



SHAKESPEARE AND LATINIDAD

Edited by Trevor Boffone and Carla Della Gatta

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Carla Della Gatta

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*Willful Invisibility: Translating Shakespeare's
The Reign of King Edward III*

Octavio Solis

It takes a great deal of hubris to presume that one can take up the task of 'translating' the eternal plays of William Shakespeare into contemporary American English, much less attempt to make the language of such a genius more accessible to twenty-first-century audiences. The kind of ego it requires is one that I have sometimes lacked, even when approaching my own writing. When I accepted the offer to take on one of the Bard's texts for Oregon Shakespeare Festival's (OSF) *Play on!* project, I felt that ego shrivel up to nothing. Yet, that 'nothing' proved to be my way in.

With *Play on!*, OSF sought to translate the entire Shakespeare canon from Elizabethan English to contemporary English. Thirty-six American playwrights of diverse backgrounds, myself among them, were commissioned to take on the plays. Though it is an audacious undertaking, none of the translations are intended to supplant Shakespeare's own works, which are safely perched at the pinnacle of literature. The challenge was simply to make the works more accessible to new American audiences.

However, as a first-generation Latino whose parents hail from Mexico, and whose English is a rigorously acquired language of which I am not always master, I haven't always been considered quite so American. In discussions of Shakespeare's densely worded texts, I'm often at a remove from this very English domain and have therefore felt irrelevant and invisible. Consequently, I chose *The Reign of King Edward III* from a long list of available plays, a text that wasn't even considered a play of the canon until 2009. I chose it because I hadn't heard of it before, and the chances were good that most people hadn't either, thereby allowing me to work with that same invisibility that I have so often felt. Little did I realise that my efforts at remaining out of sight would become my *modus operandi* for retooling this little-known work. My 'cloak of invisibility' enabled me to discover on my own terms the marvellous secrets of the world's greatest writer.

I had my marching orders: First, do no harm; if the language is beautiful and lucid, let it stand. Second, honour the metre and verse where possible. Third, don't update the play to subscribe to current sensibilities or faddish expressions or slang. And finally, refrain from cutting or adapting the play for any reason whatsoever. These rules didn't make the task any easier, but at least I knew what not to do.

Originally published anonymously in a single volume, *Edward III* was first performed around 1592, making it one of Shakespeare's earliest works. But because it was not included in the First Folio, doubts about its authorship have lasted for centuries. The play has been attributed to many authors, some singly, some in collaboration, among them George Peele, Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, Thomas Kyd and, of course, Shakespeare himself. It wasn't until the play was run through special plagiarism software in 2009 that it was determined to be a collaboration between Kyd (accounting for 60 per cent of the text) and Shakespeare (40 per cent). In the process of line-by-line literal and stylistic translation of this play, I would realise that I was now the Bard's next collaborator, each of us working across the chasm of four hundred years to make his play more resonant to contemporary audiences.

Edward III depicts a vivid period in English history about which I knew little. The Hundred Years' War, which lasted from 1337 to 1453, pitted the English House of Plantagenet against the French House of Valois for control of the French crown. It began when Charles V of France died without sons or brothers to inherit the crown. Edward III, king of England and Charles V's nearest male heir, was declared king by his mother, Isabella of France, but he met with opposition from Philip VI, who claimed the crown for the House of Valois, which would make him King of France as well. This information is dutifully trotted out at the very opening of the play in a conversation between King Edward and Robert Earl of Artois, who has been banished from France. Artois has come to London to relate the events and convince Edward to claim the throne. The text hews closely to historical fact, except for the unaccountable substitution of John of Valois for Philip VI, and it lays out a clear, rational argument for Edward's rightful place on the French throne. There was also tremendous value in the alliterative play of these opening lines, with such words as *rancor*, *rebellious* and *royal* all demonstrably pointing towards the war to come. With the play's opening scene, then, I chose to leave Shakespeare's words largely unchanged.¹ For example, Shakespeare's Artois speaks to Edward of his mother:

And from the fragrant garden of her womb
Your gracious self, the flower of Europe's hope,
Derivé is inheritor to France.

