

Ilonggos, Igorrottes, Merchants, and Jews: Shakespeare and American Colonial Education in the Philippines

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I begin with a story of bewilderment. Shortly after my return to the Philippines from graduate school in 1994, I found myself an accidental speaker on things Shakespearean at a small, very exclusive Opus Dei-run high school in a converted Lopez mansion in the outskirts of Iloilo. The speaking engagement was unplanned and rather spontaneous. The school authorities, though, did a splendid job of putting a program together for the occasion. Aside from my talk, the impromptu program also featured performances by two of the winners of a recently concluded declamation contest. Quite fortuitously (or would that be unsurprisingly?), the winning declaimers both did pieces from Shakespeare.

I cannot tell you now with any certainty what I talked about then. Neither can I tell you about the boy who won second place. I don't even remember the name of the school. But I clearly remember the winning contestant who did Shylock. This otherwise nondescript adolescent who could barely speak to me—I spoke no Ilonggo and he faltered with his English—suddenly launched into a powerful rendition of Shylock's famous appeal from *The Merchant of Venice* replete with the racial stereotypes, trademarks, and clichés of the role.

This boy's performance was the source of great bewilderment for me as he certainly had his "evil Jew" down pat. His accent wavered somewhere between Britain and Brooklyn and his malicious, leering demeanor made me think of Fagin doing Shylock. Why is it that there seems to be an inherent evilness in versions of the Jew? Why was this boy's Shylock a caricature of inhuman evil even as his words were protesting humanness? Where did this come from?

I start with this story because it contains many of the things I will be interrogating further in this paper—Ilonggos, Filipinos, Jews, English, schools, merchants, education, elite education, petrified performance, and of course, Shakespeare. But I start by answering the question I posed initially with an answer absent from, yet fully present in, that list. Where did all this come from? The Americans.

Like Jews in Shakespeare's Venice, Americans, orthodox "nationalist" wisdom would have us believe, are the source of every evil. Like Jews in Shakespeare's Venice, I argue, however, that American colonialism has a specific and more complex history, as does Shakespeare. I would like to talk about the intersections between the histories of these institutions that loom large in our imagination and the site of those intersections that is Philippine culture. Looking at the specific histories of these institutions—Shakespeare and colonialism—broadens our understanding not just of texts but the contexts that created them and, indeed, they helped create. More importantly, this paper begins to address what I feel is a crucial need for re-historicizing English literary study in Philippine academe. All too often, when we talk about approaching texts historically, we talk about the history of their origins in the cultures from which they spring. I'd like to resituate history and suggest to you that *The Merchant of Venice* of 1596 London is not *The Merchant of Venice* we know in the Philippines today. Ours is a *Merchant* created by colonial education whose history only begins in Manila in 1904.

ENTER SHAKESPEARE

In June 1904, David Barrows, General Superintendent of Education of the American colonial government, codifies the *Courses of Instruction for the Public Schools of the Philippine Islands*. In it, he specifically prescribes two Shakespearean plays to be taught to all High School juniors in the Islands—*Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice* (15). Though the widespread implementation of this rule may have come a few years later as many students were only beginning secondary instruction in 1904, Shakespeare officially enters the Philippine educational system through this directive. Versions of Shakespeare may have entered Philippine culture even earlier; for example, through the *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb featured in the reading lists for the intermediate grades and

through children's versions of Shakespearean texts bought by the Public Libraries. The widespread and official deployment of Shakespeare in the Islands, however, begins with Barrows' decree.

Soon after its official entrance on the page, Shakespeare quite expectedly took the stage. Unsurprisingly, Shakespeare enters Philippine theatre through academic institutions. The first Shakespearean play performed in the country was *The Merchant of Venice*, staged at the Ateneo in 1910 (Bernad 4).¹ This theatrical debut was shortly followed by a performance of the same play at the Silliman Institute (later University) in 1912 (Edades). The earliest record of a Shakespearean performance at the University of the Philippines is a production of the Trial scene from this play staged at Los Banos in 1920 ("The Class of 1920"). Saint Theresa's College in Manila also staged an all-female version of this play in 1924 (Bernad 16).

Outside of the Ateneo, where *Julius Caesar* seems to have gone to live,² the Philippine public educational system comes to privilege *The Merchant of Venice*. Twenty years after Barrows' directive, we find *Merchant* solidly entrenched in the curricula for public high schools. In *The Students' Guide in English Literature for Philippine Secondary Schools* written by Francisco Africa and based on the *Course of Study in English for High Schools* prescribed by the Bureau of Education, *Julius Caesar* is nowhere to be found. The only *Study in English for High* play that is covered in the book is *The Merchant of Venice*. The *Course of Study in Literature for Secondary Schools*, essentially a guide for teachers issued by the Bureau of Education first in 1925 and revised in 1933, confirms the primacy of *The Merchant of Venice* in the official high school curriculum. This play remains the play that is required of all high school students throughout the period. It is probably no accident then that *Merchant* is one of the earliest Shakespearean plays translated into a native language. Ricaredo Ho's Hiligaynon prose rendition of the play, remarkably written in the style of the vernacular *vida*, is published in Iloilo in 1933.

Well, what do you know? We're back in Iloilo. One of the questions that the whole declamation program led me to ask was one about the role of Shakespeare in English literary education in the Philippines. Why was Shakespeare specifically important to the American educational system in the Philippines? And why this play? Why not *The Tempest*, a play where the valorization of the colonial

paradigm is more apparent? Why is it, for instance, that the Americans even chose to institutionalize a British playwright in the first place? If we assume that one of the impulses which drives colonialism is the creation of an imitation, mirror culture in the image of the colonizer—little brown brothers, as it were—then the choice of a British playwright is initially dubious.

