

**Workshop 47:  
The Bard in the Borderlands: Pedagogical, Artistic, and Scholarly Approaches to  
Shakespeare en La Frontera**

**Led by Katherine Gillen, Adrianna M. Santos, and Kathryn Vomero Santos**

**Abstracts**

**Zainab Cheema, *Borderland Soundscapes: The Corrido in Latinx Appropriations of Romeo and Juliet***

In Latinx appropriations of *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare's story of tragic love becomes a vehicle for staging conversations on immigration, assimilation and resistance in the multicultural, multilingual, hybrid spaces of the US Mexico Borderlands. As Ruben Espinosa and David Ruitter have noted, Shakespeare's own investments in early modern immigration debates ask us reflect on the immigrant's centrality to Shakespeare's cultural imagination as well as our own (2016). Given that Shakespeare took inspiration from the sonnet to fashion the dialogues in *Romeo and Juliet*, it's entirely fitting that Latinx adaptations should turn to the Mexican genre of the corrido to channel the borderland soundscapes in their critical interrogations of US anti-immigration policies and neocolonial surveillance along the border. The corrido and other genres of borderland soundscapes are not simply musical background but also influence the mise-en-scène, dialogue and characterization in plays like *The Language of Flowers*, Edit Villarreal's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* set in circa 1990s Los Angeles; and *The Tragic Corrido of Romeo and Lupe*, Seres Jaime Magaña's adaptation centering on the 1940s Rio Grande Valley of Texas. In this essay, I examine how Villarreal and Magaña use the ballad form of the corrido to frame, catalyze and even destabilize the power of Shakespearean conventions of tragic love to freight explorations of Latinx "identity, place, language, and difference" (Gillen and Santos). Reflecting on the corrido as a musical genre that developed as a form of cultural resistance against the US colonization of Mexico and California, I situate Villarreal and Magaña's appropriations of it within the broader genre of Borderlands Shakespeare as shaped by "localized anti-colonial appropriations that 'generate new and provocative insights, not just about the region and its colonial histories but also about Shakespeare' (Santos, 2021; quoting from Gillen & Santos, 2020, p. 552).

**Laurie Ellinghausen, "Ellos no entienden": Linguistic and Cultural Disruption in *Hamlet, El Príncipe de Denmark* [abstract updated along with essay submission, 1/24/23]**

My first examination of Tara Moses's play *Hamlet, El Príncipe de Denmark* began with a question: how to integrate this work into an undergraduate Shakespeare course informed by anti-racist pedagogy? By the time I had finished my initial reading, however, this question had morphed into others: how would I make this play, set during the Día de los Muertos in colonial Mexico and delivered partly in the Spanish language, legible to my primarily Anglo U.S. students? Do they have the cultural fluency to "appreciate" this play and, for that matter, do I? And if not, would my Latinx students – typically two or three in number each semester – be placed in the undesirable

position of having to “explain” the play to the rest of us, thus relegating our study of the play to a mere exercise in educating U.S. Anglo readers? As part of an initial foray into these questions, I propose in this paper that Moses’s play explicitly and consciously seeks to disrupt Shakespeare’s historically canonical status in North America. This disruption centers on interrogating the presumed “universality” of Hamlet’s character which has been embraced by White Anglo critics for decades and still leaves its imprint on many scholarly and artistic approaches to the play. I uncover this cultural work by attending to moments in which Spanish, which occupies the role of a minoritarian language in U.S. culture, modifies and even disrupts the familiar English elements of the play, thus confronting the hegemony of English itself. As a corollary, I also attend to the moments in which certain symbols – such as the skull and the coffin – signify a doubleness of cultural meaning, thus inserting Mexican/Indigenous Día de los Muertos symbology into the play’s meditation on memory and mortality, a meditation typically read through an Anglo-Christian lens.

