To appropriate a classical western play, a Shakespeare in this case, is to abduct the western text from its original milieu and to reconfigure it to a system of signs that make sense in another milieu. Seen as a clash of cultures, appropriation entails the act of confronting empire and imposing native will. Seen as an accommodation of cultures, appropriation is an effort to fuse native and non-native traditions. This presentation describes my theatrical attempts to appropriate Shakespeare in these two ways and in light of Philippine cultural and performance traditions. I learned two things in the process: first, that appropriation does not simply relocate Shakespeare in another cultural context, it can also dislocate Shakespeare from orthodox paradigms of Shakespearian performance; second, that this dislocation can yield strategies of resistance to colonial (or neocolonial) discourses.

Introduction: Shakespeare in Asia

Stage productions of Shakespeare in Asia, and Southeast Asian in particular, have taken many forms (see, for example, Brown 1999 and Kennedy 1993). These range from straightforward presentations of the primary texts, via the models handed down from the western theatre traditions from which they sprang (often referred to “canonical Shakespeare”) to fusions of these text with indigenous entertainment forms (or “localized Shakespeare”) to total adaptations or “post-colonial Shakespeare” where the form, language and plot of the originals are often no longer in evidence, but serves merely as the starting point for a dramatic exploration of underlying themes. In some instances, “localized Shakespeare” fuses with “postcolonial Shakespeare” to express underlying themes in the context of a specific cultural milieu.

Canonical Shakespeare pays homage to performance traditions handed down from Europe while the last two, the localized and postmodern, prefer to mine their own traditions to do Shakespeare. The two views often clash. The canonical school contends that localized or postcolonial versions of Shakespeare sacrifice the essence of the original and produce unpalatable hybrids – sort of like a dish of noodles topped with ice cream and shrimp paste. Striking back, the localized and postcolonial school may argue that canonical versions alienate local audiences from their native culture and fail to revitalize...
the classics for contemporary audiences. What is needed, these artists claim—and echoing the critic Jan Kott (cited in Markowitz 2001: vi), are works that “stretch the frames of reference found in classic text beyond the circumference around which the canon is usually wrapped.”

The reasons why theater artists choose one form over another, or combine them in one way or the other, are many. Those who espouse the canonical may feel that too much tampering with the original text constitutes literary sacrilege—a slap in the face of the author and the author’s intention. In turn, those who champion the localized or postcolonial take a less exclusive view of authorship, and reinterpret the text based on a personal agenda and a cultural repertoire. In doing so, they recontextualize Shakespeare so that his or our otherness, to paraphrase Bharucha (2001), does not get fixed in time, space, or cultural energy. The case of the famous Japanese intercultural stage director, Sukuki Tadashi is illustrative: Asked why he reinterprets Shakespeare using Japanese performance traditions, Suzuki replies:

…If I use Shakespeare or Euripides, for example, I don’t feel I’m using a foreign text, rather the heritage of the human race. If Europeans consider this to be a “European” drama, I think this shows excessive self-consciousness on their part. If the English think that Shakespeare is a part of their heritage only, then Shakespeare is of no interest. It is precisely the ability to impress other nations that makes Shakespeare so excellent (Carruthers and Mitchell 1995:10-11).

For whatever the reasons, Shakespeare has surfaced with much greater visibility in the Asian region today compared to decades ago. Two reasons are compelling. First, the production and consumption of Shakespeare in Southeast Asia have grown tremendously alongside the economic prosperity experienced in past decades. Second, and more important for our purposes, Shakespeare’s plays apparently continue to address the unique interests, concerns and perceptions of both theatre practitioners and their audiences. A colonial history is one such shared concern. Indeed, a panel on Southeast Asian Shakespeare, organized by the 2007 Asian-American Conference in San Francisco, did point out that a shared colonial past among many countries in the region is one important context for appreciating and staging Shakespeare (Huang 2007). Similarly, a growing interest in Shakespeare within the region also prompted the National University of Singapore to hold in 2002 a conference on “Shakespeare and the New Asias” with experts from East and West discussing developments in Shakespearean production in the Asian societies outside of Japan, China, and India.

