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HYSTERICAL FEMININITY IN NICK JOAQUIN'S *THE WOMAN WHO HAD TWO NAVELS*

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Abstract
This essay presents a reading of Nick Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* through the lens of feminist scholarship on the history and social construction of female hysteria. It argues that a critical intertextual reading of this sort affirms the heteropatriarchal foundations of popular ideations of the Philippine nation. It uses Sara Mills '*Feminist Stylistics* to draw attention to Joaquin's discourse on women, specifically, hysterical women such as Connie Escobar. It argues that the discourse of the novel—its reliance on the stereotype of the hysterical feminine woman, its focalization through a male gaze, and its employment of the schemata of "women asking for it"—explains why readers find Connie Escobar's inconsistent behavior and characterization not only plausible but even subversive. However, reading the novel from the lens of feminist stylistics also reveals instances where the novel reinscribes patriarchal ideology. Any reading that views Connie as a metaphor for the Philippine nation must therefore confront the patriarchal ideology that informs this vision of the nation.

Keywords: feminist stylistics, hysteria studies, Philippine Anglophone literature.

Introduction
Nick Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (1961), a "masterpiece of modern Philippine literature" (Nadal, 2021, p. 568) is popularly conceived as a novel about personal and Philippine national identity, and a "national allegory of the Philippine condition" (San Juan, Jr., 2018, p. 174). In his introduction to the canonical novel, republished by Anvil Publishing, Inc. in 2018, Ruel De Vera provides a typical reading of the Philippine National Artist's celebrated work: "Deeply woven through *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* is, as always, the question of identity, both on a small and a big scale…[T]he characters ponder the nature of their being…[the] product of different cultures and settings" (2018, p. 10).

The central character of the novel, Connie Escobar, is a young Filipino woman who travels from Manila to Hong Kong to escape the betrayal of, and trauma inflicted on her by, her closest family members. She presents herself as a monstrous woman with two navels to the community of young individuals of Filipino descent residing in Hong Kong. Connie wreaks havoc on their lives until she undergoes a near-death experience that leads to a spiritual transformation.

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For De Vera, Connie stands as a metaphor for "all Filipinos…who never stopped resisting the different kinds of invasion" (2018, p. 11). Connie's navels "stand for the different things that keep her from finding her own identity in the world" (De Vera, 2018, p. 10) and are metaphors for the Spanish and American colonial origins of both the Filipino identity and the Philippine state (Liang, 2022, p. 548). Given that Joaquin's capacious oeuvre is chiefly concerned with "the Philippines' tortured history as a captive state, most clearly in recollections of the Spaniards' 300-year rule or the American's splashy time in the oriental sun" (De Vera, 2018, p. 9), such a reading is not unreasonable, and its popularity, not without justification.

The first six paragraphs of the novel foreground details that mark Connie Escobar as a woman with a "hysterical personality"—"highly impressionistic, suggestible, and narcissistic…[h]highly labile, [whose] moods changed suddenly, dramatically, and for seemingly inconsequential reasons" (Smith-Rosenberg, 1972, p. 662). Not only does Connie ask the veterinarian, Pepe Monson, to operate on what she claims to be the monstrosity she possesses (two navels); she "cried that it was urgent: her whole life depended on it" (Joaquin, 2018, p. 13), displaying an extreme emotional reaction. In the sentences that follow, readers learn from the narrator that the seemingly desperate Connie turns "cagey" and "coy," quickly able to slip out of her emotional performance to actively flirt with the veterinarian (Joaquin, 2018, p. 13).

Since the novel is popularly viewed as an allegory of the Philippine nation (De Vera, 2018; Lizada, 2018; Gonzalez, 2019; Blanco, 2022)—one might ask what Connie's representation as a hysteric tells us about Joaquin's vision of the Philippine nation.

Reading Connie's hysterical femininity

Two fairly recent readings of the novel take Joaquin's characterization of Connie as a hysterical woman into account when extending or challenging the popular reading of Connie as a metaphor for the Philippine nation in search of its identity.

Miguel Lizada (2018) examines the novel from a postcolonial Gothic perspective, surfacing the presence of empire in the text from the perspective of revolutionary Filipinos and their offspring, people twice colonized by the Spanish and American occupations. For Lizada, Connie's hysterical claim that she has two navels amounts to a disavowal of her ownership over her monstrous postcolonial body, and the histories and heteropatriarchal cultural codes that have made it thus. Lizada extends the popular reading by claiming that this rejection is necessary to the spiritual transformation Connie undergoes—a transformation that he reads as a queer moment—at the novel's conclusion. For Lizada, this queer moment is critical to what he and scholars like Mary Rose Arong (2018, 2019) and M.H. Abedi Valoojerdi (2021) read as the novel's strategic resistance to American neocolonialism through the revival of what the latter has repressed.