### **Ruben Espinosa, How the West Was Won**

In *The Decolonial Imaginary*, Emma Perez describes how borders—political, geographic, discursive—shape historical knowledge. “We cannot escape the boundaries that our Chicana/o minds have inherited,” Perez writes, “as we take imaginary journeys beyond the Rio Bravo into Mexico, Latin America or across the Atlantic Ocean to Asia, Africa, and Europe, traversing borders and centuries to link time and space.” In these imaginings, time is linear and geographic areas are mapped. Perez goes on to say, “With these categoric spaces, we continue to conceptualize history without challenging how such discursive sites have been assigned and by whom.” This, she argues, enforces a type of colonialist historiography. One of the categoric spaces she identifies is the renaissance. Another of these categoric spaces is the U.S. Southwest.

In this paper, I seek to cross temporal borders and challenge the assignation of such discursive sites by critically examining two distinct uses of Shakespeare—James Shapiro’s attention to the staging of *Othello* in Corpus Christi, Texas on the eve of the U.S. Mexico War in *Shakespeare and a Divided America* and through Valeria Luiselli’s bold use of Shakespeare to interrogate historical reenactments in the American West in her short story, “Shakespeare New Mexico.” These works employ Shakespeare to promote (Shapiro) and challenge (Luiselli) historical narratives that seek to define the American West and the borders—political, geographic, discursive—that have been painfully forged therein. We must carefully scrutinize such narratives if there is any hope of escaping the inherited boundaries that have been defined in and through Shakespeare for far too long.

### **Jen Feather, Global Shakespeare from Foundations to Capstone**

UNCG is a regional comprehensive MSI in a relatively urban area of North Carolina. It is also a rising HSI. UNCG students, however, rarely think of themselves as occupying a borderland despite the fact that the foreign born population in Greensboro grew more than 100% over the last twenty years and more than 250% in the decade before that.[1] Greensboro has a long history of welcoming immigrants and refugees and is home to multiple large immigrant and refugee communities. At UNCG, we are currently in the process of adopting a new curriculum for the English major and implementing a new general education curriculum. These realities

have made possible the idea of scaffolding courses at different levels such that students might be able to pursue a certificate in global or borderland studies and might have opportunities to work both with immigrant communities in Greensboro and with materials like those for this seminar. My project imagines what such sequenced courses might look like. Though these courses might not be taken in sequence, I would like to design them such that a student could conceivably take all four without substantially repeating material. I will create rationales and materials for four courses that might situate study of the “Bard in the Borderlands” texts in a trajectory of study for undergraduate students. The courses are described briefly below.

**Reading and Writing for Living** (Introductory for the General Education Curriculum)

**Big Questions** (Introductory to the major)

**300-level Shakespeare Course** (Fulfills a major requirement)

**Topics in Pre-1800 Literature** (Fulfills a College of Arts and Sciences writing requirement and thus requires a research project)

### **Robin Kello, Syllabus: “Mobile Shakespeares & Twenty-first Century Borders”**

Shakespeare has always been mobile. From the sources the author lifted and rearranged from non-Anglophone cultures to the imposition of Shakespearean text, language, and purported aesthetic excellence throughout centuries of British imperial and settler colonial projects, to our present moment of contestation in theater and the academy with what Mohegan playwright Madeline Sayet has called the “Shakespeare system”—the work and its legacy has always been in flux. The border in the current global order of sovereign nation-states, however, is a marker of restriction, by which the inevitable mobility of human beings is contained while capital flows freely. Border controls violently reify the conditions of twenty-first century relations between nations, while maintaining the economic and political dominance of certain geopolitical entities, and certain groups within them, at the expense of the world’s most vulnerable. The modern border is a crucial instrument of racial capitalism in the present, one which continually crosses and separates communities and families.

This advanced-level undergraduate course places issues of migration and legacies of imperialism in conversation with Shakespeare and Shakespearean dramatic adaptations, appropriations, responses, critiques, and allusive riffs. By looking at both early modern and twenty-first century texts and cultural products that engage with patterns mobility and migration—and the restrictions on them—from the U.S./Mexico borderlands to a refugee camp in Jordan, as well as the many afterlives of Shakespeare in the present moment, we will explore the possibilities and risks of an activist theater of migration that draws from early modern dramatic precedent. The course will include creative as well as interpretive work to allow us to collectively engage with how theater might or might not challenge a global order that imagines and constructs the nation-state as a regime of exclusion that depends upon the violence of borders.

