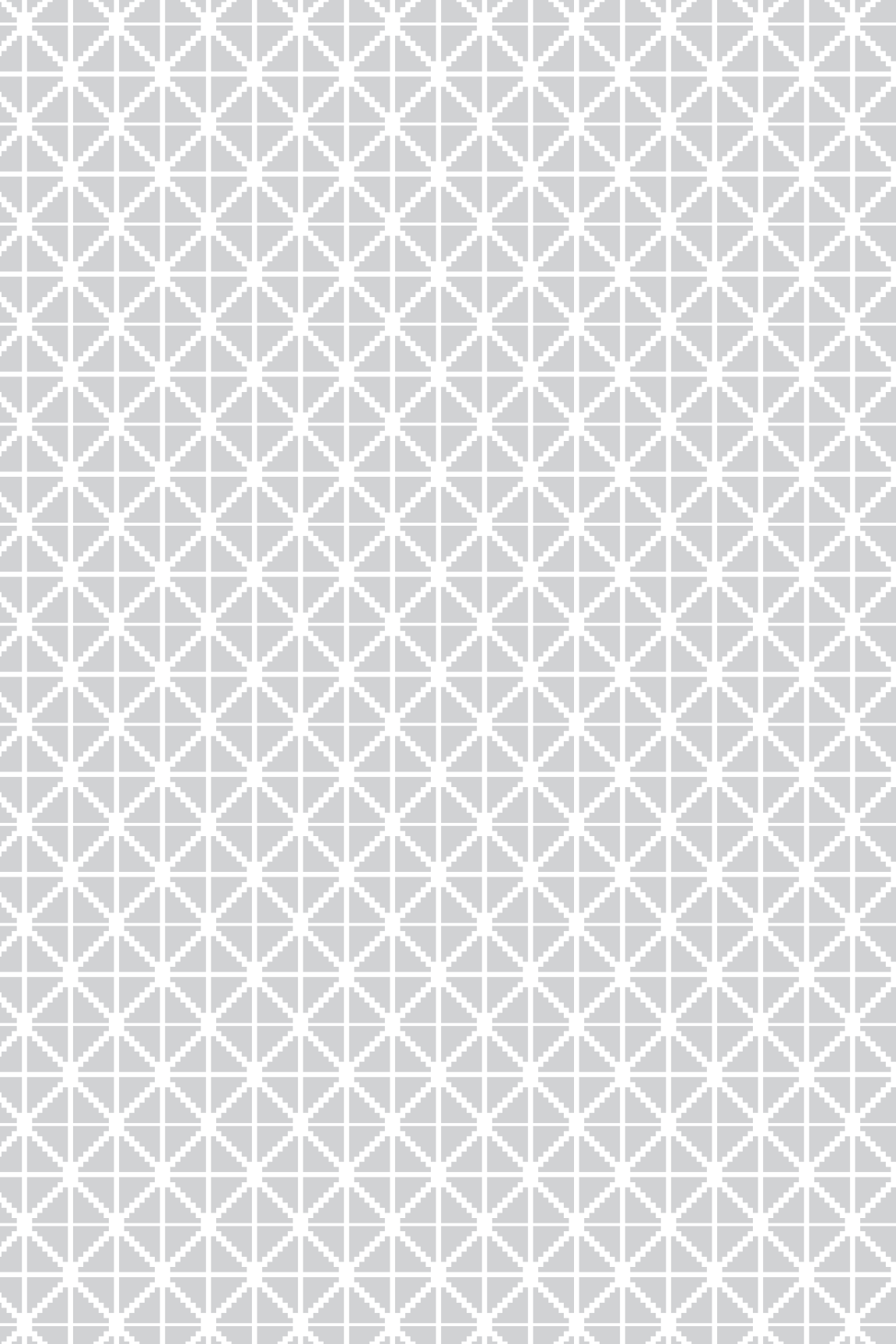




Note



A FORBIDDEN LOVE

Notes on the Print History of *Romeo and Juliet* in the Philippines

The year 1901 was a year of twin Shakespearean arrivals on Philippine shores. Almost simultaneous with the official establishment of a Bureau of Education by the American colonial government, tasked with setting up a massive system of free public education in English in which the Shakespearean text played a significant part, was the appearance in print of an indigenous metrical romance, an *awit*, bearing the title, *Ang Sintang Dalisay ni Julieta at Romeo* (*The Pure Love of Juliet and Romeo*). These twin arrivals stand for the interrelated but often competing strains in the history of Shakespeare in the cultural landscapes of colonial and postcolonial Philippines.

