

Voice and Otherness: Ethnic Ventriloquism in Matthew

López's The Inheritance

الصوت والآخريّة: التنفّس العرقي في مسرحية ماتيو لوبيز الإرث

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الكلمات المفتاحية: فن التحريك الصوتي العرقي، الصوت، الآخريّة، انفصال الهوية، المسرح اللاتيني، تمثيل المثليين

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المستخلص

يهدف هذا البحث الى دراسة توظيف تقنية "الاستنطاق الاتني" لمسرحية ماثيو لوبيز "الميراث" (2018), وتحديد كيفية استخدامه لهذه الأداة الأدبية لتعبير عن شخصيات تنتمي الى عراق مغايرة وتمثيلها . وعلى الرغم من وفرة الدراسات التي تناولت "ذاكرة الايدز" و"الزمانية الكوبرية" في " الميراث" , فان البحث الاكاديمي في انتماء لوبيز العرقي ذاته ظل محدودا. فلوبيز كاتب مسرحي امريكي من أصول بورتوريكية, وقد كتب ملحمة مسرحية متعددة الشخصيات تتألف معظمها من رجال بيض مثليين , وهو ما يفضي الى مفارقة في الصوت الدرامي تشكل القضية المحورية لهذا البحث. ويرى الباحث ان الطريقة التي يوزع بها الكاتب المسرحي الصوت الدرامي ويمثل بها الاخرية تنبع من بنية المسرحية الامريكية لا من الخيارات الفنية وحدها.

وباعتماد منهجية تجمع بين القراءة المتأنية للنصوص والنقد الثقافي , واستنادا الى نظريات عدم التماهي, الادائية والإنتاج الثقافي , يتناول الباحث توظيف لوبيز للاستنطاق الاتني من خلال ثلاثة محاور درامية: تماهي التناسي مع فورستر , الغياب البنيوي مع الجسد اللاتيني , والانابة عبر ما وراء المسرح. ويلخص الباحث الى ان عدم تماهي لوبيز يتسم بعدم تماثل واضح: فهو جذري على المحور الجنسي وصامت على المحور العرقي . وانطلاقا من تسمية هذا التفاوت , يقترح الباحث مفهوم الاستنطاق الاتني بوصفه مصطلحا نقديا لتحليل كيفية تحليل الصوت والاخرية حين يكتب الفنانون من ذوي الأصول الملونة في مواضيع مهيمنة ثقافيا في ظل قيود مؤسسية.

Abstract

This article examines the use of Ethnic Ventriloquism in Matthew Lopez's *The Inheritance* (2018), specifically how he uses this literary device to speak and represent characters who have different ethnicities from his own. Although there has been a lot of research about "AIDS Memory, " and "Queer Temporality" concerning the "Inheritance, " there has been little academic investigation into Lopez's own ethnicity. Lopez is an American playwright of Puerto Rican descent. He wrote a multi-character epic story mostly made up of white gay men; thus creating a paradox of voice which is the central issue for this paper. The author believes that how a playwright distributes dramatic voice and represents otherness is based on the structure of the American theater system and not based on the artistic choices alone. Using both close reading of texts as well as culture criticism, and drawing upon theories of Disidentification, Performativity, and Cultural Production; the author examines Lopez's use of Ethnic Ventriloquism using three dramaturgical vectors: Intertextual Identification with Forster, Structural Absence of the Latinx



Body, and Metatheatrical Surrogacy. The author finds that Lopez's disidentification is Asymmetrical Radical on the Sexual Axis, and Silent on the Racial Axis. Naming this asymmetry the author provides Ethnic Ventriloquism as a critical term to analyze how Voice and Otherness are represented when Artists of Color Write into Culturally Dominant Subjects Under Institutional Constraint.

1.Introduction

The Inheritance, a two-part play written by Matthew Lopez that premiered in London's Young Vic in 2018, before transferring to the West End and then Broadway, is explicitly inspired by E. M. Forster's condition-of-England novel *Howards End*, originally published in 1910.

The major issue that will be explored in this research is how Lopez as a playwright of color, was able to write an American story with a population of almost all white gay men; which brings up the question of why Lopez, or any other person of color would want to write about people who are so different from themselves. The major reason for writing about these characters is to tell their stories. Lopez used the characters in his play to express himself and also to give a perspective that he felt needed to be shared. He wanted to use the characters' experiences to show what it means to be white and gay in America.