Gabriel Gonzalez (2019), on the other hand, challenges the popular reading by proposing that Connie is a metaphor for the Philippine nation subjected to a patriarchal, neocolonial order (p. 153), and not simply one in search of its identity. Gonzalez draws from Juliana Chang's (2003) assertion that "nation-states of Europe and the Americas operate ideologically within the metaphor of the

bourgeois family" (p. 638). Hence, hysteria, theorized within feminist psychoanalytic theory as a response to the European and American bourgeois family, can be read as a symptom of global capital and neocolonial relations.

Gonzalez likewise adopts Chang's definition of "feminine hysteria" ("the performance of femininity that maintains characteristics which are acceptable to patriarchal norms but carries these modes of femininity to extreme or excess") when he claims that Connie's insistence that she has two navels—is an "*act* of resistance"—one which "acknowledges the hegemony of her mother and father over her as their daughter, but … is carried to an excess so as to draw attention and to divulge the contradictions that her mother's masquerade has sought to conceal" (p. 161).

Lizada's and Gonzalez' readings both suggest that the hysterical woman is *necessary* for a critique of a heteronormative, patriarchal order. One might even be persuaded that the figure of a hysterical woman is necessarily a "powerful force that disrupts all signifiers" (Lizada, 2018, p. 444) or a "figure of resistance" (Gonzalez, 2019, p. 164). Lizada supports his claim that Connie is a "powerful force that disrupts all signifiers" with the argument that it is a series of encounters with Connie that transforms one of the male characters in the novel, Pack (p. 443). However, the text does not suggest that Connie intended her encounters to have such an effect. We receive information about the encounters and the transformation that follows solely from the viewpoint of the male character, Paco. Gonzalez, on the other hand, calls Connie's declaration that she has two navels as "an act of resistance" and Connie herself a "figure of resistance." In doing so, he ascribes to Connie, in her hysterical state, an agency that the literature on hysteria does not support. It should be noted that Chang, on whom Gonzalez relies for a definition of hysteria, *refuses* to classify hysteria as an act of resistance, pointing out that hysteria "simultaneously supports and challenges the status quo" and is, at best, an ambivalent concept; a *symptom* of the contradictions of the neo-colonial state, but not necessarily an act against it.[1]

In this essay, I argue that Joaquin's critique of the patriarchal neocolonial Philippine nation is made legible through stylistic choices that reinscribe patriarchal ideology. I draw from Sara Mills's argument in *Feminist Stylistics* (2005) that ideology determines the dominant reading of the text. Readers must draw upon the ideology from which the dominant reading ensues, for the text to make sense. For example, to understand *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*, a woman would have to align herself with the dominant reading of the text, its presuppositions, and assumptions about women, even if these run contrary to her own lived experience and knowledge. If a reader chooses to reject the position foisted upon her by the dominant reading, she may find herself confronted with inconsistencies such as those that have been pointed out in the previous section on Lizada's and Gonzalez's readings of Connie's hysterical femininity.

[1] Other contemporary scholars likewise stop short of equating hysteria with resistance, noting that currently, "the term 'hysteria' tends to be tagged or deployed whenever issues that question or openly challenge established modes of cognition are at stake" (Zechner, 2020, p. 89). "To all the others, who [believe themselves to be] of sound of mind, such a reaction is alarmism…and the very existence of crisis conditions [may be] called into question" (Krasny, 2020, p. 128).

Using Mills's feminist stylistics, I revisit *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* and assert that Connie's portrayal as a female hysteric affirms the heteropatriarchal foundations of popular ideations of the Philippine nation. I argue that the discourse of the novel—its reliance on the stereotype of the hysterical feminine woman, its focalization through a male gaze, and its employment of the schemata of "women asking for it" —explains why many readers find Connie Escobar's inconsistent behavior and characterization not only plausible but even subversive. Without rejecting readings that take Connie Escobar's actions in the novel as a subversion of patriarchal norms, I show instances where the novel nevertheless reinscribes patriarchal ideology.

Feminist scholarship on hysteria

Feminist scholars argue that the history and social construction of female hysteria have been used throughout history as a tool to control and silence women's bodies and behaviors. Cecily Devereux (2014) observes that the term "hysteria" has, "for centuries [been used] as a dramatic medical metaphor for everything that men found mysterious or unmanageable in women" (p. 20).

