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Queer Tropical Gothic: Parody, Failure, Space in Nick Joaquin's "Gotita de Dragon"

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Abstract

The stories for children by Filipino literary master Nick Joaquin (1917-2004), when compared to his famous works, have received scant attention even though they are as masterfully written and thematically sophisticated. Out of Joaquin's fifteen children's stories produced between 1972 and 1983, "Gotita de Dragon" stands out for its queer tropical gothic turn. The piece is a parody of a pious legend about Saint Martha, where the titular character is on a quest to become "as big as a gothic dragon," which subsequently renders him "in search of a virgin." The narrative is built upon the failures of its masculine human and animal characters, and maps out the landscape of Manila's red-light and polluted districts of the time – via Malate and Ermita, and the Pasig River where the queer takes place. Read through queer studies, tropical gothic, and tropical materialisms, "Gotita de Dragon" is a tale set within a tropical landscape that has undergone appropriations by colonial and authoritarian forces – and where the failure of the hero becomes the impetus for the taking place of queer resistance and solidarity.

Keywords: Nick Joaquin, queer tropical gothic, tropical materialisms, Manila red-light districts, Pasig River, Gotita de Dragon, children's literature

Introduction

The Filipino literary master Nick Joaquin (1917-2004) is widely remembered for his signature stories, "May Day Eve," "The Summer Solstice," and "Guardia de Honor," and his masterpieces, the play *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* and the novel *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (1961). These pieces are memorable due to Joaquin's rendition of the tropicality of Old Manila and the female characters who dominate the discourse.[1] Dismissed by some as a writing nostalgic of a "torch-lit world of the past" (Feria, as cited in Pablo, 1995, p. 188), these stories complicate the way waves of colonial occupations[2] tempered what might be identified as "Filipino." The Philippine government recognized Joaquin with the Republic Cultural Heritage Award for Literature in 1961. The same stories would be later reprinted in *Tropical Gothic* (1972) and, in celebration of Joaquin's birth centenary, in *The Woman Who Had Two Navels and Tales of the Tropical Gothic* (2017).[3]

This genre called *tropical gothic*, which Joaquin is known for, "provides a space of reflection upon the unique social, historical, political, cultural and environmental conditions of the tropics" (Lundberg et al., 2019, p. 4). While Gary Devilles and Jocelyn Martin (2018) attest to the existence of a "plethora" of studies of Joaquin's corpus (p. 414), Ann Ang (2023) points out in "What's Tropical about Nick Joaquin's *Tropical Gothic*?" that up until then "there [was] no study of tropicality in Joaquin's work" (p. 13). In other words, the *tropical* in the pieces in the said collection is not as scrutinized as their gothic aesthetics,[4] despite the tropical nomenclature ascribed to his writings[5] and his attentiveness to the climate and seasons of the Philippine tropics.[6] In the same article, Ang turns to the tropical heat in "The Summer Solstice" and "The Legend of the Dying Wanton," which "[registers] the climactic locality of the Philippines and [animates] the gothic inversion of historical progress" (p. 13). Ang says:

> During his writing career, Joaquin confronted the fraught nature of a Philippines caught between American influence and the spectral

[1] Together with other pieces, Joaquin's iconic stories are first collected in his critically acclaimed collection *Prose and Poems* (1952).
[2] The Philippines was a Spanish colony (1565-1898) that was turned over to the Americans (1898-1946), which Japan occupied (1942-1945) during the Pacific Theater.
[3] *Tropical Gothic* was published by the University of Queensland Press as part of its series on Asian and Pacific Writing, gathering the following: "Candido's Apocalypse," "Doña Jeronima," "The Legend of the Dying Wanton," "May Day Eve," "The Summer Solstice," "Guardia de Honor," "The Mass of St. Sylvestre," "The Woman Who Had Two Navels," and "The Order of Melkizedek." *The Woman Who Had Two Navels and Tales of the Tropical Gothic* was published by Penguin Classics, adding "Three Generations" and *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* to the collection.
[4] See gothic discussion in Galdon, 1976; Sharad, 1981; Arong, 2016; Reyes and Selman, 2018; and Lizada, 2018.
[5] The University of Queensland Press published Joaquin's other "tropical" collection, *Tropical Baroque*, in 1982. See discussion of Joaquin's baroque in Blanco, 2004 and Serrano, 2018.
[6] See "May Day Eve," "The Summer Solstice," and "Guardia de Honor" in *The Woman Who Had Two Navels and Tales of the Tropical Gothic* as examples.

> nature of a Hispanic and pre-colonial past. Tropicality, then, represents a charged resignification of heat and corporeality to effect a biotemporality fully expressive of Philippine history—itself part of Joaquin's many-hued and eclectic mythologies of the Philippines as a beloved locale. (p. 28)

Lily Rose Tope (2018) also touches upon the tropical in her ecocritical reading of Joaquin's "use of natural elements" in "Doña Jeronima" (p. 133). To Tope, Joaquin's employment of the river and cave of Pasig in the said short story illustrates "the intrusion of Spain into local Filipino culture thereby giving the Filipino natural world a chance to tell a differently worded history" (p. 132). Tope then tells us:

> These natural images and narratives in "Doña Jeronima" provide one lens by which Nick Joaquin can be appreciated. The mix of natural images makes the natural world an actor in history and culture and makes nature a node in a nation's still unwritten history. (p. 146)

In this present study, this intersection of nature and gothic is further pursued by looking into how Joaquin taps the tropical, in tandem with the queer, in approaching, not only the specters of colonial occupations, but also the postcolonial aftereffects of authoritarianism. This thus becomes a study in queer tropical gothic, vitalized by the interrelations between human and animal characters.

When the Philippines was under Martial Law (1972-1981), critics read the absence of a major literary work by Joaquin as silence (see Bresnahan, 1990). However, Joaquin, named a National Artist for Literature in 1976 by the regime, was at the time publishing essays and children's stories, which he regarded as his "major work of the period" (Joaquin, as cited in Bresnahan, 1990, p. 69). "Gotita de Dragon" is among the fifteen stories for children that Joaquin wrote during this period of authoritarian rule.[7]

When compared to Joaquin's famous literary pieces, his children's stories have received scant attention, even though they are masterfully written and thematically sophisticated; in fact, we only have two studies in reference this period. Jose Nilo Binongo's (1993) reading of Joaquin's stories for children, through a framework of humor and mathematics, and Anna Katrina Gutierrez's (2014) analysis of the stories from a context of a dialectic between national and glocal.

