
Remy Sylado and the Two Brouwers: The Stage of Bandung in the 1970's and It's Memories

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Introduction

On December 12, 2022, the renowned Indonesian writer Remy Sylado¹⁾ passed away at the age of 78. Tributes commemorating his death



photo 1

Remy Sylado (1945-2022)

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lauded him as “Maestro” and a “Walking Encyclopedia,” celebrating his prolific career across literature, music, painting, and criticism. He was a recipient of numerous literary awards and cultural honors. Yet, his final years were spent bedridden at home, cared for by his wife, and marked by a complete cessation of creative endeavors and irreparable damage to his personal life. His passing, alone in a quiet room, was a somber and solitary end for someone of his stature.

While Sylado's artistic reach extended across multiple domains, his creative journey began in theater²⁾. After graduating from the ATNI Theater

1) Remy Sylado (1945–2022), whose real name was Yapi Tambayong, was born in Makassar, South Sulawesi. He was active as a writer, playwright, and musician. In 2005, he was awarded the Satya Lencana Cultural Medal of Honor. Sylado left behind many novels that shed light on lesser-known aspects of history, including *Ca-Bau-Kan* (1999), which depicts the fate of a local woman and a Chinese man who meet in a brothel in colonial Batavia, and *Namaku Matahari* (My Name is Matahari: 2011), a story about Mata Hari, a dancer who operated as a spy during World War I. In 2002, he won the Khatulistiwa Literary Award, Indonesia's most prestigious literary prize, for *Kerudung Merah Kirmiji* (*The Scarlet Veil*), and in 2015, he received the Southeast Asian Writers Award from the Thai Royal Family. [photo 1]

2) Sylado's highest educational attainment was at the Drama Academy ATNI, where he declared, “Theatre is a synthesis of literature, music, and painting” (Tambayong 1981, p.39).

Academy in Central Java in 1965, Sylado began his theatrical career in 1970 in Bandung, 15 years after the Asia_Africa conference. The political landscape had shifted dramatically following the 9/30 Incident of 1965, with Soekarno's regime giving way to Soeharto's pro-Western policies. Under Soekarno, Western culture had been dismissed as incompatible with "Indonesian identity," but Soeharto's government welcomed its influence. After years of martial law and violent purges of alleged communists, Western counterculture—embodied by long hair, blue jeans, and psychedelic aesthetics—suddenly flooded cities such as Bandung, captivating the youth.

"At that time, Remy was an extraordinary firework," recalled Boy Worang³⁾, who performed in every one of Sylado's productions from his early days in Bandung to his final stage in 2017. "And when the firework fades, all that remains is ash."

No recordings exist of Sylado's groundbreaking theatrical productions in Bandung, which reflect the era's technological limitations. Unlike today, when digital media ensures permanence, video-recording equipment was prohibitively expensive. Moreover, Sylado himself showed little interest in documenting or preserving his work. Rarely repeating performances, he allowed most of his scripts to be lost over time. Thus, no concrete evidence of his theatrical brilliance remains—yet this ephemeral nature is precisely what solidifies his reputation as a "firework." His impact transcends the titles of "Maestro" or the litany of awards he received; it exists in the fleeting yet unforgettable moments he created.

As cultural critic Susanto aptly remarked: "Indeed, it feels impossible to discuss Remy Sylado from just one perspective... It seems modernity

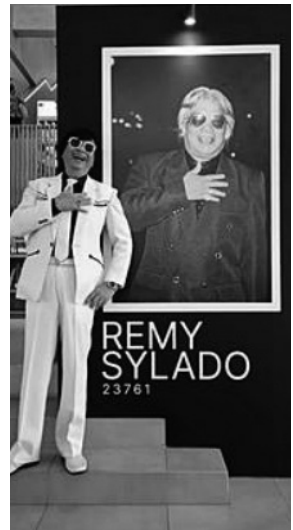


photo 2

©photo by the author

3) Boy Worang is a dramatist and social activist based in Bandung. [photo 2]

itself cannot keep pace with his movement and style.⁴⁾” Sylado’s dynamic and multifaceted nature defied simple categorization, making him a figure who appeared different depending on the observer’s viewpoint—yet whose essence was undeniable in every portrayal.

Phelan famously argued that theatrical performances are inherently irreproducible; no technology, no matter how advanced, can recreate them. They exist solely in the memories of those who witnessed them⁵⁾. To uncover the essence of Sylado—the creator of such ephemeral memories—I conducted repeated interviews with 60 individuals, including theater colleagues, close relatives, and friends who knew him during his lifetime⁶⁾. The Sylado they described often appeared riddled with contradictions, and the more I listened, the more elusive his true nature became. Yet, as if realizing that a seemingly simple spark of a fire work is actually part of an enormous sphere, I saw the contradictions themselves beginning to reveal a fuller, more authentic portrait of Sylado—a man seemingly shaped by those very paradoxes.

Why was Sylado able to so profoundly move the youth who witnessed his performances? How impactful were his productions? With these

4) Susanto 2019.

5) Phelan 1993.

6) In the course of writing this manuscript, I greatly appreciated the input provided by many individuals between February 2023 and November 2024. I would like to extend my special thanks to the following individuals for their invaluable support: Mr. Adi Ferry, Mr. Agus Sutanto, Mr. Agus Wahyudi, Ms. Ameriawati Atmadibrata, Mr. Anang Darsono, Mr. Arthur S. Nalan, Mr. Benny Soebardja, Mr. Boy Worang, Mr. Budi Ipank Pamungkas, Mr. Budi T. Assor, Mr. Cahyo N., Mr. Candra Gautama, Ms. Dinah St Gandhina, Mr. Doel Sumbang, Ms. Eleonora Moniung, Ms. Emmy Maria Louise Tambayong, Ms. Ermy Kulit, Mr. Ery Saprudin, Mr. Fahd Prasajo, Mr. Faiz Manshur, Ms. Frida Apriliani, Ms. Hana Sihombing, Mr. Ibnu Wahyudi, Mr. Isa Perkasa, Ms. Jais Darga, Mr. Jan Hartland, Mr. Januar P. Ruswita, Ms. Jeanelle C. Virginia, Ms. Jenny Huis, Mr. Jose Rizal Manua, Ms. Johanna Sophie Tambayong, Mr. Kemal Ferdiansyah, Mr. Kin Sanubary, Ms. Linda Ingrid, Ms. Monica Herlina, Mr. M. Yoesoef, Mr. Muhammad Syafrin Zaini, Mr. Muhammad Yusuf, Mr. Odang danaatmadja, Mr. Pamuki, Mr. Pax Benedanto, Mr. Peter Basuki, Ms. Rama Simanjuntak, Mr. Ratu Albert Moniung, Ms. Renny Jajusman, Ms. Ria Setyawati, Mr. Rosyd G. Abby, Mr. Saptari, Mr. Seno Gumira Adjidarma, Mr. Supriyo Priyanto, Mr. Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, Ms. Suwari, Mr. Tatang Ramadhan Bouqie, Mr. Teha Sugiyono, Mr. Tekad Fajar Bowo Waluyo, Mr. Untung Hadi Makalidirdja, Mr. Yanov Ukur, Mr. Yehana Setyo Rahardjo, Ms. Yenny Taksha Tambayong, Mr. Yoseph Ai Pradja, and Mr. Yudhistira ANM Massardi.

questions in mind, this paper seeks to delve into Sylado's legacy through the narratives of those who experienced his "extraordinary firework" firsthand, aiming to uncover the ways in which those memories have shaped their lives. It also attempts to decode the dualities and contradictions within Sylado's inner self, with insights drawn from two Dutchmen who shared the name "Brouwer."