The issue here isn't just one of theme, but also of dramaturgy. It has to do with voice whom does the play allow to have a voice, and whom is seen as an "other" relative to the world of the play. When Lopez referred to having read Forster's diary and seeing himself as a "closeted white man in England" (Lopez, as cited in Mead, 2019), he was gesturing toward the dramatic mechanism for what this project calls ethnic ventriloquism the dramaturgical act of a playwright of color creating a theatrical world and speaking from voices that are culturally/ethnically different from him.

This research uses three key texts to explain the framework used to understand this practice. Muñoz (1999) accounts for how minoritarian artists utilize dominant cultural structures and engage with their own identities by utilizing said structures (Muñoz 1999). They do so by either rejecting or completely assimilating into such dominant cultural structures; instead they inhabit



those structures and then use them to subvert and/or critique those same structures. Butler, J. and Trouble, G. (1990), using her theory of performativity, views identity as an outcome of repetition and citation of previous acts and expressions. Thus, the performance of whiteness is viewed as a repetitive act vs. being a neutral background. Using Bourdieu's (1993) theory of the field of cultural production provides the language needed to view artistic decisions based upon structural position and reward opportunities available within an established institutional field. Together, these theories will provide the foundation necessary to interpret voice and otherness in *The Inheritance* as structurally influenced rather than solely aesthetically created.

Although there is substantial research regarding this play, much of the existing literature does not adequately examine this aspect of the play. While many scholars have focused their analyses of the play to include how the play deals with HIV/AIDS memory and queer time as well as an examination of the play's intertextuality to E.M. Forster (Fernández Carbajal, 2022; Hann, 2020) the most "representationally" aware of these studies still do not examine how the playwright's own ethnicity structured his ability to give voice to certain aspects of the narrative. The present study seeks to fill this void. Rather than asking what the play presents, this study will ask why the author of the play had structural positioning to represent the play as he did and what the resulting distribution of voice and otherness will reveal about the contemporary American theater field.

Beyond a specific play, the importance of this investigation is to understand how the structure of American theater shapes the voices that are heard and those that are made other. Therefore, this research makes two contributions. First analytically, it expands upon "ethnic ventriloquism" as a theoretical framework for conceptualizing the way in which dramatists of color produce their work. Second conceptually, it places this framework within an even larger theoretical construct (proxy authorship) that describes how artists of color use the narratives of others to obtain mainstream venues. Naming these constructs is the first step towards understanding how they can potentially be changed. .



The argument proceeds in three movements. Following a review of the critical field and the theoretical framework, the analysis traces ethnic ventriloquism across three dramaturgical axes: intertextual identification with Forster, the structural absence of the Latinx body, and metatheatrical surrogacy. The study concludes that López's disidentification is asymmetrical radical on the axis of sexuality, yet nearly silent on the axis of race and that this asymmetry is itself symptomatic of who is permitted to speak, and through whom, on the American stage.

2. Literature Review

The scholarship on *The Inheritance* is intellectually rich in content, but it lacks structure. Across the U.S., there has been a tremendous amount of scholarly work about the play which has either addressed memory of HIV/AIDS, queer time, and/or intertextuality as a theme; yet, the writer's racial/ethnic identity was left unaddressed by all of these studies.

The most sustained engagement with the play's memorial dimension comes from Hann (2020), who reads *The Inheritance* through the lens of queer generationalism, arguing that the play binds the loss of the AIDS past to a present political obligation and thereby resists the nostalgic framework common to much AIDS drama. Hann's analysis is foundational for its chosen axis; yet that axis queer memory and generational transmission does not, by design, accommodate the question of the playwright's ethnic location. This study reads that absence not as a flaw in Hann's work but as a structural boundary of its analytical frame.