I retained the sumptuous poetry of these lines, not only because they demonstrate Artois's open flattery of his king, but also because they establish a theme of planting and gardening that recurs in ensuing scenes. My lines were only slightly adjusted here:

And from whose fragrant garden of her womb
 Were you thus born the flower of Europe's hope,
 The sole inheritor to France's crown.

Maintaining the metre was not difficult, though I wrestled for a while with the line 'Derivé is inheritor to France'. I determined that this accented word would cause contemporary ears to stumble, so I rephrased the line in a manner that kept its metre and still amplified the specific idea on which the entire war rested. So much for the first scene of the play. Later scenes would bring up greater challenges in the realm of metre and language choice.

Finding Freedom in the Metre

One reason I wrestled with the metre has to do with my own bilingual upbringing. My first tongue is Spanish, and in Spanish, iambic pentameter is not only difficult, it's practically impossible. Our Spanish words often end with an *o* or an *a*. For instance, France translates into Francia in our idiom. It's ingrained in me to speak in the old rhythms of my family home, which tend to be trochaic, dactylic and sometimes even anapestic. My solution to the metrical issues that translation provoked was to alter the line in favour of these other rhythms without disturbing the flow of the content. Again, remaining somewhat invisible.

It was a line late in the first scene of the play that gave me the freedom to change my strategy with the metre. When he hears that war with Scotland is breaking out even as he prepares to vie with France, Edward lays forth his plan to repel the invading Scots:

KING: First therefore Audley this shall be thy charge
 go levy footmen for our wars in France
 and Ned take muster of our men at arms
 in every shire elect a several band
 let them be soldiers of a lusty spirit
 such as dread nothing but dishonour's blot.
 Be wary therefore since we do commence
 a famous war and with so mighty a nation.²

He is direct and assured in his directions, and yet he also cautions his men to 'be wary' because their foe is prodigiously armed. In my translation, I made

the slightest adjustments for the sake of clarity, revising constructions that read as awkward by today's standards while taking care to preserve the metre. 'Elect a several band', for instance, became 'enlist as many bands'. I also wondered about his use of 'famous' as a descriptor for this forthcoming war with Scotland and determined that 'widespread' might better define this conflict.

But the line 'let them be soldiers of a lusty spirit' gave me pause. No matter how hard I tried, I simply could not craft my line that it would fit the iambic pentameter of his play. I parsed his original line once more and realised that it wasn't a pure pentameter. It ended with an additional eleventh syllable on a 'weak' stress. In other words, Shakespeare cheats. And not only once, but often – that is, whenever he deems it necessary. In my translation then, I chose to let the metre carry over from the prior line, creating a kind of internal rhyme between 'band' and 'can':

In every shire enlist as many bands
You can of soldiers of a lusty spirit

Trained as I was in the school of thought that nothing of Shakespeare's comes by chance, I assumed that he must have intended this slight: perhaps he simply preferred the word 'spirit' above all others, and to hell with the metre. The metre enables the actor to remember his lines and deliver them in smooth, unfettered diction, thereby allowing the audience to receive it in the same manner, but often when the rhythm cannot suit the word, the word wins. Whether the line is a sign of his laziness or youth (*Edward III* was likely among Shakespeare's first plays), or whether he simply knew that the audience could not count every beat in his characters' dialogue, the reason does not matter. What is clear is that the metre is only meant to be a guide, not a hard and fast rule. A colleague of mine reminded me that in Shakespeare's most famous line of all, he violated his own rule by ending on the extra syllable: 'To be or not to be, that is the question.'

Within the same speech of Edward's, Shakespeare transgresses yet again by ending on six iambic feet, or twelve syllables: 'a famous war and with so mighty a nation'. The work of my translation became easier with this realisation; if the Bard could slyly cheat on his own verse structure, then so could I. I almost used the word 'land', which would have made the line scan perfectly in iambic pentameter, but I opted for the sovereign weight of the word 'nation'. Ergo, my version of this line rolls in eleven syllables to his twelve: 'a widespread war against a mighty nation'.