Sylado on Braga Street

The capital city of West Java, Bandung, was built as a colonial city in the cool highlands and has long been referred to as Paris Van Java⁷⁾. Remy Sylado arrived in this city in 1968 at the age of 23.

By the time he was 20, Sylado had attended the ATNI Theater Academy in Solo⁸⁾, Central Java, and had even published a novel featuring photographs of himself playing the protagonist⁹⁾. After completing his studies, he worked for a magazine in Semarang, the provincial capital where he had spent his middle school years. While there, he contributed columns and critiques on



photo 3

©Remy Sylado1966/B.P.,C.V. Alliance

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- 7) "Paris Van Java" is also the title of a novel by Sylado, published in 2002. It depicts the hardships of a Dutch couple who came to Bandung during the colonial era.
- 8) ATNI (Akademi Teater Nasional Indonesia) was a higher education institution for contemporary theater established in the 1950s in Jakarta, Denpasar, and Solo. It aimed to develop professional actors, directors, and stage technicians who could perform both nationally and internationally, and to create theater as a national art that reflects the diverse cultures of Indonesia. It existed until around 1968. (Sumardjo, 1992)
- 9) The novelist Seno Gumira Adjidarma introduces and analyzes Sylado's debut work, *Inani Keke*, a play set in 17th-century North Sulawesi and crafted using playwriting techniques, accompanied by photographs in *Tempo* (Adjidarma, 2024, September 8). He also explores another work by Sylado in the same format, *Trabar Batalla*, which depicts a mestizo youth living in Minahasa during the Spanish colonial era. Adjidarma argues that these works, despite adopting the style reminiscent of formulaic dime novels, are distinguished by a dynamic blend of Sylado's historical and multilingual "encyclopedic" knowledge, visual elements inspired by 1960s contemporary fashion, and insights that resonate with postcolonial discourse (Adjidarma, 2024, October 6, 20). [photo 3]



photo 4

©photo by the author

theater to various media outlets. On a visit to Bandung during this period, he attended a performance by Studi Teater Bandung (STB), the city’s prestigious theater troupe. Sylado submitted a critique to a local newspaper, describing the performance as “formulaic.” This comment angered the troupe’s senior members, though younger actors secretly applauded it¹⁰⁾. This incident forged a connection between Sylado and Bandung’s young performers, prompting his eventual move to the city.

Since the Asia-Africa Conference in 1955, the city’s main street had been renamed Asia-Africa Street. This thoroughfare intersected with Braga Street, the bustling heart of Bandung’s colonial-era commercial district, at Merdeka Hall, the site of the historic conference. Lined with shops, restaurants, and cinemas, Braga Street also housed the YPK Hall¹¹⁾, a rehearsal space for various theater troupes. Here, Sylado established his base in Bandung. According to the poet Sutardji Carzoum Bachri¹²⁾, who had a close friendship with Sylado during that era, Sylado seemed starved for the stage at the time. Quickly gathering a group of local youth, he wrote and staged four original productions within just one year¹³⁾. When a theater academy¹⁴⁾ was established in Bandung in 1970,

10) Tempo No. 47/41, 2013.

11) The Gedung Yayasan Pusat Kebudayaan (Cultural Centre Foundation Hall) was used as a recreation facility for lower-class Dutch during the colonial era and became a center for the independence movement in Bandung at the beginning of the 20th century. In October 2024, the roof collapsed owing to aging. (<http://narasisejarah.id/gedung-yayasan-pusat-kebudayaan-dalam-lintasan-sejarah-indonesia/>)

12) Sutardji Carzoum Bachri is a poet from Riau, Sumatra. After enrolling at a university in Bandung, he formed connections with Sylado and others. He is known for his unique style of creative work, advocating for the “liberation of words from meaning” and drawing inspiration from mantras (spells).
[photo 4]

13) Sylado 2002, p. 295.

14) The Akademi Sosial dan Seni (Academy of Social and Art), commonly known as Akademi Sinematografi.

Sylado was hired as one of its instructors.

On the first day of class at the newly established academy, a young Boy Worang was startled by the sight of his teacher. With long hair flowing past his shoulders, a floral aloha shirt, and purple eyeshadow visible beneath his sunglasses, Sylado stood out in every way. Worang recognized him as the man he had often seen squatting near YPK Hall with two hippie-styled companions, observing passersby. Those two companions—a man and a woman—were also part of Sylado's theatrical circle.

From that day forward, Worang, along with his classmate Jan Hartland, joined Sylado and his companions. They began sitting along the roadside near the campus, eventually occupying a corner of Braga Street. This group of long-haired youths marked the beginning of Dapur Teater 23761¹⁵⁾, the theater troupe founded and led by Sylado.

The Maverick Dapur Teater

Dapur Teater 23761 was fundamentally different from the aforementioned STB in every respect. According to Sumardjo, modern Indonesian theater originated during the colonial era among amateur theater groups formed by the indigenous elite. Unlike tonil, Western-style entertainment troupes catering to colonizers, these groups performed classical works such as Shakespeare and served as



photo 5

Remy Sylado and Boy Worang in the 70's ©Boy Worang

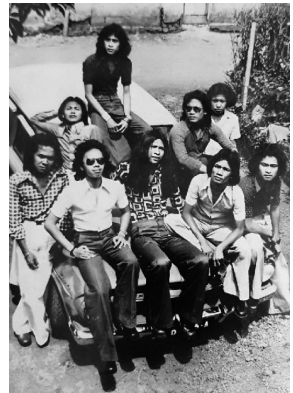


photo 6

The Maverick Dapur Teater
©Boy Worang

15) The number 23761 represents the musical notes "Re Mi Si La Do" in numeric form. It is said to be inspired by the opening of The Beatles' "And I Love Her." However, according to Sylado's sister Yenny, it commemorates the date July 23, 1961, when a 16-year-old Sylado first performed with a band at a celebration, which was also their mother's birthday, becoming popular.

social spaces for cultivating Western cultural refinement. They flourished in cities such as Batavia (Jakarta), Bandung, and Yogyakarta, eventually becoming a driving force behind the independence movement.

After independence, new theater troupes emerged across the country, inheriting the idealism of these earlier groups. STB was one such troupe¹⁶⁾. Founded by students from the prestigious Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), STB focused on adapting works such as Shakespeare or Chekhov. During the Cold War, it became Bandung’s most prominent establishment theater troupe, receiving financial support from embassies of countries from both the Eastern and Western blocs, representing the playwrights’ homelands. Around the time of Suharto’s rise to power, the troupe was even commissioned by the military to perform anti-communist propaganda plays in rural areas. With its ample funding from public and institutional backing, STB maintained close ties to academia¹⁷⁾.

In contrast, Sylado’s Dapur Teater was its antithesis. The word *dapur*, meaning “kitchen” in Indonesian, carries connotations of a space for preparing and mixing various ingredients. It also evokes the idea of a domestic, behind-the-scenes environment tied to the everyday struggles of

life. This eclectic group comprised inexperienced young people, whose performances drew inspiration from the mundane, everyday happenings around them. With few sponsors, the members themselves raised the funds to sustain their activities.