As a medical condition, hysteria referred to "*involuntary, uncontrollable, somatic symptoms*" that were observed primarily in women, and which, from antiquity, were believed to be related to female reproductive capacity (Krasny, 2020, p. 125; King, 2022, p. 3; Bonomi, 2023, p. 55). Beginning in the nineteenth century, however, hysteria began to be theorized as a nervous disorder caused by psychological, rather than physical, factors. Jean-Martin Charcot observed that the evocation of an old physical trauma to a patient under hypnosis reproduced hysterical paralysis, leading him to conclude that it was a mental representation of a trauma experienced by the patient, and not the patient's gender, which was the source of hysterical symptoms (Bogousslavsky, 2020, p. 5). Nevertheless, hysteria remained coded as a female characteristic throughout the nineteenth century and beyond (Showalter, 2020, p. 29). Devereux (2014, p. 24) suggests this may have been due to the fact that Charcot's studies on the subject involved female, rather than male, patients.

Influenced by Charcot, Sigmund Freud developed the science of psychoanalysis by studying hysterical patients. He theorized that hysteria was caused by an "internal psychical scar produced through trauma or repression" (Devereux, 2014, p. 24), replacing the uterus with a pathological human imagination as hysteria's cause. This, however, did little to change the perception that women were at greater risk of suffering from hysteria, since "women's imagination was understood by the physicians of the time…as diseased" (Gilman, 2020, p. 42).

In women, hysteria was viewed as a "character disorder, the product of an unresolved Oedipal complex" (Smith-Rosenberg, 1972, p. 653). Whereas men were thought to achieve identity by recognizing their separation from the mother ("she is what he is not; he has what she does not"), the fact that women lacked a penis was thought to condemn them to "spend their lives desiring its replacement or substitution, first, and "normally," through children" (Devereux, 2014, p. 25). This line of thinking has prompted feminist scholars to conclude that psychoanalysis is an apparatus of the patriarchy (Devereux, 2014, p. 27).

Mark S. Micale (1989) has pointed out that, before the twentieth century, what passed for the history of hysteria and its pathologization was the writing produced by male medical professionals, who based their work on their observation of patients, most of whom were female (p. 319). Male doctors who treated hysterical women in the nineteenth century determined that their patients displayed, not only a variety of physical symptoms ("nervousness, depression, the tendency to tears, and chronic fatigue, or of disabling pain" and a sudden seizure) but also a "hysterical personality": "highly impressionistic, suggestible, and narcissistic. Highly labile…egocentric in the extreme…consistently superficial and tangential" (Smith Rosenberg, 1972, pp. 661-662). They described hysterical women as physically attractive and often sexually aroused; but also depressed, frigid, and uninterested in sex (Smith Rosenberg, 1972, p. 663). These descriptions presented hysterical women as being simultaneously sexual and asexual, the object of male desire, and yet without desires of her own. Doctors were often unsympathetic—even hostile—to their hysterical female patients., as they were deemed duplicitous (Gilman, 2022, p.352). Showalter (2020) observed that "nineteenth-century physicians generally believed that hysterical women were skillful performers, faking their symptoms in order to get attention and special treatment" (p. 29). Thinking these patients were incorrigible, doctors frequently recommended "suffocating hysterical women until their fits stopped, beating them across the face and body with wet towels, ridiculing and exposing them in front of family and friends, showering them with icy water" (Smith-Rosenberg, 1972, p. 675).

It was only towards the end of the twentieth century—during the rise of Second Wave feminism— that a significant body of feminist writing on hysteria appeared. Devereux (2014) notes that this corresponded with the term being dropped from the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (p. 19); a determination had been made that it was a non-specific and poorly defined diagnosis based on patriarchal ideas about women's bodies and psychology. While feminists pointed out the sexism inherent in a diagnosis of hysteria, the psychiatric profession began to use more specific diagnoses to describe the symptoms and behaviors previously associated with the term.

In France, feminist writers attempted to reappropriate the term "hysteria" and use it in a feminist context. Helene Cixous proposed that women can escape from the phallocentric symbolic order "by producing texts that challenge and move beyond the Law-of-the-Father" (Jones, 1985, p. 85). Cixous practiced "hysterical engagement"—mobilizing hysteria's somatic symptomatology in her writing—as a means to escape the phallocentric order that she believed permeated all language: "The societal Symbolic becomes represented within, or collapsed into, the subject's Imaginary…pluck[ing] patriarchy from its perch in the social order and instead mak[ing] it play within the bounds of the subject's consciousness" (Reinier, 2020, p. 7). In this way, the self makes space to imagine and critique what was previously repressed.