Shakespeare's use of language to propagandistic effect added its own unique challenges to the question of metre. *Edward III* celebrates the accomplishments of a vastly popular king who engaged in multiple campaigns that spread the English monarchy across Europe. Edward comes across as fair

and level-headed in his dealings with both his captains and his rivals, as is clear even in his early speeches. In contrast, Shakespeare takes pains to make Edward's foes sound ridiculous. For example, in Act II scene ii, King David of Scotland assures the Duke of Lorraine of his loyalty to the French. This speech renders the King of Scotland almost incomprehensible to contemporary ears. He launches coherently enough in the beginning: 'My lord of Lorraine, to our brother of France / commend us as the man in Christendom / that we most reverence and entirely love'. But as he gathers spite and fire, he spouts phrases that delight and yet confound the senses:

and never shall our bonny riders rest
 nor rusting canker have the time to eat
 their light-borne snaffles nor their nimble spurs
 nor lay aside their jacks of gimmaled mail
 nor hang their staves of grainéd Scottish ash
 in peaceful wise upon their city walls
 nor from their buttoned tawny leathern belts
 dismiss their biting whinyards till your king
 cry out 'enough, spare England now for pity'.³

This was a formidable passage to translate, with its 'rusting canker', 'light-borne snaffles', 'jacks of gimmaled mail', 'staves of grainéd Scottish ash', 'biting whinyards', and so much more. I determined that Shakespeare intended him to wax preposterous in his bellicose declarations, and so I kept much of that colourful Scottish vernacular, considering that it may have been comically indecipherable even to Lorraine:

And never shall our bonny riders rest,
 Nor give their fest'ring blisters time to gnaw
 Their light-borne snaffles nor their nimble spurs,
 Nor lay aside their jacks of gimmied mail,
 Nor hang their clubs of grainy Scottish peat
 So peaceably upon their city walls
 Nor to their buttoned tawny leather belts
 Sheathe their biting whinyards till the king
 Cry out, 'Enough, spare England for pity's sake!'⁴

While retaining the colour of the speech, I adjusted some words for clarity; 'grainéd Scottish ash', for example, became 'grainy Scottish peat' because peat is more familiar as a feature of that northern land. But it was the closing line of David's speech that cemented my lesson about metre. Shakespeare's David concludes his speech with a charge to the Duke of Lorraine:

Farewell, and tell him that you leave us here
 before this castle, say you came from us
 even when we had that yielded to our hands.

In my version, these lines became:

Farewell, and tell him that you met us here
 Before this castlekeep; and say you left
 As it submitted even to your will.

David's eleven-syllable closing line is here revised to my own pentametric form. The essential realisation that Shakespeare could vary his metre was the key that set me free. From this point forward, the translation came faster and clearer, as I discerned that his many choices were indeed driven by expedience, but more often by the context of the moments portrayed. I also recognised that the limitations imposed on him by the English language and its rules of tempo drove many of his word choices. Plainly put, I began to understand how he thought.

Rendering the Language for the Contemporary Ear

In my work to 'weed the garden' of Shakespeare's text, certain issues of language were paramount: uncommon accenting ('arméd'), archaic pronouns ('thee', 'thou' and 'thy') and verbs forms that do not conform with current usage ('shouldst'). These are the facets we associate most with Shakespeare, and it pained me to alter them, since that is how we have always heard his plays. But in most cases, especially among those who are not as familiar with Elizabethan drama, these are the cues that most arrest the untutored ear, and thus I altered them to meet contemporary standards. Take, for example, the encounter between King John of Valois and King Edward in Act III, scene iii. John and his two sons, Charles and Philip, are valiant warriors bent on protecting their homeland from the invading armies of England, building alliances against those of the English. When they finally meet Edward and his son, Ned the Black Prince, John fires off a salvo that is replete with archaic phrasing. Here is its opening:

Edward, know that John the true King of France
 musing thou shouldst encroach upon his land
 and in thy tyrannous proceeding slay
 his faithful subjects and subvert his towns
 spits in thy face and in this manner following
 upbraids thee with thine arrogant intrusion.⁵

I updated the archaic language, but I took it even further, teasing out the intent of the words:

Edward, know that John the true King of France,
Appalled by your invasion of his land
And by your tyrannous propensity
to slay his subjects and subdue his towns,
Spits in your face; and in these ensuing terms
Indicts you for this arrogant incursion.⁶

Translating Shakespeare's sumptuous language into the same forceful terms while refining some of his expressions was difficult but necessary. For instance, the lines 'leave therefore now to persecute the weak / and arméd entering conflict with the armed', which John delivers near the end of the speech, may suggest to some that John is exhorting Edward to depart *in order to* assail the weak, but he actually intends the opposite, employing the word 'leave' to mean 'stop'. Therefore, I rewrote the lines:

Thus cease your persecution of the weak
And taste some conflict armed against the armed.