Despite—or perhaps because of—its raw and unpolished approach, Dapur Teater quickly captivated the younger generation. A 1971 article in *Pikiran Rakyat* described the overwhelming response to one of their performances:



photo 7

Boy Worang and Jan Hartland. They entered the Theatre Academy in the same year and became the golden duo representing Dapur Teater
©Boy Worang

16) Sumardjo 1993, op. cit., pp. 121 - 125.

17) Abdulah, Tatang, et al. 2015.

“The 400 seats of Rumentang Siang Theater filled up in no time, forcing many of Remy Sylado’s fans to stand. According to theater staff, such an event was unprecedented in the venue’s history.¹⁸⁾”

Throughout the 1970s, Dapur Teater and Remy Sylado swept through Bandung, leaving an indelible mark on the city’s youth.

OREXAS

During the Cold War, as Soeharto’s new regime embraced a pro-Western economic development agenda, the Western culture once shunned as cultural imperialism under Soekarno found its way into Bandung. The city was soon alive with young people sporting long hair, bell-bottom jeans, high-heeled London boots, and miniskirts. Amid the bustling crowds of Braga Street, one group stood out—Remy Sylado and his troupe, nicknamed OREXAS by onlookers.

Soon after arriving in Bandung, Sylado became involved in producing a youth magazine. What began as a modest, locally circulated zine eventually evolved into *Aktuil*, a national sensation and a defining publication for Indonesia’s youth¹⁹⁾. The transformation was catalyzed in 1971 when Sylado began serializing his novel OREXAS in its pages. The title, an acronym for Organisasi Sex Bebas (“Free Sex Organization”), captured the zeitgeist of the counterculture movement, portraying the hedonistic lives of Bandung’s “hippies.” The novel, originally conceived as a script for Dapur Teater’s stage, drew heavily from the group’s



photo 8
The cover of *Aktuil* magazine.
©photo by the author

18) *Pikiran Rakyat*, October 24, 1971.

19) Launched in 1967 as Indonesia’s first youth-oriented entertainment magazine, it covered domestic and international information on music and other topics of interest to the younger generation, using consumption of entertainment information originating from the West as a benchmark for “youthfulness.” It served as a medium that conceptualized the first post-independence generation of readers in Indonesia into a category known as the “younger generation.” (Takeshita 2011)

anarchic daily lives.

The theatrical adaptation of OREXAS opened with a defiant and provocative chant:

“Let us pray: curses upon our hypocritical parents! Diabetes! Plague! Hypertension! Parasites! May every curse befall them! Amen!”

An adaptation of the American musical *Hair*²⁰⁾, the production became a cultural flashpoint. It laid bare the generational rift, with young performers delivering scathing critiques of their parents’ hypocrisy. Scenes of marijuana smoking, casual sex, and masturbation depicted the moral rebellion of youth while sparking outrage among the older generation.

This unapologetically taboo-breaking performance was dismissed by orthodox theater circles as sensationalist kitsch, derisively branded “Remy’s style.” Sylado frequently found himself summoned by authorities, yet he remained resolute in his stance:

“What’s wrong with depicting reality? Art sanitized for pretense is worthless.”²¹⁾

This rebellious philosophy permeated his work at *Aktuil*, which became a vehicle for his vision and catapulted him into national prominence.

In 1972, he introduced the “Puisi Mbeling” (“Rebellious Poetry”) column, inviting readers to submit provocative free verse. The term mbeling connoted defiance, and the poetry often featured vulgarity, drug references, and sexual slang—material deemed unfit for traditional literary magazines such as *Horison*. Sylado openly criticized *Horison* for its elitism, positioning Puisi Mbeling as a literary



photo 9

Many people in Bandung believed that the members of Dapur Theatre, who often gathered on Braga Street, were the real-life OREXAS. ©Boy Worang

20) This rock musical, which premiered in 1967, stands apart from the traditional Broadway format and symbolizes American counterculture. It reflects the social and political issues of the time and has been adapted worldwide.

21) *Aktuil* No. 87, 1971.

counterculture movement.

Aktuil itself originated from the efforts of Bandung's youth, who used makeshift printing equipment to create a magazine that bridged the cultural gap between Indonesia and the West. In a country where television and telecommunications were still underdeveloped, the magazine provided a vital window into the global counterculture. Sylado's contributions—spanning fiction, poetry, essays, and criticism—were prolific, incendiary, and electrifying, akin to the psychedelic ethos²²⁾ he championed. By 1972, *Aktuil* had surpassed *Tempo* to become Indonesia's highest-circulating magazine, with Sylado as its most potent creative force. His influence drew countless young readers to the theater, transforming the cultural landscape.

On a national scale, However, Jakarta's Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) cultural center remained the epicenter of Indonesian theater. Established in 1968 with government support, TIM fostered the careers of the so-called "Big 3" playwrights—Rendra, Arifin C. Noor, and Teguh Karya. Among them, Rendra, who had studied in the United States, gained acclaim for his spectacular plays, which subtly critiqued Suharto's regime. His experimental minimalist productions leveraged TIM's state-of-the-art sound and lighting systems, capturing the attention of intellectuals and cultural elites²³⁾.

While Sylado was often hailed by the media as the "Fourth Newcomer" alongside the Big 3²⁴⁾, he rejected such comparisons and viewed TIM with disdain. To him, the state-controlled institution



photo 10
a scene from *A Branch of Jasmine for Lima*.
©Jan Hartland

22) In the 1969 edition of *Aktuil*, readers commented on the ongoing cultural debate between Sylado and STB playwright Saini KM featured in the magazine, saying, "Sylado's discourse is like a psychedelic poster." (*Aktuil* No. 27, 1969)

23) Regarding Rendra's silent drama, which Gunawan Mohamad termed "Mini Kata" (Minimum Word), Sylado described his own expression as "Maxi Kata" (Maximum Word).

24) *Tempo*, August 12, 1972.

epitomized the establishment culture he opposed. Sylado remained steadfastly loyal to Bandung, where theaters were colonial-era relics devoid of modern equipment. Yet these limitations suited his artistic ethos; Sylado eschewed technical embellishments, relying instead on the unamplified power of the human voice.

One memorable performance of OREXAS illustrated his audacious approach. As the curtain rose, the stage remained pitch black until a sudden explosion of sound and light revealed dozens of motorcycles roaring onto the stage. Their headlights cut through the darkness as engines revved, creating a chaotic and electrifying atmosphere. This bald spectacle led to Dapur Teater being banned from the esteemed Lyceum Theater, a colonial-era venue. However, rather than alienating audiences, such incidents only amplified the fervor of Bandung’s youth, who flocked to Sylado’s productions with even greater enthusiasm.

The Youth Who Gathered on Stage

From the moment Remy Sylado began appearing on Braga Street, he was rarely seen without his two hippie companions: Benny Ditus and Juju Romila, the latter also his girlfriend. Near Juju’s home in the working-class neighborhood of Babakan Ciamis lived a boy named Tatang, whom Sylado doted on during his frequent visits to see Juju. One day, Sylado brought the little Tatang to a rehearsal, where the boy was astonished to see Benny Ditus, with his dark skin and Afro hairstyle, cast as the lead role of Jesus Christ. Benny, a local petty thug, was hardly the conventional choice for such a role.

