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Notes and Comments

Whistling Up The Wind: Myth and Creativity

N. V. M. GONZALEZ

Myth is a contemplation of the unsatisfactory compromises which after all compose social life. In the devious statements of myths, people can recognize indirectly what it would be difficult to admit openly and yet is patently clear to all and sundry that the idea is not attainable Myth makes explicit . . . the contradictoriness of reality. — Mary Douglas¹

When sailing along the American eastern seaboard, it is said, one is cautioned against whistling: to do so could cause a storm. Whistling up the wind, on the other hand, is customary with Filipino sailors. Why these two contradictory gestures?

Imagine a very, very distant once-upon-a-time. The Eliadean *in illo tempore* — at *that* time, in other words. At this point in human experience, Man has barely come to be — that is, he has yet to feel at home in the Cosmos. As we say these days, he must keep a low profile. Whistling could mean peril.

The opposition here is between silence and noise, the first indicative of “proper” unions, the second of “reprehensible” ones.² Thus we sit quietly before a fireplace, representing earth and sun in union; but we greet an eclipse, meaning the blocking of that union, with drumbeating, shouts and all manner of noises, conjuring up the idea that there is a dragon to be driven away out there.

And who is the sailor, of the East or West, who at moments cannot but feel awed by the sea? For, indifferent to men and

1. Mary Douglas, “The Meaning of Myth,” in Edmund Leach, ed., *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism* (London: Tavestock, 1967), p. 52.

2. Nur Yalman, “‘The Raw : the Cooked :: Nature : Culture’ — Observations on *Le Cru et le cuit*,” in Leach, *The Structural Study*, p. 84.

history, the sea "pre-existed creation."³ Small wonder that our Filipino sailor, like his Western brother, takes the sea for a sacred place, although there is one difference to be noted. In the Filipino's case, no warning concerning his presence is necessary: especially as an islander, he belongs.

His beginnings may be traced in myth: from Maykapal to Tung-kung Langit and Alusina, to Sikalak and Sikabay, to Sibu and Samar, thence to Pandaguam and Lobloban, parents of Anoranor, who all lived in Kahilwayan at *that* time. It is to Pandaguam that Bisayans trace the crafts and arts of fishing;⁴ and, as shall be noted, it is to Lobloban's second mate (one hesitates to call him "husband"), Marancon by name, that Bisayans attribute the beginnings of thievery.

ROLE OF MYTHS

The tale invites contemplation, as indeed it must, for myths are the "reservoirs of articulate thought on the level of collective" thinking and speak of how people regard "themselves and their condition."⁵ Thus in Kahilwayan is concealed New History, at the very least a fresh reading of Philippine experience. The truism that there are "few purposes a myth will not adequately serve"⁶ should not be forgotten.

To return, then, to Pandaguam: it is he, too, who introduced death to Kahilwayan. Myth traces the event to his having caught a shark. He appears to have grieved over the fact that the shark could not survive on land, which was quite reprehensible from the point of view of the god Kaptan. In one account (Boxer's Codex⁷), Kaptan causes a thunderbolt to strike down Pandaguam, who dies and is taken up to heaven. There he sojourns for thirty days and then is returned to Kahilwayan. In the mean-

3. Micrea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: New American Library, 1958), p. 206.

4. F. Landa Jocano, *Myths and Legends of the Early Filipinos* (Quezon City: Alamar-Phoenix, 1971), pp. 9-19. In this text "Pandaguam" is so spelled, differing thus from the Codex text. The Jocano text also prefers "Luplupan" to "Lobloban," the spelling in the Codex.

5. K. O. L. Burridge, "Levi-Strauss and Myth," in Leach, *The Structural Study*, p. 92.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

7. Jocano, *Myths and Legends*, pp. 221-22.

time, Lobloban has remarried; and this results in yet another reality for Pandaguam to accept.

In another version, no mention is made concerning the remarriage. It is simply told that Kaptan sent two missions to Kahilwayan to ascertain why Pandaguam appeared so heartbroken over the shark's death. That Man should grieve over a shark's demise is a question only myth might answer, and if asked in the proper language.

