

Exploring Representations of Nature in Literature: Ecocritical Themes in the Fiction of Satur Apoyon

Khareen B. Culajara

Abstract—The study explores how the Filipino writer Satur Apoyon reveals not just multiple representations of nature, but also relevant ecocritical issues that we are facing today in his collection of short stories, *Ang Gakit ni Noebong Ug Ubang Mga Sugilanon*. The analysis is carried out through the lens of ecocriticism particularly using the 3-step ecocritical approach by Glotfelty (1996) to find various representations of nature, the ecocritical issues embedded in the author's narratives, and the counterviews about the relationship between nature and humanity that are elicited in the work. An ecocritical analysis of his work reveals themes such as nature as destroyer, nature as the cause of suffering, nature as abode of the gods, nature as mysterious and elusive, and nature as feminized and 'sexualized'. Satur Apoyon invites his readers for a more environmentally-conscious thinking by highlighting anthropocentric thinking, human hierarchy and exceptionism, and aggressive attitude towards nature as some of the few causes as to why environmental crisis exists.

Index Terms—Ecocriticism, Glotfelty, nature, textual analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past years, studies about the relationship between literature and the physical environment have emerged as a formal field of study. Known as ecocriticism, this new approach is a particular strand of scholarship that illustrates how environment concerns such as climate change and environmental preservation are manifested in the literary works of today's writers.

As the newest addition to the growing list of literary text scholarship today, ecocriticism goes by many names, and this includes "literary ecology," "ecoliterature," "ecopoetics," "ecocritical studies," "environmental literary studies" and many others. The world of literary theory is shaken up with the appearance of this new literary lens which is still formalizing its definition for what it is and what it is not. Even though it is still evolving as a school of criticism, numerous studies and special sessions about ecocritical interests have been carried out in the 90s: this included MLA special session on ecocriticism, the formation of a professional organization Association Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) and publications such as *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE)*, *The Ecocritical Reader* anthology and *American Nature Writing* newsletter.

Even though readership about texts concerning the study of literature and environment extends beyond the United States

to include Europe, The Far East, India and Taiwan [1], there is little or no exploration about ecocriticism in the works of Filipino writers today. Part of the lack of this ecocritical scholarship in the country is because it remains to be a new area for exploration for literary studies. It is in this light that the researcher wanted to highlight a local writer such as Satur Apoyon through a new theoretical lens which is ecocriticism.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The simplest definition of ecocriticism comes from the succinct statement of Cheryl Glotfelty, leading ecocritic and thinker, who stated that ecocriticism is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" [1]. Pioneering treatments of ecocriticism were provided by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm [2] and by Laurence Buell [3].

At present, ecocritical studies and practices are now more interdisciplinary in approach. In most cases, practitioners of ecocriticism now draw on cultural theory and criticism to explore how elements in nature leads to new understandings and interpretations of our sense of nations, communities, identities, and bodies [4]. Most critical reflections on ecocriticism do not only show us the connection between literature and the physical environment and the expanding scholarly conversation in this emerging field; they also underscore both the texts and the cultural practices that concern them. John Muir's statement underscores the interdisciplinary nature of ecocriticism, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe" [4].

The most popular researcher and leading theorist for ecocriticism is probably Cheryl Glotfelty who presented three patterns for ecocritical study. Ecocriticism follows the same analogous pattern of Showalter's feminist criticism [2]. Thus, ecocriticism begins with an interest in "representations", followed by an examination of how nature is depicted in literature and which subsequently leads to raising public awareness of attitudes toward the natural world.

In [5], Hubert Zapf, a German ecocritic and theorist, pointed out that literature challenges and transforms cultural narratives of humanity's relationship to nature via language, imagination, and critique in his concept of Triadic Model of Literature as Cultural Ecology. This is the essence of his paradigm for literary study – that literature functions as a cultural ecology. Hannes Berghaller [6] reviewed Zapf's triadic model of literature as cultural ecology as a new transdisciplinary paradigm for literary studies. The triadic model of literature as cultural ecology is a theoretical framework which conceives of literary texts as evolved

Manuscript received July 25, 2016; revised December 2, 2016.

Khareen B. Culajara is with the Department of Arts and Sciences, University of Mindanao Digos College, Davao del Sur, Philippines 8002 (e-mail: khareen17@gmail.com).

cultural forms – functioning within cultural systems that can themselves be understood as ecological phenomena [6].

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How is nature represented in the fiction of Satur Apoyon?
2. What ecocritical issues are embedded in the narratives?
3. What counterviews about the relationship between Nature and humanity are asserted in the narratives?

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

The source of data is the collection of short stories by Satur Apoyon entitled *Ang Gakit ni Noebong ug Ubang Mga Sugilanon*. The book was published by the author in 2008 through a grant from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA). This collection of stories included 13 short stories by Apoyon namely but only eight stories are ecocritically analyzed. The stories are written in Cebuano language.

This research uses a qualitative research method specifically employing textual analysis. The texts were analyzed using the frameworks of literary ecology and cultural ecology. To analyze the data in light of the research problems, the researcher pinpointed, examined, and recorded patterns (“codes” or “themes”) from these data sources through coding.

