

A Literary-Cultural Critique Of Filipino Men In F. Sionil Jose's Select Short Stories

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Abstract— Literature as a reflection of the society is widely acknowledged fact. It portrays human life and action through the characters. Honoring the role of literature as mirror of the social character, this paper analyzes the male characters in the works of Francisco Sionil Jose, a Filipino national artist. Five short stories are subjected to close reading and content analysis. Using Cultural Criticism as lens, this study examines: portrayal of Filipino male characters, character delineation of the Filipino behavioral and cultural values, and the use of symbolism. As basis for analysis, this paper uses three value themes: social acceptance, social mobility, and economic security highlighted in the work of Frank Lynch based from his Four Readings on Philippine Values. The author incarnates characters who are brave, freedom seekers, source of wisdom and strength, advocates of change, and possessing positive relational traits. However, a character portrayed as crass money maker, bribe-giver, dismissive of his own Filipino culture, and detesting his own country and people are also personified in the story. This research concludes that valuing art as imitation; F. Sionil Jose created real-life characters that also delineate the Filipino behavioral and cultural values. The paper further reveals that Smooth Interpersonal Relations (SIR), *hiya*, and use of go-between as intermediate values of social acceptance are observed in the story. Social mobility and economic security are also apparent values the characters possess which are likely the same goal of most Filipinos, uplifting their social class and status. Furthermore, the use of symbolism enhances the delineation of the Filipino men characters and providing a much deeper and more significant character representation. Based on the findings, this paper mainly recommends postcolonial and Marxist reading of the selected stories to deeply tackle cultural, political, and economic issues.

Keywords— short stories; critical criticism, behavioral values; cultural values

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature has indeed become the expression of the society. People's sentiments, ideas, feelings,

and opinions are reflected in different texts. It is thus safe to say that values, issues, morals, laws, culture and traditions, and development of the society in general may be gleaned from literary texts.

In 2000, Lehtonen (72) regards texts as communicative artifacts or human-produced instruments of communication. Literary texts are instrumental in preserving ideologies and short stories are no exception. He also suggested that authors form the backbone of texts, thus the figure of the author should not be overlooked. Short story authors make every effort to create accounts that reflect the mood of the society and construct events that mirror the prevailing social issues. These writers also fashion unique characters that portray the values, attitudes, customs, opinions and individuality of the Filipino people.

One such widely-read Filipino writer in the modern times is Francisco Sionil Jose. He is an author of famous short stories and novels that depict the social underpinnings of class struggle and colonialism in Filipino society. His works received awards making him the country's National Artist for Literature. For more than half of his life F. Sionil Jose has been simultaneously a writer of "fiction with a cause," and his declared aim always has been to work for social justice and moral order (encyclopedia.com). The works of F. Sionil Jose speak of the Filipino past. And it is through his literature that these precious things are all preserved and transmitted from one generation to the other.

F. Sionil Jose is considered as the country's living writer of the English language and his works received adequate critical attention. A study conducted by Reyes, Legaspi, and Canada (135) revealed that his selected short stories depict class struggles in various forms and social issues that confronted the characters, reflective of the time these stories were written. In his texts, he created life-like and well-remembered characters no wonder his writings are valued and became famous for communicating very important purposes. As supported by Lehtonen (78), texts do not stand solely by themselves; they stand for the author's intentional purpose. Thus this study aims to understand F. Sionil Jose's intention in portraying such male characters in his selected stories.

No research undertakings have been conducted yet examining F. Sionil Jose's character portrayal – how the men in his stories are presented under the context of social values and culture. Several feminism topics have been analyzed over the course of literature research. In fact, the evaluation of gender roles has come mostly from the analysis of women. This lack of comprehensive attention to men can be attributed to the absence of an activist movement to push a societal re-examination of men's gender identity unlike the manner that occurred in women as the existence of the different waves of feminism (Pearson 42-43 qtd in Angeles 5). This state also prompted the researcher to study male characters believing that they too need equal attention.

This paper analyzes the main male characters in F. Sionil Jose's selected short stories and assumes that these characters possess attributes reflective of the Filipino behavioral and cultural values. To gain fuller understanding of this study, the author's biographical information is considered. Further, this study is anchored on the concept of Philippine Values by Frank Lynch as the major reference and also the three main cultural values highlighting Filipino behavior by Tomas D. Andres.

