

The Spirit (Not the Letter) of the Word: Poetry, Myth, and Spirituality¹

J. NEIL C. GARCIA

My education in the University of Santo Tomas, from high school to college, bequeathed to me my life's most enduring friendships, along with a plenitude of inestimable gifts. The brightest and choicest of these is poetry—a language and a perceptual mode through which the mysteries of the spirit come to present themselves as powerful symbolic images and narratives. Which is to say: as myths.

I have, of course, the poet and teacher Ophelia Alcantara Dimalanta to thank for this gift, which she generously gave me alongside her fond affection. This is a gift that she gave many others in UST, an institution that she served and loved, across a number of generations, right to the very end. It is to be hoped that this university shall continue to memorialize this love—as well as the deathless gratitude of so many Thomasian writers—in honor of a life devoted to the teaching and creation of literature.

However, it was not a particularly propitious time to be thinking of poetry in the Faculty of Arts and Letters when the two of us first met. The worldly dispensation on campus then was ill-disposed toward writers and writing, and made no bones about openly displaying its hostility. Ophie suffered immensely from this lack of support, but despite it she endeavored, and prodded the pluckier and more creative students of



Ophelia Alcantara Dimalanta
(photo courtesy of author).

the college to found the Thomasian Writers Guild, of which I was the first president.

In the face of frank animosity coming from certain people in the administration, Ophie stood her ground, and demanded that a creative writing elective be opened. After a delay of a semester, the class was offered in the second half of my junior year, and it was there that I first got to experience her magic as a teacher, which was reinforced, to a large extent, by her magic as a poet. Her teaching was characterized by kind encouragement complemented by gentle and keen-eyed critique, and her preferred method was the lecture, through which she was able to casually utter statements that arrested in their gracefully phrased wisdom, and thereby inspired. I remember one such moment almost clearly. After talking about a sampling from the *Ariel* poems of Sylvia Plath, Ophie averred that, too often, it is life that hurts poets into art. Thereafter—she opined—it should become the poet’s singular duty to hurt others back from art into life. Noticing perhaps the blunt nakedness of my need for even more poetry—disturbingly visible, I can now imagine, in the gaping hunger of my pimple-ravaged face—sometime during the middle of that semester, Ophie privately gifted me a copy of her second book, *Time Factor*, which I quickly and desperately devoured.

I can say that it was through that book that I first experienced the intimate wonders and consolations of poetry. In particular, Ophie’s poems concretized quite vividly the lesson she was teaching us regarding “the paradoxical coexistence of object and subject” that is to be evidenced in all good art.² In other words, as I eagerly read it, Ophie’s work provided compelling arguments for poetry’s reputed ability to harmoniously unify form and content, image and statement, pleasure and wisdom.

I remember that, of all the poems in this book, it was the wonderfully dramatized piece, a longish poem titled, “Rat Story,” that affected me the most. This poem’s form—its story, imagery, and sound—yearns beautifully and breathtakingly toward its content, which is, of course, the poem’s own proffered insight: that even in our most determined attempts to overcome the quotidian struggles of life, evil’s long shadow, its human darkness—doubt, despair, fear and, yes, possibly even loathing—will always just be lurking in the fringes, haunting us, creeping up on us, like some pestilential revenant. In Ophie’s version of things, the abominable image of the rat functions most instructively as a metaphor, and metaphor is the key that would open up to me the world of mythology and spirituality a short time after college.

Allow me to confess that it had been my original wish to write a long paper on Ophie's poetry, as well as on her formative influence on my own poetic and pedagogical practice. However, because of the sheer immensity of this task—and because of a paucity of temporal resource—I have elected to work on this paper's less daunting and more doable subject, instead.

In any case, I should like to read this poem of hers now, as a form of tender tribute, and as a way of making her “present” through the poem's voice—inimitably Ophie's own.

