

# Endemic Violence and Trans/National Identity Crisis in Daniel Alarcón's *City of Clowns*



A Zoom Lecture by

**Dr. Oswaldo Estrada**

Professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies  
 Director, Faculty Fellow Program, Institute for the Arts and Humanities  
 University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Wednesday

**April 13**

3:30 p.m.

**Morris University Center,  
 Room 215**

Shawnee State University  
 Portsmouth, Ohio

In this presentation, I will discuss various issues related to migration, racial discrimination and social marginalization in Daniel Alarcón's *City of Clowns*. This transnational text has traveled a long way since it was first conceived as a short story in an Iowa City farmhouse in 2002. The story, published in *The New Yorker* in 2003, was included in the collection *War by Candlelight* (2005) and became known as "Ciudad de payasos" in Spanish translation (2006). Thanks to this short-story collection and his first novel, *Lost City Radio* (2007), Alarcón was soon recognized as one of Peru's best writers and, simultaneously, as an innovative Latino author who fictionalized the social conflicts of

an Andean country. Several narratives of his first short-story cycle—especially "Lima, Peru, July 28, 1979," "War by Candlelight," and "Flood"—problematized the internal conflict of the eighties and nineties between the Peruvian state and the Shining Path, a Maoist movement. But "City of Clowns" offered a universal story of endemic violence, inequality, determinism, and identity crisis, which could easily be applied to other social contexts around the globe. Logically, in collaboration with Peruvian artist and illustrator Sheila Alvarado, Alarcón turned this short story into a graphic novel in 2010, in Spanish, the same one that returned to the United States in its original language in 2015.

*Oswaldo Estrada is a Peruvian-American writer and literary critic. He is a Professor of Latin American Literature at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and has authored or edited over a dozen books of literary and cultural criticism. He has received two International Latino Book Awards for his collections of short stories, *Luces de emergencia* (2019) and *Incurables. Relatos de dolencias y males* (2020). His book *Las locas ilusiones y otros relatos de migración* won the International Latino and Latin American Book Fair Prize from Tufts in 2020. Last year he published *Las guerras perdidas* (2021).*