Unless, of course, that British playwright is the William Shakespeare. While the story of the creation and development of Shakespeare's literary reputation and its evolution into shorthand for the very ideas of "civilization" and "high culture" is a fascinating one, the tale is too long to tell here. Suffice it to say that by the time Shakespeare arrived on Philippine shores, we weren't just receiving copies of a few plays but a whole complex apparatus. It included a culture of scholarship, a history of colonial appropriation (by the Americans of the British), an evolving practice of institutionalization in education, and, of course, centuries of stage traditions. Shakespeare was not a simple product, not just another playwright, but a complex web of traditions, institutions, and commercial appropriations. It wasn't just a bard coming to town but The Bard and "Bardbiz" along with him, "Shakemyth" along with Shakespeare.³

One part of the saga of Bardbiz, however, is pertinent to the story of our Shakespeare. America's role in the creation of the cultural icon, "Shakespeare," and the unequivocally American interpretations of these texts are of great relevance to our understanding and our received notions of this thing called Shakespeare. I will, then, sketch out in necessarily broad strokes the tortured relationship of America to Shakespearean culture in an effort to throw light upon this relationship and what it has to do with us.

BUFFALO BILL SHAKESPEARE

In his impressive analysis of Shakespeare as an American institution, Michael Bristol proves that "the interpretation of Shakespeare and the interpretation of American political culture are mutually determining practices" (3). In more basic language, Bristol claims that Shakespeare is deeply implicated in the historical process of defining an American identity and that the process of definition necessitated the creation of a specifically American Shakespeare. The

history of the American appropriation of Shakespeare is long and complicated, however, two important figures in that history illustrate certain aspects of America's Shakespeare that later becomes relevant to our own versions of the man. Oddly enough, these two Americans cross paths in school.

During his senior year at Amherst College, Henry Clay Folger attends a lecture delivered by Ralph Waldo Emerson that stimulates a life-long Shakespearean obsession (Bristol 70). If the name is familiar it is because this is the Henry Folger after whom the biggest and best Shakespeare library in the world is named. It was through his capital and initially through his personal efforts that the collection of this library was accumulated. The Folger Shakespeare Library created by American capital and situated in the American capital—right beside the Library of Congress, directly behind the Supreme Court building and obliquely behind the House of Representatives—among other institutions that legitimize the nation brashly claims Shakespeare as one such American institution in no uncertain terms. When Folger was deciding to build his Library, the British government begged him to consider housing his collection at Statford-Upon-Avon. He declined.⁴

The conviction that allows Folger to imagine Shakespeare as truly American, indeed as a national institution deserving of a place among other national institutions, can perhaps be traced to Emerson who was one of the chief defenders of the idea.⁵ His influential declaration in *Representative Men* that Shakespeare was “the father of the man in America” was rooted in his belief that Shakespeare’s great “moral sentiment,” made him more suitable to the promise that was America, even more American in a sense, than the Old World from which he sprung (211).

What both Emerson and Folger illustrate are certain crucial characteristics of the American Shakespeare. First is the paradoxical position of Shakespeare as a site of simultaneous connection to and defiance of European culture. Emerson’s claim to Shakespeare fathering American man links America to Europe through Shakespeare as it proclaims absolute separation. Folger’s compulsion to buy out Shakespeareana from the decaying old houses of the English aristocracy with new capitalist money validates and rejects Old World culture at the same time. Second, the deep implication of

the notion of culture in capitalist economy is hinted at by Folger's grand gesture. While the initial importation of Shakespearean culture into America may have had more populist roots (i.e. fledgling, amateur productions put on by English immigrants to the New World), by the turn of the century Shakespeare had been co-opted by the American elite largely in collaboration with educational institutions.⁶ Finally, another characteristic of American Shakespeare that both these men enable is a de-historicized Shakespeare, the poet radically separated from his time and material culture.

Unlike Shakespeare, the "national poet" and the champion of Englishness in its British incarnation, the American Shakespeare is a transnational, universal poet whose significance lies nowhere near its origins. While British interpretations of Shakespeare tend to see him as a poet who prized the monarchy and valorized social hierarchies, the American Shakespeare is definitely a democrat. Shakespeare's involvement with the old, un-democratic aristocracy dictated that American writers like Emerson adopt and adapt a version of Shakespeare that rejects these bourgeois roots—hence, his "fatherhood of American man." The processes of adoption, adaptation and appropriation entailed the creation of an Americanized Shakespeare that was, in a sense, essentialist, ahistorical, not specifically British but more in the nature of a universal truth—ironically truly "not for an age, but for all time." Emerson, in fact insists that Shakespeare's power lies in his very separation from a specific history. "*It is the essence of poetry to spring . . . from the invisible, to abolish the past and refuse all history*" (In Bristol 125).

