

## Eco-Spirituality and the Nature of Colonialism in F. Sionil Jose's *The God Stealer*

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### ABSTRACT

*Ecocritics argue that everything in the world is interconnected and that humans have a moral obligation to safeguard nature. According to some researchers, human culture and nature are intricately intertwined and impact one another. As a result, this is one of the few studies that looked at the nature of colonialism as described in F. Sionil Jose's *The God Stealer*. It also looked into the idealization of nature and the rural by building a link between nature and culture. Furthermore, the data revealed that nature plays an important role in many indigenous ceremonies, customs, cultures, and spiritualities. The concept is not to reject the worldly, but to live in harmony with nature. It argues that God's existence is revealed through His creation and creatures. Moreover, the theft of an idol or god in *The God Stealer* implies disregard for tribal beliefs and traditions. In addition, the character Sam Christie personifies an exploitative colonial force that devalues an idol/god (nature) by turning it into a collectible. The analyses also show that colonialism has caused alterations to traditional tribal ways of living. Thus, it is evident that the nature of colonialism is portrayed in F. Sionil Jose's *The God Stealer*. Also, An analysis of the eco-feministic approach to discovering masculine colonialism, as well as the socio-political structures, may be studied in order to uncover the themes and sub-themes in F. Sionil Jose's Literature.*

### KEYWORDS

*ecocriticism; nature; colonialism; Eco-spirituality; F. Sionil Jose*

### INTRODUCTION

According to Goethe, nature is a garment that God wears to show and express Himself to man (Bortoft, 2004). This implies that God sees trees, air, skies, mountains, bodies of water, bodies of fire, animals, and mankind as His face. This further means that the tribes, their customs, culture, religion, and spirituality are all inextricably linked to nature (Nanda, 2020). Unfortunately, colonialism's interference and the ensuing growth of material luxury resulted in moral decay. Colonialism endangers spirituality and testifies to the plight of marginalized tribes. Material affluence, on the other hand, affected people's perceptions of nature. The sounds of nature were drowned out by the commercial and sophisticated urban environment.

A rising number of ecocritics believe that all creation is interconnected and that humans have a moral obligation to protect the environment. Literary works, according to ecocritics, have tremendously broad intellectual, ethical, political, and even spiritual agendas (Bressler, 2011). Moreover, Glotfelty (1995) asserts that human culture and the nature are intertwined and have an impact on each other. Humans worship nature as the most powerful creation through rituals, festivals, prayers, rites, and other forms of devotion.

Moreover, the Philippines, being a melting pot of cultures, is home to a large number of indigenous peoples who prioritize nature in all of their cultural activities. The Ifugao, for

example, maintain their traditions through dances, music, folklore, ceremonies, wood carving, agriculture, and forestry. Many Ifugao people think that certain trees are connected to spirits (anito), hence they continue to safeguard them (Camacho, et al., 2015). Furthermore, the culture of the Philippines is a product of mixed ancestry. However, the attitudes of certain younger generations conflict with traditional Filipino values such as respect for the elderly, family devotion, and self-respect. In terms of clothes, music, and social norms, today's Filipino youth are very similar to their western counterparts. As a result, the importance of some core cultural practices has been questioned, such as people's intrinsic connection to nature and how humans can influence nature. In addition, the colonial mindset of Filipinos threatens spirituality and ignores indigenous tribes' struggles at the hands of a sophisticated majority. One of the best-known Filipino writers, F. Sionil Jose, has also written about the country's socio-political contexts. As a result, several scholars, such as Klincar (1988), have used Marxism to examine how F. Sionil Jose's works reflect social and political problems and how the characters are seen as social reflectors of Philippine culture. But only a small number of scholars have tried to look at F. Sionil Jose's writings through an ecocritical lens in order to figure out the what the nature of colonialism is like in them. Hence, *Ecocriticism and Pastoralism* by Lawrence Buell and *Eco-spirituality* by Albert Fritsch provide support for this assumption.