Rat Story³

The sight of rats [is] enough to unhinge reason.
—Blaise Pascal

From a flight with swans
Through clouds of sleep,
She sags down mornings
At the sight of a scudding rat
The size of a house,
And the battle royale of the day begins.
She rolls her sleeves
Ready for the scuffle
And vows to hold the fort
Lest soon, a whole pack of them
Is bound to hold dominion.

No ordinary, less-than-mortal
Enemy here, and wily, almost
Reasoning, plump as scum
And lumpy eyes as forbidding
As the day's load,
And twice as sinister.
It seems to know exactly what route
To take, to trace, retrace,
What pots and pans to tumble,
From the hole in the wall, through
The freeways of the tiled cantilevered
Kitchen sink to the soap stand

And cabinets and across, to nibble
And gnash, disordering and destroying
In its wicked wake, scheming as it
Skims over surfaces, with an almost
Human passion, until quietly seethes
To lie in wait, for the first lunge
Of dawn, waiting for the time to
Scoot and scam away.

At other times, naughtily tarrying,
Ignoring a mutual pact, this one shrewd
And reasoning rat: it goes when she comes.
And so she comes, heavy slippers, bulk
And all exaggerated heavy footfalls
Announce her coming, and on better days,
She misses it as it misses her,
One hairbreadth of a second and she sighs,
Relieved, ready for the day's minor battles.

But today, it is specially willful.
They cross each other's path, they meet,
Her eyes upon its vileness, its mind
Upon her fear, a scream, and a frenzied
Dash away both ways, the greatest scare
Of their diurnal lives, this one early
Morning clash, her fear, the greater one
Because emotional, unreasoning, almost
Not human: to kill or not to.
Whether 'tis safer to let live.
Which is the greatest horror.
Death's fixity, a glassy stare,
Once and for all, and the ghost of it,
The reek, the sight of its absence there,
Or the scary hassle with the live
And vilely moving, a moving, scuttling
Scurrying shape along one's way or
Upon the margins of one's daily eyepath.

This, or perhaps the blob of a carcass,
Deliberately situated, the clinging
Stench of it, the horrible sense of it,
A coal-gray blot of a nightmare's
Gibberish dumped right into the beaten
Bypaths of one's morning sanities,
All that is banal and foul!
From the tips of a pulpy crown to inert
Porcupine toes furtively outstretched
To trip one's morning serenity, dashing
It finally to pieces: which the horror?

Whichever, everyday is for contending,
Beleaguered as she is by packs of all
Sizes and shapes and nuances of black,
In the open or in hiding, whatever,
Until at the back of her consciousness
Is always one rat, gnawing at every piece
Of cloud, clinging upon the fringes
Of nighttime or daytime, or hanging
Upside down, toes stiffly up, from the well points
Of her dreaming, swan-filled eyes.

After all these years, I can say that I still love the drama (by turns comical and Hamletian) of this poem. I can still almost mentally conjure the image of a newly risen Ophie, stamping heavily in her plush bedroom slippers, down the wooden stairs of their old Navotas home, determined to shoo the dreaded murine scavenger away lest she suffer the particular misfortune of having to actually see it. I also love the contrast between the waking and the dreaming life, which Ophie in this piece renders as the difference between the “vilely moving ... shape” of the darkly scuttling pest, and the downy-winged swans that freely wing inside the dreamy-eyed character's mind. At the time I first read this poem, to my mind it exemplified, in full and lovely measure, the power of poetry to transfigure life, to deepen our awareness of its truths, precisely because it seeks to understand them through the principle of imagistic substitution, through the workings of analogy—which is to say, through the artful use of metaphor. However, I would not quite appreciate the complexity of this procedure until a little later, when I began to understand

more deeply the ambivalence that inheres in all instances of metaphorical resemblance.

