Resonances Between William Shakespeare and Nick Joaquin

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Abstract

This essay stages a comparative reading of Nick Joaquin's "May Day Eve" and "Summer Solstice" alongside William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through the analytical lens of resonance rather than influence. Departing from models of Shakespearean "echoes" that depend on direct allusion or identifiable borrowing, I conceptualize Joaquin's engagement with Shakespeare as a mode of resonance: one that enables comparison without presupposing a source-influence relationship. This framework allows for an exploration of shared thematic and rhetorical concerns across otherwise disparate texts. Through this frame, I suggest that interrogations of the problematic resolution of Shakespeare's comedy (as opposed to classical notions of "clean endings" to comedies) are reinforced when read alongside the reintroduction of dust, ritual, and the natural element into marriage in "Summer Solstice." Conversely, readings of the two stories by Joaquin as straightforward narratives of native reclamation or feminist empowerment become more ambiguous when placed in dialogue with Shakespearean natural imagery, particularly the moon and its associations with femininity and instability. In "May Day Eve," Joaquin offers a darker vision of enchantment as an irrevocable force, trapping Agueda in marriage to Badoy; this dynamic resonates with the enchanted love of Demetrius for Helena, as well as with the coercive undertones of Theseus and Hippolyta's

union. In the end, this essay demonstrates how a resonant mode of reading opens interpretive possibilities that complicate assumptions about marriage, magic, and gender. In doing so, it attends to Joaquin's engagements with Philippine folklore and history while situating these within broader, non-hierarchical encounters vis-à-vis Shakespearean studies.

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I

Scholars of Anglophone literature in the Philippines in the twenty-first century are faced with a few inescapable figures. William Shakespeare is one of them. Historically, we can locate the persistent presence of Shakespeare in the Philippines through education. The year 1904 "inaugurates the study of Shakespeare in the Philippines," beginning with *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice*, and the list will continue to expand.[2] By 1933, the Bureau of Education crafted courses so that students "enjoy Shakespeare through a realization of the human qualities of his characters and their universal appeal."[3] This belief endures: released in 2020, a module from the Department of Education for Grade 9 English takes students through a study of *Romeo and Juliet*. One writing task begins with the following passage reaffirming Shakespeare's relevance: "[He] is still relevant today for many reasons. His plays and poems teach society how to not only love but dream and hate all at the same time,"[4] before inviting

the student to rework the classic play into modern language and setting. The ringing implication across the years is Shakespeare's universality and pedagogical import; the Anglophone Shakespeare teaches, and we Filipinos are students—his plays and poetry enable us to realize humanity through his characters and words.

Beyond the strictly educational frame, Shakespeare has also evoked strong reactions from literary scholars. (In)Famously, the self-affirmed Bardolator Harold Bloom declares, "Shakespeare invented us and continues to contain us,"[5] contending that the power of Shakespeare's creative force gave way to our modern understanding of human personality, thus resulting in his continuous, indeed inescapable influence. We find a more temperate, but still appraising evaluation from Marjorie Garber, who says that Shakespeare "has scripted many of the ideas that we think of as 'naturally' our own."[6] For Bloom and Garber both, the script of the Shakespearean play has ramifications beyond the Globe and into our global world, that is to say, outside the confines of the stage and onto broader sociocultural matters.

Such matters play a crucial role in the Philippines. Judy Celine Ick, in her essay, "The Undiscovered Country: Shakespeare in Philippine Literatures," demonstrates how Shakespeare made his way to Philippine shores. Translations and retellings abound, dating even before the "formal" introduction of Shakespeare as academic study during the American occupation in the early twentieth

century.[7] At present, Shakespeare's place in secondary and tertiary education is perhaps exceeded only by the national hero, Jose Rizal (though he himself, as Ick writes, must have admired Shakespeare, as evidenced by traces of allusions in his works).[8] Most pertinently, Shakespeare enjoys preeminence in the country's Anglophone literary sphere, especially with many prominent Filipino writers in English: F. Sionil Jose, for example, considers Shakespeare one of those towering writers of the past who loom over the wary writer of the present.[9] Another writer would consider Shakespeare "the world's greatest poet,"[10] a hyperbolic but commonplace assertion in the Philippines as elsewhere.

This last quote was from Nick Joaquin, another inescapable figure of Anglophone literature in the Philippines and known for his finely-constructed fiction, plays, poetry, and essays. He briefly wrote about Shakespeare in his *Almanac for Manileños* (1979), which contains the praise quoted above. He includes the Bard in the section for April, calling him the quintessential Taurean. His praise, while superlative, is qualified by an acknowledgment of his pecuniary objectives: "Shakespeare wrote the world's finest poetry while goaded by a gross ambition: to set himself up as a Man of Property … which ambition being accomplished, he forthwith gave up the practice of poetry."[11] There is some historical basis to this. Indeed, upon his death, he was recorded as "William Shakespeare, gent.," with generous bequests to his daughters.[12] The implied,

however, claim that he quit the theatre because he had already amassed wealth is more dubious. By 1597, he was already capable of purchasing a great house in Stratford replete with servants' quarters and a courtyard, yet he continued to write until well into the 1600s.[13] No one denies Shakespeare's proclivity for business in relation to his work at the theatre, yet the two ventures may not be as directly linked together as Joaquin thought.