A ceaselessly malleable Shakespeare, whose refusal of history opens up the possibility of a range of interpretations, is necessitated by a deep-seated conflict in the American psyche or in what Alan Sinfield calls "an ideological faultline in U.S. Man" (256). While attached to the Old World, America took pride in the New. A reinvented Shakespeare seemed to serve both ends. Seeking legitimacy through the acquisition of a version of European culture, the American notion of its national character nonetheless includes an equally strong strain of pride in a pioneering spirit. Sinfield asserts that the cultivated European combined with Daniel Boone best describes this cultural schizophrenia. "Imperial Shakespeare," he claims, "seems to heal the split in concepts of U.S. Man: Daniel Boone was acting in the spirit of the Elizabethans, and Shakespeare's writing justifies Anglo-

American dominance of diverse peoples and places” (267-268). What better way to heal this cultural rift than to fearlessly foray into the wild blue yonder, to colonize a territory to ostensibly train the natives in self-government and, in so doing, spread the gospel according to Shakespeare as well? Or in the words of authentic “Thomasite,” E.E. Schneider, from a poem written on board the transport *Thomas* in 1901:

O'er boundless seas to a foreign land
A chosen and devoted band you go . . .
The selfsame task you carry out, to sow
The seeds of truth and culture; and you know
This is a noble duty, wisely planned (132).

SHAKESPEARE IN SCHOOL

Like those early American teachers, we take the transport *Thomas* back to the Philippines. On some level, the employment of Shakespeare by the American colonial educational apparatus comes as no surprise. Many historians and critics of colonial education have thoroughly discussed the role of literary education in the evolution of the ideal colonial subject (Altbach and Kelly; Viswanathan; Bhabha; Loomba). The humanistic assumptions of literary education cloak the barbarism of the colonial enterprise very well. That's why literature is (seemingly) an effective tool of conquest.

Barred by official policy from the direct use of religion to mold its students, for American colonial education, literature or Shakespeare, was perhaps the next best thing. In their discussions of the uses of literature in British colonial education, both Gauri Viswanathan and Ania Loomba talk about how the dangers and controversies of the religion question in British India were sidestepped by colonial education through literature. Literature was invested with the power to teach values more conventionally contained in religious teaching. Did the Americans employ a similar strategy and use Shakespeare as a surrogate Bible? Maybe a surrogate Koran.

In a letter to his sister, Josephine, pioneer American educator, Rizal scholar, and founding University of the Philippines academic Austin Craig mentions a textbook he had just put together:

I have just finished a little book on Morals, *Koran Counsel*, to be submitted for use in the Mindanao and Sulu Schools, collaborating with a Mecca Pilgrim, a Hadji. It takes ethical quotations from the Muhammadan scriptures on Goodness, Honesty, Patience, Justice, Doing Good for Evil, Against Ignorance, Irreverence, Lying, Gambling, etc. There is in every case a quotation from Buddha, one from Rizal or a Filipino proverb, one from Shakespeare, a few from common English and American poets and the rest from classical writers—particularly Latin. It aims to show that Christian, Buddhist, and Muhammadan morals are the same—all religions having these ideas in common—so all can live together harmoniously in a single government (121-122).

Notice that Craig does not use the Bible as the text to illustrate Christian virtue? In its place, he uses Shakespeare, arguably Rizal,⁷ and “a few common English and American poets.” Shakespeare takes up the place that should have been occupied by the Christian Bible. One might argue that this discursive move guarantees the escape from religious controversy. After all, invoking the Bible to convince Muslims to attend a school run by Christians is not exactly strategically wise. I think, however, that the singling out of Shakespeare and his elevation to the status of Mohammed and Buddha are telling.⁸

“WHICH IS THE MERCHANT HERE? . . .”

The discussion thus far only hints at why Shakespeare was important to the American colonial enterprise. The related question—why *The Merchant of Venice*?—remains unanswered. A simple answer would be shifting popular taste. Following Gary Taylor’s widely accepted account of Shakespearean reputation, *Merchant* was one of the most popular plays at the turn of the century in America. Significantly, Taylor reports that, “[b]etween 1886 and 1900 *The Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Caesar* were taught in more American high schools than any other works of literature” (204). So it may very well be that the teaching of these plays in Philippine schools was purely an act of mimicry. It may be that these years approximate the years the Americans involved in the development of the secondary curricula went to or taught in high school themselves and they, in turn, sought to replicate the experience here.

Was the entrance of *Merchant* in Philippine education, then, merely the result of its contemporary popularity? Yes, but the more crucial question is why. What accounts for this popularity at the close of the nineteenth century in America?

It is a commonplace of *Merchant* criticism to note that the play is one obsessed with money and religion. The driving mercantilism of Venice is the same force that drives Bassanio to woo Portia in Belmont. Even the “love story” is not immune from a sense of venture capitalism. Bassanio’s loaning money from Antonio to fund his courting of Portia represents Antonio’s literal investment in Bassanio’s future. Portia’s desirability as wife (indeed, she attracts suitors from Aragon, Morocco, and farther corners of the world) is enhanced, even secured, by her being “a lady richly left.” Her very hair, “her sunny locks/ Hang on her temples like a golden fleece” (1.1.160-170). And when Bassanio wins her and Gratiano wins her maid, Nerissa, Gratiano then boasts that “we are the Jasons, we have won the fleece” (3.2.240).⁹ The other major issue in the play is religion. Much critical ink has been spilled over the relationship between the Christian Venetians and Shylock the Jew. It is perhaps safe to say that up until World War II, conventional critical wisdom held that the religious conversion forced upon Shylock after losing his case in the Venetian court, represented the supreme example of Christian mercy in the play.¹⁰

Men venturing forth on loaned capital to fund get-rich-quick schemes in faraway lands. Christians dead set on converting “heathens.” I could be talking about *The Merchant of Venice*. On the other hand, I could very well be talking about historical colonialism itself. In “Which is the merchant here? And which the Jew?: subversion and recuperation in *The Merchant of Venice*,” Thomas Moisan presents a number of early modern tracts that yoke together the twin concerns of early colonialism—economics and religion. He states that “to the audience inured to such texts, *The Merchant of Venice*, might well have seemed a transparent allegory of its times” (191-192). The origins of British imperialism and the production of Shakespearean plays are historically simultaneous phenomena. It is no surprise then that a play that exists at and interrogates the intersections between capitalism and racism—the twin impulses of Empire—should have been written at this time.