V. REPRESENTATIONS OF NATURE

A. Nature as Destroyer

Most of the stories of Apoyon carry the message that nature has the power to destroy lives and properties to the point that humans are depicted powerless and helpless.

In the story, “Ang Gakit ni Noebong”, there occurs a destruction of a previous race of men by means of a great flood. This plotline is reminiscent of a biblical flood; only instead of a sinful previous generation, the reason behind the flood is deeply ecological. In the story, most of the characters (with the exception of the main character Noebong and his family) have been cutting trees and causing damage to the environment. There have been several floods in the area in the last few years before the contemporary “great flood”, and Noebong pointed out that illegal logging is the primal cause:

“Mas kusog pa gyud diay ang bul-og sa baha karon kaysa miaging tuig,” nagkanayon si Noebong sa kaugalingon. “Bunga na kini sa tinonto nila ni Olanyog...” (p. 87) [7]

“The torrent of the river is more violent now compared to last year’s,” Noebong said to himself. “This is the result of the foolishness committed by Olanyog...”

Noebong muses that if not for Olanyog’s open support for logging activities, the frequent flooding in the area wouldn’t be as regular as it had been before. The technique of redressing a popular biblical story to make it ecological creates a high sense of awareness that nature can destroy lives once it becomes heavily damaged and exploited.

Similarly in the story “Dili Alang Kang David Ang

Baboy-Ihalas”, the natural world is depicted as a dominant force, a phenomenon that even humans are depicted powerless to intervene.

“Midaog ako!” nakasinggit si David. Apan ang iyang tingog igo lang gilamoy sa kamingaw sa lasang. Human sa maong pagpamulong, gitikuboan ni David ang iyang inagaw nga ganti sa unang pangayam. Apan human niadto, wala na si David motuyhakaw.” (p. 14) [7]

“I won!” David shouted. But his voice was then devoured by the stillness of the forest. After he uttered those words, David enveloped the stolen reward of his first hunt. After that, however, David did not stir anymore.)

In this excerpt, the protagonist David, though victorious in seizing the wild boar from the gigantic snake that first captured it, ended up dying in the forest, with his last words swallowed by the stillness of the forest. The words *igo lang* signifies how powerful and commanding nature is in the affairs of the humans. Everything that surrounds David (trees, forests, and the landscape in general) is oblivious to the human sadness brought about by his death despite his victory. The ecocritical analysis portrays both nature and the natural world act as powerful, dominant forces. Thus, the scenery in this part of the story acts like a dominant character, an active role over the character of man.

B. Nature as the Cause of Suffering

In relation the previous representation of nature as destroyer, nature is also the cause of suffering of several characters in the story.

For instance, in the story “Mga Gutom,” the main character Mundo is forced to go to the city because they could no longer find food in their neighborhood. Eventually, this leads him to wrestle with a starving female dog as he wants to kill it for food, but when he realizes that that the female dog is as hungry as he is (after seeing the dog and her famished puppies) he begins to identify himself with the mother-dog. His suffering starts the moment he tries to protect the mother-dog from the throng of hungry village people. However, Mundo, gets himself beaten up by the villagers. In the end, he realizes that the village-people have killed the dog. He suffers from the regret because he fails to protect the mother-dog from the villagers. To absolve himself from this guilt, he carries the orphaned puppies and runs for their lives.

Nature is also depicted as a cause of major suffering in the story “Dili Alang Kang David ang Baboy-Ihalas.” David, in the event of food shortage, had to go up to the highlands to find food for his hungry family. Upon knowing that food is scarce in the lowlands where David lives due to drought, he immediately goes to the Bagobo native Atong who lives in the highlands to try his luck in hunting. David meets his utter demise when he fights off against a massive snake to snatch away the *baboy-ihalas* (wild boar) from it. If not for a weather condition like drought, David wouldn’t have to go a long way to find food into the woods, and he probably wouldn’t get himself killed.

Lastly, in the story “Ang Gakit ni Noebong,” nature is also seen as a cause of suffering. The story opens up with a late-night storm packing heavy rains and high winds that lashes Sinuda, the barangay where Noebong, the main character, lives in. When the main character wakes up the next

morning, the first thing that he thinks of is his beloved carabao which he usually ties around the tree near the river. However, when he goes to the place, his carabao is nowhere to be found.

“Nia ang pisi, apan hain among kabaw?” masub-anong nangutana si Noebong sa kaugalingon.

Ang dinaguok sa nagpadayong bul-og sa baha duol kang Noebong maoy nahimong makantalitahong tubag sa mawilihon niyang pagsusi sa nahanaw nga katimbang nga hayop. (p. 82) [7].

“Here is the rope, but where is the carabao?” Noebong sadly asked himself.

The rumble of the continuing gush of flood nearby became the scornful reply to Noebong’s wistful search for his lost, equal companion.)

The excerpt above shows the relationship of Noebong and his carabao. When Noebong finds out that his carabao may have been washed away by the river torrents, he feels sadness over such loss. The words *nahanaw nga katimbang nga hayop* (“lost, equal companion”) suggests there is no implied hierarchy between Noebong and his carabao and that Noebong treats his carabao as his equal, like a friend. This human-nonhuman relationship is also cultural given that carabaos in the Philippines are seen as faithful partners in life.

