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Santiago: Making Bilingual Shakespeare Count

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ABSTRACT

Santiago is a bilingual script of Othello, created jointly by Joe Falocco of Texas State University and Shakespearean scholar and translator Alfredo Michel Modenessi. Developed during spring 2023, it was performed as a staged reading at the 51st Annual Shakespeare Association of America Conference. This production directed by Maija Garcia of the Guthrie Theatre's Professional Training Program, featured a BIPOC and Latine cast. In performance, the script offered new perspectives on *Othello*, shifting focus away from Othello and Desdemona and highlighting Iago and Emilia instead. *Santiago* thus seems less concerned with issues of race and colourism than with questions of religious and cultural identity, especially as marked by linguistic power founded upon the ability to code-switch with ease between two languages, in this case, (Shakespeare's) English and (Modenessi's) Spanish. An extended interview with Falocco, Modenessi, and the two Texas State actors who voiced in Minneapolis examines these claims; a coda then places *Santiago* into wider conversation with prior scholarship on the nature of translation, issues of *Othello* and race, and the newly emergent field of Borderlands Shakespeare.

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Introduction

On 1 April 2023, as the 51st Annual Shakespeare Association of America (SAA) conference concluded in Minneapolis, a staged reading of *Santiago* was performed for a small but receptive, highly attentive audience. Billed as a bilingual adaptation of *Othello*, this production was presented by Minneapolis' Teatro el Pueblo and the Professional Training Program of the Guthrie Theatre. The script was developed by Joe Falocco of Texas State University in collaboration with Alfredo Michel Modenessi. A BIPOC and Latine cast of Guthrie MA students, joined by three Latine Texas State undergraduates, was directed by the Guthrie's Maija Garcia. The reading, without intermission, was riveting – even for the many English monolinguals attending – especially as the

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motivations and objectives of the bilingual characters, Iago, Emilia and Montano, came into sharp new focus.

If, as Boffone and Della Gatta have claimed, 'Shakespeare and Latinidad is … a productive avenue for how we can stage a conversation about theatre and identity',[1] then in its bilingualism and its inclusive casting, *Santiago* enters this essential conversation at multiple junctures. In the interview which follows, several such meeting points are broached, as the author queries Falocco (JF), Modenessi (AMM) and the Texas State student-actors reading the roles of Iago and Emilia, Ricardo Lopez Montilla (RLM) and Ana Paula Monterrubio (APM). In a coda, the author then examines and extends several of the claims made by these creatives and proposes a yet seemingly unrecognised or untapped node of intersection between *Santiago* and the wider sphere of Latine Shakespeare, namely the newly emergent project of Borderlands Shakespeare.[2] In doing so, he posits that in future performances of the bilingual script, should they occur, an acknowledgement of the hybrid perspectives of *La Frontera* (realised through set and costume design, music, lighting, props, choreography and ritual practices) might deeply enrich and complicate (rather than obfuscate) *Santiago's* potential engagement with issues of race and indigeneity.

Interview

Q: Where did the idea, the germ, for *Santiago* originate from?
JF: The inspiration for *Santiago* came while I was researching the influence of Cervantes on *Othello*. I came across the notion, advanced by several Iberian scholars, that Iago, Roderigo, Emilia, and Montano all have Spanish names and should therefore be thought of as Spaniards within the multi-ethnic Venetian Empire that is the setting of Shakespeare's play.[3] Upon reading this, I experienced a 'lightbulb' moment. It occurred to me that this insight might lead to an alternative interpretation of *Othello*. Since Paul Robeson first played the title role on Broadway in 1942, American theatre has seen the play almost exclusively in terms of our own troubled racial history and according to a binary logic that sees the world divided, quite literally, into Black and white. In many productions, the actor playing Othello is the only African American performer and thus represents the struggle of a lone Black man living in a white world. This interpretation has produced many wonderful productions, but it is not the only viable reading. By creating a bilingual version of the play in which many characters speak Spanish, my colleague Alfredo Michel Modenessi and I hoped to create a more complex multi-cultural mosaic that would resonate more intensely with contemporary audiences. This may be

[1]Buffone and Della Gatta, 'Introduction: Shakespeare and Latinidad', 3.
[2]Gillen, Santos, and Santos, 'General Introduction', xv–xxxii.
[3]Falocco, 'Echoes of Cervantes', 8.

especially true in my adopted home state of Texas, where most people in 2023 are neither Black nor white.

Q: Can you elaborate on why you believe bilingual scripts might qualify as 'essential Shakespeare' today? *Santiago* is not your first collaboration with Alfredo, Joe?
JF: The United States is currently the world's second-largest Spanish-speaking country. The Texas State University campus, where I work, is only 150 miles from Mexico, which is the world's largest. It seems to me self-evident that a bilingual approach is one way to keep Shakespeare's plays alive on stage in the twenty-first century. In 2015, I therefore developed a bilingual *Comedy of Errors* that captured the farcical essence of that play. Alfredo and I then collaborated in 2020 on *Dos Familias*, a bilingual *Romeo and Juliet* in which the Capulets speak Spanish, and the Montagues speak English. While abridged for performance, both adaptations aimed to preserve the structure of Shakespeare's original works. *Santiago* is something different. It is not merely a bilingual *Othello,* but instead a new play with Iago as protagonist. Ironically, however, the choices we've made may allow practitioners to rediscover aspects of *Othello* that have been lost to the American theatre in recent decades.