Seen through these lenses, the play's popularity at the turn of the nineteenth century begins to make more sense. The time period from the late nineteenth to the early part of the twentieth century roughly corresponds to a heyday of global imperialism. At this point, the sun had yet to set on the British Empire as it held global economic dominance (Arrighi 363-367). On the political front, the modern nation-state not only reached its apex in Europe but similar state structures were being set up in African possessions as well (Young 77-140). In the words of Frank Golay, "imperialism saturated the political and intellectual climate of the closing decades of the nineteenth century" (5). The play's popularity in America, then only beginning to get into the imperial game, can be no accident. *Merchant* seems to be specifically compatible with imperialist ideologies. Aside from valorizing capitalism and Christianity, the play presents a vision of a civilized and civilizing Christian merchant society whose identity and hegemony are confirmed and strengthened via the subjugation of its "others." Clearly, *Merchant's* supremacy was always more consequential than a question of cultural caprice.

Post-colonial critics of Shakespeare most often designate *The Tempest* as the paradigmatic play of European colonialism (Brown; Cartelli; Hulme and Barker).¹¹ *The Tempest*, however, literally figures only secondarily in colonial education in the Philippines. The 1933 edition of the *Course of Study in Literature For Secondary Schools* lists *The Tempest* among the elective readings for the home reading requirement (52). Coming late into the game, American colonialism no longer encounters "a brave new world" like Prospero's island. The Philippines was no longer purely the unspoiled virgin territory peopled by uncontaminated exotics. Instead, most of the territory had already undergone three centuries of Spanish colonial rule. In an interesting subversion of the reading of *The Tempest* that likens Prospero's isle to the New World or America, the story of American colonialism has the New World arriving at the scene of an "other" world contaminated by an Old World Culture. The Philippines then was much like Venice at the borders of East and West. Even more tantalizing is the equivocal geographic and ideological position of the Philippines in the American imperial imagination. The Philippines was imagined both as the gateway to the Far East and the extension of the Western Frontier.¹² Both East and West. The fluidity of the Philippines' position then mimics the ambiguity of Venice.

Unlike Prospero's isle where magic is used to wield control over the native population and other intruders, the Venetians hold no power to conjure storms. Instead, they have the rule of Law. Where irrational and illusory power rule in *The Tempest*, *The Merchant of Venice* invokes the powers of contracts and courts of Law. The apparatuses that support the Venetian State in this play are more developed and complex than obvious aggression. They rely not on a subject's naïve wonder but on his informed participation. I wonder if, like us, all Shylock needed to succeed in Venice was "education for self-government"? In keeping with the ideologies and practices of American imperialism, the cruelty in the text of *The Merchant of Venice* is equally insidious. As was "benevolent assimilation." At the same time, in Venice, violence or its constant threat was never absent and as we know, the Americans did extract way more than "a pound of flesh."

" . . . AND WHICH THE JEW?"

And then there's race. That race is an underlying force in the American colonial enterprise in the Philippines hardly needs further elaboration.¹³ One need only invoke the colonial fiction of "little brown brothers." Or, if one desires a more literary example, remember that Kipling's (in)famous poem exhorting the Americans to "take up the White Man's Burden" and "serve . . . "Your new-caught sullen peoples/ Half devil and half child," appeared in McClure's magazine at the height of the congressional debates on "the Philippine question" (in Golay 39-40). The very political structures of colonial government that effectively split the Philippines in two—with a civil government ruling over half the territory and a military government controlling "the non-Christian tribes" until 1914—illustrates the practical applications of the racist assumptions of colonial rule (Abinales). Racism in *Merchant* is based on two similar things—skin color (as with Portia's suitors) and religion (the Jews). And just as "little brown brothers" simultaneously encodes discrimination and affection (discrimination as affection?), the Venetians, in demanding Shylock's conversion to Christianity, seek to punish and save him at the same time. Even as the colonial government openly declared the separation of Church and state as public policy, the religious and racist assumptions evinced in the existence of a separate government for non-Christian tribes—or indeed in the very nomenclature that uses

religion as the principle of that division—proves that absolute separation was a fiction. While the denial of racism and the avowed adherence to religious freedom may have been the “official line,” colonial practice left much to be desired.

This contradiction can be gleaned from the “official” interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice* in the period. In the *Course of Study in Secondary Schools* issued by the Bureau of Public Instruction in 1927, the guidelines for studying this text are spelled out through suggested class activities and class discussion questions. The aims of studying this play are also professed. The primary reason stated for teaching *Merchant* was “to have students enjoy Shakespeare through a realization of the human qualities of his characters and their universal appeal” (92). Democratic idealization and an essentialist Shakespeare are one and the same. The assumption of a universal human nature is also elaborated upon in the objectives for teaching literature in general with special reference to the play.

