

**SAA Annual Meeting 2026**  
**Seminar 29: Postcolonial Shakespeares**

**Seminar leader: Amrita Dhar**

**Seminar respondents: Ifeoluwa Aboluwade, Amrita Sen, Kathryn Vomero Santos, Christopher Thurman**

**ABSTRACTS**

**Where Hamlet's Rot Takes Root: Ecologies of Resistance from Elsinore to Kashmir**

**Jahidul Alam**

This paper explores Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* (2014) as a powerful postcolonial re-visioning of *Hamlet*, where Haider's rebellion rises out of the political and cultural tensions of contemporary India. By relocating Shakespeare's tragedy from Denmark's royal court to conflict-scarred Kashmir, the film anchors its story in a landscape marked by the lingering wounds of partition, militarization, and state surveillance. Urdu poetry, Sufi imagery, and Kashmiri resistance traditions deepen the film's emotional fabric, allowing *Hamlet's* familiar shadow to fall across a narrative shaped by dispossession, fractured identities, and unheard subaltern griefs. Read through a postcolonial lens, this study argues that Bhardwaj's adaptation enacts both defiance and reclamation: it unsettles the authority of Shakespeare's canon while using the tragic form to illuminate the tensions of modern nationhood. In its fusion of Shakespearean drama with the histories, aesthetics, and insurgent voices of Kashmir, *Haider* becomes a testament to how postcolonial art speaks back to empire, not by erasing influence, but by rewriting it into a story that insists on memory, resistance, and cultural self-definition.

**Stage 2 x 2: Identity Confusion in *La Comedia of Errors***

**Charmaine Cordero**

This paper will examine will investigate the correlation between identity formation in both sets of works to discover what constitutes healthy cultural identity for a group whose cultural foundations and surroundings are frequently at odds via characters who are Americans of Mexican descent ("Pochx") from four Chicanx adaptations of the works of William Shakespeare that are set in the southwestern United States: *The Language of Flowers* by Edit Villareal, *La Comedia of Errors* by Lydia G. Garcia and Bill Rouch, *El Henry* by Herbert Siguenza, and *Rough Magic* by Andrew Siañez-De La O. These works, which adapt *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Henry IV Part One*, and *The Tempest* respectively, are a part of a group of Latinx adaptations of Shakespeare known as Borderlands Shakespeare. The paper will examine

these issues by placing Shakespearean scholarship in conversation with Chicana Studies by considering the projection of racial anxieties of the works these plays are based upon, specifically exploring the correlation between the characters and the development of bicultural/multicultural identity as described in cultural studies and psychology and the effects of this on not only the individual but the larger community. The focus of my work for this seminar is specifically *La Comedia of Errors* by Lydia G. Garcia and Bill Rouch. This will be a chapter of my dissertation that considers how hybridity of identity is partially accepted in Chicana culture. The twins of this adaptation are originally born in Mexico but separated in an accident, with one pair raised in the United States and the other from Mexico. The confusion and “comedy” that results not only examines appearance and citizenship but racial intolerance, immigration issues, and sexism. Andy Antipholus of the United States in particular must conquer his prejudices to accept not only his father and brother but himself. This play also includes a new character, La Vecina (The Neighbor), who serves as narrator, translator, and commentator for the events of the play but most importantly for negotiating identity and cultural issues.

## **Between Languages, Between Empires: Polyglot Shakespeares in Ottoman and Modern Türkiye**

**Emily Glider**

Shakespeare first reached Ottoman İstanbul not in English— or in Turkish— but in Armenian. The Ottoman *Tanzimat* (reorganization) of the mid-nineteenth century contributed to the growth of a rich, multilingual performance culture featuring actors and theater companies from within the city’s minority language communities as well as traveling productions from across the world. These policy changes initiated by Ottoman leaders in 1840’s and 1850’s had real implications for the Armenian, Greek Orthodox, Syriac and Chaldean Catholic, Jewish, and Circassian *millet*s, which saw new autonomy as self-governing entities and integration into the daily life of the city. The first Shakespeares came to İstanbul through “minor languages” and minoritized performers and were taken up by highly placed civic and imperial leaders as well as traveling entertainers arriving from across the Ottoman Empire, across Europe— and even across the Atlantic Ocean. There is no such thing as a general history of “Shakespeare in Türkiye,” but instead a patchwork of Shakespeares invented and reinvented by different actors for a variety of different purposes, taking part in the transnational spread of the plays, yet resistant to the rhetoric of “universality.” Instead, Turkish Shakespeares have long been rhizomatic, provisional, and radically translocal, reaching new destinations by way of nonlinear and recursive trajectories across time and space. How might this tradition of polyglot performance— which is kept alive in major cities and university campuses all throughout Türkiye today— enact strategies of resistance to a program of English-language dominance that continues to shape our world into the present?

