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Slovenia, the Syrian and Shakespeare: Nationality, Immigration, and Shakespearean Pedagogy at the Borders of Europe

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> "I think Shakespeare is important to the whole world but our little nation not so much… In our school system, we mention him as an important element in Elizabethan era and theater... we did go to London in 3rd year in high school, we went to see … the original Globe Theater… we read *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, but just briefly so we knew the works. In our school system [we] give much more focus [to] our Slovene authors because that is our legacy… I think we [should do] something new, not *Hamlet*…
>
> [T]he immigrants... did not have an appreciation for our little green country, if for any. They march[ed] along the highway towards Maribor and [left]… trash lying on the grass and they … thr[e]w rocks… and … call[ed] us indecent…[T]hey cannot just come in waves and act as they wish… What world would we live in, if everyone would act like that? I saw some immigrants… but they weren't allowed to go outside of their camp… I was so stressed by this event."[1]

Abstract

This essay reviews celebrations of Shakespeare in Ljubljana occurring in 2016, the 400th anniversary of the author's death, in light of the concurrent Syrian immigration crisis that rocked Slovenia and the rest of Europe in 2015–16. Comparing Shakespeare's warm cultural reception—a further sign of his supposed "universality"—to the migrants' political and social rejection in Slovenia, the author proposes a new Shakespearean pedagogy in the country's universities to address such disparities.

[1] These remarks come from "Cvetka," an MA student at the University of Maribor, from 2015–19. She received degrees in the Slovene Language (2018) and English (2019). Her English thesis received an award for its contribution to the field of drama (Shakespeare studies), contrastive linguistics and translation studies. Cvetka was a student in a Master's level course on Shakespeare I offered at Maribor in the Spring of 2017. Since teaching that course, I have remained in contact with her and several other students from the class; in preparing this essay, I reached out to several of them in order to solicit their thoughts about the issues broached here.

Key words: Slovenia, cultural geography, Syrian immigration, Shakespeare, Shakespeare festivals, Shakespearean pedagogy

Introduction

"Cvetka," a millennial Slovenian woman, reveals in these remarks the profound differences between her country's reception of Shakespeare, and Slovenia's welcome of migrants from Syria and the Middle-East from 2015 to the present. Shakespeare conveys global significance, and though she initially doubts his place in "our little nation," she reconsiders and finds room for him. He belongs. Contrary-wise, the immigrants do not belong, not in "our little green country," and perhaps nowhere in this "world… we live in." They seem to her to be dirty, ill-mannered, and unpleasant; as such they are rightly confined within "their camp."

In 2015–16, Cvetka's country of just over two million citizens was traversed by more than 400,000 migrants from the Middle-East trying to find refuge in Europe; arguably, these travelers from across the Mediterranean were poorly received and marginalized at the borders of Slovenia. Simultaneously, in Ljubljana, the nation's capital, multiple events embracing trans-Alpine Shakespeare—a northern and western European conveying prestige and authority—were staged. This essay explores this dichotomous reception, and suggests that the overt and lavish celebrations of Shakespeare were blind to, and ignorant of, the ostracized immigrants.[2] As such, these Shakespearean festivities might be said to demonstrate Slovenia's inclination toward, its predilection for, the trans-Alpine European over the southern Mediterranean. However, because I posit Slovenia as simultaneously both an Alpine and a Mediterranean nation, I wish to suggest that Shakespeare and the Syrians might have been accorded more equal shows of respect and hospitality. Insofar as such a balanced reception to "strangers" failed to occur, I conclude the essay envisioning a modest intervention that might begin to bridge these gaps: namely, a new form of Shakespearean pedagogy to be implemented at the nation's universities, a curriculum that would engage with those plays that most urgently pose questions about immigration and probe attitudes of (un)acceptance and (in)tolerance of the (racially, religiously, sexually or nationally) "othered."[3]

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[2] For further considerations of Shakespeare and immigration, confer Oldenburg (2014) and Espinosa and Ruiter (2014).