Q: Since *Santiago* is an admixture of Shakespeare's language and your translation of that language, Alfredo, prior to discussing what the bilingual script enacts, how in performance it re-shapes *Othello,* I'd like first to talk about that initial act of transformation. Alfredo, can you speak first to the nature of translation? In general, how do you go about translating Shakespeare's works into Spanish?
AMM: If you translate a sonnet into a sonnet, or a play as a play, you will be writing a new poem or a new play. In any case, the new text will relate to its source like the execution of a musical score relates to its own: as a *singular* performance, effected within another time–space, by kindred yet distinct means, in a differentiated act of interpretative creativity. A source text cannot help but be fixed; but translating can render an infinite number of new and differentiated texts. This is *not* loss but gain, contrary to worn out commonplaces. Translating literature involves creating in a different language, in the *target* language, the same or extremely close acts of speech that are achieved in the *source* language. Contingent and ephemeral by nature, such performances actualise diverse potentials of their sources in variegated ways, and hopefully on solid grounds, so as to deliver *new* products, albeit rarely everlasting – again, nothing is lost by this: translations are made to fade, disappear, and be replaced by new ones.

Q: Can you say more about translation as performance? Does this mean that translation is in some manner always provisional and transient?

AMM: Translating is indeed a performative act, whose goal is itself: translating, carrying a work of art, a cultural construction, across different borders and bridges. Nonetheless, the translator *must* perform her/his task with utmost care for what the source text effects as its own acts of speech, as notwithstanding the hard-earned conceptual flexibility and freedom of action that translators duly enjoy today, there are conditions that none of us may bypass. These include a superior and steady command of our source, control over our conceptual and practical tools, and a firm grasp of our target media of expression.

Q. But in the dawn of the era of Chat GPT, why use a human translator such as yourself, Alfredo, when even a rudimentary tool like a dictionary or Google Translate might do the job? What essential value do you add to the process of moving Shakespeare into the 'target media' as you term it?
AMM: In broad terms, contrary to the stale and tiresome adage, if when speaking of translation we envision 'loss' and betrayal, it would be very fair to say that the real traitors in this process are the dictionaries and their uncreative handling. For, regardless of apparent similarities between languages, and despite the ongoing, deplorable proliferation and popularity of web-based, automatic 'translators', and the yet more horrific horizons of Chat GPT, languages are living organisms with singular minds. Most so-called automated translations are still very rudimentary operations of *lexical* substitution depending on databases that are incapable of keeping up with the furious speed at which language-users transform their own means and ways of expression. Worse still, and unsurprisingly, given the world's economic divide, many such 'machines' rest on western, specifically *English* syntactic principles, which not only render overt, awkward results that may be beneficial to tourists, but also have covert, intrusive, and eventually deleterious consequences for other languages. Off the bat, the simplest example I can give you is how, in Mexico, starting maybe twenty years ago, to identify themselves many people started to ask '*¿cuál es su/tu nombre?*', and to answer '*mi nombre es* so and so'. This is a blatant calque of the English way and has no real connection with the history and soul of Spanish. Instead, the beautiful, identitarian question: '*¿cómo te llamas?*', and the answer '*me llamo* so and so', structurally distinguish the act of *naming oneself* in opposition to simply *stating one's name*. This may sound minimal to some but, trust me, it's not only huge in and of itself but epitomises an ugly process and problem: such unnecessary borrowings have started to disfigure natural use where English grammar and syntax are often blindly employed even when they make no sense in the other language, and they eventually become normalised. Don't get me wrong: I love my own and my acquired languages dearly, but I don't want them to become the same thing at heart, though seemingly different on the lexical surface – how boring! The value of multilingualism, like that of translation, is in diversity, not in sameness. So, all languages *act* differently. However, at the same time, all are also capable

of effecting very similar or even identical *acts of speech*, but always by totally different *means* – their *own* means, the means that are natural to each language, to the life of each language as an entity that is independent from all other languages, even if they belong to the same language family or have historical traits in common.

Q. So, human intelligence and creativity is fundamental to this work? You would claim this as non-negotiable when translating Shakespeare?
AMM: Absolutely. Translating Shakespeare does not mean importing his germinal acts of speech into the target language/medium just by looking something up and replacing one word or phrase for another. Instead, translating Shakespeare (and any other writer, for that matter) entails reaching deep inside the source act of speech in its native medium, grasping its process, and processing from there a *new* act for *kindred effects* in the target medium, according to the linguistic ways of the latter, not to those of the source medium. The resulting translation may certainly be a text closely resembling the surface text of the source, but it does not have to. What it must effect, by the same process, is a new act equal or nearly equal to the source act. When doing Shakespeare, for instance, sounds, rhythms, cadences, pitch, tone … all of them can (I'd say must) take priority over 'meaning' or 'content' – without disregarding them, of course. That is why *translating* is so hard, to begin with, though so often taken for granted, mostly by people who misconstrue it as merely *explaining* or *glossing* what a text 'says'.

I wish to again emphasise that translating is a performative activity that *actualizes* its source in many possible ways. It's akin to playing music, where you don't *do* anything *to* the music sheet, to the score, but you can do a lot of good by *playing* it well. To that extent, translating never 'changes' anything in the source, for the source remains unchanged regardless of whatever the translator chooses to write as a translation. Therefore, translating is also always interpretive and transformative, but never deleterious of its source.

