

Nick Joaquin's Apocalypse

Women and the Tragi-comedy
of the “Unhappy Consciousness”

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ABSTRACT

Beginning with the notion of experience exchanged via story-telling, this paper focuses on the evolving drama of consciousness variously rendered in Joaquin's narratives. This drama has been rehearsed conceptually in Hegel's critique of the “Unhappy Consciousness” in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Torn between the patriarchal regime of the family and the necessity of survival in a bourgeois-capitalist milieu, Joaquin's bifurcated subject (represented by characters in crisis) dissolves into the mirage of unifying myths or becomes reconciled to the alienating system by artistic fiat. Joaquin's motive of attempting to reconcile polarized memories and fantasies, a project of extracting universality from particularized dilemmas, symbolizes the predicament of the *ilustrado* class. Joaquin articulates the conscience of this embattled group whose legitimacy has been challenged by the sheer force of repressed natural drives. These energies were hitherto sublimated in subaltern negativity embodied in collective labor and resistance. Truthful to the *ilustrado* syndrome, Joaquin's art is thus unable to resolve the dialectic of the “Unhappy Consciousness” within a materialist

historical frame, thus functioning as the testimony of mere utopian longing or the allegory of a compulsively repeated tragicomedy rescued from an embalmed past.

KEYWORDS

bifurcated subject, *ilustrado* syndrome, Nick Joaquin, phenomenology, “Unhappy Consciousness”

When we say of things that they are finite, we mean thereby . . . that Not-being constitutes their nature and their Being . . . Finite things . . . are related to themselves as something negative, and in this self-relation send themselves on beyond themselves and their Being . . . The finite does not only change . . . it perishes; and its perishing is not merely contingent It is rather the very being of finite things that they contain the seeds of perishing as their own Being-in-self, and the hour of their birth is the hour of their death.

—G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* (1929), 142

The elevation of Nick Joaquin’s reputation to a Penguin Classic in 2017 signaled not only an apotheosis of sorts but also an exoticizing marginalization. Under the rubric of the “postcolonial,” the endorsers relegated the Filipino author to a fraught academic trend in rapid obsolescence. But his acclamation as our Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the exemplar of postcolonial “doubleness,” albeit overlain by “a tribal civilization,” ascribed an “aura” fit for our feckless addiction to commodity fetishism. No, we are not alluding to Duterte’s total war against suspected drug-lords and terrorists. I am referring to that inescapable “aura” that Walter Benjamin anatomized in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” It is the aura of Joaquin’s *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* as the quintessential Filipino theater. It is the aura of a sanctified writer whose mastery of English has allowed him to define, for the whole nation (whose existence is still contentious since the popular/the *masa* remains outside the neocolonized polity), its historical genealogy, political predicament, and destiny.

Benjamin is also the source of Vicente Rafael’s view of Joaquin’s craft as a sign of a reprieve from U.S. colonial subjugation. Together with his contemporary Anglophone writers, Joaquin “epitomized the modernizing promise of colonial rule” (xx). Using English as the “very idiom of modernity itself,” Joaquin allegedly succeeded in “regaining the capacity of remembering itself in order to constitute the remembering self” (xxi). This is premised on the “attenuation of experience” which led to the “demise of the craft of storytelling” (xv). This, I submit, is a flawed construal of Benjamin’s demystifica-

tion of romanticized story-telling. Actually, Benjamin linked narrative art to the web of determinate social relations, specifically the mode of production and conflicted classes (peasantry, guild artisan, merchant trader, capitalist industrialist), which produced the substance and circumscribed the narratability of diverse experiences. Story-telling is tied to the rhythms of work and the oral context of a long-vanished communal audience. With the onset of capitalism, that context dissolved; the “short-lived reminiscences of the storyteller” gave way to the “perpetuating remembrance of the novelist” in a commodified milieu.

Memory, a conjured homeland, the narration of collective experience, shared fate—this is what is at stake in estimating Joaquin’s relevance today. It is the novel as “the form of transcendental homelessness” (a concept borrowed from Georg Lukacs) to which Benjamin attributes the function of revitalizing epic memory. And so it is the novel, such as Joaquin’s *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* and *Cave and Shadows*, that evokes “the genuinely epic experience of time: hope and memory...” (Lukacs 99). Whether such a mode of experience salvaged from the “ruins of modernity” can be conveyed by the tales and legends that comprise the bulk of the Penguin collection, is what needs to be clarified. We cannot echo what Gorky once said of Gogol’s “The Overcoat,” that Filipino writing all disingenuously came out of Joaquin’s two navels.

REBIRTH OF THE AUTHOR?

Poststructuralist critics have long pronounced the death of the author in its conventional sense as a sacred demiurge, a sovereign genius. Earlier Marx, Darwin, Saussure, Freud, and Nietzsche all concurred in the demise of that individual-centered cosmos. But Barthes and Foucault have resuscitated the author as a function, a site of discursive contestation, rather than an originating presence with the mystical halo given by the Penguin Classic editors and blurbs. One American reviewer ventured peremptorily to dismantle that halo by ascribing to Joaquin a melancholy anger, relentlessly composing “a fierce elegy for a past that never was.” She summed up Joaquin’s central preoccupation thus: “the older generation is bitterly impotent against the sea

changes of the present, and the younger generations desperate to understand the world, but adrift between potential and petrification” (Valentine).

The thematic problem that Joaquin engages with concerns the question of the Subject of a singular Filipino national experience. It is a complex hypothesis, a speculative proposition, that we have explored before (San Juan, *Subversions*). This involves accounting for the subject-positions offered by the texts. It is not the mismatch or incompatibility between generational attitudes, but rather how this Subject, confined to the petty bourgeois urban sector, asserts itself, its negativity, in the process of evolving to a dynamic self-conscious historically concrete position. Essentially, this Subject is an evolving identity-in-difference (Marcuse). Situated in the transition from the feudal/colonial mode of production to a bureaucratic-comprador mode, this Subject undergoes diremption. Defined by Otherness, it proceeds to recognize its difference/alienation and struggles to sublimate the antagonisms converging in its life-world in order to construct its new subject-position, a relatively autonomous, free, rational self-consciousness in command of its lived experience. In brief, it is the ordeal of a particular community discovering its concrete universality in the process of attempting to reconcile historically determinate contradictions, yielding tragi-comic spectacles and language-games.

The Subject as an identity-in-difference, for Joaquin the hispanicized Filipino creole (Rizal, Luna, among others) bifurcated by Spanish and Anglo-Saxon subjugation, refuses to accept the domination of alienated labor (capitalist exploitation) and struggles to maintain the honor-centered norm of theocratic Manila. Proof of this is Joaquin’s 1943 essay, “La Naval de Manila,” a celebration of the Spanish victory over the Dutch in 1646, which won him a scholarship to St. Albert Monastery in Hong Kong in 1947 (De Vera). From the Commonwealth period up to the installation of the “puppet republic” of Roxas, Quirino, and Magsaysay, Joaquin’s endeavor to construct this Subject—the metamorphosis of the *ilustrado* sensibility into a civic-minded citizen of the Republic—founders. Only the sisters of Antigone—Candida and Paula of *A Portrait*—remain as testimony to this heroic attempt to shape a national allegory of bourgeois compromise. This would be nothing else but a self-determining reflexive story of private lives and individual destinies

encapsulating the “embattled situation” of the third-world public culture/society (Jameson 320).

MARGINALIZING THE METROPOLIS

Whether Joaquin succeeds or not in re-inventing the national allegory of the Filipino Subject, the rational self-conscious intelligence of the Filipino middle-stratum beyond sensuous certainty, selfish interests, and animal passions is the topic adumbrated in this essay. Counter-intuitively, Joaquin’s allegory is an imaginary resolution of the lived contradictions (see Balibar and Macherey) between traditional beliefs and instrumental reason represented by fictional characters. It seems to me simplistic to reduce the complex theme to the conflict between the priests and satyrs, between the pagan, totem-and-taboo tribalism—the brute world of the “bitch-goddess” worship in the *Tadtarin* cult—and the sadistic chastity of Christian ascetics. Or, in *A Portrait*, the opposition between materialistic, individualistic, consumer society and the numinous realm of family affections. Even though Joaquin may be fascinated with the primitive ideal of cyclic regeneration, this is easily incorporated into a Christian paradigm of death-and-resurrection personified by the “Unhappy Consciousness” (discussed below), this syncretism being a false dialectic of subsumption and rechristening—the well-tried colonial ideology of cooptation and assimilation.