[3] A shorter version of this essay was first vetted at the seminar, "Shakespeare across the Mediterranean," held at the 46th Annual Meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America in Los Angeles, April 2018. I am indebted to seminar organizer Sabine Schuelting, Freie Universität, Berlin, and the other participants in that seminar, for their feedback and suggestions. I also wish to thank colleagues Vernon Dickson and Asher Milbauer at FIU, Jason Blake, Igor Maver and Eva Sicherl at the University of Ljubljana, and Tomaž Onič, Tjaša Mahor,

Before proceeding further, I wish to acknowledge a crucial point regarding the odd juxtaposition ventured here between a political and humanitarian crisis involving tens of thousands of desperate, needy refugees with cultural festivities celebrating the works of Shakespeare in a country such as Slovenia. The ongoing immigration question operates in the public sphere of the nation, and continues to circulate widely in news cycles, social media, and political decision-making in the country. When I last visited Slovenia in the summer of 2019, concern about immigration remained prevalent, operating in a discourse of policed borders and barriers, barbed wire, and tragic drownings in the Kolpa river that separates south-central Slovenia from Croatia. Such narratives seemed to me to generally frame the strangers as illegal, unwelcome, and uninterested in learning the Slovenian language and adapting to the culture and religion of their new home. Just as every American citizen currently espouses some belief—inflected by culture, political inclination, language, and geography—concerning *our* immigration policies, so too, in Slovenia, is the "plight of the stranger" very much in the public eye, on everyone's tongue. This issue touches everyone.

In contrast, Shakespeare is *not* on everyone's mind in Slovenia, although this poetry-loving nation does often confront him, and when it does so, I believe the codes of contact tend to establish the English author and his works as iconic, a welcome, and revered import from the north. Furthermore, such contact is primarily experienced through the realms of education (in the *osnovne šole*—primary schools, *gimnazije*—high schools, and the English faculties of the Universities of Ljubljana and Maribor) and cultural production (such as at the *Mladi levi* festival in Ljubljana in August 2019, featuring the Sardinian adaptation of *Macbeth/Macbettu*, written by Alessandro Serna). Shakespeare in Slovenia is *not* typically viewed through a political prism, and attitudes of "stranger danger" rarely if ever attach to him. In the context of the 2015–16 Slovenian refugee crisis, counterpoised with roughly simultaneous celebrations of Shakespeare, this essay seeks primarily to gently question the past and future reception of the author and his works; I am much less interested in, nor qualified to condemn or condone Slovenia's handling of its influx of Syrian immigrants. I bring these two separate realms to bear upon each other here because, when held together, they usefully shed light on how Slovenia defines and approaches its "neighbors," and in so doing, constructs and positions itself as a European nation on the continent's southern border.[4]

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and Michelle Gay Gadpaille at the University of Maribor for their commentary, friendship and encouragement.

4 In thinking of both Shakespeare and the Syrian refugees as Slovenia's "neighbors," I purposefully if stealthily follow in the tracks of Slavoj Žižek. In his *Refugees, Terror and Other Troubles with the Neighbors* (2016), he appraises both the promise and the problematics of Middle Eastern immigration to central

Slovenian Geographies

Claiming Slovenia—the smallest and most homogenous (linguistically, socially, ethnically) nation-state to emerge from the Balkan wars of the 1990s—as part of the Mediterranean world may initially seem outlandish. Under the orbit of the Austro-Hungarian empire until the end of WW I, and then part of the Yugoslav federation from 1918–91, the country bears witness everywhere to its Austrian and Slavic filiations.

Much of its food, music, and architecture, as well as religious, political, and social practices show strong links to Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, and Zagreb. Geographically and geologically, such connections are also obvious: the Julian Alps connect Slovenia and Austria (and the northeast corner of Italy); the Pannonian plain characterizes the eastern-most regions of the country and flows on into Hungary. Indeed, Slovenia identifies itself officially as a tiny alpine nation, and its national tourism board employs slogans locating it at the "green heart of Europe" and on "the sunny side of the Alps."[5] The alpine nature of the country seems ubiquitous—schools break for one week in February for "ski vacation"; mountain trekking is pursued religiously, and hikers halt for refreshments at a *koča*, a hut serving up a variety of food and beverages to sustain high-altitude perambulations; the country's iconic landmark, Triglav, the three-headed summit that every Slovene aspires to surmount, appears on the flag. According to this mapping, Slovenia is a small, mountain country located at the southeast flank of central-western Europe.