I added my personal flourishes of language, removing the accent to balance 'armed' with 'armed' in these lines, and placing the word 'taste' here to close a metaphor from earlier in the speech: 'thy thirst is all for gold' (or, in my text, 'your thirst is all for gold').

I also chose to keep the theme of gardening that Shakespeare writes into John's speech. Shakespeare's John accuses Edward of transience and thievery, suggesting that he either has no home at all,

or else inhabiting some barren soil
where neither herb or fruitful grain is had
dost altogether live by pilfering

In my text, these lines became:

Or else, inhabiting some barren soil
Where neither herb nor fruitful grain can grow
Survives entirely by pilfering

One of the directives of this assignment was to preserve beautiful language for its own beauty, as well as for the sake of thematic imperatives not immediately obvious to the audience, and these lines, with a minor adjustment, are

sustained just so. This aesthetic regard was important to me: in the final analysis, I realised that my goal was to make myself invisible in the process, to coax the audience into thinking that I had done very little to the text at all, and that all they were hearing was Shakespeare at his most lucid. The only way I could accomplish this feat was through the use of the same tropes and techniques that the Bard would employ in his oeuvre. I had to learn to write like him.

Making Shakespeare Sound Like Shakespeare

As I stripped away the archaic underbrush of the text, I came to see that my primary task in translating Shakespeare was to make him sound more like himself. I turned to techniques that he used in his later plays in order to bring this one to life for contemporary viewers. I wanted audiences to feel like they're only really listening to a clear rendering of his play. The text that is incontestably self-evident remains unchanged, while the text that hinders this experience is stripped away.

This work of stripping away debris was particularly important to a scene between Edward and the countess of Salisbury in the second act. This scene exemplifies the theme of vows that runs throughout the play, which explores promises, oaths, contracts, allegiances and marriage vows from a deeply humanistic perspective, examining the complexities that pit men against their king, against each other, and even against their own wills. The scene takes a detour from the battles of the Hundred Years' War to depict the one dark stain on Edward's storied career as England's sovereign. It was long rumoured, even in Elizabethan times, that Edward had raped the countess of Salisbury or had at least used his royal privilege to enjoy an illicit affair with her. But a legend had also grown that the countess had freely bestowed her love on him (this version is part of the story of how the chivalric Order of the Garter was created).

Shakespeare knew that in recounting the glories of Edward he had to depict, if not resolve, this nettlesome rumour, and so he constructed a powerful narrative in which the king breaks the siege on the countess's castle, for which she repays him with a feast. Naturally, he instantly falls in love, tumbling headlong into the language of amorous conceits. His speech begins:

She is grown more fairer far since I came hither
her voice more silver every word than other
her wit more fluent.⁷

She is more comely than he remembers, and the king wonders whether her imprisonment and trouble have enhanced her beauty. It is a beautiful passage, but I sought to employ some of Shakespeare's own later techniques

of repetition and chiasmus to clarify it, and recalling how the Bard himself would later structure his comparisons in more elegant lyric, I dared to imitate his own commanding verse. My version began:

She was fair before, but fairer since I've come,
 With every added word her voice more silver,
 Her wit more witty.⁸

As 'wit more fluent' became 'wit more witty' and as 'more fairer far since' became 'fair before but fairer since', I realised how, in translating these verses, I was concealing my own voice with the Bard's gorgeous constructions in his later works. Again, the power of invisibility. Even with lines that began with trochaic feet, with the stress on the first syllable, I found a way to form a more 'Shakespearean' flow in the thought expressed. For example, Shakespeare's Edward marvels about the countess:

Wisdom is foolishness but in her tongue
 beauty a slander but in her fair face.