Sylado often gave Tatang unorthodox advice: “If you’re going to pick a fight, choose someone bigger than you. Even if you lose, you’ll be the one who stands out.” This philosophy reflected Sylado’s own approach to life. In 1969, *Aktuil* magazine published a column by Sylado about a theater competition in Bandung featuring 28 amateur troupes. His

play *Generasi Semaui Gue* (“The Do-As-You-Please Generation”), performed with Juju Romila²⁵⁾ and others, was selected as a finalist alongside a university troupe. Most participants, however, were middle and high school students, and the judges were prominent figures in the theater world, including STB founder Suyatna Anirum. Sylado fiercely criticized the judges, arguing that pitting young students against older, more experienced performers ran counter to the competition’s goal of fostering interest in theater among beginners. He also condemned the judges’ authoritarian critiques as oppressive and discouraging²⁶⁾.



photo 11
Juju Romila with Jan Hartland
©Jan Hartland

For young people, Sylado’s bold defiance of authority and subversion of social norms struck a powerful chord. They celebrated his audacity, which they saw as a reflection of their own frustrations. Before long, an eclectic mix of followers—ranging from petty delinquents to the children of government officials and wealthy industrialists—gathered around Sylado. These young people took turns performing in his productions, finding in him a voice that represented their rebellion.

Unlike Jakarta, where access to recording and broadcasting technology could propel performers into professional careers in music or film, Bandung lacked such infrastructure. Nevertheless, this mattered little to Sylado’s followers. What drew them in was the chance to share his stage, hurl insults at authority figures, and bask in the cheers of the audience.

From the late 1960s into the 1970s, urban centers like Bandung and Jakarta were rife with sensational tales of “moral decadence.” Among the affluent youth, acts of rebellion—drug use, promiscuity, and reckless street racing—became fashionable. Beneath these behaviors lay deeper societal

25) [photo 11]

26) *Aktuil* No. 36, 1967.

fractures: a generational divide and widespread anxiety stemming from the political turmoil following the 9/30 incident. Yet many parents chose to ignore these underlying issues. Instead, they lamented the erosion of “Indonesian identity” and “independence spirit,” blaming the rapid influx of Western culture for their children’s waywardness. This generation of parents—responsible for initiating the Westernization and development policies they now criticized—remained blind to their own contradictions and hypocrisy.

Sylado’s stage offered a unique counterpoint: a space where the youth could reverse the narrative, exposing and ridiculing the authority figures who had failed them. By staging scenes of marijuana use, promiscuity, and other “deviant” behaviors, these performances became acts of defiance and declarations of self-assertion.

Despite these themes, Sylado enforced strict discipline during rehearsals. He prohibited not only drug use but also smoking, demanding punctuality and order from his cast. Live theater, he insisted, allowed no room for error—every performer’s contribution had to align seamlessly to ensure the production’s success. He frequently reminded them that a single performance depended on each individual fulfilling their responsibility. His words resonated deeply, and the young actors came to understand their truth as the curtain fell amid applause and cheers.



photo 12
Gito Rollies ©kompas

For many, the experience of performing on stage with Sylado sparked personal transformation. One well-known example is Gito Rollies, a musician who overcame severe drug addiction after joining one of Sylado’s productions²⁷). Others—particularly the children of absentee parents such as high-ranking government and

27) *Kompas* March 2, 2008. [photo 12]

military officials—found Sylado’s rehearsals to be a catalyst for self-discovery and improvement. For some, the stage offered a momentary reprieve from deeply rooted trauma.

Jenny Suharto²⁸⁾, for instance, was eight years old when she witnessed a massacre near her family’s home in Jakarta, shortly after the 9/30 incident. The sight of soldiers killing suspected communists haunted her throughout her childhood, compounded by the social unrest that followed. Yet, after participating in one of Sylado’s productions, she became captivated by the experience. Despite keeping her involvement hidden from her parents, she returned to the stage time and again.

Both Sylado and his followers belonged to Indonesia’s first post-independence generation. Born as Indonesians without having experienced the struggle for independence, they came of age amid political upheaval and social transformation. When rock ‘n’ roll and bell-bottom jeans became accessible, they embraced these trends wholeheartedly, only to be denounced by their parents for lacking historical consciousness and national pride. Sylado turned this generational conflict into theater, offering young people a stage where they could scrutinize their elders from their own perspective.

Muhammad Syafrin²⁹⁾, who began attending Sylado’s performances as a middle schooler, called him “the first historical hero of our generation.” Although Syafrin never performed on stage, he eagerly worked behind the scenes, assisting with production. Sylado’s productions were further enriched by contributions from a growing community of young artists.



photo 13

Jenny Suharto (Huis) with Remy Sylado, Boy Worang and Jan Hartland ©Jan Hartland

28) Jenny Suharto (currently known as Jenny Huis). [photo 13]

29) Muhammad Shafrin Zaini. [photo 14]



photo 14
© Muhammad Syafrin

Live music was provided by the up-and-coming rock band Shark Move, led by Benny Soebardja, while stage design was crafted by young painter Jeihan. Emerging artists from various disciplines in Bandung lent their talents freely, drawn to Sylado’s vision. In tribute to Sylado’s Puisi Mbeling (“Rebellious Poetry”) movement, they came

to be known as the Kaum Mbeling (“The Rebellious Crowd”).

“God the Father” and Its Subversion

Sylado’s rebellion extended beyond the authoritarianism of the parental generation to challenge established notions of “God the Father.” In 1971, he staged *Messiah II*, a provocative play featuring a dark-skinned, Afro-haired Christ draped in a colorful poncho. This Christ moved through a surreal narrative, crossing paths with historical and cultural figures such as Joan of Arc, Jimi Hendrix, and Marilyn Monroe. Benny Ditus, a regular collaborator, played the unconventional Jesus. The performance opened with the hippie-style Christ sensually swaying his hips as he declared, “I intercourse with the wind.”



photo 15
A scene from *Messiah II* ©Jan Hartland

The choice of Gedung Merdeka—a revered venue where the Bandung Conference had been held—to stage this irreverent production drew sharp criticism from the clergy and the older generation³⁰. Yet this was only the beginning. Over the course of the 1970s, Sylado produced a series of scandalous works, including *Genesis II*,

30) [photo 15]

Testament II, Apocalypse II, and Exodus II, each titled after a book of the Bible. These productions broke every taboo imaginable, such as one infamous scene where a female audience member, overtaken by fervor, was pulled on stage and stripped of her clothing³¹). Such incidents routinely led to Sylado being summoned by the authorities, but he seemed to embrace the notoriety.

In Exodus II, a climactic moment featured Jan Hartland as Christ sharing an impassioned kiss with Marilyn Monroe, portrayed by Jais Hadiana³²). Cast as a novice actress, Jais faced widespread backlash, while tabloids relished rumors of her relationship with Sylado. However, these controversies were no accident—they were deliberately orchestrated by Sylado, who saw scandal as a medium of expression as powerful as the stage itself.

Through these absurdist dramas, Sylado systematically dismantled Christian orthodoxy and the sanctified image of Jesus. He hurled invective at clergy, shattered sacred taboos, and inverted moral binaries: the holy became vulgar; light turned to darkness; good became evil, and vice versa. Like a photographic negative flipping to positive, Sylado disrupted these established dualities, creating chaos that pulsed with raw energy and fervent engagement.

This spirit of inversion was visually symbolized in Sylado's frequent use of stark black-and-white contrasts in his stage designs and costumes—a motif that eventually became his signature aesthetic.

The interplay of contradictions and reversals became the essence of Sylado's charisma. His scandalous provocations—whether on stage or in print—elicited



photo 16
Jais Hadiana ©Pos Film

31) *Aktuil* No. 99, 1970.