The theoretical basis for understanding Jewish characters as metaphors in western post-war drama is provided by Schiff (2012) with her extensive study detailing the development of the Jewish stage figure from the outside stereotype of medieval/early modern drama into what she calls the "hero as mensch." A humanist substitute for the post-Holocaust suffering, yet resilient Everyman in a dramatic imagination, Schiff's study provides an interpretive language through which later scholars have analyzed figures such as Eric Glass in López's *The Inheritance* (2018): a Jewish character whose ethnic and religious identities serve as symbolic capital, rather than a substantive representation of his identity, and are drawn from this "hero as mensch" tradition. Because Schiff's study was published more than three decades before López's play, the study



does not address how this metaphorical use functions in a text written by a playwright who has mixed ethnicity and no Jewish ancestry, nor does it ask what structural/institutional factors in contemporary American and British theater influenced the author's decision. This study addresses these questions directly by extending Schiff's historical framework to the particular instance of a playwright of mixed heritage using (and displacing) ethnic identity in one contemporary text.

In addition to the above mentioned limitations in the research on temporality, there exists an additional limitation based on Przybyllo & Jacob (2020). They analyze youthism and queer generativity via the internal temporal politics of the play; they show that the play mediates the transference of queer memories across different generations. While their analysis is theoretically very strong, however their analysis is limited strictly to the areas of sexuality and generation and does not address or discuss the ethnicity of the playwright in regards to who inherits and from whom. Like the general scholarship on temporality, Przybyllo & Jacob treat López's authorial identity as if it were analytically invisible – an invisibility that I read here as indicative of the larger tendencies in the field to separate issues of queer representation from issues of racialized authorship.

This decoupling is what the present study seeks to undo. The critical consensus treats López's ethnicity as contextual but analytically marginal, rather than as fundamentally structuring. The present study argues the opposite.

The scholarship on Latinx theatre also explains why the larger field has generally ignored the Latino aspect of López's identity. Boffone and Della Gatta (2021) demonstrate how artists from the Latinx community who embrace the Western literary canon have always had to determine what stories or whose stories they would make visible for mainstream audience members. Svich and Marrero (2000) demonstrated that as part of this process, mainstream theatres consistently pressure Latinx writers to eliminate cultural elements of their writing so that their writing could be performed at mainstream venues. Rivera-Servera (2012) illustrates that even when a writer is a person of color, mainstream theatres will continue to use white narratives to frame their

performances. Together, these three works provide evidence for an essential premise: when an artist decides to write about "whites," the decision is not strictly aesthetic, but rather one that is influenced by the structural constraints of the art form. It is within the context of this premise that the discussion turns toward developing the theory upon which this study will rely.

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Disidentification, Performativity, and Field Theory

This study mobilizes three theoretical perspectives disidentification, performativity, and field theory and synthesizes them into two operative concepts: ethnic ventriloquism and proxy authorship. The three theories supply, respectively, the psychic, the citational, and the structural dimensions of the practice the study sets out to name.

Muñoz's (1999) theory of disidentification describes how minoritarian artists negotiate a dominant culture that neither fully includes nor wholly excludes them. Rather than assimilating to that culture or rejecting it outright, the disidentifying subject inhabits its forms in order to work on and against them from within hollowing out dominant structures while occupying them. In his later work, Muñoz (2009) extends this logic toward queer futurity: a horizon on which the minoritarian subject imagines a world organized otherwise than the present. López's use of his Puerto Rican identity to author a world of white gay men can thus be read not as capitulation but as a disidentifying negotiation an inhabiting of mainstream representational norms that gestures, however obliquely, toward a theatrical future not yet available to him.

Butler's (1990) theory of performativity holds that identity is not the expression of a prior essence but an effect produced through repeated citational practice. Applied to *The Inheritance*, this reframes the play's whiteness as something other than a neutral setting. López's staging of white gay identity is a citational act: in reiterating the association between gay male identity and white social privilege, it naturalizes and reproduces that association regardless of authorial intention.



Bourdieu's (1993) theory of the field of cultural production supplies the sociological vocabulary for analyzing the institutional conditions under which López makes his choices. For Bourdieu, artistic choices are shaped by the structure of the field the system of positions and power relations that determines which works can be made, rendered legible, and rewarded. In the American theatrical field, this structure objectively favors work addressed to the dominant culture's predominantly white audiences. Read through this lens, ethnic ventriloquism appears not as a personal failing but as a rational response to the objective structures of the field.

