

Tributes

I was one of the first graduates of the UP Department of English and Comparative Literature's MA program. Jimmy Abad was one of my professors. He was my teacher in this strange class called Dream and Writing, where our main textbooks were Thomas Moore's two books: *Care of the Soul* and *Soul Mates*.

The biographical note of Thomas Moore at the back of these books read like this:

Thomas Moore is a leading lecturer and writer in North America and Europe in areas of archetypal psychology, mythology, and the imagination. He lived as a monk in a Catholic religious' order for twelve years and has degrees in theology, musicology, and philosophy.

This could've been the biographical note of Lord Jim as well:

Gémino H. Abad is a leading professor and author, in demand as an adviser and panelist of many graduate students in the Philippines and many parts of Asia. His poetry and writing delve on the subject areas of archetype, mythology, and the imagination. Though he is not a monk in a Catholic religious order, there are times when people suspect he might have been one.

I have become many things since 1996, and one of those things I have become is a lawyer. And when there are times when I think I am unable to define myself or, in comparison, I have not become as consequential as how others might define a life that matters, I might turn to a Jimmy Abad book, and all might be better. For example, there is this little thing in his book *Getting Real* where he asks the question, "What is the use of poetry?" And in the book he answers this question in many ways, one of them in this manner:

The question may be put another way: *What are poets for?* Because poetry is what they do, and what readers read. So, then: What are lawyers for?—Law; and What are poets for?—Language. But both law and language are instruments, one for the cause of justice, the other for our sense of reality, than which nothing has more practical value in the living.

The poem finally isn't its language; it is the living become word. "Get real," says Franz Arcellana at every writer's workshop. Words do not have their meaning from themselves, but from lives lived. It isn't meaning that language carries, it carries you. The poem's rhythm is the very sensation of living.

So forever undecided on what might be worth doing with one's life, I have chosen for myself, at least for the moment, the sensation of reading, writing, and lawyering, letting language carry me everywhere I want to go. And I have been carried far away and back here to this place again and again by words, by many special people, by Lord Jim. And I count myself very lucky to have been one of Jimmy's Angels, because I do feel many times, despite times of real or imagined failures, that I can soar—yes, like an angel—because I had in my life someone who I feel cared very much for me and my soul.

Andrea Pasion-Flores
UP College of Arts and Letters
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Jimmy Abad stands in the frontline, as dazzling a giant as Ed and Edith Tiempo, Francisco Arcellana, NVM Gonzalez, Ophelia Dimalanta, Cirilo Bautista, and Bienvenido Santos. One hears both compelling philosophy and the rustle of language when he writes. All the time, he creates in defense of both idea and metaphor. And where gentlemen writers stand matchless like the Man of La Mancha, Dr. Abad will never, never apologize for the thoughtful, elegant, and timeless way in which all writing must be carried out.

Some years ago, I had the good fortune of attending his class on Carl Jung and the art of Dream and Writing. I still remember how, because of his mesmerizing lecture on the anima, the room had suddenly come alive. The figures on the paintings all seemed to be gazing back at me. Warm, glowing energy was coming off the walls. Right now, the cynical me thinks that I had simply skipped both breakfast and lunch that day. But that's how a poet can change your way of looking forever.

D. M. Reyes

27 February 2015

To the uninitiated, he is perhaps the biggest cheese of local literature. The mightiest Manchego. And, various as cheese, the man goes by many names: “Jimmy” to friends and intimates, “Dr. Abad” to his colleagues in the academe, “Lord Jim” to the literati, and “Geminiano” to rival Italian poets.

In the hour and a half that has covered our meeting, there has been a cigarette break whereby he has emerged from outdoors with a mischievous smile, stealing puffs from one of his omnipresent Winston Reds as one would cookies from a mason jar. He has spoken cursorily about the state of local literature, referring to you all the while with the signature Abad affix, *kaibigan*. He has turned up poetic tenets you would do well to fix forever in the gray matter between the Our Father and the memory of your first kiss: “Word choice, rhyme, and meter are just communicative skills,” he says, cutting down to size the basic building blocks of poetry, as if Shakespeare’s toys, Berryman’s slangs, and Abad’s playthings were old shoes. After a moment’s pause, he clarifies: “Literature happens when one reaches the ineffable.” You regard the man in front of you, one of local litdom’s most prominent and beloved figures, and know that he speaks from a place where no words break, the one that takes its entire lifetime to reach, the silence that rakes musicians all their lives to play.

