



“Shakespeare and Italy” Travel Study Trip 2013

During Spring Break 2013, students enrolled in Dr. Dana Lawrence’s “Shakespeare and Italy” course at USC Lancaster traveled to Italy in hopes of expanding their understanding of the playwright’s Italian settings and experiencing the intellectual growth that accompanies traveling abroad. In the weeks leading up to spring break, students read *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, examining Shakespeare’s representations of Italy along with some of the plays’ major themes.

While in Italy, students had the opportunity to explore the Casa di Giulietta in Verona: a tourist-destination built as a shrine to Shakespeare’s fictional star-crossed lovers, where modern-day lovers scrawl the name of their beloved on the wall or on a padlock affixed to a gate in the courtyard in hopes of experiencing their own (hopefully less tragic) eternal love. Haley Heath, a student in the class, remarked, “Visiting the Shakespeare sites in Italy has really made the plays, that we read in class, come to life. Seeing Juliet’s balcony helped me visually see her standing there confessing her love in *Romeo and Juliet*.”

In Venice, students explored the canals, the Rialto, and Campo del Ghetto Nuovo, re-imagining the events surrounding the bond between Antonio and Shylock and witnessing the difference that still exists between the ornate, touristy Rialto area and the quiet simplicity of the historically Jewish neighborhood.

Although Rome’s tourism industry is not nearly as Shakespeare-centered as that of Verona, the bard’s influence is never far away, as even our Italian tour guide situated the group’s position in the ruins of the Forum Romanum by reminding us of Antony’s famous “Friends, Romans, Countrymen” speech from the English play. Meagan Denyer noted, “Even though the Roman Forum is now ruins, the chaos that would’ve been occurring in the days of Julius Caesar is still evident as you look over the many important buildings that would’ve been in place.” The Colosseum and the now absent statue of Nero, after which the arena is nicknamed, provided material evidence of the kind of ego that the conspirators of *Julius Caesar* feared in their doomed leader.

In addition to considering Shakespeare’s interest in Italy, students were able to explore their own interests as the group traveled from Venice to Rome, stopping in Verona, San Gimignano, Florence, and Assisi along the way. The

group enjoyed a taste (both literally and figuratively) of some of the different regions of Italy, and were fortunate enough to see some of the most famous works of art and architecture from the ancient, medieval, and Renaissance eras. This tour of history culminated with the experience of history in the making as the students found themselves in St. Peter's square in Vatican City at the moment when white smoke poured into the sky to announce the election of Pope Francesco. Early the next morning, the group boarded the plane back to the states, armed with souvenirs and thousands of photographs—and ready to read more Shakespeare, of course! Reflecting on her experiences in Italy, Jessica Blakeney said, “Personally, this trip was exactly what I needed. I needed some time away from my everyday routine. While abroad, I strengthened some friendships and built new ones, not only with others I didn't know, but my fellow classmates. I am glad that I have seen another country and other sides to people that I see weekly.” Jeremy Moulton agreed, “Overall, this was one of the best experiences of my life.”