[7] These stories were serialized in the weekly tabloid magazine *Mr. & Ms.* under his nom de plume Quijano de Manila. While the complete selection was published as *Joaquinesquerie: Myth a la Mod* (1983), ten of these stories were earlier produced as picture books forming the two-volume series *Pop Stories for Groovy Kids* (1979). The other five would later on be collected, in commemoration of Joaquin's tenth death anniversary, in *Gotita de Dragon and Other Stories* (2014).

"Gotita de Dragon" is worth looking into today for its approach to queerness and tropicality, motifs that earlier studies have not touched upon. The piece is queer not only in terms of form and theme but also because it is, arguably, the only Joaquin story that revolves around queer masculine (human and animal) characters, a divergence from his standard gynocentric and heteronormative narratives. Here there is no convent school girl divining "him whose woman [she] will be" on a "moist tropic" May eve (Joaquin, 2017, p. 55, 53); nor an initially prude doña who had her feet kissed by her husband in "the pure heat [that] burned with the immense intense fever of noon" that last of Tadtarin nights in June (p. 52); or a guardia de honor time-travelling every October when "a breath of the north stirs Manila" for the feast of Virgen La Naval (p. 112). Instead, we have a bachelor poet, who, when twilight gathers while still high noon, can "understand the language of animals," plants, and things (Joaquin, 2014, p. 93); a young lizard, christened Gotita (although it is "a he, not a she") out on a quest to become "as big as a gothic dragon" (p. 94); and two "warring couturiers," one of whom even called the other "a witch" (p. 105, 101).

This turn to a queer tropical gothic is addressed through a textual scrutiny of "Gotita de Dragon." First, a summary of the story is presented, and its form is discussed as both tale and parody. Then, the misadventures of the male characters are delved into via Jack Halberstam's queer art of failure as a liberating force. The tropical setting of the story is read in light of Christopher Reed's imminent queer spaces, which become through taking place. In sum, the paper considers that in "Gotita de Dragon" the failure of the hero is impetus for queerness to take place within a tropical gothic landscape that has undergone appropriations by colonial and postcolonial authoritarian forces,[8] and from there takes place resistance and solidarity.

A Parody of Saint Martha

In her introduction to *Gotita de Dragon and Other Stories*, Cyan Abad-Jugo (2014) describes the form of Joaquin's stories for children as one with "an exhilarating mixture of mythical fantasy and folklore and fairy tale, superstition and legend, science fiction, mystery, and divine intervention" (p. 79). Let us follow her description by examining the form of the titular story.

The story begins with a poet who lives in Pasig[9] scooping "a wee drop of dragon" out of his beer, which he then christens Gotita de Dragon and, when the lizard says "I'm a he, not a she," nicknames him Goti (Joaquin, 2014, pp. 93-94). The two would get

[8] The genre of Tropical Gothic has been richly employed in storied critiques of colonialism, militarism, authoritarian regimes, neoliberalism, and industrialization and pollution (see Lundberg et al., 2019).
[9] Pasig is an historical city within Metro Manila. It lies on the banks of the meandering Pasig River. It was originally inhabited by Tagalog people where the river was a centre of trade. Spanish colonization came early to Pasig, and the Immaculate Conception Parish Church was established in 1572. The 'Pasig Cathedral' remains an emblem of the city's deep-rooted colonial-Catholic heritage.

along; and in one of Goti's visits, he asks when will he become "as big as a gothic dragon"? (p. 94). His poet godfather says he will have to make three good deeds as in tales of old, and off they go to Remedios Circle.[10] There Goti meets his helpers, cockroach and mouse, who will lead him to Mondrian de Manila and then to Anito de la Moda, two couturiers who have lost celebrity. In an attempt to revive the couturiers' careers, Goti sneaks into the mind of Mondrian and smuggles his designs for Anito to produce—eventually causing the couturiers to fight. To rectify the do-gooding gone wrong, Goti's helpers advise him to pray to Saint Valentine whose birds then instruct him to send cards to the warring couturiers. Thanks to his poet godfather, the couturiers each receive a Valentine card, resulting in their reconciliation and design collaboration. During the subsequent launch of their label 'Mondrianito' at the Manila Hotel, Goti transforms into a dragon, causing mass panic. The police authorities chase him away, prompting him to hide at a "lonely bank of the Pasig" (p. 106). Cockroach and mouse then fetch the poet to the riverbank. Remembering that "only a virgin can tame a monster," he sends the two off to the wolf in Project Four, who "only eats anything with a skirt on," to borrow his "foolproof virgin-detector" (pp. 106-107). Goti's friends then proceed to the red-light districts of Malate and Ermita where there are "lots of girls" (p. 107), but the gadget would not whistle—until they return to the riverbank. Thus it is with the poet's belt around his neck, that the gothic dragon is tamed and reverts to being a little lizard "no bigger than a pin" (p. 109).

In "Gotita de Dragon," Joaquin recasts a pious medieval legend about a virgin who tamed a dragon (Saint Martha) and complements it with folktale aspects like the dispatcher (the poet), the hero on a quest (Goti), the helpers (cockroach and mouse), and the donors (the couturiers). To this, he adds sci-fi elements like a giant monster causing city pandemonium as he is hunted by authorities (reminiscent of the cinematic elements of King Kong and Godzilla) and the deployment of a virgin-detecting gadget, which may be read as a deus ex machina but also function as a time marker indicating the narrative's contemporaneousness with the digital revolution of the 1980s that saw the rise of personal and portable devices. He additionally interposes concepts like the Big Bad Wolf from fairy tales (the wolf owner of the virgin-detector) and the Christian doctrine of intercessory prayer, that is, when the intercession of Saint Valentine is sought. The result, as may be imagined, is a parodic tale.

