

## Storms and Sea-Changes in Two Bikolnon Translations of “Ariel’s Song” from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*

Maria Lorena Santos

### Abstract

Shakespeare’s fascination with the sea is evident in his works where shoreline storms serve as metaphors of disruption and transformation. In the Philippines’ Bikol region, likewise marked by recurrent typhoons and ecological precarity, writers draw on sea and storm imagery to convey human vulnerability and possibilities of healing within larger natural systems. This essay examines how Shakespeare’s oceanic sensibilities undergo their own “sea-changes” in two translations of “Ariel’s song” in *The Tempest* by poets from a storm-drenched region. Using a blue humanities lens, I analyze how Bikolnon writers re/interpret Shakespeare’s aquatic transformations through local conceptions of sea and storm, coastal danger and enchantment. As these translations negotiate Shakespeare’s text in an archipelagic context, they reconfigure the song’s themes of death, rebirth, and oceanic power as culturally resonant metaphors and ecological realities. In doing so, new sea songs/dirges reveal how water, as situated in specific geographical coastal and inland realities, does not simply provide imagery but actively shapes meaning, enabling ecological and cultural imagination beyond mere reproduction of a source text.



## Shakespeare's Sea-Changes

Shakespeare's preoccupation with the sea pervades both his plays and poetry, where oceans, storms, and shorelines function as symbols, metaphors, or narrative and dramatic gateways, indicating transformation and disruption. Britain's National Maritime Museum, through the Royal Museums Greenwich website, notes how "water courses through" Shakespeare's works, and features an assemblage of passages, chosen by academics, authors, and directors, to demonstrate how "tumultuous seas, shipwrecks, and maritime life... seep into [his] language" whether or not his works are set on water.<sup>1</sup> Many of these reference sea-storms and the havoc these wreak, such as in the Duke of Clarence's dream in *Richard III* of "a thousand fearful wrecks," treasures lost, and his own death at the "slimy bottom of the deep"; the power of natural like "the light foam of the sea" erasing with its waves a man's legacy in *Timon of Athens*; and the cyclical pattern of fortune in the rising and ebbing tide in *Julius Caesar*.<sup>2</sup> As Shakespeare and blue humanities scholar Steve Mentz notes in *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*, the ocean, in multiple Shakespearean works, is "both a nearly inconceivable physical reality and a mind-twisting force for change and instability."<sup>3</sup>

The bard's maritime imagination finds perhaps its fullest expression in *The Tempest*, described by Mentz as "a core text in the history of human-ocean interactions" and "perhaps the most canonical vision of the ocean in English literary culture."<sup>4</sup> The play opens with an ocean storm of unnatural violence that wrecks a ship carrying the King of Naples and his entourage, casting them onto the mysterious island ruled by the exiled Duke Prospero. Conjured by Prospero's command of the sea and its spirits, the tempest can be seen as the play's driving force; it is an overwhelming, oceanic power that disrupts political order, exposes human vulnerability, and blurs the line between natural fury and supernatural design. The shipwreck scatters survivors across the island's shores, setting in motion a drama of reconciliation and renewal shaped by the sea's capacity to both destroy and deliver.

It is within this play that readers encounter one of Shakespeare's most celebrated lyric moments: "Ariel's song," often also referred to by its opening line, "Full fathom five thy father lies." It appears in Act I, Scene 2 of *The Tempest* when Ariel sings to Prince Ferdinand soon after the shipwreck separates him from his father, guiding him across the island's shorelines. The song is meant to playfully lure and mystify

Ferdinand, making him believe his father has drowned. But it also interestingly deepens the play's oceanic atmosphere: its imagery of sinking, transformation, and the now famous "sea-change" links the tempest's destructive force not just to themes of loss but also renewal, as it "imagines the combined physical-and-magical powers of the ocean transfiguring human bodies," as Mentz observes.<sup>5</sup>

This stanza is often reprinted in isolation—sometimes under the title "Full fathom five" and sometimes "A Sea Dirge."<sup>6</sup> Lines 474 to 482 below are excerpted from the said edition, including stage directions in line 481.

*Full fathom five thy father lies;*  
*Of his bones are coral made;* 475  
*Those are pearls that were his eyes:*  
*Nothing of him that doth fade*  
*But doth suffer a sea-change*  
*Into something rich and strange.*  
*Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:* 480  
 [Burden, within:] *Ding-dong.*  
*Hark! now I hear them,—Ding-dong, bell.*<sup>7</sup>

Ferdinand, hearing the song, naturally believes his father Alonso has drowned, as there is an explicit reference to his

father's bones lying fathoms below him at the bottom of the ocean and to knells hourly signaling his death. Yet Ariel's incantation seems part elegy, part enchantment; its images of coral, pearls, sea-nymphs, and bells evoke wonder as much as mourning. The refrain "ding-dong" may call to mind not just the solemn tolling of a death knell but also the lilting chime of ceremonial bells, their tone ambiguous between grief and celebration. There is also a teasing reassurance in pivotal lines from the stanza that Ferdinand's father is not truly gone.