To me, back then, what this poem readily demonstrated is the fact that poetry functions most visibly in a figurative fashion, moving past the literal to the evocative. A metaphor is usually defined as a linguistic device in which one thing is said while another thing is meant, and it is generally regarded as the indispensable element in all poetic articulations. As such, a metaphor is said to consist of two parts: a “concrete” vehicle or analogue, which connotes or evokes the more “abstract” tenor or subject.⁴ Their comparability or “similarity” invariably rests on a physical—thus, imagistic—resemblance between them. For instance, the rat in Ophie’s poem can so effectively bring to mind the idea of evil because it is usually disgustingly black in color, and as such, like most evil things, it is (supposed to be) not too pleasant to look at.

Over the next two semesters, my training with Ophie in the business of reading and writing metaphors would gradually but surely encourage, in me, an aptitude for associative, parallel, or analogical thought. This is what a metaphor, finally, is: a complicated and comparative way of thinking. It is through a metaphor that we may consider more closely an object or an idea, for it clarifies each by juxtaposing them against each other. And yet, as I would understand only later, courtesy of the various “agonies” of my own poetic practice, we never really forget the fact that metaphors cannot completely replace the irreducibly real things to which they attend.

For instance, despite yoking the image and concept of “ratness” with evil, Ophie’s poem doesn’t—for, indeed, it can’t—succeed in reducing all evil to this figure alone. After all, despite or precisely because of its own accretive, hyperbolic, and self-conscious nature as a “conceit,” the best that Ophie’s extended metaphorical project in this poem can do is to effect an anomalous syncretism, a “mixedness” that gathers together into a provisional unity these ontologically disparate meanings. As such, it remains effective and perceptible only to the degree that the fusion or identity between its terms is not seamless or complete, but rather remains itself haunted by the specter of “otherness”—which is to say, bedeviled by the rat of its own inescapable failure as a trope. Thus, finally, we may say that the appreciation of metaphors—which is to say, the appreciation of poems—brings about a kind of complex perception, which we can also call ironic or paradoxical: while they posit a resemblance between two unlike objects, they do not champion the cause of identity at the

expense of recognizing difference.⁵ The paradox of poetic metaphors is that they do not obliterate the literalness of one thing even while they transform it, figuratively, into another.

In Ophie's poem, the image of the rat as a metaphor for evil ("packs of all / Sizes and shapes and nuances of black," "All that is banal and foul!") is an interaction of both the principal and the subsidiary terms—between the tenor (the notion of evil) and the dissimilar or anomalous vehicle, "rat." Needless to say, it is this "simultaneous" kind of embodied consciousness, this complex form of perception that apprehends the sameness and difference of "ratness" and "evilness" all at once, and its effect is to generate questions and evoke a sense of unity as well as of incongruity in the reader. As its central image, the rat focalizes the poem's energies around itself, in effect transforming the poem's particular situation of a rodent-specific encounter into an analogy for all the general difficulties, "uglinesses" and, yes, evils that we—the universal humanity for whom the aghast female persona is a poetic stand-in—need to face on a daily basis. And yet, all this is also, as an experience and as an *idiolectical* articulation, quite irreducibly particular. And so, precisely because of its analogical movement, the metaphorical "universalizing" that this poem wishes to effect cannot quite unctuously come to pass.

I shall be turning now to the subject of myth, whose relationship to poetry lies in its metaphorical nature. On one hand, even from my earliest serious attempts at poetry, mythological stories have always been an abiding interest. My earliest poems were, in fact, retellings of didactic "legends" about the origins of everyday things, that I'd first heard as a strange and tantrummy child.⁶ On the other hand, my subsequent readings in the field of comparative mythology, primarily through the work of the great comparatist, Joseph Campbell, would later alert me to the important metaphorical link between poetry and myth.