And in my translation:

Wisdom is folly on any tongue but hers,
 Beauty a crime on any face not hers,

The end result is still Shakespeare. And to the contemporary ear, it's arguably *more* Shakespearean than the original. Such was my goal.

Of all the issues that a contemporary audience faces in Shakespeare's works, his frequent allusions to now-obscure ideas, objects and activities are what make the call for translation most necessary. Too many such references have unfortunately muddied the poetry of Shakespeare's plays. Specific references to weapons of war, animal husbandry and heraldry, old jokes and obscure passages in ancient literature can sometimes illuminate the characters' dialogue, but they may also leave glazed-over expressions on the faces of contemporary spectators.

One passage in the first act was particularly difficult for me to make sense of. In conversation with the countess, Edward hints at the pain that his love for her is causing him, characterising it as some sort of betrayal:

COUNTESS: Far from this place let ugly treason lie.

KING EDWARD: No farther off than her conspiring eye
 which shoots infected poison in my heart
 beyond repulse of wit or cure of art.

Now in the sun alone it doth not lie
 with light to take light from a mortal eye
 for here two day-stars that mine eyes would see
 more than the sun steals mine own light from me.
 Contemplative desire, desire to be
 in contemplation that may master thee.⁹

This is one of those passages that made me consider that my upbringing as a young Mexican American would never permit me to fully understand Shakespeare. But I realised that the passage is dense and impenetrable not only to me but also to so many others. I was especially jammed on ‘to take light from a mortal eye’: does it mean death, or blindness? I did some research among the many annotations to this play and learned that in Shakespeare’s day it was commonly assumed that in total darkness, the human eye had the natural capacity to project its own light, as in a lamp, to see by. This ‘emission theory’ was thought to explain our pupils’ adjustment to the dark. Edward is saying that even in the blazing sun, her shining beacons of light (the ‘two day-stars’ that are her eyes) have utterly blinded him. But since he uses a defunct concept for his metaphor, this passage’s meaning is lost.

The question became how to serve the purpose of the passage and still employ the same notion. It’s the signature Rubik’s Cube of the play, one in which language, rhythm, metaphor, meaning and dramatic emotion all have to click into place. Here is my attempt at this passage:

COUNTESS: Far from us may this ugly treason lie!
 KING EDWARD: (*aside*) Yet no farther than her treasonous eye
 Whose glancing poison quickening the pulse,
 Sparks that which wit nor feeling can repulse.
 If eyes to see by render their own light
 And light of day itself expands my sight,
 Then gazing here I should but cannot see,
 For her twin suns steal my own light from me
 Oh contemplation of desire, desire me
 To contemplate a course of apt sobriety.¹⁰

The trick lies in the word ‘if’ in the king’s fourth line, which creates the suggestion of a theory of light emission in the eyes to make the feeling true. It makes an elegant kind of sense, too, since lovers are often blinded by the glow in their paramours’ eyes. I am largely pleased with the result, particularly in the reformulation of the chiasmus that takes place in the final couplet (with the repetition of ‘contemplation’ and ‘desire’, which also keeps the rhyme intact, albeit with different words.

Elsewhere in the play, Edward references what is now a little-known myth about the nightingale while describing the sharpness of his sword:

KING EDWARD: Fervent desire that sits against my heart
is far more thorny-pricking than this blade
that with the nightingale I shall be scarred
as oft as I dispose myself to rest
until my colours be displayed in France.¹¹

He refers to the belief that the nightingale's song is sweetest when it tears its breast open against the thorns of the briar. But as no one today knows this myth, I interpret the passage in a different way:

The longing that presses against my heart
Is sharper and more vexing than this blade
And like the nightingale's penetrating song,
will cut the fiber of my sleep to shreds
Until the English flag is raised in France.¹²

It is different, but it expresses the same emotive idea in a way that discards a myth that no longer touches on our consciousness. And yet, still embedded is this notion of cutting oneself open for the sake of poetry, in 'the nightingale's penetrating song'.

Still other passages allude to older texts that may be somewhat obscure today. One refers to a tale from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, citing Hero, Leander and the Hellespont. And, from the Old Testament, there is a reference to Holofernes and Judith. I could not bring myself to excise these references, since I find them scholastically valuable beyond the scope of the immediate play, and such allusions feel distinctly Shakespearean anyway. Perhaps they might induce some to conduct their own research into these timeless fables.

