

Introduction

This journal is long overdue and comes at a precarious time. I write this introduction at the start of our second lockdown, with more cases per day than we had last year. It is a special issue dedicated to Gémino H. Abad, University Professor Emeritus and devoted faculty member of the DECL since 1963. Sir Jimmy, as students and colleagues call him, needs no introduction really. His oeuvre and anthologies of Philippine poetry in English are read widely and written about extensively, and this issue is but a glimpse into a body of work that spans decades. At 82, Sir Jimmy has shown no signs of slowing down, despite a lauded career. For those who are unacquainted with his life of accolades, we have a brief biography of Gémino in these pages, as well as his bibliography.

It cannot be emphasized enough—we need poetry in a pandemic. There is no actual escape inside our homes without texts, without insight, without meditation. This issue of the journal hopes to bring some of literature’s “revel and revelation” to you, with Gémino’s own selection of his ten best poems, a choice surely not easy considering how prolific Sir Jimmy is. We are also given access to “Houseboy,” a short story that transports the reader back to the communal experience of watching a movie and navigating the crowded streets of Manila. Likewise, Sir Jimmy shares with us “Etymons,” his notes on words and their origins mixed with quotes from his favorite authors, which demonstrate the poet’s lifelong reverence for words, attention to detail, and careful description that have always been the true hallmark of his works.

There is not much to say about Sir Jimmy’s impact on friends, students, fellow writers, and scholars that have not been published or delivered elsewhere, but we have a few of these tributes as part of the issue. More than being a decorated writer, Sir Jimmy is husband and father first; as his daughter Cyan Abad-Jugo describes: “Often my sister, my twin brothers, David and Diego, and I would interrupt him with quarrels, questions, anecdotes, and he would look up and smile. Almost as often, we would catch him not really listening, but he never begrudged us the time we took away from his ‘work.’”

Aside from these, the special issue also brings together for the first time the winning essays and poems of the two iterations of the *Gémino H. Abad Literary Awards for Poetry and for Literary Criticism*. The first, held in 2015, saw Thomas Chaves, Ronn Angeles, Jade Castro, and Ned Parfan besting other contestants in poetry. Chaves also won the essay prize that year. The latest competition in 2019 had as winners Rayji de Guia for poetry and again, Thomas Chaves for essay. The finalists for poetry were Jonathan Peter Llanita and yours truly. The lone finalist for the essay was Julian dela Cerna. We are proud to publish these works, some of which are offered to the public for the first time.

These are extraordinary times, with hardly the head space and quiet necessary in poetry. Yet, periods of uncertainty can also be fertile ground for art, as Sir Jimmy most certainly knows (and who is most probably crafting poems now as we speak). For a poem is a gesture towards some resolution, a repeated attempt to make sense of life's mysteries, a "safety" or resistance to banality and ineptitude that persist to lock us in. As Gémino writes in "The Light in One's Blood":

The soil is ours, and inters
 the secret bones of our loss.
 We must know our loss, all things
 that ghost our time.
 Speak now, collect every bone,
 lay the pieces together.
 Here is true speaking,
 a mountain rises beneath our feet!

Until then, keep safe, bones intact.

Vyxz Vasquez
 Quezon City
 March 28, 2021
 lhvasquez@up.edu.ph