32) [photo 16]



photo 17

Sylad on the stage ©Boy Worang

hysterical reactions from parents, teachers, and clergy. When confronted with criticism, however, Sylado revealed a striking duality. The same man who had reveled in vulgarity would suddenly wield his encyclopedic knowledge, eloquently defending his work with theological and Biblical expertise.

Sylado was a trickster, adept at traversing the boundaries between opposites. His audacity resonated deeply with young audiences, who found exhilaration and empowerment in his fearless dismantling of authority and tradition.

The Priest, Brouwer

While some contemporaries regarded Sylado’s performances as avant-garde, influenced by the French existential absurdist theater of the time, the dominant view within Indonesia’s theater community was far less flattering. His works were often dismissed as sensationalist and gimmicky, emphasizing



photo 18

Father Brouwer ©kompas

shock value over artistic merit. Yet, among those intrigued by Sylado’s productions was a remarkable figure: M.A.W. Brouwer, a Dutch Catholic priest³³⁾. Father Brouwer served as pastor at Bandung’s cathedral and was a celebrated columnist for national publications such as Kompas. He also lectured in psychology at some local universities and was a trusted counselor, particularly focused on family and youth issues. A cultural icon in Bandung, Brouwer’s legacy endures to this day;

33) M. A. W. Brouwer (1923-1991) was born in Delft, Netherlands. As a missionary of the Franciscan order, he first came to Indonesia in 1950 and later majored in psychology at the University of Indonesia. From 1963, he served as a priest at the cathedral in Bandung and also taught at several universities. In 1988, he returned to the Netherlands for medical treatment (Sidharta 1994).

[photo 18]

a monument on Asia-Africa Street bears inscriptions commemorating his deep love for West Java more than three decades after his death³⁴⁾.

A passionate theater enthusiast, Brouwer famously referred to Sylado as the “Hottest Man in Town.”³⁵⁾ After each performance, Brouwer would pen a review, which inevitably appeared in one newspaper or another. However, his critiques were often laced with his trademark humor and wit. For example:

“This kind of play was already being performed in Chelsea in 1952,” or, “A demonstration of sexual intercourse might have seemed provocative in a village school in Giethoorn, but in Bandung, it feels silly.”³⁶⁾

Brouwer’s insight went beyond surface commentary. He observed that while Sylado’s performances embodied the rebellious spirit of counterculture, they lacked the overt anti-military or anti-regime messaging seen in youth movements elsewhere, such as in Czechoslovakia. Instead, Sylado’s sharpest barbs were directed at the hypocrisies and moral failures of the parental generation. Brouwer eloquently remarked:

“Remy is a troublemaker, in the tradition of Voltaire and Pasternak. He is driven by an insatiable need to see the world for himself. Mischief-makers like Erasmus, Martin Luther, Calvin, and William Ochman challenged the status quo, liberating Europe from religious oppression and paving the way for transformative reforms centuries later.”³⁷⁾

Sylado, for his part, revered Brouwer. He valued the priest’s thoughtful, and at times brutally candid, appraisals of his work.



photo 19

A monument inscribed with the words of M. A. W. Brouwer: *God created the land of Parahyangan while smiling.* ©photo by the author

34) [photo 19]

35) *Indonesia Times*, October 1, 1977.

36) *Kompas*, May 18, 1972.

37) *ibid.*

Before every performance, Sylado would peer from backstage to ensure Brouwer was in the audience before the curtain rose.

Yet, for all his admiration, Sylado avoided meeting Brouwer in person. Despite sharing the same city, Sylado went to great lengths to evade any direct encounters with the priest. If he spotted Brouwer in public, he would hurriedly retreat or hide. This peculiar behavior stood in stark contrast to Sylado’s otherwise unflinching confrontations with authority figures, including clergy and societal elites.

What explains this almost childlike and puzzling behavior toward Brouwer—the very antithesis of Sylado’s fearless provocations against clergy and establishment figures? Exploring this anomaly may provide a key to understanding the private life Sylado kept so carefully hidden and the inner workings of his complex psyche.

Sylado’s Early Life and the Concept of “Fatherhood”

Remy Sylado was born in 1945 in Makassar, South Sulawesi, to parents of Minahasan descent from North Sulawesi. He was the youngest of three children, with two elder sisters. His father, Yohannes H. Tambayong, was a Protestant pastor and a scholar of remarkable intellect. Yohannes’s father, Sylado’s grandfather, had served as an indigenous soldier trained under Dutch military education³⁸). Educated at an American Alliance Church seminary, Yohannes was fluent in Dutch and English, known for his extensive personal library and insatiable love of reading.

In the 1930s, Yohannes was a key figure in the church-building movement in Minahasa, which advocated for independence from Dutch colonial rule. He worked alongside prominent leaders such as Sam Ratulangi, who would later become Sulawesi’s first governor. Yohannes also contributed to theological

38) In 2014, Sylado published a novel titled *Malaekat di Lereng Tidar* (*Angel on the Slopes of Tidar*), which is based on his grandfather, Jezekiel Tambayong, a native mercenary known as Marsose in the Dutch colonial army.

publications such as *Kalam Hidup*, widely circulated in eastern Indonesia³⁹⁾. According to Sylado's sister Yenny, Yohannes's commitment to regional development and education was so impactful that many residents in the North Sulawesi villages he served became fluent in Dutch and English.

Yohannes met Sylado's mother, Juliana Panda, in the remote village of Maluku. Juliana, the daughter of a poor farmer, later moved with Yohannes to Makassar. Tragically, Yohannes passed away shortly after Sylado's birth, leaving Juliana to raise their three children alone.

Following her husband's death, Juliana relocated with her children to Semarang, Central Java, where she worked as a live-in domestic helper at a newly established Baptist seminary. Sylado grew up in this seminary, living with his mother and sisters until he completed high school. Like his father's alma mater, the American-affiliated seminary steeped him in Western norms, culture, and knowledge. Yet, the family's position as subaltern dependents within this rigid, hierarchical environment exposed them to prejudice and mistreatment.

Some pastors were particularly harsh toward Juliana, belittling her lack of education in stark contrast to her late husband's erudition. One incident seared itself into young Sylado's memory: a pastor mocked the porridge Juliana had prepared for the students, calling it "cat vomit" before throwing it on the floor and forcing her to clean up the mess. Isolated on the hilltop seminary, where friends and leisure were scarce, Sylado sought solace by sneaking into the library to read voraciously, only to face reprimands and expulsion when caught. On one occasion, a pigeon coop he had lovingly built was destroyed, and the newly hatched chicks were discarded.



photo 20

Young Sylado (center) with his mother (second from the left) and his two sisters (left and right).

©Eleonora Moniung

³⁹⁾ Sylado 2002, p. 280.

These formative experiences as the son of a subaltern worker in an elitist and hierarchical environment profoundly shaped Sylado’s consciousness. Rarely shared outside his immediate circle, these struggles were nonetheless foundational to his worldview. The traumatic realities of his upbringing left an indelible mark, particularly in shaping his complex relationship with the concept of “Fatherhood”—both divine and human.

This duality—resentment toward institutionalized “Fatherhood” and a profound yearning for the idealized image of his late father—deepened Sylado’s inner contradictions. It fueled his rebellion against conventional religious imagery and narratives while simultaneously intensifying his admiration for his father, a pastor respected for his intellect and writing. These conflicting emotions forged the roots of Sylado’s provocative style, his relentless questioning of authority, and the dialectical worldview that would define his work.