A tale, whether folktale (oral tradition) or fairy tale (literary production), is a narrative that recounts a strange event which often begins with an exotic setting ('a land far away and long ago') and concludes with good triumphing over evil. Tales have a loose

[10] Remedios Circle is a large open space rotunda in the district of Malate, Manila. It is named after The Nuestra Señora de los Remedios [Our Lady of Remedies], who is the patron saint of the nearby Malate Cathedral. In colonial times the area of the traffic rotunda was a graveyard, today the circle is the center of Manila nightlife, and a cruising ground for gays.

plot and structure, however, a strong moral lesson. A tale has a hero with a weakness or character flaw, and a villain who causes harm to the hero. Other characters necessary to a tale include, a dispatcher who sets the hero on a quest, the helpers who "carry out various actions in support of the hero," and the donor who "gives the hero the magical agent after a series of tests and questions" (Thomas, 2016, p. 19). Bronwen Thomas (2016) points out that in Vladimir Propp's morphology of the folktale, characters may "perform more than one sphere of action" and a character's role in the narrative or sphere of action "depends not so much on who they are as what they *do*" (p. 19). Joaquin observes these basic elements of a tale in "Gotita de Dragon."

The narrative begins with lines that impress a strange phenomenon: "There lived a poet in Pasig for whom twilight sometimes gathered while the sun was still a-nooning. When that happened, he could understand the language of animals, and also of flowers, kettles, and chairs" (Joaquin, 2014, p. 93). This opening unravels the rather exciting quests of Goti as summarized above. This strangeness (the poet's capacity to understand the nonhuman world) is an effect of an occurrence outside the ordinary (twilight at noon) that, according to "the other people in the room," might require the poet "another stay at the rest house" (p. 94). This queer behavior then situates the story at a place familiar but also far away; in other words, it conditions the tropicality of the narrative by letting us enter a seemingly "exotic world which [is] simultaneously a familiar world" (Lundberg et al., 2022, p. 6) and, at the same time, through the atmospheric phenomenon, introduces a gothic eeriness about the story world. It also signals an entanglement where human and nonhuman are "co-emerging" in the same exotic yet familiar world via "their interposing agencies in the same encounter" (Benitez & Lundberg, 2022, p. 3). However, because the other people in the room could hear only the poet speaking—in his conversations with the nonhuman—he is taken to be sick. Colloquially, this is taken as symptomatic of a psychological condition. This arc of the poet however is not fully fleshed out in the narrative because as Goti sets out "into the great world" (Joaquin, 2014, p. 94), the poet disappears into the background. As the story progresses, it is revealed that other characters, likewise, interact with the more-than-human world of animals: Mondrian and Goti would also converse with each other (pp. 95-97), and the sauna attendants, which Goti's helpers find in their search for a virgin, can understand the language of their animal patrons (p. 107). Furthermore, the exchange of Mondrian and Goti exposes the innermost thoughts of the old couturier, thus invoking an otherworldly dimension.

Joaquin concludes "Gotita de Dragon" with a celebratory scene as expected of traditional tales. When Goti has reverted to his actual size, the narrator tells us:

> Then, oh, what a merriment as Goti linked hands with cockroach and mouse and danced them round and round in the morning sunshine!

> And overhead appeared the two lovebirds of Saint Valentine, singing this prophecy:
>
> *Goti's a big big hero, hooray,*
>
> *as you all remember when,*
>
> *for an instant, every Valentine's Day,*
>
> *he becomes a dragon again!*
>
> And that's why, on every eve of Saint Valentine, the poet in Pasig stays up until midnight, to see, as the clock strikes the first hour of the feast, little Goti, for a brief brief second, again turned into a dragon. (p. 109)

Good triumphed, not necessarily over evil, but through friendship and solidarity among the animal characters—the hero and his helpers. Goti was actually reluctant to respond to the friendliness of cockroach the first time they met on Remedios Circle during his quest to fulfill three good deeds (p. 94), but cockroach and mouse ended up carrying out Goti's second quest (the search for a virgin) on his behalf when, having become a gothic dragon, he cannot leave the river lest the authorities pursue him. Good also triumph through "the value of self-contentment" (Binongo, 1993, p. 502), which Goti finally realizes while hiding in the river: "I only want to be liked—and I thought I would be liked more if there were more of me to be liked" (Joaquin, 2014, p. 106).

The summary and discussion so far offers some ideas on the roles performed by the characters. The dispatcher is the poet who physically brought Goti to Remedios Circle thereby sending him off into the great world where he would tender three good deeds in order to achieve his goal of becoming a gothic dragon. The hero, needless to say, is Goti, with cockroach and mouse his helpers. The donors are the couturiers, Mondrian and Anito, whose reconciliation functions as the magical agent that brought about Goti's spectacular transformation. And who is the villain—the character who would present the conflict and harm the hero? If we follow Propp's point that a character's role in a tale is less about their personality and more about "what they *do*" and that they may fulfill different roles at the same time (Thomas, 2016, p. 19), then the villain here is the same dispatcher poet. Recall that in the beginning the poet, having scooped out the fallen lizard from his beer, named the creature Gotita de Dragon and

> [a]t that, the baby lizard lying limp on the cloth lifted a groggy head and whimpered:

> "Gotita de Dragon! But I'm a he, not a she—and Gotita sounds like a she!"
>
> "Oh, all right then," said the poet, "you shall be called Goti for short."
>
> "Because I'm so short?" asked the baby lizard anxiously.
>
> "Because," reassured the poet, "someday you'll be as big as a gothic dragon: *un dragon gotico*!" (Joaquin, 2014, p. 94)

By giving the lizard a name that does not correspond to his sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, the poet inadvertently injures Goti; and this is so because "names encode expectations" and language can "reflect, reproduce, and recreate structural violence" (Barchas-Lichtenstein, 2017). If Goti did not feel slighted by the act of naming, he would not be so insistent and in such a hurry to physically grow up, which becomes the springboard for his adventures in the great world. Fairytales, and certainly Joaquin's children's stories, have complex and mature themes.[11] As Gutierrez notes, Joaquin writes with his readers in mind:

> By dedicating his stories to groovy kids, he reimagines Filipino childhood according to the rebellious and inventive spirit of the word [i.e., groovy], making it an ideal space from which to synchronize social and cultural inequalities. (Gutierrez, 2014, p. 6)

It would help to consider that the period from which the story was produced witnessed not only a military regime (1972-1981), but also a variety of movements: student activism, anticolonial and nationalist sentiments, liberation theology, gay liberation, technological advancements, globalization, mass media, and so on (see Tilman, 1971; Corsino, 1981). Thus the need for stories that could address such historical and cultural upheaval. Joaquin's choice of genre is fitting because, as Kimberley Reynolds (2011) tells us, children's stories are "important carriers of information about changes in culture, present and past" (p. 4) since they can be easily recalled, digested, and shared. Let us add that the platform through which such stories are released are as important. *Mr. & Ms.* was a weekly tabloid magazine that had a varied readership because of its heterogenous content: opinion essays critical of the regime at the time; feature articles about celebrities, their private and showbiz lives; literary pieces by established and emerging Filipino writers; serialized canned fiction; movie advertisements and centerfolds; horoscopes; weekly meal plans; and so on. Joaquin knew his readers, and we may even daresay that he was not writing for children alone.

