



# The (Re) presentation of Philippine mythology and folklore: A psychological literary analysis of Karen Francisco's *Naermyth* Duology

Hazel ANN M. Collado, AL Rhea B. Fernandez and Mark Anthony G. Moyano\*

Department of English and Humanities, College of Arts and Social Sciences, Central Luzon State University, Philippines  
markanthonymoyano@clsu.edu.ph

Available online at: [www.isca.in](http://www.isca.in), [www.isca.me](http://www.isca.me)

Received 4<sup>th</sup> March 2022, revised 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2022, accepted 17<sup>th</sup> July 2022

## Abstract

*Karen Francisco's Naermyth Duology propagates the Philippines' diverse mythology and folklore. The plot centers on Athena Abigail "Aegis" Dizon, who dedicates her life to protecting humanity from mythical creatures attempting to seize the human homeland. The two novels do not only illustrate Athena's life as a shepherd and her battle against Naermyth but also provide a glimpse into her past. In this regard, the researchers attempted to study the novels through the viewpoint of psychological criticism, specifically Carl Gustav Jung's Theory of Dreams, and proved that the events in the story were merely the main character's dreams. Dreams, according to Jung, are not a collection of insignificant events but rather a slew of truths that the conscious mind denies or rejects. The findings of this study indicate that the repressed desires and unfulfilled wishes of the main character were reflected in her dreams. In this case, the purpose of her dreams is to foster psychological healing by driving her to go through a self-realization or individuation process.*

**Keywords:** Mythology, Psychological Literary Criticism, Philippine Literature in English, Karen Francisco, *Naermyth*.

## Introduction

The Philippines has plenty of mythical creatures and divinities. In fact, it is a country that is famed not just for its stunning scenery and delectable cuisine but also for the wealth of folklore that has been passed down through the decades. These legends and stories have been veiled for generations behind storybooks and legends. Mythical creatures, along with the sticks or paddles of the elderly, serve as bedtime stories to scare children into compliance.

As defined by dictionaries, mythology is a group of myths made up of stories about various facets of the human condition. It usually involves supernatural beings such as gods and goddesses or superhuman beings endowed with divine strength, such as Perseus from Greek mythology. Over the years, mythological novels have become an outlet for the author to either re-introduce the fascinating tales of their region or re-write the mythological tales to create a new realm that will let the reader travel back in time or at least foresee the possibilities of the future. Novels that offer this kind of story also fall under dystopian literature.

Dystopian literature is a form of speculative fiction designed to respond to utopian literature. It explores the dangerous effects of political and social structures on humanity's future. Dystopian fiction has gradually generated a huge amount of public attention and recently redounds in the wildly popular subgenre of young adult dystopian fiction<sup>1</sup>. Dystopian and mythological literature is acquiring monstrous accomplishments on various international platforms, just like the works of popular and well-

known international writers such as J.K. Rowling, J.R.R. Tolkien, Rick Riordan, and numerous others. Apart from that, this genre began to take hold in the Philippines after the locally produced comic series *Trese* of Budjette Tan and Kajo Baldesimo was streamed on Netflix, piquing people's curiosity worldwide.

In light of this current prominent trend, this study proposed to explore the mythological novels that propagate the local folklore of the Philippines. It comprised two book installments, each depicting the war between humans and mythical creatures. The first book, *Naermyth*, was published in late 2010, while the second installment, *Revelation*, was released in 2018.

The *Naermyth* Duology is a fantasy story set in the Philippines. It is not just an ordinary adventure to unravel but also a fascinating tale that focuses on the historical facts of Philippine mythology and folklore. It also explores the adventures of the main character, Athena, who is fighting for her survival against the mythical creatures that are usually considered imaginary, but, in the story, they were all too real, and they were called *Naermyths*.