2.2 Defining the Operative Concepts: Ethnic Ventriloquism and Proxy Authorship

Ethnic ventriloquism and proxy authorship are the study's primary terms derived from the intersection of those three theories. Here, "ethnic ventriloquism" describes artists identifying with an ethnicity different than their own creating characters and social worlds representing dominant cultures, but doing so under constraints of institutional conditions (as opposed to simply because they prefer it). "Proxy authorship," then, represents a larger institutional context for ethnic ventriloquism to operate in producing stories about people with identities based upon the writer's own identity, produced and constrained by institutions. Thus, ethnic ventriloquism represents the process of how authors create stories (dramaturgy), while proxy authorship represents the structure that creates the process.

A clarification on methodology is needed. Fernandez Carbajal (2022), as cited earlier, states that Lopez has Puerto Rican and Polish-Russian Jewish ancestry. This study does not deny or downplay that aspect of Lopez's background it incorporates it. It is claimed that Lopez is not positioned in an exclusively "other" relationship with the dominant culture rather Lopez is primarily identified/interpellated by the institutionally constructed field of social relations through his Latinx identity. As mentioned previously, the fact that Lopez was the first Latino playwright to win the Tony Award for Best Play illustrates his status as a prominent example of how his Latinx identity has been selectively interpellated by the institution. Furthermore, when the institution identifies Lopez through his Latinx identity, and then awards him for producing stories centered on whites, this forms the structural base of ethnic ventriloquism.



3. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis proceeds along three dramaturgical axes through which ethnic ventriloquism operates in *The Inheritance*: intertextual identification with Forster, the structural absence of the Latinx body, and metatheatrical surrogacy. Read together, these axes reveal a single structural pattern in the distribution of dramatic voice.

3.1 Forster as Proxy: The Ethnic Logic of Intertextual Identification

The first step in Lopez's "ethnic" ventriloquizing of Forster is his identification with Forster, the basis for this is found in Lopez's own self-identification of being a white, closeted man living in England while reading Forster's diary. Lopez transfers identities across both time and race at the exact same moment he has identified with Forster's queerness and bracketed or ignored Forster's whiteness - treating it as something incidental to the identity instead of something fundamental to the identity.

The shift of context in the play begins early on as soon as the Young Man opens his favorite book for inspiration and calls upon Forster to assist with telling his own story (Prologue Lopez, 2020a). As the play opens "He has a story to tell it is banging around inside him, aching to come out. But how does he begin". The young man is welcomed, with an open heart, however the world he enters is Forster's transplanted world. He shows him all that exists in that world: apartments on the upper west side, summer homes at fire island, dinner parties of writers, struggling writers – a social world that is nearly completely affluent and white. While there are occasional references to how white this world is, nothing takes place in the world that will challenge that whiteness. Lopez has taken the sexually charged world of Forster and moved the politics of gay life to the foreground of the story line; however, the one structurally significant element of that world that remains unchanged is the whiteness of that world.

3.2 The Absent Latinx Body: Erasure as Structural Symptom

Ethnic ventriloquism has both been most obvious and easily quantified as no Latino characters have appeared in the primary cast of this play. In an overall cast that exceeds one hundred characters with over six hours of story time, located in a contemporary New York City, which had approximately a quarter (28.3%) of its residents identify themselves as Latino by the 2020



census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), there are no significant Latino characters. It is worth noting that the omission is acknowledged by the author: in Part One of the play, a character asks about the individuals missing from the room (López, 2020a, Part One) but the issue is raised again; however, it is never resolved during the course of the action in the play.

By explicitly addressing the omission Lopez also made an explicit connection in a New York Times article written for the premiere of his Broadway production to the fact that "It is because I am Puerto Rican that *The Inheritance* is the play it is; not in spite of it. A white man, Eric Glass, though Lopez's main character, "is a white man who was created by a Puerto Rican one" Vidal-Ortiz (2004). This public response has two implications. It first establishes Lopez's Puerto Rican identity as being part of the play's content; thereby supporting the premise of this research that ethnic authorial identity can impact creative output. Secondly, stated in a prominent national magazine at the time of the premiere of the Broadway production, Lopez' response is a preemptive strike against the very argument made in this paper that Lopez' failure to include Latinx identity in his play is an example of proxy authorship allowing him to gain greater acceptance among mainstream audiences. Thus, Lopez does acknowledge the role of proxy authorship in his response to criticism; however, he declines to identify or provide evidence of the structural factors which require such a practice.

