heavily influenced by its cultural and historical situation. The discussion on Gothic becomes a discussion on nationalism, and its “peculiar melding of rationality and affect” (356). Holden presents the opposition of modern (rationality) and pre-modern (affect), and much in the same way that this paper approaches pre-Catholicism versus modernity, Holden calls for pre-colonial rationalities “to be incorporated in the new nation” (356). His discussion on “The Summer Solstice” attempts to situate the story with an agenda of “class, race, and governance” (363), by highlighting the “contradictions in the constitution of nationalism” (364) as represented by Guido, the emerging nationalist elite. Like Arong, Holden notes the need to “resolve contradictions in the post-War Philippines” (364) while simultaneously registering the contradictions of the appeal toward the pre-Hispanic past. We question, however, Holden’s dismissal of gendered Gothic tropes as being simply symbolic of class and race. Though he acknowledges gender, Holden turns away from further possibility of gender discussion by labeling the body as a metaphor for the nation-state, despite the highly prominent role gender plays in the story.

While Holden regards gender as another trope to represent a broader category of analysis, E. San Juan in “The Virgin and Her City” offers a discussion of feminine modalities while theorizing a tendency for Joaquin toward a hybridization of time,

thus positing a resolution to the modern and pre-Catholic opposition while also reflecting on another opposition present in Joaquin's work—the female and the male—and the consequence of this opposition: suppression and the consequent avenging of the female by the culturally dominant male. The hybridization of time as well as the suppression and eventual return of the alienated Virgin intersect in the idea that the present individual, as San Juan quotes Joaquin from *Culture as History*, “is a sort of unconscious anthology of all the epochs of man; and that he may at times be moving simultaneously among different epochs” (25). This creates the impression that 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. San Juan makes the case that it is the feminine which injects the madness in Joaquin's stories due to the phallogentric will which has repressed the woman, whose modalities are already comprised of “repetition, cyclic rhythms, recurrence, cosmic sense of unboundness, the vertigo of hallucination, dreams, rage and the shock of terror unleashing *jouissance*” (15), and thus positions her toward avenging.

It is this final thesis that this paper chooses to further study: while the discontentment of both the pre-Catholic and the modern is symptomatic of Joaquin's hybridization of time—by removing the wall between the pre-Catholic and the modern, he prioritizes neither and allows for the simultaneous approval or disapproval of both—the curious situation between the masculine and the feminine may have been hastily understood by San Juan, who fails to consider the hybridization of genders as well; that is, the manifestation of the monstrous through the female as a result of the modern anxieties that both genders experience, but which only the female can process. It is less of a case of what the female is, as San Juan argues, and more of a case of what the male is not.

### **MODERN ANXIETIES: THE FEMALE AS A NECESSARY MONSTER**

In understanding the female monster in Joaquin's stories, we look primarily at Jeffrey Cohen's “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” where he provides seven methods in reading monstrous figures in literature. His primary position is that monsters are not to be read as exclusive capsules of space and time but as intertextual and transcendental representations of culture that can offer preliminary insight on the very culture that has espoused it. In order to formulate a more thorough understanding of the monsters existent in Joaquin's works through female characters, this paper focuses on more than one thesis in the belief that these are most potent when read alongside, and not against, each other.

The first step is to recognize the monster not as a mere image of horror but as an “embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place” (4). This places the monsters developed by Joaquin on a more specific plane of ideological, temporal, and cultural dispute, with purposes other than mere fright or terror. This is the first thesis developed by Cohen, in which monsters are “pure culture,” “that which warns” (3). This allows the monster to be read as a transhistorical figure, as “a displacement [that] always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the omens into which it is received, to be born again” (4). The monster has since evolved from an object inciting reaction (dread, thrill, cowardice) to a symbolic figure that is in essence reactionary to cultural and historical specificity.

Cohen’s first thesis allows more nuanced readings on the monster and opens up the discourse on cultural representations; specifically in his fourth thesis, “The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference,” where he explores the use of monstrosities as propaganda, as distorted representations of cultural difference. Interestingly, Cohen goes beyond the realm of the religious and the political by observing the anxiety in maintaining gender identities: “the woman who oversteps the boundaries of her gender role risks becoming a Scylla, Weird Sister, Lilith (‘die erste Eva,’ ‘la mere obscure’), Bertha Mason, or Gorgon” (9). Ultimately, the monster or the Other is misrepresented as both anatomically and culturally distant from the norm, “rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within” (7), which becomes symptomatic of an internal ideological insecurity presented instead as a zealous conquest for normalcy.