At the outset, I would argue that Joaquin’s focus on the *agon*, the ordeal, of the urbanized *Indios* of Metro Manila fails to resolve their predicament. On the contrary, it refracts the syndrome. It reproduces the contradictions of the past by negating the challenges and opportunities of the present. The chief symptom of this inability to dialectically transcend the past is its exclusion of the peasantry and the whole proletarian world of serfs, women, tribal or indigenous communities (Muslim, Igorot) marginalized by Spanish and U.S. colonial domination. However, the mediations offered in “The Order of Melkizedek,” *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*, and *A Portrait*—resigning to the contingency and accidents of life, asserting impetuous will, or welcoming the priestly intervention of the alienated citizens of a competitive egocentric society—are flawed, temporary stop-gaps, compromise mediations.

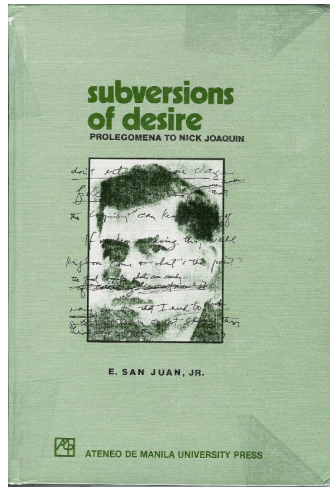


Fig. 1 *Subversions of Desire: Prolegomena to Nick Joaquin* is the only book-length study on Nick Joaquin. Published by Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988.

Nonetheless, they may constitute Joaquin's most instructive contribution to the current dialogue on national-democratic reconstruction.

At the end of the day, the “Unhappy Consciousness” (as described by Hegel in *Phenomenology of Spirit*) of Joaquin's Subject yields up the fruits of labor and enjoyment for the absolving act of the intermediary consciousness (such as the father's in “Three Generations” or the epiphany of Candido, Sid Estiva, Bitoy Camacho, and Pepe Monson). But they occlude the fate of Others: of the sisters Paula and Candida, of the children such as Guia and the Monson brothers, and neighbors of the decaying house in Intramuros. In *Tales*, such as in “The Summer Solstice” and “Candido's Apocalypse,” moral decision and understanding are sacrificed for a stance of stoic fatalism, or abject sinfulness. This is not useless if one grasps this stage of the experience as one aware of its particularity, the limits of mechanistic self-satisfaction, abstract solipsism, and alienated privacy. One can convert the experience of the “Unhappy Consciousness” as a prelude to attaining the stage of the universal, the rational self-conscious stance of the Subject, the self-deter-

mining agent of historical praxis. But that is a hypothetical possibility for Joaquin.

CRUCIBLE OF EXPERIENCE

The key concept of experience is central to our inquiry. Benjamin asserted that the old sense of communal experience embodied in Leskov's stories has been destroyed, replaced by information. Information consists of incidents, positive facts or factoids, mixed with explanation. In industrial capitalist society, the business media communicates information, with instant verifiability, eradicating the amplitude of traditional storytelling based on the interactive collaboration of the audience. The modern audience consists of atomized psyches devoid of memory, victimized by the reifying impact of universal commodification. Memory, death, and time disappears; experience degenerates to information in an anomic society (epitomized by the rhetorical shifts in "A Pilgrim Yankee's Progress" and "The Mass of St. Sylvestre").

What Benjamin has condensed in the term "information" is the reduction of life as the passive undergoing of the phenomenal world. Empiricism and sensationalism informed the scientific exploration of the world by merchants and industrialists. Immanuel Kant rejected this by positing the active thinking of the empirical subject, leaving the thing-in-itself untouched. It was Marx who revised contemplative materialism by affirming practical action to change the material world. Marx qualifies Hegel's philosophy of experience by accentuating the role of the collective subject (social classes). By investigating the necessary properties and the laws of motion of the phenomenal world, and the rational methods of activity to transform it, humans have given the concept of experience a new meaning. Experience thus denotes the dialectical interaction of the social subject with the external world, merging with the "sum total of society's practical activity" (Rosenthal and Yudin 154; see also Adorno 83-86).

Experience is thus a complex notion of imbrication of various layers of phenomena, both subjective and objective. It was Hegel who defined experience as a transactive interface of subject and object working its way in a dialectical process in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. From a phenomenological

frame, Hegel conceived of experience as that which later views of reality have of the earlier ones; that is, what a more mature and self-conscious grasp of reality reveals is the “experience” of what was inscribed in earlier, naïve notions. In effect, it is the experience of the passage of consciousness, “the dialogue between natural consciousness and absolute knowledge,” toward the concrete Universal (Heidegger 146; see also Findlay 87).

Now, exactly what is that still unmediated complex of experience bedeviling Joaquin’s conscience? Everyone knows that the passage of our country into modernity was interrupted twice: first, by the defeat of Aguinaldo’s revolutionary forces by the U.S. invasion and bloody pacification from 1899 to 1913; and, second, by the U.S. failure to prevent the Japanese occupation and destruction of Manila, followed by more than two decades of neocolonial subservience to U.S. diktat. The harmony of Spanish monastic supremacy subtending the feudal/patriarchal order was broken not by the 1896 Katipunan uprising but by U.S. imperial conquest. While accepting the compromise of the Commonwealth, where the *ilustrado* fathers (Recto/Don Perico in *A Portrait*) found token recognition, Joaquin could not accept the collaboration (and U.S. resignation to the oligarchy’s acquiescence) with the Japanese. This was due to the horrendous devastation of Intramuros, the prime symbol of a form-giving Catholic ethos and *ancien regime* manners. It is the event of a WW2 disaster, the “orgy of atrocities” matched only by the 1937 Nanking massacre (Karnow 321), that traumatized Joaquin’s psyche crawling out of the rubble of Intramuros. The Filipino *ilustrado* soul entered the phase of “transcendental homelessness,” the theme of the classic European novel and of Joaquin’s fictional attempts to assuage and cure the trauma.

Except for the tales and folkloric adaptations—“The Legend of the Dying Wanton,” Doña Jeronima,” “The Mass of St Sylvester”—the major stories in the Penguin anthology strove to confront the two crises by resolving, in an imaginary sphere we call “ideology,” the contradiction between the project of reconstructing the tradition by sublation—negating the archaic residues, preserving elements of Christian humanism (free will; reason governed by grace), and lifting them to a richer, multifaceted universality—and accepting

the fate of imperial domination. Whether the experience of his protagonists demonstrates a genuine immanent critique and resolution of the schisms in their world remains to be analyzed.

MAPPING THE ORAL SPACE OF TIME

Let us examine how this adventure of the “Unhappy Consciousness” unfolds toward a sublimation of its immanent contradictions. Joaquin’s two novels originate from the matrix of tale-telling. The core problem we need to engage with is the nature and consequentiality of those experiences rendered by Joaquin’s moralizing plots. We need to understand what shapes of memory and hope may be glimpsed and delineated so as to give counsel, warning, or ultimatum to its modern audience. Who this audience is and where, remain also as problematic as the specific contingencies underlying both Joaquin’s life and the still taken-for-granted sociohistorical situation that is the condition of possibility of his art.

To approach the intricacies of this question, let us take as specimen the widely-anthologized “The Summer Solstice.” The time-period (1850) is still colonial, materialized in the suburb of Paco (also replicated in Obando, Bulacan) outside of the Walled City, still pervaded with pagan practices. The *Tadtarin*, a three-day fertility festival overlaid/legitimized by the Christian feast of St. John the Baptist, enacts the death, flourishing, and birth of the sun/life-force. The *Tadtarin* is represented by an old woman who ritually dies, carrying a wand-fetish and a sheaf of seedlings; she is resurrected, the crowd of women-worshippers dancing around her, with St. John the Baptist figuring as the somewhat tabooed, engulfed phallic icon. The orgy is supposed to synchronize human biological time and the rhythm of the universe, here intimated by the triple-time dance steps evoking the sound of a circumcision ceremony (Roces). It is less a Dionysian debauchery than a celebration of desire, passion, lust, attuned to the organic cycle of animal/natural life. Patriarchy temporarily submits to the maternal, generative principle.