However, I assert that Slovenia's Mediterranean aspect overlays and complements its alpine identity. Why? First, the western reaches of the country include an (admittedly small) Adriatic seacoast, including the towns of Portorož, Piran, Izola and the country's major port, Koper, all sandwiched tightly between Croatia and Italy. This littoral realm, defined by its proximity to the Adriatic, is essentially Mediterranean in aspect, demeanor, and

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and western Europe. The most basic grasp of human rights and human dignity would seem to dictate that these travelers—exiles from war, tyranny, and economic deprivation—be accorded welcome and opportunity in Europe; yet their otherness, marked especially in terms of culture, religious practice, and languages, keeps them suspended in realms of distrust and distance. In the present context, it's worth noting that Žižek, global philosopher and public intellectual, who now holds academic positions in London and New York, is Slovenian. He took his degrees from the University of Ljubljana, where he continues to hold a position at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, as a Professor of Philosophy.

5 Both of these slogans are claimed by other lands in Europe as well. The "green heart" moniker has been widely used by Luxembourg, Austria, and Croatia, as well as Slovenia. "Sunny side" is more distinctly Slovenia's brand; as far as I can determine, only the Tyrol region of northern Italy has also attempted to employ the slogan.

perspective. In this regard, it's worth recalling that Trieste was long the major Austro-Hungarian seaport, and as such, it was ethnically and demographically very much a Slovene city (Trst) prior to its violent Italianization following WW I. For many Slovenes, Trieste remains symbolically and culturally, if not politically, Slovenian—it is perceived as a northern extension of their seacoast. This western region of the country, and its karstic hinterlands stretching inland about ten to fifteen kilometers, is Mediterranean in much the same manner that the Istrian peninsula and the Dalmatian coast of Croatia are.

Secondly, for much of its history, Slovenia has been a land of passage, a realm that peoples journeyed through on their way elsewhere. The ancient Romans traversed these lands from west to east, journeying south of the Alps via the Postojna Gate and then through the mountain pass at modern-day Trojane, carrying their empire to the Pannonian plain and beyond. Emona (now Ljubljana, the capital) and Celeia (now Celje), both originated as Roman settlements—*castra*—along this path. Many medieval crusaders, on their way to Jerusalem, followed this same route. In terms of Adriatic seafaring, Piran, the jewel of Slovenia's seacoast, was a fifteenth century Venetian outpost. As already noted, the country bears many traces of the passage of the Austro-Hungarians, traveling southwest from Vienna to Trieste, or west-northwest from Budapest to Italy. The southern pathway of the famed "Orient Express" railroad, the Simplon, traversed Slovenia between Venice and Belgrade. And, as the northwestern frontier of Tito's Yugoslavia, Slovenia served as the gateway to Western Europe for all the Balkans. If, following Shakespeare's lead in plays such as *Comedy of Errors, Twelfth Night*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Othello, Antony and Cleopatra,* and *The Tempest*, we imagine the conceptual Mediterranean as a fluid terrain—both oceanic and continental—of passage and encounter with the "other," then Slovenia, a transit nation, might be said to embody a northern outpost of this same Mediterranean world.

An alpine nation at the southern margin of the Euro-zone; or a Mediterranean realm at the northern fringe of these oceanic waters and coastal lands of voyage and passage: this I believe is a false choice. As a diminutive country of crossroads, Slovenia should ideally embrace *both* of these geographical and cultural inclinations. Embodying both of these perspectives, Slovenia—transit nation *and* "the sunny side of the Alps"—should not place one of these views above the other, should neither tilt predominantly one way—towards Europe and the Alps—nor the other—towards the Mediterranean and the south. That being said, I suggest that Slovenia's handling of the Syrian refugee crisis from 2015–17, when contrasted with its reception of Shakespeare in 2016, seems to point at such unbalanced preferences. In celebration of the quadricentennial of his death, "Shakespeare," an immigrant or import from white, Anglo-northern, transalpine Europe, was given safe passage and warmly embraced throughout

Slovenia and especially in the nation's capital, Ljubljana, its political and cultural center. Simultaneously, refugees from far-distant southern and eastern—that is, Middle Eastern—Mediterranean countries, seeking to traverse the country on their way to Germany, Norway, or Sweden, were treated roughly, not warmly welcomed. Either their journeys through the country were tightly controlled by police, internment camps, and prescribed routes of passage, or they were entirely blocked from entry, stranded in limbo at the southern border as various European governments, human rights organizations, and NGOs tussled over their fate. This dichotomy, between Shakespeare's reception and the immigrants' rejection, came into particularly sharp focus in the spring and summer of 2016.