Because mythology is an alternative path to the Sacred, and because religions are mythological in their deepest truth, I would later on come to rethink my own experience of spirituality, which I have come to increasingly understand in poetic terms, as well. Finally, I hope to have the time to turn to the example of my own poetry, in order to demonstrate what, to me, has been the inexorably personal "nature" of these realizations. In particular, I hope to be able to read a selection of poems from my book, *Kaluluwa*—a lyric sequence that returns to and seeks a new understanding of the universally resonant story of the Garden.

Comparative mythology takes myth as a form of spiritual orature/literature, which has provided human beings one of the oldest paths to the Divine. Myth represents in ritual, narrative, and/or symbolic forms intuitions of the spiritual realm, and it has done so from the earliest times.⁷ In a strict sense, religion is simply mythology that one believes in. It is often said that only “other” people believe in falsehoods or myths. Of course, between the two terms, religion and mythology, mythology is the more descriptive and capacious term. All religions are mythological, in their most basic function.

Campbell calls myths the “masks of God,” temporal forms that refer to the formless eternal mystery.⁸ Along with its accompanying rituals and symbols, mythology offers ways to understand the essential concerns of human life. Birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, love, hate, parenthood, pain, old age, death.⁹ While we typically hear that the word myth is a synonym for falsehood, the fact is that myth is not false. It is, on the contrary, about knowing and experiencing the deepest kind of truth.

Comparative mythology argues that the truth of myth comes from its metaphorical nature, which serves to indicate profound insights and truths about the human condition. Myths are to be taken as literally false, but metaphorically true, therefore.¹⁰ Religious and scientific fundamentalisms, which are literal-minded, dogmatic, and empirically rigid in their orientation, cannot accept that myth is truthful at the very least. Among other functions myths, being about inner truth, encourage complex and paradoxical perception, confound simplistic thinking, make us accept the world’s mysterious nature, and gesture toward a concept of the veridical that is complex, ambivalent, multiple, and shifting.

The basic theme of myth is that there is an invisible reality that underlies and supports the visible world.¹¹ Myth, in this sense, is fundamentally mystical in character, rendering into tropes and images the amorphous essence of all things, through which it can be experienced and known. We may then see myth as a creative and “imaginal” field whose referent, in the ultimate sense, is transcendent. Its purpose is to enable us to experience the world that opens to us the sacred, spiritual dimension that enfolds it. Mythology makes us realize the mystical presence in everyone and in every thing, for according to its deepest insight, the creator is present in all of creation. God is, indeed, within all of us: we have all been poured out of the creator’s eternal Self; we are all manifestations of the one divinity.

The simplest premise of mythology, therefore, is that spirituality buoys and sustains the material universe. Because of myth, we learn to address the world as a “thou” rather than an “it”—“thou,” because nature deserves the same dignity as a person, being itself also a manifestation of the Divine. Primitive peoples knew this truth intimately. They saw the entire world as a sacred place, in which they constantly received a feeling of life as sanctified and sanctifying, with the one radiance effervescing through all things. Myths, in their narrative commitment to paradox and mystery, all point to the essential unity of all life, despite the surface displays of clovenness and duality.

What the study of mythology and the reading of different world myths teach us is that the moment we understand that our stories about God are myths, the moment we see that our religions proffer not literal truths but symbolic and spiritual ones, then our faith can be set free from the cultural prisons of fundamentalist ethnocentrism and literal-mindedness.¹² In other words, we need to understand that the various myths—actually, all religions—are at once false and true. False because what they give us are mere metaphors (which by definition cannot be literally true), but true precisely because these very same metaphors gesture toward the one transcendent mystery.

And so, we are not required to be “literalists”—which is to say, to effectively abandon scientific rationality—just so that we can make full and beneficial use of mythology’s illuminating and spiritual power. We can use the images of myth in the discernment of our own spiritual journeys. We may use as analogy the experience of reading a well-wrought and fascinating novel, whose characters and actions we know to be merely make-believe. But still, we can allow the literary experience to touch and move us; we can open our minds fully to its magic. Myths, too, can enter our lives this way—they can enchant, encourage, and enlighten us, the way all fully realized art does. In fact, all art, all great art, is said to be, in the end, mythic. Campbell claims that artists are tasked with the mythologizing—which is to say, the sacralizing or “making sacred”—of their world. This way, they provide an access to the experience of life as transcendent, using the images and metaphors of their respective media.