What is being highlighted in the above excerpt is the scornful reply (“makantalitahong tubag” p.82) [7] of nature to the main character’s sadness. When Noebong asks himself where is his carabao he does not expect a reply but only voicing out his thoughts. However, in the story, the rumble of the continuing gush of flood as the scornful reply to Noebong’s question depicts nature as an indifferent and unmoving force. Such uncaring attitude of nature and its “scornful reply” intensifies the suffering of the main character.

Not only does Noebong lose his carabao, he also cannot bear the pain and shock after the unseasonal rain destroyed his crops. The last night’s storm is a terrible blow to a native farmer like Noebong who depends on his carabao and crops for their livelihood. The phrase *naluspad ang iyang katibuk-an* (“the entirety of his being was made pale”) describes how the character feels after the flood ravaged his crops, and implies a sort of paralysis that serves as a culmination of the unfortunate event that befalls on him. The above excerpt also functions as an objective correlative – the description of the corn and coffee crops that lay uprooted on the ground implies that Noebong himself feels “uprooted”, displaced, or detached from the land that he once tilled. Such feeling of detachment spurred by a paralyzing image before him is seen to cause Noebong some (or even more) suffering.

All of the excerpts indeed point to the idea that nature is depicted in the stories of Apoyon as a cause of suffering for characters. The characters’ notions of seeing nature as the cause of their suffering are due to their collective belief that they expect nature to provide them the basic necessities such as food. So in the event of environmental phenomena such as flood or drought, humans suffer but never realize that it is the consequences of their conquests over nature that’s the root cause of their own suffering. The representation of nature as a cause of suffering is part of the anthropocentric thinking of man – that we expect nature to provide everything for us, and in the event that it does not, or in a way takes its revenge

against us, we suffer at the end.

C. Nature as Abode of the Gods

Many ancient cultures expressed a reverence for the plants, animals, and geographic features that provided them with food, water, and transportation [8]. In some stories of Satur Apoyon, nature is seen as the abode of the gods; ancestral spirits dwell in the area and thus, humans should pay their respects to them.

In the story “Dili Alang Kang David Ang Baboy-Ihalas”, Atong calls out for help to the gods in the forest after David threw himself into the cliff in the interspecific competition to snatch away the wild boar from the massive snake that first captured it.

“Mga kalag sa lasang... Diyos ko... di unta mapagan si David sa dakuan niyang pangahas,” nangaliya na lang si Atong...

“Mga anito sa lasang, pasayloa unta ninyo si David!” nangalipuyo na usab si Atong. (p. 13).

“All you spirits of this forest... my God... spare David from his great ambition,” Atong could only pray.

“All you ancient spirits in the forest, may you forgive David!” petitioned David again.)

In the excerpt above, the implication of the phrases *mga kalag sa lasang* (“All you spirits of this forest”) and *mga anito sa lasang* (“All you ancient spirits in the forest”) suggest that nature is the abode of the gods and ancient spirits. When Atong acknowledge the spirits of the forest and seeks help from them during the crisis, it suggests that the forest is not just a mere setting or an inanimate object but it is also a living thing that may come into rescue for anyone’s help.

Similarly, in the story “Ang Jihad ni Hadji Aribani”, the Tiruray native Dalina calls upon the ancient gods and spirits gives thanks to the ancient spirits after the wounded Hadji Aribani arrived to her house. The phrase *salamat sa mga anito ning ulay nga lasang* (“thanks to the gods of the virgin forest” p.18) carries the implication that indeed the native-dwellers believe that ancestral spirits live in the forests and wilderness. It also implies further that the forest (and the spirits and gods that dwell in it) is like a character that is alive and can respond to human’s needs.

D. Nature as Mysterious and Elusive

Natural scenes, imageries, and the figurative language are integrated in Satur Apoyon’s work. Specifically, nature is depicted as a largely untrammled space, and in some of the stories, these scenic spaces are mysterious dimensions that hid deeper secrets.

The story “Anak sa Wakwak” is filtered through the I-narrator of the story, an adolescent boy who is smitten by the mysterious beauty of Teresa. His object of admiration, however, is largely believed in the community as a daughter of an old witch who lives beyond the meadows. The I-narrator, driven by his infatuation of Teresa, decides to visit her in their house one day.

Apan sa unahan pa gayod ang balay nila ni Teresa nga gipatang-an sa duha ka labong nga mga punoan sa kawayan ug ubang kakahoyan sa bungtod. (p. 55) [7].

(But Teresa’s house is yonder, in the midst of two verdant bamboo and other trees in the forest.)

The scenic description above suggests that nature imagery transforms into a symbol that points into mysterious, baffling and even elusive characters of both Teresa and his mother.

Similarly, in the story “Ang Sakit Ni Mystica Brilliance”, the rendezvous for where the main character Mystica meets a married lover was located in an offgrid place, at the outskirts of the city.

...nahiabot siya sa motel nga nahimutang ilawum sa kalubihan simpig sa lapyahan nga gikusokuso sa mga balod kay giugay sa habagat sa nagkalawom nga kagabhion. (p. 26-27) [7]

(She arrived at the motel located within a coconut plantation near the seashore buffeted by the winds that were fondled by the southwest wind in the deepest night.)