The lines, "Nothing of him that doth fade/ But doth suffer a sea-change/ Into something rich and strange," introduce a term that has since entered the lexicon to denote radical and profound transformation. For readers in the know, Ariel's doublespeak gestures towards the magical and moral metamorphosis—one that is achieved through water—at the heart of the play: Alonso does not simply perish but undergoes an inward reorientation that will culminate in remorse and renewal. Here, "rich" signals not only wealth or material abundance, which is already Alonso's by virtue of kingship, but can also be read as the promise of restored relationships and moral clarity, while "strange" conveys the startling, unexpected, and extraordinary nature of such a change. The adjectives "rich and strange" combine to describe

the “sea-change” or transfiguration by salt water as something mystic or queer, surprising, and of great value or worth.

The durability of these two key phrases is evident in their cultural afterlives in the Western world. William Safire, in fact, once lamented the overuse and resulting dilution of “sea-change” in modern discourse, a sign of its diffusion beyond Shakespeare.<sup>8</sup> *Rich and Strange* is the title both of Alfred Hitchcock’s 1931 film and Ron Rash’s short story collection, while “Full fathom five” appears in Jackson Pollock’s painting of that name, where, as critic Ellen Johnson observed, the embedded objects “suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange.”<sup>9</sup> The gravestone of Percy Bysshe Shelley likewise bears the line, linking Shakespeare’s lyric to the poet’s Romantic biography. Such examples demonstrate how the stanza has transcended its dramatic context and period, exerting an influence across art, literature, and popular culture. Through time, Ariel’s song has remained literary, associating the mysterious and magical with the sea, and suggesting, rather than stating directly, that key characters will undergo profound shifts in perception and relation because of it.

The song crosses oceans via these phrases’ presence in Philippine political and literary-critical discourse, with

“sea-change” and “rich and strange” connoting massive transformation and hybrid forms. In “SEA Change: The PEMSEA Story,” the title of a Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA), “sea change” refers both to vital environmental transformation and to the association of archipelagic nations of Southeast Asia (SEA) undergoing a regional maritime change.<sup>10</sup> An Asia-Pacific magazine titles one article “Sea Change: ‘Bongbong’ Marcos and the Future of the South China Sea,” to describe a major shift in the Philippines’ geopolitical positioning and strategy regarding China’s claiming of the Philippine Sea,<sup>11</sup> while at least two opinion pieces use the phrase idiomatically to reflect on much-needed environmental<sup>12</sup> and sociopolitical<sup>13</sup> transformation in the Philippines. The second phrase appears in a book review titled “Rich and Strange: The Manifold Remakings of English in Southeast Asian Literatures,” as a metaphor for how the English language can be transformed, hybridized, and deeply localized in contexts where it still carries colonial histories.<sup>14</sup> A textbook on 21<sup>st</sup>-century Philippine and world literature similarly deploys the phrase “something rich and strange” in its title to evoke the wealth of new texts and digital, hybrid, and transmedial genres at the turn of the century.<sup>15</sup>

## Oceanic Perspectives and an Archipelagic Asian Shakespeare

From a perspective that foregrounds the ocean and other bodies of water as central to understanding human history and culture, Mentz asserts that what is at the core of this famous passage from *The Tempest* is “salt water’s power to transform,”<sup>16</sup> saying that “The real taste of ocean” and its “impact on human flesh” tends to be lost when the sea is read as a metaphor for change.<sup>17</sup> His observations draw from a blue humanities approach that emerged from ecocriticism to shift away from land-based or terrestrial frameworks. In doing so, it pays attention to both material realities, such as shoreline relations, marine ecologies, and weather systems, and oceanic imaginaries and symbolism, like Shakespeare’s shipwrecks and storms. By using a framework that considers how the sea, a zone in which humans and non-humans interact in dynamic ways, shapes the world and the self in *The Tempest*, Mentz is able to describe a new “marine logic” that emerges in the play.<sup>18</sup> He is therefore able to explore in Shakespeare’s sea-poetry what he calls the “bitter ecology of salt,” in which the ocean offers both the treasure of “strange and powerful knowledge” and death for humans.<sup>19</sup>