Now this is not the mere sharing of one vocabulary. Here words take less significance compared with structure. Structure tells all. Thus, Kaptan's two missions — the first undertaken by flies, and the second by beetles — underscore not so much what the emissaries found but what those visits concealed.

To begin with, the flies were irresponsible. They played truant and were consequently punished. Nectar would henceforth be denied them; from then on they would thrive on dirt and scum. The beetles, in contrast, proved to be more reliable. Indeed Kaptan had to depend on their report so as to arrive at a decision concerning Pandaguam. Its resonance reaches us to this day. The myth makes patent the need to keep communication lines open between the two worlds, Kaptan's and Kahilwayan. Thus Kaptan relieves Pandaguam of sorrow by providing him with mortality. And what may Lobloban's remarriage mean? Verily, Kahilwayan's status as sacred place ends; it is now profane space. Here the text is worth quoting at some length. The twists and turns of the narrative are paradigmatic; Lobloban and her son Anoranor are archetypal:

... Asking from Anoranor for his mother (for Pandaguam, at this point, has returned to the world), the son said she was not in the house, and was told to look for her and inform her that he had been resurrected, and that the gods had sent him back to earth and that he was waiting for her at the house. Lobloban at that time was in the house of her friend Marandon, relaxing from a meal of pork which (Marandon) had stolen ... and as the son told Lobloban to return to their house because Pandaguam had already been resurrected and had been sent to call her because he wanted to see her, Lobloban became angry with her son Anoranor and replied harshly and badly, saying he was lying in what he had told her, and to leave and say nothing more of it; because Pandaguam was already dead, that he was not going to return because the shark he had killed had not come to life, and much less would Pandaguam his father come to life. With this reply Anoranor returned to their house and told his father Pan-

daguam what his mother Lobloban had said; giving with this account everything he had done after the lightning of the gods had killed him, and how she had lived with Marancon. Pandaguam felt this deeply and leaving his house in great anger against his wife, went to hell — which in their tongue is called *sular* — and never returned nor appeared in this world.⁸

Consider the sensuous imagery (“relaxing from a meal of pork,” Lobloban addressing her son “harshly and badly,” etc.), the moral life evoked by the episode (the patience and honesty in Anoranor, Marancon’s theft), and the unabashed emotions in both Lobloban and Pandaguam, and profane reality is what Anoranor reports to the father. What a pity that heretofore Pandaguam’s experience has been limited to life on sacred space. Myth, in other words, reveals our anguish as well as our collective idealism.

When our sailor is becalmed and sits at the stern of his boat, tiller in hand, his sails flapping empty, he is, as it were, restored to sacred time and place. He is Pandaguam returned to in illo tempore and his Kahilwayan status. This return and renewal seems to be a never-ending one, if we comprehend myth and are aware of how it “reads.” Unfortunately, we have accepted merely the entertainment its narrative surface offers. For good measure, we dismiss its pedagogic feature as superstition; its behavioral insights, folkways. Decodification, in short, has yet to begin.

Yet numerous examples of our awareness of the sacred abound. We do not have to bundle up our possessions, live in the crater of an extinct volcano, and dream up salvific offerings to provide expression to the mythic promptings in our blood. Our legacy from a once-upon-a-time is too rich to discard in the name of progress. Our sailor whistling up the wind prefigures our own collective and deep commitment to a unique yet universal heritage, an at-homeness in the world.

Song has willynilly become our instrument of mediation. To respond to the Conquista, the collective esemplastic imagination created the *kumintang*. That a *kundiman* might have been adopted at the Malolos Congress for our national anthem is no surprise, and today the melody survives. Christ’s Passion we celebrate round about the Easter-sultry poblacion in song, for song is ritual accessible to all. Substitute song for *pakikisama*, which resonates per-

8. Ibid.

vasively in Philippine society, and particularly attains harmonic complexities in the form of *utang na loob*, and we come pretty close to the "soul music" of the society. Gestures such as *lagay* and *compadrismo*, networks like "P.R." and the like are stops and grace notes on the score. It cannot be said, therefore, that Sikabay and Sikalak left us unprovided for. Again and again the country is reminded of its rich supply of "natural" resources. Here are the tools, says Myth, with which to tap them.