The nature imagery in the excerpt above is collectively a setting that permits the lovers to be with each other, possibly comfortably. For the readers, the word *kalubihan* (“coconut plantation”) creates a mental picture of closely spaced rows of coconut trees. Such image sets the characters’ rendezvous private and exclusive; it suggest boundary, a borderline to a different dimension in which the lovers’ roles are changed and different. The water imagery of *balod* (“waves”) is as entrancing as the rows of coconut trees and the combination of the two creates liveliness and excitement. However, if we have to consider the Cebuano term *giugay* (“giugay”) as a colloquially familiar and sexually charged word, with the word “fondle” as its closest counterpart in English, then the nature image of the coconut tree as an immediate phallic symbol in this excerpt is reinforced. Not only does nature provide comfort and solace to the characters as most popularly-studied literatures suggest. In this excerpt, the natural world provides a space for the illicit lovers to be free from society’s rigid shackles. On the other hand, the excerpt also provides another perspective; it can be seen as a metaphorical image of humanity raping the environment. Such perspective is not strange, however, since the word *gilugos* (literally translates to “being raped” or “being violated”) is also used in the story “Si Bandoyong Ug Ang Kataposang Lasang” to describe how trees are cut down, cleared, or “violated.”

The idea of nature depicted as mysterious and elusive suggests that nature is something that humans can never fully understand, and thus, humans cannot destroy it. Humans can use it, exploit it, or get hurt by it, but humans cannot fully understand the depth and breadth of its elusive and mysterious identity. What Apoyon tells us is that nature remains a permanent enigma that some people seeks either for its charmed privacy (like the illicit lovers), or as an exciting romantic pursuit (like the smitten, adolescent boy). And since nature, like a mysterious character, leaves us perplexed, Apoyon implicitly tells us to regard it instead with utmost reverence – the reverence for a life-place that is independent of the full understanding of the human knowledge.

E. Nature as Feminized and ‘Sexualized’

The theme of ‘sexualized’ nature as far as imagery is concerned can also be analyzed in the story “Ang Jihad ni Hadji Aribani”. In this story, the main character Hadji is rescued by a Tiruray native Dalina whose temptations constitute Hadji’s internal struggles. When Hadji finally

decides to leave Dalina in her home which is located in the wilderness, Dalina musters her last effort to tempt him to stay. In this scene, Dalina was bathing naked in the river as Hadji bids her farewell:

Milingiw gilayon si Hadji Aribani sa pagpaduas na usab ni Dalina sa iyang mabigot nga lawas nga nahimong lumoy ug manggahon nga natandangan sa bag-ong sidlak nga Adlaw lagbas sa lunhawng kadahonan sa nagkalainlaing kakahoyan, kabagonan ug mga tanom nga ihalas sa kalikopan sa suba. (p. 21) [7]

(Hadji Aribani quickly looked away when again Dalina exposed her sleek body that was made soft, delicate, and mango-like when illuminated by the Sun’s morning rays piercing through green leaves from varieties of trees, vines, and wild plants in the surroundings of the river.)

The excerpt above explains the “jihad” of Hadji Aribani as he walks away from the deliberate display of temptation from Dalina. In this scene, Apoyon combines metaphor and imagery to create a place of struggle for the character – his jihad – wherein he strives and perseveres to dismiss the sexualized nature setting in front of him.

The word *lumoy* (“ripe”), *manggahon* (“mango-like”), and *mabigot* (“voluptuous”) collectively points to the physical attributes of Dalina; and the words *kabagonan* (“vines”) and *lagbas* (“pierce”) suggest a phallic force in the setting. As Hadji hurriedly leaves the setting, the branches are described to be swaying as if nature invites upon him to stay but he is no longer swayed. He emerges triumphant in his own jihad against himself; and eventually escapes from the Mephistophelian paradise devised by “the thirsty, new Eve inside Dalina.” (p. 22) [7].

By depicting the female character Dalina as the force moving in the delectable nature setting, and a character that seems to meld in nature unsurprisingly, it can be analyzed that nature is indeed feminized in the story. According to Judith Plant in her essay “Women and Nature,” there are two faces of nature: (1) the passive, nurturing mother, and (2) the other, wild, and uncontrollable. Based from the above excerpt, Dalina qualifies as the second face of feminized nature. The story “Ang Jihad ni Hadji Aribani” depicts her as a female widow with intense yet unsatisfied sexual desire who keeps on coaxing Hadji Aribani to commit a sexual act with her. And since the character of Hadji Aribani is depicted as a devout Muslim (who keeps on carrying a copy of Quran with him), Dalina’s sexual advances on Hadji automatically sets her character as a temptress in the woods. Because Hadji is described as a married man, Dalina is depicted then as the terrifyingly ‘other.’

If Hadji stands in the story as the masculine force opposite Dalina’s feminine energy then it can also be interpreted that Hadji’s desire to escape the clutches of Dalina is also like escaping the overpowering force of nature. Hadji cannot subdue and control nature because he is afraid to get lost with what Leonard Scigaj referred to as the sensuous pleasures of encounters with the “flesh of the world” [9].

The navigation of the environment in the story – from lowlands to highlands – passing gridlocks of trees in the forest, undefined trails and cliffs – underscores the complex struggle of the character of Hadji Aribani that could have led to his demise. Nature in this context is not just feminized and

sexualized – it becomes a place of the exotic, an invitation to temptation with tinges of negative connotations.