Translations by eco-poets of Shakespeare's ocean- and storm-centered passages, like Ariel's song from *The Tempest*, coming from regions of environmental crisis may also be studied by supplementing "green" ecocritical lenses with a "blue" oceanic perspective, which can offer new insights into both the poetic and translation practices in texts that respond to an unstable and uncertain future. Moreover, this allows critics to consider what Shakespeare scholar Judy Celine Ick calls an "Archipelagic Asian Shakespeare," from a paradigm that centers on sea routes, island networks, and maritime histories rather than limiting continental boundaries.<sup>20</sup> While Ick proffers this paradigm primarily to understand how the spread of Shakespeare through seafaring, trade, and migration across the Southeast Asian archipelago shapes how his works are adapted and understood through "flows" or cultural exchanges in island Asia, her assertion that "a cartography of islands and seas over continents" leads to a closer attention to "how geographical features can inflect upon the creation of cultures of performance" can be applied to translation studies.<sup>21</sup> Adapted in this present study is her idea of remapping or "counter-mapping" Shakespeare through this archipelagic approach,<sup>22</sup> which ties in with the blue humanities' emphasis on materiality, as a way of investigating how coastal

Longhand  
versus landlocked environs of writers might shape Shakespeare translations.

### Storm-Poetry from Bikol Shores

Some 12,000 kilometers from England, on the eastern seaboard of the archipelagic Philippines, lies Bikol, a region that may be described as defined by the sea (see Figure 1). Positioned squarely in the country's typhoon belt, Bikol is repeatedly battered by storms (see Figure 2). On average, 8.4 tropical cyclones strike the Philippines annually, many of them impacting Bikol.<sup>[23](#)</sup>

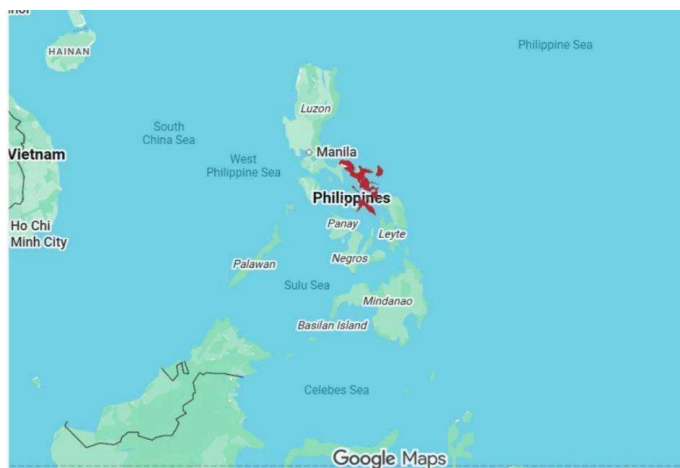


Figure 1. Google Maps image of the Philippines, edited to show the Bikol region in red.

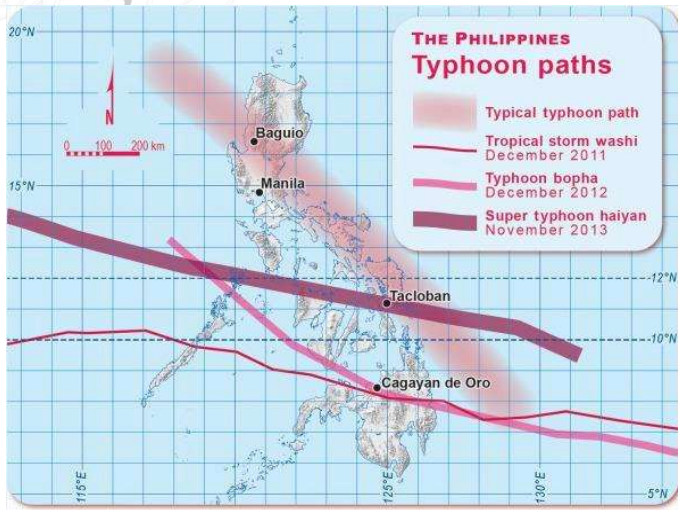


Figure 2. Photo from a book chapter by Holden and Marshall on climate change and typhoons in the Philippines<sup>24</sup>

In November 2024 alone, six storms made landfall, two of these devastating low-lying Bikol cities and towns. Typhoon Kristine inundated Naga City in the province of Camarines Sur, while Pepito flattened parts of another province, Catanduanes. In September 2025, the country's 15<sup>th</sup> typhoon of the year devastated the relatively sheltered island province of Masbate, destroying tens of thousands of homes and displacing families. The Bikol region (see Figure 3), as a whole, has been dubbed *Republika ng Kalamidad* or the Republic of Calamity;<sup>25</sup> its easternmost island of Catanduanes is nicknamed the "land of the howling winds,"<sup>26</sup> and Camarines Sur is called the region's *arinola* (basin).<sup>27</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that storms or

*bagyo* feature prominently in Bikol literature, both traditional and contemporary.