One version of that history might claim that Shakespeare was officially introduced to the islands in 1904, when David Barrows, General Superintendent of Education, issued the *Courses of Instruction for the Public Schools of the Philippine Islands*. The directive effectively inaugurates the study of Shakespeare in the Philippines. The secondary course in English literature prescribes the study of prose and poetry in the first two years, particularly suggesting the reading of Irving's *Alhambra* and Longfellow's *Evangeline*. It also

states that “the work in the first half of the third year will be devoted largely to the English Drama; the pupils will read *Julius Caesar*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and other plays.”¹ Shakespeare seems to have been prevalent in the secondary-school curriculum based on the number of plays suggested for study and copies of plays bought for public school libraries. While only *The Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Caesar* are stipulated in the 1904 *Courses of Instruction*, by 1907 the list expands to include *Macbeth* and *As You Like It*. In 1908, *Othello* joins the list of options and *The Tempest* is included by 1914.² The bulletin *Suggested Books for Libraries for Philippine Public Schools*, released by the US Department of Education in 1912, recommends the acquisition of a volume of *Shakespeare’s Complete Works* and Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare* for all public school libraries as well as single-volume editions of the following plays: *As You Like It*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Richard III*, *The Tempest*, and *Twelfth Night*.³ As education was conducted in English, there was no need to produce translated texts in local languages, and textbooks were conveniently imported for Philippine libraries instead. Further proof of the prominence of the Shakespearean text in the American-established educational system can be gleaned from the numerous school performances, oratorical and declamation contests, and Shakespearean-inspired debates by school-based literary societies that came to the fore as the education system continued to grow. Ignoring or perhaps even blithely unaware of all incongruity, Filipino schoolchildren guided by their American or American-trained teachers sought to reproduce Shakespearean texts, mimicking Elizabethan actors in Elizabethan

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- 1 Philippine Islands, Bureau of Education, *Courses of Instruction for the Public Schools of the Philippine Islands* (Manila: Bureau of Public Printing, 1904), 15.
 - 2 Benigno Aldana, “The Philippine Public School Curriculum: Its History and Development,” *Philippine Teacher’s Digest* (1935): 318–43.
 - 3 Mary Racelis and Judy Celine Ick, *Bearers of Benevolence: The Thomasites and Public Education in the Philippines* (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, 2001), 331–35.

ruffs in the tropics in their best approximations of an alien queen's English. All these activities, of course, were meant to showcase the studentry's increasing linguistic facility of English at the same time as it underscored (yet again) Shakespeare's "universal" relevance and appeal. In the Philippines, as in other colonial locations, the colonizer's cultural superiority was displayed via its cultural icons.

The "textbook" history of Shakespeare, however, only tells part of the story. Another version of the history of Shakespeare in the Philippines can be gleaned from its history in print outside the purview of colonial schools. Beyond understanding the Shakespearean text as a colonial artifact foisted upon colonial subjects or as a product promoted and disseminated top-down by the colonial government via obvious institutions like colonial schools, looking to local print history reveals a more complex situation where the Shakespearean text is consumed by local populations on its own terms. "Consuming the text" in this case means more than its mere acquisition as a fixed and stable product but understanding the act of consumption as an act of production that includes a recontextualization, a metaphorization, or an entering into what Priya Joshi calls "a poetical economy of consumption." Texts were not simply reproduced but also in the process recreated to suit the needs of its consumers who are understood by Joshi following Michel de Certeau as "unrecognized producers; poets of their own affairs."⁴ Shakespearean texts were translated and published in local languages and literary forms and consumed by native cultures in modes uniquely their own that sometimes may be understood as counterdiscourses to colonialism writ large. These texts represent a more meaningful practice of translation that goes beyond the simplistic "rejection or recapitulation" of the colonial; instead, they