Read through Bourdieu's field theory this erasure is fully legible as a structurally rational response to the objective conditions of the field not just an aesthetic choice. Lopez didn't write white as a non-constrained, creative expression, but rather as a strategic response to the dominant cultures representational standards of what the American theatrical field rewards - with gatekeepers who are predominantly white. The theatrical field rewards work centered on white narratives. Culturally specific work is marginalized. This is exactly why López became the first latino playwright to win the Tony Award for Best Play - he wrote a play that the field could read & therefore reward. The field didn't force him to make those choices. It made the conditions in which some were rational & other costly.



The first dimension of this structural condition the way Lopez writes an explicitly Jewish version of whiteness requires equally clear description. The reason why Eric Glass is white is because he is the grandson of a German-Jewish man who was freed from Dachau after being imprisoned there during WWII. His family's Holocaust past is tied into the two main thematic ideas within the play: intergenerational trauma and cultural memory. As Solomon has observed, Eric makes use of his grandmother's Holocaust experiences to act as a model through which he transmits queer history to subsequent generations by using Jewish traditions of collective memory to frame stories around his own identity as gay. In addition to this, the author/creator relationship adds another level of complexity; Lopez did not just express white gay identity, rather he chose to amplify one part of his heritage specifically, the Eastern European Jewish while silencing the other specifically, the Latinx, creating a performance product that the field could ultimately legitimize.

This is not a question of a Latino writer versus white characters, but rather a three-part structure where the closeness to Jewish heritage provides a means of mediating the degree to which Lopez constructed a whiteness that was both true to himself and accepted by the power brokers in the establishment. While this does not diminish the strength of the structural critique, it also deepens it. The conditions created within the field do not just limit minoritarian writers to writing white, but also encourage them to draw upon whatever aspect of their own minority heritage most aligns with the norms of the dominant culture.

3.3 Forster's Ghost as Ethnic Surrogate: The Metatheatrical Dimension

Lopez's use of Forster as a proxy for his own authorial voice allows the reader to understand how Lopez can also be seen as a voice representing Lopez, but an absent one (Prologue- Lopez, 2020). When Forster was called to come and assist the boys with telling their story (Lopez, 2020) he agreed to do so. Later on, toward the end of part 1 of the play, when Toby demands from Forster, "why we should believe anything you say since you have never spoken the truth about yourself" (Part 1-Lopez, 2020) the play becomes a meta-play where the white canonical author/character is replaced by two new white voices. The play has no mechanism for staging the Puerto Rican playwright behind it all. Lopez's authorial voice is missing from the play absent



and ethnically speaking through two white voices to narrate a gay liberation without including him.

The metatheatrical aspect of this moment increases in intensity at the end of part one. The verbal challenge Forster receives turns into a physical humiliation; the older male figure withdraws from the stage the canonical figure for gay men of an earlier generation is defeated, embarrassed, and forced out of the symbolic space he once occupied. In queer-temporal theory, this event can be interpreted through the lens of Przybylo and Jacob (2021) who argue this is when the younger generation violently rejects the closeted authority of the past. However, according to the current research, the removal of the white canonical figure for young gay men does not allow access to the absent Latinx author. The empty space is filled with other younger white gay males. The substitution of one white figure for another generation of white figures, exemplifies the logical structure of ethnic ventriloquism the ethnic author scripts his own exclusion from the dramatic narrative of succession which he authored. It does not conflict with this interpretation to say that López is writing the shame of Forster because it solidifies this interpretation the ventriloquist can write the rejection of the dummy, but when the dummy disappears, there is no emergence of the ventriloquist.