What, then, is the real motivation for the creation of the monstrous? In the development of this analysis, we examine the male and female opposition and utilize this to read the overshadowed opposition between the pre-Catholic and the modern, with the use of Cohen’s aforementioned theses. In understanding why the emergence of the pre-Catholic is exclusive to the female, we look at Sherry Ortner’s brilliant anthropological essay, “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?”. Ortner seeks to explain why the female is often linked to nature, and men to culture: Biological roles intrinsic to women such as childbirth and even menstruation are often idealized with the natural, and the passive role of conception and child-rearing women play versus the active and more influential role of men. It is perhaps this ideology that opens a new understanding of the monstrous within the feminine in Joaquin’s texts: the female’s link to nature allows her to become the vessel of the pre-Catholic precisely because the female body is perceived as more raw, more “natural.”

Ortner’s paper also presupposes that men are removed from nature, which validates why the monsters in the three selected stories of Nick Joaquin only make



an appearance through the female. We see the male characters, often icons of modernity, displaying ambivalence—fear and desire simultaneously—toward the transformed female characters. These reactions suggest that while the modern individual is wary of the pre-Catholic, he is still very much attracted to it (as perfectly exemplified by the male character Don Paeng in “Summer Solstice”). As Simone de Beauvoir states in “The Second Sex,” the female “is more enslaved to the species than the male, her animality is more manifest” (60). But why is this existence problematic?

In his third thesis, “The Monster Is the Harbinger of Category Crisis,” Cohen positions the monster as a “third system” that exists to disrupt binaries by refusing categorization: “they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions” (6). The monsters and the female bodies they choose to inhabit are problematic precisely because the characters’ post-transformations are neither pre-Catholic nor modern; the characters neither exhibit the materialistic self-assurance of the modern characters, nor wholly embody the raw paganism of the pre-Catholic. In this case, “pre-Catholic” and “modern” are to be interpreted as independent and opposing planes that have no space for coexistence. Despite this, Cohen does not argue for the impossibility of such a combination; only that once these two planes are combined, the resulting product no longer fits in either category and becomes the reborn “third system.” It is this emergence of the pre-Catholic monster in the very body of a modern woman—as is witnessed in each of the selected stories—that plays the role of the “third system,” allowing the very disruption of binaries Cohen gestures toward, where the characters become, ultimately, “a system allowing polyphony, mixed response (difference in sameness, repulsion in attraction), and resistance in integration...” (7). The re-emergence of the pre-Catholic monsters in the image of modern characters, then, becomes symptomatic of a modern anxiety. In each of the stories, the very elements modernity wishes to suppress—pre-Catholic paganism and female power—make an appearance in the bodies of female characters. Through the transformation of the female into an incomprehensible monster, the male is forced to recognize his own repressed desire for the pre-Catholic as the root of his anxieties against modernity. In this way the female becomes empowered through her own necessity; without her role as the monster, the male never comes to this understanding.

### THE WIFE OF THE RIVER, THE CROCODILE, AND THE MOON

In “Summer Solstice”, the two modern characters—Doña Lupeng and Don Paeng—encounter the pre-Catholic in the Tadtarin festival, resulting in the anxiety in both of them and ultimately Doña Lupeng’s embrace of the pre-Catholic in her transformation into the monstrous. Perhaps in no other story in *Tropical Gothic* does the pre-Catholic make a stronger appearance than in “Summer Solstice.” Firstly, heat is a recurring element set by the story, a point that has also appeared in Holden’s reading. The scene opens with Doña Lupeng “feeling faint with the heat” (373) and the house described as a furnace. Throughout the narrative, heat presents itself as an omnipresent figure felt from the Moreta household up to the Tadtarin festival. While this image may be seen prematurely as merely an extension of the tropical, in the parade of the St. John, the “very male, very arrogant” figure is regarded also as “the Lord of Summer indeed; the Lord of Light and Heat—erect and godly virile above the prone and female earth” (375).

Interestingly, Don Paeng teases Lupeng whenever she treads the unconventional, asking her, “Has the heat gone to your head, woman?” (376). Similarly, it is the female characters who feel the extremes of the heat: the wild Amada with her “sweat-beaded brows” (374) and Lupeng’s frequent heat-induced headaches, as compared to the male’s response to the heat: Guido merely “moist with sweat” (377), Paeng “drowsily stroking his mustaches... [and] his eyes closed against the hot light, merely shrugged” (375).

It can be first assumed that heat acts as a male symbol, embodied by the masculine St. John, and therefore the women are most oppressed by it and momentarily we are to accept that the female is indeed subservient to the male. However, come the evening, the heat is revealed to be something else: “The heat had not subsided. It was heat without gradations: that knew no twilights and no dawns; that was still there, after the sun had set; that would be there already, before the sun had risen” (379). In these very lines, the heat is described as an elemental, independent force. What was once a male-exclusive symbol became a ubiquitous element affecting both Don Paeng and Doña Lupeng. This sudden turn suggests that the precise categorization of the modern St. John festival, as opposed to the more paganistic Tadtarin festival, reveals that the “Lord of Heat” is actually a rudiment of the natural, pre-Catholic world.