*Naermyth*, the novel's title, is a portmanteau of the words "Never and Myth." Athena, the voice of the story, mentioned this word as she described the story set in the post-Apocalyptic Philippines, where creatures of lore and myth have driven humankind to the brink of extinction. Athena also emphasizes that the threat in the story was never fictitious nor a product of the vain imaginings because they were there all along, hiding

and just waiting for the right time to take over and pervade darkness or fear among human beings<sup>2</sup>. The two novels did not only illustrate Athena's life as a shepherd and her battle against Naermyth but also provide a glimpse into her past<sup>3</sup>. In this regard, the researcher attempted to study the novels through the viewpoint of psychological criticism, specifically Carl Gustav Jung's Theory<sup>4</sup> of Dreams and proved that the events in the story were merely the main character's dreams.

Dreams, according to Jung, are not a collection of insignificant events but rather a slew of truths that the conscious mind denies or rejects. Jung considers dreams to be messages from the unconscious or a repository of undesirable and feared content<sup>5</sup>. Through his self-analysis, Jung assumed that the human's darkest dreams might contain imagery that illustrates humans' inner conflicts and points to their resolution. Aside from that, Jung emphasizes the importance of dreams, particularly in the development of one's personality, which he refers to as the individuation process<sup>6</sup>.

The Individuation process, according to Jung, is synonymous with being one's own self or self-realization. Furthermore, dreams are the psyche's way of relaying crucial information to the consciousness of the individual for them to become aware of the things that they are not aware of or have forgotten, either willingly or not<sup>7</sup>. In this regard, while Freud regarded dreams as a phenomenon that reflects a person's hidden desires and forbidden wishes, Jung considered dreams as a means of truly expressing something freely<sup>8</sup>.

## Methodology

In this study, the researchers used an IPO or Input-Process-Output model where Karen Francisco's *Naermyth Duology* served as an input and in the process of analyzing these novels, Carl Jung's psychoanalysis and Dream Theory was applied. As for the output, the Psychological Literary Criticism applied to Karen Francisco's *Naermyth Duology* was determined.

Moreover, the researchers used the Qualitative research method as well as the descriptive qualitative design to obtain detailed descriptions of the phenomenon in the *Naermyth Duology*. Qualitative research is expected to deeply investigate, comprehend, and interpret social phenomena in its natural setting<sup>8</sup>, and by employing a qualitative research method, the research will be able to collect a large amount of data and gain a better understanding of issues, cases, or events<sup>9</sup>.

The descriptive qualitative design was also utilized to obtain detailed descriptions of the phenomenon in the *Naermyth Duology*. Because the data is in the form of words or utterances from the novel's characters, this study falls under the category of qualitative research. Aside from that, the researcher<sup>10</sup> employed the analytical research approach, which entails applying critical thinking abilities and examining facts and data relevant to the study. Analytical research is important since it entails critical

reasoning skills and a critical review of the facts gathered. Furthermore, this research aims to get an understanding and deep information on how Naermyth characters, objects, and events reflected the concept of Carl Jung<sup>11</sup> about Dreams.

## Results and discussion

Carl Gustav Jung stated that the purpose of dreaming is to foster psychological healing by driving the individual to go through the self-realization or individuation process. For this reason, this paper delves into the two novels and attempts to prove that the events in the story were merely the main character's dream.

Based on a thorough investigation, the researchers discover the following:

Athena Dizon was a mere commodity that could be used for personal gain. This idea was further solidified through the events and characters presented in the story. Arnold Dizon, Athena's father, portrays himself not as a father but as a businessman who sees everything as something to be sold for profit. The fusion in the story refers to an experiment in which the subject (Arnold Dizon) injects himself with a refined substance distilled from the Naermyth (Benevidez's blood) and has a sexual interaction with another being (Catherine Dizon, Athena's mother) in order to conceive a child who will carry the Naermyth gene, thus Athena's strange conception. Furthermore, all of the important characters in the story also expressed their ill intention towards Athena and were all up in using her, whether it is for the greater good or to form an allegiance to conquer the world. Azazel, the goat, wants to use Athena as he sees her as the key to Eden's salvation. While Nasino wanted to marry her because he thought that if Athena, the most powerful naermyth in the world, stood by him, he would be able to prove that he was an eligible heir and son of MariangMakiling. Lastly, there is Dorian—the man who stayed beside Athena and promised to protect her until the very last part of the series—he is known to be the brother of Athena. However, before that, he is also one of the characters who had to use Athena to be more aware of himself and reveal his own identity as a Grigori and as the biological son of Gregory Benevidez.

