

# FAIGAO *Oniana*

by **AVELINA J. GIL**

I FIRST met Mr. Faigao in 1949; he was one of the half dozen teachers I met all at once, but it was he alone I remembered of the lot. He was not an easy man to forget, more especially because his disarming friendliness and dry humor cropped up every time I encountered him.

How aptly that word "encountered" identifies our every discussion! He had a witty tongue, which was, however, tempered by his deprecating smile — somehow, he gave me the feeling that if he cracked the quip with me, I felt complimented to have him think I could take it.

Once, for instance, a lady teacher came to school with her long hair cut and waved into a mass of short curls. Wailed Cone with mock sorrow, "Oh, her clowning glory!"

But he was not always poking fun at others. He also had his serious hours when his ideals would gleam through his facetious comments. Once at the beginning of the semester, years ago when teachers could teach any number of classes and increase their income thereby, I knew that one of Mr. Faigao's classes had been literally grabbed by another. He made no move to claim the class back from that teacher, much less to report the matter to the dean, and when I asked him why, he was so passive about the "theft," he explained with no histrionics or oratory, "You know, it does something to a man's soul if he fights over money." He did not explain further. I did not ask any more. I felt chided that I should have thought him the kind that fights over money; I felt abashed to have him think that I should be that kind.

Then when Mr. Faigao was appointed Head of the English Department, I went over to congratulate him. Laughing, he replied, "I feel as though I am more the foot than the head!" I too laughed, never dreaming that I would make the same remark five years later.

As head of the department, he worked without fanfare. Only now do I know that he had prepared a detailed outline of a textbook for

English I with plans for a joint authorship with two other teachers of English; he helped prepare the descriptions of the English subjects in the prospectus. He humbly declared himself not any better than the other teachers of English; why, therefore, should he hold faculty meetings? What he would say in a meeting he simply told the individual teachers, there being only half a dozen of us then.

He was humble for the rest of the teachers too. A couple of years ago, I once held forth on the frivolity of the Faculty Club — existing solely to hold dinners, parties, and picnics, each one an informal fashion show for the ladies. Like a passionate reformer, I was enthusiastic over organizing games like charades and vocabulary quizzes with, probably, memory games for relaxation in between. Cone heard me through and then gently dampened my ardor by saying, "Don't overestimate my intelligence. If the Faculty Club parties had those for entertainment, I would not appear at all." And I held my peace after that.

If he knew that I have written this much about him, he would perhaps squirm in embarrassment and say with his eyes glinting with amusement, "You are dissecting me to honor me. Please let me rest in one piece!" ‡

Bury me?  
Bury my body?  
My body is not I.  
You will not succeed  
in burying me!

(SOCRATES)

## *Anecdotes*

I OFTEN wondered, with whimsical curiosity, whether I would ever get a chance to see Mr. Faigao lose his temper. He seemed to me unusually calm and collected even in the face of trying provocations.

I was seated at the faculty table with him one day when somebody tactlessly dropped a scathing remark that made us, faculty members, seem like mercenary, miserable beggars. I felt the blood rise to my face, but I was too stunned to hit back. I shot a glance at Mr. Faigao expecting him to take up the fight. His lips quivering with suppressed anger, he stood up abruptly and with that characteristic shuffling gait walked out of the room.

A few minutes after the offender had left, he came back visibly pacified. Before I could tease him about his retreat, he offered an explanation: "I had to walk out, Inday. I was afraid I could not contain myself."

That magnificent self-control! I was reminded of Newman's definition of a gentleman.

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I will always remember Mr. Faigao's quiet, refreshing humor. Commenting on the strong nationalistic

Faigao Taking a Siesta





Faigao in New York

## In Memoriam

not good enough. And I still remember how so determined I was to get a better grade that, the night before another themewriting day (he used to give us the topics to mull over for a day or so), I sat up half of the night thinking about how I would write my theme. No other teacher had made me do that.

sentiment in his works, I asked him, "Are you really as nationalistic as your works sound?"