Q: If a translation can do no harm to its source, what are its essential relationships to the original? Doesn't a translation preserve the source in some manner?
AMM: 'Preserve' is a troublesome notion. As I said, the translator must deliver the acts of speech that the source text delivers in the form of new speech acts. By definition, acts of speech convey meaning, but not independently of their praxis, which is what actually defines them as acts of speech. The source acts are themselves, and that's basically it for them. If you wish to 'preserve' them, then do nothing – or submit them to some other process of preservation. Say, if you want to explain them by means of another language, you can of course do it – and thus supposedly 'preserve' their 'meaning' while explaining them; however, you will not be *translating* them. For if you want to *translate* them, they'll have to be *translated* – that is they must undergo a process

whereby they will be taken to a new life in a different medium. In fact, translation and preservation are two entirely separate acts. One *quickens*, while the other *stays* the creative energies inscribed within the source. The problem, as I see it, resides with those who misconstrue what translating means and insist on a stale notion of 'preservation', which is directly at odds with transformation and *transcreation*. That use of the word 'preservation' reeks of terminal stages; it leads to dead ends, to not knowing what to do with texts that seem inert, moribund, in need of hospice care. Often, the effort to 'preserve' results in translations or productions that are little more than dull explanations and illustrations of the 'contents' of the source play or poem. Or, alternatively, 'preservation' results in spectacular productions full of gimmicks and noise, masking conventional, outdated, often empty discourses. A translation that seeks to preserve the source will never be anything more than a work that, deep inside, conceals the same-old-same-old trite and 'universal' Shakespeare, nicely window-dressed for consumption and facile mass appeal.

Q: Alfredo, can you speak further to the vitality and freshness of the Shakespearean translation you envision and attempt to effect, a fierce and brave act of border-crossing, perhaps? What's to fear here?
AMM: Indeed, my creative approach – a transcreative, transformative, translational approach – begins with the knowledge that Shakespeare's plays and poems are opportunities for interpretive action; that they are alive, richly inviting, provocative, open to transformation. Whoever sees them as in need of 'preservation' seems to fear that something dreadful will happen to them if you interact with them and transport them, translate them, to a different dimension of mind and emotion. But they needn't fear. Nothing happens to a Shakespeare text if you use it for what it was made for: if you play it or play with it. The worst scenario is when the proposed transcreation or translation falls short, or flat, or so-so. But then you can always start over and do better. Translating is an act of creative liberation, not one of servile or poor mimicry. The artists who have produced great works based on Shakespeare outside the English-speaking world have done so precisely because they are fearless with respect to Shakespeare; because, to them, Shakespeare isn't a cultural or historical obligation or burden, but a rich asset and resource; because they embrace the risk of *using* Shakespeare, instead of revering or trying to *preserve* it. Surely some textually 'faithful' endeavours purport to take that same risk, even ostentatiously, but many times they end in massive self-delusion.

Q: Joe, same question for you, as we return to *Santiago*. What new and vital insights are discovered in this bilingual reshaping of *Othello*?
JF: I started with the assumption that an interpretation of *Othello* that divides its characters along a racial binary does not make sense within the context of the

early modern era. I know that many critics will disagree with this assertion. For example, the recent collection *White People in Shakespeare* argues that early modern theatre was 'key to the racializing assemblage of white people and the mass production of them into a singular and privileged race'.[4] Arthur Little, Jr., the editor of this volume, laments that 'studying race' in the early modern era 'is met almost reflexively … with skepticism and accusations of anachronism' (Little 9).[5] Yet, as Ibram X. Kendi notes, the term 'race' was not defined in a European dictionary with anything like its current meaning until 1606.[6] And, as Little acknowledges, the first recorded use of the term 'white people' dates to 1613.[7] Thus, applying either of these terms to *Othello*, a play composed in 1603–1604, is therefore, by definition, anachronistic. So, although Little and colleagues make a strong case for the early modern fetishisation of white skin, they fail to adequately acknowledge, however, the extent to which skin colour in this period was thought to derive from environment rather than heredity. Little refers, for instance, to 'Shakespeare's Black Cleopatra'.[8] But he does not note that the Egyptian Queen attributes her blackness to 'Phoebus' amorous pinches'.[9] Similarly, the Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice* calls his colour 'the shadowed livery of the burnished sun,/ To whom I am a neighbor and near bred'.[10] Besides physical appearance, the personality characteristics associated with different peoples were also perceived as deriving from these same environmental sources. Desdemona, for instance, assures Emilia (ironically, as it turns out) that her husband is not jealous because 'the sun where he was born/ Drew all such humors from him'.[11]

Q: If *Santiago* decentres racial difference, what does it emphasise instead?
JF: Religious difference and identity become more pronounced, for one. The anxiety that Othello provokes among the Venetians derives not so much from his unchanging and essential status as 'Black', but rather from his unsettled condition as a convert from Islam. Such conversions were highly suspect and often undertaken for the sake of convenience. Such was the case with the many European 'renegades' who became Muslim in order to more freely practise piracy, and with the Moorish scholar who embraced Christianity to become Leo Africanus.[12] In a 1627 sermon, English clergyman Henry Byam chastised those who 'are Musselmans in Turkie, and Christians at home; doffing their religion, as they doe their clothes, and keeping a conscience for every Harbor where they shall put in'.[13] Religious and cultural instability, rather

[4]Little, 'Introduction', 6.
[5]Ibid., 9.
[6]Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist*, 40.
[7]Little, 'Introduction', 4.
[8]Ibid., 14.
[9]Bevington, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 'Antony and Cleopatra', 1.5.29.
[10]Bevington, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 'Merchant of Venice', 2.1.2–4.
[11]Bevington, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 'Othello', 3.4.29–30.
[12]Falocco, 'Echoes of Cervantes', 2–4.
[13]Quoted in Falocco, 'Echoes of Cervantes', 3.

than racial essentialism, was the hallmark of ethnic identity in the Mediterranean world in which *Othello* is set.