Authorial Geographies

Prior to progressing any further, I wish to establish and make transparent my own critical position as an observer; I am a mono-lingual American citizen, married to a Slovene-American whose parents were born there but immigrated to Chicago in the 1950s. With my wife and her family, I have visited Slovenia repeatedly ever since 1989, when it was still a republic of Yugoslavia. These periodic journeys were personal, concerned primarily with maintaining and strengthening familial bonds linking her American family to numerous relatives and close friends still living in Slovenia. As such, my initial experiences of the country were neither professionally inclined nor politically motivated. Rather, these trips, usually ten days to two weeks in duration, were characterized by family gatherings, story-telling, and Bacchic celebrations of family milestones (such as the so-called *spominski dan*, "day of remembrance," in 2006, reuniting more than fifty American and Canadian family members who gathered in Drašiči, Bela Krajina to commemorate the centennial of the birth of my wife's paternal grandparents). These vacations typically included a smattering of touristic sightseeing as well, though never enough to satisfy my intense curiosity about the home country of my in-laws.

This thirst to learn much more about Slovenia, and explore it thoroughly, was satisfied from February to July 2017, however, when I enjoyed a six-month sabbatical in the country. I lived in Ljubljana with my teenage son; I taught a graduate course on Shakespeare at the University of Maribor, and an American poetry seminar at the University of Ljubljana. This extended stay in Slovenia afforded me a much deeper and more professional knowledge of the country. I also met and became close friends with many Slovenes outside of my "family circle." Because I am a relatively poor language learner, easily tongue-tied, however, my experiences and understandings, then and now, were mediated in and through English, a *lingua franca* widely understood and spoken well by many Slovenes. At that time, I did not take a keen interest in Slovenian politics generally, nor in the

immigrant situation particularly. My conversations with Slovene students and friends tended to address other topics, such as the place of English studies in Slovene life and work; the construction of educational and health-care systems within the state; societal mores and customs regarding family life and the "everyday"; and the harsh financial realities faced by many Slovenians in a post-communist, Westernized market-based economy, such that many university graduates and mid-career professionals are tempted to relocate to the north and west (Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, England, France, and Spain) in order to find gainful employment. And always the question: where to travel next with my son, and what to see and do there, and where to eat?

When political conversations did arise, these usually turned on American issues (gun culture, the 2016 election and the policies and pronouncements of the Trump administration, our increasingly divisive politics) or broader European topics, such as the threat posed by Brexit to the EU, or the spring 2017 French elections. No one in my orbit seemed to want to converse much about Slovenia's own political issues, nor were Slovenes particularly eager to discuss (or give notice to) refugees in their midst. Thus, for me at the time, the Syrians and other immigrants were invisible, their presence recorded primarily through ubiquitous graffiti expressing either support for, or violent opposition toward, these "neighbors"—to again resort to Žižek's apt term. It is only now, having returned to my American home in Miami—where questions concerning the reception and treatment of immigrants and exiles always seem to prevail, and where my own near-term professional goals and research agenda occasion an examination of Shakespeare's reception and local meanings here at this particular crossroads of the Americas—that I find myself retrospectively posing the same two linked questions about Slovenia. How, *there*, was the immigrant received? And how is and was Shakespeare grasped? And too: can the latter appropriation be meaningfully reformed or re-shaped (in the classroom, and elsewhere) to better lean into the former (more politically and socially urgent) question?

I am cognizant of the quixotic, even foolish nature, of the proposed intervention I envision. As an American outsider with neither fluency in the Slovenian language nor, as yet, any real contact with the refugee community there, the critique that follows is highly provisional. Who am I to criticize the manner in which tiny and homogenous Slovenia (both in public and in private) reacted to these "Mediterranean" guests asking for safe transit through, and kind hospitality within, their "alpine" nation—especially since as an observer from afar, I was and remain completely untouched by the multiple challenges created by this crisis of contact with the other? As an American citizen, living in Miami, would I not be on much firmer ground asking the same kinds of questions concerning my own country's horrific treatment of Central American immigrants during the summers of 2018 and

2019? Who am I, who cannot read the most admired Slovene authors, the poet France Prešeren and the novelist Ivan Cankar, except in English translation, to criticize their own practices and tastes in importing, translating, and accommodating the works of Shakespeare into their language and their milieu? And yet: my experience teaching Shakespeare's Mediterranean plays to Slovene university students in spring 2017, in Maribor, and especially their warm and complex reactions to these texts, hints at the aptness of the *micro*-intervention I propose here. It may well be time for a change of approach in Slovenian Shakespeare, a turning away from *Hamlet* to look afresh at *Othello*, glancing away from *As You Like It* to re-view and re-appraise plays like *Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night.*