Figure 3. Image from *Wikipedia* of Bikol's six provinces<sup>28</sup>

Storms appear in Bikol fiction and poetry not just as weather but as a form of everyday catastrophe and as cultural, emotional, and spiritual forces. In her study of Bikol storm poetry, ecocritic Paz Verdades Santos notes that while many mourn the destruction, loss, and death brought by storms, no blame is directed at these forces of nature or at God.<sup>29</sup> Instead, the following motifs recur alongside these laments for

destruction and loss: reflection on ecological transformation, acknowledgment of human accountability, and, at times, exaltation of storms as sublime natural forces, the latter deriving from an understanding that humans are part of a larger and more complex ecological system.<sup>30</sup> The poems echo a local proverb, *Kun duros an itinanom, bagyo an aanihon* (“Those who sow winds harvest storms”) yet also articulate hope and cleansing.<sup>31</sup> Such poetics invite a reflection on how ocean and storm imagery in Shakespeare might be transfigured in a Bikol literary tradition deeply attuned to the sea’s dual powers of devastation and renewal.

### **Sea-Changes Across Bodies of Water**

This essay features and zooms in on two translations of Ariel’s song by Bikolnon writers whose bodies of work reflect an ecological bent. The first is a Filipino translation by Merlita Lorena-Tariman, a trilingual poet whose work is described as weaving together “the threads of gender, environment, and the human condition, creating poetry that speaks to both the heart and the consciousness.”<sup>32</sup> Tariman is from Daraga, a landlocked municipality northwest of Albay’s capital, Legazpi City. Despite its inland location, Daraga (see Figure 4) lies in Albay’s typhoon corridor and experiences strong winds funneled

through the lowlands. Located along the foothills of the highly active Mt. Mayon, it is also vulnerable to lahar or volcanic mudflows during heavy storms and river overflows triggered by intense rainfall. The second is a Bikol translation by award-winning poet Jaime Jesus Borlagdan, a writer with strong eco-poetic sensibilities, who is also recognized as an essayist, musician, graphic artist, and cultural worker. While from Albay like Tariman, Borlagdan hails specifically from the port city of Tabaco (refer to Figure 4), the sole international sea port in the direction, which directly faces the Philippine Sea and Pacific Ocean, and has a deep, lived, and historically shaped relationship with both storms and sea. Major typhoons, such as Sening (1970) and Reming (2006), and even Baguiong Oguis (White Typhoon) in 1811, have left deep marks on Tabaco's collective memory.



Figure 4. Map of Albay province from Wikipedia, with Tabaco numbered 1 and Daraga numbered 5<sup>33</sup>

Following Marne Kilates's assertion that translation "bears the burdens of meaning across time, *geography*, and states of being" (my emphasis),<sup>34</sup> I examine how the word choices in these versions of "Ariel's song" negotiate the oceanic sensibilities around Shakespeare's "sea-change" and "something rich and strange." I also ask how these translations intersect with the motifs of *pagbagunas* (cleansing) and *paglaom* (hope) identified by Santos in Bikol eco-poetry.<sup>35</sup> The reflections here form part of a larger project on storm and sea imagery in Bikol translations of Shakespeare, including sonnets and at least one more forthcoming Catanduanon version of Ariel's song.<sup>36</sup> Together, these works reveal how Shakespeare's maritime imagination finds new life across the Pacific, on

shores where sea-storms and watery trials are both destructive and transformative.

Below is the first translation, trilingual writer Tariman's "*Panambitan*," written in the Philippines national language, Filipino.<sup>37</sup> Lines are numbered, while key words and phrases are in boldface for easy reference; a direct line-by-line translation is provided in a footnote.<sup>38</sup>

|                                                                             |   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Sa <b>labing-isang talampakang</b> lalim <b>nahimlay</b></i>             | 1 |
| <i>Ang ama mo; Naging koraless na ang <b>kalansay</b>;</i>                  |   |
| <i>Sa dating mata niya'y kuminang ang mga perlas;</i>                       |   |
| <i>Walang bahagi niya ang nawalan ng kulay.</i>                             |   |
| <i>Data-pwa't <b>tiniis ang paglilitis ng dagat</b></i>                     | 5 |
| <i>Hanggang sa maging <b>isang bagay na iba't sikat</b>.</i>                |   |
| <i>Ang <b>agunyas</b> niya'y oras-oras inihuhudyat ng mga <b>nimpa</b>:</i> |   |
| <i>Ding-dong.</i>                                                           |   |
| <i>Pakinggan mo! Dinig na dinig ko, —Ding-dong, tunog</i>                   |   |
| <i>ng <b>kampana</b>.</i>                                                   | 9 |