Q: How does *Santiago* tap into these Mediterranean anxieties around cultural practices?
JF: There's no doubt that in *Santiago*, the contingent nature of cultural affiliation is driven by the linguistic code-switching of Iago. By transitioning seamlessly from Spanish to English, he can manipulate both the anglophone Othello and the Spanish-speaking Roderigo. Our interest in this cultural fluidity is one reason that we edited the script to make Iago the unequivocal protagonist. While most productions cut Iago's lines to make room for Othello, we did just the opposite.

Q: Ricardo, can you respond to this emphasis placed upon your role in *Santiago*? How did you approach this shift in focus in your portrayal of Iago? Did you feel extra onus or burden as the lead, the title character in this production?
RLM: I certainly felt the pressure of leading this show. In Shakespeare's works, only Hamlet has more lines than Iago does, and knowing that going in, the amount of work I had to do to perform such a complex character was comprehensive. My anxieties surrounding the weight of this role faded once I met the whole cast, and our fabulous director, Maija Garcia. What she helped me understand was, that at the end of the day, though I may be the main engine for the play, my job as an actor is not to focus on my role but rather to explore my objectives, to *play*, and to have fun.

Q: Was if fun to be the primary code-switcher in the play, and to know, as such, that you held the 'code' for the entire production? As the key by which this show is unlocked, how do you perceive the borders between these two languages? How did you perform the shifts from Spanish to English?
RLM: The borders between the two languages are very important. They inform me as an actor on where I am, who I'm talking to, who has the status in the relationship, as well as small behavioural things like cultural tendencies and intonation patterns. The shifts from Spanish to English require a technical proficiency, but I always tried to treat the entire script as one seamless text, not two separate pieces. Shifts in language often provided clues to beat changes, but sometimes they were just driven by who my character was talking to. In those few scenes where an English-speaking character could hear me speaking Spanish, it was always important to take into consideration their level of proficiency in Spanish. Venice was multicultural, and if an English-dominant character spoke no Spanish, they might still understand it – much as is the case I believe in the contemporary US. Even if they understood no Spanish, how Iago would say the words still indicated much. Iago

knows everybody is watching and listening to him, so he must always play both sides of the field simultaneously. This is true even in monolingual scripts of *Othello*; and this is why the bilingual adaptation worked so well. It provides a direct parallel to his famous duality.

Furthermore, in my opinion switching between languages can look and sound more impressive than it is. Spanish is my home language, but English is the language I speak almost everywhere else. Switching between them is something I learned very early on – sometimes it took practice because my mouth was utilising different muscles, but this was really a mechanical, technical challenge, not a mental one.

Q: So let me press further here, Ricardo. Were you more at home in, more comfortable as Iago, when speaking in English or in Spanish?
RLM: I was definitely more comfortable speaking English. Spanish is my first language technically, but I moved to the US when I was three, so Spanish became my second language after a while. I've done plays in Spanish before, and they're always a challenge because it takes time and effort to understand the character's motives, trauma, back-story. But once I do, I've found it becomes just as fun as performing in English. Speaking in Spanish really allows me to immerse myself in the imagined world – because my body works so hard at the mechanics of the language and culture, it prevents me from ever getting in my head. A manufactured flow state happens, and even if everything doesn't go exactly as scripted, the choices I make are organic and come from my body, not my head.

Q: Joe, if Iago is the protagonist, what kind of a play does *Santiago* become?
JF: Whatever (Sant)Iago's other strengths might be, he is not a tragic hero in the Aristotelian mode. He cannot be said to experience *peripeteia* (reversal of intention), since his ever-evolving plans work out pretty much the way he intends. Nor does he achieve *anagnorisis* (tragic recognition). When he has the opportunity to come clean and acknowledge that he is at fault, Iago instead 'lawyers up'. One might argue for him as a Marlovian over-reacher in the tradition of Barabas or Tamburlaine, but Iago's claim to such a status is undercut when he does not die in the end. In fact, I am convinced that, were he to be tried, Iago would be exonerated of all charges. I've even written a yet-to-be-staged ten-minute play titled 'The Trial of Iago', exploring this idea.

It could be that, with Iago as protagonist, the play becomes a Satanic farce. However, what we have discovered in *Santiago* is that, with Othello and Desdemona reduced in scope, the tragedy of Emilia takes shape. She indeed undertakes an action (the purloining of the handkerchief) that leads to opposite results from what she intended. She also recognises her fault in bringing about the play's catastrophe.

Q: Ana Paula, this seems your cue. How conscious of this shift in focus and power were you when portraying Emilia? Did you feel this emphasis as a burden or as release?
APM: Since the start of the project, I felt great responsibility in portraying Emilia with authenticity. I wanted my work to do her justice. I wouldn't call this responsibility I felt a burden, but rather a significant opportunity. Emilia has so many important and relevant things to say, and I had the opportunity to make sure that she was understood and that the audience was able to recognise the unswerving truth she represented.

