As a filmmaker, Kim constantly asks the question: “Whose story are we telling and how do we tell it legitimately?”

In his work as a professor and filmmaker, Kim aims to help his students understand that film is more than just a form of creative exploration. “I want people to understand that film can dovetail with different disciplines, and that the social implications of filmmaking can fit closely with the mission of this university,” he says.

“I would like for people to think about film as much more than just an escape mechanism. The fact that you can profit so heavily from film has made it a commodity, but in an institution of higher education, we should think of film as part of our culture, something we explore as we do the literary classics.”

However, Kim clarifies, thinking about film as a cultural work does not mean we should be uncritical viewers. “The notion that documentary film is or should be purely objective needs to escape mechanism. The fact that you think of film as part of our culture, something we explore as we do the literary classics.”

But a filmmaker, Kim constantly asks the question: “Whose story are we telling and how do we tell it legitimately?”

In 2015, Kim served as lead producer of all television and media operations at the General Conference Session of Seventh-day Adventists in San Antonio, Texas. Kim also assisted Scott Grady, executive producer of the Audiovisual and Broadcasting Committee.

A highly complex event, Kim was responsible for capturing actual moments for the world church as they unfolded. His primary concern while filming the General Conference was transparency. “The moment I am proudest of was getting the actual tallying of the [ordination] vote broadcasted and recorded,” he says, so that people could view the voting process from beginning to end.

Since the General Conference, Kim has worked on several film projects, including a tribute to Niels-Erik Andreasen, titled “A Life of the Mind.” In it, he masterfully captures Andreasen as an educator near the end of his career reflecting on his early dreams to become a teacher and the realization of those dreams. The film, which was a “very personal one,” became “a project of passion” for Kim and is now in the film festival circuit.

“Many of the best projects begin as projects of passion in places where you have local access,” Kim says. Those are the kinds of films Kim enjoys working on, projects that originate organically from established relationships in the community. “As a filmmaker, you have to figure out what kind of filmmaker you are and what kinds of projects fit.”

For Kim, “the right fit” might be something like a longitudinal film on a local story, perhaps about the Southwest Michigan agricultural community or migrant workers. He hopes that by showing the “complexities of someone’s life and situation” over a long period of time he, as a filmmaker, can convey the truth of who they are and the meaning of their experience. As he recently told a student, no filmmaker in the world can have more perspective and intimacy with a subject than the one who is already right there, living alongside them.

In the 2014 podcast, “Serial,” journalist Sarah Koenig investigated the supposed involvement of Adnan Syed in the 1999 murder of his ex-girlfriend, Hae Min Lee. In the introduction of the show, Koenig remarked, “On paper, the case was like a Shakespearean mash-up. Young lovers from different worlds, thwarting their families, secret assignations, jealousy, suspicion and honor besmirched. The villain not a Moor exactly, but a Muslim all the same. And a final act of murderous revenge.”

For most listeners, that statement is just another reason to keep listening to the story, but for Vanessa Corredera, assistant professor of English, it is an example of how pop culture reimagines Shakespeare as a way to discuss issues of race, gender and class. Koenig’s introduction references both “Romeo and Juliet” and “Othello” although, Corredera notes, she does it without naming the plays or characters.

“I’m really interested in popular culture,” says Corredera, enthusiastically. “And it’s wonderful when you can mix your hobbies, research and teaching.” When she first listened to “Serial,” she saw a way to maximize her time and interests.

Corredera developed that single reference to Shakespeare “into a reading of race, ‘Serial’ and Shakespeare and what that means for the field of Shakespearean studies,” and presented it at a seminar on Early Modern Race/Ethnic/Diaspora Studies at the Shakespeare Association of America in 2015. The same paper was chosen to be part of a special edition of Shakespeare Quarterly, one of the preeminent journals in the field, on Shakespeare and race (forthcoming).

“Shakespeare and race studies emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a part of a larger movement in literary studies towards thinking about women’s and postcolonial issues and critical race theory,” explains Corredera. “A lot of the early work on Renaissance literature and race was conducted on how race was constructed in the period by looking at primary sources to determine how Jews, Moors...
or other figures of alterity are portrayed. Researchers also looked at how those issues intersect with things like class, gender and beauty..."