Tariman's text is accompanied by a copy of the original text, labelled "A Sea Dirge, from The Tempest, by William Shakespeare." Tariman directly translates "dirge" in this title into the Filipino "*Panambitan*," while omitting an explicit reference to *dagat* or the sea, removing the context for the

song, a choice that sets the tone of her piece by foregrounding mourning. In the first line, Tariman renders “Full fathom five” as “*labing-isang talampakang lalim*” (eleven feet deep)—a depth that is sufficient for drowning (for example, in a flash flood), though relatively shallow compared to Shakespeare’s full-fathom five (thirty feet). In place of “lies,” Tariman uses the Filipino word “*nahimlay*,” which can mean not only “lies” but also “sleeps” or “rests,” and which in local usage connotes being deceased. Through enjambment, the father (“*ama mo*”) is lowered to the beginning of the second line, which confirms that he is “at rest,” rather than merely resting, via the description of his *kalansay*—skeleton rather than bones—transforming into coral (*korales*). The third and fourth lines are fairly literal, albeit more colorful translations: *Sa dating mata niya’y kuminang ang mga perlas* means “In what used to be his eyes, pearls glisten” and *walang bahagi niya ang nawalan ng kulay* means “no part of him has lost its color.”

Tariman’s most striking choice is to translate “suffers a sea-change” in line 5 as *tiniis ang paglilitis ng dagat* or “suffers/endures a trial by sea.” The phrase intensifies Shakespeare’s verb “suffers” by invoking not a test or challenge but the protracted legal processes familiar in the Philippine context, contrasting also with swifter proceedings

associated with Western court trials. The ordeal thus becomes an extended litigation, with the sea serving as an inexorable judge who dispenses a slow yet unremitting punishment. In this reading, Prospero's tempest becomes a moral and punitive reckoning, and the ocean—as arbiter of a man's fate—finds him lacking and thus purifies him via its waters. However, the transformation, despite the emphasis on color, is less magical and more mundane than Shakespeare's when “something rich and strange” is translated in the next line as *isang bagay na iba't sikat*—literally “one or some thing that is different and famed”—a famed and unusual object, perhaps like a religious relic.

Towards the end of her Filipino translation, Tariman opts for a cluster of nativized Spanish borrowings rather than indigenous lexical equivalents. She uses *agunyas* (from the Spanish *agonías*) to evoke a solemn death-knell, and *kampana* (from *campana*)—a term that in local usage frequently collocates with *simbahan* (“church”)—as a stand-in for “bell.” Her rendering of the “sea-nymphs” simply as *nimpa* (from *nimfa*) in line 7 once again elides the maritime or natural specificity of the spirits. A more indigenously resonant term such as *diwata* might have foregrounded local cosmology (even if *diwata* itself derives from the Sanskrit *devata*). Instead,

Tariman's lexical choices reflect a naturalized multilinguality, drawing from a vocabulary sedimented by the Philippines' maritime history—its seas having borne colonizers and their languages to its shores. The overall effect is a somber, punitive vision of the sea as a Spanish-introduced Roman Catholic God or tribunal, condemning Alonso and stripping Ariel's lyric of its mischievous ambiguity.

The second translation is a Bikol (in the Central/Legazpi dialect) rendering titled "*Awit ni Ariel*"<sup>39</sup> (a direct translation of "Ariel's Song").<sup>40</sup> The lines are similarly numbered and noteworthy word choices are emphasized in boldface type, while a literal line-by-line translation is provided in a footnote.<sup>41</sup>

***Pirang dupang rarom, su ama mo nakairarom;*** 1

*an gabos niyang tûlang gibo na sa korangon;*

*Perlas na ngonian su dati niyang mga mata;*

***wara man ki napara sa saiyang ikinatawo***

***ugaring dagat an hewas kan saiyang pinagbago*** 5

*ngani maging masamno buda makagirabo.*

*Oras-oras pigbabagting kan mga magindara an pregaryo:*

*Ding-dong.*

***Hinanyuga!*** Dangog ko na an ***bagting***--Ding-dong, ding. 9

Borlagdan's translation has a lighter and more mystical tone from the beginning, especially as set up by a title that opts for "song" over "dirge." In the first line, the depths of the ocean are rendered as indeterminate: Borlagdan translates "fathom" as *dupa* or arm's length, referring to an indigenous and nonstandard unit of measurement historically used to measure length or the depth of water, prefacing this with the vague determiner *pira* ("some"). In the same line, Alonso is *nakairarom* (underwater)—an unspecified number of arms' lengths deep—without an immediate suggestion that he is "at rest" or dead beneath the waves. While in the second line, *an gabos niyang **tùlang** gibo na sa **korangon*** or "all his bones are now made of coral," Borlagdan opts to directly translate Shakespeare's bones as *tùlang*, the imagery connotes transmutation and mineralization into *korangon* (coral), signaling the emergence of beauty from preservation rather than decay. Crucially, he writes, "Wara man ki napara sa saiyang ikinatawo" or "Nothing of *his being* has disappeared or been erased" (my emphasis), an assurance that Alonso's innate humanity (*ikinatawo* in Bikol) is not lost – only transformed into something more connected to the sea.