Shakespeare is familiar with colonization. He wrote, after all, at a time when Britain was colonizing the world. His plays speak of power and dominance over other societies. In turn, Southeast Asian societies, historical subjects of colonialism, have found in Shakespeare a way to strike back against Empire. But not all the time. Those who insist on canonical versions may refuse to strike back, and opt instead to preserve loyalties with colonial (or neo-colonial) power (for the uses of Shakespeare in two Southeast Asian societies, Malaysia and the Philippines, see Ick, n.d.).
The Philippines, a country steeped in a colonial past, illustrates one Asian reception to Shakespeare, a response that embraced canonical, localized, and postcolonial versions, but also one that shows a unique appropriation of Shakespearean texts. Not only has the Philippines relocated Shakespeare in a Filipino/Asian context; it has also dislocated Shakespeare from orthodox modes of Shakespearean performance. This is what this paper hopes to discuss. And it begins with an overview of Shakespeare’s formal appearance in the country.

Shakespeare in the Philippines – Colonial Imprints

Shakespeare officially reached the Philippines in 1904 courtesy of the American colonial government that prescribed *The Merchant of Venice* as required reading for all public high school classes in English. As the Filipino Shakespearean scholar Judy Celine Ick (2009, p. 2 forthcoming) observes:

...Shakespeare was intimately tied to specifically pedagogical goals like English language education and education in the forms and ways of democracy (like elocution and debate) or to colonial goals in general, early performances left little room for creativity or even translation into local languages or vernacular forms.

Since then, Shakespeare – and by extension, productions of Shakespeare’s plays – have retained its colonial imprint. And because of Shakespeare’s link to education, access to Shakespearean plays became a marker for cultural elitism as well. The American colonial patterns persisted over time: Shakespeare’s plays, including *Merchant*, have remained a staple of high school and college English classes, particularly in elite schools (for a fuller treatment, see Ick 2000.) The Ateneo de Manila started productions of Shakespeare plays as early as 1910 (Bernad 1977), primarily as a vehicle for teaching (Arcilla 2008). It was a choice emulated later in other private, elite schools. Eventually, the rise of professional theater companies, those formed by graduates of these elite schools, brought Shakespeare outside the academe and made his plays part of the repertoire of these professional companies. But Shakespeare’s roots, at least in the Philippines, remain in education (Ick, n.d.). Schools, particularly elite schools, are the producers of Shakespeare and students from private schools and leading state schools are its main consumers. Professional companies also rely on students to fill up the house seats for a Shakespearean production. Indeed, one way to reach out to students, perhaps as part of their general formation program, is for them to view a Shakespearean production.

But what kind of production would students watch? A typical approach has been to go canonical, or Anglo-centered. This means locating the play as dictated by the text (e.g. Verona, Italy), costuming the characters in Renaissance fashion, and having them speak in Elizabethan English, with some actors even aping a British accent. The canonical style likewise retains an orthodox reading of the text, such as to render Shylock as the Jew and villain of *Merchant*. Unfortunately, many of these productions, done in schools or the professional stage, tended towards the literal and reflected the same lack of creativity in
which Shakespeare was taught in Philippine schools. Ick calls them “copycat productions.” She adds (Ick 2009:4):

Instead, performances tended towards copycat productions, replaying Shakespeare for local consumption. Writing in 1955 on the performance history of Shakespeare in the islands, Philippine theater stalwart Jean Edades observed that “the Philippines is the only country in the world which may be termed English-speaking which has never enjoyed a production of a Shakespeare play outside the walls of a school.”

The continued employment of “copycat productions” also made Shakespeare (and any student academic program that may be attached to it) a part of a neo-colonial theater industry. And as Jean Edades suggests, the exclusive hold on Shakespeare by elite schools also created a divide that separated Western theater (including Broadway dramas and musicals) and local theater (those employing traditional presentational forms). One group creates theater for the affluent, the other for the less affluent. It is a divide that still exists today.

Precisely because Shakespeare, especially when staged in the canonical style, reinforces this divide, some may claim that is better not to stage Shakespeare since it only beholdens Filipinos to Empire and weakens our sense of national identity! Others are less adamant. If one assumes, for instance, that Shakespeare’s works possess genuine artistic and educational value, an alternative strategy would be to “appropriate” Shakespeare and to make his plays address issues of social, cultural or national importance. This strategy leads us to the creation of “localized Shakespeare,” “postcolonial Shakespeare,” or a hybrid of the two – at least as it is staged in the Philippines.