Note that both Doña Lupeng and Don Paeng hail from a cosmopolitan background. The readers would observe early on in the story that both characters were heavily skeptical of the Tadtarin festival. Their speculation, even disgust at times, illustrates how removed they are from the paganistic rituals still prevalent in the outlying provinces in the Philippines as modern Filipinos. However, the suggestion

that the St. John is still “natural” and elemental undermines its superiority over the Tadtarin festival, and foreshadows an eventual transformation in the characters of Don Paeng and Doña Lupeng. It is also interesting how the maid Amada becomes possessed by the Tadtarin, and is depicted as a clear opposite to her wealthy Doña Lupeng. Though both characters are female, it may be that Amada’s faith for the pre-Catholic allows her an earlier and easier transformation, whereas a modern woman like Doña Lupeng demands a harder transition because of the speculation inherent in modernity.

It is important now to bring to light the difference in the processions of the Tadtarin and of St. John and how these lead to gendered (female vs male) and cultural (pre-Catholic vs modern) subservience. Processions are central elements to the story where the pre-Catholic Tadtarin is juxtaposed with the modern St. John. Through the two festivals we also see how the pre-Catholic tradition of festivities and parades has been culturally adapted by a modern version of spirituality through Catholicism. Though the second festival may have omitted certain aspects central to a festival, other key elements have been preserved. For example, in both situations, crowds or hordes of bodies gather for a procession, half-naked in pure ecstasy, with the celebrated figure.

The atmosphere set by both processions is of complete grandeur but certain differences can be noticed: While St. John’s is joyful, filled with laughing faces and singing, the Tadtarin’s is solemn and horrific with its “prancing, screaming, writhing women” (381); the crowd becomes a part of the celebration of the St. John, with their ditch and river water. On the other hand, the Tadtarin festival, though equally noisy, exudes a genuine sentimentality for the celebrated, and the crowd “parts” for it, as if in ominous welcome, as opposed to people joining in it; where the people gravitate toward the St. John, the parting of the crowd in the Tadtarin presents striking visual references to the festivals. As pointed out by Holden, the Moretas are enclosed in a carriage, and therefore spatially and symbolically distanced from the St. John procession, but in witnessing the Tadtarin they are out in the open. More importantly, in the St. John procession a mere statue is used to represent the saint, whereas the ancient Tadtarin makes an appearance through human possession:

Behind her, a group of girls bore aloft a little black image of the Baptist— a crude, primitive, grotesque image, its big-eyed head too big for its puny naked torso, bobbing and swaying above the hysterical female horde and looking at once so comical and so pathetic that Don Paeng watching his wife on the sidewalk, was outraged. The image seemed to be crying for help, to be struggling to escape— a St. John indeed in the hands of the Herodiads; a doomed captive these witches were subjecting first to their derision; a gross and brutal caricature of his sex. (381)

These powerful lines demonstrate the power of the Tadtarin, the female pre-Catholic goddess, and what was once the “Precursor” (375) is reduced to a mere “Baptist” (381) in the presence of a more ancient being. For a moment, it is not the pre-Catholic that appears grotesque but the very image of St. John, reassigning all uncanny associations (primitive, grotesque) to the Baptist. It is also interesting to note that the ubiquitous element, heat, is still present in the story and appears to have magnified even after the sun has disappeared, as if gesturing that the heat is now generated by the female body, emanating both eroticism and power.

The festivals not only exhibit gendered differences but eventually hint at anxieties beyond class and gender. In the Tadtarin festival, Don Paeng experiences anger and frustration—these emotions no doubt generated by the modern anxiety toward the re-emergence of the pre-Catholic—at his wife’s fascination, and offers little to no explanation for this frustration other than the failure of his gender’s dominance, having witnessed the power of the females. Doña Lupeng, on the other hand, while watching the St. John, arrives at a conclusion unexpected of a modern woman: “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.... Women had built it up: this poise of the male. Ah, and women could destroy it, too!” (376). What develops in Lupeng that remains absent in the male characters is an emerging discomfort toward the modern Catholic religion and all it has stood for. A similar discomfort toward the pre-Catholic is exhibited by the young Guido when he admits that the Tadtarin festival “made [his] flesh crawl” (377). We read Guido’s ambivalence, for he exhibits both distaste and fascination, as reflective of the male’s inability to truly understand the power of nature (pre-Catholic and the feminine), remaining only as an observer.

Two possessions occur to named characters—early on by the maid Amada and at the end by Doña Lupeng—yet we argue that only one has experienced a true transformation. As the maid indulges in the spirit of the Tadtarin, the usually brutish Entoy was “watching stolidly” (374), renouncing all power in respect of his wife: “The spirit is in her. She is the Tadtarin. She must do as she pleases” (374). Entoy’s easy acceptance of his monstrous wife allows her full power of the pre-Catholic, her gestures clear facsimiles of the traditional Tadtarin.

