

DECONSTRUCTING SINS FROM THE MORAL COMPASS OF DON CARLOS COBELLO IN F. SIONIL JOSE'S SINS

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ABSTRACT

The novel "Sins" by F. Sionil Jose depicts the adventurous life of an affluent man whose confessions rationalize the sins he committed as judged only against social standards but ironically narrates the dire consequences as moral concepts. The study aims to deconstruct the prevailing theme of sins as social notions to prove that sins are moral constructs and to teach that morality is an inherent feature of man's mortality. To establish these contradicting ideologies, the study utilized the deconstruction approach in literary criticism by Jacques Derrida. Deconstructionism exposes embedded ideologies by revealing inconsistencies in the text. Specifically, content analysis was integrated to examine words and phrases in-depth to analyze rooted messages. This paper found out that the novel claims incest, premarital sex, and sexual exploitation as sins established only by society and should be judged by it and not beyond it. However, through investigating its instabilities, it was revealed that the novel actually justifies sins against the character's morality because of his belief in mortality as the recipient of suffering, forgiveness, retributive punishments, and even conscience. Thus, the novel inculcates that sins are not just mere social concepts, they are the foremost moral constructs.

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A. Introduction

Literature is the encapsulation of life in its varied dimensions and perceptions that expresses not only about its established norms but also its deeply-ingrained ideologies. In essence, literature

represents the 'social, political, cultural and historical growth of society'.¹ Due to its universality, it could be treated as the medium to expose, influence, educate, and even entertain through the portrayal of human lives in reality. The platform to teach

¹ Matilda H. Dimaano, "Oppression amidst Socio-Political Tapestry of Azucena Grajo Uranza's 'Bamboo in the Wind,'" *International Journal of*

English Literature and Social Sciences 3, no. 2 (2018): 165–73, <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.3.2.7>.

how to live through exploration of human nature and enhance language use, and the portal to inculcate culture, history, and even critical thinking.²

In understanding literature, it must always be noted that literature is 'deliberately somewhat open to interpretation due to its portrayal of life and its deeply-ingrained social, cultural, historical, and moral values. Thus, the complexity of the layers deeply embedded in literature attracts a wide range of critical analysis,³ dimensions, and most importantly, interpretations.⁴ Moreover, to decipher literature, language plays the greatest and most important role as the medium of message dissemination.

In Carter and Long's approaches to teaching literature, they have emphasized that the language model emphasized the crucial role of language as the literary medium.⁵ Therefore, through literature, people can learn various aspects of language. However, contrary to what structuralism forwards, language is more than signifiers and their signified. Language has layers that reveal inconsistencies and instabilities that

expose not what it explicitly articulates but what it subliminally rationalizes. In other words, "... a text says something different from what it intends to mean or the ways texts don't always mean what they say."⁶ This could only be realized through deconstructionism.

Jacques Derrida, the revered 'intellectual terrorist,' coined deconstruction as a new lens of literary criticism. Contrary to popular belief that a literature is either absolute or exists in the rigid dichotomy of binary oppositions, "in order to understand the meaning of any concept, we need to understand from its opposite."⁷ Deconstruction forwards that literature and/or language is "Unreliable ... words are never stable and fixed in time ... meaning is the product of difference, and it is also always subject to a process of deferral."⁸ Simply put, literature is innately irregular, inconsistent, and unstable, which results in contradictory ideologies and thus, proves that it could be interpreted limitlessly."⁹

The most notable advantage of deconstruction as an approach to literary criticism is "its capacity to expose

² Sanju Choudhary, "A Literary Approach to Teaching English Language in a Multicultural Classroom," *Higher Learning Research Communications* 6, no. 4 (2016): 1–16.

³ Al Ryanne Gatcho and Philip Paolo Delorino, "Reading Short Stories of F. Sionil Jose Using Marxism as a Literary Vista," *International Journal of English Language and Translation Studies* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2019): 76–86.

⁴ Paul Deane, "Building and Justifying Interpretations of Texts: A Key Practice in the English Language Arts," *ETS Research Report Series* 2020, no. 1 (2020): 1–53, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12304>.

⁵ Ronald Carter and Michael N. Long, *Teaching Literature* (New York: Longman, 1991).

⁶ Sanjaya Sahu, Harihar Sarangi, and Partha Sarathi Mallik, "A Deconstructive Analysis of Derrida's Philosophy," *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities* 9, no. 1 (2021): 98–107, <https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v9i1.4097>.

⁷ Ajda Bastan, "A Brief Discussion of Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction and Hermeneutics," *E-Journal of New World Sciences Academy* 3, no. 2 (2008): 219–25.