Several paths are available to localize Shakespeare, give it a postcolonial reading, or both. Among these paths include translation to a local language, relocation of time and place, textual alteration, or a combination of these. What these paths do, as a whole, is to “appropriate” Shakespeare in a form that is perceived as meaningful to the audience – and directly or indirectly, to the imagined community that is the nation as well. The act of appropriation also becomes part of the play’s message and that message informs the audience, mainly students, about their culture, their history, and their lives. Done in this way, Shakespearean theater can become a potent, empowering educational vehicle -- a way to make Empire one’s own.

How has this been this made possible? Let me look at my own experience in staging Shakespeare, a task I began in 1990 with a production of A Midsummer’s Night Dream. Let me look, in particular, at two productions, The Merchant of Venice (“Ang Negosyante ng Venecia,” 1999) and Taming of the Shrew (“Ang Pagpapaamo sa Maldita,” 2002) with allusions to other productions such as Twelfth Night (“Ikalabingdalawang Gabi,” 2001) and A Midsummer’s Night Dream (“Pangarap sa Gabi ng Gitnang Tag-araw,” 1990 and 2004). All these plays were staged in Filipino. But beyond language, how else did appropriation take place?
The Task of Appropriation

To appropriate is “to take possession of for one’s own; to take to one’s self,” to engage in “commandeering a desired object and making the object one’s own, controlling it by possessing it (Marsden 1991:1). To appropriate Shakespeare is thus to seize his work or his figure and use it for one’s own uses. It can be as simple as painting his face on a coffee mug or a tee-shirt, and selling these to tourists, or as complex as rewriting one of his plays to espouse a political cause, or as compound complex as transforming one of his plays into a full-length opera, accompanied by ballet sequences. To appropriate Shakespeare on the Philippine stage is to abduct the Bard from his Renaissance home: to hijack his plays, so to speak, works written four centuries ago, and to reconfigure them to a system of signs that make sense to the Filipino. It is to possess Shakespeare and reinvent him as part of us.

Appropriation is a political act, one that takes special significance in the Philippines since Shakespeare came to the Philippines in the 1900s as part of the colonial apparatus of the United States. Since then, Shakespeare’s plays—as well as other classics of western drama—have largely retained its colonial and elitist imprints. The use of English in these plays exacerbates the colonial and elitist elements of these works; it may even be said that the text helps to widen the cultural divide between the haves and have-nots.

To appropriate Shakespeare on the Philippine stage is, thus, in large part to wrench Shakespeare’s plays away from their colonial roots, and to make them respond to postcolonial Philippines. Of equal importance, the act of appropriation, by making the production more appreciable in non-elitist contexts, also serves to break down the elitism that has largely infused the standard production and consumption of Shakespearean plays.

Modes of Appropriation

Several aspects of an original text can be appropriated for local use. They may be used singly or in combination. I cite three major modes.

Language. Staging Shakespeare in the local language is the most basic mode of theatrical appropriation. Rolando Tinio, my theater mentor and later, National Artist for Theater, pioneered this task when he was Artistic Director of Teatro Pilipino, the theater company housed at the Cultural Center of the Philippines for over 20 years. I was a resident actor in the last 10 years of the company’s existence (1981-1991) and joined the productions of Hamlet and Macbeth in Filipino. At the time of his demise, Tinio translated and staged seven of Shakespeare’s plays in Filipino, hoping to demonstrate that the national language can encompass the richness of Shakespearean tongue, and also make Shakespeare more intelligible to Filipino audiences. Since then, many of Shakespeare’s plays done in schools and professional companies have relied on Tinio’s masterful translations. Other Filipino translators of Shakespeare have emerged as well.
I have used these translations myself, at times going beyond the need to make the text intelligible and onto making a political or sociological comments as well. In my 1999 production of Merchant of Venice, for example, staged by Tanghalang Ateneo, I had the Christians speak Shakespearean English while Shylock and his Jewish comrades (Jessica, Tubal, Launcelot Gobbo and his father) speak in Filipino (Tinio’s translation). In this manner, I wanted to underscore through language the play’s colonial elements. Just as the Americans imposed a new order in colonial Philippines, so did the Christians (Antonio, Bassanio, Portia, the Duke among them) sought to make Shylock (my representation of the native) subordinate to Christian law (for more details see Ick 2007, Reyes 1999, Abad 1998).

