

Janelle Gondar

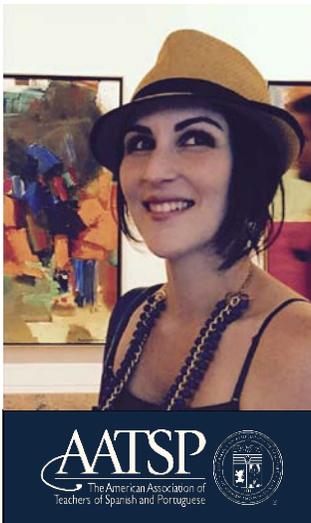
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“True teachers are those who use themselves as bridges over which they invite their students to cross; then, having facilitated their crossing, joyfully collapse, encouraging them to create their own.”

—Nikos Kazantzakis

Growing up in a bilingual home and a multilingual city, I realized at an early age that language was a very powerful tool. The ability to communicate, both to express oneself and to understand others, provides access to relationships and information that can significantly impact people’s lives. While working at an economic development organization in Miami, I translated several episodes of a local television program that we produced, so that Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs could learn about tax incentives and other financial benefits for starting or growing their companies in economic empowerment and enterprise zones throughout the city. Later, while living in New York City, my interpreting work in the healthcare industry afforded me the opportunity to interact directly with the Hispanic community, ensuring that health concerns, diagnoses, and treatment options were clearly translated and understood. During that time, I also created and presented educational workshops for all new Spanish-speaking patients.

Throughout my life, being bilingual allowed me to bridge language and culture divides among family, friends, neighbors, and community members, but I was not actually empowering them to do these things themselves. That is something that only teaching can do. By showing others how to communicate with new groups, I can give them a chance to find their *own* voices instead of speaking *for* them through mine. Nikos Kazantzakis’s quote above captures the very spirit of my own approach to teaching: to take my students on a journey, all the while trying to give them the knowledge and the confidence to travel beyond the boundaries of the classroom. I present my class as an invitation—an invitation to travel the world, to develop language skills that will open doors along career paths, to discover new literature and cultures, to discuss new ideas and perspectives on real-world issues, and to create one’s own bridges over which to cross and continue exploring. And, for me, nothing is more rewarding or thrilling than joyfully collapsing, knowing full well that my part is done, and that the lessons I have imparted live on in the work of those whom I have had the privilege of teaching.



Janelle Gondar is a PhD candidate in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Yale University who specializes in twentieth-century Latin American literature. She has a BA and an MA in Spanish from CUNY Hunter College in New York City, as well as an MA and an MPhil in Spanish from Yale University. Janelle has taught several Spanish language courses, and has also been a Teaching or Research Assistant for undergraduate and graduate literature courses at Yale. Moreover, she is an active member of her academic community: she serves as a graduate student representative for two departmental committees, is a founding member and organizer of the Avant-Gardes Working Group sponsored by the Whitney Humanities Center, and is the assistant director of the Latino and Iberian Film Festival at Yale (LIFFY). Janelle is also an associate editor of the AATSP’s new graduate student journal, *Spanish and Portuguese Review*. Currently, she is working on her dissertation, “The Evolution and Revolution of the Haiku in Ibero-America,” in which she analyzes how the Japanese haiku was introduced to and adapted by Ibero-American poets in both Spanish and Portuguese languages spanning across several major literary movements over the course of the twentieth century. In addition to her graduate research, she works as a translator, researcher, and writer, as well as substitute language teacher and tutor at multiple schools in New Haven, CT. Before beginning her doctoral studies, Janelle taught English and Spanish in Japan.