Doña Lupeng’s transformation is strikingly greater in effect—Whereas Amada’s is always seen as grotesque and comical, Lupeng’s is noticeably more intimate, erupting not into hysteria, but a familiar eroticism that produces in her modern husband “the shameful fear that had unmanned him in the dark chapel” (384). But why is this effect not replicated in Entoy, a character also symbolic of masculinity?

It must be realized that the two couples do not belong to the same class and must then not share the same superstitions. Clearly Lupeng and Paeng are the more modern couple, affirming their positions after having exhibited distaste for and a certain fear against the pre-Catholic. But what has initially appeared as mere insistence for the modern might actually be reflective of a looming desire for the pre-Catholic, a sentiment supposedly so alien and divergent in such characters that this ripple in their ideologies end up as projections of disgust and hate. This is embodied by Lupeng's transformation, arguably the most powerful one despite the lack of semblance to the monster that has appeared in Amada and the women in the festival, precisely because it has appeared in the combined form of the pre-Catholic and the modern.

The erotic display that Lupeng and Paeng enact toward the end appears to be a direct result of the Doña's "possession", which allowed her to subjugate her husband. Just as Lupeng can't help but submit to her natural pre-Catholic identity, so too can't her husband, as an exhausted Paeng finds himself at the mercy of a Lupeng that is neither pre-Catholic nor the modern, but an amalgamation of both that makes her all the more powerful, finding himself miserable and yet enamored. At the end, Paeng undergoes his own transformation. Instead of the self-assured Don, we find a version of Paeng kissing his wife's feet. This initial ambivalence, eventually concluding to absolute adoration, exhibits both fear and attraction to the pre-Catholic. These reactions suggest two things: 1) The Don is afraid because he has witnessed that which he had not believed was possible, a disruption of the binaries pre-Catholic and modern in the image of his "possessed" wife; and 2) that secretly, the Don is attracted to this side of Lupeng; and that consequently, the modern feels an uncanny inclination toward the pre-Catholic, as already seen by the former's adaptation of the latter's cultural practices.

As he succumbs to his transformed wife, Don Paeng ultimately confesses adoration and "like a great agonized lizard" (385), kisses her feet; in these images, Joaquin indulges us with last-minute transformations of the modern through Paeng's image and all the power it has since wielded is transported to the pre-Catholic—the husband embodies a cold-blooded animal, symbolic of his subservience to the "wife of the crocodile" (374) and at once the huge moon, symbolic of the female, "glowed like a sun" (385). And it is in Doña Lupeng's transformation that she commits the female sacrifice, sacrificing her own modern self and becoming a monster, allowing Don Paeng to reach the acceptance of the pre-Catholic that has been troubling him.

### THE LOVER AND THE OLD HAG

“Doña Jerónima” follows the life of the Archbishop of Manila, as he is stranded on a remote island, returned to his city a changed man, and confronted by the woman of his youth, who has remained unchanged and unaged over the many decades since he last saw her. The ultimate representation of modernity in “Doña Jerónima” is the Archbishop and his ambition to reach higher levels of influence. He has spent a life climbing the ranks of the Church not for piety but power, dealing in political and social matters unrelated to the seat of the Archbishop, and his lust for further power beyond Manila dies only after he is bound to the cross of the ship’s mast by pirates and is “borne safely over the wrath of the waters” (57); the pun of “borne” and “born” provides the image of the Archbishop becoming reborn in this event, from the cross and back to the natural and pre-Catholic world. In a way such wordplay could perhaps indicate a reverse baptism—a rebirth from the Catholic to the pre-Catholic world.

It is this abandonment into the natural world that awakens the urge to find a “stillness”—this “stillness” that he only discovered once he was removed from the modern world and plunged into the natural, pre-Catholic world—though what this stillness is or what it represents he fails to grasp, knowing only that it is within him. His search for “stillness” overcomes all other previous desires. He is disillusioned with his power and fame, and in this search he begins seeing flashes of a woman in white, who is later revealed to be Doña Jerónima; it is unclear, however, if these flashes before their initial confrontation are Doña Jerónima herself or hallucinations of her. Their confrontation marks a radical shift in his search—he grows a fear that “what if, upon reaching the core of the stillness, he should find that unstillness was forever” (70). But if the stillness he seeks is truly Doña Jerónima or what she represents, why does this realization evoke this extreme degree of fear?

The Archbishop’s entire conflict rests on his lack of memory of his youth spent with Doña Jerónima; his search for “stillness” may have been a search for this memory all along—which Doña Jerónima seemingly confirms with the line, “Am I not,” she lightly replied, “the woman whom you lately sought?” (65)—and when this memory is stirred he is not only mentally but also physically shaken. Time is not something that can be left behind, to be remembered whenever it is called upon; it is something that perhaps must be actively remembered, and if not, it possesses the proclivity to leaving the past and directly engaging with the present.