[11] Joaquin's *Lilit Bulilit and the Babe in the Womb* gives the aswang a contemporary image and tackles abortion.

"Gotita de Dragon" then, is not merely a tale, but also a parody—an intertextual piece that, according to Linda Hutcheon (2002), is out "to enshrine the past and to question it" (p. 6). Joaquin picks up the medieval legend of Saint Martha, the virgin who tamed the dragon, and appropriates the narrative for his groovy readers. How would the search for a virgin play out in a contemporary setting? There must be a mod intervention to make it work (considering the given genre, readership, and platform), and that is the virgin-detector. But consider that it could also be a way of posing a question on matters we have become accustomed to. In the Bible, there is no mention of Saint Martha being a virgin; and therefore, one might ask why in the *Golden Legend*,[12] she is described so. Her virgin identity has travelled transnationally to wherever there are believers in the Catholic faith, such as the Philippines. In my parish, for example, there is an image of the same dragon-taming virgin with an inscription that says she is the patron saint of (curiously) housewives. In other words, by teasing out a past, which can only be approached through its traces, Joaquin is calling attention to it, but with a critical flair. In this case then, to parody is also a means to queer the narrative: instead of having a female virgin in "Gotita de Dragon," Joaquin has the male dragon tamed by a male virgin, whose virginity is vetted by the virgin-detecting gadget owned by a fairy-tale figure of perverse reputation, the wolf. It enshrines the pious legend of the female saint (the poet refers to it twice in the story), but simultaneously disrupts the original, dominant narrative. This "queer parody," performed via the recasting of the legend offers on the one hand, as Moe Meyer (1994) puts it, "a transgressive vehicle yet, on the other, simultaneously invokes the spectre of dominant ideology within its practice, appearing, in many instances, to actually reinforce the dominant order" (p. 5). The said haunting specter (the pious legend as an ideological apparatus) is summoned and exorcised through the process of appropriation. In the next section, Joaquin's bid to perform such task is further scrutinized.

A Story Built Upon Failures

The colonial project had always been aimed at exercising power over the empire's 'other', and in classic postcolonial critique, the conquest of the other has always been rehearsed in discourse through the conquest of the feminine body (see Said, 1978; Spivak, 2010). This 'other' is penetrated, explored, and taken possession of as the empire legitimizes and gratifies its virility. While such rendering of alterity remains instructive and illuminating in comprehending the colonial past and its insidious and intergenerational effects on the present of the former colony, it is also worthwhile considering how such "legacies" also discipline, condition, and repress another

[12] The *Golden Legend* is a collection of 153 stories of saints by Jacobus Voragine (1275). Translated by William Caxton (1483).

'othered', that is, the postcolonial masculine body. Hema Chari (2001), responding to Edward Said's feminization of the Orient, points out that "the gaze of the imperial voyeur" is not only directed on the colonized female as it is at the same time "glancing askance on the colonized [male]" (p. 279). Both these bodies were appropriated according to the empire's belief systems, which would become its way of sustaining its "dominion and status" over the colony (p. 279). In the Filipino context, the Catholic religion became an ideological apparatus of the Spanish colonial empire. Several studies point out how friars and missionaries contemporaneously indoctrinated the locals in submission to colonial power and conversion to their faith, which included the regulation of their bodies in a heteronormative and patriarchal manner, and consequently meant repression and condemnation of anything that would negate, resist, or dissatisfy the system (see Ildefonso, 2022). Such was the norm for three centuries (1565-1898), until the Americans took over the colonial occupation of the Philippines for the next decades (1898-1946), thereby systematically loosening up the restrictions previously imposed on the locals through their introduction of liberated views on the body via formal education, state policies, and mass media (see Ildefonso, 2022). But the old repressive apparatus, defiant in obsolescence, metamorphoses into specters out to haunt the present—a leitmotif Joaquin has repeatedly reflected on in his signature stories through the struggles of his female characters. Interestingly, in "Gotita de Dragon," Joaquin tackles this same theme through the failures of his masculine characters.

The character of the poet is a dispatcher, and also a villain. His act of violence, the naming of Goti, is no ordinary instance of naming because the poet is performing a priestly act:

> "Well, well," said the poet, "I sit down for a wee drop of beer and I get a wee drop of dragon!"
>
> And fishing out with two fingers the little drowning creature, he dropped it on the tablecloth and made a blessing over it.
>
> "Since you have already immersed yourself," said he, "I may as well complete your baptism. I christen thee Gotita de Dragon." (Joaquin, 2014, p. 93-94)

This is indicative of the poet's cognizance of the catechism, and his act of blessing the baby lizard that has drowned and baptizing it—via the liturgical speech act "I christen thee"—signals familiarity, if not adherence, to the Catholic faith. This is also an invocation of the colonial specter, but carried out irreverently where beer becomes

baptismal water.[13] This scene moreover shows how the act of naming, and the language of the empire itself, can be violent. The poet gives the name Gotita de Dragon based on how he saw the creature swimming in his beer—"a wee drop of dragon" (p. 93). Technically, Gotita de Dragon is not a female name, but a Spanish rendition of the descriptive phrase. What makes it feminine is the /a/ sound: "Goti*ta* sounds like a she!" (p. 94; emphasis mine). Although the subsequent name, Goti, negates the nominal misgendering of his body, it still insinuates a feminization according to his small build, and so he endeavors to become as big as a gothic dragon the quickest way possible. This desire, on one hand, is a manifestation of a child's trusting confidence in his godfather who had said he would become a gothic dragon someday, while on the other hand, is symptomatic of a negative body image. Recall that when the poet nicknamed him Goti, he "*anxiously*" replied: "Because I'm so short?" (p. 94; emphasis mine). The gothic dragon would later on learn that size does not create likability: "…I *thought* I would be liked more if there were more of me to be liked" (p. 106; emphasis mine). But before Goti reaches such a realization, he would have to encounter Mondrian and Anito, and through these relations we learn more about him.