formation; thus working The process of disidentification by Muñoz (1999), is at once a complex process. Disidentification represents an alternative that lies between identification and counter-identification. As a result of this process, the minoritarian subject creates an ambivalence toward the structure of the dominant both with and against the dominant structure, and creating a void within the dominant structure. Lopez performs a similar disidentifying action when orchestrating Forsters humiliation. He makes Forster a key organizational element of the canonical literary tradition, and then expels him, so as to demonstrate the boundaries of closeted white authorial authority. However, Lopez' disidentification is asymmetrical. With respect to homosexuality, Lopez' disidentification is complete: Forsters codified homosexual desire is completely replaced by explicit queer politics. With regard to race however, Lopez' disidentification is almost non-existent. The removal of Forster leaves the plays whiteness intact, simply transferring it from one generation to another. It is precisely this asymmetry the queering of sexual norms with no attendant racial queering that the term "ethnic ventriloquism" designates. Thus, according to Butler (1990), Lopez cites the norms of the dominant culture even as he queers them; i.e.,



transforms the tradition's sexual norms while maintaining or reproducing those traditions racial norms.

Taken together, the three axes intertextual identification, structural erasure, and metatheatrical surrogacy converge on a single finding: ethnic ventriloquism in *The Inheritance* is not a voluntary decision but a field effect, a structurally determined representational practice combining disidentification with a performance of whiteness in response to the objective conditions of the American theatrical field. The ventriloquist speaks; the dummy is white; and the objective conditions that render this configuration rational are the proper target of institutional critique.

3.4 Asymmetrical Disidentification and the Limits of Ambivalence

López's ethnic ventriloquism exemplifies the ambivalence Muñoz (1999) describes: neither pure capitulation nor straightforward subversion, but a contradictory incorporation of dominant modes of representation. While this study affirms Muñoz's account of ambivalence, it argues that the minoritarian subject's capacity to work both with and against dominant ideologies is itself shaped by the field-specific constraints under which the subject operates a qualification Muñoz's theory anticipates rather than precludes. The disidentification performed in *The Inheritance* is unambiguous on the axis of sexuality: López queers Forster's representation of homosexuality in *Howards End* in ways that are definitive and political. On the axis of race, however, it is markedly less effective, disincentivized by the structure of the American theatrical field. This differential is not a flaw in Muñoz's conceptualization but precisely the kind of effect he describes what occurs when minoritarian performance operates in a field that intensely pressures it to conform. The field selectively incentivizes some forms of disidentification while penalizing others for failing to align with dominant representational norms.

The play thus performs a radical queering of Forster's homoerotically coded world while leaving the whiteness of that world entirely intact. Reading this differential as field-determined rather than reducing it to either subversion or capitulation permits a genuinely intersectional and sociological interpretation of the play's politics. As Bourdieu (1993) would predict, the difference is structurally conditioned: the American theatrical field incentivizes queer visibility

and white narratives simultaneously, orienting López's disidentificatory performance toward both incentives at once.

3.5 Proxy Authorship as an Analytical Framework

An additional benefit of using the lens of proxy authorship as a theoretical model to analyze the single case study above are the three interdependent dimensions that comprise it. The first dimension is institutional pressure; how the specific nature of a field (its audience, who produces works within it, where they are produced, etc.) will require minoritarian authors to use their work to tell stories about dominant culture in order to find a platform on which to have their voices heard by those in power.

The second dimension is symptomatic; the ways in which an author's hidden identities are visible within the work itself due to a "structuring absence" – i.e., there are characters or ideas present that do not exist anywhere else within the work. In *The Inheritance*, this can be seen in the "who is missing?" scene and throughout the play's concerns regarding inheritance and sense of place. Additionally, the self-reflexive dramatic elements of the playwrights' struggle to succeed one another are indicative of a structuring absence.

Lastly, the third dimension is political outcome; proxy authorship provides each individual minoritarian author an opportunity to achieve mainstream acceptance of their voice but ultimately reinforces the structural issues which require them to act in such a manner.

3.6 Institutional Implications

Proxy authorship in structure as opposed to individuals cannot persist without there being an explanation for how individual choice can become rational through the objective realities of the field. Bourdieu's (1993) work provides an analytical focus toward the material incentives that produce the field's logic to dominate over individual moral evaluation. The commercial theater economies in both New York City and London have a great deal of economic risk involved in them, and they consequently depend upon a consistent base of a financially stable, mostly white and aesthetically conservative audience. Within this context, the use of proxy authorship within commercial theater is not anomalous; it is structural and economically necessary. The field's



incentive systems reward producers who create products that are interpretable to their primary constituents. This process has been reinforced culturally through award systems by creating a concentrated source of symbolic capital the Tony, the Olivier to provide institutionalized sanctioning to the representational practices exhibited by productions.