4 Priya Joshi, *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 21.

reformulate the foreign “into an element of oneself”⁵ and invest it “with a power to explain the past and underwrite the coming of the future.”⁶

The print history of *Romeo and Juliet* in the Philippines offers a powerful counter-reading of the impact of Shakespeare as colonial text and icon. Appearing nowhere in official curricula, textbooks, teaching guides, or library purchase lists of the American-run public school system, and indeed banned from performance by the conservative, Church-run private schools, it is nonetheless the most translated, published, and circulated Shakespearean play as text in the Philippines in the American colonial years and beyond. Despite the best efforts of the colonial school system to enshrine a specific canon of Shakespearean texts, in print, *Romeo and Juliet*, in its various vernacular guises, prevails. It has appeared as an awit twice in Tagalog, and once in Bikolano, as an early Tagalog novel, and even as a subject of several Tagalog poems. It has also been adapted into (and published as) an Ilonggo zarzuela, a light operatic form that gained prominence on stages in the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries. It is also the first play translated as a performance text in *Tagalog* in the postcolonial years and appears as one of the fourteen plays in the first local English reprints in 1974 (the martial law Shakespeare).

Remarkably, it appears as a play or as a straightforward translation of the original text only in the postcolonial years; more frequently and especially during the colonial period, local print editions were also adaptations into local vernacular forms. Two quick explanations for this may suffice at this point: one is that the nature of vernacular drama was highly improvisational in the first place and scripts were largely meant for performance and not

5 Vicente Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines* (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, 2006), 20.

6 *Ibid.*, xvii.

publication. Hence, play scripts were not usually published material in the local markets. Also, the forms in which Shakespeare was translated and published roughly correspond to the popular forms of the day. Tracing the patterns of development of the “bestsellers” of each historical period, Patricia May Jurilla’s masterful history of the book in the Philippines tells us that the most popular forms of literary production moved from the religious (novenas, *pasyon*) to the quasi-religious (*vidas*, conduct books) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to the metrical romances that dominated the nineteenth century, to novels that were widely produced from the turn of the century until the 1930s, when magazines and comics—more economical and more efficient publications—came to the fore. In terms of Tagalog versions of *Romeo and Juliet* at least, it first appears as an awit, and then as a novel following the pattern of development Jurilla plots out in her book. This seems to indicate that popular taste and market forces were in some measure instrumental in the translation and publication of Shakespeare into the local language, in turn suggesting that colonial education was not the only force that determined the shape that Shakespeare took in the Philippines.

The earliest of these versions—G. D. Roke’s *Ang Sintang Dalisay ni Julieta at Romeo*—was published in Manila in 1901. It is written as an awit, a popular vernacular form derived from European metrical romances brought to the Philippines in the centuries of Spanish occupation. Plots usually revolved around the theme of forbidden love among characters of the ruling classes (typically construed as one between a Christian and an “infidel”) that take place in fictitious or exotic European locales and that end with a restoration of order and the triumph of true love usually through a conversion or a magical revelation. Although derived from European metrical romances, the awit through the centuries acquired strong religious-didactic elements. In Roke’s version of Shakespeare’s classic, then, only about half the lines are devoted to the outlining

of Shakespeare's plot. More often, the text takes the form of heavily moralized discourses on the evils of violence or philosophizing about the nature and power of love. What in Shakespeare's play is a relatively simple street brawl that begins the play, for instance, is in this version close to a twenty-page battle.⁷

In the foreword to the 1901 text, *Ang Sintang Dalisay ni Julieta at Romeo*, the author explains that the awit, while not original, is specifically made for its presumably Tagalog/Filipino audience ("di sariling catha't may quinunang ugat, linangcapang acma at cayang saguisag"). This version of *Romeo and Juliet* localizes Shakespeare in other unique ways. In keeping with or perhaps in fear of the teachings of a very conservative and powerful Catholic church in the islands, the text is cleaned up. All the bawdiness disappears—along with the Nurse and Mercutio, arguably the bawdiest characters in Shakespeare's play. In its place, one finds stanza upon stanza of moralizing and editorializing on the action in keeping with the didactic nature of most Philippine vernacular literatures.