Three main streams of thought have developed regarding discussions of race and the early modern period. The first group, Corredera says, believes scholars can legitimately talk about race during that period. "Obviously there is interest in skin color, what we would call ethnicity, regional difference and religious difference (such as in Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice'). The language used and attitudes taken are about something equivalent to race, differences that are categorical and cannot be changed."

"But," she continues, "other scholars say we cannot discuss race because it is something we now describe as being biological; there was no concept of biology at that time. They also say that 'race' during the early modern period referred to familial relations." A third category of scholars warns against imposing "modern conceptions of racial difference, such as the emphasis on skin color, which is not only modern, but, to a certain degree, very American."

Still, discussions of race and the early modern period continue. Among those scholars who have decided to move on from the debate, some focus on how "Renaissance literature illustrates or addresses the racial or ethnic issues of the time." Others, such as Corredera, "look at the way that Shakespeare speaks to current racial issues." Corredera, and scholars like her, examine "modern appropriations of Shakespeare, such as YouTube videos, film adaptations, modern theater performances, novel adaptations, art installations, etc."

Inspired by the work of scholars Ayanna Thompson, Kim Hall and Peter Erickson and the conversations at the seminar on Shakespeare and race, Corredera has begun working on a book on modern representations of "Othello" from 1994–2014. "I chose 1994 as the inner parameter for my study because of the O.J. Simpson trial; it was not just about race relations, it was also about black masculinity. He was a charming, African-American football player in an inter-racial relationship; I would not be the first to make the connection between his case and 'Othello,'" she says. In fact, the similarities were referenced in newspapers and newspapers during the trial.

Corredera is using 2014, the date "Serial" was broadcast, as the outer parameter for her study. She plans to work chronologically through several versions of "Othello" as represented across different media, such as a young adult novel, a podcast, a film and a modern play adaption.

"I want to analyze why 'Othello' appears in the various mediums, what ideas or issues about race and racial theory the texts are engaging," Corredera says, "and why the authors/creators choose to work with Shakespeare." She notes that "Shakespeare" is a loaded term that refers not only to all Shakespearean texts, but also to William Shakespeare the person, as well as "all our cultural ideas about Shakespeare as the great humanist, the universal Shakespeare and the genius Shakespeare."

In light of this, Corredera asks, "What do these re-imaginings of 'Othello' tell us about how we imagine Shakespeare and how we imagine Shakespeare in relation to race? Does Shakespeare allow us to see different things about race that we otherwise wouldn't? Is Shakespeare antagonistic to productive discussions about race and racial relations?" Corredera aims to answer these questions in her book, which she sees as being "particularly timely for the current American context."

Corredera's current research project is a slight departure from her doctoral work on "The Early Modern Face: Physiognomy On and Off the English Stage," which she completed at Northwestern University (2012). However, the two projects are connected by the concept of otherness, whether it is described in facial features or race. "For my dissertation I looked at archives, primary material and physiognomic texts to examine what they said about the complexion and the face and what tells the reader about how they can interpret someone else's nature and character," she explains.

The physiognomy research, Corredera clarifies, "is not a race project, it's much broader. Race is part of the transactional social relationship context for physiognomy." The concept of complexion and its representation, however, was a topic she explored in her dissertation, particularly with regard to Thomas Dekker's drama "Lust's Dominion." The overlap between the two projects lies in questions about conceptions of the other. Both projects, Corredera says, analyze "social relationships and how they appear in literature" as well as the "intersection between race and gender in literature."

Corredera has recently published revised chapters of her dissertation as a chapter in James A. Knapp's 2015 "Shakespeare and the Power of the Face" titled, "Complex Complexions: The Facial Signification of the Black Other in 'Lust's Dominion'" (Ashgate), and as an article, "Faces and Figures of Fortune: Astrological Physiognomy in 'Tamburlaine Part 1,'" in the Winter 2015 issue of "Early Modern Literary Studies."

"The broad research interests" of how race, gender and social relationships are represented in literature "span across all my projects," Corredera muses, "but they are manifested differently depending on the method, texts and theoretical frame. I think I'm still asking similar questions, just through different methods, with different texts and different foci."