Joaquin further quotes and alludes to Shakespeare on several occasions in *Culture and History*,[14] a collection of essays on historical, national, and literary matters. The invocation of Shakespeare in some passages—whether his plays, their characters, themes, or lines, or even, to use Garber's term, "scripts"—allows him to expound or provide examples to the themes he is discussing. For instance, Joaquin alludes to the development of Hamlet and "the intervening events that turned him finally into *this* man of action." In the play, Hamlet is not presented merely as a prince already prepared for action; the preceding process, to understate the fact, takes up more space—more than four acts of the play. As with the nation, Joaquin argues, the historian must reckon both local and foreign "intervening events" to understand the resulting modern, yet enigmatic Philippines.[15]

As we have seen thus far, his interest in Shakespeare—both for the man and his works—is apparent.[16] This essay, then, explores the literary relationship between William Shakespeare, the "world's

greatest poet," and Nick Joaquin, National Artist of the Philippines, considered by most to be "the most distinguished Filipino writer in English."[17] The evidence above invites consideration of Joaquin vis-à-vis Shakespeare. To what extent is Shakespeare's influence discernible in the work of Joaquin? Can we find reverberations in Joaquin's fiction beyond the quotations in his essays, beyond the brief paragraph in his *Almanac*?

I argue that there are indeed Shakespearean reverberations in Joaquin's works that go beyond mere allusiveness. That is to say, I do not posit a *direct* line of influence from Shakespeare to Joaquin locable in the latter's texts (for instance, in the form of a reworked quotation or a reappropriated plot point). Rather, following Garber's argument that "[for] philosophers and artists, thinking through Shakespeare has been a mode of intellectual engagement,"[18] I read Joaquin's fiction as participating in this mode of engagement with the Bard's oeuvre. I conceptualize this engagement in terms of *resonances*. To resonate with someone or something is to prolong or modify a sound. This stands in contrast to the echo, which more directly attributes itself to an originating impulse, however faint, that it then reworks and/or amplifies. Unlike echoes, resonances need not presuppose a singular, identifiable source; to resonate also encompasses generating one's own sounds and responses.[19]

The concept of Shakespearean "echoes" has received considerable scholarly attention, evidenced by the volume *Shakespearean Echoes*, edited by Adam Hansen and Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. There, echoes are defined as phenomena that "validate and protect their original sources but also negate and unsettle [them]."[20] This concept is also useful in the realm of Philippine Shakespeare studies, wherein Ick describes local Shakespearean influence in terms of "echoes that reverberate through sections of Philippine literatures."[21] Her focus, indeed is on concrete allusions—sometimes deliberately distorted, as with Rizal's intentionally incorrect reference to a fisherman in *Macbeth*—aligns with the conceptualization forwarded by Hansen and Wetmore Jr., in that the "echoes" in her essay ultimately depend on more direct connections: translations of Shakespeare's works into local language, for instance, that present themselves as specific adaptations of the original.

By proposing *resonance* as an analytical term, this essay instead explores areas of overlap not predicated on a source-influence relationship. Joaquin's primary materials are Philippine folkloric and historical traditions,[22] rather than Shakespeare's plays. Put differently, I lean into the idea that localized engagements with Shakespeare may produce "vague [feelings] of simultaneous connection and nonconnection."[23] If echoes depend upon identifiable links within a literary work—such

as quotation or plot correspondence (criteria that the Joaquin texts under consideration here do not meet)—resonances illuminate precisely those zones of nonconnection. They do so by inviting comparison, or by arguing for comparability, across shared themes and rhetorical strategies among otherwise disparate artists and texts. Such illumination is reciprocal: it casts light, in this case, on Joaquin no less than on Shakespeare.

I do not intend to subordinate Joaquin to Shakespeare by arguing that Shakespeare's influence is evident in Joaquin. Rather, the frame of engagement through resonances opens up as well a consideration of the reverse, not just of Joaquin vis-à-vis Shakespeare, but of Shakespeare vis-à-vis Joaquin. It cannot be, as Bloom says, that Shakespeare "contains" us, for if we were indeed contained, there would be no possibility for new perspectives. I follow postcolonial Shakespearean criticism, which interrogates "the structures of cultural dependency for which Shakespeare has for so long been both signifier and instrument"[24]—structures unsettled when they are reconfigured and displaced into new locales.

This endeavor, finally, coincides with Joaquin's own thoughts in the essay "Culture and History," which lends the collection its title. He writes, "We are being shaped by the tools we shape; and culture is the way of life being impressed on a community by its technics."[25] These "tools" come from a variety of

forms: indigenous or colonial, past or recent, and it is through these that culture is disrupted sufficiently to constitute a new norm that is culture (such as the printing press, which brought humanity from an oral to a written culture). We can appropriate this idea of "tools" into the realm of literary production, and the term thus takes on a similar meaning to Garber's "scripts."

II

An exhaustive consideration of Nick Joaquin's fiction cannot be covered in this essay; here, I take up two of his most famous short stories, "The Summer Solstice" and "May Day Eve," to see what resonances can be found there with Shakespeare's works. To begin, we look again to his *Almanac for Manileños*, where Joaquin lays out the intermingling of both colonial European and native cultural forces. For instance, towards the latter end of his account for April, he writes:

> [As] on a midsummer's night, you may be lucky (or unlucky) enough to see fairies and elves and … *lamang lupa* [literally, "the insides of the earth," my translation] … Certain rites … are supposed to enable you at midnight to behold in a mirror or a basin of water the face of the person fated to be yours in love… This is the [devil's] hour and his witches are abroad … which is why in Europe there used to be a May Day Eve ceremony known as "Burning Out The [Witches.]"[26]

The import of this passage to the short story "May Day Eve," first published in 1947, is clear.[27] It is the story of Agueda, who, as soon as the clock strikes midnight and the May Day's Eve of 1847 ends, runs downstairs to look into a mirror, chant an incantation, and hopes to see the face of her future husband. The old maid, Anastasia, both informs Agueda of this superstition and warns her against it, saying she might instead see a devil. Her young charge nonetheless pushes through and comes to meet Badoy Montiya, who has returned from Europe.