Goti's exchange with the "pushing sixty" Mondrian reveals that the old couturier had, during his heyday, dressed the elite of the city. He was in demand and earning a lot, but now "cannot even pay the light bill" because he can no longer "bring forth [his] own creations" (pp. 95-97). Conversely, the "barely fifteen" Anito, mouse informs Goti, is "so clever with needle and scissors" but "has no sense of style" (p. 98). Just a year after opening his atelier, he is already planning on going "back to his barrio in the province and there again herd his father's carabaos" (p. 98). Goti takes the situation of the couturiers as an opportunity to tender two good deeds in one go. While Mondrian is asleep, Goti creeps into his head through his ear, finding there "a vast wardrobe, but in miniature, hung with frocks and gowns and ternos[14] of unearthly loveliness" (p. 97). Goti would put these dresses on, and crossing Remedios Circle, proceed to Anito's atelier on the other side from Mondrian's. The cross-dressed lizard would then creep into the head of the young sleeping couturier, entering through his ear and leaving there the miniature dresses. Anito would wake up next morning with designs in mind, which "he thought he had dreamed," and "in a few hours" produce them (p. 98). Patrons come in, so problem solved for Anito—but not for long because the moment Mondrian found out: "Back and forth raged the spindle war, to the wicked profit of the columnists" (p. 101). Disappointed in the outcome of his handiwork, Goti

[13] This also indicates that in the tropics, even the animals are to be Christianized. In this piece, Joaquin brings out an old belief that even lizards kiss the ground when it's time to pray the Angelus at six in the evening. This also appears in *The Woman Who Had Two Navels.*

[14] The terno is an iconic dress shaped by the Philippines' history of colonization.

stops his "nightly fashion shuttle" on Remedios Circle, subsequently ending the couturial "miracles" and the word war (p. 101).

In this part of the narrative queer is not simply about cross-dressing in Remedios Circle. Goti's failed quest to do good deeds, alerts us to a deeper queering in this story. Joaquin has thus built his parody of the pious legend upon events of failure, which Jack Halberstam invites us to consider as a promise of queerness. The fall. The irreverence. The disillusionment. The unsophistication. These are "a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and . . . a form of critique" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 88). Goti "couldn't be stopped" by his mother's injunction, and so he fell into the poet's beer (Joaquin, 2014, p. 93)—but it is from that fall he will experience the great world outside. The poet's irreverent baptism makes him a godfather to Goti, whose misadventures will out the poet's virginity, which identifies him useless in terms of procreation, and yet, his uselessness is useful. Without the virgin poet making possible the gothic dragon's reversion to a little lizard, the city remains only in "the belief" that the monster is gone (p. 106). In the meantime, Goti's disillusionment on embodying the gothic dragon becomes a signal for the hero to embark on a quest again, to find a virgin that will tame his dragon. Here we enter into the classic Joaquin past-present discourse in order to tell the story and bring about its climax.

When Goti no longer transfers "clothes from the mental wardrobe of the old man to the mental atelier of the younger one" (p. 101), the latter becomes unsure of himself. The narrator reports: "But why, he wondered in anguish, could he dream up no more style sensations? Was he, indeed, a witch who had been looting the imagination of old Mondrian de Manila, that maestro whose masterpieces he, Anito, had idolized as a child?" (p. 101). The narrator also informs us that Mondrian "had raged at the robbery but in his heart had thrilled to see his clothes again the sensation of Manila Elegante" (p. 101). Put differently, the scene suggests that without the patterns from the past, the present could only go so far—but the past cannot go so far without the participation of the present (p. 101), setting the past and the present in a continuum. Joaquin is fond of framing the past-present interplay in this manner.[15] It is unsurprising then that Joaquin would have the two couturiers reconciled, complete with a collaborative fashion line, 'Mondrianito,' and a show launching their "joint creations" at the Manila Hotel before all the elegant of the city (p. 105). What is curious, is that Joaquin would also have the evening of beauty and success disrupted by Goti's transformation into a dragon right at the very moment Mondrian and Anito tender their final bow together,

[15] In *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*, for example, the older generation is described as "a reference, a dictionary" (Joaquin, 2010, p. 19).

thus creating a pandemonium that has the people "petrified" and "stampeding" (p. 105). It is funny and, as one may also imagine, frustrating. What can we take from this?

"Under certain circumstances," writes Halberstam (2011), "failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (pp. 2-3). Perceived this way, failures then could be a force that liberates us from the spectral haunting of repressive norms, delimiting expectations, and exploitative means. The frustrated evening, and how it is dealt with, is emblematic of how productivity takes precedence. The couturiers only matter if they are creating and producing that which the ruling class wants, which in this case is fashion: "miracles of elegance, so fresh, so original, and in so steady a stream as to seem without end" (Joaquin, 2014, p. 99). Goti "*thought* that [he] would be liked more if there were more of [him] to be liked" (p. 106; emphasis mine), which is symptomatic of the effect of the pressure that normative standards force on people, especially on children. Goti, as a child in the story, thought that because he is "so short" he is not enough (p. 94); and when he finally becomes a gothic dragon, he also becomes the odd one, the monster that people run away from and police authorities chase away (p. 106). The queer then—the one who disturbs the normative order, the one who does not fit the mold—has to *fail* the specters haunting them. "And while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair," says Halberstam (2011), "it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life" (p. 3). What Joaquin is illustrating, by building his queer parody of the pious legend upon what Halberstam calls "the queer art of failure" (p. 87), is that the undoing of the normative order is the same order's failure to fashion homogeneity despite the disciplinary acts, religious tenets, and various standards it comes up with. And here, it is the queer—the irreverent baptizer, the useless bachelor—who would deliver the city from the monster it had created out of Goti. This failure—this virgin—would save the queer child, "leading the huge dragon from river to bank," safe from those cornering and chasing him away (Joaquin, 2014, p. 108). But before the poet can do exactly that, he will have to reckon with his own complicity with the specters, and failure.