⁸ R. Gnanasekaran, "An Introduction to Derrida, Deconstruction and Post-Structuralism," *International Journal of English Literature and Culture* 3, no. 7 (2015): 211–14.

⁹ Mark Bauerlein, *Literary Criticism: An Autopsy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 1. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fh8pb>.

ideological lies, to dismantle cultural cover-ups.” However, it must also be stressed that deconstruction doesn't mean looking for literary holes and claiming that the author has exposed what s/he is not supposed to expose but to point out that '... What he does see is systematically related to what he does not see.'¹⁰ In simpler term, the aim of deconstruction is to reveal what was removed in the foregrounded and backgrounded exposition of the literature.

The primary source of the study is the novel by F. Sionil Jose titled "Sins." As the name expresses, the novel depicts the illustrious life of an aristocratic worldly man, which is attributed to his inherited affluence and his vigorous conquests as an alpha male. As a man who came from old money and political might, Don Carlos Cobello, or C.C., believed and practiced seizing opportunities from others' misfortunes as the key in solidifying their clan's affluence across the Philippines' eventful century. As a man born with power, C.C. knew that he could do whatever he pleases, so he pursued a life of carnality that explored social taboos like incest with his sister and nieces and premarital sex with househelps, prostitutes, and even foreign acquaintances.

As a man bound by mortality, C.C. justified that sins are socially constructed as these were established by the prevailing

culture and social norms. However, he realized that these sins eventually haunt him through the forbidden love between his illegitimate children, who didn't know they were siblings. Thus, the glaring irony of C.C.'s rationalization of his sins can only be investigated using the deconstruction approach in literary criticism.

As a method of removing the traditional interpretation and replacing it with new one,¹¹ the deconstruction of the novels "Scarlet Letter," "The Awakening," and "The Virgin Suicides" established how women adjust to fit into the prevalent Madonna/Whore dichotomy, which is heavily set on the patriarchal society.¹² In particular, the Scarlet Letter's Hester was labelled as a whore despite her character which is modelled like Madonna or the Virgin while The Awakening's Edna is in between the behavior of Madonna and whore since she was portrayed as sexually appealing but was conformed to exude purity and The Virgin Suicides' Lisbon girls expresses suicide as the only way out of Madonna/Whore archetype which is imposed by the society.

As an approach to provide fresh twists or insights,¹³ the deconstruction of the poem "The Road Not Taken" revealed that contrary to its overt theme, i.e., rebellion against conformity, it actually challenged unconformity because the mind

¹⁰ Gnanasekaran, "An Introduction to Derrida, Deconstruction and Post-Structuralism," 212.

¹¹ Mawazo Kavula Sikirivwa, "Deconstruction Theory and Its Background," *American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research* 4, no. 4 (2020): 44–72.

¹² Whitney Greer, "The Madonna, The Whore, The Myth: Deconstructing the Madonna/Whore

Dichotomy in the Scarlet Letter, the Awakening, and the Virgin Suicides" (Honors Thesis, University of Mississippi. Salli McDonnell Barksdale, 2016), https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis/943.

¹³ Sikirivwa, "Deconstruction Theory and Its Background," 59.

dwells longer on something good that was missed on the other path.¹⁴

Most importantly, as the shaker of the foundation,¹⁵ the deconstruction of fairy tales, i.e., Little Red Riding Hood, exposed that contrary to its forwarded message in the popular culture of the dangers of not knowing the evils in the world, it actually presents children's natural ignorance and emphasizes on their obligation to listen to old people's counsel to keep them safe.¹⁶

From these studies, it can be summarized that "every gesture of deconstruction, as it brings apart some discourse or structure, must also at the same time bring it together in some new configuration."¹⁷

Hence, this study used the deconstruction lens to analyze F. Sionil Jose's "Sins." It is a memoir narration of an illustrious worldly man from an aristocratic lineage who expanded his empire around the world in a span of more than half of the 20th century Philippines and whose sins are haunting his children in an ironic, twisted fate. This paper determines existing binary opposition, justifies its instabilities, and establishes the resulting prevailing theme that opposes what it explicitly justifies. The result of the analysis establishes a comprehensive literary analysis of the novel, which has never been criticized

before as compared to F. Sionil Jose's other novels. Moreover, this study offers fresh perspectives not only in reading the novel but also in teaching deconstructionism in analyzing literature, not only to teach them how to interpret and justify their interpretations¹⁸ but also boost their critical thinking.¹⁹

B. Method

The study used the descriptive method to probe into its instabilities and inconsistencies and prove that the literature conveys more than it overtly expresses, particularly the deconstruction approach of literary analysis. As conceptualized by Derrida, deconstructionism believes that literature is ambiguous; that is, there is more than one meaning.