Borlagdan's rendering of "sea-change" as "*ugaring dagat an hewas kan saiyang pinagbago*" ("like the sea's breadth

Longhand  
is his change”) captures the vast scale of the ocean’s transformative powers. Not only is nothing lost but an immense change has taken place because of this experience with the sea. Indeed, he becomes “rich and strange,” which Borlagdan translates as *masamno buda makagirabo* or “resplendent and extraordinary,” though these English words fall short of encompassing the full meaning of the Bikol words. *Masamno* is a formal, literary adjective derived from the noun *samno* (which means “decoration,” “embellishment”) and is used in reference to adorning or trimming something to make it look rich, magnificent, dazzling. *Makagirabo* describes something that gives one goosebumps or makes one’s hair stand on end. It is a mental and physiological reaction to an extraordinary thing or event, good or bad—the frisson one might feel in a haunted house or when witnessing something extraordinary. Borlagdan’s pairing of these adjectives conveys beauty coupled with the uncanny, aligning closely with Shakespeare’s depiction of the sea and its tension between wonder and strangeness.

Like his use of the indigenous word *dupa* for “fathom,” Borlagdan’s substitution of *magindara* for sea-nymphs further localizes the imagery, particularly when this lexical choice is contrasted with that of Tariman’s translation. In Bikol

mythology, the magindara is a sea guardian from Bikol's archipelagic waters, both alluring and dangerous, a creature similar to Western sirens.<sup>42</sup> By combining in these closing lines a Bikol figure associated with the epic *Ibalong*, the vernacular admonition *Hinanyuga!* ("Listen/Hark!"), the Spanish-derived *pregaryo* (from *pregario*, prayer) to denote the knell, and the native word *bagting* for the peal of a bell, Borlagdan constructs lines made up of a layered lexicon that was shaped by successive maritime encounters. The result is not merely a culturally resonant strangeness but a multilingual, multilayered text in which indigenous, Hispanized, and localized registers playfully interact. The sea that tolls the bell thus becomes more than setting; it figures the historical medium through which colonizers (Spanish and American), religion (Roman Catholic, Christianity), languages (Spanish and English), and foreign literature (Shakespeare) arrived on Philippine shores. In this sea-borne amalgam of tongues, texts and beliefs, the poem sonically reenacts the archipelago's colonial crossings, allowing linguistic mixture to emerge as both historical legacy and living practice.

## **Translational Sea-Trials and Confluences:**

### **Shakespeare on Bikol Shores**

Tariman's *Panambitan* is a transliteration that darkens Shakespeare's lyric as a lament for something lost to watery trials and a death that results in a transformation of something vital and alive into something different yet mundane: a famed object or relic. Perhaps the writer's distance from the sea, which is experienced in Daraga in the form of destructive winds that hail from it and deadly mudflow when storm surges and volcanic debris meet, renders its magical powers less enchantment than calamity, transforming the song sung by an island spirit into a land- and church-bound funeral hymn. In the translation's depiction of Alonso's hasty storm trial, the sea's quick judgement, and the penance of death, one might draw connections to Tariman's personal history as a martial law activist and detainee, as well as her own experiences of loss to military forces and natural disasters, though oriented more to volcanoes, lahar-flow, and flooding than shipwrecks at sea. The sea-change here is, thus, from shoreline to land-locked perspective, from Shakespeare's romantic tale of renewal and forgiveness to harsher Philippine realities of suffering, injustice, and cruel death.

In contrast, Borlagdan's "Awit ni Ariel" embodies what Eugene Nida terms "a translation of dynamic equivalence" or a translation that achieves natural expression within the receiving shores and culture.<sup>43</sup> For locals familiar with both the source text and Tabaco history, the translation, in particular its last few lines, evoke not only Shakespeare's conjured storm, sea and island spirits, and a threatening yet also life-giving ocean; they also summon images of Bikol's own sea spirits and mythic waters, the colonial-era Tabaco Church with its resonant bells, and the tolling signals once used to warn coastal communities of approaching "Moro" raiders or "pirates" whose presence on the water often ended inter-island trade and traffic. His translation is a true *dakit taramon*, a Bikol coinage for "crossing of words" across shores, languages, and cultures. His choices foreground cleansing and renewal, while preserving Shakespeare's lightness and ambiguity, transposing this to the storm-battered Bikol context where typhoons can ironically evoke fun and laughter as part of the people's "resilience."