Campbell further argues that artists are the new mythmakers,¹³ and mythology is nothing if not the “song of the imagination,” the “music of the spheres,” motivated by the energies of the body, spurred by nothing if not the simple experience of being alive. The artist’s highest calling, therefore, is to awaken in his or her audiences an awareness of the inner and spiritual

dimensions of existence. His or her noblest task is to imagine and to render the world as magical, awe-inspiring, and rapturous, once more, by infusing myth's profound power into the shapes of his or her expression. Campbell surmises that, at the very least, outside the sacred and epic themes, the sensuous form of art reveals to us the radiance of the transcendent because it reflects the fortunate symmetry, order, and harmony of our own lives.¹⁴

To summarize, then: when we read myths for their poetic message, we can no longer believe that divinity is external to our human nature. This is because the message of mythology, the message of all myths, is that the gods and goddesses, the demons and villains, the heroes and heroines of myths—in other words, the primordial generative and destructive powers of creation—all live inside us. They are nothing if not images of the innermost potentialities of our lives, they are the metaphorical stories for our truest nature, which is nothing if not spirit. Taken symbolically, myths encourage us to see all of life poetically, for its acts and characters and aspects are not just what they denotatively are; they also connote—meaning, they also are indicative of the spiritual reality that is the immemorial foundation of all things.

Thus, we need to understand that the problem of religious fundamentalism is the problem of scriptural literalism. As such it is an idolatrous attachment to what is merely a contingent (and therefore an easily appropriable or replaceable) signifier of the transcendent reality of the Divine, which by definition exceeds all attempts to envision or speak it. We must remember that idolatry may be for religious images, objects, or even the words of the Bible itself. Fundamentalism, to my mind, is a symptom of weak-mindedness, of intellectual laziness, that refuses to read more deeply into the symbol, and fastens on to what should finally be abandoned in the process of reflection.

We must remember that Christ himself taught in the analogical register of parables, and in all of them we are not supposed to prefer the provisional vessel over its message; we are not supposed to think of their substance in strictly literal terms. While I do agree that it is a moving scene—people desperately clinging to crosses, swastikas, crescents, or whatever else; people throwing themselves into the mouths of lions, walking into the fire, killing and being killed in the ardor of religious fervor; and yes, people protesting the supposed desecration of conventional mass-produced images of holiness—the truth is all this is being done for the sake of little else than a trope, a figure of speech. Thinking more deeply of it, we may see in these examples

the image of the human body entirely devoted to the task of transcendence. And yet, what these connections among poetry, myth and spirituality tell us is that it is consciousness—and not the flesh—that can and should aspire to do just that.

And so, if it is really just against Scripture's spirit—as opposed to its letter—that one can blaspheme against, then how much less likely is the charge that one can blaspheme against merely derivative religious imagery, by appropriating it in “non-pious” ways. Scriptural literalisms and idolatrous fundamentalisms are the unfortunate results of mythological misreading, for they reduce myth's essential tenor to its provisional vehicle, they insist on the successful ontological “unifying” of the two without recognizing that as a metaphor such a union is always premised upon a necessary difference. As the study of myth reminds us, all religious narratives are not facts but myths—which is to say, what they offer are poetic metaphors (not literal certitudes) for the transcendent mystery. It stands to reason, then, that to the degree that an artwork violently appropriating or recontextualizing religious imagery does so excellently and artfully, then it can still be said to gesture toward illumination, which is nothing if not the aspiration to transform the “real” into the “true.” And then, we must also remember that all works of art that seek illumination, even as they may seemingly “desecrate” images coming from orthodox religiosity, may be seen as ultimately spiritual, in the end. In like manner, their “makers” may not be said to be blaspheming against the spirit in the least, for it is the spirit that their labors still reference over and again, and what their works actually incarnate, if they are profound and majestic—that is to say, if they are poetic and mythological—enough.