But history, not myth, preoccupies Joaquin in celebrating June. In the zodiac-designed *Almanac for Manileños*, Joaquin assigns the solstice month to

Juno, the patroness of marriage and fertility, following prehistoric Roman tradition. But more significant is June 12, 1898, Aguinaldo's proclamation of the independent Malolos Republic. June 24 is the feast of St John the Baptist canonized by Christ himself; "all the rest of humanity were born in sin," adds Joaquin, except for St. John, Christ, and the Virgin Mary (*Almanac* 170). But what for Joaquin is more significant is the founding of Manila by Legaspi on June 24, 1571, because with city records and chronology of deeds, Spanish conquest gave history to the country and began to eradicate pagan myths and animist/obscurantist practices like astrology and occult fortune-telling. This palimpsest translates Joaquin's formula (*La Naval* 30) of reconciling the form, temper, and physiognomy that Spain bequeathed to us and the national destiny we are trying to create.

Communal time, however, is cyclical and cannot be reduced to the spatial linearity of the merchant's calendar. What Joaquin does is to use this social/cultural arena to dramatize the phase of consciousness which Hegel described as the conflict of slave and lord, the bondsman and master. In it the slave wins recognition (self-consciousness) via his labor and creation, whereas the lord remains in-himself, sunk in empirical solitude, treating the slave as a thing/object. In the relation between Doña Lupeng and the husband Rafael Moreta, the archetypal gender-war centers on the woman's introjection of the collective, universal for-itself of the community. She is no longer just wife or mother, for she now embodies the in-itself/for-itself Subject that mediates between the patriarchal law of property-owning society (wives and children are the slaves in the Roman *familia* and the divine sphere). The melodramatic episode of the husband crawling to kiss the wife's foot has externalized the "Unhappy Consciousness" into a fight between two humans reduced to animal/physical sensations, with mastery as the object/goal, in the realm of the empirical/natural life. No genuine mutual recognition of each other's identities transpires. We are remote from any hope of reaching the self-conscious Universal that sublimates the organic/natural impulse into the ordered ethical sphere of the family and ultimately in the self-reflecting Spirit of civilization.

Joaquin's resort to the strategy of Christian evangelism/evangelicalism assimilating/adapting pagan rituals can also be observed in the other tales: "Doña Jeronima," "May Day Eve," "Guardia de Honor," and "The Order of Melkizedek." In the latter, the sacrifice of Guia betokens the return of the Manichean casuistry personified by the guilt-ridden Fr. Lao.

But at the same time, with Fr. Melchor standing for a recurrent urge to repeat the inaugural sacrament of the Feast of Circumcision, and the founding of a new millenary movement to renew society, Joaquin revives the roots of the "Unhappy Consciousness" by focalization on a utopian biblical image: his toothbrush and the "burning bush" of a plane-ticket illuminating the void of the niche in Salem House. The once displaced native has vowed to stay in the homeland and solve the mystery of the unfulfilled promise of national redemption.

The would-be dialectical mediators of opposing forces, the tutored Candido and the moralizing Sid Estiva, seem unable to grasp the negativity of the empirical surface. They remain trapped in sensuous certainty, the antinomy of desire and sinfulness, unable to leap to a further stage to capture the Other's inwardness, remaining torn by heterogenous immediacy. In this busy detective story, the "Sign of the Milky Seed" –a pun on seminal fluid—historicized as the Order of Melkizedek, opens the occasion for introducing the character of Father Melchor, accompanied by the avenger Fr. Lao. The latter, a double or the obverse face of the former, seems to parody the vocation of those "justified and sanctified by God's grace" and who offer their lives "in sacrifice to God's incomprehensible dominion (Rahner and Vorgrimler 376). Sid Estiva is just a catalyst in the return of the priestly order so that the political millenarism of the youth (Guia and her circle) is sublimated into the erotic affairs of the adult guardians (for a diagnosis of this shift in Western philosophy, see Taylor).

A millenary impulse of prefiguring the return of the Messiah underlies this project of Joaquin to resolve the sordid dilemma of the "Unhappy Consciousness." It evokes the delusionary phantasies of victims of overwhelming catastrophes in the Middle Ages, replete with demon scapegoats, messianic leaders, millennial mirages, together with the army of Saints (for

example, the Albigensians alluded to by Joaquin as the “terror of the troubadors” (*La Naval* 33) suppressed by St. Dominic and the Papacy) ready to purify the earth so as to establish “the new Jerusalem, the shining Kingdom of the Saints” (Cohn 73). The Pauline image of the crucified Christ, performed by Father Melchor, invokes the millenary tradition of revivalist sects inspired by St. John’s apocalypse (Smith 172-79), a repetition-compulsion lacking catharsis.

What needs underscoring is St. Augustine’s insistence that the millennial kingdom wished-for by millenarian movements actually began with the birth of Christ. One historian notes that in the anti-Papacy movements (for example, the Anabaptists) from the thirteenth to the sixteenth, “the earlier millenarianism bloomed again in full vigor. It became part of the baggage of the Reformation and has continued to the present day, a seemingly necessary consequence of verbal inspiration of the Scriptures” (Mead 492). Joaquin’s revival of this chiliastic, millenarian tendency testifies to a proto-revolutionary impulse in his work that connects with the genealogy of our rich tradition from Tamblot to the Colorums and Mt. Banahaw sects, the Rizalistas, up to the revolt of the Lapiang Malaya of Valentin de los Santos on May 21, 1967 (Agoncillo and Guerrero 508). This may also explain his praise of the Crusades and slaughter of the infidel Turks at the Battle of Lepanto (1571), defeat of the Calvinist Dutch fleet (1646), and the Moros of Luzon annihilated by Legaspi, Martin de Goiti, and Juan de Salcedo (1570-76; Zaide 149-57).

TRIANGULATING COUNTER-MODERNISM

Counter-modernist reformation evokes not a return to a utopian past but a futuristic projection of an authentic fulfillment. This is a transitional subject-position occupied by the “Unhappy Consciousness” whose itinerary we are tracing here. It might be worthwhile to note first, as a heuristic guide, the time-span covering Joaquin’s production of his stories and novels, between 1946 and 1966, except for “Three Generations,” published in 1940. We are plunged into the postwar milieu of General MacArthur’s “Liberation,” the onset of the Cold War, the founding of Communist China, the Korean War, the upsurge and crushing of the Huk rebellion, and the Vietnam War.



Fig. 2 Photos of Nick Joaquin. The photo on the left was taken from goodreads.com while the photo on the right was taken from the Philippine Daily Inquirer online version.



Fig. 3 The aftermath of the Liberation of Manila in 1945 part of the Pacific Theater of WWII. Next to Warsaw, Manila is the most devastated city.



Fig. 4 A portrait of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel painted by Jakob Schlesinger (1831).

For Joaquin, as his polemics against U.S. neocolonialism in the articles for example on WW2, Bataan, and Corregidor, indicate (Joaquin, *Discourses*), the single traumatic event is the destruction of Intramuros in 1945. That holocaust also spelled the confusion, anomie, and decadence of a feudal/comprador formation, evinced in “The Order of Melkizedek,” “Candido’s Apocalypse,” and *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino*, and the two novels.

So anchored is Joaquin to this sequence of episodes that one might categorize Joaquin’s art under the rubric of trauma-psychodrama. It allegorizes the vicissitudes of the “Unhappy Consciousness” described by Hegel. But if one seeks a pedagogical or ethico-political motivation behind this obsession, it might be heuristic to sketch here a metacommentary on the singular way that Joaquin selects events, personages, and locales, in order to resolve recurrent aporias and conflicts that block normal everyday life. What we need is a symptomatic deciphering of this fixation, the repetition-compulsion if you will, in order to ascertain Joaquin’s position in the unfinished struggle for our country’s genuine independence and popular sovereignty.