“Are you teaching *The Merchant of Venice*? How keenly do your pupils actually realize all that Shylock must have felt during the trial? Or what Bassanio must have felt, after his success in winning Portia, upon the arrival of the messenger with the news that his friend’s life must be the price of that success?” (5)

Reading Shakespeare, then, was supposed to result in an affective identification that absolutely negated historical and cultural exigencies.

At the same time, the *Course of Study* does not successfully escape the latent racism of the colonizer’s culture. In the entire section discussing *The Merchant of Venice* the word “Jew” is used only once. The suggestions for handling the discussion of the play’s characters lists qualities for some of them. For example, Portia is generously described as “lighthearted, humorous, girlish, eloquent, mischievous, resourceful, generous, intellectual, fascinating, and lovable.” That her character can also be read as a racist, spoiled brat does not occur to the writers of the *Course of Study*. Shylock, on the other hand, is presented in more confused terms. There are two options presented to assess his character. He can be seen as either “a revengeful, repulsive, inexorable Jew” or “a type of maltreated race—a man more sinned against than sinning.” Whichever interpretation one chooses, however,

his character traits remain listed as “intellectual, proud, satirical, devoted to his race, revengeful, mercenary, relentless, and obstinate” (92-93). The negative view of Shylock’s character is clearly dominant in this reading. Moreover, its racist underpinnings are hinted at in the context in which the word “Jew” is singularly used. To imagine Shylock as a victim meant imagining him as “a type of maltreated race,” not specifically Jewish. To imagine him as specifically Jewish meant seeing him as “revengeful” and “repulsive.”

One of the most stunning absences in the official guidelines for the teaching of *Merchant* is any extended engagement in or anything more than passing reference to Shylock’s Jewishness. How much of this “amnesia” can we attribute to latent, pre-Holocaust anti-Semitism? How much can we attribute to deliberate erasure of the religion question? Or might it be that owing to the relatively small size of the Jewish community in early American colonial times, it really didn’t matter? Jews were culturally and historically invisible anyway. This “invisibility,” however, was enabled by the fact that they were Americans. In his account of the history of the Jewish community in Manila, Lewis Gleeck point out that “what is crystal clear from the history of Jews in Manila during the early American period is that they are not thought of as a religious group but simply as Americans, both by Filipinos and their fellow Americans” (16). Or so one version of the story goes. What if the “invisibility” was strategic? What if it was necessary for survival?

In 1938, President Quezon announces his willingness to accept up to 10,000 Jewish refugees fleeing Hitler’s Europe. Plans are laid down for a resettlement community in Mindanao (Gleeck 19). At this point, the Jewish question becomes an issue in Philippine society. Much resistance meets Quezon’s plan. The Philippine Medical Association, for instance, refused to grant licenses to Jewish physicians seeking to establish practices here (“Political Persecution?”; “Social Justice for Jews?”). Quezon himself states, at a speech given at the Jewish resettlement community in Marikina that Filipinos protesting Jewish immigration do so out of the fear that the Jews would all be “merchants” who would end up controlling the country’s commerce and industry (Torre).

Where does this anti-Semitism come from? One might argue that it has always been present as an idea in Philippine culture. We

certainly cannot discount three centuries of orthodox Catholicism that sees Jews as Christ's killers. Furthermore, there are hints that more than religious reasons underlie the traces of anti-Semitism in Philippine culture. Inevitably, economics also comes to the fore. In *Clash of Spirits: The History of Power and Sugar Planter Hegemony on a Visayan Island*, Filomeno Aguilar Jr. essays the events surrounding the only massacre of Caucasians in Philippine history (15-31). During a virulent outbreak of cholera in Manila in 1820, Spanish friars successfully blamed foreign merchants—primarily British, Dutch and Americans—whom they labeled as “Protestants,” “Masons,” and “Jews” for spreading the disease. Their propaganda led to the massacre of 28 foreign merchants by “3,000 Men armed with pikes and knives” in Manila on October 9, 1820 (15).¹⁴

This furtive anti-Semitism doesn't disappear suddenly because another colonial government creates the sense of religious freedom. The idea only had to meet material reality to surface more prominently. The fear of a Jewish “invasion” makes this clear. Historicizing Shakespeare, or talking about real Jews, then, was potentially dangerous for American colonialism. The pedagogical silence on the issue of Jewishness in *Merchant* could perhaps be read as the avoidance of controversy. But as the treatment of the Jewish question in *the Course of Study* reveals, anti-Semitism was not an exclusively Filipino trait, if at all. The silence on the issue of Jewishness and the tactical escape to universalist fantasies of human nature could also be read as a refusal to acknowledge the fact that real live Jews at the time were also real live Americans.

The anti-Semitism lurking beneath the democratic idealization of a universal human nature reveals a chink in the colonial armor. And that “chink” is created by the collision between two of colonialism's most powerful informing discourses. When race clashes with religion, the democratic fictions of colonialism fall apart. The site of this collision is the figure of the Jew. The “static” surrounding the idea of the Jew could perhaps be explained by its ambiguous status as both race and religion. In tracing the history of the Jewish archetypes in *The Merchant of Venice*, Leslie Fiedler points to a historical shift in the perception of Jewishness from one that is theologically-bound (Judaism as religion) to one that is racially imagined. He locates this shift in the nineteenth century as religion gives way to science, as the evolutionary model provides a basis for racial classification and

hierarchization (85-136). Interestingly, the same evolutionary model that enables racism figures in the congressional debates in the early days of American colonialism. Frank Golay explains that “[t]he concept of nature as an endless struggle in which only the fittest survive was enthusiastically adopted by advocates of expansion who developed pseudoscientific theories to rationalize their imperial designs” (7). Colonialism and anti-Semitism shared the same rationalizations. How does one begin to explain Jewish colonialism? The status of Jewishness as race and/or religion in *The Merchant of Venice* read against real existence of American Jews in Philippine history point to a rupture in the colonial fabric that is perhaps best ignored as it opens up a site for confrontation of its contradictions.¹⁵

“O WHAT A GOODLY OUTSIDE FALSEHOOD HATH!”