Of course, it is rather unfair to compare this awit exclusively to Shakespeare's play, as its source is clearly not only Shakespeare. In her analysis of the 1914 edition *Sintahang Dalisay*, Damiana Eugenio concludes that the text "was not derived from any one source. The poet probably collected from all known accounts of the story the details that appealed to him and wove them into his story. At every possible occasion, he inserted long moralizing stanzas which make up approximately half the bulk of the romance."⁸ She names and compares this awit to four other sources aside from Shakespeare's: the Italian Mateo Bandello's "Romeo e Giulietta" (itself derived from Luigi da Porto's novella *Historia novellamente ritrovata di due*

7 This brief explanation is drawn from Damiana Eugenio, *Awit and Corrido: Philippine Metrical Romances* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1987), a seminal work on the awit (and *corrido*) in the Philippines.

8 Eugenio, *Awit and Corrido*, 145.

nobili amanti), William Painter's *The Palace of Pleasure*, and Arthur Brooke's "The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet" (both derived from a French re-telling of the tale in Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoires tragiques*). *Sintang Dalisay* seems to be a pastiche of these versions of the Romeo and Juliet legend where the author of the awit picks up the Prince's speech after the opening brawl, the dialogue between Paris and Lord Capulet and even Juliet's age from Shakespeare, the balcony scene and the title from Bandello and Brooke, and the first meeting at the dance from da Porto.

Despite the variety of sources, however, an "original" moment in the text that completely parallels none of the possible sources takes place at the story's climax and at one of its iconic scenes—the deaths of the main characters. In Shakespeare, as in Boaistuau, Groto, Brooke, Painter, and Bandello, Romeo is dead before Juliet reawakens in the tomb. In *Sintang Dalisay*, as in the da Porto account, Juliet awakens in time to find Romeo in the tomb but only after he had already drunk the poison creating the opportunity for a melodramatic farewell scene where death is held in dramatic abeyance only long enough for our lovers to bid each other their tearful goodbyes. In this case, "long enough" takes all of forty stanzas or one hundred and sixty dodecasyllabic lines (not counting all the ruminations on the nature of tragic love that follows the double suicide). Unlike in da Porto, however, where Juliet kills herself by holding her breath, the author of the awit, perhaps more sophisticated than his medieval source, turns to Shakespeare and has Juliet more realistically and more dramatically stab herself to death.

I pause to consider this moment of authorial indulgence, of deviations from and combinations of sources to produce a death scene that to the author's mind would be most apropos to his audience. It highlights the theme of *sawi na pag-ibig* (doomed or thwarted love) that is central to the Filipino cultural sensibility. Indeed, vernacular literature is replete with stories of the *sawi*—it

is the central plot conflict of *awit* and, later on, novels, the subject of poetry, the source of the most poignant of songs, and even, later on, is the major plot line of every other Filipino film ever made (an exaggeration, I know, but it certainly feels like it). It seems that in Philippine cultural traditions, love is not love unless it is threatened or forbidden, nor does it alter when it alteration finds.

Another intriguing aspect of this text is the question of authorship. The author, G. D. Roke, is identified by the bibliographic entry as a pseudonym—not an uncommon practice among writers of this form. Given the range of sources employed in writing this version of the story, however, one marvels at who this might be. Significantly, the pseudonymous author, like the foreign text itself, identifies himself in the *awit*'s dedicatory foreword as a stranger to the land. At the same time, a few stanzas later, the author identifies the Philippines as “*mahal cong bayan*” (my beloved country). Both local and foreign, the author positions himself much like a translated text, occupying the tenuous ground between the foreign and the local. Furthermore, when one reads the extended and unusually erudite footnote on the history of Verona, one recognizes that what is highlighted in this long history is its history of colonization by foreign invading powers. There are hints as well that we are meant to find a correlation between Verona and the Philippines, the foreign source and the native text. In the foreword, the author describes the Philippines as a place threatened by destruction, much like Verona itself. In the afterword, the poet sings praises to Verona being the staging ground for this story of true love and tantalizingly refers to its colonial history in terms of translation:

Naguing para ca mang mut-yang punong ning-ning
 pinag-agauanan at nasalin salin
 sa iba at ibang liping nagsisupil,
 n~gunit ang sintahang tunay sa iyo'y supling.