Bringing to Life the Battle Reports

Shakespeare has a proclivity for giving some of his greatest speeches to commoners, soldiers and villagers – characters who appear once and then are seen no more. In *Edward III*, we see this happen with a speech given to a mariner in the third act, who recounts in vivid detail (and across forty-four lines) what appears to be the 1340 Battle of Sluys in the English Channel.¹³ For example:

These iron-hearted navies
when last I was reporter to your grace
both full of angry spleen of hope and fear

hasting to meet each other in the face
 at last conjoined and by their admiral
 our admiral encountered many shot

It is a vivid and fiery speech, filled with the horrors of combat in the open sea. Its detail and scope capture both the epic nature of the battle and the personal cost to the men who perished in it. Still, there was much work to do. Here is my iteration of the above snippet, which brings the action more into focus for a contemporary audience:

These hostile iron-hearted navies,
 When last I was reporter to your grace,
 All full of anger, hope, and fear, and men
 Hasting to meet each other hull to hull,
 At last faced off, and from their flagship
 Our flag incurred substantial cannon-shot.¹⁴

The mariner's eyewitness report fires the imagination with its recounting of wholesale gore. In translating it, my goal was to intensify this feeling while mitigating points of confusion in the language or the imagery.

One such point of confusion occurs early in the mariner's report about the naval encounter. He states, 'by this the other that beheld these twain / give earnest penny of a further wrack'. These lines are a reference to the guarantee of greater conflict in the initial face-off between the two opposing flagships, the 'earnest penny' being the down payment on this conflict. So I translate the lines thus: 'On cue, the others that beheld these ships / Transact a pledge of further ruin'. By employing the idea of a 'pledge', the passage now calls up the overarching theme of vows and promises kept and broken, while also playing on the original passage's allusion to a financial transaction.

And yet, so many passages remain untouched, lines that still throb with the richest metaphors, such as the potent description of cannon fire, from which 'smoky wombs' the warships 'sent many grim ambassadors of death'. Even the most graphic description of human butchery is so poetically and vividly rendered that I kept the lines intact and unchanged:

Here flew a head dissevered from the trunk,
 There mangled arms and legs were tossed aloft,
 As when a whirlwind takes the summer dust
 And scatters it in middle of the air.

Of course, there is also much that I transposed in the mariner's speech: Shakespeare's 'compulsion' for my 'conscription'; his 'purple the sea' for my

'sea all crimson'; his 'foeman's side' for my 'opponents' side'. These and other changes had to be selected carefully and made with enough discretion to offer some clarity and familiarity to the listener without sacrificing the tenor of Shakespeare. Even as I aimed to become invisible in the playing of the work, I felt some permission to carry this 'translation' further than perhaps some of my colleagues, if only because *Edward III* seems ripe for the kind of revision that the Bard himself might have applied were he alive today. Which is presumptuous of me to say. There is no doubt that the changes I have offered have marked this particular play as my own creation, but I prefer to regard myself as simply his newest collaborator on the work, one whose chief task is to enhance his gift for expressive language.

Solving the Puzzle of Shakespeare's Text

One of my chief diversions is solving crossword puzzles in the *New York Times*. The true satisfaction comes not from solving the puzzle but from learning to read the mind of the enigmatologist. A good puzzle is at first very difficult to solve, but once a few squares are filled in and a theme is established, the rest of the answers fall into place. I know there are only so many blanks per clue, and I know the answers can't be too esoteric or depend on arcane knowledge or the puzzle will lose the solver. With these tools, it's thrilling to intuit what wry wordplay will drop next.