American colonialism, despite postcolonial or nationalist historians’ declarations, was hardly a monolithic institution whose agenda was clear from its inception (Stanley; May). Contradictions always ran rampant. While it fostered an image of order as an enabling condition, a cursory survey of early congressional debates (Golay 17-89), further investigation of the relationship between the emergent colonial state and U.S. domestic politics (Abinales “Progressive-Machine Conflict”), or the significant anti-imperialist sentiment all point to a less than orderly state of affairs. The less than noble intentions behind professed goals like “education for self-government” similarly rely on cultural obfuscation to ensure colonialism’s survival. The Jew in the classroom threatened to expose such fictions of order.

The possibility of exposure is further enhanced by the nature of literary texts and the educational apparatus themselves. While literary education may have been an effective tool in imparting some versions of colonial ideologies, the very nature of literature and education can never guarantee absolute control. One basic reason for this is that both literature and education invite and foster critique. In his discussion of the uses to which Shakespeare has been employed in the British educational system, Alan Sinfield discusses the “subversive” possibilities inherent in education.

Any social order has to include the conditions for its own continuance, and capitalism and patriarchy do this partly

though the education system . . . At the same time the system is not monolithic. First, because the official ideology is democratic, the reproduction of an unjust society cannot be straightforward, it has to appear that education is for the good of all the pupils; second, in order to function educational institutions must have a certain relative autonomy, and within this teachers and administrators will have particular professional purposes and needs (“Give an account” 134).

Closer to home, Caroline Hau, in her discussion of nationalism in education in the post-colonial period, takes a similar position.

. . . the ethical technology for the formation of the subject of action is not a simple tool for the elitist indoctrination of ideological justifications for American colonization of the Philippines . . . this same technology, and the pedagogical imperative that suffuses it, cannot be characterized as necessarily repressive because the educational apparatus does not only concern itself with producing citizens, but also with producing “knowledge.” This means that the educable being whose responses are open to correction is also an educable being whose views are subject to theoretical reflection and interrogation . . . It can be used to shore up the American regime even as it has been used effectively to criticize that regime (243).

And I haven’t even begun to talk about the text. *The Merchant of Venice* is itself a text fraught with contradictions, one that carries within it the possibilities of its own subversion. Let me just name three possible sites of textual breakdown. Not surprisingly, they all involve Shylock.

First is the notion of capitalism put forth in the text. While conventional readings of the play tend to valorize Christian generosity over Jewish thrift, creating a distinction between “good” and “bad” capitalism, there are ways in which the text makes no such distinctions. After all, it is a single economy that suffuses Venice. Shylock’s capital funds Bassanio’s venture. The relationship between usury and capitalism in the play can be read as symbiotic rather than contentious (Moisan 196; Smith 164).

The second site of textual breakdown is Shylock's supposed difference from the Venetians who surround him. Without falling into some universalist trap, it is possible to see Shylock as "essentially" the same as the other characters in the text. Taking the cue from his own speech that insists upon sameness, there are ways in which the text constructs Shylock not as the Venetians' "other" but as their mirror image. The sameness, however, does not rest so much upon physical similarity ("Hath not a Jew eyes? . . . If you prick us do we not bleed?" 3.1.52-58) as upon successful tutelage. "The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction," (3.1.65-66) he declares at the end of that famous speech. In this speech, Kiernan Ryan cogently argues "that Shylock's bloodthirsty cruelty is not simply the result of the Venetians' treatment of him, but the deliberate mirror-image of their concealed real nature . . . The whole point of Shylock's demanding for payment of "a pound of flesh", and of Antonio's heart in particular, lies in its grotesquely graphic attempt to translate the moral heartlessness of Venice into reality" (18). Portia's ambiguous question upon her entrance in the Venetian court takes on powerful resonance. Which is the merchant and which is the Jew? Indeed, we may never be able to tell them apart.

Finally, there are ways in which the text deconstructs the notion of the very reliability of texts. The play is relentlessly anti-textual. After all, Antonio reminds us that "The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose" (1.3.93). Portia's defeat of Shylock in the Venetian court is a supreme example of the defeat of "literality," of the triumph of the "spirit of the Law" over the "letter of the Law."¹⁶ If we can't trust texts—spiritual or secular—what can we trust? And why are we reading them in the first place?

These are potentially dangerous thoughts to have in the colonial literature classroom yet they are conceivably contained in a colonial text. It is impossible to say for certain that they even existed but the potential was arguably there. This potential was enabled not only by the permissive space of the classroom or the radical potentialities of literary texts but also by the democratic fictions of reading Shakespeare engendered in its American incarnation. A malleable, de-historicized Shakespeare who despite his Britishness was capable of being the father of American man was certainly capable of being other things besides. Loosed from historically—specific moorings, Shakespeare becomes potentially interpretively anarchic.