The specific moment—starting at May Day Eve and transitioning after midnight into the first day of May—creates a space for rituals that, at any other time, would be futile. Here, one such ritual is the use of a reflective surface, like a mirror or a basin of water, to reveal one's future lover.[28] Further, writing about May, he begins with the title "In the Merry, Merry Month of May: Every Day's a Holiday," emphasizing the festive nature of summer months. May Day, he declares, "was a day of lovers, when the young went a-maying, danced around the maypole."[29] It is this theme that he deploys and problematizes in the story, where love and marriage do not always go hand in hand. Joaquin's narrative spans many decades but always insistently returns to the same midnight that brings May Day. Agueda and Badoy meet in front of "a big antique mirror with a gold frame carved into leaves and flowers and mysterious curlicues,"[30] which, while situated inside

the house, symbolically takes them into the realm of nature and magic.[31] In the *Almanac*, Joaquin writes of the festive practice of electing a May queen and king (Maid Marian and Robin Hood, respectively) who then "[pair] off into the woods to build themselves love-bowers under the greenwood tree."[32] But in his short story, he contrives a space that is both inside and outside, both domestic and wilderness. Indeed, May is both "fiesta time" and "green," not just from the emerald, which is the month's birthstone, but—as is evidenced when lovers retreat into the woods or even when *lamang lupa*, whose habitat is the primeval earth, emerge—a festivity celebrated with and within Nature.

Yet, the story's set-up, in the first few paragraphs, underscores the festive atmosphere of that night, where the reader is introduced to young men "simply bursting with wild spirits, merriment, arrogance, and audacity, for they were young bucks arrived from Europe."[33] That these revelers have spent time in Europe—presumably, participating in celebrations as much as they did their studies—thematically represents the intermingling of colonial forces in local practices of festivity. The indigenous is not effaced—far from it, as Badoy partakes in the mirror superstition himself. Yet, the foreign is also present, in holding balls (a European event brought over by Spanish colonization and reinforced by rich Filipinos bringing home from studying or vacationing abroad).

In his section on June, Joaquin sketches a brief history of the "great [European] midsummer festival marked by smoke, flame, torches, fireworks and bonfires,"[34] which continues the theme of summer festivity. He is referring to the Summer Solstice, which in modernity is pegged at the 21st of June, while according to Joaquin, ancient astronomers dated it at the 24th. If in Europe, the solstice is celebrated with fire, in the Philippines, it is celebrated with water, following the theme of baptism—June 24, after all, is slated in the Church calendar as the day of Saint John the Baptist. This concerns another story, first published in 1947: "Summer Solstice," about Doña Lupeng, wife to Don Paeng, discovering for herself the ecstasies of the cult of the Tadtarin, a celebration lasts three days, beginning on the feast of Saint John: "On the first night, a young girl heads the procession; on the second, a mature woman; and on the third, a very old woman who dies and comes to life again."[35] The story demonstrates the complex tension between the masculine and Catholic feast of Christ's precursor, Saint John the Baptist, and the feminine, native, and orgiastic rituals of the Tadtarin. Doña Lupeng, who initially scoffs at those who participate in the Tadtarin, eventually partakes in the celebration herself and finds a liberating power there.

Heat and sweat pervade the narrative,[36] where even the moon is said to "glow like a sun [whereupon] the pure heat burned with the immense intense fever of noon,"[37] harkening to the

European midsummer festival of witch-burning, full of "flame, torches, fireworks," in as much as it represents the all-too-real intensity of Filipino heat in the summertime. As in "May Day Eve," there is also a Filipino returned from Europe, Guido; he "[*adores*] these old fiestas of ours! They are so *romantic*!"[38] He is fascinated, not by the feat of Saint John the Baptist but by the Tadtarin, and thus piques the interest of Doña Lupeng, but her husband would not allow her to attend, as "only low people go there."[39] Nevertheless, she persists and prevails, and she revels without constraint: "she flung her hands to her hair and whirled and her hair came undone."[40] As the rituals are open only to women (or else to men who don women's clothing, as Guido had done the night before, wearing an old woman's stocking like a glove), Don Paeng is violently excluded. With her husband scratched and wounded, they return home. There, the final triumph of Doña Lupeng over Don Paeng, with her feet placed over his prone body, reaffirms what Joaquin once wrote in his *Almanac*: "Unconsciously, perhaps, we here glorify the victory of the earth goddess: the supremacy of the feminine over the masculine principle."[41]

In all this, where is Shakespeare? The preceding discussion on nature, rituals, festivals, fairies, and lovers may have already clued the attentive reader to a particular play, the play which I argue resonates with Joaquin's stories: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. How have the "shaping fantasies" in the play been apprehended,

and how may this have reverberated in Joaquin's work? In light of C. L. Barber's influential study, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, we are inclined to view *Midsummer* as structured by festivities—the tradition of marriage pageantry, as well as the May game pastime, in particular. The play draws on the "wantonness" of May games, which comes with a "realization of a power of life larger than the individual, crescent both in men and in their green surroundings."[42] Dalliance with love and lovers is excused, even promoted, as they troop into the green world of the forest. Further, these affairs are complicated by the intervention of nature and mind-altering magic, wherein "the whole night's action is presented as a release of shaping fantasy which brings clarification about the tricks of strong imagination."[43]

François Laroque notes that many figures that appear in the May game also occur in those of Midsummer's Eve, thus "a certain confusion arose"[44] between both rituals. He explains that "[the] nonsensical position results in part from the fact that the calendar has been interpreted in two different ways, one popular (it is Midsummer), the other aristocratic (it is May Day)."[45] Barber has also alluded to this confusion earlier on, writing that the specific day is not the point but rather the "Maying can be thought of as happening on a midsummer night, even on Midsummer Eve itself, so that its accidents are complicated by the delusions of a magic time."[46]

This is where I locate the entry point for apprehending Shakespearean echoes in Nick Joaquin's stories, since his "May Day Eve" and "The Summer Solstice" draw deeply from traditional rituals, as in his *Almanac for Manileños*. A significant overlap, I find, is the erotic May-game experience "in men and women and trees and flowers."[47] Desire is related, therefore, in "geographic and meteorological terms,"[48] presenting desire and nature as intertwined stylistically: tumultuous passions of human sexuality find both linguistic and narrative parallels. We can frame this discussion as finding a path into the Natural as exemplified by Titania's speech in the first scene of the second act. The clarification Barber notes in festive comedy is "a heightened awareness of the relation between man and 'nature'—the nature celebrated on holiday."[49] Awareness emerges from a closer examination of the figurative language through which desires and emotions are represented.