It is easy to demonstrate how Joaquin exorcises the haunting specter of WW2 catastrophe by imposing a break, an ineluctable cut between past and present. This is clear in “The Mass of St. Sylvestre.” The GI soldier’s colloquial flat idiom to convey his witnessing is both truthful and parodic. Anglo-Saxon technology/photography cannot capture the aura of a ritual, the sacramentalizing cathexis of joining past and future through collective repetition. What supersedes the soldier’s momentary vision is the recording of the sight of ruins, immense blocks of ruins—the heritage left by MacArthur’s “Liberation.” The present sensibility can never fully capture the substance of Manila’s history, the implied narrator hints, so therefore let us just resign ourselves to that stark separation, that gap or rupture in time which seems impossible to cover up.

In stories like “Three Generations,” “May Day Eve,” and “Guardia de Honor” where the problem of continuity is also center-staged, the moment of epiphany connecting generations is Joaquin’s easy fix. The father in “Three Generations” compulsively repeats the past which the son refuses to accept. In “May Day Eve,” the weeping Badoy struggles to discover coherence in the discordances of the past afforded by the urban rituals of Intramuros. Meanwhile, in “Guardia de Honor,” the contingency of everyday life furnishes the space for humans to exercise free-will by following sensuous inclination and intuition (chiefly Natalia Ferrero’s) which bridge the gulf between parental authority and the children’s right to decide their destinies. In all three stories, we find a formula to reconfigure the repetition-compulsion as a wound healed by the same passage of time that allows the subject—here designating the spiritually tormented protagonists of three decades of US occupation—to accept historical necessity without the benefit of Christian transcendence. Surrender to providential fatality resolves the antinomies of life. In *A Portrait*, the role of Bitoy Camacho, the narrator-participant, easily fulfills the role of mediator, tying past and present, suturing the wounds of self-denials, hypocrisies, compromises, and fatalism distributed among family members, relatives, and strangers.

CONFOUNDED TEMPORALITY

Modernity via imperial mediation ushered in fierce individualist competition among clans, family dynasties, and ethnic assemblages. I think it is imperative to remind ourselves that our colonization aborted our entrance to modernity defined by the instrumental rationality of bourgeois society. U.S. rule strategically preserved the feudal landlord system supervised by a comprador-bureaucratic apparatus managed by American administrators. Except for a semblance of urbanization (railroad, highways), selective meritocracy and a paternalistic electoral system, the old order of exploitation of workers and peasantry, together with the repression of the indigenous/ethnic folk (Moros, Igorots, Lumads), prevailed. Proofs of this are the numerous peasant revolts, uprising of millenary sects, and the Sakdal/Huk rebellion of the thirties, forties, and fifties. The center failed to hold, everything seemed to have fallen apart. The surrender of Bataan and Corregidor was a prelude to the rapacious epoch of the next thirty years after MacArthur's bombing of Manila which coincided with Joaquin's most productive period as fictionist, poet, playwright, and journalist.

In brief, we failed to make the transition, suspended in the dying world of Don Lorenzo Marasigan and a new world (ambiguously represented by Candido and the Monson brothers) struggling to be born. In between these poles, we witness morbid, bizarre symptoms of the passage of lives. We see how the reality of uneven/combined development preserved an ethos of authoritarian conduct, patriarchal despotism, and superstitious beliefs anchored to a backward economy that clashed with imperial financial interventions which undermined its drive for efficient industrialization. How to reconcile the polar opposites of communal solidarity and individualist-familial selfishness is one way of formulating the problem.

Whatever our stance on the Hispanic heritage—no one denies such a legacy, especially given the globalized transnationalist network of historicist scholarship today—Joaquin's framework of Spanish "physiognomy" is unnecessarily constricting. Its insistence only fosters authoritarian violence and irrationality. There is no returning back to a golden age of theocratic diplomacy and honor-centered decorum. Joaquin's praise of "custom and

ceremony” and its twin children, beauty and innocence, seems an ironic resignation to the implacable onslaught of social Darwinism in the twenties and thirties, a period of repression dominated by the predatory business compromises of family dynasties during the postwar regimes of Roxas, Quirino, Magsaysay, Garcia, Macapagal, Marcos, Aquino, up to the present conjuncture.

COUNTERFEITING THE TALE-TELLER

In the rural/pastoral world of the three centuries before the outbreak of the Katipunan rebellion, the oral narrative provided not only entertainment but knowledge. From Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* to Edgar Allan Poe’s *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, the tale served to distill folk-wisdom in the guise of fantastic occurrences (as in folklore dealing with supernatural characters), or the prowess of heroic pioneers (Paul Bunyan). In the Philippines, aside from the *pasyon* and saints’ lives, the medieval romances of chivalric protagonists elaborated in *Ibong Adarna* or *Bernardo Carpio* postponed death by the Scheherazadesque trick of endless multiplication of episodes. Medieval vision literature as well as the *exempla* in the *Gesta Romanorum*, or the prodigious inventions in Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, or in Voltaire’s *Candide*, offer models for adaptation. The duration of storytelling afforded a home for raconteur and listeners, as well as practical advice that can be extrapolated from the ending of the adventures.

This is the tradition of the short-story form followed by Joaquin. It is basically the orally-disseminated tale that counters his own prejudice against it in favor of the visually-oriented narrative (Joaquin *Discourses* 67-72). Ironically, Joaquin’s gothic retelling of legends invokes the power of the aural or auditory imagination so carefully documented by Walter Ong. But, as T.S. Eliot once said, tradition cannot be inherited. Joaquin labored hard to contrive versions of the tall tale, or traveler’s yarn, in “The Legend of the Dying Wanton” and “Doña Jeronima.” They are aesthetic stories fabricated out of stylistic devices and motifs taken from gothic romances which utilized the “gradual heightening of psychological tension of the sensation story and

the concealment of meaning associated with the detective story, along with ‘fine writing,’ to make an overt bid for high prestige” (Ferguson 189).

The crisis confronted in them inheres in the sharp division between the sacred and profane, the worldly and the spiritual. Incorporating vice and piety, Currito Lopez’s soul is saved by the intervention of the Virgin. However, this event cannot be made intelligible to a secular crowd without the mediation of Doña Ana de Vera. The contradictions between the debased world of sixteenth-century Spain/Manila and its exaltation of saintly virtues are resolved by the domestic routine of a devout Doña Ana. There is no hint of suspicion that the miraculous and the ordinary can co-exist in the person of Doña Ana, the exemplary mother of an official in the early years of Spanish pacification of the islands.

Unless amnesia has overtaken the colonial state in 1613, the memory of the 1574 Lakandola-Soliman revolt as well as the 1587 Magat Salamat and Agustin de Legaspi conspiracy in the Manila area has probably not been wiped out. In 1589 and 1695, several uprisings in Ilocos and Cagayan against *reduccion* and tributes might have disturbed conscientious administrators of the provinces. And before the decade passed, the Bankaw uprising (1621) was followed by the Tamblot rebellion (1622) which exploded in Bohol with thousands of natives rallying to the native shaman, attacking churches and defying the fifty Spaniards and one thousand native troops recruited from Pampanga and Cebu (Constantino 85; Veneracion 57; Zafra 72). No doubt Currito and Doña Ana seemed oblivious of rebellions happening around them, turning the rest of 17th-century Philippines into a cauldron of indigenous fury against Church and State.

With the flourishing of the galleon trade and its eventual demise, the schism between the worldly and the spiritual intensified. The reliance on tribute, *polo y servicios*, ravaging of the natural resources (gold and silver), and exploitation of native labor can no longer be maintained in the face of British naval superiority in the 17th century. The capture of Manila by the British in 1752 kindled numerous uprisings against Spanish tyranny throughout the islands. One can no longer expect the Catholic Church and its hegemony to continue without serious erosion and eventual collapse. Joaquin wrestled

with this threat in “Doña Jeronima”: she becomes the symbolic return of the repressed, only to be tamed, recuperated, ultimately subdued. But the dialectical process of subsumption of the wild or dangerous appears spurious or fraudulent: a myth-making compromise yokes the penitent Archbishop/lover with the wasted Jeronima. She becomes the local deity of the place, the new *diwata* celebrated by varying generations. But both lovers transcend their original historical matrix and exert mystifying reverberations, thus forfeiting the possibility of realizing the identity-in-difference born of self-consciousness and the labor of negative determination.