The first conversation between Doña Jerónima and the Archbishop is one wrought with symbolism, allowing us to better understand the reason for the Archbishop’s fear. If she is the woman in her story and he is the man, then the goddess he has submitted himself to is not the Church but modernity itself;

however, her immunity to age makes her more than just a woman, but something unnatural, mystical, and thus she becomes a representation of the pre-Catholic.

Firstly, it is interesting to note that his fear of Doña Jerónima has nothing to do with her resistance to time; he sees nothing strange in her inability to age, and is instead wrapped in his fear of the memory of her, particularly, his memory of his obligation to her. His reaction is almost violent, crying, "I am not he!" (66). But his denial is not a denial of the obligation but a denial of the man who made the obligation, which is made clear when he says, "That young man died long, long ago, Jerónima, and whatever hurt he did you I shall atone for" (66). There is recognition of a wrongdoing, and a sincerity toward repaying Doña Jerónima for the hurt that has been caused her, but there is an utter refusal to associate himself with the youth of his past. This youth is not a man who grew up to become the Archbishop, but a past-self the Archbishop no longer relates with; and he pleads for her to understand: "Who can keep that pledge who wears the skirts of a man wedded to Holy Church?" (66). The fear is made clear: It is a fear manifest from the understanding that the "stillness" he has been searching for is exactly that which he previously abandoned; the "stillness" is the peace and fulfillment he had as a youth with Jerónima before he joined the Holy Church. The inherent male disconnected from nature prevented him from remembering this past in a way that the female Jerónima could not, thus allowing him to leave her behind in his ambition toward modernity. Finally, then: "what he feared was not failure of flesh but of faith" (69), that all he is seeking is the pre-Catholic within.

Yet the physical manifestation of the monstrous or the second source of fear in Doña Jerónima comes from Jerónima's transformation into an old, hideous woman; "for the face he saw was of an old hag—wan, wasted, withered, woeful; no radiance in it and no beauty; mere skin and bone and wild eye; and smelling of death" (78). First we must understand why, in a later meeting between the two, Jerónima retracts her love for him, claiming that it was a love of vanity, not the Archbishop, that drove her passions. It is possible that this is another example of Joaquin's discontentment of both the pre-Catholic and the modern; never truly embracing the pre-Catholic, Joaquin exemplifies the callousness of the pre-Catholic, the foolishness of its affect over rationality, as described by Holden. Thus Jerónima becomes an old hag praying to (assumingly) the Catholic God in her cave, her immunity from time seemingly taken from her in her embrace of the modern faith. She is thus the materialization of the pre-Catholic joining with the modern, the hybridization of these two times as a response to the Archbishop's anxieties, and in this process occurs her metamorphosis to the monstrous. She becomes the "third system" in Cohen's framework, resisting categorization as pre-Catholic or modern, and thus disrupts both. Yet simultaneously her acceptance of the Catholic faith is her ultimate sacrifice: She sacrifices her youth, her beauty, and her timelessness,

at the request of the Archbishop himself. In the conflict of interests between the Archbishop and Jerónima, it is the latter who concedes at her own expense.

The distinction is made clear that it is her adopted faith of Catholicism atop this character who represented the pre-Catholic that has made her monstrous, as when she and the Archbishop die, both are reborn and live on, as young and beautiful lovers who live in place of the pre-Catholic, pagan nymph of the cave. And yet, most interesting of all, there is the sense that Doña Jerónima is accepted more than the nymph before her: While the nymph is described as “also be[ing] cruel” (82), no such malice or warning is cast upon Jerónima; instead her cave is saluted by the fishermen, as she was “young and beautiful, and they knew she was kind” (82). The final act of symbolism then is in the young Archbishop, Doña Jerónima’s lover, who is perhaps all that separates her from her *diwata* predecessor, the vital difference in her kindness instead of cruelty. The combination of the pre-Catholic with the modern and the acceptance of this betrothal rather than the revolt against it defeats the monstrous and the anxieties from which it came, allowing them to finally find peace and become the young and beautiful lovers at the end of the story.