III

I find resonances of Shakespeare in Nick Joaquin's prose, particularly in his use of natural metaphors. One seemingly marginal yet important image is that of dust. When Puck announces a successful marriage by coming with a broom and sweeping "dust behind the door" (V.1.406–07), he signals that the union is clean and free from dirt or impurities. In this gesture, natural spaces that once enabled dalliance and desire are symbolically abandoned in

favor of the safety and domesticity of marriage. This figure is taken in reverse in "The Summer Solstice." The story opens with Doña Lupeng insisting they use the open carriage to travel to the feast of Saint John the Baptist; she prefers to be dirty and dusty rather than boiled alive in the heat of a closed carriage. Her choice anticipates the story's reintroduction of the natural realm—a space where desire runs free and social order unravels—as in, for instance, when the worshippers dance with rearing animals and amidst thickening dust, in the feast of Saint John.

The more poignant figure is that of the moon. Indeed, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a "moonlight play,"[50] and as Laroque notes, the abundance of nighttime rituals in social practice (such as the processions on Midsummer Eve) and theatrical representation (much of *Dream* takes place in the nighttime or in darkness), adhere more "to the influence of the moon that to that of the summer solstice."[51] This is evident in the play, for example, when Titania speaks of her "moonlight revels" with her train of women—a revelry in which Oberon may or may not participate (II.1.146).[52] The association between women and the moon has a long history; the idea, for instance, that women's cycles coincide with the lunar phases dates back to Aristotle.[53] In "The Summer Solstice," this is made explicit: Guido, returned from Europe, says that, "the tides of women, like the tides of the sea, are tides of the moon."[54] Further, the moon is invoked as "the Lord of women."[55]

When the spirit of the Tadtarin resides in Amada one night of the festival, her husband Entoy, who once hit and beat her, now refers to her as "the Tadtarin … she is the wife of the river … of the crocodile … of the moon."[56] It is also a "silver light" that illuminates the Tadtarin's orgiastic rites.

But to be the Lord of women does not simply mean symbolizing them; this Lord has the power to exert influence *over* them, a power that may, either or at once, liberate or constrain. When Doña Lupeng was in ecstasy on the last night of the Tadtarin, "Her eyes brimmed with moonlight."[57] Barber's observation, that *Dream* is a play "where the body and its environment interpenetrate in unaccustomed ways, so that seeming separateness and stability of identity is lost,"[58] finds resonance in Joaquin's story. Here, the moon quite literally invades Doña Lupeng's body, entering her organ of sight, so that she perceives the world through the moon's gaze. This merging of body and environment is reinforced in the story's conclusion, when Doña Lupeng stands over Don Paeng's lying body: behind her, the "huge moon glowed like a sun … and the pure heat burned with the immense intense fever of noon."[59] The moon thus rises as emblem and witness to her triumph, just as it presided over the rites of the Tadtarin, and as it did "the night [the Mechanicals play their] play," (III.1.50–51), a play of raging, though tragic, love and desire between Pyramus and Thisbe.

Finally, the figure of the moon, here, serves to reintroduce elements absent from Shakespeare's play—heat and fire. The moon, usually associated with water and tides, "the governess of floods" (II.1.106), assumes in Joaquin takes on the intensity of the sun. Throughout the story, Doña Lupeng sweats and suffers beneath the oppressive heat, even asking for the open carriage instead of the closed, risking dust and dirt for ventilation. Joaquin, well aware of the witch-burning tradition of Midsummer (as recorded in his *Almanac for Manileños*), surely had this in mind when composing his story. With Saint John initially figured as "Lord of Summer indeed; the Lord of Light and Heat" and the Tadtarin as belonging to nighttime and moonlight, the final scene presents a paradoxical fusion of sun and moon that destabilizes their symbolic boundaries. Yet the association of burning with punishment rather than empowerment ultimately unsettles any straightforward feminist readings of the text, which have hitherto been the dominant critical interpretation. E. Vallado Daroy, for instance, finds that the story's portrayal of the Tadtarin symbolizes the "destruction of the male principle,"[60] while E. San Juan, Jr., more emphatically, writes that "the Tadtarin festival aims to resuscitate the myth of matriarchy as the occluded but irrepressible antithesis of male-dominated society … [and that the] rite serves as the occasion to stage the revenge of women."[61]

Reading Shakespeare and Joaquin side-by-side reveals how such themes are worked and reworked across them. For instance, we find that Don Paeng reappropriates the language of Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

> I am your spaniel, and, Demetrius,
> The more you beat me I will fawn on you.
> Use me but as your spaniel: spurn me, strike me,
> Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave
> (Unworthy as I am) to follow you, (II.1.210–14).

So too in the story's final scene, Don Paeng declares, "That I adore you. That I adore you. That I worship you. That the air you breathe and the ground you tread is holy to me. That I am your dog, your slave."[62] The recurrent figure of the dog signals subservience; yet here, unlike in Shakespeare's play, the gendered role is inverted, from Helena to Don Paeng.