In his Four Readings on Philippine Values, Lynch proposed that social acceptance is of paramount importance in the lowland Philippines (4). Social acceptance – enjoyed when one is taken by one's fellows for what he is, or what he believes he is – is the Filipino's ultimate goal. In order to attain this, Lynch explains that there are two intermediate values that work hand in hand to achieve acceptance: Filipinos act in a way to retain smooth interpersonal relations or SIR and they are sensitive to personal affront (*amor propio*) (10).

SIR according to Lynch is defined as a facility at getting along with others in such a way as to avoid outward signs of conflict: harsh words, open disagreement, or physical violence. It connotes hospitality – the smile, the friendly lift of the eyebrow, the pat on the back, the squeeze of the arm, the word of praise or friendly concern. It means being agreeable, even under difficult circumstances and of keeping quiet or out of sight when discretion passes the word. It means sensitivity to what other people feel at any given moment, and a willingness and ability to adjust in order to maintain a favorable atmosphere at all times.

SIR is acquired and preserved principally using three mechanisms: namely, *pakikisama* or good public relations, euphemism, and the use of a go-between. *Pakikisama* in its most restricted sense, means "giving in" and "following the lead or suggestion of another" or in another word concession (13). Lynch further explains that this refers especially to the practice of yielding to the will of the leader or majority so as to make the group decision unanimous. Euphemism, which is the stating of an unpleasant truth, opinion, or request as pleasantly as possible is another way of preserving SIR. Lynch classified this as an art that has long been highly prized in Philippine

society. This is still valued even during these modern times. Harsh and insulting speech is correspondingly devalued. Lastly, another common means of preserving or restoring smooth interpersonal relations is the use of go-betweens or a third party or sometimes called a middleman who is used to tone down anger, heal a wound, or prevent injury (15). Go-betweens are utilized in several situations to attain reconciliation for political or social conflicts. This is done not only to avoid possible embarrassment or bad feeling, but also to remedy an existing state of conflict or tension.

SIR is the most striking quality manifested by Filipinos. This pleasantness is also valued by other races but this counts relatively more important by Filipinos than from any of them. Lynch implies that SIR is basically the most distinctive characteristic of a Filipino. For him, Filipinos are more conscious of exhibiting qualities and/or behavior patterns which tend to assist in the attainment of social acceptance. According to Lynch, the goal of social acceptance-enjoyed when one is accepted for what one is and when one is not rejected by one's fellows-underlies much of Filipino behavior patterns even when Filipinos do not consciously direct their actions towards becoming socially acceptable.

Moreover, Filipinos, too, are taught to be sensitive to the feelings of others and not to openly criticize or insult others lest they offend someone else's self-esteem and incur another's ire or retaliatory action. Sensitivity to personal affront or *amor propio* is another intermediate value that Lynch mentioned to attain social acceptance, the ultimate goal. If SIR is the most and highly valued (48) according to Lynch, *amor propio* is valued consciously but implicitly (49). Unlike SIR, this sensitivity which is indirectly taught serves to retain the acceptance one already has. Relatedly, the concept of "*hiya*" (propriety) demands that one acts cautiously so as not to shame or embarrass ("*pahiyain*") others nor bring this ("*kahihayan*") upon one's self (Miralao 195). Thus, *hiya* and *amor propio* guard the loss of social acceptance.

SIR and sensitivity to personal affront are what the Filipino strives for to make his fellows regard him as a good and acceptable member of the community.

Filipinos aim heavily on social acceptance but aside from this, they also aspire economic security and social mobility. Lynch defines economic security as the ability to provide one's basic material needs without borrowing. Thus it would mean a Filipino should have resources enough to meet his day to day needs. Social mobility, on the other hand, would mean progress or improvement in one's status. This would indicate climbing up to a higher status or advancing to the next social class/ position (Lynch 17).

Lynch, in his most widely circulated essay (73), had isolated what he considered important values in Filipino behavior: social acceptance, economic security, and social mobility. But in his paper he concentrated on social acceptance, Lynch is definite in proving that the lowland Filipino strives to

have his fellows see him as a good acceptable member of the society (17).

Another aspect that this research elucidates is about Filipino cultural behavioral patterns. Filipino culture – their ways of living, learned behavior traits, lifestyle, ways of thinking, believing, feeling and etc. – differentiates them from other people of the world.

Tomas D. Andres, a Filipino intercultural consultant and a professor at the Ateneo de Manila University, exposes the three main cultural values which highlights Filipino behavior. His book *Managing People by Filipino Values* (1988) cited personalism, authoritarianism, small-group centeredness or familism as the three dominant social behaviors observed in the Philippine societies (27).