Mookie Katigbak Lacuesta

From “Lord Jim,” UNO, October 2009, p. 44

If quantities alone matter in how Abad has made his mark on Philippine literature, his numerous books would perhaps suffice, these having academically guided countless literature and writing students to various careers, literary or not. But it is his intensely personal and enlightened manner of mentoring aspiring and even the more mature young writers that is perhaps most appreciated and remembered, which for these writers exemplifies what is called “influence.”

For despite what the post-modernists and post-structuralists say, that ultimately the author is separate from his work and that the work becomes an almost lifeless artifact to be broken up into fragments and examined under a microscope, the poet Gémino H. Abad, is also his work. . . . Abad belongs to that exemplary literary tradition of the poet-scholars: a creative imagination that is not only self-aware but also conscious and capable of observing the creative process both as a function of individual poet or writer and as a collective act of the imagination.

Not all will find their way in the labyrinth that awaits their discovery and rescue of meaning that he proposes and lays out to anyone wanting to write. Not all will agree with the hints and directions he offers. And some will even differ with and protest his description of the Filipino consciousness as “an intricate multilingual weave, each word there—whether indigenous or adopted—sounding a note of our sensibility.” But none can ignore (and only at their own risk!) the map that he has drawn of our poetic imagination, the rigor of his scholarship, and the passion of his mentoring. For it is towards the maturing of that special sensibility of the poet and writer as narrator and interpreter and creator of symbols of a people’s consciousness that he has ever since devoted his attentions and concern, his expertise, and humble wisdom.

Poets and students have a simple word for Gémino H. Abad’s “style” of instruction and overseeing of literary apprenticeship. It is what is called, in the Filipino manner, *mabait*. The word, as he practices it, neither means lax nor uncaring, but on the contrary, it is the unharsh refusal to let go of the Filipino poet until he finally finds his own voice and peak his part of the national narrative.

Marne L. Kilates

From “The Poet and the Person Are Also His Work”

29 December 2007

Dr. Gémino H. Abad's contribution to the world of letters, as writer, critic, scholar, and literary historian and anthologist, is tremendous. His numerous books and literary awards are eloquent testimony of this—51 books in all. Given the size of the Abad oeuvre, it is not surprising that many people might have only read a fraction of the total. But even that fraction demonstrates the force of his imagination, the rigor of his scholarship, and the beauty of his language, be it poetry or prose. In fact, the originality of the insights and the unique articulation of these with his characteristic precision and elegance are acknowledged even by those who may not agree with him.

His name has become synonymous with Philippine poetry in English and with Philippine literary scholarship and criticism. Everyone knows who said “What is most imagined is what is most real,” “Words already mean before one speaks, yet other shores seem within reach where no words break,” “The world in which one breathes has neither substance nor reality for us apart from our words,” and, perhaps the most memorable, “Philippine literature from English” (rather than in), which is his summary for the process by which Filipinos “colonized” English and made it into an appropriate vehicle for the national experience. This was his protest against the theory that English, imposed upon the Filipino people as the language of power by the colonial masters, had erased the “language of our blood.”

But more important than all those accomplishments and laurels, what earns him the level of respect that his colleagues, students, and younger generations of writers accord him—a respect bordering on reverence—is the recognition of the integrity of his character, and the great moral influence he exerts through the example of his life, which has never been tainted by dishonesty, disloyalty, selfishness, or pettiness.

Besides an illustrious career as member of the UP faculty, Dr. Abad has also served as an academic administrator, both in UP Diliman and the UP System for some 21 years. Among the positions he has held are: Secretary of the University and the Board of Regents, and Vice-President

for Academic Affairs. When close to retirement, he was once again called to serve as Director of then UP Creative Writing Center (now the UP Institute of Creative Writing). He consented to do so and proceeded to transform the small unit into a vibrant, dynamic hub which drew to itself, through its many projects and activities (e.g. the Writers' Night every December, the Madrigal-Gonzalez Best First Book Award, and the Gonzalo Gonzalez Reading Room), not just writers from the other UP campuses, but even writers who were not connected with UP. In short, he made it a force to reckon with in the country's literary life. In this he was helped by a team of graduate students (whom he referred to as his "angels"), who worked basically for free, simply because they loved working for him. The writing program was still fairly young then, but it was attracting some very talented young persons who were delighted to find an outfit that was led by a poet, and such a charming one, too. They also loved his leadership style: a low-key, relaxed style, characterized primarily by trust, openness, warmth, a sincere caring for the welfare of each of them, and a readiness to put in the same long hours as they did. He was always willing to lend his name when he thought it would be helpful to the proponent of a project, but never ever claimed credit, even when, in fact, he deserved it. Those young writers went on to become quite successful, not just in the writing field, but in academe, in publishing, in media, even in government service. It was one of his "angels" who gave him the name "Lord Jim," which struck them all as, at once ironic, since no boss behaved less like a "lord and master," yet also curiously appropriate, since no boss more richly deserved to be treated as lord and master. He continues to answer to that name with a smile.