Elizabeth Grosz (1989) suggests that those who intentionally engage with hysteria in writing this way are "acting as the hysteric" (136). Devereux (2014) reads this strategy as an attempt to "establish the possibility of a female subjectivity [that is] *not* defined with reference to the Oedipalizing male" (p. 29). Understanding that hysteria is a symptom of the contradictions of the prevailing social order—

which allows women no position other than *Other*—Cixous, Irigaray, and other practitioners of l'ecriture féminine[2] act as hysterics to call attention to these contradictions, resist the system that produces them, and explore the possibility of creating an originary, emancipatory space for women. It is their intentional replication of hysterical symptoms in their writing practice—the consequence of the writers' exercise of agency—that allows readers to understand their choice to act as hysterics as empowering. This qualification needs to be made to emphasize that representations of hysterical women are not innately empowering, emancipatory, or subversive. As Juliana Chang (2003) reminds us, the term "hysteria" is ambivalent, calling attention to the contradictions inherent in the status quo, yet supporting it.

It is with this understanding that I read Nick Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* to answer the question: How does Joaquin's discourse on women—specifically, hysterical women such as Connie Escobar—operate to deliver his critique of the heteropatriarchal foundations of the Philippine nation?

Method

Sara Mills (2005) calls "feminist stylistics" the use of linguistic or language analysis to reveal how systematic language choices in a text shape readers' ideas and impose structures on their perceptions of the world. It identifies itself as "feminist" because it aims to "draw attention [to] and change the way that gender is represented" (p. 1). Feminist stylistics "allows for an analysis of features of a text's language other than simply relying on content analysis to be able to extract ideologies present in a particular discourse…emphasizing the foregrounding of certain features in the text that…provide an opportunity for a more critical analysis of ideologies propagated by powerful entities in a society" (Topacio, 2020, p. 56). Mills' feminist stylistics has been used in conjunction with feminist critical discourse analysis to reveal how gendered relations of power and gender ideology have been constructed and deconstructed in literary works (See Ezenewa-Ohaeto & Ikemelu, 2021; Bukunmi et al., 2021; and Kayani & Anwar, 2022).

For Mills, a text can be analyzed at three levels: "of the word; of the phrase or sentence; and of *discourse"* (p. 15, emphasis supplied). At the level of discourse, one analyzes structures within the text that are larger than sentences, and which therefore determine smaller-scale elements such as words, phrases and sentences. Mills says that feminist stylistic analysis at the level of discourse does not focus on content "as if it were a self-evident given"; instead, the text is read "as something which is the negotiation of textual elements and codes and forces outside the text which influence both the way the text is constructed and the way that we decipher what is written" (p. 123).

Mills performs this type of analysis by examining: how characters are drawn in a text; how much the characterization or description of characters relies on stereotyped gender roles; whether characters and events are focalized from a male gaze and how this positions readers and affects their reception of the text; and how the operation of schemata, "larger discursive frameworks which seem to operate

[2] Sheena J. Vachhani (2019) describes écriture féminine, as a means through which one might "channel the hysteria designated to the feminine precisely as a meaningful disruption of traditional epistemological methods of seeing/knowing" (p. 20).

over a wide range of texts… produces different visions of males and females" (pp. 148-156).

A schema is a "narrative pattern which, once embarked on, entails in its wake all manner of linguistic choices and decisions…a model or narrative format which individuals use to structure their thought and action sequences…[They are] 'stereotypical models for the processing of thought'" (Mills, 2005, p. 152). The following are schema that Mills identifies in her discussion on schemata in *Feminist Stylistics:* women who are "asking for it"—that is, wanting things that are not in their interest (p. 150); women as people who are "there to be advised" (p. 153); women as "sites of transformation" (p. 154); and women as "victims of terrible accidents and difficult circumstances which they then go on to conquer, because of their own personal strength" (p. 155). The last schema, Mills notes, expects women to survive these difficulties individually without the expectation that fundamental social inequalities that cause these difficulties to arise in the first place be resolved.