It is interested in investigating its relations to other texts and highlighting the implicit or excluded aspects. Deconstruction "highlights what remains indecidable and what operates as an indecidable in the text itself;²⁰ thus, "it is always 'something else'" Therefore, using deconstructionism, the paper will "expose the binaries/dualism and deconstruct them without privileging one component over the

¹⁴ Sara Setayesh, "The Road Not Taken under Deconstructive View," in *The Proceedings of the Second National Congress on Change and Innovation in the Humanities* (Kharazmi International Institute for Research and Education, Shiraz, 2017).

¹⁵ Sikirivwa, "Deconstruction Theory and Its Background," 63.

¹⁶ Perry Nodelman, "The Hidden Meaning and the Inner Tale: Deconstruction and the Interpretation of Fairy Tales," *Children's Literature Association*

Quarterly 15, no. 3 (1990): 143–48, <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.0858>.

¹⁷ Sikirivwa, "Deconstruction Theory and Its Background," 69.

¹⁸ Deane, "Building and Justifying Interpretations of Texts," 88.

¹⁹ Choudhary, "A Literary Approach to Teaching English Language in a Multicultural Classroom," 1.

²⁰ Gnanasekaran, "An Introduction to Derrida, Deconstruction and Post-Structuralism," 212.

other by asserting the truth of the uncertain hesitance.²¹

In order to deconstruct, one must search for the prevalent conventions that are generally accepted as the sole interpretation to highlight the underlying notions of superiority/inferiority and privileged/ underprivileged, then discover the binary inversions to establish the incompatibility of what is articulated and what is obscured through content analysis.²² Content analysis is the thorough investigation of certain words or phrases in the texts through analyzing their meanings and relationships to conclude about the underlying messages.²³ As employed in literary criticism, the content analysis focuses on the "writer's intentions, arguments, thematic substance, and target audience" while exploring its nature and effects on the novel.

Specifically, this paper aimed to dismantle persistent "logocentrism," or the belief that the concepts are always in the central position.²⁴ Contextually, the logocentrism in the novel posits that sin is a social concept and not a moral one. However, through rigorous content analysis, the study targeted to disprove this centralized idea by examining the inconsistencies of particular words or phrases and thus verify that sin is

evaluated against a moral standard by Don Carlos Cobello, the protagonist of the novel.

C. Results

The results of deconstructing the novel "Sins" highlighted two parts: the first is the explicitly expressed theme is "sins as a social construct," while the other is the implicitly implied theme which is "sins as moral concepts."

1. Sins as Social Constructs

The novel "Sins" narrates the life of Carlos Cobello (C.C.), from his own perspective while unconsciously confessing his sins which he rationalizes as inherent to men at the top of the social hierarchy like himself and as a social construction.

The novel revealed that the prevailing binary opposition from where the novel revolves around is as stated as "Sin is a social definition, not a moral one."²⁵

Simply stated, C.C. believes that sin is a product of social constructionism instead of the traditional moral concept. Social constructionism believes that knowledge is constructed, not discovered, through interactions of the individuals in society.²⁶

As further evidence, he claimed that:

²¹ Bastan, "A Brief Discussion of Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction and Hermeneutics," 223.

²² Sahu, Sarangi, and Mallik, "A Deconstructive Analysis of Derrida's Philosophy," 101.

²³ Satu Elo et al., "Qualitative Content Analysis: A Focus on Trustworthiness," *SAGE Open* 4, no. 1 (2014): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014522633>.

²⁴ Sahu, Sarangi, and Mallik, "A Deconstructive Analysis of Derrida's Philosophy," 100.

²⁵ F. Sionil Jose, *Sins* (New York: Random House, 1973), 12.

²⁶ Tom Andrews, "What is Social Constructionism?," *Grounded Theory Review* 11, no. 1 (2012): 39–46.