## **The play's the thing?: Exploring the Potential of Shakespeare Adaptation to Contribute to Indigenous Storytelling and Self-representation**

**Erin Rose Grant**

Shakespeare's works are often celebrated as adaptable, universal, and empowering. Yet, they have also been used as tools for colonization. Confronted with Shakespeare's troubling lineage, this paper asks whether his works can be used to ethically share Indigenous stories by focusing on three recent Toronto-based theatrical productions: Mirvish's staging of Cliff Cardinal's *The Land Acknowledgement, or As You Like It* (2023), Shakespeare in Action's staging of PJ Prudat's *Otîhêw* (2023), and Canadian Stage's staging of Jani Lauzon and Kaitlyn Riordan's *1939* (2024). Each of these plays engage with Shakespeare and the history of Indigenous-settler relations in Turtle Island/Canada. Cardinal might resist categorizing his play as a Shakespearean adaptation, instead viewing it as a theatrical work that makes use of the cultural capital attached to Shakespeare to raise awareness about Indigenous identity. Yet, I would argue that both Cardinal and Prudat choose specific Shakespeare plays that resonate with the themes embedded in the stories they wish to tell, in turn deepening and amplifying these same themes found in Shakespeare: displacement of peoples from their ancestral homes, racial discrimination, and erosion of rights and freedoms. Further, I would argue that Jani Lauzon and Kaitlyn Riordan's play, unlike their counterparts, might place too much emphasis on Shakespeare's works as transformative vehicles for emancipation, ignoring the fact that Shakespeare does not give people voices, but instead provides storytelling opportunities to reach new audiences.

## **Bollywoodization of *The Comedy of Errors*: Shakespeare and Indian Popular Cinema in *Cirkus***

**Abhishek Sarkar**

This paper will locate the 2022 Bollywood film *Cirkus* (an official adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors*) in the long chain of reception of Shakespearean topoi, episodes and character elements in Indian commercial cinema. The paper will trace the variations in *fabula* and characterization from Shakespeare's play to an 1869 Bengali novelization (*Bhrantivilas* by Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar), to a 1963 Bengali film (*Bhrantivilas*; dir. Manu Sen) based on the novella, to a 1968 Hindi film (*Do Dooni Chaar*; dir. Debu Sen) that adapted the Bengali one, to a 1982 Hindi film (*Angoor*; dir. Gulzar) that further reworked the earlier Hindi film, to *Cirkus* (dir. Rohit Shetty), which adapts the 1982 film more directly than the Shakespeare play. In a remarkable deviation from Shakespeare's play and the earlier Indian adaptations, *Cirkus* has a full-fledged character (along the lines of the *sutradhara* of Sanskrit dramaturgy and traditional Indian performances) who tracks the two sets of identical twins from the outset and addresses the audience directly from time to time, apart from intervening in the unfolding action of the film. In another remarkable departure from *The Comedy* and its earlier adaptations, one set of twins does not automatically become the slaves/servants of the other. Within each adoptive family, the equivalents of Antipholus and Dromio are raised with the belief that they are blood brothers, and they also take their foster parents to be their biological parents (who are totally elided from the

film). This reinforces the theme of nature vs. nurture (beloved of Bollywood), together with the importance of adoption, posited quite early in the film by the *sutradhara* figure. Further, the film introduces the implausible plot element of the character corresponding to Antipholus of Syracuse feeling the shocks when the equivalent of Antipholus of Ephesus exposes himself to high-voltage electric currents. This seems to be appropriated from the novella *The Corsican Brothers* (1844) by Alexandre Dumas, père, or more probably from its Hollywood adaptations (this formula itself having a hoary history in Hindi commercial films). The amalgamation of the plot element from Dumas, père exemplifies the predominant mode of the reception of Shakespeare in Indian popular entertainment, where the Shakespeare corpus has been treated since the nineteenth century as a convenient storehouse of discrete plot and character elements that can be mixed and matched - often with similar borrowings from other texts. It needs to be asked why the film *Cirkus*, which acknowledges the history of Shakespeare reception in Indian cinema in a way that is likely to excite scholars of Shakespeare adaptation across the world, and which makes conspicuous politically correct gestures unlike the other films of the director Rohit Shetty, continues to be a commercial and critical disaster.