[You were like a jewel full of sparkle
 Fought over and “translated”
 By different conquerors
 But true love was your offspring.]

What saves Verona, a land constantly threatened by invasion and internal strife, from its fate of certain destruction is true love (“sintahang tunay”). The author certainly saw the writing of this awit, this tale of transcendent love, as a way out of his personal depression as he explains in the foreword. It is also figured as a remedy for the ills of the Veronese state threatening to implode in the wake of the feud but united in the end as a consequence of the tragic love of Romeo and Juliet. Was the author insinuating the same for the Philippines?

Whatever the case, the sentiment must have resonated with the Filipino reading public. In 1914, *Julieta at Romeo o Sintahang Dalisay* goes through a second printing—a relative rarity for non-religious literature in Philippine publishing until the early part of the twentieth century—attesting to the popularity of this story. This edition, however, names Gedeere as the author of what is substantially the same text save for some updating in language and spelling and a slight abridging of the text. The 1914 edition of this text no longer includes the foreword or afterword. The reason for these changes in authorial attribution and deletion of the paratextual material is unclear, although one may speculate that the evasion of some kind of authority may have necessitated the change. At least one historian of the theater at the time cites “ecclesiastical prohibitions” against the staging of *Romeo and Juliet* (along with *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Othello*).⁹ After all, this tale of forbidden love, teenage suicide, and the defiance of parental authority with the complicity of at least one friar would understandably not have sat very well with

9 Miguel Bernad, SJ, *Dramatics at the Ateneo de Manila: A History of Three Decades, 1921–1952* (Manila: Ateneo Alumni Association, 1977), 82.

the conservative Catholic Church. In the private scene of reading, however, the story remained popular, hence, a second edition.

Furthermore, despite possible prohibition, an even greater proof of the awit's popularity is that the only record of a Shakespearean performance in a local language and the only performance outside of a school during the American colonial period is a Cebuano *linambay* called *Romeo ug Julieta*, staged in Carcar in 1917.¹⁰ It is also the first Shakespearean play adapted into film (*Romeo at Julieta*, Lebran Productions 1951) and has been adapted repeatedly since—even notably as a lesbian love story in the indie film *Rome and Juliet* (Cinema One Originals 2006).

A few years later, in 1918, a version of *Romeo and Juliet* is published, this time as a *nobelang Tagalog*, or Tagalog novel. Pascual de Leon's *Bulag ang Pagibig* (Love is blind) is a more straightforward rendition of Shakespeare's text (it says so on the title page ("hango sa 'Julieta at Romeo' ni Shakespeare"), albeit still with some "cultural adjustments." For example, the first meeting of the lovers uses the words of the Shakespearean sonnet but divides the lines so that the seduction is not mutual; Romeo is clearly the more aggressive party, speaks all his lines, and kisses Juliet before she even speaks. Curiously, though, this edition features a rather lengthy afterword written by another famous novelist, Juan Rivera Lazaro. In this essay, Lazaro takes up the cudgels for translating foreign texts and writes a strident, even defensive, rationalization for translating foreign texts by appealing to universal human nature, the timelessness

10 Resil B. Mojares, *Theater in Society, Society in Theater: Social History of a Cebuano Village, 1840–1940* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1985), 63. The *linambay* is the Cebuano version of the Tagalog *komedya*, essentially the dramatic rendition of the metrical romances, the awit and corrido. Mojares writes a finely detailed account of the *linambay* in *Theater in Society, Society in Theater*. For more general accounts of the *komedya*, I am indebted to the work of Nicanor Tiongson, *Kasaysayan ng Komedya sa Pilipinas, 1766–1982* (Manila: De La Salle University Integrated Research Center, 1982); Doreen G. Fernandez, *Palabas: Essays on Philippine Theater History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1996); and Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign*.