### **THE WITCH, THE SCARLET, AND THE WHORE OF BABYLON**

“The Order of Melkizedek” explores the lives of the Estiva family, from Sid who had once been curious of his pre-Catholic past but has now abandoned it, to his sister Guia, who has become one of the harbingers of the pre-Catholic titular Order of the story. In “The Order of Melkizedek,” the anxiety of the modern world explains the cultural shift from the rejection of the past to the appropriation of it, in the relatively short time between Sid’s departure and return. Santiago highlights this early on, claiming that Guia’s participation in the Prophet’s Order is partly a result of the recent confusion of the Vatican Church, with customs and traditions now seemingly shaken by modernity. As Santiago explains, “I almost fainted when I found out he was a priest; he was dressed in the style of a teen-ager. And with *permission*. Now what is happening here, I ask you” (213). This inherent confusion or lack of understanding about modern practices, portrayed here with regards to the priest dressed “modernly,” is telling of the discrepancies of the supposedly wholly developed modern world. Thus the response to this anxiety is a return to the past, returning to older traditions and customs and looking down on anything new or different, and yet there are seemingly two levels by which characters can look back: by treating the past as decoration, in furniture, clothing, and *barrio fiestas* instead of steak and barbecue, or by truly embracing it as done by Guia and the Order, which ultimately results in the monstrous.



The manifestation of the monstrous through the feminine in “The Order of Melkizedek” seems, at first glance, not as fitting a framework as we have shown in the other two stories selected, due to the Prophet being male. However, Melkizedek’s maleness is perhaps as transcendental as his humanity. Assuming he is truly a single everlasting entity rather than a line of imposters—and with the evidence presented we are led to believe in the former—then Melkizedek’s gender is not representative of maleness or masculinity. Firstly, the Prophet and his aliases are never described as resembling strong male figures: “he wears his hair long and dresses in the manner of women, he limps a bit” (248). His maleness is a tool, rather, to further push the pagan agenda, as men are much likelier to earn influence in Christianity, as Sid puts it, to “smuggle back the pagan in Christian disguise” (255), and in Guia’s words, an image: “Oh, is it only that that’s worrying you? An *image*?” (251). Though Guia is referring to something other than the Prophet’s own image, the message is still implied: the *image* should not be the main area of concern.

The monstrous is witnessed then in the conversion of modern women toward vessels of pagan belief, and yet even then, clear examples of it are sparse. For the most part, Guia and the other female followers of Melkizedek are described as being eccentric, wearing native clothes and playing guitars in church, and Guia’s interactions with Sid reveal her as being a very modern woman speaking modern colloquialisms. But there is an underlying sense that something else is being kept secret. Several times, Guia is caught out in conversation, and her response is hesitation or an effusive change of topic; when Sid asks Guia and Sister Juana about their group having “its own mass, where you dance” (225), they respond by glancing at each other; when Sid asks Guia about Salem being the kingdom of the high priest Melkizedek, she answers, “Yes. What a lot you’ve eaten, Sid. You must have been *starved*” (227). And yet we are shown a glimpse of the hidden monstrous, in the conversation between Mrs. Banaag and Sonya:

The first initiation?

Yes,” said Mrs. Banaag.

An outraging, of course.

He said all shame had to be burned out of us, if we were to recover innocence.

Dancing in the flesh.

—in the moonlight. This was last October, the last day, behind Salem House. There’s a circle of ruins. And a shrine in one stone.

A shrine?

An image of Christ.

Oh yes, in the primitive manner.

More.

More of the outraging?

But somehow not outrageous—

Naked?  
—during that dancing to the moon.  
But it was.  
And in the extremest manner. (243)

Perhaps what is most interesting in the exchange above is the two opposing ways Mrs. Banaag feels about the ritual: outrageous or not outrageous. It is actually Sonya who initially plants the idea of it being outrageous, with Mrs. Banaag emphasizing how during the dancing itself it was “somehow not outrageous” (243) and finally simply agreeing. What we witness here is Mrs. Banaag’s transformation—during the dancing she is something else, something from which “all shame had [been] burned out” (243), or the modern woman stripped entirely of her modernity. It is these rare if not occasional transformations into the monstrous that build uncertainty and hesitation in Guia and the other women who have joined in the rituals, including Mrs. Banaag, inducing within them an inability to understand or accept what is truly happening to them. Melkizedek recognized the importance of withholding the pagan roots of their rituals, telling Sid, “And as your sister will be, when she has gone beyond the Christian image and learns by herself what is the question that must be asked: the name of the god she worships” (256).

But we must ask: why is it Guia and not Sid—why the woman and not the man—who helps lead the resurrection of the Order, despite Melkizedek’s claim that it was Sid who “called us back years ago” (268)? It is Ortner’s theory of the female’s inherent link to nature—absent in the male, and overshadowed by his pursuit of culture—that explains the Order’s reliance on feminine symbolism and imagery scattered throughout the story. Their headquarters are located in an old nunnery, they hold their masses late at night under the moon, they celebrate the Feast of the Circumcision which is also known as the Solemnity of Mary or the celebration of the Blessed Virgin, and the Prophet primarily recruits only modern rich women who are without husbands.