This Bourdieusian reading transforms the critical question into a structural one: not who is to blame, but what conditions would have to change more diverse audience demographics, alternative funding models, revised award criteria capable of recognizing non-dominant cultural experience as achievement in its own right. Proxy authorship thus serves not only as a tool for evaluating existing texts but as a diagnostic lens for identifying the specific mechanisms through which the field reproduces its own logic, and the points at which that logic might be challenged.

3.7 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This research intentionally limits its focus to the structural and institutional aspects of ethnic ventriloquism within a single piece of theater. While this approach allows for an intense level of detail into a specific area, it is unlikely to determine if findings generated by this singular piece of theater are applicable to all other pieces of Latinx Theater. The research does not intend to indicate that "proxy authorship" is the sole means through which minority writers can create representations of their communities or that ethnic ventriloquy occurs equally throughout the entire field; instead, it suggests that these structural elements recur sufficiently frequently to function as a systemic dynamic, rather than individual incidents.

To narrow this analysis down further, we will focus on textual and institutional evidence rather than include the perspectives of the directors, producers, actors, and audiences that ultimately bring dramatic texts to life. Including those voices could provide additional context to what is presented here. Following are some potential directions for future research. A comparative examination of proxy authorship by Black, Asian-American, Indigenous authors working under similar constraints in the marketplace, would allow us to test the validity of our argument and also develop it further. Audiences specifically their reception of plays written through proxy authorship from a variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds, would be another area for the addition of empirical data. Research over time (longitudinally) of changes within the incentive system of the U.S.



theater field as a result of movements like We See You, White American Theater; would assist in determining at what point in time (or whether), significant change can occur to the reproductive logics of the U.S. theater field. Lastly, the idea of proxy authorship is easily extendable to other cultural fields such as literary fiction or film where minoritarian artists face analogous institutional barriers. This study serves as a model and is therefore, open to growth.

Conclusion

This study has identified a blind spot in the criticism of *The Inheritance*: its failure to address the ethnic politics of authorship that shape the play's distribution of voice. Drawing on disidentification, performativity, and field theory, and synthesizing them into the concepts of ethnic ventriloquism and proxy authorship, the study has argued that the white gay identity constructed across the play is not a purely aesthetic choice but a representational practice conditioned by the institutional structures of the American theatrical field.

The primary discovery of this research is that López's disidentification has an asymmetric nature. His disidentification is radical on the dimension of sexuality, but almost completely mute regarding the dimension of race. Through three close analyses it can be shown how the symmetry of his disidentification functions. When Lopez identifies with Forster through intertextuality, he utilizes the alignment with a white canonical precursor to create a space to reproduce whiteness. Additionally, when the Latinx body does not exist structurally in the work of López (and instead exists as erased), the erasure of the Latinx body represents the symptom of Lopez utilizing proxy authorship. Finally, when Lopez replaces one white substitute with another in the metatheatrical drama of succession, he creates a space where he will remain absent in relation to the story he produces. These two axes provide evidence of an individualized disidentificatory strategy existing within a field which rewards queer visibility while simultaneously maintaining white centered narratives.



The study's contribution extends beyond this single play. It offers a vocabulary and a method: ethnic ventriloquism names the dramaturgical practice, while proxy authorship identifies the structural conditions and political consequences that sustain it an analytical apparatus applicable wherever artists of color narrate culturally dominant subjects under institutional constraint.

None of this is to diminish López's achievement. The Inheritance is an ambitious and serious work, and its institutional recognition marks a genuine milestone. The argument here is not that López chose poorly, but that the structural context conditioning his choices must be recognized and named. The play's limitations are best understood not as personal failures but as symptoms of a structure of opportunity that will remain untransformed until the economic and cultural conditions of the American theatre are themselves transformed. The Inheritance is finally best read as a negotiated historical document at once a record of what a Puerto Rican playwright could accomplish in pursuit of mainstream success in the U.S. theatre of the 2010s, and a testament to what he could not.

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