### **Before the Film Plays: What Disclaimers “strive to mend” in *Ram-leela***

**Ira Sen**

Sanjay Leela Bhansali's 2013 film *Goliyon ki Raasleela Ram-leela*, inspired by William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, screens three disclaimers prior to the plot's beginning. This paper studies the effect and function of these disclaimers, considering them as counterparts to the Prologue in *Romeo and Juliet*. The film's simultaneous performance of both attribution and disavowal, I argue, allows for a reading of how an appeal to authority (in this case, Shakespeare and India's Central Board for Film Certification) brings to light how outward compliance to censorial, legal, or canonical/colonial weight can be utilized to critique (often violent) extreme nationalism, jingoism, and the prioritization of a singular identity category over others. Where *Romeo and Juliet*'s Prologue apologizes for details missed that will be mended over the plot (that is, a lack to be remedied), *Ram-leela*'s disclaimers ask the viewer to ignore any potential resonance with national, religious, or cultural symbols (as excesses to be cast aside) – ironically drawing attention to the many possible interpretations of these very symbols before the film even plays.

### **Infesting the Canon: Decolonizing Shakespeare with *Sonnet's Shakespeare* (2019) and *full-metal indigiqueer* (2017)**

**Julie Thompson**

In *Sonnet's Shakespeare* and *full metal indigiqueer*, Sonnet L'Abbe and Joshua Whitehead take on the challenge of disrupting, infesting, and decolonizing Shakespeare through their poetry. Building on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theories of the arborescence and rhizomatic, the

poetry of L'Abbe and Whitehead operates as a rhizomatic system to deterritorialize and, subsequently, reterritorialize Shakespeare's sonnets. The rhizomes of *Sonnet's Shakespeare* disrupt and deterritorialize Shakespeare's colonial territory by "produc[ing] stems and filaments that seem to be roots, or better yet, connect with [the arborescent] by penetrating the trunk, but put them to strange new uses" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980). L'Abbe does this by using their writing as an allegory for colonialism and writes over the traditional territory of English literature, such as Shakespeare's sonnets (L'Abbe). By writing over the sonnets, L'Abbe creates a rhizomatic system of language that overlays, erases, and obliterates Shakespeare's language and meaning through their relative deterritorialization, as opposed to Whitehead's absolute deterritorialization. Whitehead performs an act of absolute deterritorialization by mulching and composting Shakespeare's arborescent territory in *full-metal indigiqueer*. Furthermore, his Indigenous positionality and ancestral relationship to the land enable Whitehead to use rhizomatic systems in a way that L'Abbe—as colonizer and colonized—is unable to access. He performs an absolute deterritorialization to invade the colonial, arborescent territory of Shakespeare and others in a symbolic act of taking the land, or in this case, language, back. In places where the canon threatens to overwhelm Whitehead's language in *full-metal indigiqueer*, he chooses to obliterate language completely with infected, binary source code that both eradicates and refines his message. By creating a space of disruption by corrupting the colonizers' language, analogous to colonialism, with his own form of a viral linguistic hacker code, Whitehead decenters Shakespeare—and by extension English—as the colonial and cultural matrix.

## **The Scottish Play and the Cannibal Spirit: Decolonizing *Macbeth* in Renelitta Arluk's *Pawâkan***

**Willow White**

This paper examines how Renelitta Arluk (Inuvialuit, Cree, Dene) reimagines *Macbeth* in her "Cree-takeover" *Pawâkan*. In the play, Arluk repositions Shakespeare's Scottish play within the cultural, political, and spiritual landscapes of the Prairies prior to the Confederation of Canada. Like Shakespeare, Arluk mobilizes history as a generative site for exploring power, kinship, and conflict; her adaptation draws on a real historical alliance among Cree, Nakoda, Ojibwe, and Métis peoples—known as the Nehiyaw Pwat—to ground the story in place-based relations rather than Scottish feudalism. Arluk also activates supernatural and spiritual elements within her play, and, like Shakespeare, centers a woman's story within a narrative dominated by warriors and masculinity. Yet, *Pawâkan* departs decisively from fidelity to Shakespeare's plot and worldview by structuring the drama through Cree cosmology, storytelling, and Indigenous dramaturgical practices that foreground relational accountability. Arluk's play carefully navigates the tragic foreclosure of *Macbeth* by challenging colonial historiographies that cast Indigenous peoples as passive and vanishing. Instead, Arluk emphasizes Indigenous sovereignty by foregrounding inter-Nation allyships as a mode of resistance that extends both backward into history and forward into an Indigenous futurity on the Prairies. Ultimately, *Pawâkan* is a political and cultural intervention that refuses settler-audience expectations of authenticity and tragedy, while reclaiming history as a living story with sovereign Indigenous possibilities. My analysis is based

on my observations of a performance of *Pawâkan* in June 2025 during the production's "Métis Tour." I am further informed by my own experiences as a Prairie woman of Métis, Cree, and settler descent whose ancestors are represented in the production.