Together, these versions of Ariel's song show how translation in the archipelagic Philippines and Bikol region is less a textual transfer than a tidal process and that it is shaped by the region's eruptive landscapes, recurrent floods, and

tumultuous typhoons—material forces that interact with cultural and social forces—and each leaving its imprint on how Shakespeare lands and is reshaped on Bikol shores. Philippine translations of Shakespeare, as Ick has previously observed, often seek “reconciliation rather than reproduction,” producing a Filipino Shakespeare rather than replicating the English one.<sup>44</sup> The two versions discussed here exemplify distinct modes of that process: Tariman reshapes Ariel’s song into a watery dirge for the Philippines, marked by histories of violence and loss, while Borlagdan, through cultural translation, grounds Shakespeare’s magic in local mythologies and storm-battered coastlines, emphasizing cleansing and hope. Read through a blue humanities and archipelagic Asian Shakespeare lens, both works demonstrate how translation is inevitably steered by the geographies in which it is made—by the archipelago’s volatile seas, eruptive landscapes, and the lived experience of navigating between islands and empires.

If Ariel’s song is, as Mentz asserts, “a poet’s attempt to match and figure the great waters,”<sup>45</sup> then these translations are perhaps attempts to complicate and destabilize “fantasies of sustainable growth and a harmonious relationship between human culture and the natural world”<sup>46</sup> by situating Shakespeare on Bikol shores. These translations enact

sea-changes of their own: transformations of a canonical text through the oceanic and archipelagic imagination of two Bikolnon poets, revealing how Shakespeare continues to wash ashore in new, locally resonant forms.<sup>47</sup>

## Notes

1. "Shakespeare's language of the sea," Royal Museums Greenwich, <https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/art-culture/water-sea-shakespeares-plays>
2. "Water, sea and Shakespeare's plays," Royal Museums Greenwich.
3. Steve Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean* (London: Continuum, 2009), Preface, x.
4. Steve Mentz, *An Introduction to the Blue Humanities* (London: Routledge, 2024), 225.
5. *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*, x.
6. The word "dirge" is absent from the Folger edition of the play.
7. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, Rebecca Niles, eds (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), accessed November 25, 2025, <https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/a-midsummer-nights-dream/>
8. William Safire, "Downsize That Special Sea Change," *On Language, The New York Times Magazine*, February 13, 1994, accessed September 16, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/02/13/magazine/on-language-downsize-the-special-sea-change.htm>
9. Ellen H. Johnson, "Jackson Pollock and Nature," *Studio International* 185, no. 956 (June 1973): 260.
10. Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA), *The PEMSEA Story: 28 Years of Collaboration for the Seas of East Asia* (Quezon City, Philippines: PEMSEA, 2021). <https://www.pemsea.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/The%20PEMSEA%20Story.pdf>
11. Patrick M. Cronin, "Sea Change: 'Bongbong' Marcos and the Future of the South China Sea," *The Diplomat*, August 25, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/sea-change-bongbong-marcos-and-the-future-of-the-south-china-sea>
12. José C. Sison, "Sea Change," *The Philippine Star*, September 24, 2010, <https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2010/09/24/614498/sea-change>
13. Juan L. Mercado, "Sea Change," *Philippine Daily Mirror*, April 28, 2012, <https://www.philippinedailymirror.com/sea-change/>

14. Shirley Chew, " 'Rich and Strange': The Manifold Remakings of English in Southeast Asian Literatures," *BiblioAsia* 8, no. 2 (July 2012): 46, [https://biblioasia.nlb.gov.sg/files/pdf/vol-8/issue-2/v8-issue2\\_RichStrange.pdf](https://biblioasia.nlb.gov.sg/files/pdf/vol-8/issue-2/v8-issue2_RichStrange.pdf)
15. Paz Verdades M. Santos and Maria Lorena M. Santos, *21<sup>st</sup> Century Literature: Something Rich and Strange*, (Quezon City: LJ Graphics and Literacy Exponent, 2019).
16. *An Introduction to the Blue Humanities*, 27.
17. *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*, 1.
18. *Ibid*, 9.
19. *Ibid*, 18.
20. Judy Celine Ick, "The Augmentation of the Indies: An Archipelagic Approach to Asian and Global Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare's Asian Journeys: Critical Encounters, Cultural Geographies, and the Politics of Travel*, ed. Bi-qi Beatrice Lei, Judy Celine Ick, and Poonam Trivedi (New York; London: Routledge, 2017), 21.
21. *Ibid*, 32.
22. *Ibid*, 32.
23. *The Mayon 2006 Debris Flow: The Destructive Path of Typhoon Reming* (Japan International Cooperation Agency / Department of Public Works and Highways, October 2007), 3, [https://www.jica.go.jp/Resource/project/philippines/0600933/04/pdf/FCSEC\\_Technical\\_Report\\_3.pdf](https://www.jica.go.jp/Resource/project/philippines/0600933/04/pdf/FCSEC_Technical_Report_3.pdf)
24. William N. Holden, Shawn J. Marshall, "Climate Change and Typhoons in the Philippines: Extreme Weather Events in the Anthropocene," *Integrating Disaster Science and Management: Global Case Studies in Mitigation and Recovery*, eds. Pijush Samui, Dookie Kim and Chandan Ghosh (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2018), 407-421, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/chapter/edited-volume/pii/B9780128120569000245>
25. "Catanduanes: The Ultimate Guide to the 'Land of the Howling Winds,'" *When in Manila*, accessed September 16, 2025, <https://www.wheninmanila.com/catanduanes-ultimate-guide-to-land-of-the-howling-winds/>
26. Paz Verdades M. Santos, *Pagmangno: Woman, Nation, Ecology, Bikol* (Manila, Philippines: De La Salle University Press, 2023), 147.
27. *Ibid*, 147.
28. "The Bicol Region," Wikimedia Foundation, Last modified November 18, 2025, 19:47 UTC.
29. *Pagmangno*, 151.
30. *Ibid*, 152.
31. *Ibid*, 153.
32. Albay Arts Foundation, "Meet Merlita Lorena Tariman — a trilingual poet, journalist, and advocate whose words transcend boundaries. Her work weaves