Findings and Discussion

Connie Escobar's escape to Hong Kong is triggered by the discovery of love letters exchanged between her husband, Macho, and her mother, Concha. Upon arriving in Hong Kong, she causes much turmoil amongst the Monsons, Texeiras, and their friends, who remark on Connie's ability to make men do what they do not want to do. In this way, Connie is characterized as a fragile woman who exerts a mysterious power over the novel's men—a power that seems to be rooted in her helplessness, weakness, and sinfulness. Connie is the stereotypical hysterical woman.

Focalization

One might argue that Connie's characterization as a hysterical woman is necessary to the novel's plot: without her outrageous claim that she had two navels, there would be no mystery to be unraveled, no story to tell. By necessity, therefore, Connie is presented as an object of mystery to be puzzled over by the other characters; it is not surprising, then, that although the author's omniscient narrator uses multiple focalizations throughout the novel, it is focalized through the other characters of the novel—mainly through the male characters, whom Connie approaches in Manila and seeks out in Hong Kong.

The following passage describes Tacos and Connie's first meeting in Manila:

> While she talked Paco watched her face—they were standing very close in the dark room—and a smile appeared on the corners of his mouth. He was feeling more and more sure that it was this girl he had felt watching—not only just now but all the time before. He saw her coolly remarking his twitching mouth, his narrowed eyes. She asked if he were ill. Scooping the sweat off his brow, he swore at the heat. She offered to drive him out to the country where it might be cooler (Joaquin, 2018, p. 45).

In this passage, the omniscient third-person narrator focalizes the narrative mainly through Paco, who takes in Connie's *face*, her physical presence so close to him. He is pleasured by what he perceives to be the attention Connie pays to his

mouth and eyes. He smiles at the attention he is given—the implication being that he reads Connie's attention as attraction— notwithstanding that Connie might have simply been worried that he was ill. This attention, together with Connie's invitation to drive out to the country with Paco, apparently make Connie an object of desire for Paco, who attempts to make love to Connie when she stops her convertible by a river's edge:

> …[H]e shoved his arms around her and an unspeakable relief convulsed his taut frame. He saw her eyelids swooning, her mouth soundlessly sighing open, as his face swooped down, as their bodies collided, gravitated…But as, moaning, he moved his mouth over her chin, her ears, her tight throat, and felt the long-knotted ache in him sweetly uncoiling at last, she opened her eyes and, groaning, pushed him away…He grabbed her wrist so suddenly the compact shot out of her hands, whirling, she slapped him across the mouth…She said, spitting out the words: did he think she was as easy a job as her mother (Joaquin, 2018, p. 46)?

In the last excerpt, we find Connie "fragmented" into female body parts—eyelids, mouth, chin, ears, and throat that Paco both apprehends and moves his mouth over. Paco is the actor in this scene. The object of his actions is Connie's body parts. Mills (2005) observes that the fragmentation of women in literary texts not only foregrounds male erotic arousal; it also co-occurs with male focalization (p. 135). Both appear to be the case in this scene. It is Paco's "unspeakable relief" and "sweetly uncoiling long-knotted ache" that the narrator reports to be the result of the acts he performs on Connie's body parts. When Connie, (no longer a collection of body parts) manages to push him away and slap him, he is "blurrily baffled" at the sudden change between what he had perceived to be her mutual desire for him and her cold demeanor towards him.

Because this portion of the novel is focalized through Paco, the reader is likewise puzzled by Connie's seemingly inconsistent behavior. This befuddlement subsides when one considers the possibility that the narrator's close focalization through Paco positions readers to process the event through Paco's perspective—through the lens of Paco's desire. Connie's actual thoughts and intentions remain a mystery. As a result, when Connie acts against Paco's desired perspective, the reader gets the impression that Connie is sick in the head. They fail to consider the possibility that Connie is a young woman who has been taken advantage of.

Schemata

The passage above conforms to what Mills (2005) calls the schema of women who want things that are not in their interest—women who are "asking for it" (p. 150). Having focalized the narrative through Paco, the author, through the third-person narrator, suggests two conflicting messages about Connie in the same text: (1) women like Connie are objects to be acted upon in sexual relations; and (2) women are strong and active, capable of inviting a man to a trip to the countryside, seducing him, and then preventing him from consummating his desire. These conflicting, though simultaneous, messages present women as natural objects of

men's sexual attention—even active solicitors of such attention—while denying men's responsibility for the violence they inflict on women.