Slovenia and Immigration

Since declaring its independence as a sovereign nation in June 1991, tiny Slovenia, whose population has long hovered around two million, has been buffeted by two major immigration crises. The first of these, lasting from 1991–2002, brought tens of thousands of Bosnian refugees fleeing the Balkan wars to Slovenia; though fellow Slavs, many of these individuals were Muslim, and visibly "other" in terms of race and cultural practices, too. Slovenia's stance towards these exiles was problematic: the country refused them full integration. Instead, interpreting the Temporary Protection Act (1997) in a limited manner, Slovenia only granted the Bosnians temporary housing; they were denied employment and other rights guaranteed by TPA, such as education and health care. Enduring a shadow-life full of hardship and deprivation, many of these refugees chose to leave Slovenia for Germany, Sweden, and Norway, where they could more easily acquire citizenship, work, and other basic rights. In 2002, those few Bosnians remaining in Slovenia were given permanent residency, and allowed to apply for citizenship; however, ten years of invisibility and second-class integration ensured continued economic—and psychic—difficulties. Critics have characterized Slovenia's treatment of the Bosnians as a program of "hidden repatriation": a covert strategy designed to send the refugees packing—either back to their (southern) homes in post-war Bosnia, or on to other (northern) European nations, wealthier, larger and better able to integrate them—due to the inhospitable welcome they found in Slovenia (Vrečer 2010).

After twelve years of relative stability, from about 2003–15, a span in which Slovenia became increasingly European[6] and northern-looking (or

[6] Slovenia entered the European Union in 2004; converted its currency to the Euro in January 2007; and gained admittance to the border-free Schengen zone in December 2007. For the first six months of 2008, Slovenia acted as the first former communist-bloc country to assume the presidency of the EU.

Alpine) in its identity and its political leanings,[7] the tiny nation suffered a second immigration crisis, from 2015–17. Alongside the rest of "fortress" Europe, "crossroads" Slovenia struggled to provide humane reception and basic welfare to hundreds of thousands of refugees from war-ravaged Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq—exiles from across the south-eastern Mediterranean—streaming across its borders, seeking shelter in north-western, trans-Alpine Europe. The crisis began in earnest for Slovenia in September 2015, when Hungary closed down its southern borders; the refugees quickly shifted to the "western Balkans" route through Croatia and Slovenia as their preferred pathway into Europe. Although most refugees perceived Slovenia only as a temporary haven, aspiring to move on to wealthier, larger countries like Austria and Germany, crossing into Slovenia from Croatia was considered significant, because of Slovenia's inclusion in the border-free Schengen zone. Thus, the border between the two countries became a highly-contested militarized ground. From October 2015 to March 2016, none of the efforts made by Slovenia to control refugees crossing from Croatia worked effectively. Border police, army reinforcments, pepper spray, daily quotas of immigrants allowed to cross over, even the construction of a razor-wire fence: all these mechanisms failed to stem the tide of refugees flooding into the country. By early November, an estimated 180,000 had crossed into Slovenia; by January 2016, 420,000 had entered. Consequently, on 9 March 2016, Slovenia offically closed its border with Croatia, allowing entry only to those few refugees who wished to apply for Slovene citizenship. Refugees already in the country were either forced northward to Austria, or redirected to the south and southeast, to Croatia, Serbia, or Macedonia.[8]

Slovenia continued to struggle to find a humane response to these largely invisible and unwanted refugees throughout 2016 and 2017;

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[7] Consider as evidence of this turn to the north, Slovenia's failed bid, along with Austria and Italy, to host the 2006 Winter Olympics in the Julian Alps; and its ongoing spats with southern neighbor, Croatia, concerning coastal and sea-faring lanes, fisheries, and proprietorship over wine regions and branding. These disputes are typically resolved, if at all, in Brussels, not in Ljubljana or Zagreb.