It is unfortunate that the attention given in the past, from Pigafetta on, to the mythic Filipino has not made this aspect of our culture attractive beyond the school textbook trade. Perhaps, even if scholarship had been venturesome enough, we might have gone no further than the treatment of myth for its pedagogic value. And we are indebted for all of this to the West.

KITTO AND ELIADE ON MYTH

Professor H. D. F. Kitto recounts (and it could be a libelous story, he warns us) how a Chinese philosopher once held that the Earth rested on a tortoise. "And what does the tortoise rest on?" was the next question. "An elephant." "And what does the elephant rest on?" "Now, don't be inquisitive," came the warning. The all-too-rational Greek mind that raised these questions, Professor Kitto says, could not see the universe as capricious. Homer, he notes, saw in the acts of the gods "a shadow power . . . called Ananke, Necessity, an Order of things . . ." which even the gods could not "infringe."⁹ A law held sway over the lives of men; nothing happened by chance. To Sophocles, Fate was nonsense. To Aeschylus the fortuitous was, in fact, a grand design. The Greeks, says Professor Kitto, made fun of their gods — they, like them, being subject to The Law. Like the Greeks, we, in our day, derive amusement from our myths and even more so from our folklore.

There was of course a political, if practical, reason for this attitude. Chirino and Loarca and other folklorists of the Conquista saw themselves essentially as harbingers of the Word. They spoke of the "*illud tempus* evoked by the Gospels . . . a clearly defined historical time" when Pontius Pilate occupied the governor's seat

9. H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1951), p. 176.

in Judea.¹⁰ Colonialization was thus sacramentalized. This was a radical event, given the then prevailing concept of time, a legacy from India, that survives today in "yuga" and "laya" (as in "Dimayuga" and "Malaya" or "Laya") that are not unfamiliar sounds in both Tagalog and Bisayan.

As it turns out, Indian thought has what are called *yugas*, or cosmic cycles, and a *mahayuga* comprises 12,000 years. This makes a complete cycle that is dissolved at a point called *pralaya*. A *Great Dissolution*, so called, comes at the end of the thousandth cycle. Twelve thousand years of mahayuga contains each three hundred sixty of our years; in other words, release from the cycle (the pralaya) does not occur until after some four million three hundred twenty thousand years.¹¹ Now, these mind-boggling numbers are not easy even for a Batangueño or a Tagalog, and just as perplexing to a Bisayan. Both, it will be noted, share the concept of *bahala na*. Given life-through-time, one could either be brought in the cycle or set free. In Sanskrit, *laya* means "to be set in motion, or released." Today's Dimayugas could well be descendants of those who rejected the cycle; and the Malayas or Layas, of those who had struck out for freedom.

Mircea Eliade considers the Indian concept of time perhaps the "true eternal return," a determination that the Greeks were only too cognizant of; and Indian and Greek time, so to speak, are very much with us to this day. Faced with time that repeats itself ad infinitum, the Indian intellectual and elite, Eliade points out, evolved *karma*, *maya*, and *moksha*, or, in our terms, the law of universal causality, cosmic illusion, and final deliverance "implying a transcendence of the cosmos."¹² The Greeks did not leave matters as they were, either. They improved on the Indian model of time, carrying, Eliade says, "the concept of circular time to its furthest limits" — to a reality that is "made, unmade, and remade in conformity with an immutable law and immutable alternatives . . ."¹³

The position of the Philippine archipelago in the China Sea has evoked, in this connection, an illuminating metaphor. The Philip-

10. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt Brace Javovich, 1957), p. 111.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 109-10.

piners, it has been pointed out, are verily a net laid out to catch the cultures from the Asian mainland and subcontinent. Given this apt image, it should not be an overindulgence to ponder on how we caught the "fish" of cyclic time and how despair over a reality "made" and "unmade" found rehabilitation in *bahala na*. Perhaps the earliest ground-breaking for Christianity occurred here. With Judeo-Christianity came "a beginning" and an "end," and with Catholicism came a soteriological reality. Gone the cyclic *ad infinitum* and its anguish, and mythic time gave way to historical time. To human experience has been added a transhistorical dimension. Imagination, in other words, was *di mayuga*. It refused to be held or bound to the cyclic scheme. It preferred *laya* — freedom. For a comfortable safety-net, the Filipino mind evolved *bahala na*.