Yet in this same final scene, the persistence of heat within what should be a lunar realm suggests the continued, though symbolic, recurrence of the masculine. This tension is reinforced at the level of language. Aileen O. Salonga, utilizing a linguistic approach, observes that Joaquin's use of reporting verbs presents Doña Lupeng as hysterical and overly emotional, while Don Paeng is portrayed as calm and reasonable. While Salonga writes that, despite her findings, "contemporary feminist readings of 'The Summer Solstice' can definitely stand on their own,"[63] I argue that

such readings require requalification. Though Joaquin may write in his *Almanac for Manileños* of the victory of the earth goddess at the time of festive summer, this does not—and should not—determine our reading of his story. This is not to say that the story is decidedly *anti*-feminist; my reading aligns with Salonga's exploratory, not prescriptive, intentions. Here, I forward that the language and symbols in "The Summer Solstice," especially when read with Shakespeare's, yield relationships that resist any straightforward feminist or empowering interpretation. How is the "male principle" destroyed here, if Agueda takes the position of Saint John—towering and fiery—rather than that of the earth or fertility goddess bound to the ground, or of the moon associated with coolness and the watery tides?

Moreover, the celestial orb is not always figured as a benevolent presence. She draws women with the same inexorable force that governs the tides, casting the moon as both an emblem of vitality and a source of constraint. In "May Day Eve," this ambivalence surfaces when Agueda looks into the golden mirror and first encounters Badoy. He mocks her for admiring her reflection; when she denies her vanity, he retorts, "You were admiring the moon perhaps?"[64] Significantly, the moon is physically absent from the scene, with the characters relying only on candlelight. The moon thus appears only as a symbolic presence, an object for admiration yet simultaneously beyond reach. In *A*

Midsummer Night's Dream, Cupid fires his fiery shaft at the celestial orb, but the "wat'ry moon" (II.1.167–68) quenches it; instead, the bolt falls on a "a little western flower / … now purple with love's wound" (II.1.172–73). While the moon herself remains untouched, mortals bear the consequences; as Louis Adrian Montrose aptly writes, "ironically, the vestal's very freedom from fancy guarantees the subjection of others."[65] So too in Joaquin's tale: Badoy reaches for the moon, projects it onto the mirror where Agueda stands reflected; and she, in the end, is the one left marked "with love's wound."[66]

The narrative, though spanning decades, continually returns to the same night—the liminal realm of the moon, the eve of May Day. Night unleashes desire and transgression, but it guarantees neither equality nor reciprocity among lovers. If the moon is indeed the lord of women, this does not assure the reverse, that she can command the men. This results in an asymmetry that parallels the gendered divide between Titania and Oberon, or even Theseus (with his masculine, conquering army) and Hippolyta (queen of the all-female Amazons). Agueda, like Hippolyta, is conquered—though the latter was "wooed with [Theseus'] sword," the young Agueda was trapped by a self-fulfilling prophecy. Believing, as she did, in the power of this May Day midnight, she is entrapped in a loveless marriage to Badoy—a cruel fate, especially in a country that does not allow divorce.[67] The text's language

makes this entanglement explicit: in her death, she is imagined as released from both "the snare of summer" and the "terrible silver nets of the moon."[68] If in "The Summer Solstice," the mature Doña Lupeng can harness the realm of moonlight revelry for her own, albeit momentary triumph, in "May Day Eve," the young Agueda, by contrast, moves from fleeting liberation under the night's enchantments to ultimate imprisonment within them, with death as her only release.

IV

Beyond metaphoric language, I also observe that these short stories' narratives coincide with specific plots in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which I continue to read through Barber's framework of festive comedy. Joaquin's stories likewise turn to festivity, and comparing these works reveals both overlaps and divergences in their treatment of ritual and (dis)order. As Reinhard Wendt writes, festivities in the Philippines have, "through their cultural practices, [modified] the foreign elements forced on them from the outside, combined them with local traditions, and transformed them into something of their own through … hybridization."[69] Joaquin's fiction, then, may be seen as working in much the same way—enacting a hybridization of local and foreign sources.

In Shakespeare's play, Titania and Oberon, who are the "parents and original" of a "progeny of evils" (II.1.120, 118), suggest the idea that passionate disturbances could cause or originate natural calamities. Joaquin's "Summer Solstice" presents two similar cases, featuring the story's competing festivals: the Feast of Saint John the Baptist and the Tadtarin. Followers of the Tadtarin believe that she must be given free rein, "otherwise, the grain would not grow, the trees would bear no fruit, the rivers would give no fish, and the animals would die."[70] The Feast of Saint John the Baptist, however, is presented with the more general aim of supplication, yet I assume that part of their prayers is for a bountiful harvest.[71] Joaquin is careful to portray the relationship of one festival in the other: first, in the feast of Saint John, he is described as ""erect and goldly virile above the prone and *female earth*;"[72] second, in the Tadtarin, they parade their own caricatured image of Saint John, "a crude, primitive, grotesque image, its big-eyed head too big for its puny naked torso, bobbing and swaying above the hysterical female horde."[73] It is this tension—between Catholic and pagan, foreign and native—that structures the story's gendered conflicts. The intermingling of the sexes here is discouraged, though not strictly, as men may be invited to join the Tadtarin if they wear women's clothing—as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Titania invites Oberon, "If you will

patiently dance in our round / And see our moonlight revels, go with us" (II.1.145–46).