As a synthesis, the different representations of nature in the narratives of Apoyon communicate a tight connection between humanity and nature. Although there are contrasting representations of nature (nature as the victimizer or the victimized; the passive or the active), what matters is that the narratives can position the readers to question these varying representations. In such process, Apoyon as a writer tries to awaken people and eventually move them into a more environmentally-conscious thinking.

VI. ECOCRITICAL ISSUES IN THE NARRATIVES

A. Drought and Global Warming

The first paragraph in the story “Dili Alang Kang David ang Baboy-Ihalas” starkly demonstrates one of the environmental challenges that we are facing today – drought.

Gikan sa tamboanan sa gamayng balay-kawayan sa bungtod, miguho si David. Gisud-ong niya ang nangadalag nga dahon sa mais gumikan sa hataas nga hulaw. (p. 8) [7]

(From the window of the small nipa hut on the hill, David emerged. He scanned the corn leaves which had turned yellow because of the extreme and long drought.)

The barren landscape has an impact on the character of David, who stood and sighed along at the sight of the effects of drought in front of him. The decline of healthy soil in which the character grows his source of food and the extreme weather situations acted upon him, pushing him to respond. And thus this started his journey to go up into the mountains to try hunting wild animals as a last resort to survive hunger. The sight of dried, yellow leaves of corn in his field has a ripple effect on the character – his wife nags him to provide them with food because he is, after all, the head of the family; he meets up with Atong to teach him how to hunt for the first time; and he stakes his pride on finding the last wild boar which he can bring home as a trophy – but to a bitter end of his own death. In this regard, nature affects us like a simple thread pulling us closer as to how we act when faced with an environmental crisis. If not for drought, David would have stayed in his farm to partake nature’s fruits; his wife would not have pestered him to provide the family food; and he would not have carelessly competed against the gigantic snake at the cost of his life.

B. Food Shortage

The issue of drought here cascades to a much bigger issue which is food shortage. The story “Mga Gutom” is in some ways, quite similar with “Dili Alang Kang David ang Baboy-Ihalas”, in terms of themes of lack of food due to climate change and staking one’s pride to find one for the family. In the story “Mga Gutom”, the main character Mundo deliriously chases after a female dog to kill it; he was described in the story like a deer in terms of speed and determination to hunt for its prey (“Ingon sa binaw ang kakusog sa iyang dagan nga milutos sa nayugotan niyang mananap” p. 4) [7]. However, when the chase leads him to the mother-dog’s three puppies, he undergoes a change of heart. In ecocriticism, animals are part of the physical environment /

nature and since this is the case, they are also worthy of ecocritical study. The story of Apoyon reflects anthropocentrism in such a way that when man is faced with an environmental problem such as drought or food shortage, the man’s struggle for it are far worthy of attention than the animal’s.

C. Environmental Diseases

Even though it is not emphasized in the narratives, diseases caused by continuing environmental mismanagement are also mentioned in the stories in two instances.

In the story “Ang Jihad ni Hadji Aribani”, the native Tiruray named Dalina rescued the wounded Hadji Aribani. During their initial conversations, Hadji asked his host about her family. Dalina revealed that she is all alone living in the forest because his husband was taken away by the rebels and the rest of his family died because of cholera outbreak.

On the other hand, in the story “Ang Magtiayon sa Bakilid”, the couple Berto and Masyang consecutively lost their three children due to malaria outbreak. In the story, Masyang explains that after having lost her three children because of malaria, she no longer finds hope to live anymore.

Apoyon portrays the sufferings of characters because of environmentally-related outbreaks. Both the excerpts significantly mirror the attitudes of the characters towards environment. The character puts to blame the environment and sees it as a cruel villain that brought misfortune to their family. However, what these characters never considered is the idea that if not for a proper environmental management, diseases such as cholera and malaria wouldn’t break out into the community at all.

D. Exploited and Damaged Environment

Some stories depict scenes of exploited and damaged environment brought about by the aggressive attitude of humans. The stories display awareness that nature is exploited and damaged through man’s operations, such as logging for instance.

In the story, “Ang Gakit ni Noebong,” the continuing clearing of forests in the hills and mountains is highlighted as the main cause for the occasional flooding in the area where Noebong lives. The plot of this story is patterned after the biblical great flood to which it is heavily alluded; however, the reasons behind such event is deeply ecological. Noebong builds an ark as he foresees a great flood coming due to continuing deforestation. Olanyog, a Bagobo native, is one of the financiers of the illegal logging, and continuously mocks Noebong for his “end-of-the-world” claims. However, when the great flood arises in the story, the dying Olanyog asks Noebong for forgiveness for what the former did.

One of the criteria for a work analyzed with an ecocritical lens is that human accountability to the environment should be a part of the text’s ethical orientation [3]. Most of the stories of Apoyon exemplified this statement. In the story “Ang Gakit ni Noebong” Apoyon uses the allusion of the Great Flood to raise the level of awareness regarding the effect of cutting down forest trees. Those who are accountable for the illegal logging activities (including Olanyog) were among the casualties of the huge catastrophe that happened in the story.