When viewed through the lens of Sylado’s struggle between defiance and longing toward the “paternal,” how might Father Brouwer—a figure who, like Sylado’s late father, embodied both a clergyman’s role and a writer’s commitment to social good—have appeared to him? Brouwer’s gaze, marked by understanding and interest, occasionally tinged with sharp critique yet fundamentally warm, seemed to inspire pride and joy in Sylado. Yet, Sylado could never meet that gaze, instead choosing to evade it entirely. Could this reflect that Sylado, in reality, never seized the moment of growth that could only



photo 21

The American Baptist Church Seminary in Semarang, where Sylado spent his childhood. ©photo by the author



photo 22

The seminary library that young Sylado often sneaked into is now used as a meeting room. ©photo by the author

come from confronting and resolving the deep inner turmoil evoked by the “paternal”?

To Jakarta

As the 1970s drew to a close, Sylado’s time in Bandung came to an end. In 1978, *Aktuil* effectively ceased publication when its publishing rights were transferred to journalist Sondang Napitpulu, who launched a Jakarta-based news magazine under the same name. Although Sylado had left *Aktuil* in 1975, he contributed an exposé to the Jakarta edition, revealing corruption involving West Java’s vice governor in land ownership. This article resulted in a defamation lawsuit against him. While Sylado stood firm in his defense, Sondang publicly apologized, and Sylado was ultimately convicted⁴⁰. This incident led to Sylado losing all his platforms in Bandung, which compelled him to relocate to Jakarta in 1980.

In Jakarta, Sylado continued his theatrical work under the name Dapur Teater. However, the group had shifted from its earlier focus on young amateurs to a more professional ensemble of seasoned actors. Boy Worang, his steadfast collaborator, commuted from Bandung for each production. Even after beginning a banking career, Worang maintained his commitment to theater, initially hiding his iconic long hair under a short-haired wig—though by then, he had cut it off entirely.

In Jakarta, Sylado also ventured into television and film—industries he had previously disdained. The capital was experiencing a media boom, fueled by Soeharto’s development-driven policies, which also invigorated the entertainment industry. Artists discovered by Sylado during his *Aktuil* years, such as singers Ermy Kulit⁴¹ and Doel

⁴⁰) *Aktuil* September 14, 1981.

⁴¹) Ermy Kulit, jazz singer. As a teenager singing at a church in Manado, North Sumatra, she was discovered by Sylado, who recognized her talent during his visit to the area as a writer for *AKTUIL* magazine. This encounter provided her with the opportunity to make her professional debut. She continues to thrive as one of Indonesia’s leading female singers. [photo 23]



photo 23
Elmy Kulit ©photo by the author



photo 24
Doel Sumbang ©photo by the author



photo 25
Yudhistira ANM Massardi ©photo by the author



photo 26
Seno Gumira Adjidarma ©photo by the author

Sumbang⁴²⁾, were flourishing in the mainstream. Writers who had emerged through Sylado’s Puisi Mbeling column, such as Yudhistira ANM Massardi⁴³⁾ and Seno Gumira Adjidarma⁴⁴⁾, were establishing themselves as prominent voices in literature and journalism.

Meanwhile, musicians who had performed live for his productions, such as Benny Soebardja⁴⁵⁾,

42) Doel Sumbang, a singer and songwriter with a charismatic appeal that transcends generations. In the late 1970s, he met Sylado through theatrical activities, where Sylado recognized his talent for composition and singing. This led to his debut as a singer, beginning with the creation of theme songs for stage performances. He remains active to this day. [photo 24]

43) Yudhistira ANM Massardi, a novelist and poet who worked alongside his twin brother, Noorca Massardi. After serving as the editor-in-chief of the magazine *GATRA*, he became involved in establishing and running initiatives for underprivileged children. He lost his father during the anti-communist purges following the September 30th Movement. Subsequently, he and his brother lived on the streets, delivering newspapers to make a living. During this time, he submitted a poem titled *The Rebellious Spirit* to *Aktuil*, which caught Sylado’s attention. From then on, Sylado became his mentor. Yudhitira later remarked that Sylado was “the one and only teacher” he had during that difficult period. [photo 25]

44) Seno Gumira Adjidarma, a novelist and journalist. He founded entertainment magazines such as *JAKARTA-JAKARTA* and also served as a faculty member and rector at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts. He credits Sylado with teaching him the principle that “Art doesn’t have to be noble, but it must be mind-blowing.” [photo 26]

45) Benny Soebardja, a musician and singer. Soebardja formed the rock band *The Peels* in the late 1960s while still in high school, performing both domestically and internationally. He later debuted as a vocalist and led legendary bands such as *Shake Move* and *The Giant Step*. Subsequently, he continued to front iconic bands such as *Shake Move* and *Giant Step*. Today, he remains an active and charismatic figure in Indonesian progressive rock, thriving in his solo career. [photo 27]

had become celebrated rock artists, achieving both national and international acclaim. Jeihan⁴⁶⁾, who had contributed stage designs for Sylado's plays, had grown into a globally renowned painter, thanks in part to the support of Jais Hadiana (Darga), who had once played Marilyn Monroe in Sylado's productions. Jais herself had become a successful art dealer and one of Southeast Asia's first prominent female gallery owners⁴⁷⁾.

By contrast, connections with figures such as Juju Romila and Benny Ditus had faded into obscurity. However, Tatang—a boy whom Sylado had once mentored—graduated from the Bandung Institute of Technology's School of Visual Arts and pursued a career as a graphic designer. Though Sylado had encouraged him to become a writer and even provided personal guidance on his work, Tatang ultimately chose a different path.

By the 1980s, the once-rebellious youth of 1970s Bandung had matured and moved on, leaving behind the fervent days of their youthful revolution.



photo 27

Benny Soebardja ©photo by the author



photo 28

Jeihan Sukmantoro (1938–2019) ©Peter Basuki



photo 29

Jais Darga (Hadiana) ©photo by the author

⁴⁶⁾ Jeihan Sukmantoro (1938–2019), a painter, was born in Central Java. He studied at the Faculty of Art at Bandung Institute of Technology. Known for his distinctive portrayal of figures with eyes painted in solid black, he gained international recognition as an Impressionist artist. [photo 28]

⁴⁷⁾ Jais Darga has been active as the first female art dealer in Southeast Asia. Her biography, *Jais Darga Namaku* (I am Jais Darga), published in 2018, became a bestseller. The film based on this work, *Before, Now, and Then* (directed by Kamila Andini, 2022), was nominated for the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival, and supporting actress Laula Basuki won the Silver Bear. [photo 29]



photo 30

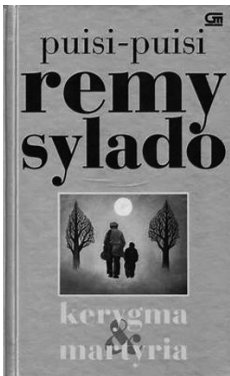


photo 31

“A Declaration of Maturity”

By the 1990s, Sylado had firmly cemented his position within Jakarta’s media landscape, becoming a mentor figure to many he had once inspired. As Indonesia entered an era marked by the emergence of private television networks, Sylado’s presence on TV increased. At the same time, he maintained a prolific output of essays and serialized novels across various publications, many of which were later compiled into books by major publishers. These works—predominantly sweeping historical epics and biographies—were distinguished by their sheer heft, dominating bookstore shelves. This image, rows of voluminous volumes bearing his name, perfectly captured the image of his nickname, “The Walking Encyclopedia⁴⁸⁾.” As a writer, Sylado had successfully transitioned from a creator of popular youth-oriented fiction to a venerable literary heavyweight.