SHADOWING THE ADVENT OF REDEMPTION

It is relevant to ask at this juncture: Is the narrative scheme of unifying opposites a mystification? Native Catholicism is a syncretic product of the blending of medieval doctrines and folk mythology. This approximates the lesson of “Doña Jeronima.” However, the process of reconciliation elides a final closure because the Archbishop’s ring cannot be recovered from the river, emblem of the flux of nature and worldly exigencies. The Jesuit scholar Quentin Lauer describes the route of this “Unhappy Consciousness” as the practice of late-medieval pietism: while enjoying the image of the “immutable” as a gift from the “almighty power,” this persona persists in its division and evolves into the postures of devotion and thankfulness (122-24). Despite the sacrifices, the universal and singular cannot be reconciled by the mediator, Doña Jeronima.

We confront Joaquin’s typical narrative paradigm. We are suspended in the sphere of what Hegel calls “the Unhappy Consciousness,” the transitional passage of Spirit (*Geist*, Hegel’s term, translates into the Aristotelian *enargia* or cosmic life-force) from Stoicism, a thoroughgoing negation of the world sunk in fear and servitude, to Skepticism which dissolves all rules, perceptions, certainties. But this freedom of the Skeptic “reinstates the dogmatism that it both requires and negates” (Findlay *Hegel: A Re-Examination* 100) In short, it embodies a truly paradoxical situation suffused with inner contradictions which were one-sidedly resolved by the proud self-righteous Stoic

and by the ironic dialectic of the slave's mastery over the lord in an earlier stage of the process.

Hegel's notion of the "Unhappy Consciousness" (which follows the route of the Stoic and Skeptic) alludes to the dual experience of medieval Christendom, a tension between the Changeable and Unchangeable (the immutable). It epitomizes the negativity of human existence. Hegel explains that this contradictory, inwardly disrupted consciousness typical of Judaism and medieval Christianity "is the gazing of one self-consciousness into another, and itself is both, and the unity of both is also its essential nature. But it is not yet explicitly aware that this is its essential nature, or that it is the unity of both" (126). We follow the pious man's struggle "to synthesize his double consciousness, in which each of the opposed terms finds itself again and again in the other, but in a merely implicit union with its other, which again and again dissolves and sharpens the agony of severance" (Mure 79). As Findlay paraphrases it, "Each approach to the Godhead must, therefore, be succeeded by the painful reaffirmation of its own nothingness, each positive achievement or enjoyment by an act of humble thanksgiving for Divine Grace" (98).

Hegel's description of the "Unhappy Consciousness" as a stage in the "perpetual negation of every particular modality of being" (Hyppolite 24) can be applied to the experience of the Archbishop in "Doña Jeronima." It can illuminate aspects of the Dying Wanton's life and the predicament of the major protagonists in "Candido's Apocalypse," "The Order of Melkizedek," and *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*. Note the syncopated turns of consciousness and reciprocal effects of each on the other:

In thought I raise myself to the absolute, transcending all that is finite. I am therefore an infinite consciousness, and at the same time I am a finite consciousness of myself in my whole empirical make-up. The two terms approach each other and fly from each other. I am the feeling, the intuition, the imagining of this unity, of this conflict; and I am the connection of the conflicting terms. I am this combat. I am not one of the combatants engaged but both of them and the combat itself. I am the fire and the water which make contact. I am the contact and the unity of the utterly self-repelling (qtd.in Mure 49-50).

The circumscribed mercantilist milieu of the galleon trade traverses the entire seventeenth-century punctuated by the Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and St. John's "dark night of the soul." Mexican silver was then exchanged for Chinese goods via the port of Manila on the way to Acapulco and eventually to Spain. The tragicomedy of the Archbishop's rescue from shipwreck, and withdrawal from the city to inhabit the riverside hermitage to confront his past, renders by analogy one way by which the colony survived in the face of rapid socioeconomic changes—for one, the subordination of Spain to British commerce (Constantino 110). One can perceive the shiftings, permutations, and reiterations of Subjective Spirit registering those historical transformations in this passage where Joaquin animates the trajectory of the "Unhappy Consciousness" caught between the encapsulated city and the navigable river, the *aporia* of the changeless and the mutable, where the meaning of the quest is at stake:

Riding forth from the city at twilight, the Archbishop shivered with senseless excitement and wondered if revelation was at hand. On the desert isle and the retreat on the riverbank, he had pressed with might and main for an answer . . . Children accepted the earth with frank pleasure; and lost innocence only in the grief of knowing themselves exiles from elsewhere. Was the quest, then, a relearning of this frank pleasure—and of reverence for the despised flesh, astonishment for the scorned world? Was it this quest which, extending beyond this life, made flesh and its fevers, even if they be forever and ever, not hell but at worse a purgatory, a school for lovers? (Joaquin *The Woman* 163)

While there is combat between the priestly lover and the pagan woman, there is no internalization of the Other, no mutual recognition. What reconciles them is their shared belief, transforming both into legendary patron-spirits of the place. The negative totality of each does not evolve into self-conscious "negation of the negation." Instead, a fetishized halo shrouds both, elevating them into a timeless, supernatural realm. Similar but different from "The Summer Solstice," where the Dionysian revelry of a phalanx of women mediates Doña Lupeng's sensuous self into a demand for recognition which does not succeed, here the vision of the eternal river—the

cycle of natural existence, the mirage of immediacy—abruptly terminates the singular protagonist’s quest.

ENGENDERING LABOR OF THE NEGATIVE

We have tried to sketch here a cognitive mapping of the terrain encompassed by Joaquin’s effort to thwart the onslaught of alienated labor. Its symptoms in a still ascendant but eroded patriarchal institution and its ideological legitimacy survives in the family as a domain that “contradicts the universal principle of exchange” (Adorno 145). The traditional family sustains the servitude of women, wives and mothers, all confined to domestic work and the care of children. Masculine domination of the public sphere is guaranteed by the relegation of women to the sexual/animal domain (as in “The Summer Solstice”), or treated as sacrificial offerings (Guia, Concha). It would need the intervention of Connie Escobar and the two sisters, Paula and Candida, to untangle the misery and greed of the petty bourgeois family, the tyranny of the fathers and their surrogates, in order to actualize the concept of the Subject construed as an identity-in-difference.

In the archive of critical commentary on this story (extended into a novel), the themes of doubleness, hybridity, and ambivalent identity predominate. For example, Bienvenido Lumbera is impressed by Joaquin’s “dramatic rendering of an obsessive problem of the Westernized Filipino intellectual caught between the pressures of his people’s history and of two colonial cultures—that of national identity” (Lumbera and Lumbera 244). More recurrent is the theme of the “divided Filipino psyche” insisted on by the Singaporean critic Shirley Lim. She locates the problem of Filipino identity not in its dualism but in “the denial of that fracture” (73). Most commentaries subscribe to the consensus that the two-navelled woman emblemizes the syndrome of the disrupted or differentiated psyche of Filipinos. The split “Unhappy Consciousness” serves as the subsuming archetype. This is surely a reductive formulation that collapses the complex manifold antagonisms into a formulaic proposition (for a deviant take, see San Juan, *Toward a People’s Literature; Subversions*).

Opposed to this individualistic, empiricist reading, I propose focusing our analytic skills on the institution of the family and its embeddedness in a society of exchange and its reifying ramifications. This includes the mediation of labor (specifically, reproductive) and the metabolism between society and nature (Lukacs 109-2). The trope of duality is only an offshoot of the logic of determination construed as negation, then as negation of the negation, a contour registered in the vacillations of the “Unhappy Consciousness.” But what is crucial is to ascertain the historically variable content of this trope and other ambiguous figures which define the meaning of substantive ethical transactions enacted in the intertextual fabric of fiction.

In Joaquin’s *ilustrado* family, we discern not the unifying force of love, but “the barbarism of private property against family life” (Marx *Critique* 99). The labor of the negative in history escapes the narrative armature of these tales. They subsist in the sphere of natural needs, egocentric appetites, with brute force imposed on workers and peasants. Would *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* and *A Portrait* be able to clearly demonstrate a contrary process of resolving the contradictions of a disintegrated society and its ethos of inward spirituality and hypocritical sociability? We have noticed that in spite of forced denouements, all the knots are not tied by the convergence of events and the compromise negotiated by the characters. The texts reveal their fissured, twisted fabric, “disparate and diffuse from being the outcome of the conflicting contradictory effect of superimposing real processes which cannot be abolished in it except in an imaginary way” (Balibar and Macherey 284).