“What are social taboos? They are the absurd and even grotesque creations of society. Look at the Bible—you have everything there: incest, adultery, murder. Does the Bible lose its value because of these depictions?”²⁷

As social constructivists would conclude, sins are originally innate human attributes that have been habitualized to be prohibited. This proves the point that as social constructions due to social and interpersonal impacts,²⁸ sins consequently lead to them being institutionalized as social taboos.²⁹

Generally, C.C.'s unconscious confessions of his sins are justified as universal and instinctive human endeavors practiced in every society and culture, such as incest, premarital sex, and sexual exploitation.

a. Incest

The first set of pieces of evidence is his sexual behavior through incest. The first encounter was when he discovered sexual pleasure while bragging to his schoolmates. He claimed that:

“Now, in school, I expounded on sex with authority. And why not? The boys crowded around me as I talked about encounters, the surrender of women and their wantonness when aroused. Much of it was fiction, but not the description of the act; they were realities that I enjoyed almost every night now, or even in daytime when Corito felt the urge.”³⁰

Another encounter was during the wedding night of Corito to Camilo, who was homosexual. He detailed that:

“Right there, beside her husband in the deep throes of drunken stupor, we did it wilfully, savagely and with delicious vengeance. Corito moaned and heaved, her back arched, her embrace maniacal in its intensity, and through all that tumultuous and noisy passion, Camilo snored on.”³¹

Even decades later, their deeds did not stop. C.C. still narrated that:

“When Corito kissed me, it did not appear as a sisterly kiss. I was often angry with her because she did it not just before Angela but before other people. It was her way of laying claim on me and such an attitude became a heavy burden for me to bear, especially when her jealousy became more and more pronounced.”³²

Aside from his sister, he also fornicated with his nieces, the young and beautiful daughters of his cousins.

“...There were my beautiful nieces who vied with one another in seducing me, knowing that if they succeeded in dragging me to the altar, a great fortune awaited them”³³

These statements prove that incest is committed in the novel. As proved in the theoretical and historical perspectives of incest, it is a taboo that is not universal to all societies and cultures.³⁴ Ancient Egyptian, Incan, and Roman empires,

²⁷ Jose, *Sins*, 12.

²⁸ Alexandra Galbin, “An Introduction to Social Constructionism,” *Social Research Report* 26 (2014): 82–92.

²⁹ Andrews, “What is Social Constructionism?” 41.

³⁰ Jose, *Sins*, 11.

³¹ Jose, 43.

³² Jose, 43.

³³ Jose, 107.

³⁴ Dwight W. Read, “Incest Taboos and Kinship: A Biological or a Cultural Story?,” *Reviews in*

particularly the royal and noble clans, exercise brother-sister marriage to preserve blood lineage, prestige, and power among themselves.³⁵ The lack of sexual aversion in kinship in these cultures, which is strongly implemented in Catholicism, is mainly due to political and/or structural reasons³⁶ completely disregarding filial roles and genetic consequences.³⁷ Hence, as Sebo suggested that the presence of incest in the novel showed how political and structural factors influences sexuality of a high-born man.³⁸

b. Premarital Sex

Another set of evidence is his sexual exploration through engaging in premarital sex with various women. During the Japanese occupation, C.C. was given instruction by his father to stalk the Japanese officers who are patrons of the brothel. He claimed that after his father brought him to the brothel, he never considered it as 'socially abominable' because it was not unique. He explained that some have "... gambling dens and whorehouses ... in a more socially acceptable businesses."³⁹

Anthropology 43, no. 2 (2014): 150–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00938157.2014.903151>.

³⁵ Alexandra Maryanski and Jonathan Turner, "Incest, Theoretical Perspectives On," *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, September 5, 2018, 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118924396.wbiea2041>.

³⁶ Read, "Incest Taboos and Kinship," 17.

³⁷ Jeff Sebo, "The Ethics of Incest," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 13, no. 1 (2006)

³⁸ Dwight Read, "Incest Taboos and Kinship: A Biological or a Cultural Study?" *Reviews in Anthropology*, 17.

³⁹ Jose, 27.

⁴⁰ Jose, 27.

From then on, he proclaimed that:

"I knew then that I was a sensualist, that I craved whatever pleased the senses, be it a gourmet dish or a woman in all her glory, the fine down on the back of her neck, the narrow waist broadening into her buttocks, those limbs down to the dainty feet, and of course, I must not forget, the beautiful mounds of her breasts."⁴⁰

This reflects some of the primary drives of committing premarital sex, which are curiosity, proof of manhood, lust, and sex promiscuity, especially among youth⁴¹ However, this also reveals the existence of double standards in premarital sex, that is, high abstinence standard for women but high permissive standard for men.⁴² Thus, it is acceptable for men to practice premarital sex with different sexual partners as these are not only innately driven but also socially allowable.