In 2004, Sylado revisited his past by publishing *Puisi Mbeling*, a collection of his rebellious free-verse poetry from his *Aktuil* magazine days⁴⁹⁾. Alongside this, he released *Kerigma & Martirya*, a self-curated anthology of 900 poems written since his youth⁵⁰⁾. *Puisi Mbeling*, with its vivid, pop-inspired design, encapsulated the colorful and subversive spirit of 1970s Bandung. In stark contrast, *Kerigma & Martirya* was a serious and contemplative work, delving into themes of solitude, hope, and divinity. This imposing 1,056-page hardcover volume featured Sylado’s own color illustrations, including a cover painting depicting two figures—an adult and a child—walking along a dimly lit path. In many ways, this anthology seemed to invert the psychedelic

48) In a 1999 column, the *Jakarta Post* gave this designation to Sylado. Since then, this designation has been repeatedly used in reference to him.

49) Sylado 2004a. [photo 30]

50) Sylado 2004b. [photo 31]

exuberance of *Puisi Mbeling*, offering instead a profound and introspective counterpoint.

In the afterword of *Kerigma and Martirya*, Sylado reflected on his rebellious expressions and actions of the 1970s, admitting he had been “naked” in those years. Now, he declared, he had “clothed himself (with the garments of wisdom and discretion)⁵¹,” signaling a conscious embrace of maturity.

This “declaration of maturity” was underscored by the accolades that followed. In 2005, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono bestowed upon Sylado a cultural merit award. He went on to receive numerous literary honors, including Indonesia’s prestigious Khatulistiwa Literary Award, further solidifying his status as a “Maestro.” By the time he reached his 60s, Sylado had completed his transformation—from a magnetic figure of youthful rebellion into a respected and enduring literary elder statesman.



photo 32
Emmy Maria Louise Tambayong
©photo by the author

Emmy’s Perspective

However, the narratives of those who knew Sylado intimately reveal a side of him starkly different from the story of maturity he presented about himself and the media’s glowing accounts.

Emmy Louise Tambayong, Sylado’s wife since 1976, offers a rare and personal perspective on his life⁵²). Unlike many prominent Indonesian figures, details of their marriage were almost entirely absent from public discourse during Sylado’s lifetime. Emmy, born into a Dutch-Eurasian Catholic family in Semarang—the same city where Sylado had spent

51) *ibid*, p. 1046. This statement appears to be based on Genesis 2: 25 (“At that time, the man and his wife were naked, but they were not ashamed”) and 3: 21 (“And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them”).

52) [photo 32]



photo 33

A wedding photo of Sylado and Emmy.

©Emmy Maria Louise Tambayong

part of his youth—abandoned her career as a pharmacist upon their marriage to support his artistic endeavors. Her unpaid contributions ranged from crafting costumes and preparing meals for theater members to choreographing dances and translating Dutch texts. Without her behind-the-scenes dedication, many of Sylado’s productions

would not have come to fruition.

Their wedding, held in a Catholic church in Semarang, reflected Sylado’s eccentricity. He wore a white morning coat, while Emmy donned a black dress—a symbolic inversion of traditional wedding attire⁵³). This unconventional choice embodied Sylado’s unique flair, but Emmy’s family saw it as an ill omen. Tragically, their apprehensions proved accurate, as Sylado’s behavior toward Emmy was fraught with issues from the outset.

Sylado frequently erupted in fits of rage over trivial matters, often resorting to physical violence against Emmy. His financial irresponsibility compounded their struggles, as he poured most of their income into his theatrical pursuits. When Emmy attempted to return to her career as a pharmacist to support their household, Sylado reacted with fury and violence. Alarmed, Emmy’s father presented Sylado with a divorce permit obtained from the priest who had officiated their marriage. In response, Sylado inexplicably tore it apart, along with their sacramental marriage certificate. Yet Emmy, undeterred, carefully retrieved and painstakingly pieced the fragments of the marriage certificate back together.

Though the physical violence eventually ceased, Sylado’s infidelity persisted, continuing unabated until his later years when illness confined him to bed.

Despite his treatment of Emmy, Sylado deeply revered his mother, who

53) [photo 33]

had raised him as a single parent. Shortly after his marriage, he brought her to live with him and Emmy in Bandung. Yet his ongoing mistreatment of his wife revealed a stark lack of emotional growth, underscoring his inability to build or sustain a healthy partnership with the person closest to him.

This personal immaturity sharply contrasted with the figure of the exacting artist who demanded unwavering discipline and responsibility from his performers. Sylado's dual nature—on one hand, the rigorous theater director who approached the stage with uncompromising professionalism, and on the other, the emotionally stunted individual—painted a portrait of a man deeply at odds with himself.

Sylado on His Deathbed

By October 2020, Sylado was on the brink of death. For the preceding eight years, he had been absent from his Jakarta home, living with another woman. After suffering a stroke, he was abandoned and left entirely alone. His life was saved only through a miraculous, last-minute intervention when he was discovered in critical condition.

Following this near-death experience, Sylado returned to his home for the first time in nearly a decade. Bedridden, he was cared for by his wife, Emmy, who, despite years of estrangement and inner turmoil, chose to take him back. Over the next two years, Sylado survived several brushes with death, sustained by Emmy's tireless devotion.

During this time, Sylado's mind was often clouded, and he would occasionally erupt in unexplained fits of rage. Yet, to Emmy's astonishment, he began expressing sentiments he had never voiced before: gratitude for her care. He repeatedly expressed remorse for the pain he had caused her and sought solace in prayer with a fervor that was entirely new to him.

However, illness was not the only burden the couple faced. They were also confronted with severe financial hardships. As smartphones gained rapid

popularity in Indonesia during the mid-2010s, sales of Sylado’s many works declined precipitously. His contracts with major publishers were terminated, and royalty payments dwindled to a fraction of what they had once been. Coupled with the ongoing financial losses from his theatrical endeavors, their savings were long depleted. Without children to rely on, they could not afford even basic medical care and struggled daily to make ends meet.

Their survival was largely dependent on the generosity of prominent figures who had known Sylado in the past⁵⁴). The man once celebrated as the “walking encyclopedia” now faced the cruel irony of living in a world where digital media, which had eroded the value of his encyclopedic knowledge and literary contributions, had also upended his livelihood⁵⁵).

The “Brouwer” of Semarang

During his extended illness, Sylado began to share with Emmy the outline of a new story he had envisioned. It was inspired by a real-life Dutch vagabond who had lived in Semarang during the mid-1950s. This man’s life had unraveled during the Japanese occupation, when he was detained along with other Dutch nationals. After being forced to witness the brutal assault of his wife by Japanese soldiers, the man succumbed to a mental breakdown. He eventually became a vagrant and met a tragic end, dying after being struck by a pedicab. Inexplicably, the people of Semarang referred to him as “Brouwer.”

Brouwer was often seen begging along a riverside road that connected the former headquarters of the military police with the middle school Sylado had attended. His route extended toward the eastern residential

54) In April 2002, a charity event for Sylado was held at the Taman Ismail Marzuki cultural center in Jakarta.