One indication of this ideological subterfuge may be observed in the situation of Paco Texeira. Haunted by the totemic mother (represented here by Concha Vidal), the story’s viewpoint maneuvers from the pole of narcissism to object-eroticism by shifting the libidinal object to Connie Escobar. His journey and sojourn in Manila is an attempt to heal the wounds/disruption of his own family and thus achieve self-integration. But even after the combat with Connie, Paco emerges victorious, only to be hounded by the Furies in the shape of the Philippine landscape that his father told him about. He thought he had escaped Connie/Concha:

But looking up and seeing the mountains, his heart stopped, his eyes started out of his head, his throat screamed soundlessly. He had not escaped, he had not fled at all—for there she still was, stretched out under the sky, the sly look in her eyes and the bloody smile on her lips, and her breasts and shoulders naked. (Joaquin *The Woman* 103)

On this function of equating mother/homeland, Geza Roheim remarks:

Neurosis separates the individual from his fellows and connects him with his own infantile images. Culture (sublimation) leads the libido into ego-syntonic channels by the creation of substitute objects. The most important of these substitutes is a human being, the wife who replaces the mother. (qtd. in La Barre 167)

Fathers and mothers (the past as present) need to find reconciliation in their offspring (the future as present). And so it is Paco Texeira, the hybrid child, outsider/insider to the Hong Kong exiles, who fulfills what the Monson family failed to do: return to the father's homeland, affirming his patriarchal origin. Paco's memory reinstates the position of his vagrant father, bringing him to life, acknowledging him as a source of vital wholeness:

He had clutched at the railing as he gazed at the mountains in astonished delight, thinking of himself as a boy, seated on the bed, staring at his father's photograph, and trying to stir up some feeling over his father's death The astonishment had renewed itself all the time he was in Manila, every time he looked up and suddenly saw the sleeping woman outlined against the sky—and it changed the indifference with which he had come into his father's country into a stirring of clan-emotion—a glow, almost, of homecoming. (Joaquin *The Woman* 89)

But the homeland offered only the camaraderie of the band of musicians, semantically charged with the Oedipal threat of incest and the killing of the totemic father.

FROM FAMILY TO POLIS: THE ANTIGONE EFFECT

From Hegel's perspective, the family serves as the natural basis of political life, making humans ethical beings. It is the "obscure right of the natural

element within spiritual relationship.” It stands for individual versus communal right. Hegel perceives that in Greek society, “the old Gods are assigned the right of family situations in so far as these rest on nature and therefore are opposed to the public law and right of the community” (qtd. in Rose 133).

In Sophocles’ tragedy *Antigone*, the conflict is between family right, the right to bury the dead, and communal right, the law of society. Both ethical powers clash. Antigone is compelled not by her character, but by pathos, “an inherently justified power over the heart, an essential content of rationality and freedom of the will” (Rosen 133). Collision of two equally necessary and substantial rights results in tragedy—those of Connie/Concha and of Candida/Paula—modulated into comic resolution with the reinstatement of the extended neofeudal family. The reason for this outcome is that in modern capitalism, only freedom in thought (Kant’s Categorical Imperative), not actual freedom, exists; while in truth, the power of commodity-fetishism, reification, imposes the fatal necessity that constitutes the normal routine of everyday life.



Fig. 5 Antigone and the body of Polynices. Image taken from the Project Gutenberg.

Meanwhile, Joaquin shifts the stage of the conflict from mother/daughter to father/sons. It is the cultural milieu of the Monson family that becomes the mode of sublimating anxieties, a network of defense mechanisms consisting of Pepe Monson, Father Tony, Rita Lopez, and the domestic hearth of Mary Texeira, the wife. It is the wife who substitutes for the mother, stabilizing the gap between narcissistic fixation and object-eroticism. The wife functions as the matrix of the family which in turn serves multiple functions (economic provision, exchange of sexual services, socialization). But more important than all the tasks performed by the family, Eric Wolf reminds us, “it remains also, even where ties of kinship are highly diffuse, the bearer of virtue, and of its public reflection, reputation. Because the family involves the ‘whole’ man, public evaluations of a man are ultimately led back to considerations of his family” (8). For Joaquin, national identity/destiny depends on the healing of dissensions in the family as in the “Unhappy Consciousness.”

THE MATRIX PARADIGM

Women protagonists therefore uphold the familial niche containing the emblem of virtue in Joaquin’s fantasized *polis*. But this presumes the recognition of the unity-in-difference of women in the family. In Connie Escobar’s situation, Joaquin allegorized the fantasy of division and the spirit’s diremption. This is possible because she is not afflicted with the schizoid temperament of the “Unhappy Consciousness.” It is Paco Texeira, the musician, half-Filipino half-Portuguese, who undergoes the shifts, displacements, and confrontations of the Negative Totality that is Manila/Philippines after Liberation. Fleeing the clutches of the mother Concha Vidal, he pursues the daughter Connie. After offering a sacrificial doll to a Chinese god in Manila’s Chinatown—the flagrant Others demonized by the Spaniards by consigning them to the Parian ghetto outside Intramuros—Connie wrestles with Paco, a struggle that emblemizes the *agon* of master-slave relations long superseded by the ordeal of the “Unhappy Consciousness.” Illusion and the pleasure-principle confront the reality-principle immanent in Paco’s identification as member of the band. In any case, his temporary return to his family reaffirms the husband-wife relation as, in Hegel’s terms, the one

“in which one consciousness immediately recognizes itself in another, and in which there is knowledge of this mutual recognition” (Hegel, *Phenomenology* 273). Unfortunately, this illusory denouement only serves to obfuscate the continuing neocolonial subjugation of the majority.

The two-navelled woman may be said to represent in part a return of mother-right in the guise of Persephone replacing Demeter, or the Virgin’s immaculate privilege overshadowing the son/father link. Joaquin’s fable, in its diegetic aspect, returns to the predicament of the patriarch Monson disenchanted by the reign of anarchic individualism evinced by the aggressive Escobar and his mirror-image Paco. The older Monson is oblivious of positive changes in neocolonial society, still believing that he cannot utter “*Nunc dimmitis servum tuum, Domine*” (according to his children) because he still believes he is needed by his compatriots. This bubble of fixation is threatened and eventually destroyed by the intrusion of Concha Vidal and the daughter Connie. It is as if the Divine Law controlling natural existence represented the reality of neocolonial Philippines and its violent repression of peasants and workers in the Huk rebellion and the Cold War fascist curtailment of civil rights and other democratic liberties. The intrusion of the wicked characters seems required for the status-quo Identity-in-itself to be exposed as concealing or repressing its negativity.

We can surmise that the two-navelled Connie and the flamboyant Concha Vidal are the twin faces of a society from which the Hong Kong exiles have kept a precarious distance. Their refuge is menaced by a world of “dust and crabs” Innocence has devolved into bitter disenchantment, not wisdom. This quasi-Gothic romance turned mystery thriller also unfolds the education of the Monson children and friends, as well as their initiation into the sphere of antagonisms and incongruities, violating traditional conventions and negating pious decorum:

The mirror’s cracked world was safe no longer; was perilous with broken glass, teeming with ghosts; was now the world where Paco waited for the strangle-hold and dear good Mary told lies and the cautious Rita was dazzled by dragons and Tony hid in a monastery and fathers took drugs and

mothers had lost their dictionaries and young women had two navels
(Joaquin, *The Woman* 111)

This concludes the short story, which was expanded later into a novel at the end of which Connie and Paco together set out on a new journey, presumably suggesting the dynamics of “free will” and a future unchained from contingency and undecidability. Are the old (past) and new (future) sensibilities/mentalities fusing together in a prophesied synthesis? We await the messianic event, the sublime impulse refusing conceptualization: for Joaquin, the return of the globalizing missionaries, the armed evangelists. It is the birth of another mirage: the Kantian noumenal world of abstract universality without content, a floating signifier vulnerable to forces that can limit and eviscerate it. The enigma in Doña Jeronima returns like the proverbial vampire hunting for fresh victims.