[8] See "Migrant Crisis: Hungary Closes Border with Croatia." *BBC.com* 17 October 2015; "Migrant Crisis: Slovenia Sets Limit of 2500 People a Day." *BBC.com* 18 October 2015; James Politi, "Slovenia Struggles to Cope with Migrant Crisis." *Financial Times* 27 October 2015; "Slovenia Starts Building Fence to Control Flow of Refugees." *The Guardian* 11 November 2015; Jennifer Rankin, "Croatia and Slovenia Impose Limits on Refugee Numbers." *The Guardian* 26 February 2016; "Migrant Crisis: Slovenia Moves to 'Shut Down' Balkans Route." *BBC.com* 9 March 2016; Tim Hume and Barbara Arvanitidis, "Migrant Crisis: Misery Builds in Greek Transit Camp after Migrant Route Sealed." *CNN.com* 10 March 2016; Anthony Faiola, "7 Things to Know about the Incredibly Complicated Migrant Crisis." *The Washington Post* 11 March 2016; and *Razor-Wired: Reflections on Migration Movements through Slovenia in 2015*; Šalamon and Bajt (2016).

moreover, while political rhetoric and media attention emanating from the capital, Ljubljana, was plentiful, the refugees were marginalized and confined in camps near the borders of Croatia and Austria. It appears that most Slovenians, including those in the capital, neither laid eyes on, nor made actual contact with, these short-term neighbors—except on their televisions and computer screens.[9] In reviewing the country's response, Slovenia has been accused of racist, xenophobic, and Islamophobic practices by some human rights organizations and activists.[10] From my perspective as an American citizen, such struggles of a national government and its border patrol agents and immigration and customs officials to deal humanely with huge numbers of refugees amassing along the southern border, asking for reception and welcome in a host country, and the resulting political divides, media coverage and cries of malfeasance from human rights activists in that host country: all of this seems *very* familiar.

Shakespeare Comes to Slovenia

Simultaneously, in the spring and summer of 2016, Slovenia, and Ljubljana in particular—the country's cultural and intellectual capital—welcomed Shakespeare as though he were a northern celebrity, a luminous and transcendent author conveying universal truths especially fit for the nation. Certainly, the works of Shakespeare were not new to Slovenia in 2016; his plays, and particularly *Hamlet* and the major tragedies, have long been known and staged, first in German, and since 1886, in Slovene.[11] The major

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9 See Liam Deacon, "Migrant Crisis Could Spark European War, Slovenian PM Suggests." *Breitbart News* 9 September 2016; Verdan Pavlič, "Slovenia Adopts New Anti-Migrant Measures at Border with Croatia." *Total Croatia News* 27 January 2017; Sophie Casimes, "10 Important Facts about Refugees in Slovenia." *The Borgen Project* 8 July 2017; and Laura Smith-Spark, "Europe's Top Court Rules that Austria, Slovenia can Deport Asylum Seekers." *CNN.com* 26 July 2017.

10 According to one critic, Slovenia's "political elites… branded refugees as a threat to national security and [national] identity. Calls for a humanitarian response to the crisis have disappeared from the political discussion… protests against new refugee centers have increased… In Slovenian society, prejudice against ethnic and religious minorities runs deep." See Neža Kogovšek Šalamon, "Slovenia Built a 'Corridor' to Move Refugees Straight Through the Country." *Open Society Foundations: Voices* 2 February 2016. For evidence that the debate concerning refugees rages on at Slovenia's border with Croatia in particular, even into summer 2018, confer the coverage of, and vitriolic commentary in response to, a Pakistani refugee who drowned attempting to swim across the Kolpa river into Slovenia; see Boštjan Videmšek, "Smrt v Kolpi," *Delo* 14 July 2018.

11 *Hamlet, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet,* and *King Lear* were performed in German in Ljubljana in 1779/1780, whilst the city was still under the sway of Austro-Hungarian rule from Vienna. *Othello* was the first play to be performed in

comedies, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* are also known and often performed, in Slovenian translations, in venues like the Slovenian National Theater Drama (SNG) in Ljubljana, and the Slovene National Theatre in Maribor as well. Furthermore, as was mentioned earlier, courses in Shakespeare are a standard component of the English curricula at the Universities of Ljubljana and Maribor, and as Cvetka's anecdote at the head of this essay indicates, in their final years at *gimnazija*, Slovene teenagers are likely to encounter a handful of Shakespearean plays and poems in their English lessons, and perhaps even travel to London to see a play at the Globe Theatre or another venue in the West End. And finally, when observed in the context of the *global* commemorations, celebrations, and considerations of Shakespeare's life and works transpiring throughout 2016—the 400th anniversary of his death—what occurred in Ljubljana from January to September 2016 does not seem that unusual or extraordinary. It is only when viewed through the prism of the *local* sphere that the rhetoric of hospitality, warm welcome, and supposedly shared intelligibility afforded Shakespeare in Slovenia stands in vivid contrast to the narrative of "otherness" and alienation cast upon the Syrian and other Middle Eastern migrants attempting to cross into and through Slovenia concurrently.