“SO MAY THE OUTWARD SHOWS BE LEAST THEMSELVES”

A word about the staged versions: In her essay on “The Impact of American Colonial Rule on Philippine Theater,” Priscelina Legasto claims that “[t]he Philippine theater in English that presented world masterpieces and popular foreign plays in English translation was a direct transmission belt for American culture” (57). I question the notion of “direct transmission.” Any theater practitioner is aware that the performance text is an entirely different text from its literary counterpart. The layers of mediation implicit in theatrical performance render the performance text even more unstable. The policing of its possible meanings is virtually impossible. Talk about interpretive anarchy.

Just because one is performing, say, Shakespeare, does not mean that what is performed is “Shakespeare.” The variables of theatrical performance always guarantee that what is staged is an aberration of the literary text. And if, as I hope my discussion above has begun to show, the literary text is in itself already radically unstable, then the variability of performance only makes it more so. For indeed, what was the impact of native actors speaking a foreign tongue, dressed in exotic costumes, playing alien roles? Furthermore, the very fact of performance guarantees not only textual aberrations but exaggerations as well. Isn’t there a parodic distance almost always implied in native performance? Is exaggeration not the necessary hedge against the incommensurability of a Shakespearean role and the amateur native performer? Or let’s put this in concrete terms: is the absolute and complete identification of Raul Manglapus as Portia truly possible?¹⁷

Obviously not. It is perhaps this parodic distance created by necessarily exaggerated performance that was the very source of my initial bewilderment over that Ilonggo schoolboy’s Shylock so many years ago. The very same parodic distance that always subverts a Shakespearean text by the very fact of performance. “Direct transmission” indeed.

“THE VILLAINY YOU TEACH ME, I WILL EXECUTE . . .”

I began with bewilderment and end with braggadocio. If you’re wondering where the Igorrottes are, here they come . . .

Marion O'Connor in *Shakespeare Reproduced* provides a detailed account of an exhibition called *Shakespeare's England*, elaborately set up in Earl's Court in London from May to October 1912. Edwin Landseer Lutyens, the British Empire's chief architect, was called on to construct an exact replica of Shakespeare's Globe Theater and an exhibit featuring an almost-to-scale version of Sir Francis Drake's, *Revenge*, the flagship of the British Navy "responsible" for the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. The Globe Theater was peopled by actors in Elizabethan costume behaving in the manner of "common theatre-goers" of the time. Excerpts from Shakespearean plays were staged daily. The celebration of Empire was clearly the theme of this exhibition.

Amazingly, influential theater director and antiquarian revivalist, William Poel, takes great offense at the behavior of the actors playing Shakespearean audiences. He is publicly critical of the whole Globe set-up and publishes reviews to that effect. In these reviews he suggests that exhibition-goers enjoy another exhibition site instead.

A most interesting feature in the Western Gardens is the Igorrote Village, inhabited by a number of barbarians from the mountainous districts of the Philippine Islands. These natives are to give exhibitions of war and peace dances to the music of the inevitable tom-tom, as well as of their more industrial pursuits, and the whole show affords an interesting insight into their life. The extreme scantiness of their attire, however, gives one cause to wonder how they will fare under the attentions of a typical London east wind! (*The Stage*, 9 May 1912, 21)

An attraction to which all should repair is the village of Philippine islanders, wherein natives execute war dances, sing weird songs, and go through mimic combats with assegai and shield. The practice of the natives in carrying on their warfare is particularly interesting, and great is the evident pride of the scarred and tattooed warrior who has the distinction of having cut off most heads. The way in which the natives climb imitation coconut trees is astounding (*The Era*, 18 May 1912, 15).

Yes, I am aware of the extremely racist attitudes embodied in such remarks and in the very fact of presenting Igorots for exhibition as if they were caged animals. But what this example also illustrates

is the “upstaging” of Shakespeare in a celebration of Shakespeare in Shakespeare’s homeland. And the Igorots did that through performance. I see no reason why Filipinos interpreting Shakespeare in this day and age—in education or performance—should not do the same.

Or maybe I do. In my experience, there seems to be three predominant modes of reaction to Shakespeare in contemporary Philippine culture—awe, indifference or both. These responses are, for the most part, based on incomplete impressions of the role Shakespeare has come to occupy in the Filipino cultural landscape. On the one hand, there is an almost heroic adulation and valorization of the text from a few who are usually theater practitioners or critics. There are also those who rely on hearsay and proclaim his importance without knowing very much. These are my students. And then there are those who question the reasons for even studying a “colonial” playwright. You know who you are. All these responses bespeak a failure to understand exactly what Shakespeare has come to be and mean in our culture, a failure to understand its specific local and colonial history.

“My project has been to attempt a repunctuation of the play so that it may reveal its involvement in colonial practices, speak something of the ideological contradictions of its political unconscious” (Brown 69). I wish I had said that but that was Paul Brown describing his work on *The Tempest*. Brown articulates my own ambitions in re-historicizing Shakespeare. Recognizing the specific history of the English text in our culture and reading texts in this alternative historical context strips them of their innocence. More than seeing colonial texts as simply complicit in the colonial project, however, I think it is important to go beyond this and begin to glean the complexities contained within. Just as these texts are not the innocent expressions of universal human nature, they are not simple tools of colonial control either. Sometimes, they can be tools of exposure. They were and are repositories of certain colonial logics, illogics and, admittedly, ill logics.

And finally, let me declare that “perhaps it is time to study discourses not only in terms of their expressive value or formal transformations, but according to their modes of existence. The modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation of discourses vary with each culture and are modified within each” (273).