We recall now that in order for Goti's godfather and friends to help him, they will need a virgin because following the old tale "only a virgin can make [him] small again" (p. 106). The poet then dispatches cockroach and mouse to borrow the virgin-detector and to search for virgins; and having found none where there are lots of girls, the helpers return to the river frustrated, only for the gadget to whistle at the feet of the poet—effectively outing the poet a virgin, who takes "some time before [his blushing self] could find his voice" (p. 108). We may say that he is purposely concealing his virginity because, colloquially, it is considered laughable for a man to remain so (Goti

and friends are “startled” by the revelation); but we may also say that he is not voluntarily presenting himself because *to him* he does not fit the image in the narrative he has been referencing. But when the poet finally faces his embarrassing outing, and performs his role in the ritual for the good of his godson, even improvising it with his belt, he allows us to realize how Halberstam (2011) envisions the promise of queer failure as a way of life where “we choose to make good on that promise in a way that makes a detour around the usual markers of accomplishment and satisfaction” (p. 186). In this queer art of failure, therefore, uselessness is usefulness. In the next section, usefulness is delved into by looking at the tropical landscape, which Joaquin maps out in the narrative and where takes place a queer space.

A Taking Place

In the colonial project, the empire alters not only colonized human bodies, which are policed and disciplined through its spectral apparatuses, but also the landscapes of the colony, that is, its “natural and cultural aspects” (Lundberg et al., 2022, p. 2). And if the landscape is tropical, it has to be remade to become useful for the empire. This endeavor to remake the tropical landscape of the colony is, Anita Lundberg et al. (2022) point out, “a technocratic endeavor that dispensed with the pre-existing moral order of the tropics. And inevitably, colonial expansion met with forms of discursive and material resistance” (p. 4). That which resists the normative and technocratic appropriation of the landscape, and the bodies therein, is the queer. As Rob Cover (2001) explains, it transgresses, subverts, and disrupts regulations enacted by the empire and its apparatuses (p. 30). Yet the queer not only tender their resistance through a way of life—like the queer art of failure—but also by taking place. Christopher Reed (1996) imagines queer spaces as spaces that are “in the process of, literally, *taking place*, of claiming territory” and therefore “manifest[ing] an identity that . . . insists on *taking place*” (pp. 64-69). This means that while queerness is, first and foremost, constituted in and through the body, its “traces remain to mark certain spaces for others—to their delight or discomfort—to discover” (p. 64). Queer spaces then are locatable within a tropical landscape where resistance *takes place* because what remains of it, or what comes out of it, is also *taking place*: it becomes an identification in as much as it occupies place.

It is also worth adding here that what is being resisted in the former colony is not only the insidious colonial legacies. Leander Schneider (2006) reminds us that there has been “an almost universal tendency toward authoritarianism and ‘despotism’ after independence” from colonial power, a “result of an institutional legacy that colonialism left behind” that also affects the landscape of the former colony (p. 94). The Philippines, for example, weathered waves of colonial occupation, which also endured instances of authoritarianism; in terms of length, the Martial Law declared by Ferdinand E.

Marcos, Sr., president from 1965 to 1986, was the longest (1972-1981) and had the most impact on contemporary landscape of the country, especially on its economy that Filipinos continue to grapple with today (see *Essential Truths about the Economy during the Martial Law Era*, 2022; *Martial Law in Data*, n.d.). We must note that the period was tumultuous not simply due to the autocratic rule and resistances to it, but also because there existed growing anticolonial sentiments in the country (when the regime was practically allied with the US) as in other Asian, Latin American, and African countries at the time—which at one point the regime also instrumentalized to legitimize itself.[16] Thus, the postcolonial, in the Philippines, is resisting not only the colonial legacies haunting the nation, but also the oppressive situations caused by the authoritarian regime. This resistance takes place in queer spaces of the tropical landscape.

When Joaquin makes use of the pious legend of Saint Martha, he is at the same time calling attention to how the empire continues its ideological hold on the former colony through its most enduring apparatus, the Catholic religion; and this is discernible through the calendrical and liturgical celebrations that persist to this day. Every February, a feast in honor of Saint Martha is celebrated in Pateros, an old town of Manila. However, the residents are not celebrating the saint's taming of the dragon[17]—in the oral tradition of Pateros, Santa Marta slayed, sometime during the Spanish colonial period, the giant crocodile[18] that had eaten the ducks they were raising along their segment of the Pasig River for their balut[19] industry.[20] It is telling that in the Filipino rendition, the legend is tethered to the livelihood of the townspeople, implying that the prosperity of their balut industry, and so their life at the time, was vouchsafed by the saint, a colonial apparatus. This tropical landscape then—the river, the ducks, the balut industry, the crocodile, the townspeople, the fiesta—had been made useful for the empire's colonial agenda through popular devotion. The postcolonial turn arrives when Pateros residents replaced the dragon at the feet of their patron saint with a crocodile, a tropical queer moment taking place on a Catholic altar. Their devotion continues as they serenade Santa Marta with their hope (Ruiz, 2022), even though their duck-raising industry no longer exists due to the pollution of the river and the urbanization of the area since the 1970s (Alejandria et al, 2019).

In "Gotita de Dragon," Joaquin uses urban spaces in Manila—which include the polluted Pasig River and the red-light districts of Malate and Ermita—to complicate the dominant narrative of the dragon-taming virgin through his oblique criticism of the

[16] Joaquin delves into this in the novel *Cave and Shadows* (1983).
[17] In Catholic lore, Saint Martha slayed a monster called "Tarasque" in Provence, France, often depicted in her iconography as a dragon.
[18] In Joaquin's *Almanac for Manileños* (1979), it is in plural form.
[19] Balut is a steamed fertilized duck egg, a popular street food in the Philippines.
[20] See "The legend behind 'Rosas ng Pateros,'" 2019.

technocratic appropriations of these spaces. This tropical landscape also hosts the queer entanglements of characters both human and nonhuman to produce a unique narrative of the period. As it turns out now, it is a way for Joaquin "to voice and articulate [his] disquiet in astute observations of society" grappling with martial rule (Lundberg et al., 2019, p. 10).

Joaquin's selection of Malate and Ermita is strategic in setting up his criticism. During the 1970s and 1980s, Malate and Ermita thrived as red-light districts where nightclubs, gay bars, and drag performances were aplenty—an insidious legacy of the Americans (Genota et al., 2023) who, during their time of occupation (1898-1946), developed these areas on the outskirts of Intramuros (which had a fishing village and an hermitage) into trendy residential areas, erecting high-rise apartments and spacious bungalows for American settlers and the Filipino elite,[21] only to be destroyed by them as they fought against the Japanese during the Battle of Manila in 1945 (Morales, 2015). At the same time, Remedios Circle, where once stood a cemetery, particularly flourished as a commercial place and a base for bohemians and artists, despite the looming urban decay.[22] Thus, in the story world, as in the real, these areas are generally called "tourist turf" (Joaquin, 2014, p. 94, 107).[23] It is outside-the-walls, configured and disfigured, and off-the-wall: queer.