Q: Yet, following your husband's lead, many of your lines are delivered in Spanish in this bilingual production, including your famous dialogue with Desdemona in Act 4. Can you speak to your code-switching in *Santiago*, and how this relates to your delivery of an authentic, just Emilia?
APM: In her dialogue with Desdemona, Emilia tries to empower Desdemona after Othello has hit her because he suspected her of cheating on him. Emilia wants Desdemona to know that many husbands are abusive, and that women don't need to put up with them. This scene comes after the audience has witnessed Iago silencing and disrespecting Emilia several times. I believe Emilia's dialogue comes from a place of hurt and anger that Iago may never love her as she wishes he did. Emilia begins delivering her monologue in English, butthen, she swerves into Spanish until the last couplet. I believe this shift into Spanish demonstrates that everything she says in this moment is very personal; it originates from her heart, unfiltered and true. Her passion about the matter suggests that Iago has hurt her previously several times. He has probably hit Emilia, particularly when he thought she was cheating on him. In addition to comforting Desdemona, Emilia is comforting herself. At the moment she says, '… para eso tenemos hígado y hiel … tenemos paladar para lo dulce y lo amargo', she discovers her own self-worth (in addition to helping Desdemona find hers) and determines she doesn't need to put up with Iago. Now a free agent, she can gain revenge for the way he has treated her.

I wish to emphasise that delivering this monologue in Spanish was liberating. I felt pent-up anger in Emilia that she finally expresses here. I thought the consonants in the Spanish words gave her an additional channel through which she could release this resentment. It felt good to vent, to hold men accountable for their wrongdoings, especially in Spanish.

Q: And you continued to rely heavily on Spanish in the fifth act, when delivering the bitter truth to Othello. Why?
APM: It was easier for me to deliver this weighty truth to Othello in Spanish. As mentioned above, Spanish allows Emilia to speak from her heart, without filters. She doesn't have time to think about how to posture in English; she just must

get the truth out. Speaking in Spanish allows me to connect more with Emilia's despair at this moment, which fuels her bravery to accuse Othello of his mistakes.

Q: Joe, does *Santiago*, in production, actually become Emilia's play? I know that several of your audience members in Minneapolis were strongly moved by Ana Paula's reading of the role, and in their comments intimated such emotional ties.
JF: No, I don't think this is the case. With her limited stage time, this could never become 'Emilia's play'. Rather, I think we may have achieved with *Santiago* an alternative version of *Othello* similar to that described by Keith Hamilton Cobb. In his play *American Moor*, Cobb describes the complex relationship between African American actors and Othello. It is, of course, a great role, but one into which Black actors are often channelled at the expense of others. Once cast, these performers are charged with a nearly impossible burden. Shakespeare, Cobb laments, 'seems to want me to believe that Othello is a complete psycho-emotional cripple'.[14] The deck is therefore stacked against any performer in this role trying to carry a production. Rather than placing the burden of the story exclusively on the titular Moor, Cobb instead aspires to a new interpretation in which one can 'see several human beings conspiring to create tragedy'.[15] I feel that our intentions in creating *Santiago* were comparable, and good: we wished to soften Othello's burden by surrounding him with Latine brothers and sisters. But the road to hell is paved with such intentions. In the wrong hands, our script could do more harm than good, with its multi-ethnic *dramatis personae* squabbling like the Los Angeles City Council. But in Minneapolis, I feel *Santiago* was in the right hands, such as those of Maija Garcia and these two young actors, Ricardo and Ana Paula.

Q: Ricardo, Ana Paula, what did this performance mean for you as young Latine actors?
RLM: I'd like to begin by emphasising the diversity of the Latine community – we are not a simple monolith of generic Spanish speakers with identical language and culture. We share much, but we are diverse too! I am actually Venezuelan, but Ana Paula and our Roderigo are Mexican. Alfredo's translation uses Mexican Spanish, not Venezuelan, as you might expect – and there are important shades of distinction between the two. In rehearsal, he shared with me once that the specific use of the expletive 'coño' (or fuck) in the script was intended to make the actor switch tactics and reach new emotional heights. That specific curse word is not used commonly in Mexican Spanish vernacular, but it's a very frequent expletive in Venezuela. So there were some differences I needed to learn about between my Venezuelan

[14]Cobb, King, and Kello, 'A Theatre Practice', 205.
[15]Ibid., 206.

tradition and Mexican culture, as well as some Mexican words that I hadn't encountered prior to reading *Santiago*. My accent is also not what Alfredo wrote for, although I would like to think it worked! The Mexican accent is more musical and moves more slowly than does Venezuelan speech. Luckily, Alfredo walked me through what he terms the 'rhythmic prose' structure he implements while translating. This helped me tremendously with operatives, and made the script much easier to work with. In English, Shakespeare's verse is much easier for me than his prose to act in, because of the detail that scansion provides. In the Spanish, Alfredo's 'rhythmic prose' felt very similar to Shakespeare's verse.