While there are male elements involved in the Order, it can be argued that this was the cause of their downfall; the monstrous transformations of the feminine are socially outrageous but not illegal, while the murder and kidnapping committed by Melkizedek’s male thugs bring about their arrests and the Order’s end. Male understanding of Melkizedek’s purpose does not seem to resonate exactly with female understanding of it, and perhaps it is impeded by the male inability to accept what the female can: The old man who knew the Prophet as a child during the New Jerusalem experiment in Pangasinan described the experience as a Christian communism, a nationalist movement. Guia, however, says nothing about nationalism in explaining her interest in the Order and instead says: “Magic” (232). In this context, magic can be attributed to the natural or the pre-Catholic world,

and Guia not only understands this but embraces it, while the old man sought a more modern label he could better understand.

We see the distinction between the male and the female clearly through the difference in the lives of Sid and Guia, who are both “almost not another person” (265). Despite the similarities of their characters the two have gone opposite directions, with Sid fleeing the pre-Catholic after once having flirted with it and Guia instead searching for it, and all that separates them is their willingness or unwillingness to follow impulse. As the story explains, Sid perhaps was the first among his society who began digging into the past, and he was made to feel that this interest was “unhealthy, reactionary” (206). With Sid, we feel there is a general discomfort associated with the unknown past, and as he explains to Sonya when she asks why he stopped searching for the past: “I think I got scared. If you go back into the past it could come back” (206). It is a fear of impulses that only arose after his initial diggings into the pre-Catholic; and while Sid works to repress these impulses—“It was a long time since he had felt any impulse there and had so approved the UN agency because it seemed to use up the material for such impulses” (243)—Guia has spent her entire life chasing them.

Her four blocks of experiences before joining the Prophet each represent a notable development in her blind search for the pre-Catholic. As Steve or Estiva with “The Group” of writers, following in the traditions of Joyce and Rimbaud and Kerouac, she finds modern ideas and modernity itself; as Ginny with The Barkada, she tastes the primitive with their affinity toward “Food, sex, drink, action” (23), but is once more left unsatisfied; as Gigi in the business world, those climbing the ranks of modernity share a discontentment toward it, with everyone writing “everything from epic poems to exposes of the Filipino soul” (231), but this passive search fails to resonate with her; and as Guiang with the nationalists, the active resistance against the US embassy and US firms seems misguided to her. She is rechristened each time with a new name, emphasizing the immense change each stage had in her person, and also showcasing her seamless ability to transform from one persona to another, hinting toward the ultimate monstrous pre-Catholic transformation bubbling within her. Each stage was just another step toward her ultimate desire for her role as Sister Guia, and satisfying the pre-Catholic self-emerging from within; a satisfaction she shares with her fellow female members of the Order.

If she cannot share this satisfaction with Sid, then, what differentiates Guia from her older sister Adela? While Sid initially accepts Guia’s participation in the Order, thinking it a curiosity rather than a serious problem, Adela is infuriated with Sid for pushing Guia toward a life of her own choosing, insisting that she return home and “learn the duties of a woman” (214). Adela’s disapproval for the

Order almost reaches an obsessive level, to the point where it seems more akin to an irrationally driven horror toward it, with instances where, while listening to Guia talk about the Order, “Adela was crouched forward on her chair, plump hands on thighs clenching” (225). But we see in Adela two sources of suppression that are not present in Guia that may explain this difference: her husband, Santiago, and her past. There are hints that Adela has been conditioned since childhood to reject the pre-Catholic, the provincial, and the natural. For example, Guia refers back to a time where Sid mocked Adela for being a heretic and Adela responds defensively: “I was baptized Holy, Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic” (223). Adela also incorrectly proclaims herself as a “Daughter of Isabela” (222), which Guia corrects by reminding her that Adela’s mother was actually Aglipayan, a branch of Filipino Catholicism distant from Roman Catholicism, and Sid observes that “Adela looked so put out” (222) afterwards. Secondly, her husband’s suppression is described by Guia, in which she reveals to Sid that they no longer engage in sex, but neither do they have affairs. This repression of the carnal urges—and Guia has described their Order as worshiping the “carnal Christ” (251)—has caused their house to “fester” (254), whatever it is they are keeping down. We see from these clues that Adela is a representation of the pre-Catholic struggling to become modern, as she struggles to hide away her provincial and pre-Catholic past.

Here we must take note of the difference between not only Guia and Adela but also Adela and Sonya—two middle-aged mothers from the same rich and modern social class, both unconnected to the Order (until the very end), and yet Sonya falls to Melkizedek’s influence upon their first meeting, while Adela has a mental breakdown. Sonya, who has been left by her husband and therefore like Guia has no suppression forced upon her, readily accepts the ruthlessness of “something in me” (267). It is this lack of dominating male influence in their lives that allows them to more openly accept their pre-Catholic urges—Melkizedek’s preference for widowed or single women then is not for their money but for their freedom—explaining why their father’s death had so much impact on their lives, and why Adela accuses Sid of Guia’s actions as being “all your fault” (213), after he left and moved to New York.