While the play concludes with apparent neatness, that is, with marriages squarely arranged and Puck sweeping away the dust, Joaquin offers no comparable restoration of order in "The Summer Solstice." We are not shown the effects of rituals on the harvest, as would be expected of tales of such rituals in an agricultural society; instead, the story closes with the paradoxical fusion of sun and moon glimpsed through a window of the Moreta household. This image signals neither natural disaster nor harmony, but, as with the earlier question of feminist (dis)empowerment, is an indeterminate state. Although the narration returns us to the home, the natural world still penetrates the domestic sphere of the married couple; in Barber's terms, there is release but no clarification. Doña Lupeng's earlier double participation has clear ramifications only for her relationship with her husband, that the "elemental feelings [of the Tadtarin] shakes the foundations of an outwardly respectable marriage."[74] Instead of the "female earth," it is now the masculine Don Paeng who is on the ground, kissing her feet. That such a cataclysmic shift occurs within the marriage union suggests that "The Summer Solstice" can be read as a continuation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: the peace and purity at the play's conclusion is challenged by a return to the natural world, the heat, dust, and dirt which open Joaquin's story. Such a reading emerges

when one recognizes that Joaquin deploys similar elements in language and narrative to those found in Shakespeare's play.

Another parallel can be observed between *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and "May Day Eve." While the play makes use of "love-in-idleness," a potion that makes one fall in love with the first person one sees, Joaquin's short story has "a big antique mirror with a gold frame carved into leaves and flowers and mysterious curlicues."[75] When one speaks the incantation:

> Mirror, mirror,
> show to me
> him whose woman
> I will be,[76]

the face of that man will appear over one's left shoulder. Thus, the face that you see would be your first sighting after the magic has taken place, replicating the immediacy of "love-in-idleness." I wish to point out, however, that Joaquin's incantation emphasizes the possessiveness of love since it admits that the speaker will be "*his* woman." Yet, while Agueda does say the words "him whose woman / I will be," the incantation Badoy utters is subtly different:

> Mirror, mirror
> show to me
> her whose lover
> I will be.[77]

The use of "lover" is ostensibly to match the meter of the two-syllable "woman," but it also positions the man as an active subject ("one who loves"), while the woman is reduced to an object of possession.

What happens after Agueda sees a face? She is distraught—she cries, bites Badoy's hand, and draws blood—far from the pacifying effects of love-in-idleness. As the story progresses, however, we infer she must have been pacified enough, at least, to succumb and take Badoy as her husband and have children with him. Only when she had grown much older, even older than Doña Lupeng in "The Summer Solstice," does she admit to her daughter: when she had looked into the glass all those years ago, Doña Agueda saw the Devil.[78] Despite Agueda's soothing explanations to her daughter—that the devil's scar is different from her Papa, that the devil had horns and a tail—the reader understands that Agueda is truly referring to Don Badoy.

As I have already noted, the gender roles here are reversed, if we are to take Helena and Demetrius as the prototype: it is now the female Agueda, instead of the male Demetrius, who was initially repulsed by the other, but then was magically conquered. However, further differences emerge: Demetrius' repulsion runs along the lines of aesthetic or romantic preference rather than on moral grounds, as when he says: "Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit, / For I am sick when I do look on thee" (II.1.218–19).

Badoy, on the other hand, is cast in a more reprehensible light: he is called a Devil, though we are not privy to specific reasons.[79] In the preceding section, we have seen how the depiction of an impermeable moon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* results in the subjugation of mortals, and how this theme reverberates in the fate of Agueda. Yet, the magic does not transform Badoy into a desirable suitor or husband for Agueda; the magic in "May Day Eve" lacks this metaphoric power. This undermines the very foundations of common marriage, which Shakespeare's play seems to endorse—namely, that attraction and preference precede the marital union. Helena "becomes" desirable for Demetrius. In Joaquin, there is a union without desire, and magic functions not to transform but to ensnare.

However, from Badoy's perspective, Agueda's act of biting his knuckles and drawing blood is precisely what conquers him into love. He soon muses, "What a pretty color she turned when angry!"[80]—a line reminiscent of one in *Twelfth Night*, when Olivia exclaims, "O, what a deal of scorn looks beautiful / In the contempt and anger of his lip" (III.1.152–53).[81] Yet, the closest thematic parallel of this scene is the opening of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in the conversation between Theseus and Hippolyta. Theseus tells her,

> Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword
> And won thy love doing thee injuries,

But I will wed thee in another key,
With pomp, with triumph, and with reveling. (I.1.17-20).

Indeed, Agueda won Badoy's love by "doing him injuries." At first glance, we see that the gender roles are again reversed: it is the female doing the fighting and the conquering in Joaquin, as opposed to the triumphant warrior-king Theseus. More crucially, however, Theseus *assumes* that Hippolyta was "won," and after Theseus' speech ends at line 20, she does not reply, is interrupted by the entrance of Egeus, and never speaks again in the scene—not even when Theseus asks her, "What cheer, my love?—" (I.1.124). In Joaquin, Badoy explicitly admits and revels in the fact that he was conquered. This semantic reversal is relevant because it allows us to interrogate the implications of love as a conquering force. While Badoy ostensibly takes on the role of the conquered, it is Agueda who is left unhappy in the marital union with no way out. While Badoy, in his old age, wistfully reminisces over his past love for Agueda, she thinks of him as the Devil, even though she cannot say so straightforwardly. In this, Agueda and Hippolya are similar—in the first scene of the play, at least, Hippolyta is both conquered and silenced, won by Theseus by the sword and the bonds of marriage; Agueda, too, is won into marriage, and her silence is figured first through evasive language, and finally, through death.