This is predominantly the reality in patriarchal societies that enforce strictest sanctions against premarital sex mostly to prohibit contraception, abortion, and spread of venereal diseases.⁴³ Although these are inviolable truths, this is imposed more on women since they are the most

⁴¹ Lateef Omotosho Adegboyega and Olumayowa Ayorinde Jacob, "Causes of Premarital Sex as Expressed by Adolescents in Yagba West, Kogi State, Nigeria," *Anatolian Journal of Education* 2, no. 2 (2017): 8–20.

⁴² Gabriela Sagebin Bordini and Tania Mara Sperb, "Sexual Double Standard: A Review of the Literature Between 2001 and 2010," *Sexuality & Culture* 17, no. 4 (2013): 686–704, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-012-9163-0>.

⁴³ Agner Fog, "Sexual Behavior," in *Cultural Selection*, ed. Agner Fog (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1999), 169–88, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-015-9251-2_10.

vulnerable in this practice. Hence, as a man, this is lesser forced and more justified to act as instinct and natural activity.

c. Sexual Exploitation

The last set of evidence is his sexual escapades by forcing his hierarchal status. Particularly to Severina, to whom he believes as his great love and the one he always remembered among the women he encountered, he narrated that:

“I always felt that I could do anything I pleased with the help. I had seen Mother slap them when they displeased her, and they would whimper, “No, Señora. Yes, Señora.” I had also seen Father kick the tenants in the hacienda and whip them with his riding stick, which he always carried even when he was not riding. So I knew I could also do whatever I wished with Severina. He even forced his power to her in the statement, “Take off your clothes, Severina,” I snarled... “Take them off or I will beat you.”⁴⁴

Although Severina accepted her fate and chose to enjoy the encounters with C.C., the use of power to force one's desire is referred as sexual exploitation. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee's (UNHCR) Critical Issue – Abuse and Exploitation elaborated that this is a type of sexual violence that emphasizes social status as its key player. This is a common violence experienced in societies where

the gap in the social hierarchy is strong and where the oppressors are never punished, especially if they are at top of the hierarchy.⁴⁵

These sets of evidences justified how C.C.'s rationalization of sins is socially constructed. However, upon using the deconstructive approach in analysing the novel, the result showed inconsistencies and instabilities that undermines sins as product of social construction. Thus, the novel actually deconstructs its own by inadvertently exposing that his confessions of sins are actually judged against moral standards.⁴⁶

2. Sins as Moral Concepts

Traditional Christians conclude three generalizations about sins: “only persons sin, sin is that which makes persons appropriate candidates for divine forgiveness, sin is that which makes persons appropriate candidates for divine retributive punishment.”⁴⁷ Moreover, sin also involves ‘moral guilt’ which is commonly referred as ‘conscience.’

Contrary to what C.C. forwards sins as a social construct, he himself deconstructs this theme through the same statements that highlight sins as moral concepts that only humans commit.⁴⁸

As evidenced, he confessed in his dying state:

⁴⁴ Jose, 14.

⁴⁵ United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugee, “Action for the Rights of Critical Issues - Abuse and Exploitation” (United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugee, 2022), <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/children/3bb81aea4/action-rights-children-arc-critical-issues-abuse-exploitation.html>.

⁴⁶ Jesse Couenhoven, “What Sin is: A Differential Analysis,” *Modern Theology* 25, no. 4 (2009): 563–87, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2009.01555.x>.

⁴⁷ Couenhoven, 564-565.

⁴⁸ Couenhoven, 570.

“Is my condition now the supreme irony? Did God will it or some unfathomable fate? To be imprisoned in a useless body, to have the mind alert, capable of memory and cunning but not able to command the body to act—is this punishment? In spite of my iron Catholic upbringing, in my most decrepit condition, now I questioned Him. If He is such a perfect Being, why did He create an imperfect world, why was He miserly when He denied perfection to men? A Jew who converses with God would reply: so man can make his own moral choices. Why must such a choice be made at all?”⁴⁹

This justifies the position that no man would question, and even blame, a High Supernatural Being like God, if he disregards his morality completely.⁵⁰

Specifically, although C.C. defended his sins as absolute experiences universal to all human beings,⁵¹ the inconsistencies forward those sins, no matter how deeply embedded in the human collective consciousness and contextualized socially, are still moral concepts.⁵²

a. Forgiveness

The first set of evidence is his incessant apology, particularly to Severina. Ending the first chapter, he claimed that:

“Oh, Severina, forgive me. I was so young then, just as you were young, too. I loved and sinned. Forgive me.”⁵³

Another instance is in his delirious state, claiming that:

“I listen to my own silent recitation of pious obscurities, the air wheezing, rasping from my lungs and, above all, my own wind-drowned call, begging Severina’s forgiveness.”⁵⁴