The idea of an exploited environment is even more clearly communicated in the story “Si Bandoyong Ug Ang Kataposang Lasang.” In this story, Bandoyong pledges to protect the last forest from loggers who are attempting to raze it for their economic interest. He accepts his custodianship of nature with intense assertion that it is part of their tribe’s responsibility to protect it.

E. ‘Place’ as an Important and Emotional Signifier

Nature can also be a powerful emotional signifier. In the story “Si Bandoyong Ug Ang Kataposang Lasang”, the character Bandoyong, commits to protect the last forest from illegal loggers who wish to take it away from their tribe. Bandoyong insists that the forest belongs to their tribe; he is attached to his own cause to protect and preserve it, calling it *pinangga niyang lasang* (beloved forest) and *atong lasang* (our forest). The character of Bandoyong is likened to a rooster without metal spurs in the middle of a cockfight; he is powerless against the upcoming intrusion of logging and other business-related exploitations in nature. Under this situation, Bandoyong expects that his kin will help him in his cause but it turns out that he has to fend his forest on his own. Bandoyong has two major reasons as to why he chooses to indignantly fight the influx of loggers in his area. One is deeply ecological; he knows the forests need saving as it is his self-affirm moral task. The other reason is cultural; he does not want to “lose” the forest as losing it to loggers would also mean losing their livelihood, tribe, and culture. Such scenario is not strange here in Mindanao. The threat is real when conflicts arise with the influx of settlers into the last remaining ancestral domains of the tribes [10]. Many tribes are afraid that they will vanish as people. In this case, their culture is not the only thing that is eroded, but they are also being dispossessed of their traditional lands [10].

VII. APOYON’S COUNTERVIEW TO ANTHROPOCENTRIC CONSTRUCTIONS

A. The Anthropocentric Man: Nature for Human Interest

Anthropocentrism or human-centered nature asserts that humans are the sole bearers of intrinsic value and all other living things are there to sustain humanity’s existence [11]. Apoyon’s stories shake off purely anthropocentric perspective by consequently presenting environmental degradation as its immediate consequence.

In the pre-climatic scene of the story “Dili Alang Kay David ang Baboy-Ihalas,” Apoyon calls into attention the character’s desire to seize the baboy-ihalas from its new rightful owner, a massive snake.

Ang tang-ang baboy-ihalas moagumod karon ug unya samtang hugot nga milikos kaniya ang dapit sa ikog sa bitin. Gawas nga may lima ka dupa ang gitas-on sa baksan, ang lawas niini maorag paa sa kasarangang binatilyo.

“Mao kana ang gipangandoy mong baboy-ihalas, Sano, apan iya na kana sa bitin.”

“Agawon ta, ‘Tong.”

Milingo-lingo si Atong.

“Supak kana sa regla sa pangayam, Sano. Kon unsa’y iya sa bitin, iya sa bitin.” (p. 12) [7]

(The wise boar grunted here and there while being tightly coiled by the snake’s tail end. Apart from the 5-foot length of the snake, its body is as big as any leg of a typical youth.

“That’s the boar you are dying to have, Sano, but the snake already owned it.”

“Let’s steal it, ‘Tong.”

Atong shook his head.

“It is against the norms of hunting, Sano. You have to give to the snake what it is due.”)

This specific scene from the story “Dili Alang Kang David ang Baboy-Ihalas” highlights the theme of nature being exploited for human interest.

In the story, the enormous snake first claims the wild boar as its own prey, to which David plans to seize. But Atong, obviously knowledgeable in the norms of hunting, rebukes David for his proposition.

“Di ba mas gikinahanglan kanang baboy-ihalas sa tawo kaysa sa baksan?” nangatarongan si David. Kaluksoon na siya ngadto sa ubos nga may lima ka dupa ang giladmon.

“Di ta dayon makaingon niana, Sano. Kinsay nasayod nga labi pang gigutom ang halas kay kanato?” sumbalik ni Atong nga nagkiwi ang dagway sa pagsinud-ong sa panlimbasog sa baboy-ihalas nga makalingkawas sa naglikos nga baksan. (p. 12) [7].

“Isn’t it that man needed the boar more than the snake?” David reasoned out. He wanted to jump five feet deep below.

“We cannot really say that, Sano. Who knows that the snake is hungrier than us?” reprimanded Atong whose face was now disfigured while looking down at the boar struggling to break free from the snake’s shackles.)

In the above excerpt, the character of David exhibits an anthropocentric view in saying that humans far need the wild animal than the snake does. The character believes that everything in the environment lies in its instrumental worth for humans. While it is true that the character of David is an anthropocentric human being, the native Atong has a more egalitarian view similar to those deep ecology and biocentric thinkers. Atong’s reply to David is thus consistent to ecological wisdom. This is in congruence to Buell’s criteria for environmentally oriented texts. He said that “a work is considered worthy of an ecocritical investigation if it shows that the human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest [3]. In the same story, the snake also is a nature-agent worthy of ecocritical study. The title of the story – “Dili Alang Kang David Ang Baboy-Ihalas” – suggests that the prized object of hunting, the wild boar, is not just for humans, but for other fellow animals as well.