I employed the same strategy in a 2004 production of A Midsummer’s Night Dream, produced by the Metropolitan Theater Guild. Here I made the personages of the court speak English while having the “rude mechanicals” (representations of the Filipino masa or common people) speak in Filipino (Abad 2004). The bilingual strategy was intended to differentiate between social classes, and by having Puck, Oberon and Titania speaking in English, I also wanted to suggest that Filipino fantasies of liberation are western-inspired.

Thus, as a mode of appropriation, language need not be used merely as a tool to express thought but also to display social position. More than this, the deployment of a bilingual strategy can also be a way to build audience identification with character. In both Merchant and Midsummer—the bilingualism helped to draw audience sympathy towards the local-inspired characters. In Merchant, audiences sided with Shylock, the canonical villain of the play; in Midsummer, they applauded the most the scenes with the mechanicals, making the Pyramus and Thisbe scene the comic centerpiece of the production. Thanks to the appropriation of language, the Filipino, humbled or subordinate or snubbed, becomes a champion on stage.

Relocation: Cultural and Performance Traditions. Beyond language, an effective way to “localize” a Shakespearean production is to set the play in another milieu, to use the cultural traditions of that milieu, or to incorporate local performance traditions. Shakespeare productions around the globe are replete with instances of relocation. (see, for example, Kennedy 1993, Sasayama 1998, Marowitz 2001, Westmore 2007). The Philippines is no different. I am familiar, to cite a few, with a Macbeth set in an Philippine ethnic community, another Macbeth set in a mythical Oriental palace, a Midsummer Night’s Dream set in 19th Century Philippines, and a Hamlet in an imagined world where Viking-like men or anime-inspired characters are caught in a web of vengeance. I have seen a contemporary setting used for Love’s Labor Lost, and have found the love of Romeo and Juliet blossoming in a Filipino working class area. I have followed this strategy of relocation, too, using, for example, a mythical Southeast Asian community for Twelfth Night (2001), an imagined Philippine provincial town for Taming of the Shrew (2002), and an urban setting (complete with 1980 disco effects) for Much Ado About Nothing. Often staged in Filipino, or as I mentioned above, sometimes in
bilingual format, both cultural relocation and language can strongly combine to appropriate Shakespeare and make him our own.

But what does relocation add to the reading of Shakespeare? Is it merely design or part of a frame that strengthens our understanding of the text? I can only speak for my own work. My inspiration for the setting of Twelfth Night, for instance, was a news item about the sinking of a ferry in southern coast of the Philippines (Abad 2000). The Southern Coast of the Philippines is home to Muslim Filipinos and traditional communities of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. A combination of these traditions could anchor, I thought then, the design for the play – an idea encouraged by Salvador F. Bernal, the production designer of most of my Shakespearean productions and a National Artist for Theater Design. The Asian look then led me to an Asian reading of the play – one that dealt with the Asian value of “saving face” amidst the possibility of shameful exposure. So I built the comedy on the many threats to exposure, rising to the point when exposure does happen, leading to happy resolutions (Orsino and Viola as well as Olivia and Sebastian get married) and sad departures (Malvolio leaving Illyria).

It gets more elaborate in Taming of the Shrew. I replaced Padua with Paracale, a gold-mining town during the American colonial period that is located in Bicol, a region in Southern Luzon, the Philippines. Baptista Minola is now a wealthy resident of the town, and his household’s affluence, aided no doubt by the presence of two beautiful daughters (including Katharina the shrew) are strong magnets for Petruchio, the American soldier of fortune. The play is now set to explore the dynamics of a colonial relationship, that of the American military officer and his tamming of a native subject, Katharina the shrew.

Beyond setting, another mode of appropriation is the use of local performance traditions to accentuate the production. I learned about this strategy not from past Filipino productions of Shakespeare — I have not seen one though it may have been done -- but from non-Filipino staging of Shakespeare. I recall, for example, a Cambodian production of Othello where Desdemona, following court dance traditions, was not allowed to die but to rise as a spirit after her brutal murder (Westmore 2007). I’ve also read about Shakespearean stage productions done by Japanese directors like Suzuki or Ninagawa the performance traditions of the Noh or Butoh are used as the base of the play’s movement vocabulary (Sasayama et al. 1998). And later, as a participant of the Salzburg Seminar on Shakespeare in 2000 (Abad 2000), I also learned about the works of other directors — Indians, Japanese, Chinese, South Africans, Chileans, among others – who shamelessly included local performance traditions in their Shakespearean pieces.

