

1-1-2024

Ricardo G. Abad: The Curtain Comes Down

Jonathan O. Chua

Ateneo de Manila University, jchua@ateneo.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://archium.ateneo.edu/paha>

Recommended Citation

Chua, Jonathan O. (2024) "Ricardo G. Abad: The Curtain Comes Down," *Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities Asia*: Vol. 14: No. 1, Article 11.

Available at: <https://archium.ateneo.edu/paha/vol14/iss1/11>

This Feature and Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Ateneo Journals at Archium Ateneo. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities Asia by an authorized editor of Archium Ateneo.

Jonathan Chua

RICARDO G. ABAD

The Curtain Comes Down

Throughout his professional career, Ricardo G. Abad (b. August 10, 1946; d. December 26, 2023) wore two hats. He was a professor of sociology at the Ateneo de Manila and a director and actor on the campus and the national theater scene.

Abad was the child of Jose Tagle Abad and Rosie Cabuco Gianchand, and the husband of Elizabeth Uy-Eviota, a sociologist. He finished high school at the Ateneo de Manila in 1962 and finished an AB in Sociology in 1966 at the same university. He taught at Notre Dame de Jolo College in 1966–67 before going to the United States to obtain a PhD in Sociology from Fordham University in 1975.

Returning to the Ateneo de Manila, he began teaching at its Department of Sociology and Anthropology in 1976, and became the chairman of the department in 1979–87 and in 2014–17. At various times, he was also consultant, researcher, or fellow at different research institutes, including the East-West Center of the University of Hawaii, the Philippine Social Sciences Council, the Social Weather Station, and the Commission on Higher Education. He was the director of the Institute of Philippine Culture in 1977–80.

As a sociologist, he authored or co-authored articles and reports on migration, poverty, population, religiosity, and popular culture, among other topics. He was also on the editorial team of the journals *Philippine Studies*, *Philippine Sociological Review*, and the *Loyola Schools Review*.

His achievement as a theater director and actor, however, overshadowed his sociological career. He acted in or directed about a hundred shows in the Philippines and elsewhere, for which he received a Hall of Fame award from the Aliw Awards Foundation in 2017, the foremost recognition in theater in the Philippines.

As early as 1957, Abad was in the Ateneo Children's Theater's production of *The Prince and Pauper* and in the 1960s, he acted in productions of the Ateneo Experimental Theater, founded by Rolando S. Tinio. He also directed and acted while he was at the Notre Dame de Jolo.

Abad emerged in the national theater scene in the early 1980s, in the productions of Tinio's Teatro Pilipino at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. In 1985, he became the moderator of Tanghalang Ateneo, a position he held until 2013. Many of the plays he directed or acted in for Tanghalang Ateneo were translations or adaptations of Western classics, including the tragedies and comedies of Shakespeare. Aside from Tanghalang Ateneo, he also worked with the World Theatre Project, the Metropolitan Theater Guild, and Dulaang UP.

He was the founding director of the Fine Arts Program of the Ateneo de Manila, the artistic director of Bulwagang Bughaw, the president of the Role Players Inc., founding member of the UNESCO-ITI Network for Higher Education in the Performing Arts in 2013; the international director of the National School of Drama in New Delhi, India, board member of the Asian Shakespeare Association, and president of the Asia-Pacific Bond of Theater Schools, 2019-21.

Among his most memorable works were *Death of Memory* (2007) and *Sintang Dalisay* (2011), for both of which he was named

best director at the Aliw Awards. The latter is an adaptation of G. D. Roke's adaptation in *awit* form of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, titled "Ang Sintang Dalisay ni Julieta at Romeo" (1901), combined with Rolando Tinio's Filipino translation of *Romeo and Juliet*. *Sintang Dalisay* sets the action in a Muslim community and features *kulintang* music and the traditional *igal* choreography. The show was restaged in Belarus, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Malaysia.

Abad's interest in intercultural creation in theater is shown in his articles in theater scholarship, such as "Appropriating Shakespeare and Resisting Colonialism: Reflections of A Stage Director," in *Transnationalizing Culture in Asia: Dramas, Musics and Tourism*, edited by Hiroko Nagai and Tito Valiente; "Shakespeare as Cultural Capital: Its Rise, Fall and Renaissance in Elite Education," in *Shakespeare's Asian Journeys*, edited by Beatrice Li and Judy Ick; and "Localizing Shakespeare as Folk Performance: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Sintang Dalisay*, and the *Igal* of the Sama Bajau in Southern Philippines," published in this journal in 2020.

Abad's unique hand rests on his combination of sociological insights and theater practice. Teaching sociology, he would use theater techniques to enliven the class. His innovative teaching practices resulted in various recognitions, including the Most Outstanding Teacher Award from the Metrobank Foundation in 2001. His artistic choices are sensitive to sociological realities. For example, his take of *The Taming of the Shrew* (translated as *Pagpapaamo sa Maldita*) turns it, as Fernando Zialcita observed, into an allegory of the American colonization of the Philippines and Filipino resistance. Theater, he also remarked, "is not just an art. It is a weapon of change."

In 2017, he became professor emeritus of the Ateneo de Manila University and began his appointment as artistic director of Areté, the creativity and innovation hub of the university. He died while still holding that position.

One of his last productions, just as the university was beginning to reopen after the lockdowns from the COVID pandemic, was *Sarising Soneto: An Evening of Shakespearean Sonnets in English and Filipino* on April 21–22, 2023, at The Doreen Black Box of the Areté complex. Various theater actors, including Banaue Miclat-Janssen, Leo Rialp, and Sonia Roco recited translations of sonnets, mostly Shakespeare’s but also others’, in an immersive dinner-theater setting.

Abad is fondly remembered by family, colleagues, students, and peers in a collection of eulogies *Build and Destroy: Remembering Ricardo G. Abad*, edited by Missy Maramara. A fragment from Abad’s reflections on theater during the lockdowns reads: “Post-corona theater . . . ought to be a theater of humanity, one that is able to recognize pain and use it as a stimulus to generate compassion and gratitude to all peoples.” The eulogies in the collection attest that Abad’s theater had succeeded in being so before any pandemic snuffed the lights out of houses worldwide.

JONATHAN CHUA

jchua@ateneo.edu

Ateneo de Manila University