V

In conclusion, this essay demonstrates how our readings of both Joaquin and Shakespeare can be enriched when we take these two writers side by side. The *seemingly* clean conclusion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* following the conventions of comedy can be imaginatively disrupted by the reintroduction of dust and the natural element into the marriage union, as in "The Summer Solstice," and indeed, this would concur with the wealth of scholarly insight that problematizes this ending, arguing that it's not clean and straightforward at all.[82] Conversely, the commonplace readings of native reclamation and feminist empowerment in that tale can be recast in a more ambiguous light when we read it in terms of Shakespearean naturalistic metaphors, as with the dust and the natural or with the moon and women. In "May Day Eve," we find a darker treatment of natural, but irrevocable, magic, which traps the poor Agueda in marriage to Badoy. While Demetrius, happily though as irrevocably bewitched, enjoys his enchanted infatuation with Helena, Joaquin forces us to rethink the supposed stability of marriage itself. The happenings in Shakespeare's play take on a darker shade when read with Joaquin's work, suggesting a pessimistic view of festivities and rituals; Joaquin's awareness of the history of colonialism in the Philippines must have colored his

perception of foreign festivities as they intermingle with local rituals and, ultimately, culture at large.

Ultimately, the shared theme of love, facilitated by natural symbols, enables us to adopt this comparative perspective. However, I do not claim that these readings are definitive—the artistry of both Shakespeare and Joaquin cannot be limited to a singular interpretive frame. Can these symbols and narrative themes be traced to different genealogical trees? Indeed, they can. What I have sought to demonstrate instead is how reading them side by side—justified by Joaquin's knowledge of Shakespeare and the history of rituals pertinent to the works discussed here—leads us to a reciprocal illumination of both works. Such a comparative method attends to the complex history of Anglophone writing in the Philippines as well as Joaquin's own broader cultural and historical views of colonial influence on the nation, and future work in this vein could attend to this method's pedagogical import as well as its application to other works in Philippine Anglophone literature.

Notes

1. An early, abridged version of this essay, then titled "Rituals and Desire in Green Spaces: Revisiting Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night* through Joaquin's *Summer Solstice* and *May Day Eve*," was presented in a symposium at Shakespeare Shorelines: 6th Conference of the Asian Shakespeare Association. My gratitude goes out to Dr. Judy Celine Ick for her encouraging and (rightfully) firm guidance in revising this essay. Many thanks, too, to Nicko Manalastas and Joan Rayos for their insights that helped clarify key points.
2. Judy Celine Ick, "The Undiscovered Country: Shakespeare in Philippine Literatures," *Kritika Kultura* 21 (2013): 184, https://archium.ateneo.edu/kk/vol1/iss21/10.
3. Quoted in Judy Celine Ick, "Local Shakespeares, Shakespearean Locales," *Public Policy* 3, no. 1 (1999): 67.
4. Department of Education, *English Quarter 4 - Module 1: Explain How Elements Specific to Full Length Plays Build its Theme*, DepEd Tambayan Website, 2020, https://depedtambayan.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/ENG9-Q4-MOD11.pdf, 13.
5. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), xvi.
6. Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2008), xiii.
7. Ick, "The Undiscovered Country," 184.
8. Ick, "The Undiscovered Country," 181.
9. F. Sionil Jose, "History as prison, and as liberation," *PhilStar*, May 26, 2013, https://www.philstar.com/lifestyle/sunday-life/2013/05/26/946220/history-prison-and-liberation
10. Nick Joaquin, *Almanac for Manileños*, (Manila: Mr & Ms Publications, 1979), 87.
11. Joaquin, *Almanac*, 87.
12. S. Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life*, (1977; reis., New York: New American Library, 1986), 296.
13. Edward S. Brubaker, *Shakespeare: A Life in Seven Chapters*, (Lancaster, PA: Franklin & Marshall College, 2008), 185.
14. I found the following in Nick Joaquin, *Culture and History*, (1988; reis., Mandaluyong City: Anvil, 2017): "If Hamlet without the Prince is absurd, a Hamlet strictly of the climax — with no reference to the intervening events that turned him finally into this man of action — would be incoherent," 7; "You get no fountain where there is no water pressure; and Shakespeare was not an isolate miracle but the expression of a people who may have seemed raw at the time but were actually ripe for their hour of greatness," 52; "In the same way

that the Long March has become national history for the Chinese, and a hallowed item in their nationalist culture, so the deeds of every "happy few" become at last the action of the many and a collective racial memory. "We happy few!" cried Henry V at Agincourt — and that was history as current event speaking; but history as culture says that it was the English "people" who fought and won on that battlefield," 205.

15. Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 7.

16. It is worth noting, too, that the "Esquinita de Quijano de Manila" at the Miguel de Benavides Library, University of Santo Tomas, houses Nick Joaquin's personal collection, which includes twenty-seven books related to Shakespeare, comprising both the plays and critical works.

17. "Order of National Artists: Nick Joaquin," *National Commission for Culture and the Arts*, https://ncca.gov.ph/about-culture-and-arts/culture-profile/national-artists-of-the-philippines/nick-joaquin/.

18. Garber, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*, xxii.

19. Oxford English Dictionary, "resonate (v.)," March 2026, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9809133561.

20. Adam Hansen and Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. (eds.), *Shakespearean Echoes*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 8.

21. Ick, "The Undiscovered Country," 183.

22. See, for instance, Florentino H. Horendo, "The Source of Nick Joaquin's 'The Legend of the Dying Wanton,' *Philippine Studies* 26, no.1, 297–307, https://doi.org/10.13185/2244-1638.1725. There, he points out that Nick Joaquin draws from history, specifically the Spanish Catholic past, in his fiction, 297.

23. Ick, "The Undiscovered Country," 182.

24. Michael Neill, "Post-colonial Shakespeare? Writing away from the centre," in *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, ed. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 166.

25. Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 3.

26. Joaquin, *Alamanac*, 97.

27. For a more expansive treatment on the historicity of the ideologies in "May Day Eve," see E. San Juan Jr., *Subversions of Desire: Prolegomena to Nick Joaquin*, (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2008), 33–44, http://unitasust.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/UNITAS-88-2-San-Juan-SOD-Online-Book-1.pdf. For instance, San Juan admits that the story "at first glance concerns itself with May Day rituals" but that it also depicts the influence of "European rationalist enlightenment," 33–34.