I suspect that Shakespeare tackled *Edward III* in the same manner. There are only (mostly) ten syllables per line, and they need to express a specific idea or emotion; they must (more or less) conform to the beat of the iambic foot; nothing esoteric or arcane can be delivered to the audience without some more conjoining metaphor to ground it. He was his own enigmatologist, solving his own puzzle as he was writing, finding the perfect word and placing it just so within the rhythmic framework of his dialogue. The unity of the original text feels as though it had only one mind devising its code, and therefore I assert – regardless of the computational findings on percentages and authorship – that the play is wholly Shakespeare's. The many tropes he uses in *Edward III* correspond to those we find in many of his plays in the canon, and the Bard's expansive spirit which confers all his characters, friend and foe, major and minor, the same generous humanity is found in this work; but it is the essential flow of the language, the complex music of the work, that ultimately felt 'Shakespearean'. If the play is a result of writer collaboration, it exists between the younger, cockier actor-writer and the mature master dramatist he will become in later years. I also have to admit that any remnants of Kyd or any other dramatist, any language and stylistic choices that may have been attributed to him, have been thoroughly reconfigured in this translation to resonate more with Shakespeare's. In

other words, my translation has crowned Will as the sole author of *Edward III*.

Edward III is, in turn, his puzzle for me. As I begin to understand his choices, I sense the poetic workings of his mind. I gradually intuit something vital about him that helps me in my translation. I see why the music of the spoken idiom is so important to him. It's the bridge between the poet and the playwright: one mind fixed on the purity of the verse, the exacting nature of language, built on the foundations of a thousand years' tradition of poetry; and one mind bent on putting on a ripping good show, working to depict a king and an entire world of subjects in a time of war, each possessing their own particular needs and intentions, each with their own historical context. This balance between intellectual rigour and theatrical bravado is what defines Shakespeare and what permits him to take liberties with his own rules.

But it is also what makes me suddenly more visible. I take the same approach and seek the balance between honouring the language and metre and crafting new expressions for our contemporary sensibilities. At times, this approach means strictly adhering to the rhythms and tropes already present in the work, a rigorous choice in itself; and at other times, it means taking special pains to alter the language and the metre just enough to make the work a little more distinct and theatrically satisfying. Remarkably, at a recent live reading of *Edward III*, I was heartened to see Shakespearean scholars listen to the performance with side-by-side versions of Will's play and mine to compare and contrast, and to see how deftly we managed our collaboration.

Here's the final revelatory aspect of my work. I had the American Heritage Dictionary, Roget's Thesaurus, countless online lexicons all over the Web, and the entirety of Shakespeare's canon to help me. There have been more than 420 years' worth of words added to the English language since *Edward III* was written. Shakespeare had none of this. He worked without the benefit of any lexicon, and yet he's credited with adding over 1,500 words to the Oxford English Dictionary. When he didn't have the right word to fit the metre for his purposes, he simply invented it. In Eric Sams's edition of *Shakespeare's Edward III: An Early Play Restored to the Canon*, which was the chief volume I used for my work, I found many annotations in the notes that began with the phrase 'first recorded use of this word'. The genius required for this kind of massive undertaking, not only on *Edward III*, but over his other plays and volumes of poetry, is unmatched. No other writer has accomplished anything like this before or since, and I had no pretensions about trying.

So it was this humility, this *Willful* invisibility, that enabled me to approach the translation of this great work, and whether or not my version finds itself onstage sometime in the future, I remain proud to have become more intimately acquainted with the genius of this man, and immensely indebted to

the *Play on!* project for ultimately making me feel *seen* as a writer worthy of sharing his inkwell with the Bard himself.

Notes

1. These two scenes appear, respectively, in William Shakespeare, *Edward III*, ed. Eric Sams (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), I.i.17–19; and Octavio Solis, trans., *Edward III* by William Shakespeare (unpublished script), 1.
2. Shakespeare, *Edward III*, I.i.145–52.
3. Shakespeare, *Edward III*, I.ii.204–12.
4. Solis, *Edward III*, 7–8.
5. Shakespeare, *Edward III*, III.iii.1368–73.
6. Solis, *Edward III*, 52–3.
7. Shakespeare, *Edward III*, II.i.377–9.
8. Solis, *Edward III*, 15–16.
9. Shakespeare, *Edward III*, I.ii.310–19.
10. Solis, *Edward III*, 13.
11. Shakespeare, *Edward III*, I.i.114–18.
12. Solis, *Edward III*, 4–5.
13. Shakespeare, *Edward III*, III.i.1192–7.
14. Solis, *Edward III*, 46–7.