Lastly, while having his last moments suffering, he once again thought that:

“... the old and nagging thought bores into me like some purposeful and avenging hex, condemning me, taunting me, and again, I cry out—Severina, forgive me, lift this curse that you have cast upon me so that I will be free again.”⁵⁵

The contradicting discussions about forgiveness support the statements’ revelation as a moral requirement and as an elective aspect to forgive repentant after pilgrimaging self-reflection and self-reform.⁵⁶ As a moral requirement, C.C. asked forgiveness so the curse will be lifted from him and as an elective aspect because he confessed that he has sinned as a boy to her; thus, begging for forgiveness.

b. Retributive Punishments

The next set of evidences indicates to the fervent belief of C.C. that he is suffering from the retributive punishments as consequences of his sins which are: impotency from Syphilis, Angela’s frail condition, Delfin’s hatred, cripplement, and Angela and Delfin’s child.

⁴⁹ Jose, *Sins*, 52.

⁵⁰ Couenhoven, “What Sin is,” 564-565.

⁵¹ Justin F. Landy and Eric Luis Uhlmann, “Morality Is Personal,” in *Atlas of Moral Psychology* (New York, NY, US: The Guilford Press, 2018), 121–32.

⁵² Couenhoven, “What Sin is,” 568.

⁵³ Jose, *Sins*, 2.

⁵⁴ Jose, 108.

⁵⁵ Jose, *Sins*, 108.

⁵⁶ Paula Satne, “Forgiveness and Moral Development,” *Philosophia* 44, no. 4 (2016): 1029–55, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-016-9727-6>.

1) Impotency from Syphilis

Firstly, his impotency from Syphilis that he got from exposure with Angela, his favorite woman in his father's brothel during the Japanese occupation, from which she also got from one of her patrons, Colonel Masuda, a Japanese soldier. However, before developing into impotency, the venereal disease has been passed on to Corito, and eventually to Angela, their daughter:

"I know now what is wrong with her, with you, too. And of course, me most of all. We are all sick, Corito. It is all my fault. I gave it to you. Syphilis."⁵⁷

2) Angela's Frail Condition

The next is the frail condition of Angela, his daughter with Corito, since birth. He referred to Angela as deserving of her name, however ironic her existence has been.

"Indeed, she deserved her name—she had angelic countenance and a voice so clear, so lipid, it was such a pleasure to listen to her"⁵⁸ and "My ever precious Angela, conceived in sin..."⁵⁹

Further, he believed that it was his and Corito's sins that Angela is suffering.

"...but we had both blamed our sin as having visited our daughter; as long as she was alive and always in need of care, that was God's immutable way of reminding us of our guilt, for which there was no atonement, no absolution. Now, this sin was compounded by my youthful willfulness. I had brought perdition not just to my sister but to an innocent child as well."⁶⁰

3) Delfin's Hatred

Another punishment he claimed he was suffering is the hate of Delfin, his estranged son with Severina. The first evidence is the fact that no matter the amount of money he has accumulated, it could never buy his son's affection.

"How does one become an instant father? All my life I have had my way. With money, I got anything I wanted; almost anything anyway. Could I now buy this young man's affection?"⁶¹ and "What could I possibly do to gain my own son's affection? Here I am, one of the country's richest, most powerful men, but with him, I am completely powerless."⁶²

The next evidence is their opposing principles. While C.C. was born with riches, Delfin was born to earn his food through manual labor.

"It was difficult for me to understand why a boy who had obviously lived in want in some dilapidated village in the Visayas would reject the ease and comfort that I offered, circumstances that were legitimately his and were all being gladly given. If I were he, I would have grabbed everything."⁶³

Moreover, he confessed that:

"I could not understand Delfin's deep longing for independence, his desire to challenge the world and live on his wits and brawn in a manner I never fostered in my own self, used as I was to the privileges of birth and high station. Where did all that granite perseverance come from? From Severina and her

⁵⁷ Jose, 92.

⁵⁸ Jose, 157.

⁵⁹ Jose, 159.

⁶⁰ Jose, 91.

⁶¹ Jose, 118.

⁶² Jose, 135.