Personalism is evident in Filipinos for their need to be respected and in the same way respect others. A Filipino is sensitive to the feelings of others thus is always aware that he must preserve and maintain smooth interpersonal relationship (27). Moreover, authoritarianism is also apparent in Filipinos as manifested in their respect or *galang*, the definition of rights and obligations inherent in the structural positions of individuals in their community. Related to this is the *lakad* system or use of go-betweens and the *bata* system or use of a protégé widely observed in the Filipino community (28). Lastly, is the Filipino tendency to value very strongly his belongingness to a small group called family. His family's approval before acting or deciding on anything is important. Filipinos emphasize that the welfare and interest of his family must come first over the common good of the community (28).

These mentioned Filipino social behaviors which are rooted from their cultural values can interpret many of the things that happen in Philippine societies and one may question where these things come from and who brought these pervasive influences.

Andres (32) stipulates that the Philippines has a history distinguished for a variety of influencing and cultural currents. The story of the Filipinos is one of centuries of immigration and of the molding of the personality of a sea people – a mixture of Malay Polynesian race. But this race is also mixed with Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, and American ethnicities.

Indeed, the Filipino is a unique race with such a blend of the rich heritage. He can be hardworking, patient, and frugal because of his Chinese descent; he can be affective, kind, likeable, and nice as his Malay ancestry; he can be religious because the Spanish taught him so; and he can also be utilitarian, concerned for power and profit and wealth like the Americans (33).

Knowing the roots of the Filipinos would not be sufficient to understand him at all but at least would give hints in examining his characteristics. The following statement from Andres summarizes his positive views of the Filipino character:

He is gregarious, loves company, and reciprocates any good deed done to him. He is pragmatic and believes that there is always a solution to a problem. His religion tells him to optimistic, hopeful, and resilient. He believes that God intervenes in his human affairs (34).

But along these positive things are cultural traits that are considered negative: being sensitive to slights and holding grudges for short or long time, being ambiguous instead of categorical, the *Bahala Na* attitude which shows fatalism, being vindictive, his love to rumor on very personal issues, his being resistant to change, non-evaluative and uncritical (34).

Moreover, this paper also values the Theory of Mimesis which considers the literary text as an imitation or a copy of nature, the world, realities, and some other texts. It imitates and represents human life and experience (DiYanni 6 qtd in Candilas 8). With this, literature carries symbols not only of thematic meaning but more so of social facts (Romulo 6). Literature as imitation of reality is always evident in literary texts. The term "mimesis" has since been used by ancient philosophers to discuss or refer to the relation between reality and representation (Baktir 277). Art imitates or reflects nature or reality; it mirrors life.

This paper also attempts to examine the cultural values and social behavior of the Filipino male characters of Jose's selected works thus employing Cultural Criticism, a lens which examines the text from the perspective of cultural attitudes and focuses on individuals within society considering race, gender, religion, sexuality and other characteristics. (Purdue Online Writing Lab, <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/722/1/>).

These theories and concepts serve as guide in the analysis of this work, in identifying how the Filipino character is portrayed in the stories of F. Sionil Jose and how it delineates the cultural and behavioral values.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In order to ascertain the author's depiction of the male characters and how these characters delineate the Filipino behavioral and cultural values, the following questions are specifically raised:

1. How are the male main characters portrayed in F. Sionil Jose's select short stories?
 - a. Waywaya
 - b. The God Stealer
 - c. Arbol de Fuego
 - d. The Exile
 - e. A Man's Reward Is In Heaven
2. How do these characters delineate the Filipino behavioral and cultural values based on Frank Lynch's concepts of:
 - a. Social Acceptance
 - b. Social Mobility
 - c. Economic Security

3. What symbolisms are used to enhance the delineation of the Filipino men characters in the stories?

4. Based on the results of the study, what monograph may be crafted to exemplify a role model or epitome of the modern Filipino man?

III. METHODOLOGY

This research carries out a qualitative-descriptive type of investigation through close textual analysis or close reading. Through this method, the researcher identified important male characters of F. Sionil Jose's select short stories and analyzed how they are portrayed by the author.

Another method, content analysis is a type of research which involves systematic collection, organization and interpretation of textual information (Young and Hren 2). This method has for its purpose to describe or in some manner analyze, criticize and conclude a reality, and ascertain its value and significance.