I gave it a try. In an early attempt, prior to Salzburg, I sought the assistance of Gino Gonzales, a young production designer about to leave for New York for a master’s degree in scene design. Both of us mounted Merchant of Venice on a set that resembled a komedya stage – a platform supported by coconut trunks with steps on its right and left sides. (The komedya, is a theatrical form derived from Spanish metrical romances, and usually involves forbidden love between persons of different faiths set against the backdrop of religious and racial conflict between Christians and Muslims). I also included a batalla, a stylized battle scene in the komedya tradition, in a scene depicting
Christian violence towards the Shylock (or in this reading, colonial violence against native Filipinos). As well, the production made costumes that, following the komedya tradition, only evoked but not resembled the European style.

After Salzburg came Twelfth Night with a burst of Asian colors and Asian customs. But it was with Taming of the Shrew that I went gung ho and employed three Philippine performance traditions: the sarswela, the bodabil, and seditious theater. The sarswela is a operetta derived from the Spanish zarzuela which in the Philippines evolved as a love story between couples of unequal social status who eventually end up together after struggling with larger conflicts (like the Philippine-American War). Unlike the komedya, where the acting is declamatory and poetic, the acting in the sarswela is more realistic. The bodabil is the Filipino version of the American “vaudeville”, a variety show that features dances, songs, skits, band numbers, and an assortment of variety acts like magic and acrobatics. In turn, the tradition of Philippine seditious theater, a form that emerged during the American colonial period, is a staged allegory of the relations between Americans as oppressors and the Filipinos as the oppressed, a kind of theater that incited revolution and revolt, and as such, banned by the American colonial government.

Both the sarswela and the bodabil provide the cultural background of the play. Both theatrical forms flourished during the American period, with the American-inspired bodabil slowly taking over the Spanish-inspired sarswela as the most popular source of entertainment. The love story inherent in the sarswela also alluded to the “love story” between Petruchchio and Katharina, two persons of unequal racial and social status struggling to be a couple against the background of a colonial regime. But it is the use of the traditions of seditious theater that this production finds its strongest anchor (Abad 2002). Katharina and Petruchchio are allegorical representations of the Philippines and America, and the taming process that Petruchchio instigates in Shakespeare’s text is the analogy for the kind of governance that the Americans imposed on the Filipinos at the time – a kind of paternal benevolence that Rafael (2000) has termed as “white love.” To the Americans, Filipinos were like children, full of great potential, but ones which were in great need of discipline. Like Katharina, we, Filipinos, are shrews that also must be tamed.

The use of cultural and performance traditions, like the use of the local language and a change of locale, are effective weapons in appropriating Shakespeare. All these extract Shakespeare away from its Anglo-centered origins, and made to grow in a new cultural setting. They also attest to the resiliency of Shakespeare in accommodating to different social contexts, and give his texts a universal quality.

But is there more to relocation? Can the relocation of Shakespeare serve more than just an aesthetic transposition loaded with exotic images and forms, but one that leaves the audience politically and socially numb? Homi Bhabha (1992) invites us to go further by speaking of a “third space” or a “space of translation,” an imaginary world where one (in this case, the stage director) construct and critique a new political object. Following this lead, can one create that imaginary world (by language and relocation) but also use that space to make statements about the social condition?
My answer is that it can be done if we see these appropriations as ways of dislocating Shakespeare from orthodox forms of presentation and through their use, arrive at critiques of present conditions.

**Dislocations and its Effects**

I owe to Judy Celine Ick’s (*forthcoming, 2009*) analysis of Filipino Shakespearean productions the idea that the local performance traditions that Filipinos use, or may use, in their productions are foreign in origin, and thus not uniquely Filipino. The *komedya* and *sarswela* come from Spain, and the *bodabil* comes from the United States. The allegories intrinsic in seditious theater owe their origins to Spanish medieval religious drama; its plots of betrayal and forbidden love affairs drawn from local theater; while the implied critique of colonial practice in the Philippines can be traced to two other local forms, both of which have Spanish roots: the *pasyon* (a Lenten ritual entailing the chanting of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection) and the *kundiman* (a romantic song to one’s beloved, not necessarily one’s sweetheart but one’s country).