⁶³ Jose, 133.

peasant origins? I was beginning appreciate my son as someone different from me. I would never be able to do what he was doing.”⁶⁴

To emphasize more their opposing principles, he pointed that:

“Was this my son talking about championing the poor? Youthful idealism, I concluded...but they soon forget it all when they enter the real world, the world which I dominate.”⁶⁵

He even compared Delfin to Sir Galahad:

“... a knight on a white horse, with youthful idealism that would be tempered by age, by the reality of the world outside that campus... By himself, he cannot destroy an organization that has its own momentum, a machine that performs with the least interference from he who owns it.”⁶⁶

Eventually, it is due to their opposing principles that lead to the eventual fallout of the faint father-son relationship. In his attempt to teach Delfin a lesson, in his words, “...to know the reality of power, of wealth...”⁶⁷ the case filed by the firm where Delfin works against Hacienda Esperanza has worked on his favor. In the end, he still gave what Delfin fought and rationalized that:

“He could not fault me with being unjust. Not anymore. But now, he resisted every effort I made to see him.”⁶⁸

4) Cripplement

C.C.’s state before dying was cripplement which he described as:

“... imprisoned in a useless body, to have the mind alert, capable of memory and cunning but no able to command the body to act—is this punishment?”⁶⁹

This condition is caused by an accident which, in his words, is explained as:

“... I did not exactly regard as derogatory for they tend to confirm my machismo... caused by my carelessness, my anxiety perhaps.”⁷⁰

In detailed narration, he described his accident that started with a night where he will perform the “*man’s most delectable function*”⁷¹ with Luisita, a vacationing Spanish beauty queen.

“I took my time—I always do—and had already rubbed myself dry. Then, as I stepped out of the tub, I was propelled into the air and my last sensation before I blacked out was a tremendous and painful whack on the back of my head as it hit the rim of the bathtub. I had stepped on the cake of soap that had slipped from the edge of the tub where Luisita had carelessly placed it.”⁷²

Upon realizing he was paralyzed after waking from a coma, he was convinced that he was cursed by Severina through Delfin. In his hysterical state, he thought that:

⁶⁴ Jose, 129.

⁶⁵ Jose, 133.

⁶⁶ Jose, 156.

⁶⁷ Jose, 168.

⁶⁸ Jose, 169.

⁶⁹ Jose, 52.

⁷⁰ Jose, 176.

⁷¹ Jose, 176.

⁷² Jose, 176.

"I was now convinced I was possessed by some malignant and inexorable spell cast no less by my dear Severina before she died. I was defenseless against that dark, unseen power that she wielded; surely, she must have hated me for having abandoned her. Who was the harbinger of her hatred? Could it be Delfin? But my son, my son—my flesh is his flesh and I love him—I realized this from my own scabrous depths, within the knotted tangle of my emotions."⁷³

5) Angela and Delfin's Child

The familial love that C.C. thought both Angela and Delfin unconsciously built has abominably bloomed into a romantic love. He thought when Angela confessed her romantic love for Delfin:

"This cannot be! This must not be! I should have known—all the signals were hoisted before me. Why did I not recognize them? It was not just infatuation when she was a child; she had grown up nurturing the feeling...Was our sin coming back to mock us?"⁷⁴

However, he did everything to kill this love but still failed as Angela confessed:

"He loves me, Tito. The day before Mama and I left, I seduced him. I am pregnant and very happy."⁷⁵

As discussed above, C.C. firmly believes that impotency from syphilis, Angela's frail condition, Delfin's hatred, cripplement, and Angela and Delfin's child were his punishments for being a sinner,

particularly a sensual man with boundless adventures. In moral philosophy, punishment is a moral necessity because punishments "... can be conceived in terms of, and justified by reference to, the notion of balance. There is a state of affairs, held to be right, which is disturbed by crime. Punishment is the restoration of the right state of affairs and is justified as such."⁷⁶ Therefore, if C.C. believes that his sufferings were retributive punishments from his sins, then he therefore believes that sin is a moral concept.

c. Conscience

The last set of evidence indicates Conscience as the fundamental piece of morality. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, conscience "motivates us to act according to moral principles or beliefs we already possess" and "is represented by the feelings that conscience generates in its self-assessment function." Further, "conscience's self-assessment often produces remorse or other negative feelings (guilt, shame, fear, and so on)."⁷⁷

In the novel, C.C. first experienced the intervention of Conscience when he believed that he could do whatever he wanted to do with the helps.

"Although this was how I looked at the help, at that age I nonetheless felt some twinge of conscience perhaps, some

⁷³ Jose, 177.

⁷⁴ Jose, 171.

⁷⁵ Jose, 177.

⁷⁶ Stephen Paul Brown, "The Moral Justification of Retributive Punishment by Reference to the Notion of Balance" (Doctoral Thesis, University of Sheffield, 1998).