**Jesus Montaña, The Transcript We Tell Ourselves in Edit Villarreal’s *The Language of Flowers***

Narrative, as Amy Shuman and Carol Bohmer explain in “Narrative Breakdown in the Political Asylum Process”, is often the central arbiter for those fleeing poverty, violence, war, and persecution. Positioning narrative as the crucial “evidence” codifies what James C. Scott terms the *official transcript* in that how stories are told, what is contained (as opposed to withheld), and who hears these stories adds to an already fraught set of circumstances that include traumas inherent in migrating and in being detained. Put another way, storytelling must conform to narrative guidelines and expectations set in place by a nation with explicit predispositions to deny entrance into the US.

In this paper I trace a different transcript, the transcript we tell ourselves. My analysis of Edit Villareal’s playscript *The Language of Flowers* shows how the transcript we tell ourselves, the stories from and for Latinx, both critiques the official transcript and simultaneously creates a new transcript. This “from and for” transcript, I argue, involves the melding and adapting of traditional cultural forms while also including components of the cultural archive (see Diana Taylor). From this lens, I interpret the Indigenous elements as a mythohistorical intervention (see Lee Bebout) whose intentions are retrofitting memory (see Maylei Blackwell) to create new forms of consciousness customized for current realities.

My goal in this essay is to examine how these elements, along with the figure of the *corridista* and the setting of the Day of the Dead, function to create a story that celebrates life and its transience, in keeping with Aztec *xochitl in cuicatl* (flower and song) that prized poetics as an integral component in the continuous regeneration of the cosmos. In other words, a story strong enough to tell ourselves in times of deportation, deportability, trauma, and violence and thus powerful enough to create new worlds beyond borders.

### **James M. Sutton, Exploring Borderlands Perspectives in Miami**

Through my participation in this seminar, I propose a pedagogical exploration of the meaning of the “Bard in the Borderlands” proposition within my own local context, FIU and Miami Florida. I hope to infuse my spring 2023 course, ENL 4224, Global Shakespeares, with a Borderlands perspective, in order to test what Anzaldúa’s seminal ideas, and the work of this group, might mean to (predominantly) Latinx students in Miami.

First a word about these students. I have 25 undergraduate students enrolled in ENL 4224; I might have an additional 5 MA students take the course. Almost all of these students will be Latinx, but few if any will come from Mexico or claim Chicana identity. Rather, I expect a rich mix of Cuban and Cuban-American exiles and immigrants, Venezuelan, Nicaraguan, Dominican, Haitian, Colombian, Argentinian, Brazilian, and Caribbean students. If I have any “Anglo” students, they will be the decided minority within my classroom.

In this class, alongside a rich investigation of Shakespearean adaptation and appropriation around the globe, I propose a parallel inquiry into the “Bard in the Borderlands” within the context of Miami and its Latin American and Caribbean spheres. I will begin, early in the semester, by having students read select chapters of Anzaldúa’s text; my experience and that of many of my colleagues at FIU has always been that, in encountering her ideas, FIU students almost always discover partial (and startling) reflections of themselves. Using some of the

seminal works published by the scholars in this group (e.g., Espinosa, Gillen, Vomero Santos), and the students own reflections upon their Borderlands journeys, in relationship to Shakespeare, I will ask them, through the semester, to ponder deeply the ideas this workshop proposes and studies. I will probably use *The Tempest* as my central Shakespearean text for this inquiry. My aim will be for them to become co-collaborators in this workshop's larger aims through the design and production of their own multi-media projects. This work will probably be done within groups of 3-5 students each, and serve as a major and culminating focus for the class.

If I could find one or possibly two like-minded instructors within this SAA Workshop, I would be delighted to link my classroom with a similar class in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona or California. Using technologies such as "Collaborative Online International Learning," I propose, and in proposing search for, one or two partners to work with in Spring 2023 on this project.