ASSAYING COMMODITY FETISHISM

In Joaquin’s expanded novel, the tension between private and public worlds is dissolved with the compromises of both Connie and the patriarch Monson. Both *The Woman* and *A Portrait* are Joaquin’s attempts to heal the rupture between the Spanish decrepit heritage and the barbarism of Anglo-Saxon utilitarian norms. This rupture, however, was constituted by heterogenous elements: the betrayal of the revolution by the *ilustrado* intelligentsia, the suppression of peasant and workers’ insurrections by the U.S.-patronized oligarchy, and the destruction of Manila and the whole country for the sake of maintaining U.S. imperial hegemony. In *The Woman*, the thematized problem is how to rescue the patriarchal regime from disruption by the natural powers (embodied by the mother-daughter’s wild pursuit of Paco, the wandering half-breed occupying both worlds) unleashed by the savagery of survivors and returning masters. In *A Portrait*, the crisis is shifted to the eve of World War II, just as Manila is preparing to become “the Open City” to the Japanese invaders, an eventuality muted by the La Naval procession that punctuates the concluding scene. And this time, the burden of discharging the blockage of sentiment, hopes, and aspirations—a profound trauma unre-

lieved by mourning and melancholia—is placed on two sisters, Candida and Paula.

Let us return to the perilous zone of communal ethics. Having deployed the Hegelian notion of the “Unhappy Consciousness” to characterize the situation of typical protagonists such as the Archbishop in “Doña Jeronima,” the father in “Three Generations,” Sid Estiva in “The Order,” and the adolescent in “Candido’s Apocalypse,” it might be useful again to invoke Hegel on the role of the beleaguered family, in particular the sisters, in diagnosing the ethical problem. Here, of course, it is the artist Don Lorenzo, afflicted with a spiritual lethargy similar to the elder Monson, whose painting, read as a metaphor of his social/moral predicament, has become an albatross on the lives of the sisters. But why assign the therapeutic agency to the sisters?

The traditional family is in crisis here. But the free individualities of the children prevail—they have no desire for one another. Hegel contends that “the feminine in the form of the sister has the highest intuitive awareness of what is ethical.” She does not attain to consciousness of it or to the objective existence of it because “the law of the Family is an implicit inner essence, which is not exposed to the daylight of consciousness, but remains an inner feeling and the divine element that is exempt from an existence in the real world.” The ethical life of the sister is distinctive because, Hegel asserts, “in her vocation as an individual and in her pleasure, her interest is centered on the universal and remains alien to the particularity of desire.” In the sisters Paula and Candida, we behold the affirmation of the individual’s right to recognize and be recognized, not ruined by desire. They fulfill the governance of the household and “the guardian of the divine law” from which the community derives its power and authentication” (*Phenomenology* 276).

It is not impertinent to ask here: are Candida and Paula finally liberated from the spell of their father’s painting (signifier of the old dispensation) and the obligations accrued by his gift? This insight into the vocation of the woman as mediating the natural/divine sphere and empirical legality occurs within the framework of the family. Within the communalist perspective sketched by Hegel, the family holds a universality based on intuition, separate from the all-embracing concept of the deontological law of obligation.

Each family member sees herself in the others and acknowledges the difference; the particular-in-itself becomes the universal for-itself. But being a form of natural cohesion—notice how need and material desires command the behavior of the elder siblings and Tony Javier—it cannot serve as the model of a coherent sociopolitical system. That is why the play dramatizes the disintegration of that old order anchored to needs, appetites, and various libidinal investments constituting the vicissitudes of the “Unhappy Consciousness.”

REMINISCENCE AS TRAGICOMIC CODA

We come finally to the apocalypse of the hispanicized Filipino intellectual. Assuming that *A Portrait* is an attempt to depict the Filipino as an artist endowed with a sensibility attuned to the sensuous, libidinally-charged environment, why is Don Lorenzo’s masterpiece such a burden to the sisters and a point of bitter conflict in the family? And does the drama really convey the emancipation of the sisters and Don Lorenzo from bondage to a nostalgically-invoked utopia?

As part of this metacommentary, let us consider the opinion of Leonard Casper, reputed to be a knowledgeable expert on Filipino writing. Casper extols the proselytizing message that we need to ponder on:

For the public, the play is an elegy for lost virtues—childhood innocence; it is a reminder of the First Fall; its appeal therefore is to every man . . . Victory for the spirit here (one cannot quite say the soul) is so nearly complete that, finally, there is no sense of loss. The past is carried into the future on the shoulders of the present, as in Marasigan’s painting of Aeneas bearing from Troy on his shoulders an Anchises whose face is his own. (141)

The pyrrhic victory lauded here rejects the orthodox notion of the “fortunate fall.” If the past is simply transported to the present without any change, given the incestuous doubling of the artist’s face in both father and child, then we are confronted with the triumph of necessity, contingency, and the force of a fatalism antithetical to the “innocence and beauty” born from custom and ceremony. Instead of a tragic collision of two morally valid positions, as in

Sophocles' *Antigone* (Wimsatt and Brooks), we have a comic ending devoid of catharsis. In the final reckoning, the sisters demonstrate their fidelity/kinship with the father's sense of honor indivisible with Catholic dogma (signified by his heading the La Naval procession), absorbing the father's artifice and testimony into the vortex of their endangered lives.

We can ask whether the concept of *Geist*, Hegel's term for "social totality" (Adorno *Negative* 314), can help us comprehend national identity as a historical process. We can posit Joaquin's totality here as the *ilustrado esprit de corps*, Spain's legacy of temper, form, physiognomy (*La Naval*). The question is whether or not the force of private property has proved victorious in Joaquin's allegory of the Filipino creative spirit. If spirit is equivalent to the autonomous person, the free-thinking individual of modern industrialized society, Gillian Rose reminds us that persons were first defined in Roman law as "bearers of legal property rights...The possessor [of property] is recognized in law as a person, not an autonomous self-conscious individual. 'Personality' is an abstraction of the law, and the claim to possess is the basis of the right to be recognized by law" (66-67). From this proceeds the institutions of exchange and contract based on the division of labor and the control of surplus. "Exchange and contract depend on the recognition of formal equalities which presuppose lack of identity or inequality" (Rose 67). In the Philippines during U.S. colonial rule, the institutions of exchange and contract prevailed over the old traditional social customs premised on honor, gift-giving, noblesse oblige, and near incestuous arrangements. Meanwhile, we continue to muddle through this legacy of alienation and pervasive reification of everyday life (Jameson *Hegel*).

BETTER TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE

The question faced by the sisters revolves around the disposition of the father's painting. Do they have the right? Since it was the father's gift to them, does that act entail obligations that prevent its sale or transfer to another? At one point, Senator Perico and his contemporaries suggested that the painting should be donated to the government since, somehow, it is a national treasure that belongs to all the citizens. However, the need



Fig. 6 *The Last La Naval de Manila in Intramuros 1941* is a watercolor painting by Rafael del Casal in 1991. The last scene of *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* is depicted in the upper right corner of the painting. Published in Flickr, 2007.

of the sisters to survive physically forces them to consider its sale, which they hesitate to do, since they still operate in the realm of intuition, sentiments, and blood-ties. They struggle between the realm of intuition/feeling and the realm of conceptual thought and legality, between their respect for tradition and the commonsensical advice of their siblings and friends. Paula's resistance to Tony Javier, the failed attempts of Candida to secure a paying job, and the refusal of Manolo and Pepang to subsidize the household, all conspire to shape the final decision to destroy the painting as an act of the sisters to free themselves from necessity, from the anarchistic war of persons competing for profit, possessions, domination over others defined as non-persons. Instead of the gift (the art-work, the father's honor, the "conscience" of the clan) becoming a commodity, it becomes a sacrifice, a sacramental offering to propitiate the gods of the household and the clan.

At the end, Paula and Candida affirm that they “stand” with their father, upholding all the values the Marasigan house incarnate. And their beatific vision of the father heading the Virgin’s procession seems to confirm their disjunction from the debasing power of a contract, with the devaluing exchange of property thwarted by the demands of sheer physical survival.