of some texts, and the democratizing impulse of translation. Jose Rizal himself, Lazaro continues to argue, was also translated. More curiously, Lazaro finds another similarity between Rizal and this Shakespearean text. Through translations of Rizal's novel *Noli me tángere*, Lazaro claims that Rizal was able to expose the evils of those in power in the country at the time, but in the process of the exposure of corruption, he also created a model for true love. If Shakespeare gave us Romeo and Juliet, Rizal gave us Ibarra and Maria Clara. Much like in Verona, amid the strife and corruption in our own land, lies the redemption of true love. Indeed, apart from the value of translation, Lazaro's afterword is really an extended disquisition on the nature and power of love or, more specifically, on the power of love over other earthly powers. In some ways, the logic of Lazaro's essay sounds vaguely like Roke's afterword to his own version of this story. Both highlight the redemptive powers of love and identify this fact as crucial to the story of Romeo and Juliet. Among the translators, this was perhaps understood as the story's essence.

Also appearing at the end of this book are several dedicatory poems extolling the virtues of the author's previously published work. Significantly, there is one poem written by the revered Tagalog poet Jose Corazon de Jesus, inspired by de Leon's translation of Shakespeare's play. "Julieta at Romeo" is a short poem in six sections where the first introduces the story and highlights the Montague-Capulet feud and the last speaks of the resolution of that feud as a result of the actions of Romeo and Juliet, providing this otherwise tragic tale with a requisite happy ending. The bulk of the poem centers on only two key scenes from the play—section 2 describes the balcony scene and sections 3, 4, and 5 detail the deaths of both characters in the Capulet tomb. The contours of this poetic retelling reveal much about what the poet (and by extension a Filipino interpreter of the tale) saw as crucial or essential to the story. Clearly, the emphasis is on the forbidden love and its tragic consequences as

seen in the choice of scenes. Everything else in the original story is inconsequential to this poet/poem. Emblematic of the pains of love, the dual suicides of the main characters are drawn in relatively great detail and obviously constitute the poem's center of gravity.

It seems that, in the face of love worth dying for, everything else ceases to matter. The enshrining of the love story of Romeo and Juliet in the vernacular canons shows just how the Filipino predilection for a good love story trumps official colonial history and offers "love" as a transcendent counterdiscourse to colonial politics. With stunning disregard for the "official" Shakespeare of the schools, of the colonial icon Shakespeare, vernacular writers have in effect installed a Shakespearean icon of its own. In a way, the popularity of *Romeo and Juliet* and its multiple translations is symbolic of the transcendence of true love over the world of colonial politics. Far from simply being a colonial imposition, the print history of *Romeo and Juliet* in the Philippines seems to indicate that the reading publics in the Philippines found in the "forbidden play" a Shakespeare far more in keeping with its tastes and traditions and kept that in print.

Vernacular traditions of Shakespeare indeed invite us to look at these texts not as "masks of conquest"¹¹ or tools of the imperial "civilizing mission" but instead as how Karl Vossler puts it: "strategic fortifications, behind which the language genius of a people defends itself against the foreigner by the ruse of taking over as much from him as possible."¹² The facile dismissal of Shakespeare as a colonial icon, therefore, attributes too much to elite institutions like colonial education in English, granting it too much agency without consideration of how other cultural forms, primarily popular cultural forms and translations into native languages, may have reworked

11 Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

12 Karl Vossler, *The Spirit of Language in Civilization*, trans. Oscar Oeser (London: Routledge, 1932), 182.

elements of colonial cultures not necessarily transmitted via its educational systems. Wholesale reproduction (mimicry) or rejection (revolution) were not the only modes of response to colonial cultures. In place of the limited and limiting postcolonial paradigm of writing back, what the print history of Shakespeare in the Philippines suggests is an even richer tradition of writing Shakespeare in.

NOTE

Originally a paper included in the Seminar on Shakespeare and Print at the World Shakespeare Congress in Prague, in 2011, much of the material in this version has subsequently been included in the expanded survey of Shakespearean translations in the Philippines by the same author. See Judy Celine Ick, “The Undiscovered Country: Shakespeare in Philippine Literatures,” *Kritika Kultura* 21/22 (2013): 1–25, <http://dx.doi.org/10.13185/KK2013.02127>.

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