Q: Ricardo, your next steps? More Shakespeare, other projects? And the future of Latine theatre, as you see it?
RLM: I am really passionate about heightened work, so I hope to continue working on Shakespeare's canon when I get out of school. I'm highly invested in poetry, dance, and movement in storytelling and have a few works of my own that I am hoping to get produced in the near future. I am a playwright, singer, dancer, and choreographer as well, so I hope to take all the lessons learned from working on this bilingual script (Shakespeare + Modenessi) and put them to use in contemporary works of my own. And I am always happy to return to Shakespeare's plays. These rich texts are one of the main reasons I love acting, and I hope to get to perform in more. And as much as I love the tragedies, I hope to soon be cast in a few comedies or history plays, like *As You Like It* and the *Henry VI* tetralogy. I'll spend this summer at the Texas Shakespeare Festival where I'll perform in *The Comedy of Errors* and *King Lear*, plus a role in *Something Rotten!* and understudying in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Q: Ana Paula, your future plans?
APM: I would love to be a part of *Santiago* once again in the future. Last summer, I studied abroad in London at The Globe Theatre, and saw some incredible Shakespeare productions. The trip broadened my passion for Shakespeare and made me realise that I want to tell his stories throughout my career, especially in a manner that speaks to other Latine folks. If I could do *Santiago* once again or participate in any other bilingual adaptations, I will be accomplishing this goal. Performing Emilia in *Santiago* was such a blessing because I felt this adaptation enhanced the meaning of *Othello* and made it relevant to today's America, and especially to my multiracial, multilingual generation. Shows like *Santiago* are essential, I think, for keeping Shakespeare vital and fresh for younger audiences.

Q: So the two of you see a bright future ahead for vibrant Latine and Shakespearean production?
RLM: Yes, I think the prospects for Latine theatre in the US on one hand have never looked better, but on the other hand are still not in the zeitgeist enough.

I've seen and read some really tremendous Latine theatre recently, works by John Leguizamo, Tanya Saracho, Jesus I. Valles, and Quiara Alegria Hudes, so the trailblazers are leading the way for us all. And there are many wonderful regional theatres that are specifically doing work by and for Latine people, and now I'm seeing new festivals and musical theatre labs, so there is definitely hope. As for the popularity of these works, and of Latine-inspired Shakespeare, I'm cautiously optimistic. Certainly I hope to be part of a wave that creates and performs more works like *Santiago*. I completely agree with Ana Paula, if Shakespeare is to be kept essential to our future, we need more productions like this that speak to all Americans irrespective of race or linguistic heritage. And I want to get back to the Guthrie postgrad, because it's theatres like this that can best merge the classical and experimental together in a vital and fresh manner. Like *Santiago* does. Which has been a dream come true.

APM: For me too!

Q: Thank you Ricardo and Ana Paula for your urgency, and for sharing your views. Joe, I want to end with a few more questions for you about the making of *Santiago*, and what you, as a professor and theatre-maker working primarily in Texas and Florida see as the future of Latine Shakespeare in the US. Can we begin with your work at Texas State, and the collaboration with Maija Garcia at the Guthrie?

JF: Yes, of course. For our 2023 reading at the Shakespeare Association of America (SAA) Conference, we were so fortunate in our collaboration with Maija Garcia of the Guthrie Theatre's Professional Training Program. While immediately intrigued by this project, Maija was concerned that there might be insufficient Spanish-speaking talent in Minneapolis to take on the leads of Iago and Roderigo. I therefore found funding to cast these parts with undergraduates from Texas State University's acclaimed Theatre programme. While holding auditions, I also heard Ana Paula read. She was so good as Emilia, in both English and Spanish, that I knocked on doors around campus until I found enough money to bring her to Minneapolis as well.

I rehearsed with these three students for a total of ten hours during the Spring 2023 semester. Alfredo Modenessi participated via Zoom in two of our rehearsals, helping the students understand his 'rhythmic prose' translation. Prior to our journey to Minneapolis, I organised a preliminary reading on campus with the help of volunteers from the local theatre community. Meanwhile, Maija Garcia cast the remaining roles with current students and alumni of the Guthrie programme. The Texas State actors and I flew to Minneapolis on March 30, and we rehearsed at the Guthrie for two days before performing *Santiago* at SAA on the evening of Saturday, 1 April 2023.

Among her many achievements as director, Maija's greatest contribution was in casting an almost exclusively BIPOC company. With the exception of my own brief appearance as Brabantio, all of the participating actors were Black and/or Latine. This affected the company and spectators in unforeseen ways. During a post-show discussion, an Indian-American audience member described being moved by seeing so many faces on stage that looked like her. Even though she spoke no Spanish, the presence of Latine performers afforded her a gesture of inclusion.

The diverse nature of the cast also freed up performers in their response to the play. Wariboko Semenitari, the Nigerian-American actor who played Othello, said that they would not have felt comfortable playing this role against a white Iago. In their view, this would have exacerbated the stereotype of a gullible Black man at the mercy of a white trickster. With Ricardo playing Iago, on the other hand, Wariboko felt like both characters could be seen as trying to make their way in an unfriendly world.

Too often, the actor playing Othello is the only Black person on stage. Maija remedied this by casting an Afro-Puerto Rican actor, Domino D'Lorion, as the Duke and Lodovico. Their embodiment of the Venetian State therefore linked up in race/colour to the Moorish General. Othello's 'otherness' thus derived, in this production, from factors other than pigmentation. I think casting like this points the way towards a new understanding of *Othello* in the twenty-first century.