28. Cf., Barber, *Festive Comedy*, 123: "It was a time when maids might find out who their true love would be by dreams or divinations."

29. Joaquin, *Almanac*, 112.

30. Nick Joaquin, "May Day Eve," in *The Woman Who Had Two Navels and Tales of the Tropical Gothic*, (Penguin Books, 2017), 56.
31. San Juan makes the point that the tale "excludes any other mode of knowledge except through mystifying ritual/superstition and a manner of remembering that apprehends nothing but banalities and platitudes." *Prolegomena to Nick Joaquin*, 38.
32. Joaquin, *Almanac*, 113.
33. Joaquin, "May Day Eve," 53.
34. Joaquin, *Almanac*, 170.
35. Nick Joaquin, "The Summer Solstice," in *The Woman Who Had Two Navels and Tales of the Tropical Gothic* (Penguin Books, 2017), 47.
36. For a more thorough treatment of the pervasiveness of heat in Joaquin's fiction, see Ann Ang, "What's Tropical About Nick Joaquin's *Tropical Gothic?*: Heat and Corporeality in 'The Summer Solstice' and 'The Dying Wanton'," *Kritika Kultura*, 41 (2023): 9–32, https://archium.ateneo.edu/kk/vol41/iss1/3. For instance, Ang argues how "Joaquin's refiguration of the summer sun in terms of tropical heat may be seen as a similar attempt to re-centre a Philippine climactic idiom," 21.
37. Joaquin, "The Summer Solstice," 52
38. Joaquin, 43; italics in the original.
39. Joaquin, 47.
40. Joaquin, 49.
41. Joaquin, *Almanac*, 120.
42. C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom*, (1959; reis., Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1993), 24.
43. Barber, *Festive Comedy*, 124.
44. François Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage*, translated by Janet Lloyd, (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 144.
45. Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World*, 229.
46. Barber, *Festive Comedy*, 120.
47. Barber, 124.
48. Sophie Chiari, *Shakespeare's Representation of Weather, Climate and Environment: The Early Modern 'Fated Sky'*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 48.
49. Barber, *Festive Comedy*, 8.
50. Barber, 123.
51. Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World*, 141.
52. William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1993). All subsequent quotations to the play are from this edition.

53. Chiari, *Shakespeare's Representation*, 35.
54. Joaquin, "The Summer Solstice," 45.
55. Joaquin, 45.
56. Joaquin, 40-41.
57. Joaquin, 49.
58. Barber, *Festive Comedy*, 135.
59. Joaquin, "The Summer Solstice," 52.
60. E. Vallado Daroy "Abrogation and Appropriation: Postcolonial Literature in English in the Philippines," *Philippine Studies* 41, no. 1 (1993): 97, http://www.jstor.org/stable/42634948.
61. San Juan, *Prolegomena to Nick Joaquin*, 40.
62. Joaquin, "The Summer Solstice," 52.
63. Aileen O. Salonga, "Representing Men's and Women's Speech: A Linguistic Analysis of Nick Joaquin's 'The Summer Solstice'," *Journal of English Studies and Comparative Literature* 9, no. 1 (2006): 26, https://journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/jescl/article/view/293/279.
64. Joaquin, "May Day Eve," 58.
65. Louis Adrian Montrose, "'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture," *Representations* 2 (1983): 82, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928384.
66. I agree with San Juan's reading: "While May Day Eve and its specular game of prophesying the future preserves the intensity of hope, dream, fantasy—a virtual explosion of Desire—it also, in Agueda's case, deludes women into marital bondage." *Prolegomena*, 38.
67. In her Foreword to the 2017 Penguin Classics edition of *The Woman Who Had Two Navels and Tales of the Tropical Gothic*, Gina Apostol makes a similar comment (x); it still holds true some eight years later, as of the writing of this essay.
68. Joaquin, "May Day Eve," 62, 63.
69. Reinhard Wendt, "From a Colonial 'Tool of Empire' to Cornerstones of Local Identities: Catholic Festivals in the Philippines," in *Religious Festivals in Contemporary Southeast Asia*, ed. Patrick Alcedo, Sally Ann Ness, and Hendrik M.J. Maier, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2016), 94–95. Wendt further notes (100) that Maytime came with many celebrations, the number of celebrations only increasing from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the present day.
70. Joaquin, "The Summer Solstice," 40.
71. Wendt, for instance, argues that "in an agricultural society like the Philippines, worries about harvest stodd at the center of ritual practices," citing such Catholic fiestas as those for San Isidro Labrador, p. 100.
72. Joaquin, "The Summer Solstice," 41; emphasis mine.
73. Joaquin, "The Summer Solstice," 48.

74. Jonathan Chua, "Nick Joaquin in Retrospect," *Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities Asia* 7, no. 2, (2017): 117, https://archium.ateneo.edu/paha/vol7/iss2/8.
75. Joaquin, "May Day Eve," 56.
76. Joaquin, 55.
77. Joaquin, 61.
78. Joaquin, 57.
79. San Juan holds the position that the reason for this lapse in the tale is that "external events possess no intelligibility unless appropriated and organized by the protagonist's memory," 39.
80. Joaquin, "May Day Eve," 59.
81. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1993).
82. For instance, in "A Modern Perspective," Catherine Belsey notes that the play's conclusion leaves the audience "exalted, perhaps, but a little less assured, less confident, and altogether less knowing than before," in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1993), 190. In a similar vein, C. L. Barber in *Festive Comedy* remarks, "*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play in the spirit of Mercutio: the dreaming in it includes the knowledge 'that dreamers often lie,'" thus casting doubt on both the process and the end result that we are presented, 159.

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