### **Laura Turchi, Shakespeare and Social Justice Lesson Plan Sequence**

At the Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles (SCLA), I am the curriculum director of a 5-year federally funded Shakespeare and Social Justice (S&SJ) project. S&SJ is in its second year of developing innovative curriculum and (secondary) teacher professional development offerings that illuminate Shakespeare texts through social justice principles, making a particular emphasis on encouraging *Action* against bias. The project focuses on supporting social-justice teaching in high school English language arts classrooms, but it draws on a non-school program: SCLA's decades of award-winning, nationally recognized arts-based youth development programming that incorporates Shakespeare and human relations work designed to raise social awareness, advance anti-racist values and actions, and support pro-social youth development among low-income, disadvantaged youth attending Title One schools. The S&SJ project further partners with Southern Poverty Law Center, building curriculum on the *Learning for Justice* standards. The four pillars of those (P-16) standards are Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Action.

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks>

For this SAA workshop, my plan is to create a lesson plan sequence (highly adaptable to different teaching contexts and time constraints, and appropriate for lower-division higher education coursework). The sequence will excerpt the four plays in *The Bard in the Borderlands* that are *Romeo and Juliet* adjacent. The sequence will offer thematic connections from the Shakespeare text concerning obedience, loyalty, and law with contemporary ideas from the *Borderland* collection including assimilation, colonialization, and citizenship. Languages and translation will be important and addressed in all.

The "Identity" lesson will be built on *The Language of Flowers* by Edit Villarreal and focus on the *R&J* balcony scene. The "Diversity" lesson will be built on *Kino and Teresa* by James Lujan and address the street fighting scene that opens both plays. The "Justice" (which in *Learning for Justice* focuses on systems/institutions) lesson will look at *The Tragic Corrido of Romeo and Lupe* by Seres Jaime Magaña and the consequences of the deaths of Tybalt and Mercutio (Placido). For "Action" the lesson from *¡O Romeo!* by Olga Sanchez Saltveit will attempt to capture both *humor* and *reflection* as perspectives on one's choices and examine what motivates action for social justice. Each lesson/approach will reference the excellent introductions of the plays in *Borderland* as a starting place to familiarize instructors with the context (etc.) and then

hone-in on the passage or excerpt and its connection to the social justice principle(s). With luck, there will be a combination of text-forward and drama-based pedagogy components in each part of the lesson sequence.

### **Laura Williamson, “Dream of justice”: Disrupting the Colonial Fantasy of / in Shakespeare Classrooms (and Communities)**

My project for this workshop is, admittedly, bifurcated: one branch focuses on pedagogical reflection, while the second is more animated by action and community engagement. In the case of the former, I intend to incorporate James Lujan’s *Kino and Teresa* into my early modern survey course as a way of inviting students to confront colonial history in / about Shakespeare as a problem of both the past and the present. The play’s seventeenth-century setting as well as my course’s current focus on adaptation, translation, and the literary canon make this an especially fruitful entry point for continuing conversations about the ways literature can reflect and resist colonialist ideologies. The second (less concrete!) branch of my project takes inspiration from Benny’s invitation to Juliet in Edit Villareal’s *The Language of Flowers* to “dream of justice,” which I read as both a gesture of consolation and as an urgent call to action (94). After reading so many examples of radical reimagining in the *The Bard in the Borderlands*, I began to envision an entire course centered around the idea of appropriation as action and storytelling as a mechanism of resistance and decolonial work. Such a class might find a home in my own interdisciplinary humanities department or, perhaps more appropriately, as part of our new “Digital and Public Humanities” minor, which pivots on public engagement. In a recent meeting with our community partners, for example, the director of the South Bend Civic Theatre reminded our group of the theater’s vision to serve as an ambassador for storytelling in our community (recently they partnered with faculty on the [August Wilson Project](#)). I am hopeful that a partnership and project could develop in the 2023-24 academic year.