In this light we cannot but allow a respectful attitude now toward our mythic past and perhaps write a New History, an accounting of "an awareness of the real and meaningful world [that] is intimately related to the discovery of the sacred," to borrow Eliade's thought. He alludes here to that point in time and space at the "founding of the World," such as is indeed the concern of myth, but which remains ever-present and which, in his view, should be the foundation of a New Humanism. The attitude will naturally open up new vistas and lead us to a new understanding of collective as well as individual experience.

SACRED AND PROFANE FOR THE FILIPINO

How superstition and cavalier modernism has caused us, for example, to overlook so many innocent disguises of what may well be our true selves as Filipinos. We may not, for instance, cut down a *balete* tree for then we may be subject to censure and reprisal by evil spirits. A mother out of childbed is urged to bathe in warm water, in a basin choked full of fragrant leaves, slices of lime, and any number of medicinal plants or their roots. A fish-bone in the throat may be removed by the unlikely healing touch only of someone who had been born feet first. One must avoid meeting a pregnant woman when going fishing. . . . The examples are numberless. They add up, on close study, to the fact that the Filipino favors two levels of time, the sacred and the profane. That is, he has not gone too far away from *Kahilwayan*.

While he has escaped mythic despair through his rejection of a formalized cycle of endless time, and while with the most sophisticated of the world's minds, he is all too eager to accept the most rational view of the world, the Filipino is nonetheless hardly keen about modern man's existential bleakness. His is a more positive stand, an optimism not too removed from sacred space, from the naivety that could make Pandaguam mourn the demise of a shark and count on Lobloban's fidelity. Thus, the most tedious of farming chores, planting rice, the Filipino celebrates in a lilting ditty. The most charming of his daughters and sons he sends over to dance, make music, and play court jester before the world's most moneyed and powerful, crossing the oceans, in short, to provide amusement for their very oppressors. The history of his people he'd prefer other scholars to write, for it could be too agonizing if he sat down to the task himself; and, in that, he probably will not get neither reward nor thanks, anyhow. If anything, mythic feelings die hard. Like Pandaguam, he is all but helpless without Kaptan's intervention.

How cutting a balete should be taboo can be explained in terms of that durable feeling, a sense of identity — overly prolonged, perhaps — with sacred space. In our context, as a people of Asia, identity is of the essence, as the cliché goes. The Indian greeting aptly dramatizes this; the Westerner's handshake signifies a different sense of one's being. Mythic man reactualizes sacred space and feels a contemporaneity with the gods. For the non-mythic man, it is relationship that is crucial. In identifying with the gods, the mythic man becomes, in fact, or is, once again, a god. Thus he is inhibited from destroying himself, or his works. He may not indeed cut down any tree, if he could. And as to the mother just out of childbed: after so violent an experience as birthing, it seems only right that she should be restored to Nature, abundantly symbolized in plant and fruit, in the fragrant scents of the very earth.

The fish-bone poses a more complicated reading, but we have Claude Levi-Strauss to assist us.¹⁴ His studies on twins and the harelippped are too intricate for exposition here; suffice it to say, however, that the harelippped and the person born feet first belong, in his book, to a class of heroes. A fish-bone in one's throat — a

14. Claude Levi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (New York: Schocken, 1978), pp. 25-33.

grave enough situation anywhere — involves nothing less, indeed, than the timely intervention of a hero. The Filipino village is hardly without one.

The herb doctor, the sorcerer, even the faith-healer, are, incidentally, brothers to the harelipped and the person born feet first. All are hero-figures, contemporaneous with Man in illo tempore, survivors straight out of sacred time. On failing to effect a cure, the faith-healer hazards a demurrer, his verbalization of a mortal's humility before the gods. "Someone higher appears to have the cure — not I!," he might say, or words to that effect. What he does mean, though, should not be taken literally. The language of myth includes silences, as in music, as well as the words that are said. The cure, the fisherman's keeping clear of pregnant women as he goes to sea — these are reactualizations of sacred space and time. Amulets and charms that bestow on their wearers invisibility or invulnerability in battle or combat, inscriptions in old Tagalog and "bad Latin" and like objects are prime artifacts under this category, evocations of that dim past before Pandaguam's raising a shark from the depths.¹⁵