Athena Dizon's fate as prophesied by the ibig ng bathala (God's Will). During the first part of the book, Athena mentioned the emerald choker given by her mentor, Gregory Benevidez. She said that it was the only thing that reminded her of him. However, it was revealed to be the bearer of truth and prophecy in the later part. It was a box in which the truth of her identity was hidden. She is a naermyth. Not just an ordinary naermyth, but a female wing wight, whom they believe to be cursed to humanity—the carrier of destruction and death. Everyone turned their back against her, including the people she treated as her family.

Naermyth as Dreams. Athena Dizon's childhood is not ordinary. It mirrors the other side of the truth about being raised in a

wealthy household. Parents will meddle in their children's lives, not minding how it will affect their children. Carl Jung also asserts that sometimes wealth is cursed because the child becomes more of a prisoner instead of having freedom<sup>10</sup> However, Athena refused to believe it was her reality. The reality in which she is nothing but a mere commodity, a trophy that can be flaunted, an achievement that his father can be proud of. She has been trying to store it in the lightless abyss of her mind, but her unconscious mind tried to remind her through her dreams. In her dreams, she encountered different characters that were either helpful or destructive. Either way, they all brought torment to Athena. That is how her waking life was. Her father meddled with her life excessively. He robs her of her capability to make decisions for herself. He honed her to be the epitome of perfection, as someone to be envious of. Apart from that, the objects in her dreams also project her fear in waking life—her fear of truth, her fear of facing reality. The Naermyths represent her inner demons that she's been battling for years, the humans represent her insecurities and flaws, while the diwatas/fairies represent her father—an ally with a hidden agenda.

Athena's dream and her journey to self-realization. According to Carl Jung<sup>11</sup>, the individuation process is a process in which an individual becomes his one's own self. In Jung's concept of dreams, individuation was done through three phases — integrating with the shadow (the darkness within the self), harmonizing the anima and the animus, and discovering the self<sup>11</sup>. Through dream interpretation, there search had theorized that the female heroine discovered her unique self as she underwent the extensive process of self-realization. The integration of the shadow was done at the time in which she embraces her flaws—both as a Naermyth and as a human. Athena, in her dreams, had undergone a metamorphosis as she transformed from just a human shepherd up to the destructive female wing wight. Although having a hard time accepting her flaws, Athena learned to accept herself and used her power to defeat the Naermyths who tried to kill her or the people around her. That part of her dream is the manifestation that Athena's Individuation Process had finally started. In her waking life, since she was reared to be the epitome of perfection and made not to have any mistakes, Athena had a hard time dealing with all her imperfections as she feared that it might disappoint her father; however, as her unconscious dismantled the truth around her mummified reality, Athena seemed to be confronting what she lacks, her darkness as well as her flaws and insecurities. When the darkness within the human psyche has been exposed, or at the very least confronted, it is now better to address the other half. Even though humans are born with the physical attributes of a Male or Female, Jung proposed that they will always have the components of the opposite gender within them in his Individuation concepts. This is what Jung called the anima or the animus. In the story (dreams), Athena always chooses to show her masculine side as she happens to be a shepherd, a warrior against Naermyths. However, in her waking life, Athena is always the typical woman gauged in the standard set by society—weak, vulnerable, and submissive. To begin

with, Athena failed to integrate her two personalities, but in the later phases of the series, she learned to be vulnerable. She finally removed the armor that was concealing her feminine self, showed them her fear and weakness, and, most importantly, she learned to let go of her bottled emotions as she finally admitted her feelings for River. Meanwhile, Athena appeared to finally have the courage to stand up to her father's dominating ploy in her waking life. Finally, Athena's self-discovery occurred when she realized she needed to save herself from everything, even walking alone. In her dreams, Athena let herself be engulfed by darkness, and so as in her waking life, perhaps she had finally freed herself from the chain that had been holding her for years.

