

# Gémino H. Abad Biography

Born 5 February 1939, Sta. Ana, Manila. His parents are the noted novelist, playwright, and essayist in Sugbuanon and Spanish, Antonio M. Abad, who was at one time Chair of the Department of Spanish in the University of the Philippines (UP), and Jesusa H. Abad, professor of Spanish in U.P. He is married to Mercedes A. Rivera, with whom he has five children: Celeste Alda (now Cyan Abad Jugo, Antonio Jose (deceased), Cybele Lara (now Cybele Abad Alvaran), David Gémino, and Diego Jose (married to Mikki Montenegro).

He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, magna cum laude, from UP, 1963, and has been teaching English literature and creative writing since then in the UP Department of English and Comparative Literature, even after retirement in 2004. He earned his Master's degree with honors, 1966, and Ph.D. in English, 1970, from the University of Chicago under a Rockefeller fellowship grant. In 1993, he was appointed University Professor in Literature, the highest academic rank at the University of the Philippines.

At UP, he served as Secretary of the University and the Board of Regents, 1977-1982; as Vice-President for Academic Affairs, 1987-1990; and as Director of Likhaan: the UP Creative Writing Center, 1995-1998. He was the first holder of the Carlos P. Romulo Professorial Chair in Literature, 1982-83, and received the UP Outstanding Faculty Award for 1985-86. He was also holder of the Irwin Chair for Literature at the Ateneo de Manila University, 1993. He received the Chancellor's Award as Best Office Administrator in 1998 for his management of the UP Creative Writing Center as its Director.

He was a Fellow at the Cambridge Seminar, Trinity College, University of Cambridge, 1988; a Fellow in the International Writers Program, University of Iowa, 1990; a Visiting Professor at the Center for Philippine Studies, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, 1991; a Fellow at the Oxford Conference on Teaching Literature Overseas, Corpus Christi College, 1995; and Exchange Professor in Literature at St. Norbert College, Wisconsin, 1998, and at Singapore Management University, 2003.

He is also a member of the UP Writers Club and founding member of the Philippine Literary Arts Council (PLAC) which puts out the *Caracoa* (since 1981)—the only poetry journal in English in Asia.

During the Material Law period, five poets – Abad, Cirilo F. Bautista, Ricardo M. de Ungria, Alfredo Navarro Salanga, and Alfred A. Yuson - banded together on 8 September 1981, and founded the Philippine Literary Arts Council (PLAC). They put out the *Caracoa*, possibly at the time the only poetry journal in English in Asia, which provided an outlet for many young writers. With the generous support of many patrons, especially Michael Adams and Agnes Arellano, the *Caracoa* lasted for 27 issues (Sept. 1982 to 2003). (The PLAC has recently been revived by a new crop of young poets: it came out with a silver issue of *Caracoa* in 2006).. /

The PLAC membership grew over the years. It held in the Pinaglabanan Art Gallery, in U.P and other venues, a regular exhibit of its members' and others' poetry called Chromatexts: the chromatext is usually a poem in the poet's own longhand with the poet's own illustration of it. With support from the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), the PLAC also started a National Poetry Reading Circuit, touring various school campuses in Metro Manila, Baguio, Dumaguete, Iloilo, and Cebu where they read their poems with other local in those places. (These-projects may have planted the seed for the current interest in poetry reading, "performance poetry," and poetry exhibits in art galleries, like Mag+net, Conspiracy, and other venues.)

When Ninoy Aquino was assassinated on 21 August 1983, the PLAC published in time ‘ for Ninoy’s birthday in November that year a yellow pamphlet of poems, *In Memoriam: A Poetic Tribute to Benigno S. Aquino, Jr. by Five Filipino Poets* [Abad, Bautista, Salanga, de Ungria, and Yuson].

Sometime also during the early 1980’s, Virgilio S. Almario (Rio Alma), who was later to become a National Artist for Literature, invited Abad to be an adviser of *Galian sa Arte* at Tula, an organization of writers in Filipino that Rio Alma had founded, which to the present, under a new name, *Lira*, holds regularly a writers’ workshop for writers in Filipino.

He has served as director and member of the teaching staff in numerous Writers Workshops (UP, Silliman/Dumaguete, MSU-IT, San Carlos University/Cornelio Faigao Workshop, etc.); as judge in various literary contests (Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards, Graphic, Free Press, NVM Gonzalez Fiction Awards, Maningning Miclat Literary Awards, etc.); and as speaker/paper reader in various writers’ national conferences and various international conferences of scholars.

He was a plenary speaker at the First International Conference on Postcolonial Praxis, 21-23 July 2010, NISMED Auditorium, UP Diliman campus (his paper, “A Poetics of Writing”); and the first keynote speaker in the Adrian E. Cristobal Lecture series at the 36th UMPIL Congress, 28 August 2010, at the Toyota Center, Romulo Hall, UP Diliman (his paper, “The Future Is First Shaped by Words”).