Ick points out that the foreign origins of these performance traditions make them neither local nor foreign. They thus act as a counter-discourse to Orientalism because of their foreign roots and only evoke an Occidentalism of sorts because they arise from an imagined, exoticized view of the West. Observes Ick (2009:5, *forthcoming*): “whereas orthodox anticolonial discourse often uses the indigenous as a countertext to the colonial, the lines are never clear where Philippine performance traditions are concerned.” How else can it be when the indigenous is colonial, and the colonial is indigenous at the same time? Be that as it may, this blurring of boundaries dislocates orthodox performance practice, at least in intercultural theater where the standard is for the East to confront the West. In the Philippines, because of this haziness in boundaries, the confrontation is not that neat. The postcolonial strategy of pitting the Western text with an Eastern form is rendered “impure,” so to speak, because that form is western in its genesis. And where else but in the Philippines, Ick adds with some amusement, where we can find a director who uses a western text, in this case Shakespeare’s plays, to undertake a critique of the East, in this case, postcolonial Philippines, using multiple strategies of dislocation to relocate Shakespeare and theatrically at least, resist colonialism?

What specifically are these strategies of dislocation? My experience lists at least three strategies, and I cite them as a way of detailing and summarizing points earlier raised.

**Reconstructing the Other.** The *komedya* pits Christians and Moors in a battle of cultural supremacy. Orthodox practice dictates that Christians emerge as heroes and Moors as villains. By reconfiguring and then reversing these roles, thus dislocating orthodox practice, I made it possible to interpret *Merchant of Venice* as a disguised confrontation between American colonial masters (the Christians) and native Filipino subjects (the Moors). The method of role reversal further enabled me to make villains of Christians and heroes of Moors, so that audience sympathy will fall on native Filipino subjects rather than on the proponents of a new order, namely the colonial masters. The
deployment of a bilingual appropriation where the Christians speak Shakespeare’s English and the native subjects speak in Tinio’s Filipino translation doubles the appropriation as well as the dislocating effect to make my reading of *The Merchant of Venice* a postcolonial critique of colonial imposition. Shylock is not the Other; it is the Christians. Shakespeare’s original Other has been turned around (Reyes 1998, Abad 1998).

**Allegorical Representation.** The seditious theater’s use of allegorical representation permitted me to transpose the *Taming of the Shrew* into a conflict between the colonizer (Americans) and the colonized (Filipinos) rather than a flesh and blood battle between a proud man and a feisty woman. Again, the bilingual format is used with the colonizer speaking in Shakespeare’s English and the colonized speaking in Filipino, translation courtesy of Ronan Capinding – a format used not only to differentiate racial boundaries but also, as shown below, as a manifestation of the taming process. Geography is dislocated as well as the play’s setting shifts from Padua to Paracale, a rich mining town in the Philippines during the American colonial period.

But as Judy Ick (2009, *forthcoming*) again notes, the fact that the colonial relationship is set in a domestic framework suggests the outcomes of colonial governance need not be, as orthodox seditious theater suggests, enslavement, or we might add, the oppression or subordination of the colonized subject. In support of this view, Rafael (1993) speaks of “contracted colonialism” that governed the historical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. So it was with religious rituals, so it was too with benevolent assimilation or white love. Further support comes from Fenella Cannell’s (1999) ethnographic study of Bicol marriages where couples, forced into marriage by their parents, eventually learn to accommodate, maybe even love, each other. In the same way, the relationship between colonizer and colonized need not be a zero-sum game but a win-win situation, though not perhaps an ecstatic one, for both. By drawing on one convention, and then dislocating another convention, of seditious theater – these coupled with a bilingual format, a shift in geography, and an application of a policy of colonial governance – Shakespeare’s comic battle of the sexes has been reinterpreted as a comic battle of colonial relations.