Ecocriticism dates back to the 1960s. Lawrence Buell, the first ecocritic, asserts that there are two waves of ecocriticism. The first wave looked at 19th-century "nature writing," while the second wave looked at and addressed current environmental issues. The first wave ecocritics are classified into two groups based on their location: American and British ecocritics. American literature focuses on natural settings, nature, and transcendentalism, a type of spirituality that connects humans and nature. The first wave of American ecocritics used these literary works to show what was important to them, such as place, setting, nature, the earth, and the spirit that was forced to live in nature itself. At the same time, the first wave of ecocritics in Great Britain is interested in the main differences between rural and urban and nature and civilization. The second wave of ecocriticism, on the other hand, focuses on contemporary environmental issues, such as the "environmental justice movement," a political ecocriticism that promotes class, racial, and gender awareness through ecocritical reading. Additionally, ecocriticism does not possess a cohesive set of assumptions. It continues to evolve and flourish. It is hence multidisciplinary. It also underlines how all things, including nature and culture, are interrelated. Ecocritics also believe that human culture and the natural environment are intertwined. This means that humans directly affect and are affected by the physical world (Bressler, 2011).

Furthermore, Pastoral ecocriticism, as an approach in this study, accentuates the urban-rural divide. Pastoralism idealizes nature and the rural, while depicting the city as the devil. Pastoralism has three branches: Classic, Romantic, and American. The Classical Pastoral is characterized by nostalgia; the Romantic Pastoral contrasts rural autonomy with urban expansion; and the American Pastoral emphasizes agrarianism as the barrier between the urban and the rural. The Classical Pastoral is characterized by nostalgia; the Romantic Pastoral contrasts rural autonomy with urban expansion; and the American Pastoral emphasizes agrarianism as the barrier between the urban and the rural (Bressler, 2011).

Eco-spirituality, on the other hand, is the intersection between environment and spirituality. The core concept is based on nature's sanctities, and it also emphasizes the supreme power's absorption in the eco system. In this view, eco-spirituality is not only transcendental; rather, God is an omnipresent and ubiquitous entity. According to set of spirituality, the idea is not about abandonment of the material world but rather

synchronization with nature. In India, eco-spiritualism is essentially an ancient and primordial tradition. Festivals, celebrations, rituals, and prayers have all been held to honor nature as the most powerful entity. It dates back to the dawn of civilization, most likely during the Vedic and Puranic periods. Nature played a vital role in all of the indigenous people's religious ceremonies. Eco-spirituality is founded on "the rules of ecology" and must be spiritually uplifting by exalting the goodness of creation. In a "Ignatian" vein, eco-spirituality discovers great subtlety in nature's divine architecture and develops the concept that nature is divine because "spiritual force" linked with "material principles" of the earth expresses itself in all life (Nanda, 2020).

This study is one of the very few that seeks to investigate the nature of colonialism as depicted in F. Sionil Jose's short story *The God Stealer*. This research analyzes the idealization of nature and the rural by determining the relationship between nature and human culture. Additionally, this research investigates the demonization of the urban by revealing the portrayal of colonialism through the relationship between nature and colonialism. The theories of ecocriticism, pastoralism, and eco-spirituality studies form the basis for the different theories, sub-theories, and studies that are incorporated into the literary analysis.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The qualitative research method used in this study is critical discourse analysis. A qualitative research method entails describing everything that occurs during a particular activity or situation. A qualitative research method's natural environment is the direct source of data, and the researcher is its most important instrument. In addition, rather than numbers, qualitative research collects data in the form of texts and images. Furthermore, using the qualitative research approach enables the researcher to conduct an inductive analysis of the data (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Moreover, the foundation of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the presumption that power relations are discursive. In other words, power is something that is communicated and exercised through discourse. CDA typically analyzes news reports, political speeches, literary works, advertisements, schoolbooks, and other works, revealing strategies that appear normal or neutral but may be ideological and seek to improve the image of events and personalities in order to achieve specific goals.