As I begin to survey these Shakespearean celebrations of 2016, I need to admit that I was in Slovenia for ten days during that summer, from late June to early July. Because this was another family vacation, centered on renewing connections with dear relatives and establishing initial contact with faculty at the University of Maribor, where I already knew I would be teaching the following spring, I did not search out any of the Shakespearean events described below, nor did I investigate or ask many questions about the immigration crisis, then in full swing. Ironically, I did tangentially brush up with both of these questions—Shakespeare and immigration—on the day I visited the Faculty of Arts at Maribor, on 4 July 2016. That mid-afternoon, I met my future colleagues, Professors Michelle Gadpaille, Tomaž Onič, and Tjaša Mohar for a get-acquainted coffee; that morning, these three had been busy administering and lecturing at the 9th Annual Maribor International Summer School, that year entitled, "Aspects of Migration: Historical and Current." Gadpaille's morning lecture and workshop had concerned aspects of immigration as revealed through two centuries of Canadian literature; Onič's talk in the afternoon was entitled, "Hath Not a Jew Eyes?: Shylock and the Renaissance Concept of Human Rights." My future colleagues, right then and there, were posing the sorts of questions I am asking here, belatedly.

Slovenian, in 1886. The first performance of *Hamlet* came in 1899; this play has remained particularly popular in Slovenia to the present moment. In 2013, at the behest of the National Theatre in Ljubljana, it received its fifth translation. See, Zlatnar Moe (2012, 2017) and Poniž (2014).

Just how comprehensive and extensive was Shakespeare's welcome in Slovenia that spring and summer of 2016? In short, it was very broad and encompassing. Consider the eight-month long "Shakespeare Forever" festival staged at the Cankerjev dom, the premier arts and culture center in Ljubljana. Beginning on 11 January 2016 and concluding on 1 September 2016, this arts extravaganza comprised a veritable smorgasbord of Shakespeareana fashioned for Slovenian consumption. The official program proclaimed the purportedly timeless nature of the author and his works:

> The New Year will begin with a tribute to a playwright and poet whose mastermind has marked the world to the extent that the dramatis personae from his majestic dramas appear even to inhabit contemporaneity. Indeed, four hundred years after Shakespeare's death it seems that, inherently, human nature has not changed at all: political intrigues, riots and wars, thirst for power and manipulation, ruthless power struggles, confused sons and daughters, forbidden and doomed love between the descendants of families engaged in long-standing feuds, between hostile clans, nations, religions or races. Life as a cruel yet nevertheless magical, invariably unique game of destinies and interests replete with passion. Shakespeare forever.[12]

Grounded in the claim that Shakespeare is "forever"—both timeless and of global significance everywhere—the festival aspired to import the English author and bathe him in Slovene waters (a symbolic baptism of sorts) while simultaneously demonstrating his purported universal and broad appeal. The festival was truly stunning, capacious and varied in promoting such aims. An exhibition on "Hamlet in Slovenia" was mounted early on, undoubtedly showcasing productions and translations of the play, perhaps tracing the history of the Slovene people through the performance of this ur-text. Performances in February of Verdi's opera, *Otello*, were complemented by lectures on the play by Serbian activist and intellectual Svetlana Slapšak.[13] This was complemented later by a staging of Verdi's *Macbeth* performed by a South African company reimaging the opera set in central Africa. A program note for this opera proclaimed that "th[is] stunning rendition

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[12] https://www.cd-cc.si/en/culture/music/shakespeare-forever. In an interview published on the day the festival commenced, Cankarjev dom director Uršula Cetinski proclaimed that "Shakespeare is very much alive in the spiritual sense, as we are able to discover ourselves through his characters, such as the bloodthirsty Macbeth and his ambitious wife, the mad Lear, and the confused Hamlet." "Shakespeare Remembered." *Slovenian Times* 11 January 2016.