The most metonymic of the images dramatize the reactualization of sacred time and place, as in the case of the nipa hut of folksong and folkways. It is our paradisiac image par excellence. Is it any wonder that when a peasant comes by a nipa hut, on his way to work, he is in all likelihood compelled to announce his presence with a respectful "*Tao po!*" or some such expression? "Here is Man!" he declares, in other words. We continually mythicize the nipa hut, and quite of necessity, too. To the *tao*, it is again and again his sacred place. How inane our substitute for "*Tao po!*" today; how empty, if not indeed bankrupt! The best we can manage is a tuneful door-bell, or the head of a Smiley on the rubber door-mat.

In this way considerable wealth is lost to us. "Through the experience of the sacred the human mind grasps the difference between that which reveals itself as real, powerful, rich, meaningful, and that which does not — i.e., the chaotic and dangerous flux of things, their fortuitous, meaningless appearances and disappearances," writes Eliade, in *The Quest*. The book is a

15. Dean C. Worcester, *The Philippines* (New York: Macmillan Co, 1899), p. 432.

reminder to contemporary man of the urgency of a new humanism. "The experience of the sacred, by disclosing being, meaning, and truth in an unknown, chaotic, and fearful world, prepares the way for systematic thought."¹⁶ Lacking this awareness, we block off, in his view, the new humanism.

It is from here where creativity comes. The physical world being our best model, the sacred, in Eliadean terms, enables us to rediscover our roots in the "founding of the world" — the point in time of the greatest creativity, hence of freedom and abundance. Our secularism notwithstanding, this should be a concept not too difficult to grasp.

We do, in fact, feel a terrible nostalgia for that time. The agony is expressed in small gestures — from the ceremonial drinking of champagne to ground-breaking rites with the honorable mayor in attendance, from the handing out of diplomas at specially roped off areas during college commencement exercises to the enthronement of the Sacred Heart at a tract home newly purchased thanks to a forbiddingly high interest rate. Every such act is a renewal for Man. Every space so consecrated, the merest event so commemorated, is a repossession of that long-ago when things hitherto non-existent came to be.

It is Creation not at one remove but in itself. And, as with space, so it is with time. We speak of "making time," of putting some tasks aside in favor of another. On the level of cosmogonic myth, time becomes new with every beginning. Thus, to begin is to have time aplenty toward the completion of a task.

NEW AWARENESS OF TIME AND SPACE

What the Filipino sensibility and imagination may come up with under pressure of a new awareness of time and space may be quite crucial. Eliade could not have had him in mind when, in 1969, he wrote in *The Quest*: "We may expect that sometime in the near future the intelligentsia of the former colonial peoples will regard many social scientists as camouflaged apologists of Western culture They may be suspected of a Western superiority complex . . ." ¹⁷ He was referring then to those scientists lusting

16. Micrea Eliade, *The Quest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 11.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

constantly for the "socio-political origin and character of primitive messianic movements," obviously an attractive subject. The warning suggests that for now we may whistle up either a storm or let ourselves be caught in the lambent quiet of a calm sea.

Consider the Rizal Day celebration — symbolic floats, beauty queen and all — as a reprehensible sample of the silly Pinoy imagination in exile in Hawaii or California. In so deriding this, we miss the message that with every death comes a birth, that a society bereft of a hero requires some guarantee of the emergence of one, that perhaps one such may yet emerge from none other than the romantic image of a beauty queen whose popularity has become legitimized through community action of some sort.

Another paradigm of renewal is the town fiesta, a favored target on the part of those who bewail waste and social irresponsibility. And just as misunderstood are immigration and exile, which are in fact drastic efforts at a re-sacramentalization of space and a recovery of time through overt attempts at new beginnings. In our lack of mythic insight we have read merely economic and political forces into the experience, when in fact it is pure history in the archetypal mold. It is with the stereotype rather than with the archetype that our intelligence appears to be preoccupied. We are, in short, at the mercy of a calm, wind-starved sea.

We are floating adrift, pitching and rolling about in oil-sleek water aglitter with trends and movements. The barnacled and worm-ridden hull of our boat is a drag in the middling current. We, passengers and crew alike, are nostalgic for that which was and thirsty for the new.

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