Therefore, "denaturalizing" the language is what is meant by the term "critical," and it relates to the process of revealing various sorts of ideas, absences, and assumptions that are taken for granted in texts. This research demonstrates the idealization of nature and the rural, as well as the demonization of the urban (Machin et al., 2012). Furthermore, the purpose of this research is to particularly use CDA to describe, interpret, analyze, and criticize F. Sionil Jose's short story *The God Stealer*. This is accomplished through analyzing the relationship of nature and culture, the portrayal of colonialism and its relationship to nature. The analysis ultimately demonstrates how the rural and nature are idealized, and how the urban world is demonized.

In addition, the primary data can be found in a book titled *Philippine Literatures: Texts, Themes, and Approaches* by Aguila, A. et al., which was printed and distributed by the University of Santo Tomas Publishing House in the year 2008. Studies that have already been published, online sources, and literary books are the secondary sources of data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the data that answers the problems raised in this study. The presentation and analyses are split into two phases. Phase 1: Nature and Rural Idealization illustrates how

the nature and rural are seen as ideal, and Phase 2: Urban Demonization highlights how cities are demonized.

### **Nature and Rural Idealization**

The idealization of nature and the rural is revealed in this phase, which examines the relationship between nature and culture. It identifies cultural markers, as well as cultural categories (material and nonmaterial cultures) that demonstrate the link between nature and culture. Table 1 shows the results of the analysis of nature and rural idealization.

**Table 1.** Nature and Rural Idealization Analysis

Lines from the Text	Cultural Marker/ Identification	Category of Culture	Relationship of nature and culture
<i>"... patience until you have seen the rice terraces. . ."</i>	rice terraces	Material	time that took to build the rice terraces develops patience
<i>"Rice wine . . . As long as he has wine he will live."</i>	rice wine	Material	rice wine for good harvest
<i>"The village doctor. . . he danced to drive away the evil spirit. . ."</i>	dance	Nonmaterial	dance ritual to cure certain diseases
<i>"... number of skulls in the village to show his social position."</i>	skulls	Material	skulls identify a person's social position
<i>"A good harvest...gods are pleased...bad one...angered."</i>	belief in god	Nonmaterial	god's response to human behaviors
<i>"...in the blaze of the bonfire, the pigs...butchered ..."</i>	ritual on animal sacrifice	Nonmaterial	god/ idol is solely responsible for the prosperity and adversity
<i>"... poured...blood on the idol's head...he recited a prayer."</i>	traditional rituals/prayers	Nonmaterial	
<i>"The idol ...made of good hardwood...were almost grotesque..."</i>	ifugao god	Material	hardwood is associated with nature
<i>"It was the loss of the god. It was stolen."</i>	curse of an idol/ god	Nonmaterial	god/ idol claims life as a sacrifice
<i>"...the hill... We buried him there."</i>	burial	Nonmaterial	we shall return to nature
<i>"Two feasts ...welcome to a youth...farewell to...who gave us blood..."</i>	festivals	Nonmaterial	nature is welcoming
<i>"... this house...stood on this patch of earth..."</i>	traditional house	Material	houses are one with nature
<i>"scraping again the block of wood...between his knees."</i>	traditional ritual/ prayer	Nonmaterial	god is carved from the image of humans

*We shall return to nature, nature is inviting, houses are one with nature, and god is sculpted from the image of humanity. This is how nature and culture are intertwined. It also has rice wine for a good harvest, dance rituals to cure certain illnesses, skulls that show a person's social status, how god reacts to what people do, and the idea that god or an idol is fully responsible for both prosperity and adversity; and the construction of the rice terraces also teaches the Ifugao people to be patient.*