All in all, then, the luminous gift of poetry, which the University of Santo Tomas, through the generous and loving agency of Ophie, gave me, continues to cultivate in me a deeper awareness and appreciation of mystery. I realize that the temporal forms of mythic stories, rituals, and symbolic imagery—which I continue to experience, through my work as a writer as well as through my continuing participation in the life of my Catholic faith—certainly gesture toward, evoke, and embody mystery, but in the same breath they do not and cannot fully capture and exhaust it. It is this paradox—that mythic narratives, being metaphors, at once coincide with and differ from the transcendent truths they purvey—that emboldens and humbles, heartens and disabuses me in the solitude of my spiritual journey. And because—as mythology instructs

us—God is the ground of all Being, then I am enjoined to see that God is one and the same, no matter the mythological system, no matter the religion God is spoken (which is to say, metaphorized) in. Finally, inasmuch as it traffics in powerful figurative expressions, I understand that my own faith, like the faith of others, truly does embody and render accessible, to me, the Divine in all its majesty. I can therefore continue to walk in my own tradition, fully confident in the truth of its sacred revelation. There are many paths up the mountain, and they all lead to the same peak.

Allow me now to end my presentation with a reading of poems from my lyric sequence, *Kaluluwa*, which was published by the UST Press in 2001.

In this sampling, I retell the mythic story of the Garden, and attend to the drama of a “creator” and his creation, as they suffer the pangs and reversals of love. One of the things that the writing of this sequence has revealed to me is that the story of the Garden is, at its mythic heart, the story of humanity’s awakening to splendor, the world’s bright and sustaining wonder . . . Perhaps we can say that so long as the world continues to charm and fascinate us, there could never have truly been a fall: if humanity can still stand in awe of the world’s mysterious beauty, then it never really left the garden of its first innocence. To the extent that we see beauty in this life, we never really lost it, once upon a time. We never really lost paradise.

The Garden: Selections from *Kaluluwa*¹⁵

XV

What I will miss, when I depart,
is not the world itself
but its rhythms—

dew humming in a sprig of mint,
chirrup against the muted sky,
my heart tapping its code of death
upon the tip of my vivid fingers,

quickened wind, the horizon decanting
into my throat its drink of day or night,
water lispings past a smooth black rock,
my breath an insistent pulse of air

sustaining me, bright song
which shall carry you off in time—
blown like a sharp and bleeding fragrance
away from the newly harvested field.

XXX

Even then, he needed me:
dumb earth, the sparkle of water
viewed from the riverbank.

His hands reached down and
palmed and palmed the muck and cold humus.
Shutting his eyes, he saw mint-green sprouts
and his own handsome face.

He turned to me, declaring
me worthy to bear the stamp
of his own bright likeness, and then
while humming creation's rhymeless song,
he cradled me in his arms
and lulled me to sleep.

How was I supposed to know
at that point, he would abandon me,
whom he summoned first
from the dark and copious earth,
in your favor?

In my dreamlessness I felt
his hand thrust into my side, grip
and fumble, and push something in deeper.

When I awoke I knew at once
I was no longer alone in my nature,
no longer singular before his face.

And when I, imploring, turned to him,
it was you that looked out from my eyes.
Gazing into them he beheld at last his image,
and quickly lost sight of me.

L

When it happens it shall be daylight—
dawn perhaps, clarity's slow spilling hour, or noon,
moment of sun and earth's green surrender

when even the wind is quiet, seemingly asleep.
There shall be no weeping, at least not until later,
for life shall be too busy breathing necessary air,

sipping necessary water. From my own end,
likewise, it shall be peaceful: as you know,
my fate is a dagger, pushed deep into my side,

which means my home is darkness, a place beyond fear.
From my first taste, of jagged salt and bile,
I have long prepared for, have long expected this.