One of the criteria that defines an environmentally oriented literature is when “the non-human environment is present not only as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history” [3]. The implication being is that man can greatly affect environment either for the good (which is environmental sustainability and preservation) or for the bad (which is destruction or loss). In Apoyon’s stories, man is an active agent in the natural history, especially in its destruction and exploitation.

Goleman [12] agrees with this counterview on anthropocentrism. In *Ecoliterate*, he said that

By recognizing the common needs we share with all

organisms, we can begin to shift our perspective about who we are relative to other species and life forms. We can move from a view of humans as separate and superior to a more authentic view of humans as members of the natural world. From that perspective, we can expand our empathic concern to consider the quality of life of other life forms, feel genuine concern about their well-being, and act on that concern.

And thus, Satur Apoyon is a writer that is ecologically conscious because he highlighted not just the environmental problems in his narratives. He also emphasized how our anthropocentric thinking does more harm than good for the environment. His stories can be collectively seen as a telescope that can zoom into the major environmental issues that we face today. In the ecocritical tradition, awareness of these issues can help readers to advance environmental understanding and justice.

B. Apoyon's Gakit: Ecocriticism as a Discourse of Cultural Change

Satur Apoyon's collection of stories *Ang Gakit ni Noebong Ug Ubang Mga Sugilanon* does not only make us aware of the representations of nature and the ecocritical issues embedded in his narratives. The stories by Apoyon also act as a transformative cultural agency that doubles as an ecological dimension of discourse. This is where Apoyon's *Ang Gakit ni Noebong Ug Ubang Mga Sugilanon* journey of literature as cultural ecology starts.

If we could stretch out further the ecocritical issues that are discussed previously to integrate what Zapf's [5] idea of literature as cultural ecology is, then we could deduce that at the heart of environmental consciousness for preservation and sustainability is a matter of cultural change, to which the practice of ecocriticism can contribute. An intellectual inquiry such as ecocriticism can change a person's beliefs, and consequently lead to environmentally-friendly practices that will promote awareness to the roles we are to play in response to the changes in the environment. Awareness on the issues, after all, is the first step to cultural change. This contention is in agreement to the idea that the practice of ecocritical analysis will "provide an antidote to the anthropocentrism that might be said to motivate, perpetuate, and aggravate the ecological crises of our time" [13].

In the stories of Satur Apoyon, readers are made aware of the experiential reflections on the natural world as seen in the eyes of the stories' characters. In the story "Si Bandyong Ug Ang Kataposang Lasang", the scene in which loggers have continuously dispossessed Bandyong's tribe depicts an 'oppressive structure' in the story. In the story, the natives have become minorities in their own homeland with the influx of new settlers and big businesses in the area. Even though Bandyong does not have the support of his own tribe, he wages a war against the logging company because he believes that it is his task to protect the land and the forest.

In the story "Mga Gutom", Mundo was tied to culture-bound expectations of the society as a provider and the breadwinner for his family. This expectation turned out to be quite oppressive to Mundo. He becomes deliriously aggressive in finding food for his family. The environmental issue of drought intensifies Mundo's desperation to pursue an emaciated dog in the middle of a hot weather. The same

oppressive belief affects another character David in the story "Dili Alang Kang David Ang Baboy-Ihalas" – he is expected to provide food on the table for his family but he could not do so because of the barren landscape in front of him. Such situation has a ripple effect throughout the story which eventually resulted to the character's death.

David's self-centered, anthropocentric attitude can be interpreted in the story as an oppressive force that leads to his destruction. In the story "Dili Alang Kang David ang Baboy-Ihalas", it can be analyzed that David wants to take away the wild boar from the snake who first captured it, explaining that "humans far more need [it] than animals do." This anthropocentrism can also be found in Mundo from the story "Mga Gutom." In the story Mundo desperately wants to kill the dog for his own family. Such anthropocentric attitude from both characters is not in congruence with the biocentric attitude that ecocriticism promotes, and is not consistent with ecological wisdom.

In these two stories highlighting the important roles that animals play as far as ecocritical analysis is concerned, we get to see how Satur Apoyon seeks to decenter humanity by presenting opportunities in which the character presents their own side of 'animality' in them. In the story "Mga Gutom", the main character Mundo, upon realizing that the mother-dog was also as hungry as he was, underwent a change of heart and empathized with the mother-dog instead of taking care of his own interest. This particular slice in the story, in which humans present reconciliation with the animals, stripped humanity of its superiority over other animals.

Indeed, man in his need to control nature has trespassed deep into the natural world and has brought imbalance and destruction for himself. The reason behind such actions is deeply cultural. Apoyon's narratives explicitly tell us that embedding environmental consciousness leads to cultural change, to which the practice of writing and consequently analyzing ecocritically can contribute. To get to the root of our ecological and environmental problems, we need to enforce such cultural thinking.

While it is true that the narratives of Apoyon indeed show to us readers the oppressive systems within a culture, his works also gives voice to what these structures suppress. Most of the characters of Apoyon from which the author's ecocritical perspectives are communicated come from a working-class background that challenges the powerful forces. Because most stories are seen in the eyes of these characters (Noebong and Bandyong, for instance), the readers easily adapts well to these characters consciousness and ecological perspectives.