The line "... because Philip is Ifugao, and you don't know patience until you have seen the rice terraces his ancestors built," reveals that the people of Ifugao have gained patience because of the amount of time it took for them to build the rice terraces. Also, the line: "Rice wine — I hope there is still a jar around when we get to my grandfather's... As long as he has wine, he will live," demonstrates that rice wine, which is made from fermented rice, is a holy beverage that serves as a conduit to obtain the favor of god. When dedicated to the gods, this rice wine may bring harvest and life to the people. Furthermore, the line "The village doctor... he came and right there in the ward he danced to drive away the evil spirit that had gotten a hold of me" proves that many indigenous people perform rituals to cure diseases. They believe that a ritual such as dancing can drive away the spirit(s) responsible for an ailing person's condition. In addition, the line that reads, "He had the most number of skulls in the village to show his social position." Now, new skulls would be added to the collection." indicates that hunting is one of the many indigenous people's highly significant activities. This shows that one of the criteria that can define the man's position in an indigenous society is his ability to hunt or fight the creatures and beasts that live in the forest. "A good harvest means the gods are pleased," "A bad one means they are angered," suggests that god's existence could be recognized through His creations. Alterations in the natural world, such as having a bountiful harvest or not, are understood as god's response to the actions of humans. "Beyond the open door, in the blaze of the bonfire, the pigs were already being butchered, and someone had started beating the gongs, and their deep, sonorous whang rang sharp and clear above the grunts of the dying animals.", "Slowly, piously, the old man poured the living, frothy blood on the idol's head, and the blood washed down the ugly head to its arms and legs, to its very feet and as he poured the blood, in his crackled voice, he recited a prayer," proves that in all religious rituals practiced by the indigenous people, nature took center stage. Since god/idol is associated with nature, it is the only one who can provide great fortune or misfortune to the people.

Furthermore, the line, "The idol was heavy. . . it must be made of good hardwood. It is crudely shaped, and its proportions were almost grotesque. The arms were too long, and the legs were mere stumps. The feet, on other hand, were huge," says that the god/idol is fashioned from hardwood which is from the nature. This is how they perceive god and nature. Moreover, the line, "But it wasn't the drink that did it, sir," Sadek said emphatically. "It was the loss of the god. It was stolen." demonstrates that a god/idol has the divine potential to heal sick people and, if insulted, to claim a life as a sacrifice. Furthermore, the line, "Near the hill on which stood the old man's house Sadek paused again. "We buried him there." signifies that Nature, as a living force and our creator, created us and all other life forms. As a result, we will return to it by becoming one with nature (by being buried). Also, the line, "and we held another feast this morning. Two feasts in so short a time. One was a welcome to a youth gone astray, the other a farewell to him who gave us blood in us..." demonstrate that evolution, speciation, and natural selection are all causally accountable for who we are. Moreover, the line, "...this flimsy thing of straw hat had survived all of time's ravages, this house that was also granary and altar, which had retained its shape through hungry years and was, as it stood on this patch of earth, everything that endured." construes that our houses are one with Nature. It has always had an affinity to the earth. Lastly, the text, "He seemed completely absorbed in his work and, with the sharp blade in his hands, he started scraping again the block of wood which he held tightly between his knees." implies that the image of god is carved from the image of mankind and is fashioned from a natural resource, hardwood. The making of a new idol has significance, as it serves as a representation of both faith and hope.

These lines from the text reveal that nature is an important element of the rituals, customs, cultures, and spiritualities which are practiced by many indigenous people. The main idea is about how sacred nature is, and it also shows how the supreme power is absorbed into the ecosystem. In this sense, eco-spirituality is not only a transcendental concept; rather, it views god as an entity that is all-encompassing and ever-present. The conviction is not about the repudiation of the worldly but rather about the harmony with nature. So, in a nutshell, god's existence is manifested through His creation and creatures.