55) The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* completely ceased its print editions after the 15th edition, which was finalized in 2010, and has since transitioned to an online version.

district where Emmy's family home was located. As they reflected on this figure from their shared past, Sylado expressed a desire to write about him. Preferring a typewriter over a computer, Sylado dictated his ideas to Emmy, who transcribed his words⁵⁶).

However, Sylado passed away before completing the story. The notes he left behind are fragmented, lacking both narrative coherence and an outline, leaving the full scope of his vision unclear. What survives is not so much about Brouwer himself but rather about a pastor in Makassar, South Sulawesi, who was accused of espionage by the Japanese military, forcibly removed from his home, and tortured. These descriptions align with Sylado's accounts of his late father, Yohannes Hendrik Tambayong⁵⁷).

In his final days, Sylado reportedly experienced visions of a man accompanied by a small child. He would often ask, "Who are they?" He described the man riding a bicycle, surrounded by flocks of pigeons. Family members speculate that these figures represented his late father and an elder brother who had died in infancy before Sylado was born⁵⁸).

The intended connection between the figure of his father and the Dutch vagabond Brouwer remains unknown. Yet, in the final chapter of his life, Sylado was finally confronting his conception of "Fatherhood"—as represented by both his earthly father and by God.

In these moments, Sylado may have come to terms with his vulnerabilities and lifelong internal contradictions.

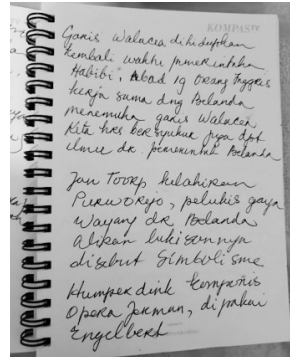


photo 34

The dictation of Sylado's tale transcribed by Emmy.

©photo by the author



photo 35

Sylado and his older sister, Johanna. This photo was taken in 2022, after his surgery. © Eleonora Moniung

56) [photo 34]

57) Sylado, *op.cit.*, p. 280.

58) [photo 36]

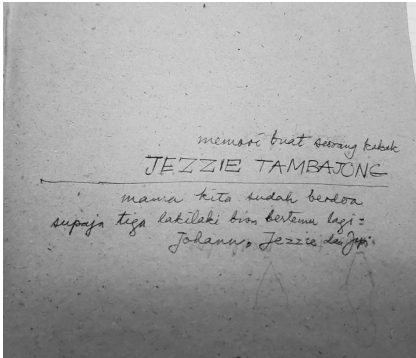


photo 36

A scribble left on the edge of Sylado's creative notebook from the 1960s. "A memoir for my late brother, Jezzie Tambayong: Mother prayed for us. Yohannes, Jezzie, Yapi—three men, hoping we would meet again someday." (Yohannes and Jezzie are the names of Sylado's late father and brother.) ©photo by the author

The young Sylado, growing up as the fatherless son of a servant in a rigid and elitist seminary, and Brouwer, a man who fell from the colonial elite to a life of destitution, shared an unspoken resonance. Both lived within a world shaped by clashing values in the same city. However, their connection went deeper. Though their circumstances diverged dramatically, both bore the scars of profound conflict centered around their partners.

As Sylado faced his reckoning with “Fatherhood”⁵⁹⁾ at the end of his life, he

may have felt an acute, unfulfilled desire to reconcile the contradictions that had defined him. Chief among them was likely an unachievable atonement toward Emmy, the wife he had hurt so deeply. In Brouwer—the man who had been powerless to protect his wife—Sylado may have glimpsed a reflection of himself.

In Conclusion: The Two “Brouwers”

In the cities of Bandung and Semarang, two “Brouwers” crossed paths with Sylado without ever truly confronting him. These figures seem to embody the “paternal archetype”—a presence Sylado postponed facing until his final days—and the unresolved inner conflicts it represented.

59) Jais Darga recounts her debate with Sylado in the 70's about the concept of “God the Father.” When a young Jais asked why God had to be “Father,” Sylado answered, “Because He is a figure of intimacy and affection.” Jais responded, “Then why not ‘God the grandmother’?” This provoked a huge angry outburst from Sylado, who exclaimed, “Never say such a thing again!” However, Jais never received an answer as to why “God the grandmother” was unacceptable. This episode is intriguing, as it highlights sylado's idealization of “the Father” while also hinting at the patriarchal values and misogynistic tendencies often noted in his worldview and writings.

When we once again turn our gaze to Sylado and the stage of 1970s Bandung, his light and shadow come into sharp focus. On stage, he ceaselessly constructed fictional confrontations with the “paternal archetype,” striving to transcend it and carve out a vision of himself beyond its hold. The deeper the shadow, the more dazzling the light, and in the

fleeting moment when that brilliance reverses, the stage transforms into a realm of boundless celebration, igniting with otherworldly radiance.

In the Northern Hemisphere, where counterculture movements—fueled by television and satellite communications—amplified the doubts and anger of a disillusioned youth, Bandung’s young people joined the wave. They grew their hair long, diving headfirst into the cultural maelstrom, relying solely on youth magazines to guide them. In their search for meaning outside the norms, society, and history dictated by their parents’ generation, Sylado stood as a beacon. He launched his solitary soul and body as a medium, reflecting the youth’s collective anxiety, stagnation, frustration, and rage, then inverting these emotions into a spectacular “firework,” drawing them into a once-in-a-lifetime frenzy of celebration.

The days when Sylado’s voluminous works—earning him the titles of “Maestro” and “Walking Encyclopedia”—dominated bookstore shelves have long since passed. Encyclopedias and bookstores themselves have been replaced by the virtual landscapes of the internet. Even within these digital archives, no record remains of Sylado’s 1970s performances. However, Yoseph Al Pradja⁶⁰⁾, who once performed on the Sylado’s stage in Bandung and has since led a theater troupe in Garut, West Java, guiding them to multiple



photo 37

Former members of Dapur Teater share their individual memories of their mentor, Remy Sylado (From right to left: Yoseph Al Pradja, Agus Sutanto, Yanov Ukur, Teha Sugiyo Boy Worang).

©photo by the author

60) [photo 37]



photo 38

Tatang Ramadhan Boujie (The Little Tatang) : Currently, he, together with his wife Jeanelle and his son Gibran, is actively engaged in painting and sculpture, and has successfully ventured into performance art, *Sirkus Demit*.
©Tatang Ramadhan Boujie



photo 39

Currently, Boy Worang is dedicated to regional revitalization efforts in a remote village on the eastern edge of Bandung. As part of his personal development, he also teaches theater to local children. ©photo by the author

contests victories, still remembers his interactions with Sylado from that time. When asked what was most essential to the stage, Sylado replied, “Hope.”

Sylado, and many of the young people who once shared the stage with him, have since departed this world.

In an era where digital penetration has

dissolved the boundaries of time and space, blurred the everyday and extraordinary, and fragmented the concept of history itself, the kind of celebration that once spurred young people to leap beyond historical confines may no longer be possible. Even so—perhaps precisely because of this—the “memory of the fireworks” remains vivid within those once-young hearts, unextinguished. In the light of those who continue to burn themselves away, Sylado lives on.

I respectfully dedicate this work to the memory of:

- Remy Sylado (1945–2022)

- Johanna Sophie Tambayong (1934–2024)
- Yenny Taksha Tambayong (1936–2024)
- Odang Danaatmadja (1950–2024)
- Yudhistira ANM Massardi (1954–2024)

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