The novel's reliance on this schema is evident when, at a subsequent encounter between Connie and Paco, Connie's decision to share the distressing information that she had two navels arouses Paco—a reaction that startles Connie:

> When she told him she had two navels, he believed her at once, and felt—not repulsion—but the heat-lightnings of a desire, feverish and electric, that charged his hands with eyes and his eyes with mouths…Glancing up and catching the look on his face, she asked, alarmed, to be taken home. He smilingly informed her that she was coming back with him; *that she had played with him long enough;* that he was determined to find out that night what sort of monster she was. When she darted up in panic he started the car, and burst out laughing as she flopped down across the seat. He continued to roar with laughter all the way back to the hotel; Connie was quiet. When they arrived at the hotel … she asked to be released: she would come quietly. *Her eyes had slitted with the sly look of her god* (Joaquin, 2018, p. 51, emphasis supplied).

The passage begins with the omniscient narrator reporting what Connie *said* and what Paco *felt*, suggesting that the narrator's focalization is closer to Paco than Connie. Although the narrator registers Connie's "alarm," upon recognizing Paco's intended lechery, one realizes that "alarm" can be recognized through the tone of a person's voice, the suddenness with which she asks to be taken home; it is not necessarily an unvoiced interior state, but one which Paco himself can perceive. The narrator then reports Paco as saying Connie "had played with him long enough," suggesting that Connie's "two-navel" confession, together with her visit to his workplace earlier that evening—were all games that Connie had instigated. At this point, we learn that Connie is panicked by Paco's intention to take her sexually against her will.

However, this detail is followed by the narrator's description of Connie acting in a manner that would seem inconsistent with the behavior of someone who is panicking. At the hotel, where Paco intended to rape her, Connie agrees to "come quietly"; the narrator tells us she eyes Paco "with the sly look of her god" (Joaquin, 2018, p. 51). These sentences suggest Connie's acquiescence to Paco's plan, and therefore her complicity in the violence attempted on her at the hotel. This has the effect of mitigating Paco's liability, if not exonerating him completely.

Stereotyping

What makes Connie's inconsistent behavior plausible to readers is the fact that she has consistently been characterized as a hysterical woman from the beginning of the novel. One should note, however, that the reliance on this stereotype normalizes, not only male violence but the dominance of the male point of view and its determination of what *is*. The stereotype makes it easier to accept the dominant reading of the text—one that adopts a male point of view and sees hysterical women as "naturally" inconsistent and therefore maddening and deserving of punishment.

Foreclosed by this stereotype are alternative readings that recognize how closely the novel is focalized through male characters. The last sentence of the passage discussed above, for instance, ends with the words, "with the sly look of her god." The phrase presents Connie's appearance—the look she gives Paco—from Paco's worldview. What would appear to be Connie's inconstancy, her panic at the thought of being raped and her "sly" desire to be taken by Paco, do not necessarily align with who women are and what they want. It may simply be the way men like Paco view women like Connie and the way the novel's readers are encouraged to view women. Joaquin's resort to free indirect discourse in this passage normalizes the male point of view, thus re-inscribing patterns of male dominance and female subordination.

Conclusion

A feminist stylistic analysis of *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* at the level of discourse reveals authorial choices that reinscribe patriarchal ideology. Ironically, these choices also operate to make legible Joaquin's critique of the heteropatriarchal foundations of the Philippine nation. Even though Joaquin arguably elevates the Filipino woman, whose subjectivity has historically been "effaced by Spanish colonial patriarchy [and] male and mestizo Ilustrados," (Fermin, 2021, p. 182) by making Connie Escobar the main character and subject of the novel, Connie remains a cipher. Even as she is characterized as a "figure of resistance" (Gonzalez, 2019), a veritable site of transformation, a mysterious "powerful force" (Lizada, 2018) who, when encountered by Paco and the other male characters, manages to change and subvert their worldviews, if not their allegiance to the status quo, these men do not know who she is or what she thinks, even at the end of the novel—nor do all of them care. While the Monson brothers wonder about Connie's eventual fate, Paco, the man she decides to run away with, does not even see her as an individual. In his view, Connie is not a person in her own right, but someone who is indistinguishable from the wife he leaves behind (Joaquin, 2018, p. 222). It is the men's concerns—their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to Connie, the hysterical *Other*—that are central to the novel, which is focalized more closely and more frequently through its male characters rather than through Connie. The hysterical woman is *useful* to the narrative, and to our reading of it as a critique of the heteropatriarchal foundations of the Philippine nation; but even as she mobilizes the novel's critique of heteropatriarchal codes and their implications, she simultaneously upholds male dominance and female subordination. Any reading that views Connie as a metaphor for the Philippine nation must therefore acknowledge, engage, and confront the patriarchal ideology that informs this vision of the nation.

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