And thus this is how Apoyon's narratives act as a medium of cultural ecology – they symbolically correct developments within a culture that is not in tune with ecological wisdom. The anthropocentric thinking, human hierarchy and exceptionism, and aggressive attitude towards nature are seen to be just few of the causes as to why environmental crisis exists. After all, the definition of ecocriticism, says that "human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" [2]. Apoyon's work is a cultural artifact in itself, and it is found to challenge and transform cultural narratives of humanity's relationship to nature. The ecological perspectives in his works demonstrate how

important and powerful literature plays in creating a more sustainable way of life.

VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Using the framework of Glotfelty's 3-step approach to ecocritical analysis, this research highlights how Satur Apoyon's collection of short stories *Ang Gakit ni Noebong Ug Ubang Mga Sugilanon* has contributed not just in representing how connected and attached are we human beings to nature but also in raising a collective environmental consciousness among its readers.

Based from the analysis done, several conclusions can be drawn from an ecocritical analysis of Satur Apoyon's narratives:

First, nature, in several instances, carries different representations. Firstly, nature is a powerful force that renders man helpless and destitute, and this is presented through the inclusion of environmental disasters in the plot of the stories. Secondly, nature is also depicted as the cause of suffering; however, this is due to the anthropocentric thinking that nature provides man the basic necessities, and if the former falls short in the latter's expectations, man suffers. Thirdly, nature is depicted as the dwelling of gods and ancestral spirits, through which man should pay their respects. Fourthly, nature is represented to be mysterious and elusive – nature as an elusive character leaves man eternally perplexed and thus the latter should regard it with utmost reverence. And lastly, nature is feminized and 'sexualized' in the stories of Apoyon as the other, the wild, and the uncontrollable. Although nature carries different representations, all of these depictions suggest a tight knit between humanity and nature. Nature affects the character and in some instances it can be a driving force behind their actions.

Second, several environmental issues are embedded in the narratives of Satur Apoyon. This includes popular issues such as drought, extreme weather conditions, global warming, food shortage, environmental diseases, and climate change in general. The stories also depicted how exploited and damaged environment becomes the main motivational factor for a character's decision. Characters become attached to the places and the landscapes where they belong. And most of all, the issue of anthropocentrism – that nature is created for human interest – is exemplified in the narratives. An ecocritical analysis of Apoyon tells us that anthropocentrism does not coincide with ecological wisdom.

And lastly, *Ang Gakit ni Noebong Ug Ubang Mga Sugilanon* is a collection of short stories that act as a transformative cultural agency that doubles as an ecological

dimension of discourse. An ecocritical analysis of the narratives tells us that Apoyon, as a writer, invites his readers for a more environmentally-conscious thinking. He presents anthropocentric thinking, human hierarchy and exceptionism, and aggressive attitude towards nature as some of the few causes as to why environmental crisis exists. Furthermore, these counterviews presented in the study allow us to reflect on the values and practices that might serve to perpetuate or redress our problems concerning the environment. In conclusion, Satur Apoyon's collection of stories can be considered as a discourse for cultural change; this means that the stories allow us to rethink (and eventually shed off) our anthropocentric roles and see ourselves not as superior beings over nature, but equal members of the natural world.

REFERENCES

- [1] A. Dobie, *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*, USA: Cengage Learning, 2015.
- [2] C. Glotfelty and H. Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996.
- [3] L. Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, Massachusetts, USA: Belknap Press, 1995.
- [4] A. M. Ingram, I. Marshall, D. J. Philippon, and A. W. Sweeting, "Introduction: thinking our life in nature," in *Coming into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice*, A. M. Ingram, I. Marshall, D. J. Philippon, and A. W. Sweeting, Eds. Georgia: University of Georgia, 2007, pp. 1-14.
- [5] H. Zapf, "The state of ecocriticism and the function of literature as cultural ecology," in *Nature, Culture, and Literature*, C. Gersdorf and S. Mayer, Eds. New York: Rodopi, 1996, vol. 3, pp. 1-14.
- [6] H. Bergthaller. (2009). Cultural Ecology – New Transdisciplinary Paradigm for Literary Studies. [Online]. Available: <http://www.jltonline.de/index.php/reviews/article/view/123/413>
- [7] S. Apoyon, *Ang Gakit ni Noebong Ug Ubang Mga Sugilanon*, Manila, Philippines: NCCA, 2008.
- [8] E. Enger and B. F. Smith, *Environmental Science: A Study of Interrelationships*, Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2016.
- [9] L. H. Westling, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Environment*, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 66-67.
- [10] M. Tiu, *Davao: Restructuring History from Text and Memory*, Davao, Philippines: Ateneo de Davao Research and Publications Office, 2005.
- [11] B. MacKinnon, *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues*, California: Wadsworth, 2007, p. 331.
- [12] D. Goleman, *Ecoliterate*, San Francisco, USA: Jossey-Bass, 2012.
- [13] Callaghan, "Myth as a Site of Ecocritical Inquiry: Disrupting Anthropocentrism," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.



Khareen B. Culajara was born in Digos City, Davao del Sur, Philippines in 1989. She finished her master's degree in English at Ateneo de Davao University in 2016. Currently, she is a faculty of the Department of Arts and Sciences in University of Mindanao Digos College. Her research interest includes literature, ecocriticism, and cultural studies.