What seems hidden by the aura of Don Lorenzo’s painting is the reality of what’s going on around that decaying zone. The atmosphere of defeat and desperate panic to escape from a devastated city keeps us distracted from the fierce antagonisms of individuals surrounding the family. In the colonial order administered by bourgeois bureaucrats, every individual has the right to own property. But this presupposes people without property, considered as “things,” and therefore subordinated or enslaved. It is the family governed by intuition or feeling that restores genuine totality of multiple connections, an identity of needs, sexual difference, and relations of parents to children outside of formal contractual relations of ownership. Ownership of the art-work becomes a crux for dispute, hence the sisters refuse ownership and destroy the problematic art-work, even to the point of disavowing its status as the father’s gift.

One thing seems established: despite the varying interpretations of the meaning and significance of the painting, the drama’s focus has always been on the artist/creator, not the circumstances or context of its genesis. Thus, even with its disappearance, we never grasp the principle of unity (e.g., property relations) binding the characters squabbling over the sacralized object. The universal spirit of the community cannot spring from particularistic appetites and animal needs (Hegel *Phenomenology* 267-787). We may infer their distinctive motives and interests, but we never see the process of recognition in which each person internalizes the other as a possible element or stage of her development. A glimmer of self-consciousness only arrives with Bitoy Camacho’s retrospective summation, a choric voice that substitutes for the missing universality of a rational civic spirit (here fulfilled by the ritual of La Naval Procession) that synthesizes the old and new, lifting them onto a higher level of historical evolution. Consciousness of the protagonists do not return to themselves to become self-reflexive. Except for the self-distanced,

encompassing view of Bitoy Camacho, the identity-in-difference sought never materializes even in the superimposed procession of the Virgin and the exaltation of the charismatic *pater familia*, Don Lorenzo.

We behold finally Bitoy Camacho’s rhetorical praise of the two sisters and his claim that though the father, the sisters, and the house were destroyed by the global war, “they were never conquered. They were still fighting—right to the very end—fighting against the jungle.” Joaquin concludes with a tragic-comic flourish in Bitoy’s vow to remember and preserve the memory of the Marasigan household and the “city of our affections,” amid the encroachment of the jungle and the falling of bombs. But his promise to continue and preserve what, is not clearly enunciated. What exactly will he celebrate when he sings about the fall of the house of the Marasigans? What standard



Fig. 7 The image of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary, La Naval de Manila. This photo is reprinted with permission of Nathan de Guzman.

or norms immanent in his vocation can legitimize his appeal to be listened to and be taken seriously by present and future generations?

INTERROGATION AND INQUEST

And so, in the ultimate reckoning, the civilizing Spirit (*Geist*) that Joaquin celebrates (personified by the *ilustrado* families of Intramuros) remains the feudal order. It is one leavened with Anglo-Saxon elaborations and represented by the journalists, the musicians, and unruly petty bourgeois intruders. Gifts instead of commodities confer prestige, status, honor. In this context, I endorse Lucien Goldmann's view that the novel form—here applicable to Joaquin's entire body of work—transposes into literary form the everyday life of people in market society. Consequently, the author represents the collective consciousness of a segment of the society he addresses, with which he identifies, and whose destiny he is trying to articulate (1-17). In effect, Joaquin's idea of the Filipino nation acquires determinate shape as a particular enclave, a fragment of a historical totality.

In identifying this collective agency, I began this essay with the notion of experience exchanged via story-telling and then charted the evolving drama of consciousness variously rendered in Joaquin's narratives. The dramatic crisis of the "Unhappy Consciousness" rehearses the problem of articulating a bifurcated Filipino subject. Torn between the feudal regime of the clan and the necessity of survival in a bourgeois-capitalist milieu, Joaquin's split subject dissolves into the mirage of unifying myths. Or else, it becomes reconciled to the alienating order by artistic fiat. The chief contradiction between the agonized psyche of the victims of colonial violence and the artist's transcendent vision is displaced into the plight of women protagonists—doubling tropes of sisters, mother-daughter parody of incest—personified by characters such as Guia or Doña Jeronima who are compelled to resolve the social crisis by imaginary compromises.

The public consensus seems widespread that Joaquin is the artist of that illustrious group of hispanicized Filipino intellectuals, the intelligentsia of the 1896 revolution surviving into the first half of the 20th century. It is comprised of Rizal, Juan Luna, Marcelo del Pilar, Cecilio Apostol, Claro

Recto, Joaquin's father Col. Leocadio Joaquin, Jose Garcia Villa's father Dr. Simeon Villa, the Guerrero clan, and many more whose world swiftly disintegrated with the success of U.S. colonial subjugation. Col. Joaquin was "a prominent lawyer in the American era; and the businessman who turned Herran street (now Pedro Gil) into the commercial hub of Paco" (Yuson and Arcellana; Lanot). Of more significance for the artist was the death of his father when he was 13 years old; the family status declined when they transferred from Paco to another district farther from the ancestral home. The trauma of uprooting and decline of status are registered as spiritual dislocation and deracination in fiction and drama.

It was Joaquin's mission to not just elegize the urbane world of his father, but to resurrect it and universalize it. His vocation was reconstructive: faced with the chaos of post-Liberation Philippines, he sought to make intelligible the fragments of a decaying public sphere. For the heirs of the revolutionary 1896 period, he sought to organize a coherent, viable understanding of their predicament that can salvage if not reconstitute in a future stage the valued mores and sacred institutions of the past amid the profane, secular imperatives of predatory business society. In short, Joaquin's motive of attempting to reconcile polarized memories and fantasies, a project of extracting universality from particularized ordeals, is a symptom of the crisis of conscience of the *ilustrado* fraction of the middle stratum. Joaquin articulates the *Zeitgeist*, and the ethos of this embattled group whose authority has been challenged by the sheer force of repressed ambitions and natural drives, libidinal energies that were hitherto sublimated in subaltern negativity or in collective resistance.

TOWARD A PROVISIONAL VERDICT

In retrospect, one can argue that Joaquin strove to recuperate the apocalyptic syndrome of the defeated, the martyrs, and conquered survivors, envisaging the end of times. For Joaquin, "Apocalyptic—a madness of hope born of despair—was the true, the original, climate of Christianity, and in this climate, too, evidently, revolutions are bred" (*Culture* 263). Whether this endeavor succeeded or not, as Joaquin speculates in his self-interpretation,

“Apologia Pro Tribu Sua,” is the question posed at the outset, and answered here in the course of analyzing the ordeal of the symbolic figure of Hegel’s “Unhappy Consciousness.”

A virtuoso in performing imaginary reconciliations, Joaquin’s art is, however, unable to resolve the dialectic of the “Unhappy Consciousness” within a materialist historical frame, thus functioning as the allegory of an exorbitant utopian longing, with a compulsively repeated tragicomic ending. However, it is no mean feat to have toiled attempting an awesome and formidable task, a demonstration of how far we have journeyed in this odyssey of decolonization and national emancipation (for my assessment of the contemporary crisis, see San Juan, *Between Empire*).

Meanwhile, around and underlying the world of the *ilustrado* fraction (the Marasigan clan; the Monsons), the governing property-relation of inequality unfolds its logical aftermath in World War II. In the worsening crisis of neocolonial society today in the regime of Duterte’s gangster terrorism amid deteriorating U.S. hegemony worldwide, what is needed is not remembrance as such (as Bitoy Camacho implores us to do) but prophecy to appreciate the apocalyptic dynamism of Joaquin’s works. Suspicion hermeneuts abound everywhere. But what is needed is what the feminist scholar Elisabeth Fiorenza calls “a hermeneutics of actualization” in which the potencies of Spirit—of self-conscious, critical minds—can interact with objective reality and release the repressed energies of the popular imagination.

Actuality, for Hegel, is the realizing of essential potencies in existing entities catalyzed by historic conditions or worldly circumstances (Marcuse 149-54). Such a transition from potential to actual needs also the dialectical method of analysis pursued here in which the tragicomedy of the “Unhappy Consciousness” is properly judged as a stage in the revolutionary transformation of our everyday life. Of course, the labor of the negative operates mysteriously, even if we have not read Hegel, inscribing its own effects in the multilayered “narrative time” of history (Ricoeur). We are all caught in this narrative of our place, whether we reject metanarratives or not, as participants, observers, and readers all manifesting symptoms of this melan-

choly enigmatic phase of the Absolute Spirit. Authors and readers are equally collaborators/accomplices in making sense of our embattled situation. We can speculate that Joaquin, were he following this appraisal today, might address to us the urgent lesson of our critical inquiry: *De te fabula narratur*.

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