And then the plan: should all the doors of knowing
slam shut, I promise to keep a toe, if not a finger,
wedged clear into a window of whatever sense abides.

A stubborn eye, leaf of an ear too stiff to unfold,
tongue that, chilled and coated in thick glue, yet aches
for the balm of pepper, or sugar's dull sting,

my loose and splotchy skin, its story quite finished
but for this postscript, this falling final action—
my knees against the grit, both palms reaching down,

heart glissading from sky to tree to burbling river.
My own bleak intelligence, dying master of my house,
I shall bid my wards come close, shall hug

and kiss each one upon the brow. At last:
I shall hold fast what has held and still holds me
before I slip, at once, from its awakened arms—

slipping past all matter, slipping past myself.

LVI

I am tired of my words:
I am tired of this.

A voice, after all, can only lend itself
so much, so long
to the completion
of any one rhapsody—

in this case, a rhapsody without color,
a rhapsody in mourning white
or black.

There is, you see, always the alternative:

that other song, its movements of fickle soil
and sky, their peaks and pits of light,
storms of red and yellow across a sprawl
of lush and beckoning leaves,

the purl of inmost waters giggling
through sieves of cloud and rock,
rhythms breathing inside shell or skin,
slur of mineral, lisp of gold—

The world is an endless song of birth,
and here I am, bleak and despairing
of my own language.

In my next life, if it can be allowed,
I shall sing in the voice of another—
voice of the old and soulless earth.

Beyond human passion, beyond regret.

LIX

For you, my love, a story:

We were born blind into a garden—
of tears and molded mud
and a god's
scintillant breath.

We were happy beyond all asking:
lost in birdsong, our feet
solid upon the loam,
we knew nothing about the past.
Which is to say, we knew nothing
about the future.

We had no knowledge of our coming death,
for instance, that the earth composing us
would someday claim us,
crumbling our edges down
till we could no longer feel ourselves
in the ostensible world.

But something happened.

We found our way to water.
Stumbling hand in hand we followed burbling sounds
to the spring at the end of a prickly hedge.

We bent down and washed the mud off our eyes,
and saw.

We did not care that we were naked
and hungry, for the garden that embraced us
was more beautiful than we had ever dreamed.

We have lived there ever since.

Notes

1. I read this paper at the Thomas Aquinas Research Complex Auditorium of the University of Santo Tomas, Conference on “Pro Ecclesia et pro Patria: Legacies and Traditions of a Quadricentennial University,” December 2, 2011.

2. Edith L. Tiempo, *Six Poetry Formats and the Transforming Image* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2007), 14.

3. Ophelia Alcantara Dimalanta, *The Ophelia A. Dimalanta Reader, Vol. 1* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press, 2005), 145.

4. Wallace Martin, “Metaphor,” in *The New Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, T. V. F. Brogan, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 184–90.

5. T. V. F. Brogan, “Poetry,” Brogan, 233–36.

6. I've written about some of these early "mythopoetic retellings" in an essay. See J. Neil C. Garcia, "Of Legends and Poetry," *Closet Queeries: Essays* (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, 1997), 146–47.

7. David N. Elkins, *Beyond Religion: Eight Alternative Paths to the Sacred* (Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books, 1998), 57–58.

8. Needless to say I draw mostly from Joseph Campbell's work in my discussion of myth in this essay. In particular, my main source is: Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991).

9. Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 134; 38–39.

10. Joseph Campbell, *Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2001), 1–2.

11. Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 26.

12. Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 67–78.

13. Campbell, *Thou Art That*, 8.

14. Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 205.

15. J. Neil C. Garcia, *Kaluluwa: New and Selected Poems* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2001), 25, 45, 73–74, 81, 84–85.