Q: You mentioned the warm reception of one audience member to the performance on 1 April. Can you speak to how other audience members seemed to respond?
JF: Of course. We did three readings in all: first, we rehearsed at Texas State, then we had a final rehearsal at the Guthrie the night before the SAA performance, with a small, invited audience, on March 31. Then we performed at the conference on 1 April. At all three of these performances, audience members who spoke little or no Spanish said that they understood Alfredo's translation better than Shakespeare's original. They found Iago's and Emilia's use of Spanish in direct address to the audience particularly effective. I found this remarkable.

Q: So what is next for *Santiago*?
JF: Both Alfredo and I would welcome any theatre that wished to produce *Santiago*, hopefully as a full-scale performance, to take on this script. And I would encourage any such company to employ the kind of diverse casting we used in Minneapolis. Any of the Spanish-speaking roles could be cast with Afro-Latino performers, and any of the Anglophone parts played by African Americans. I would also be eager to see a MESANA actor cast as Othello. Some might object that this takes away one of the few Shakespearean roles traditionally reserved for Black performers. But it might be equally beneficial to offer these actors the chance to play other parts. I'd love to see *Santiago* thus

staged in Texas, or Florida, New York – anywhere, in fact. Even in Minneapolis once again!

Q: Your final reflection on *Santiago*, Joe, and why it might be 'essential Shakespeare'.
JF: My work with Alfredo, Maija and our actors on *Santiago* reminds me of another famous bilingual *Othello*. In the late nineteenth-century, Tomasso Salvini toured the United States in three different productions of the play. Each time, Salvini played the title role in Italian, while the other company members spoke Shakespeare's English. Very few people in America spoke Italian at the time (and most who did could not afford theatre tickets), yet Salvini was widely recognised as the era's greatest Othello. His efforts and their warm reception were my original inspiration to work with Alfredo on this bilingual script of Shakespeare's great domestic tragedy. As in the nineteenth century, so too in the twenty-first century, bilingual Shakespeare is essential and vital Shakespeare.

Coda

Santiago achieves stature immediately through the involvement of Modenessi as translator, author if you will, of its Spanish language text, spoken primarily by Iago, Emilia and Roderigo. Modenessi has discussed elsewhere the invisibility of the translator in some of his earlier projects for the Mexican stage,[16] but in this bilingual production, moving back and forth between Shakespeare's English and his Spanish 'rhythmic prose', it is impossible to lose sight of, or more accurately, to fail to hear, his intervention. Modenessi has strong opinions about what constitutes good translation, and how such might work to 'transcreate' the original, becoming something fresh in the 'target' language.[17] Translation boldly and instrumentally revivifies the original text – it does not 'preserve' it – and in a bilingual script such as *Santiago*, this effort to make new and memorable portrayals of Iago and Emilia is accentuated, more pronounced, due to their transposition with Shakespeare's English verse spoken by Othello, Desdemona and others. Translation, then, for Modenessi, is at least an adaptation of Shakespeare, and verges towards appropriative work: *Santiago* exists somewhere on this spectrum, though I believe its full potential as (ethical) appropriative work cannot be realised until it receives a full staging.[18] As staged reading, its dynamism feels yet potential; in performance, its energies might become kinetic and powerful.

With one exception (Falocco himself, who read Brabantio), the cast of *Santiago* in Minneapolis was fully Latine and BIPOC; this is commendable, and

[16]Rekskou, 'Translating Richard', 98–100.
[17]Modenessi, 'Every Like is not the Same'.
[18]Joubin, 'Others Within', 31–33.

such casting choices should if possible be replicated in any future productions. As has been documented elsewhere, and as Ricardo Lopez Montilla and Ana Paula Monterrubio, the Texas State University undergraduates who played Iago and Emilia, indicate above, young Latine and BIPOC actors are eager to grapple with Shakespeare,[19] and in a manner that exceeds tokenism and the half-baked promises of supposed 'colour-blind' casting.[20] Productions like *Santiago* are vital in allowing young actors and creatives meaningful, productive encounters with Shakespeare – and precisely because of its bilingualism, *Santiago* provided a stage for such actors to wrestle with both old and new perspectives, Shakespeare's English and Modenessi's Spanish combined, sixteenth-century England in contact with twenty-first-century Mexico.[21] Thoughtful, ethical Shakespearean appropriation can provide new opportunities for the likes of Lopez Montilla and Monterrubio, and their comments in this interview indicate how eagerly they embrace such prospects.

Falocco has been dutifully engaged with such bridgework for at least ten years, having staged a bilingual *Comedy or Errors* in 2015 at Texas State,[22] and collaborating with Modenessi on *Dos Familias*, a 2020 bilingual production of *Romeo and Juliet*. *Santiago* seems his boldest intervention yet into this field. This is due not simply to the fact that it wrestles with and transforms Shakespeare's troubling 'race' play. In addition, Falocco asserts in this interview that the bilingual script – which redirects attention from Othello and Desdemona onto Iago and Emilia – diminishes the racism of the production, replacing it with tensions centred upon religious and cultural affiliation and identity. Linguistic choice (and bilingual code-switching) matters more here, determines more, than skin pigmentation and the racial coding that follows from it, Falocco claims. Although in several contexts, *Othello*'s racism has been de-centred or redeployed, these appropriations emerge from the global South,[23] not from America where *Santiago* was created and performed, nor from the Mediterranean sphere where Falocco imagines his bilingual script 'laying its scene'.[24] Perhaps Falocco is correct, *Santiago* does in some manner erase race from *Othello*, but I believe this assertion needs further testing and probing, if possible in the crucible of a full-stage performance.