together the threads of gender, environment, and the human condition,”

Facebook, August 9, 2025. <https://web.facebook.com/photo?fbid=742722532090798&set=a.163134766716247>

33. “The Bicol Region,” Wikimedia Foundation.

34. Marne L. Kilates, blurb for Victor Dennis T. Nierva, *Doros asin mga Anghel: Translations in Bikol of John Donne's Holy Sonnets and Selected Works* (Naga City: Ateneo de Naga University Press, 2011).

35. Santos, *Pagmangno*, 157.

36. This essay arises from a 2024 presentation for a conference organized by the Asian Shakespeare Association and titled *Shorelines Shakespeare*, the call for which framed shorelines as both boundaries and gateways “to different experiences and perspectives.” The reference for this is: *Shoreline Shakespeares: 6th Conference of the Asian Shakespeare Association: Call for Papers*, “A shoreline is a dynamic border ... Shorelines set boundaries but also open gateways to different experiences and perspectives,” Asian Shakespeare Association, accessed [September 29, 2025],

<https://shakespeareassociation.org/shoreline-shakespeares/>

37. Merlita Lorena-Tariman, “Classic Poems Translated: Part 2,” *Dateline Ibalon*, December 2023, accessed September 29, 2025,

<https://dateline-ibalon.com/2023/12/classic-poems-translated-part-2-merlita-lorena-tariman/>

38. Line-by-line English translation: At eleven feet deep lies at rest/Your father; his bones have become coral;/In what used to be his eyes, pearls glisten;/No part of him has lost its color;/Rather, these have endured (or suffered) a trial by sea/Until becoming one (or some) thing that is both different and famed./His knell is hourly signaled by the nymphs:/Ding-dong./Listen, you! I hear it loud and clear — Ding-dong, the sound of the church bell.

39. Jaime Jesus Borlagdan, Facebook Messenger chat with author, August 30, 2024.

40. Borlagdan’s unpublished translation was shared with this author; it is slated for publication by Kabulig-Bikol, Inc., a Bikol writers’ association.

41. Line-by-line English translation: Some arm’s length’s deep, your father is underwater/ all of his bones are now made of coral;/ Nothing of his being has disappeared or been erased/like the sea’s breadth is his change/so that he becomes resplendent and extraordinary./ Hour by hour the bell is rung by the sea guardians:/Ding-dong./Listen (or Hark)! I hear the bell’s peals – Ding-dong ding.

42. “Magindara, Guardian Sirena or Cannibal of the Sea?” *The Aswang Project*, accessed September 29, 2025, <https://www.aswangproject.com/magindara/>

43. Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964), 159.
44. Judy Celine Ick, "The Undiscovered Country: Shakespeare in Philippine Literatures," *Kritika Kultura*, no. 21 (2013): 13, <https://archium.ateneo.edu/kk/vol1/iss21/10/>
45. Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*, x.
46. Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*, xii.
47. There may be more Bikol/Bikolnon translations of "Ariel's Song" or other passages from *The Tempest*, as Shakespeare's works are part of the Philippines' World Literature curriculum. Tariman has published translations of other Anglo-American poems, and Borlagdan was an English Studies: Creative Writing major at the University of the Philippines who took and enjoyed a required Shakespeare course; he has translated sonnets and other passages from plays. Students in Bikol universities and colleges read Anglo-American literature and are given translation exercises as part of the learning process. Perhaps those Bikol writers who have studied and like Anglo-American literature are drawn to "Ariel's Song" and the narrative of *The Tempest* because of a shared (and lived) stormy imagination. Allan Popa, in personal communication to this author, indicated a long interest in writing a Catanduanon version of the play. At the end of 2025, Bikol scholar and theater practitioner Dr. Elsie Albis was awarded a fellowship to Scotland to work on her project titled *Translating The Tempest: Bikolisation of the Shakespearean Stage in the Philippines*.