### Urban Demonization

This phase depicts colonialism and the relationship between nature and colonialism. It looks into character interactions and narrations that highlight the relationship between nature and colonialism. The analysis of urban demonization is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Urban Demonization Analysis

Illustration of colonialism in the text	Devices	Relationship of nature to colonialism
"... Ilocanos...entertain a sense of inferiority."	Character conversation	urbanization results to inferiority
"...live here...to Manila?"	Character conversation	rural life is worst
"...city had won you...forgotten this humble place...people."	Character conversation	city makes one forget
"...this poor house...embarrasses us..."	Character conversation	house determines status
"... shouldn't have left...I should rot..."	Character conversation	indigenous people loathe their place
"...terraces are good...can't...for the stomach."	Character conversation	rice terraces as a commodity
"...living in Manila ... forgotten...Ifugao...I like it..."	Character conversation	colonialism breeds discrimination
"... our tongue...our blood...a stranger..."	Character conversation	colonization estranges
"...get a god..."	Narration	gods are capitalist's commodities
"...city...corrupted..."	Character conversation	city is a demon
"...down the hill, Sam...Philip...below. . ."	Narration	nature identifies socio-economic status
"... I'd steal a god...at his friend."	Character conversation	stealing and execrating god is disrespect
"... no longer believes in...idols."	Character conversation	stealing and execrating god is disrespect
"... not starve here, but ... no longer have the pleasures..."	Character conversations	nature has everything
"... I killed him ...to be free from...terraces..."	Character conversation	gods are basic commodities
"...buy everything, even gods."	Character conversation	
"... not a friend...searching for gods to buy."	Character conversation	
"...finish a new god...the stolen idol...to America...souvenirs of...places."	Narration	

*Inferiority, rural life is worst, city makes one forget, house determines status, indigenous people loathe their place, rice terraces as a commodity, colonialism breeds discrimination, colonization estranges, gods are capitalist's commodities, city is a demon, nature identifies socio-economic status, stealing and execrating god is disrespect, nature has everything, gods are basic commodities,* are the illustrations of the relationship of nature and colonialism as analyzed from the text.

The text's portrayal of colonialism is implied in the line "... that the Igorots, like the Ilocanos, no matter how urbanized they already are, entertain a sense of inferiority," which

suggests that the urbanization results in the natives' inferiority. The line: "*Hell, if I can live here, would I go to Manila?*" clearly illustrates how living in the urban is way better than living in the rural areas. Furthermore, the line "*I thought the city had won you so completely that you have forgotten this humble place and its humble people,*" depicts just how the nature in the city could be so overpowering that one forgets his roots and unique identity. This exemplifies how nature may foster a colonial mentality in humans. Also, the line: "*I must apologize, sir, for my brother, for his bringing you to this poor house. His deed embarrasses us...*" suggests that a house/place/environment identifies the socio-economic standing of the people who live there. Also, the line "*...Like my grandfather, he feels that I shouldn't have left this place, that I should rot here,*" demonstrates how some indigenous people despise their homeland due mainly to external forces such as foreign influences.

"*Hell, everyone knows that the terraces are good for the eye, but they can't produce enough for the stomach,*" says another phrase. implies that, from a Western and industrial point of view, the value of nature is contingent on its ability to support human economic activity. This further reveal that the rice terraces are viewed as a commodity rather than a cultural marker. The line: "*All of them here dislike me. They think that by living in Manila for a few years I have forgotten what is to be an Ifugao. I can't help it, Sam. I like it down there. Hell, they will never understand,*" reveals how colonialism persuaded people to identify themselves away from their indigenous communities. Inequalities and discrimination against one's own culture have emerged because of this colonial mindset. In addition, the line "*You speak our tongue, you have our blood—but you are a stranger nevertheless,*" simply implies that language and affinity are the primary components of culture that separates one culture from another. People have become unfamiliar with their own kind as a direct result of colonization. Furthermore, the line "*I had asked him where we could get a god and he said he didn't know,*" indicates the emergence of capitalism, which eventually intervened the indigenous tribes and reduced tribal gods into mere commodities. "Also, the line, "*In the city—people are corrupted by easy living, the pleasures of senses and the flesh, the mass corruption that is seeping into the government and everything,*" depicts how the city is portrayed as a demon that corrupts everyone who resides therein. It effectively means that one's nature have a substantial impact on almost everything.