In the interview, both Ricardo Lopez Montilla (Iago) and Falocco refer to the actor who performed Othello, Wariboko Semenitari, a Nigerian-American MA student at the Guthrie, and speak positively of their attitude towards reading this part; yet unquestionably, a shortcoming of the interview in its present form is that Semenitari does not speak for themself here. Would they agree that their Nigerian, Black-African identity was decentred in *Santiago*? I'm

[19]Schroeder-Arce, 'Shakespeare with … Latinx Youth', 128–35.
[20]Thompson, 'Practicing a Theory', 1–26.
[21]Modenessi, 'You Say', 40–42.
[22]Falocco, 'Lleno de Tejanidad', 170–77.
[23]Botelho, 'De-Emphasizing Race', 370–74.
[24]De Sousa, 'Introduction', 137.

not so sure: I did not see or hear this occur on the Minneapolis stage, and indeed I squirmed uncomfortably in my white body and white frame of reference as Semenitari appeared to encounter all the typical obstacles that Black actors find in the role – even if he was on stage with other BIPOC and Latine brothers and sisters.[25] Too often in recent American history, such as in Miami where I live and works, the lives and livelihoods of African diasporic citizens have been either pushed aside or erased by the claims and ascendancy of newly arrived Latinx immigrants, resulting in ill-will and hostility between Black and brown communities. Productions like *Santiago* should foster conversations, goodwill and points of contact between these groups, rather than decentring one for the emergence of the other – and in fact I think such positive outcomes might well have occurred within the Guthrie / Texas State cast performing in Minneapolis. Both Lopez Montilla and Monterrubio hint at this; Semenitari's confirmation of such generosity remains a missing link.

Coincidentally, *Santiago* was created and performed concurrently with the publication of the first volume of *The Bard in the Borderlands: An Anthology of Shakespeare Appropriations en La Frontera,* edited by Katherine Gillen, Adrianna M. Santos and Kathryn Vomero Santos. This open-access volume, published by ACMRS, presents six newly prepared texts, three of which rework *Romeo and Juliet*, and two *Hamlet* – all of them emanating from the rich cultural and linguistic hybridity that demarcates the Mexico-US border, Anzaldua's *La Frontera*. Each text is richly introduced and thoughtfully edited by Gillen, Santos, and Vomero Santos, and the whole volume is prefaced by their provocative introduction, 'Tracing the Traditions of Borderlands Shakespeare.'[26] The volume's publication was highlighted by both a seminar and a cash bar at the Minneapolis SAA, the latter occurring in the conference hotel's second floor Foyer from 6–8:15 pm on 1 April, whilst *Santiago* was staged that same evening, right beneath the foyer, in the conference hotel's first-floor Gallery from 7:00–9:00 pm

I draw attention to such juxtapositions, or near misses, in Minneapolis, because it seems to me that *Santiago* could benefit from being reimagined and staged with the perspectives and goals of the Bard in the Borderlands project kept front of mind. Falocco and his students from Texas State University are at a hub of academic inquiry into the region (cf. Center for the Study of the Southwest, https://www.txst.edu/cssw.html) – but *Santiago*, despite its Latine and BIPOC casting and rich bilingual modality, had its eyes set on the Mediterranean, at least in Minneapolis. As Falocco says at the very beginning of the interview, 'I came across the notion, advanced by several Iberian scholars, that Iago, Roderigo, Emilia, and Montano all have Spanish names and should

[25]Corredera, 'The Moor Makes a Cameo', 359–60.
[26]Gillen, Santos, and Santos, 'General Introduction', xv–xxxiii.

therefore be thought of as Spaniards within the multi-ethnic Venetian Empire that is the setting of Shakespeare's play.'

I do not wish to denigrate *Santiago* or Falocco's choices unduly or unfairly. His vision, Maija Garcia's direction, Modenessi's translation, the actors' readings: these made for a very stirring night of theatre-making in Minneapolis, a powerful re-visioning of *Othello*. Yet, I do wonder what a future stage performance of *Santiago* might enact if, rather than looking to the 'multi-ethnic Venetian empire', it heeded attention to the rich, conflictual histories of cultural contact and mixing nearer home, *en La Frontera*, another site of hybridity and multilingualism. In their volume's Introduction, Gillen, Santos and Vomero Santos contend that

> The Shakespeare appropriations in this anthology draw on Borderlands performance traditions to center historical and contemporary forms of resistance and resilience in the region. Shakespeare proves to be a site of contestation in this context, functioning as a representative of the English literary canon but also as a malleable set of texts, ideas, and characters that can be reimagined to serve community needs and interests. While the plays gathered here use Shakespeare to expose the material violence of ongoing colonization, they also emphasize the value, beauty, and restorative power of Indigenous and Mexican languages, mythologies, and rituals.[27]

What might a performance of *Santiago* addressing itself to such questions (through an ethical and appropriative Borderlands mise-en-scene) accomplish? Might such a staging of Santiago become, in the words of Ruben Espinosa, a work 'that offer(s) … a glimpse into the way Latinx culture absorbs, adapts, and interprets Shakespeare' in our contemporary Borderlands, not an imagined Mediterranean sphere?[28]

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[27]Ibid., xv–xvi.
[28]Espinosa, 'Don't It Make My Brown Eyes', 57.

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