A. Data-gathering procedure

The following steps were observed in the course of the study. (1) Reading of related literature and studies. The researcher went through extensive reading of references in different libraries and other online sources. (2) Determining the short stories for analysis. The researcher collected ten Philippine short stories in English written by Francisco Sionil Jose and then later on trimmed down into five stories of common themes and with male main characters for analysis. (3) Reading of the short stories. The researcher read closely the stories for understanding and to ensure that that they project male consciousness, as well as, reveal perceptions of the Filipino man as to his temperament, image and status in Philippine society from the perspective of the writer. The story's title and the date it is written were taken into consideration as these details were needed in the analysis. (4) Analysis of the short stories. The short stories were analyzed one at a time using the prescriptive criticism approach. The analyses ranged from citing lines/paragraphs to investigate the characters and relevant situations/incidents from the stories. (5) Evaluation of the short stories. The stories were evaluated centering on how men characters are portrayed, eliciting the images and their emerging roles, and finding out the implications behind such portrayal.

B. Sources of Data

This research generates its data through the analysis of the five select short stories of F. Sionil Jose from his book *Waywaya and Other Short Stories* from the Philippines and from *Underground Spirit Philippines Short Stories in English 1973 to 1989* edited by G.H. Abad. The selection of these stories include those that won in the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature such as *The God Stealer* in 1959, *Waywaya* in 1979, *Arbol de Fuego* (Firetree) in 1980. Two additional stories were added to the selection: *The Exile* and *A Man's Reward Is In*

Heaven. After reading ten stories, these five stories were chosen due to their presence of male main characters.

This research focused on character analysis and discussed whether or not the characters' traits tend to delineate Filipino's behavioral and cultural values. Further, this paper also examines the literary technique/s used by the author in his selected short stories to contribute to the delineation of Filipino men characters.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study arrived at these findings based on the sub-problems raised:

A. Character Analysis

It can be noted that resilience, desire to raise standard of living, *hiya*, *amor propio*, reciprocity, and smooth interpersonal relationship (SIR) are the values that are dominantly seen and observed in the male Filipino characters in the five stories of F. Sionil Jose. In terms of characteristics, the author incarnates characters who are brave, freedom seeker, source of wisdom and strength, advocate of change, and possessing positive relational traits. However, characters portrayed as crass money maker, bribe-giver, dismissive of his own Filipino culture, and detesting his own country and people are also personified. F. Sionil Jose created real-life characters that are not only ideally and morally perfect but those with flaws in order to mirror the existing social realities.

B. Character Delineation of the Filipino Behavioral and Cultural Values

Based on analysis of their characteristics, the characters in the five stories delineate the Filipino behavioral and cultural values as they reflect and elucidate what Frank Lynch considered important values in Filipino behavior: social acceptance, social mobility, and economic security. The characters show social acceptance which also demonstrates other intermediate values such as *hiya*, *pakikisama*, and the use of *go-between*. Furthermore, social mobility and economic security are apparent in them as observed in their goal to uplift their social class and status. Thus the characters in the stories, though made-up, possess values that are exhibited and are highly esteemed by many Filipinos.

C. Symbolisms Used

The story's dominant literary technique is symbolism – the use of representation to give an idea, person, or event an entirely different meaning that is much deeper and more significant (Bai 1). The story "Waywaya" is symbolic of freedom; two characters in *The God Stealer* stand as symbols of the history of colonialism: Philip's name can be derived from Philippines, while Sam Christie can be an allusion to Uncle Sam of America; *Arbol de Fuego* symbolizes Arturo de Leon, who is metaphorically a flowering tree bearing no fruit because his wealth is just wasted on his vice; Pepe Reyes in *The Exile*

is symbolic of Filipino youths who are victims of family disputes; and Sebastian Cuerva is a picture of a Filipino man concerned for SIR and striving hard to have his fellow take him as a good and acceptable member of the community.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, this study concludes that Francisco Sionil Jose fashioned real-life characters portraying the reality of the Filipino identity. These characters, though fictional, delineate the Filipino behavioral and cultural values revealing that Smooth Interpersonal Relations (SIR), social mobility, and economic security are apparently valued by the male characters. The characters hold values that are in reality exhibited and highly esteemed by many Filipinos as was suggested by Lynch, the pioneer of Filipino values. Furthermore, the use of symbolism enhances the delineation of the Filipino men characters and provides a much deeper and more significant character representation.

The following recommendations are hereby offered, based from the finding and conclusion:

1. Aside from the male characters, women characters may also be analyzed separately in order to find out how they are portrayed by the author.
2. That Masculine Studies be used as another literary vista in criticizing the male characters in the stories of F. Sionil Jose.
3. That other literary devices used by the author be also investigated to further enrich the present study.

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