Athena and her quest to search for her identity. In the contemporary Philippines, authors have always regarded the *identity crisis* as the central idea of their story. It has become a way for the author to portray the schizophrenic identity, which has become the aftermath of the colonization of three different empires for about half a century. In the story, Athena Dizon searches for the truth involving her own identity, strange conception, and roots. Athena succeeded in finding the truth about her conception as she flipped the chapters of the *Revelation*; however, in the later part of the story, the scene appears to be the beginning of another quest for Athena to know herself deeper as well as her journey in pursuit of liberty, happiness, and life.

*Naermyth* is the microcosm of the Philippines and the Filipinos. As a part of the discussion above, the researchers found the identity crisis as one of the central ideas of *Naermyth Duology*. Besides that, *Naermyth Duology* also portrays a vivid representation of the Philippines and the Filipinos in general. The novel talks about monsters, obscurity, and desolation, which somehow represent the country. The problems that have been presented in the story are the problems that still exist and have been endured by the Filipinos for a very long time. In this sense, *Naermyth Duology* is a good example of a Philippine Contemporary novel that penetrates the enduring and emerging issues of the Filipinos in general and the Philippines in particular.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the repressed desires and unfulfilled wishes of the main character were reflected in her dreams. In this case, the purpose of her dreams is to foster psychological healing by driving her to go through the self-realization or individuation process.

Based on the findings of this study, these are the ideas that the two novels had presented:

The ideas, symbols, and images are largely connected to Jungian analysis. The different archetypes like the persona, anima/animus, the shadow, the self, wise old man, and the

divine child which are particularly coined by Carl Jung<sup>11</sup> himself were also presented.

The objects, characters, and events in the story further signified what the novel is trying to imply. In line with this, the researcher asserted that what happened in the story is the projection of Athena's concealed reality, which manifested itself in her dreams. However, by proving that it is just a dream, the researcher conveys that these novels were not just fantastical novels exploring the dream of either the author or the main character; they are allegorical because they are symbolic.

The study does tackle not only the psychological issues embedded in the novels but also the mythological, formalism, and with a hint of gender issues, as a woman (Athena in her waking life and the female wing Wight, in her dreams) had to go through judgments as they were either a weakling and destruction to both society and humanity.

To sum it up, the two novels had present meanings and wisdom relevant specifically in this era where mental health issues are rampant. Athena's life journey is certainly not easy, but as the protagonist of her own story, she had to be determined and courageous enough to confront these obstacles until uncovering her uniqueness began.

Furthermore, aside from the findings that the researchers have found using the lens of psychological criticism, these are the other ideas that they have discovered:

A woman is the main character of the novel. Two things contribute to the realization of why the main character is a woman. First, Karen Francisco is a woman; hence, it is no surprise to find out that the main protagonist in her book would be a woman as well. Second is the history itself. In Greek Mythology, there exists the feminine divine or the Pagan worship, the woman is considered the powerful goddess, so in the story, it sticks to its traditional sources. Also, in the pre-colonial Philippines, the babaylan, or the powerful female goddesses exist. Tito Bing also mentioned it in book 1 of Naermyth, page 159, "*Though mankind hates to admit it, womankind is bestowed with the best gift of the species—the stronger gifts*"<sup>12</sup>.

Few characters in the story represent the aftermath of colonization. Karen Francisco has an Eastern root, she is a Filipino writer, and her stories were also leaning in the light of Philippine culture. However, the names like Athena, Dorian, Nathan, Cameron, Catherine, Rick, Rowan, River, and other human characters all originated from the West. In acquiescence to this, this story seemed greatly influenced by the notion that the Western is far better than the East. Karen Francisco herself is still suffering from a schizophrenic identity in which she still has the mentality that everything will always be gauged by the standard set by the Western countries.