Lord Jim's manner toward others never discriminates on the basis of social station, political allegiance, or intellectual level, embracing friends and strangers alike, his colleagues as well as his students. It is a manner totally devoid of arrogance, condescension or pedantry. On the other hand, the kindness never translates into accommodation for laxity or sloppiness. Many a student and workshop fellow will talk about how his very lack of harshness or sharpness, his gentleness and consideration, have a greater impact than the biting, mocking, sometimes insulting, words of some mentors.

All who know him find him unfailingly humble, open, fair, generous, and gracious. Many have remarked that he seems not to be motivated by personal gain, that he seems oblivious to wealth, public approval, and other things by which many measure success or failure. But he is unwavering in his commitment to his principles; to the University which put its limited resources at his disposal when it first accepted him as *iskolar ng bayan*; and to the country to which he returned, despite undeniable opportunities open to writers and scholars of his quality in the more developed parts of the world—the country that he continues to tirelessly serve today.

UP Institute of Creative Writing
2016

These days my father recites poems from memory—some Stevens, some Hopkins, a dash of Rilke in the original German. Smiling, his eyes bright, his lips enunciating words he clearly loves, he looks like a boy lost in the world of his paper boat. That’s my Dad in his element.

Growing up in the Abad (A-Not-So-Bad) Household, I found it difficult to imagine “the Gémino” as anyone else other than “Dad.” There were no trophies, plaques, or medals on the wall announcing his Palanca, *Philippines Free Press*, and Catholic Mass Media awards. His books of poetry and essays—in my childhood there were four: *Fugitive Emphasis* (1973); *In Another Light* (1976); *A Formal Approach to Lyric Poetry* (1978); and *The Space Between* (1985)—were on a shelf way above eye level.

Yet he wasn’t an ordinary Dad, to begin with. He drew very well, and rendered for me, among other things, a rather good likeness of Winnie the Pooh and Piglet, too. He also seemed to weave magic, what with his tales of the warlock Gulagung (who, I was convinced, was him in true wizard form), and his loyal companions, Popocateptl the dog and Nicaragua the owl. Long before I knew what my father was really up to, I already admired him and wanted to be like him.

He never really talked about what he did. We would just see him reading in a corner, pen in hand, nodding to himself. 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”; I enclose the word in quotations because his profession is to teach but his work is what he calls his “lifework”—something he loves to do, which drives him and enriches him, and gives him his soul-food.

That his work—reading, writing, research—was important to him, we never doubted. We knew that from the way he would wake up early each day, and, after breakfast, disappear into his room or into his office

in UP. Every waking hour he did not spend with us, with students, with colleagues and friends, at poetry readings or reunions, he would spend with nose in book, magazine clippings, or laptop. It was only when I went to college that I realized the funny man with cup handles for ears (as Mom loved to point out) wasn't only "Dad." "You are Gémino/Jimmy Abad's daughter?" teachers and schoolmates would ask. The teachers would smile and send fond regards. Some of my schoolmates would gasp—one or two even bowed or asked for autographs. Someone from the Silliman Writers' Workshop wrote me and said she, a few gals, and a couple of gays were crushing on him. In grad school, two of my American classmates admitted likewise. This awe seemed strange to his family—he didn't speak of his work, never boasted of his genius, never spoke the way his persona did in his poems. He would only smile whenever we told him about other people's praises, and wear the favored three or four shirts that got laundered over and over again and placed in his closet on top of all the other shirts he had forgotten were there, too.

Cyan Abad-Jugo

From "Dad in His Element," *Bookwatch*, April-June 2007, pp. 21-22

This may come as a surprise to most of you, but Papa was a sports aficionado. He was a devoted Crispa and San Miguel fan, and 100 percent anti-Jaworski. I would sit beside him, and he would patiently answer silly, impertinent questions like “Why not a four-point play?” or “Why is it called free throw?” Through Papa, I learned to love the sport, and much to my Mom’s chagrin, dinner would be delayed, because the two of us would be glued to the tube until the last two minutes were up.

And when we, his children, uttered the dreadful “I am bored, Papa!” he would smile and say, “Stand and walk on your head!” which I, of course, being the mischievous one, attempted. It was never a successful endeavor, though I did forget about my boredom, which, looking back, was probably the point of the whole exercise.

Cybele Abad-Alvaran
27 February 2015