Last 12 September 2012, he was the keynote speaker (his paper: “Teaching English: Language and Literature”) at the National Conference of English Teachers (organized by the CDCE: Council of Department Chairpersons of English and the CETA: College English Teachers Association) in SMX Convention Center, Mall of Asia; and last 14 November 2012, keynote speaker (his paper: “Terra Firma: Philippine Poetry in English”) at the 3rd Philippine International Literary Festival (organized by the National Book Development Board/ Manila Critics Circle) in Filipinas Heritage Library.

He was also a columnist in *The Manila Chronicle* (a weekly column called “Exchange,” with NVM Gonzalez, Sylvia Ventura, and Luning Bonifacio Ira); *The Evening Paper* (a weekly column called “Coming Through,” with NVM Gonzalez and Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo); *Musa: The Philippine Literature Magazine* (a monthly column called “Vates: Our Poets Speak”); and *Flip* (a monthly column called “Poet’s Clearing”).

He is cited in *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, 1992, as among “poets of note.” He is also included in the *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, ed. Eugene Benson and L. W. Conolly (London: Routledge, 1994) and the *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* (IX: Philippine Literature), 1994.

He represented his country in the 3<sup>rd</sup> “Mediterranea Intercontinental Festival of Literature and the Arts” in Rome, July 2006.

He again represented his country at the “First Congress of Iranian and World’s Poets” in Tehran, Isfahan and Shiraz (April 17-22, 2010), at the “XX International Poetry Festival of Medellin” in Colombia (8-17 July 2010); at the International Poetry Festival in Granada, Nicaragua (17-24 February 2013); and in 2017, at the International Literary Festival in Kosovo (in Croatia), Sept. 3-7, and at the Literary Festival in Singapore, Nov. 2-6 (at both festivals, he was a guest speaker).

In 2011, he made a “deed of donation” to U.P for the annual prize money for the outstanding UP College of Arts and Letters BA, MA, and Ph. D. thesis/dissertation - this is called the Antonio Mercado Abad CAL Outstanding Thesis Awards.

In 2012, he made another donation to the National Book Development Board (NBDB)/Manila Critics Circle (MCC) for the annual prize money for poetry in English - this is called the Philippine Literary Arts Council (PLAC) Poetry Award.

In 2015, an anonymous donor funded the annual U.P. Gémino H. Abad Prize for Poetry and Criticism.

In 2018, the UP Likhaan: Institute of Creative Writing named its annual Teachers' Seminar-Workshop on Teaching Literature after him.

### **Awards / Honors**

The Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature: first prize for poetry in English, 1976 (for "The Space Between"); second prize, 1980 (for "Counterclockwise"); first prize, 1983 (for "The Other Clearing").

The CCP Award for Poetry: second prize, 1973, for "In Another Light."

Outstanding Faculty Award for 1985-1986, University of the Philippines.

Manila Critics Circle National Book Award for poetry, 1988 (for *Poems and Parables*); for anthology, 1989 (for *Man of Earth*), 1993 (for *A Native Clearing*), 1999 (for *A Habit of Shores*); for personal anthology, 2002 (for *A Makeshift Sun*) and 2005 (for *In Ordinary Time*); for literary criticism, 2008 (for *Our Scene So Fair: Filipino Poetry in English, 1905 to 1955*); for best anthology, 2013 (for *Hoard of Thunder: Philippine Short Stories in English, 1990 to 2008, 2 vols.*).

Asian Publishers Catholic Authors Award, 1990.

Free Press Literary Awards: third prize for the short story, "Tarang," 1993; first prize for the short story, "Introibo," 1997; first prize for the essay, "A Day in One's Life," 1997; second prize for the poem, "A Description," 2000.

Gawad Pambansang Alagad ni Balagtas, 1996, for lifetime achievement in poetry and literary criticism.

UPAA [UP Alumni Association] Professional Award in Literature, 1997.

Ellen F. Fajardo Foundation Grant for Excellence in Teaching, 2000-01.

Chancellor's Award for Best Literary Work, 2002 (for *A Makeshift Sun*).

Patnubay ng Sining at Kalinangan sa Larangan ng Panitikan, Lungsod ng Maynila, 2004.

Outstanding alumnus, F.E.U., 2007 (Abad finished his elementary schooling and the first two years of high school at Far Eastern University)

U.P. Centennial Fellow, 2008.

Premio Feronia (Italy's International Award: foreign author category), 2009. This was for a selection of poems from *In Ordinary Time: Poems, Parables, Poetics* (UP Press, 2004) translated into Italian by Gözim Hajdari and Amoà Fatuiva under the title, *Dove le parole non si spezzano*. A bilingual (Italian/English) edition, under the same title, ed. Gözim Hajdari, tr. Andrea Gazzoni; afterword by Carla Locatelli, was later published (Rome: Ensemble, 2015).

National Book Award (from the Manila Critics Circle/National Book Development Board), 2009, for his book of literary criticism, 'Our Scene So Fair': *Filipino Poetry in English, 1905 to 1955* (U. P. Press, 2008).

Ani ng Dangal Award (NCCA/Philippine President's award), 2010. Gawad Dangal ng Lahi (Don Palanca Memorial Foundation Award), 2015.

Member emeritus, National Research Council of the Philippines (NRCPP), 2018.