

A Report on the ASA 2018 Conference “Shakespeare, Traffics, Tropics”, May 28-30, Ateneo de Manila University and the University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City, the Republic of the Philippines

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The 3rd Asian Shakespeare Association (ASA) Conference was jointly hosted by the Ateneo de Manila University and the University of the Philippines Diliman, in Quezon City, the Philippines. The ASA was founded about five years ago to address Shakespeare studies from an Asian perspective with the inaugural 2014 Conference taking place in Taipei, and the 2016 Conference in New Delhi, which I also had the pleasure to attend. The biennial ASA conference highlights how Shakespeare's influence is indeed global, not of an age, and expanding with no end in sight.

This conference is a complete experience with top-notch plenaries and sessions, cultural tours, food, and performances. In 2014 the featured plenary was given by Michael Dobson, Director of the Shakespeare Institute at the University of Birmingham, and this year by Peter Holland, Director of the International Shakespeare Association. The session topics ranged from Shakespeare in film, current novels, literary theory, education, and performance. A few of the education-related sessions were concerned with using Shakespeare's literature in language teaching. Two creative interdisciplinary talks in one of the education sessions were psychological in nature: helping victims of police brutality, grieving parents and family, deal with their tragic losses through Shakespeare studies, and resident psychiatrists performing case studies using *Hamlet*. Two workshops were of Japanese origin: “Performance” with the Artistic Director of Yamanote Jijosha, Masahiro Yasuda, and “Shakespeare and Manga” with manga artist Harumo Sanazaki.

The day before the conference there was a tour of Old Town Manila and the first of many nightly performances: *The Taming of the Shrew*. The after-dinner performances meant that each day went well into the evening, but there was ample time to reenergize at the included daily breakfast, breaks, lunch, and dinner which were full of an array of tasty Philippine dishes. More importantly, the conference is small enough that it feels intimate, and the schedule is such that breaks and meals afford time for quality conversations. Besides *The Taming of the Shrew*, there was a Yamanote Jijosha viewing of *The Tempest* (originally intended to be live, but it proved too costly to bring the

whole company), *MacBeth* by a six-member group from Malaysia, traditional Philippine music, and *RD3RD*, a chillingly poignant Philippine adaptation of *Richard III*.

RD3RD deftly uses video montage and Tagalog interjections to superimpose Rodrigo Duterte, the president of the Philippines, onto Shakespeare's psychopath character Richard III. Just dealing with the repulsive yet intriguing Richard III takes emotional stamina, but the painful images of the trauma inflicted by state sponsored vigilante deaths of street children in Duterte's war on drugs was crippling. The real atrocities and twisted verse defiled the audience with the inhumanity of our species. Stating there was not a dry eye in the house belittles the effect. By some estimates 20,000 street children have been killed by the vigilante authorities and the creators of *RD3RD* wanted to address that. In attendance was the recently ousted, a few weeks prior to the conference, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Maria Lourdes Sereno, who had opposed Duterte's methods as illegal. There was a question and answer session with the cast and director following the performance at which the director said that the authorities know of *RD3RD*, but as it reaches so few people, and perhaps worse than being forcibly shut down, it has been ignored.