**Colonial Mimicry.** The centerpiece of the comic battle in *Taming* lies in Katharina’s final speech which, as an initial reading may suggest, reflects the woman’s submission to the man’s will. Katharina has, in effect, been tamed by Petruchio. Seeing the play as a battle of colonial relations, however, makes this reading serve the colonizer and not the colonized. Yet history has shown that despite independence, the colonized Filipinos never really won over the Americans who continued to hold a dominant position in the local political economy long after the last American governor general left town. How do we then interpret this final speech?

In *Merchant*, an earlier production, the Filipino-speaking Shylock resorted to English when pleading the court to spare him the punishment dictated by law. In this situation, speaking in the Christian’s tongue is used as a strategy to win the opponent’s favor, a linguistic device to mirror a similarity and to display accommodation. Shylock fails to
turn the trial to his favor, but the use of language as a tool for leveling social relationships has been deployed – one that is put to greater advantage in *Taming of the Shrew*.

Will Katharina’s final speech be in English, the use of the language representing a subordination of native tongue, and hence of woman to man, Filipino to American? Or will it be in Filipino representing the triumph of native will over colonial power? The answer lay in Cannell’s (1999) notion of accommodation and in the sort of Shakespearean oratory that has become a staple of elocution contests and English classes. Cannell’s ethnography suggested that even as subjects of arranged marriages, Filipino women do not try to get even with their husbands. Neither do they stay in subordinate status. Instead they accommodate, finding ways to resist and accept, balancing their interests with those of their husbands. They “contract,” in short, their gender relations.

Katharina negotiates her own contract: she will accommodate. But how? How will she show both subordination and resistance? The answer lay in the exaggerated oratory that has become standard in Filipino elocution contests and school plays. Full of fire and brimstone, with dramatic gestures and melodramatic appeal, these speeches generated an artificiality of performance that is, to date, often humorous to watch. I then thought: Katharina’s last speech will be in English, showing acquiescence to the American husband, but will be recited in the declamatory style of elocution contests, a way of mocking the language so to speak, in a way that will suggest resistance. Through the use of mimicry, in this case, colonial mimicry as the speech pretends to imitate the master’s language, accommodation will be achieved. Katharina is neither the loser nor the winner. She, like the Filipino of colonial and possibly postcolonial times, has only managed to negotiate her space in the world, not by trumping or kowtowing to her lifetime mate but by asserting one’s self in ways that will maintain the relationship intact and by keeping her husband in the happy knowledge that all is well.

“A woman moved is like a fountain troubled,” Katharina says in this final speech, only in this version, the actress recites it by unexpectedly pausing after the word “fountain,” and giving a gesture of a water spouting from below, before continuing to the words “troubled/ muddy, ill seeming, thick bereft of beauty” where each word is given a gesture, facial expression, or a local accent. The audience laughs, and the laughter continues as the speech proceeds. In “To painful labor both by sea and land,” the “sea” is given a hand gesture of fast-moving waves while the “land” gets a hand gesture of flat line. The word “obedience” is pronounced “obedyens.” More laughter. The audience knows it’s a mockery of the language, yet Petruchchio, watching her wife, only smiles in pride, oblivious to the mockery unfolding before him By the time Katharina ends with “My hand is ready, may it do him ease” with a flourish of a bow and a kneeling pose at her husband’s feet, the audience applauds knowing that Katharina has maintained her integrity as a wife and a Filipino. The Filipino audience, by an act of historical imagination in the theater, has made laughter a weapon of colonial resistance.

American colonial officials banned practitioners of seditious theater from showing, among others, the Philippine flag as it may “fan the embers” of hatred against the Americans. The Filipino artists responded not by openly defying the law or by fully
complying with it. Rather, the artists accommodated. In selected moments of the performance, when they thought no authorities were watching, they would group themselves on stage in such a way that by joining together certain props like pieces of different colored cloths, would give audiences a momentary glimpse of the national flag. They would then disperse quickly and resume the performance. The audience would cheer, no doubt at the sight of this risky act, knowing that they had one up against the Americans—at least for that moment.

In *Taming*, Katharina’s final speech was akin to the momentary display of the Philippine flag. And at that instance, the modern audience also felt that they too had one up against the Americans. A play on colonial relations has empowered the Filipino and made them transcend, if only for a moment, their colonial past.

I wonder if Shakespeare would approve. But does it matter?
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