

Studying Shakespeare's Italy

—by Michael S. Lewis



During January of this year, thirty students and two professors from Penn State Berks traveled across the Atlantic to spend a week in Venice, Italy studying Shakespeare.

our understanding of culture and theatre, interpretation and performance.”

The trip consisted of experiencing two key areas: Venice and Verona. Both areas were selected because they were the setting

describing how seeing a specific place caused the student to rethink an idea about one of the plays, describing how the student would adapt a certain scene from one of the plays after having seen “Shakespeare’s Italy,” and discussing comparisons between the characters and scenes of Shakespeare’s plays to Commedia Dell’Arte.

Experiencing a new culture always has a lasting effect; every student that made the trip came back with something new. Whether that something is a greater appreciation for Shakespeare or Italian cuisine, or simply a new idea makes no difference. The important thing is that everyone came back with a slightly expanded knowledge of the world, and that in itself is life altering. ■



The idea for the trip came from the two professors who accompanied the students: Dr. Sandy Feinstein, Honors Coordinator and Professor of English, and Dr. Peter Campbell, Assistant Professor of Theatre Arts. The two professors explained, “We will be able to contrast the space of [Shakespeare’s] plays and our imagination with the geography we find; we will wrestle with myths about place and reframe

for three plays by Shakespeare, “Romeo and Juliet,” “The Merchant of Venice,” and “Othello.”

The six-day trip started on January 8 when the students and professors met on campus. As part of the coursework, the students chose scenes from the three plays and performed those scenes in the streets of Venice or Verona, with the rest of the class—and any random onlookers—as their audience.

Student response to the trip was extremely positive. Sara Kukulka summed up her feelings by saying, “It was so much fun and an awesome experience.” Deanna Biase, said, “It was great to experience a different side of Italy, one aside from tourism and more connected to theatre.”

Upon their return from Italy, the students had a choice of three topics about which to write a paper. Each topic forced the students to think about the trip and their experiences in a new way, from