I wish I had said that. But that was Foucault.

ENDNOTES

¹The Ateneo has quite a tradition of Shakespearean performance beginning with *Merchant* in 1910. The following Shakespearean plays were staged by the Ateneo during the American colonial period: *Richard III* (1917), *Julius Caesar* (1921,1930), *Macbeth* (1923), and *King Lear* (1933). Interestingly, for the Intercollegiate One-Act Play Production in 1935, the Ateneo De Manila Player's Guild performed the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice* (with Raul Manglapus as Portia!).

²Bernad records three separate productions of this play at the Ateneo in the years from 1921-1936 and a Latin version of the play was performed in 1939.

³The terms "Bardbiz" and "Shakemyth" were coined by Terence Hawkes and Peter Smith, respectively.

⁴Bristol gives a more complete discussion of the origins and development of the Folger Library: (62-90).

⁵I do not mean to suggest, however, that the entire literary establishment shared Emerson's view. Walt Whitman, that great voice of American individualism, for instance, declares in *Democratic Vistas* that "The great poems [of the past], Shakespeare included, are poisonous to the idea of the pride and dignity of the common people, the life-blood of Democracy" (In Taylor 202). Even among the American literati there was dissension about the role of Shakespeare in America. But I don't think that America was ever able to, at least in terms of its Shakespearean ties to the Mother country, fully separate itself from British literary culture.

⁶Alan Sinfield discusses this historical shift in greater detail. "Actually, the popularity of Shakespeare in the United States, even more than in England during the nineteenth century, depended on the plays being wholly rewritten in ways that would now seem outrageous, and presented alongside unashamedly popular products . . . Gradually the highbrow idea of Shakespeare gained strength: the plays became noble texts to be read and reflected upon by ladies and gentlemen; stage productions became more restrained and thoughtful, and the 'original' texts were" restored; colleges put the plays into syllabuses, expensive collections of research materials were established, productions aspired to correspond to notions of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre . . . By the end of the nineteenth century, U.S. cities and towns could no longer sustain several simultaneous productions of the same Shakespeare play. He had stopped being popular and become the province of the leisure class and the education system—the two were related, since it seemed natural that the former should set the criteria for the latter" (264-266).

⁷I say “arguably” as the debates about Rizal and religion have a long and arduous history I have no desire to engage in here.

⁸The uses of the literary in education for what we might call “moral” purposes can be gleaned further from more official documents. In the *Courses of Study for the Intermediate Grades*, the Bureau of Education strongly recommends the use of songs, poems, plays, stories, and other literary forms in the teaching of Civics—a required subject that includes among other things training in such values (Christian virtues?) as Honesty, Kindness, Self-sacrifice, Patience, etc.

⁹Interestingly, the allusion to Argonauts is prominently utilized by two historians with reference to the Thomasites (Perez; Glecek).

¹⁰ Understandably, the critical tide has shifted considerably in the Post-Holocaust years prompting critics like Peter Smith to claim, for instance, that “what we are actually doing when we watch, teach, and act these plays [Merchant and its contemporary, Marlowe’s Jew of Malta] is nothing less than rejuvenating and re-experiencing racist texts” (150). His essay on racism and Jewishness in these plays contains a useful chronicle of post-Holocaust reactions to their anti-Semitism and questions their continued propagation and performance (149-181).

¹¹*The Tempest* is also the most widely used site of post-colonial counter-discourse. The most popular example is, of course, Aime Cesaire’s *Une Tempete* (1969). A more complete discussion postcolonial counter-discourse using Shakespearean plays can be found in Gilbert and Tompkins.

¹²On the imperial discourse on the Philippines and American expansion, see Golay; Merk; Drinnon; and LaFeber.

¹³An interesting discussion of American racism with special reference to the public census of 1903 is found in Vicente Rafael’s “White Love.” On racism and the decision to colonize the Philippines: see Drinnon, (especially chapters 20-22); and Golay (Chapters 1-3).

¹⁴Interestingly, this massacre was replicated the following day against 85 Chinese for “aiding the foreigners in spreading the poison” (16). It is tempting to see a conceptual analogy between the Jew in the West with the position of the Chinese in other Asian cultures. They are subject to similar processes of demonization or ostracism due to a perceived unfair economic influence.

¹⁵That anti-Semitism is inherent to the definition of the American self and the co-optation of Shakespeare in the process is evinced in the speech of Joseph Quincy Adams, director of the Folger Shakespeare Library, at its inauguration in 1932.

“About the time the forces of immigration became a menace to the preservation of our long-established English civilization, there was initiated

throughout the country a system of free and compulsory education for the youth. In a spirit of efficiency, that education was made stereotyped in form; and in a spirit of democracy, every child was forced by law to submit to its discipline . . . In our fixed plan of elementary schooling (Shakespeare) was made the cornerstone of cultural discipline . . . Not Homer, nor Dante, nor Goethe, nor Chaucer, nor Spencer, nor even Milton, but Shakespeare was made the chief object of their veneration” (qtd. in Bristol 79; Sinfield 269).

¹⁶Thomas Moisan presents a more complete discussion of the distrust of textuality in the play. These are only some examples.

¹⁷Much has been written about the essential differences and subversive potentials contained in Shakespearean performance texts. Some excellent examples of the work done in this area are the essays included in the anthologies edited by James Bulman, Jean Marsden, and Marianne Novy.

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