In the absence of the monstrous and its direct role in the story, instead we witness ways in which the female protects herself from the discomfort of these unidentified transformations. They feature “top ten hits” in their masses, particularly songs from the Beatles, and Guia refers to their group as “The Late Late Show—keep trying to be modern to cope” (227). It is an unusual use of not only modernity but also of pop culture almost unseen in Joaquin’s writings, and its repetition from Guia may not solely be a character trait but perhaps a coping mechanism. Like Mrs. Banaag, Guia simultaneously approves and fears her transformations, not knowing why they are happening. It is Mrs. Banaag who describes it best, this gradual metamorphosis in

ideology: “It was no longer a question of belief, or doctrine, or ideas. Ideas seemed utterly unimportant compared to this felt wisdom in the blood, in the flesh..” (242).

While Guia’s participation in the Order is relatively innocuous for the most part, the final and yet perhaps least glaring evidence for the transformation into the monstrous is revealed by one subtle element: Guia’s virginity. As Guia recounted her life to Sid, she emphasized several times that she had remained intact, still a virgin, and during Melkizedek’s final conversation with Sid, he calls her “Saint Guia, virgin and martyr” (268). But the manner of Guia’s death removes any possibility that she has remained a virgin. Father Lao describes a girl who “was a witch, the scarlet woman, the whore of Babylon” (264), and we are led to believe they slept with one another, in order to convince him to join their Order—“But I sinned only from despair, because God had withdrawn” (264).

In the end, Lao shoots Guia after referring to her as the same scarlet woman, ending the Estiva family’s story in tragedy. If Guia then is truly the scarlet woman Father Lao claims, then her virginity has long ago been taken and Melkizedek’s proclamation of her virginity is false. But here arises another, more uncanny possibility: Guia has indeed remained a virgin, and the scarlet woman who slept with Lao was something she had transformed into; the emerging of the pre-Catholic through the modern, and the submission of the self to the inner self, not only symbolically, but possibly spiritually or physically as well. Guia’s virginity would have then remained intact in the way she understood it, as her transformation would have been so complete that she did not recognize her actions as the scarlet woman at all. And this is the final act of the monstrous: the damnation of Father Lao’s spirit, and the destruction of the Estiva family itself.

## **THE FEMALE SACRIFICE: A CONCLUSION**

In each of the three stories selected, it is ultimately the female sacrifice in response to the monstrous manifesting from within that leads her male counterpart to peace; Doña Lupeng loses her dignity, Doña Jerónima her beauty, and Sister Guia her life. While previous readings on Joaquin’s portrayal of the female as monstrous dispute whether the monstrous empowers or suppresses the females in his stories, in incorporating Ortner’s theory we open a new avenue for feminist interpretations, by identifying a consistent absence of awareness in the male rather than a suppression of the female, one which cannot be overcome without the female sacrifice. The female sacrifice is, once again, a requirement; without the female transforming into the monstrous, the male cannot understand the source of his modern anxiety toward the re-emergence of the pre-Catholic. Surprisingly,

suppression in these stories is more evident in the male, a suppression preventing them from recognizing their connection to the pre-Catholic, brought upon by culture itself.

By clarifying these monstrous transformations as examples of Cohen's disruption of established binaries, we attribute to the monstrous not only fear but a *purpose* for this fear: disrupting the pre-Catholic and the modern, creating a third state that defies categorization. This third state is feared or accepted, and the female sacrifice becomes the final answer to the anxieties brought upon by the conflict between pre-Catholicism and modernity that the male cannot explain: The inner self he seeks is neither the pre-Catholicism or the modern, but the hybridization of both. The symbolic turn in Don Paeng, the Archbishop, and Sid hints firstly at an understanding of this hybridization of the pre-Catholic and the modern, and eventually, a desire of it.

We see in the characters a primal fear of the monstrous, but this fear is in part fueled by its uncanny familiarity with the part of their inner selves that have been repressed—the pre-Catholic. In the final stages of each story, peace and contentment is met when culture (male) accepts nature (female), but it is only through the female's sacrifice by transforming into the monstrous that this process can be done. We see in this reading the absolute importance of the female in the three texts—in each story, it is the female's transformation into the monstrous that creates the bridge that links the male to the pre-Catholic self, thus ridding him of his anxieties toward modernity, upon his final acceptance of the monster the female becomes, thus allowing his own private transformation in the process. The transformation we see in the male image is purely symbolic and internal, an acceptance of the pre-Catholic desire he could not understand, far from the monstrousness of the female transformation. While the female opens the door to the pre-Catholic, thus sacrificing herself in the process through the hybridization of the pre-Catholic and the modern, it is ultimately the male, wrought with anxieties, who is saved.

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