"Definitely," he answered readily. "You can see that even in my complexion."

Leonor Borrromeo

**T**HERE was a short program before the traditional dinner given by San Carlos for the Faculty to celebrate THREE KINGS. We had group singing among the faculty and even the Fathers contributed a chorus on the significance of Christmas. Most of the songs were sung in English and the Fathers sang some songs in German. While the Fathers were still singing the late Faigao ambled from one group to another among the Faculty. "What, no Christmas song in the dialect or in the Filipino language? We ought to put up a number in the vernacular."

In one of his classes in Philippine literature he showed his dislike of the practice of Filipino parents in giving their children American names. "Why should we name our boys Bobby, or John, or Bill? Why not call them Lapu-Lapu, Bataan, or Sikatuna? They are just as stylish as American names, and shall I say more meaningful?"

He really meant what he told the class. In fact two of his children are named Bataan and Mabuhay.

d. Floreto

# Once I Had A Teacher

by **LOURDES VARELA**

**H**IS NAME was Cornelio F. Faigao.

I first saw him on a July morning some ten years ago. I was one of the forty or so students in his English I class at the old college building which now houses the Girls' High School.

He came into the room, his felt hat in his hand and a Woolley and Scott English handbook under his arm. He walked without hurrying until he reached the teacher's platform. Then he gently laid his hat on a corner of the table, opened his book, and quietly began to explain nouns.

That was the beginning of a long and rewarding association with a teacher who turned out to be one of the finest I have ever had.

He was not exactly a slave-driver, but he unfailingly taught us to do our best. I still remember how he found fault with my first themes. I had thought they were carefully written but to him, they simply were

But if he was relentless in ferreting out our mistakes, he was most assiduous in praising us for work well done. He would, after correcting them, set aside the best themes and ask their writers to read them to the class. Very often, the reading would be punctuated by "There! that's what I call a striking adjective!" or "I like that very much" or "Don't you think of the writer as a vibrant, fully alive person?" How the writers' faces glowed!

He was a real educator. He brought out the best in his students by using a special brand of magic common to all great teachers—he believed in their worth. To the point of almost embarrassing his students, he would sing their praises whenever he had a chance. He saw in his young boys and girls potential short story writers, essayists, and poets. If faith can move mountains, then he certainly did. A classmate, after getting a few dreary 3's for her themes, began to work in earnest (after gentle prodding from Mr. Faigao) and finally received a 1. Another wrote her first short-short story (an almost flawless one, too) because Mr. Faigao had talked her into believing that she could. There was an essay writing contest he asked me to participate in. Before the contest began, I lost my nerve and wanted to back out. In walked Mr. Faigao, looking stern. "Young lady," he said, "I know you can do it. Now go out there and do your best." Because he refused to believe that his students were mediocre, they gratefully set out to prove him right. If that is not the sound educational psychology, I don't know what is.

Above all, I shall be always grateful to Mr. Faigao for opening our  
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### CHRONOLOGY OF FAIGAO'S LIFE

- 1908. Mar. 31. Born at Jones, Romblon
- 1922. Graduated valedictorian from Banton Elementary School
- 1925. Graduated salutatorian from Romblon High School
- 1929. Graduated from the University of the Philippines, Bachelor of Science in Education
- 1930. Recognized as a short-story writer with the publication of his "Violins with Broken Strings"
- 1940. Passed the bar examinations
- 1949. Appointed Head of the English Department, University of San Carlos
- 1951. Awarded First Prize in the Literary Contests in connection with the Golden Jubilee of the Educational System in the Philippines for his poem "The Brown Child"
- 1952. Mar. 13. Founded the "Daily News"
- 1954. Awarded a Foreign Leadership Grant to observe rural newspapering and teaching college English
- 1959. May 8. Died of liver ailment at the Cebu Velez General Hospital