⁷⁷ Alberto Giubilini, "Conscience," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2022 (Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2022), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/conscience/>.

uneasy feeling, an awkwardness in the mind, but I couldn't stop, a compulsion beyond my control dictated my acts."⁷⁸

Another is his call to God to die, where he could no longer bear the intuition of Conscience.

"...there is one clear thought that glitters through: I want to die. God, how I wish the end would so that I would finally be free from these villainous realities about which I can do nothing. Let me sink quickly into that black and rimless murk from where there is no returning, in which there is no conscience, no bliss."⁷⁹

The most notable evidence, however, was his internal monologue:

"I will be asked by that supreme inquisitor—no, not God, but my own Conscience: What meaning have you given your life? I must retort: Should life have any meaning other than it be lived pleurably?"⁸⁰

He further justified that:

"This is not a hedonistic attitude; all over the world, people are searching for objects of belief; some see it in politics, in religion, but this attempt to reach out for eternity—in a sense, this is what this searching is all about—is bound to fail because eternity does not exist; the pristine nature of things change, and it is this inevitability of change that, from the beginning, we must always be conscious of."⁵⁰

Therefore, these statements reveal that an amoral person would never believe, and even confess, the existence of Conscience in his narration if he never truly has a sense of morality. Thus, Conscience is the manifestation of morality because this implies that a person would never need forgiveness unless bothered by a moral guilt. Hence, Conscience is the manifestation of morality⁸¹ and thus proves that its existence in the narration of C.C. proves that C.C. uses his moral compass in exposing his sins.

Overall, the results showed that the novel dominantly presented sins as innate characteristic which vary relative to the culture and society. This notion proves that sins are not only personal choices but also aspects of cultures that consequently enslave people. In elaboration, humans are enculturated into the value system of the society, i.e. the rewards of achievements and consequences of sins.⁸²

In the study, C.C. vindicated that incest, premarital sex, and sexual exploitation are only sins because the Philippine culture and society, which is majorly based on Catholicism, deem it to be sins.⁸³ However, deconstructing the logocentrism of the novel, i.e. sin as social definitions, revealed that despite C.C.'s strong psychological conviction, he unconsciously strengthened his sins as moral constructs because only mortals sin

⁷⁸ Jose, *Sins*, 13.

⁷⁹ Jose, 44.

⁸⁰ Jose, 152.

⁸¹ Alberto Giubilini, "Conscience," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2022 (Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2022).

⁸² Benno van den Toren, "Human Evolution and a Cultural Understanding of Original Sin," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith: Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 68, no. 1 (2016): 1–10.

⁸³ van den Toren.

and thus asks for forgiveness and/or suffers from retributive punishments and Conscience.⁸⁴

Hence, using deconstructionism as a lens in criticising the novel implies that a person's principle cannot be grounded on what the person always explicitly and elaborately rationalizes but what the person always expresses unconsciously but consistently. C.C.'s justification of his sins as mere social standards proves his desperate attempt to establish them as such despite his unconscious belief that they are consequences of his morality.

D. Conclusion

The novel "Sins" narrates the logocentrism that sins are justified as social constructs. Particularly, the paper has revealed that the practice of incest, premarital sex, and sexual exploitation are believed by C.C. as inherent mortal characteristic and high relative to the societies and cultures where one belongs. However, through the deconstruction approach of literary analysis, particularly the content analysis, the paper shows the verifications in the novel that only humans commit sins, ask forgiveness, suffer from retributive punishments, and are watched over by Conscience establish sins are actually rationalized against the moral compass of the narrator and not in his belief of social standards.

Contrary to literary analyses conducted about the works of F. Sionil Jose, the novel "Sins" portrays not only the social, cultural, economic, and political

endeavors of an illustrious aristocratic man but also his morality as a mortal creature that commits sins; thus, he suffers from its moral retributions. Specifically, the novel aims to instill one's mortality that is capable of committing sins as well as receiving punishments, asking for forgiveness and unending calls of the Conscience. Thus, the novel teaches sins not only as mere social concepts but, most essentially, as moral constructs.

The study focused particularly on the social and moral bounds of the protagonist and subtly disregarded the novel's satirical assaults on the country's morality against its ironic Catholic context and tales about its aristocratic body politic. Therefore, the study does not concern with the glaring portrayals of the country's social, political, and cultural realities.

For future studies, the paper recommended dwelling deeper into the social aspect of sins and justifying how sins could be both social and moral concepts, just like what the novel "Sins" fundamentally exposes.

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⁸⁴ Couenhoven, "What Sin is," 565; Giubilini, "Conscience."

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