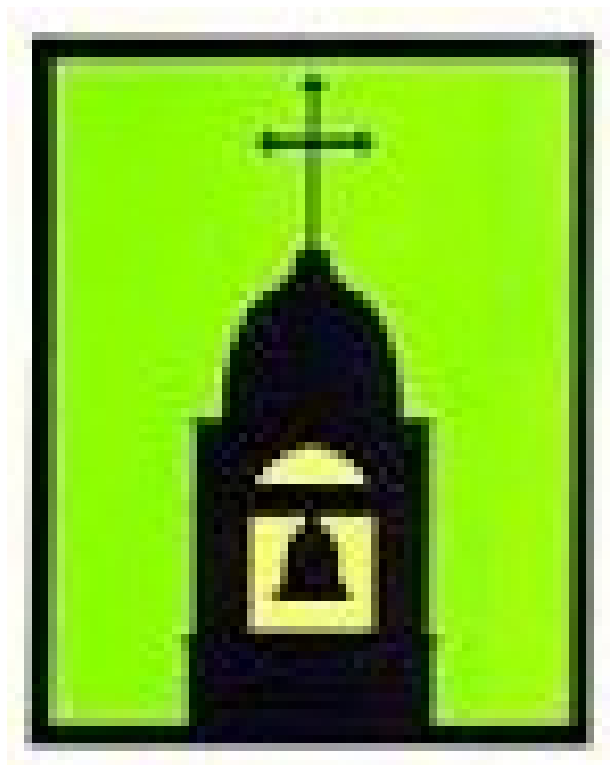


**F. Sionil Jose**

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# PO-ON



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AC-102

*Submitted to:* Mrs. Angelita L. Fruelda

Title: Po-on



Author: F. Sionil Jose

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

When our Philippine Literature professor said that she will be giving extra credits to the students who are willing to present a book report in class, the first book title that came into my mind was "A Season of Grace" by N.V.M. Gonzales. It was a novel that I bought when I was still in high school. Unfortunately, when I browsed through my book cabinet at home, I realized that my book was nowhere to be found!

I was strolling around the mall with some high school friends when I asked for their book suggestions by award-winning Filipino authors. They've mentioned so many but when one of my friends said about the Rosales Saga by F. Sionil Jose. I became curious for that was the first time I heard of that name. We passed by the National Bookstore and looked for Po-on – the first of all five novels.

I chose this book because it depicts three words which are "nationalism", "greediness", and "corruption". In this fast changing society of ours, what we need is an instrument that will lead us to our aimed societal change. Many years before since we are swayed by the whimsical politicking magic of our leaders in our government who always used to feed their pockets instead the hungry stomachs of their constituents. Just like what the story that revolves in the book, the *frayles*, who had swirled the mindset of the Filipinos in their time.

Nowadays, people of different walks of life still searches for answers to questions that even the greatest can't recapitulate. Questions like, "Why do I exist?"

Secondly, the praises for F. Sionil Jose's novels and other writings, local or international, were spectacular enough to tickle my curiosity. Lastly, I never tried reading any historical novel.

## **II. AUTHOR**

Francisco Sionil Jose, a Filipino English-language writer and was known with his pen name F. Sionil Jose, was considered as a great author in his time. He is known through his novels and short stories which depicts the social underpinnings of class struggles and colonialism in Filipino society. In 1980, he received a Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature, and Creative Arts Interaction. He was also hailed as a National Artist for Literature last 2001. And the prestigious Pablo Neruda Centennial Award was also given to him last 2004. And he received a Palanca Award to commend his contribution in the Philippine Literature. Here are some of the reviews about F. Sionil Jose:

*"...the foremost Filipino novelist in English... his novels deserve a much wider readership than the Philippines can offer. His major work, the Rosales saga, can be read as an allegory for the Filipino in search of an identity..." - Ian Buruma, The New York Review of Books*

*"Sionil José writes English prose with a passion that, at its best moments, transcends the immediate scene. (He) is a masterful short story writer..." - Christine Chapman, International Herald Tribune, Paris*

*"...America has no counterpart to José - no one who is simultaneously a prolific novelist, a social and political organizer, and a small scale entrepreneur...José's identity has equipped him to be fully sensitive to the nation's miseries without succumbing, like many of his characters to corruption or despair..." - James Fallows, The Atlantic Monthly*