There exist postcolonial elements in the story. Aside from the main character that exudes the search for identity, the *struggle for power, nation-building, diaspora, and double consciousness* was also present. The struggle for power in Postcolonial Literary Criticism pertains to the tension between the conqueror (bourgeoisie), and the colonized (subaltern) was manifested through the conflict between humans and Naermyth who are fighting against each other to either colonize or redeem the land of the Philippines. Nation-building can also be seen as humans allying or known as the Shepherd to fight against the mythical creatures. Also, in the Diaspora, humans were displaced and were compelled to leave their homes when the Naermyth attacks arose. Lastly, the double consciousness happened to Athena, Dorian who was reared by humans but later on found out that they were Naermyth, and there is Alindougan reared as a Naermyth but born as a human.

Based on the research findings, the researcher scrutinized the story through Psychological Criticism and Carl Jung's Theory of Dreams. As psychological criticism is quite broad, the researcher narrowed it by utilizing Carl Jung's Theory of Dreams. In this regard, the researchers urge the potential future researchers who want to conduct similar research to go beyond or outside the prism of Psychological Criticism.

Hence, the researcher recommends the following: i. This study can be utilized as a point of comparison or a comparative study on the newly adapted Netflix Series which also perpetuates Philippine Mythology, the *Trese Series*. ii. Since there are many underrated Filipino authors, including Karen Francisco, the researchers also recommend that future researchers study the works of those authors for them to be recognized in the literary industry. iii. Karen Francisco previously announced that there would be a potential for the Naermyth to have its third book. Further research for this study is also recommended.

## References

1. Master Class staff (2021). What is Dystopian Fiction? Learn About the 5 Characteristics of Dystopian Fiction with Examples. <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-dystopian-fiction-learn-about-the-5-characteristics-of-dystopian-fiction-with-examples>. 03/02/2021
2. Karen Francisco (2010). Naermyth. Visprint. Inc. Philippines, p.7. ISBN: 971945694-9
3. Karen Francisco (2018). Revelations: Book two of the Naermyth Series. Visprint, Inc. Philippines. ISBN: 9 789710 545827
4. Kelly Bulkeley (2021). Jung's Theory of Dreams: A Reappraisal. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/dreaming-in-the-digital-age/202003/jung-s-theory-dreams-reappraisal-0>. 30/01/2021
5. Dale M. Kushner (2021). Understand Your Dreams by Using Jung's Active Imagination.

- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/transcending-the-past/201610/understand-your-dreams-using-jungs-active-imagination>. 30/01/2021
6. Schlamm L. (2014). Individuation. In: Leeming D.A. (eds) Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion. Springer, Boston, MA. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-6086-2\\_329](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-6086-2_329)
  7. Roesler, C. (2020). Jungian Theory of Dreaming and Contemporary Dream research – Findings from the Research Project ‘Structural Dream Analysis’. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 65(1), 44-62. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5922.12566>
  8. John W. Creswell (2016). Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. SAGE Publications. ISBN 1506330193, 9781506330198
  9. Arora, R., & Stoner, C. (2009). A mixed method approach to understanding brand personality. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*. 18(4). <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/10610420910972792/full/html>
  10. Tom Corley (2014). Rich Kids: How to Raise Our Children to Be Happy and Successful in Life. Two Harbors Press. ISBN-13: 978-1626529861
  11. Scott Jeffrey (2021). A Closer Look at Carl Jung’s Individuation Process: A Map for Psychic Wholeness. [https://scottjeffrey.com/individuation-process/Three\\_Stages\\_of\\_the\\_Individuation\\_Process](https://scottjeffrey.com/individuation-process/Three_Stages_of_the_Individuation_Process). 26/09/2021
  12. Karen Francisco (2010). Naermyth. Visprint, Inc. Philippines, p.159. ISBN: 971945694-9