It is within this landscape, which has survived technocratic development and destruction by occupying powers, that Goti meets his helpers, cockroach and mouse. The attributes identified with these creatures indicate that the location is humid and untidy (breaking the ideals associated with being 'temperate'),[24] and yet, the vermin animals and tainted space jump-start the first quest. Here Goti also meets his donor couturiers, Mondrian and Anito; and his interaction with them reveals their innermost thoughts.[25] The story depicts the urban landscapes of Malate and Ermita as hosts, not only to old timers who lived through the city's halcyon days and like it had seen better days, but also to hopeful outsiders who ventured to the city for better opportunities. Mondrian is "wailing in the dark of his one-room pad" the first time Goti finds him: "I who basked in the spotlight during the barrio fiestas at Malacañang because it was I, I—*aie de mi!*—who fashioned their balintawaks and patadiongs!" (p. 95). The situation of Anito that night is as bleak. "Today had brought no buyers: so back to the carabaos! And he had gone to bed hungry," says the narrator, "with nothing to swallow but his tears" (p. 98). In foregrounding their pining for bygone eras, broken dreams, and

[21] See "Malate: 'Manila's crown jewel'" (2019)

[22] Manila's urban decay is often explored in films produced in the 1970s-1980s (e.g., *Manila in the Claws of Light, Manila by Night,* etc.).

[23] In "Queering Architecture: Possibilities of Space(s)," J. Cottrill (2006) calls this the "transparent layer" of queer space, i.e., its "apparent, sometimes stereotypical aspects" (p. 364).

[24] The tropics is always seen as the other of the temperate climate of the colonizing countries. Of course, 'temperate' also has come to be associated with order, cleanliness, tidiness etc.

[25] Cottrill (2006) calls this the "opaque layer," which "represents the private world" in queer space (p. 364).

capital losses, Joaquin is accentuating the glum mood that permeates these spaces of the city, thereby adding another facet to the landscape.

Here it is important to go back in the space-time of the story. Recall that what functions as magical agent transforming Goti into a gothic dragon is the reconciliation of Mondrian and Anito. However, because of our hero's unsophistication in trying to do good, the two couturiers ended up engaged in a spindle war only to the profit of the gossip columnists. At this point, Goti's helpers advised him to "turn to Saint Valentine," and off he went to church where the saint's lovebirds told him to "send Valentine cards" to the couturiers (p. 102). Since Goti "can't buy anything," the trade-off was for him to request his godfather poet to make the cards for him (p. 102), which he subsequently delivered to Mondrian and Anito, prompting the soap-operatic meeting of the two.

> Goti got an idea—and dispatched cockroach and mouse in opposite directions. The cockroach headed for Anito's doorway and there he crawled up Anito's leg. The mouse ran to Mondrian's doorway and there nibbled at Mondrian's ankle.
>
> "*Naku*, a cockroach!" shrieked Anito, shaking his invaded leg. "*Naku, nanay ko,* a cockroach, a cockroach! *Saklolo, saklolo*!"
>
> And he dashed out in panic to Remedios Circle.
>
> At the same moment Mondrian was also rushing out to the Circle, screaming: "*Dios mio, Dios miso,* a mouse! *Aie que horror*, a mouse, a mouse! *Socorro, socorro*!"
>
> And the two couturiers collided on the lawn of Remedios Circle. For a moment they stared at each other in frigid silence. But the next moment they were in each other's arms, bawling as one" (p. 104)

And this is when "Fossil!" becomes "Maestro!" and "Pirate!" becomes "Prodigy!" (pp. 101, 104). Tellingly, the reconciliation of these couturiers is a product of a construct that is simultaneously colonial (the saint) and capitalist (the cards); and Joaquin even sets the launching of 'Mondrianito' on a very commercialized holiday, Valentine's Day, at the Manila Hotel where "women swooned and even strong men wept to see one vision after another of raiment such as goddesses might have worn to the shrine of beauty" (p. 105). This image of decadence would be remembered later on by some in the real world as a golden age of fashion in the Philippines (see Moral, 2015). Here we see that the couturiers—unqueered in the sense that they are no longer a failure because they are useful again—are permitted to take *their* place "at the center" (Joaquin, 2014, p. 105)—but this is disrupted when "from the corner" the queer *takes*

place: the lizard transmutes into a dragon (p. 105). Queerness then *takes place* when that which is deemed monstrous and dangerous takes *the* place of the useful and the elegant of the city, when failure takes *the* place of successful, when different takes *the* place of the normative, and when resistance takes *the* place of complicity. However, the queer, for taking place, is "cornered," "bombard[ed]," "fire[d at]," and "chased away" by police apparatuses to salvage the order defined by the state and other hegemonic institutions (pp. 105-106). Goti, then, proceeds to a lonely bank of the Pasig River, where he will be reunited with his godfather poet. In this scene, the poet performs another sphere of action, that of 'the donor', whose virginity will be the magical agent making possible the dragon's reversion to the diminutive lizard. But before that can happen, the quest to find a virgin must first transpire, and through this quest Joaquin teases out another critical point.

Within the same space of glam, cockroach and mouse bring us to places of grit where there is no other choice but to "cling to a knife" (De Quiros, 2014).[26] The narrator tells us that when the two searched the bathhouses "the virgin-detector didn't whistle, though they went through all the rooms where girls were busy bathing wolves and hogs and bulls" (Joaquin, 2014, p. 107). Tellingly, they also did not encounter police authorities while scouring the "night places" in all of Malate and Ermita (p. 108). This hints at the flesh trade that proliferated during the period, operated by foreign financiers in partnership with local operators, a byproduct of the regime's multimillion-dollar tourism campaign to boost the economy (Bonnet, 2017). The human bodies in this tropical landscape have been appropriated as commodities and service-providers; and because it is sanctioned, it is not policed. That those who would "cling to a knife" in the city are servicing animal patrons off their bodies is queer—especially in the sense that in a heavily Christianized landscape like the Philippines, it is seen as a transgression of church teachings about the body. However, like Mondrian and Anito, these girls' bodies have been unqueered, made useful; this time, by the regime for its tourism campaign. This is emblematic of the surreptitious participation of the government in the exploitation of its people (by elements from former occupying forces, like the Yakuza of Japan) in exchange for economic gains (see Bonnet, 2017). The search for a virgin in the gritty bathhouses, set against the opulence of the fashion show, exposes the polarizing effects of the economic crisis at the time.