*"...The reader of his well crafted stories will learn more about the Philippines, its people and its concerns than from any journalistic account or from a holiday trip there. José's books takes us to the heart of the Filipino mind and soul, to the strengths and weaknesses of its men, women, and culture. - Lynne Bundesen, Los Angeles Times*

### **III. BOOK**

#### **a. Summary**

In 1880 to 1889, an Ilocano family decided to abandon their beloved barrio in order to survive the challenges in southern Pangasinan in the Philippines, and also to escape from the Spanish cruelty. Eustaquio Salvador, commonly known as Istak, is an Ilocano who was fluent in Spanish and Latin, a talent developed through the teachings of an old parish priest in Cabugao, Padre Jose Leon. He was an acolyte who aspires to become a priest, in the influence of Padre Jose. He was also enlightened in the arts of traditional medicine. Aspiring to become a full-pledged priest, his racial origin restricts him to achieve his goal. He lived in a period of Philippine history when a Filipino uprising against the Spanish government was about to break out. It was a time after the execution through *garote* of the three mestizo priests, namely Mariano Gomez, Jose Apolonio Burgos and Jacinto Zamora at Bagumbayan, in February 1872. Sparks were obviously lit, which will soon lead to a revolution, despite of the lack of unity of the inhabitants of the Philippine islands by that time. Another event was the heroic help that Americans were sending to the Filipinos, in removing the controlling Spaniards from the archipelago after three hundred years. The novel diverts and describes the societal struggles in which the Po-on characters were experiencing, including Istak's personal tortured search for life's meaning, a larger meaning for his own existence, true faith, and for the real face of his beliefs

and principles. Accompanied by a dignity, Istak was assigned to deliver a message to General Emilio Aguinaldo, the leader of the Philippine revolutionaries, but unfortunately died at the hands of the American soldiers, on his way to accomplishing his allocated task.

## **b. Contribution to Philippine Literature**

*Po-on* the novel is only one part of F. Sionil José's *Rosales Saga*, the historical epic narrative composed of four other novels considered by the Filipino poet and literary critic Ricaredo Demetillo as "the first great Filipino novels written in English." Specifically, *Po-on* had been described by Random House as a work of fiction which is "more than" the character of a "historical novel", a book with "extraordinary scope and passion" that is "meaningful to Philippine literature." a book as meaningful to Philippine literature as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is to Latin American literature.<sup>[10]</sup> *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the masterpiece of Latin America's Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez. Frank Gibney of *The New York Times* described the story-telling in José's *Rosales Saga* as being similar to the tradition and style found in the *U.S.A. trilogy* by the American novelist John Dos Passos. ( [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Po-on\\_\(novel\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Po-on_(novel)) )

"F. Sionil Jose writes with an urgency that recalls D.H. Lawrence and preoccupations resembling those of Hemingway. His prose has, at its best sustained intensity that is highly impressive. His work is as part, an important part, of the Filipinos' search for a nobler sense of themselves"

- David Burleigh, *Mainichi Daily News* - Tokyo

F. Sionil Jose just made a difference in the literature of our own. He just revolutionized the mindset of Filipinos most especially the young people who wants to join the bandwagon in the yell for a change that has been a demand for a long period of time.

## **IV. PERSONAL INSIGHTS GAINED FROM THE BOOK**

Alive in the novel were the concepts and the events that emanated during peacetime and wartime; even the status of the poor and the affluent, of the privileged and the powerful, and of those who have privileges, freedoms and rights. This book really showed me how cruel was the foreign conquerors and how much our fellowmen suffered under the hands of the ruthless Spaniards. In this novel, F. Sionil Jose revisited these mutual chapters in both [American](#) and [Philippine histories](#), together with the presentation of their social and psychological effects to the Philippine citizenry who had been under foreign occupiers from one time followed by another.

Some Filipino traits and characteristics were highlighted in the novel. First was the strong family ties which was shown when the family took the journey together. Another is the respect to elders by using "po" and "opo". Next is the characteristic of being hardworking. Lastly, the trait of being loving and caring which extend to the point of being willing to suffer for the sake of others.