Furthermore, the line "*Going down the hill, Sam decided to bare his mind to Philip who was below him...*" shows how nature has pre-determined the placements and heights of everything, including hills, mountains, and rivers. The hill symbolizes one's socioeconomic level, implying that Sam, a foreigner, regards Philip as a second-class citizen. In addition, the lines "*I told you I'd steal a god,*" and "*staggering forward, he shoved his grandfather's idol at his friend,*" and "*He was wrong in being so attached to me who no longer believes in these idols,*" convey that stealing a god and execrating a tribal religion is a strong expression of disregard towards tribal religion and the indigenous people. Also, the line "*My brother...he will not starve here, but he will no longer have the pleasures that he knew,*" implies that nature provides everything that a man needs to survive, yet urbanization provides all the pleasures that the tribal/ indigenous group disdains. Finally, the line "*...I killed him because I wanted to be free from these...these terraces, because I wanted to be grateful. I killed him who loved me most...*", "*That's it! You'll always find a way because you have all the money. You can buy everything, even gods.*", "*You are not a friend,*" "...*If you are, you wouldn't have come here searching for gods to buy,*" and "*...it would take some time before he could finish a new god to replace the old one, the stolen idol which he was bringing home to America to take its place among his souvenirs of benighted and faraway places,*" exhibit that colonization makes the natives/ indigenous communities believe that

theirs has always been inferior and much less significant; and that nature, even gods, are seen as basic commodities that can only be sold to a capitalist entity.

These lines from the text suggest that the colonial intrusion significantly harmed the tribal ethos and identity of the characters. The act of stealing an idol/god is considered a serious transgression by the tribal community. The reader gets the impression that the author disapproves of the introduction of capitalism, which, in the end, caused disruptions to the traditional tribal way of life. As evidenced by the fact that Philip Latak's grandfather abhorred Sam Christie's presence in the community, the arrival of Sam Christie has been a source of danger for the indigenous people who live there. The theft of an idol/god, or even the consideration of purchasing one, shows a blatant contempt for tribal beliefs and traditions. The influence of Sam Christie and the western atmosphere, which Philip Latak has been familiar with for some time in Manila, is to blame for Philip Latak's indiscipline and violation of the code of conduct. Sam Christie is also a personification of an exploitative colonial force that turns an idol/god (nature) into a collectible and makes it worth less than it is.

## CONCLUSION

The nature of colonialism is portrayed accurately in F. Sionil Jose's *The God Stealer*. Through an investigation of the dynamic relationship that exists between human culture and the nature, this study also looked into how people romanticize rural life and the nature. The idea that nature is sacred and that the most powerful force is embedded inside the natural environment is the overarching theme that emerges from this investigation. The idea of eco-spirituality encompasses more than just a transcendental outlook; rather, it considers God to be all-pervasive and ever-present. Rather than eschewing worldly pursuits, the conviction is on striking a harmonious balance with nature. The fact that idols/gods are revered by the community, and that their theft is seen as a grave offense, emerged as one of the most powerful statements in the text. Sam Christie, the main character, is also meant to be interpreted as a depiction of an exploitative colonial force that turns nature into a mere collectible. In addition to this, Philip Latak's indiscipline and infractions of the code of indigenous people's conduct can be attributed to foreign influences.

Furthermore, this study did not directly investigate masculine colonialism through an eco-feminist lens, as its primary focus was on the general themes of the nature of colonialism and the relationship between nature and human culture. Additionally, the socio-political structures should be investigated to shed light on the diverse themes that are explored in F. Sionil Jose's published works of literature.

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