

The God Stealer

"**The God Stealer**" is a short story by Filipino National Artist F. Sionil José. It is José's most anthologized work of fiction.^[1] It is not just a tale about an Ifugao stealing a religious idol,^[2] but also about the friendship that developed between a Filipino and an American, a representation of the relationship that developed between the "colonized" and the "colonizer".^[1] The story was a first prize winner during the 1959 Palanca awards in the Philippines.^[3] It is included in the book by José with a similar title, *The God Stealer and Other Stories*.^[1]

Character description

The main characters in "The God Stealer" are Philip Latak and Sam Cristie. Philip, also known as Ip-pig, is an Ifugao who became a Christian and lived in Manila. By becoming a city dweller, Philip became less sentimental with his cultural identity, beliefs, and customs. His name was derived from the word Philippines. On the other hand, Sam Christie was an American who wanted to view the rice terraces of the Mountain Province (also known as the Cordilleras). He was also interested in purchasing an original figurine of an Ifugao god. His name was derived from Uncle Sam, a representation of the United States. Philip and Sam were co-workers.^[4]

Summary

Philip and Sam went to Baguio City. During a feast honoring Philip for his return, Philip and Sam were because of the unwillingness of the Ifugao people to sell any Ifugao statue. Philip plans to steal his grandfather's god in return for the salary raise given to him by Sam. After finding out that his god was missing, Philip's grandfather dies. Because of his grandfather's death, Philip decides not to return to Manila with Sam as a form of repentance. Philip transforms himself back into an Ifugao attired in traditional clothing who was in the process of replacing the old Ifugao idol by chiseling a new one.^[4]

Interpretation

Philip's act of thievery represented the Filipinos' giving up of their past tribal origins and traditions, only to be replaced by an "unnatural" culture brought by colonialism. At one time in history, colonialism brought to the Filipinos a state of confusion, troubled emotions, helplessness, torment, embarrassment and the inability to embrace the past.^[4]

Summary

The story began with two best friends Philip Latak, an Ifugao from the Mountain Province and Sam Christie, an American, on the bus to Baguio. They were on their way to Baguio for one purpose. Sam wanted to buy a genuine Ifugao god. She wouldn't leave Ifugao without a god because it's more than a souvenir and it would remind her of Philip. He was a Christian who no longer had any respect or affection for the Ifugao customs and religion. Also, Philip considered himself a city boy and had no inclination to return to mountain life. Despite this attitude, his grandfather was pleased to see him and decided to throw a big party in his honor. On the day of the party, Sam and Philip discovered that no Ifugao was willing to sell his god. And as a last resort, he stole the god of his grandfather because he felt it would be his way of showing his gratitude to Sam since she made the vacation and the raise possible. Then, they argued if it was better that Philip returned the god back to his grandfather. The consequences of this act were severe.

After finding out that his god was missing, Philip's grandfather died. Because of his grandfather's passing, he decided not to return to Manila with Sam as a form of repentance. Philip explained his reasons for choosing to stay in the mountains. He could forgive himself for stealing the god but the old man had been wise. He knew that it was Philip who did it from the very start. He wanted to believe that it wasn't Philip but he can't pretend. Philip felt he killed his grandfather because he wanted to be free from the cursed terraces. From that moment, their friendship was broken. Philip did not, even once, face Sam. In the dark hut, Sam noticed that Philip was now attired in G-string, the traditional costume of the Ifugao and he was in the process of replacing the old Ifugao idol by chiseling a new one.