The search comes to its end upon the return of Goti's helpers to the river. Goti remains unharmed in the river because authorities did not pursue him there. They drove him out of the Manila Bay, Subic, and Corregidor—the "Philippine waters" (Joaquin, 2014, p. 106)—but did not consider the Pasig River, which is practically connected to these

[26] Cottrill (2006) calls this "translucent layer," which "represents the first layer of realities of the culture" in a queer space (p. 364). De Quiros's (2014) "cling to a knife" is an English rendering of the Filipino expression "kapit sa patalim," which refers to "the heart of desperation, a loss-loss choice between surviving and surviving badly, between being alive and raggedly so."

waters. It is because the river, at the time, is not as useful. Not an important port for international trade. Not an American naval base. Not a historical site.[27] In fact, the river has a body like that of the gothic dragon: monstrous, dangerous, queer. At the time (1970s-1980s), the river is foul-smelling, murky, and no longer participates in fishing activities (see *The Grand Canal of Pasig*, 2008). This turn of the old grand canal, from being useful in transportation, commerce, and recreation,[28] to useless, is linked to post-war mobility, urbanization of the outskirts of the capital, industrialization, and negligence: to the contemporary technocratic remaking of the landscape,[29] which "enable and perpetuate pollution, waste and toxicity" (Benitez & Lundberg, 2022, p. 14). Whereas in the colonial past, "return[ing] to the river is to find spiritual solace" (Tope, 2018, p. 142), in its contemporary taking place it is to find remarkably—in its polluted and toxic body—a sanctuary for the disliked and the different. Where Goti could escape (if not outsmart) those chasing him away. Where mouse and cockroach (normally seen as pests) could dance with their friend Goti and not be shaken off and screamed at. Where the poet's embarrassment becomes fulfillment of the search. The return to the river—to this "inhospitable and pestilential" body (Lundberg et al., 2022, p. 3)—indeed, is "a chance to tell a differently worded history" (Tope, 2018, p. 132). Joaquin returns to the Pasig River in his queer parody of Saint Martha to narrate a differently worded story of this tropical landscape that had been appropriated many times over. The heterotopic river takes *the* place from those who appropriated it only to neglect it, and through it takes place a resistance that makes a difference to the landscape. Benitez and Lundberg (2022) call this a "tropical materialism," which "open[s] up to moments of material *poiesis*—the bringing of something into existence" (p. 17). In this case, bringing into existence a narrative of resistance and solidarity, from the corner and the lonely bank, among the disliked and the different, in time of martial rule; in other words, here we have a tropical gothic narrative "where the horrific and the uncanny not only lurk in the shadows but occupy open, sun-drenched spaces alongside humans" thereby "articulat[ing] how contemporary concerns [like human exploitation and environmental pollution] are played out in the tropics" called Manila (Lundberg et al., 2019, pp. 2-10).

A Queer Tropical Joaquin

In her book review of *Gotita de Dragon and Other Stories*, Devi Benedicte I. Paez (2015) notes that the collection "does not disregard the child for it provides the fun and gratifying essentials of an action-packed collection, but neither does it screen the child

[27] "Araw ng Kagitingan" was declared a holiday in 1980 in commemoration of the Fall of Bataan, the Fall of Corregidor, and Battle of Bessang Pass.
[28] In Joaquin's "May Day Eve," this is where the characters swim on "moist tropic" evenings. In "Doña Jeronima," it is where the characters find spiritual retreat.
[29] See Rabadon, 2022.

from a view of the world that is mean, harsh, and cruel" (p. 122). The titular story is representative of this.

We have looked into the form of "Gotita de Dragon" and marked the modifications Joaquin made to the traditional tale and read it as queer parody, which simultaneously invokes ideological specters like the legend of the dragon-taming virgin, a colonial apparatus, and, employs it as a transgressive vehicle to forward, his subtle social critique. We have read the fall, the irreverence, the disillusionment, the unsophistication, and more of the characters within the ambit of what Halberstam calls queer art of failure and realized that queerness could be a liberating force. We have also observed how the tropical landscape, and the bodies therein, have been technocratically appropriated to serve colonial and authoritarian powers. In spaces like Malate and Ermita and the Pasig River, as imagined in this parodic tale, we have discerned how queerness takes place from the corner and from there the queer takes the place from apparatuses that oppress, repress, and exploit as a mode of resistance. Indeed, it is the very entanglements of these human and nonhuman characters that allow us to recalibrate our concepts of failure and space and resistance and solidarity.

Through the quests of the child hero Goti, we have noted how Joaquin teases out miscellaneous topics through a sporadic discourse: mental health, naming, body image, ageism, cross-dressing, plagiarism, capitalism, prostitution, state violence, and so on. Elsewhere in this essay it has been said that it is so because tales are more concerned with actions and results; however, we can also consider the possibility that Joaquin, like playwright Severino Reyes before him who embedded his social critique in fairy tales, composed his children's stories in such manner to "avoid the adverse attentions" of the regime (Gutierrez, 2014, p. 3). Recall that Joaquin's fifteen stories for children were produced when the country was facing a dictatorship and the press were under the threat of censorship. Indeed, reading "Gotita de Dragon" today, about half a century after Joaquin wrote his stories for "mod" and "groovy" kids for *Mr. & Ms*., a tropical gothic narrative of the period comes out. The search for virgins exposes the polarizing effect of the economic crisis of the time. The return to the river bank inspires the taking place of solidarity among the lonely, the chased away, the shaken off, the screamed at, the embarrassed.

Of course, like the queer characters in "Gotita de Dragon," and Joaquin himself, I have failures in navigating this riverine tale. But hopefully the turns missed this time could open passages for other readings. But for now, the tale of Gotita de Dragon lets us imagine how a hero's failure lends impetus for resistance and solidarity to take place in a tropical gothic landscape, christened and haunted, configured and disfigured, controlled and commodified, like ours. And that is queer, our tropical darling Nick!

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