[13] Although I hypothesize a general lack of connection between these Shakespeare events and the Syrian and Middle Eastern migrants, these lectures by Slapšak might have broached such linkages, given her personal biography and scholarly interests. A program notice hinted that "'race' in Europe" would be under discussion, obviously an important factor with *Othello / Otello*.

of *Macbeth* by excellent South African vocalists who are also brilliant performers invites speculations as to whether Shakespeare wasn't perhaps a traveler who experienced the black African continent first-hand."[14]

Claims about "global Shakespeare" were furthered through screenings of acclaimed film adaptations of the plays, such as Welles' *Othello*, Polanski's *Macbeth*, Kurosawa's adaptation of *King Lear*, *Ran*, and Jarman's *Tempest*. These are indeed iconic, provocative and highly significant film adaptations, but they are also dated, and they come from afar: Welles, 1951, filmed on location in Morocco, Venice, and Rome; Polanski, 1971, filmed throughout the British Isles; Jarman, 1979, filmed in a Warwickshire country house; and Kurosawa, 1985, thoroughly Japanese. The freshest of these films, *Ran*, was thirty-one years old in 2016. This begs the question, why not include, of particular interest and moment for a Slovene audience, a screening of Ralph Fiennes' 2011 *Coriolanus*, filmed in Belgrade and elsewhere in Serbia and Montenegro, distinctly contemporary in setting and urgency, with an international cast including three Serbian actors, Slavko Štimac, Dragan Mićanović, and Radoslav Milenković?

Similarly, the festival also ventured an evening with British actors Julian Rhind-Tutt, Jonathan Slinger, and Angela McHale, whose task was to consider "Shakespeare as the quintessential English poet, who still lives in the British consciousness… Shakespeare the global dramatist sublimely encapsulating the human condition."[15] I've seen Slinger perform twice on stage, as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* at London's Roundhouse Theatre in Camden; and the following summer, as Hamlet, in a Royal Shakespeare Company production in Stratford-upon-Avon. He was terrific in both roles, especially the 2012 Malvolio, and I can imagine him serving as a superb spokesperson for the playwright's universal appeal. Indeed, the program promised that the actors would "invite discussion about what Shakespeare means to a modern Slovenian audience as well as an English one." I am confident that the conversation was captivating, but the absence of at least one Slovenian or "Yugoslav" actor in this discussion seems surprising, if not short-sighted. There is one connection, however, among this trio and the host country: Rhind-Tutt is married to Nataša Zajc, a Slovenian-born make-up artist and yoga instructor; both he and their son speak Slovenian, and the couple keep a home in Slovenia as well as the UK.

Later in the festival, proposing yet another take upon the author's global cachet, his resonance for all: a musical staging of the Sonnets aimed

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[14] It has been well-established by recent scholars that Shakespeare was *not* such a traveler, and asking this question seems to imply a type of racial universalism on the author's part that is untenable in light of recent scholarship on Shakespeare and race, both in his time and in our contemporary moment. See, among others, Hall (1995), Johnson (1997), Loomba (2002), and Thompson (2013).

[15] https://www.cd-cc.si/en/culture/theater-and-dance/shakespeare-in-translation.

at schoolchildren, ages eleven and older. Then, harkening back to the earlier exhibition connecting *Hamlet* to Slovenia's history, later in the summer came an exhibition of Slovenian photographers, meditating on "Timeless Ophelia": given that the most fixed images of the heroine depict either her madness or her death, one wonders about these photographs. Images perhaps of young Slovenian women bedecked in flowers, running madly through Slovenian mountain pastures, such as Pokljuka or Velika Planina; or, following Millais' famous mid-Victorian painting of drowning Ophelia, perhaps the photographs reinterpreted her as despairing and destitute young women, dragged down to "muddy death" in the flowing waters of the Sava, Soča, or Ljubljanica rivers? Further extending the festival's seemingly endless emphasis on *Hamlet*, a re-imagined "comedy of errors" entitled "Hamlet and a Half," a seventy-minute show promising an orgy of metatheatricality, a "behind-the-scenes look at the staging of *Hamlet* in a central national theatre":[16] *Hamlet* for real, an unscripted, behind the curtains view of the SNG – Ljubljana, perhaps?

Other luminaries appeared in Ljubljana too, in order to deliver lectures as part of this festival. These included renowned Slovenian dramaturg and theatre practitioner Tomaž Toporišič, lecturing on "The Shakespeare Enigma"; and the celebrated Harvard University professor, Stephen Greenblatt, whose appearance in the capital marked the Slovenian translation of his 2004 biography, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*. In personal correspondence with Professor Greenblatt, I inquired about his visit to Ljubljana, and asked for his impressions of the country. He generously volunteered:

> As for my visit to Ljubljana and my talk in the Cankarjev dom, it was wonderful but absurdly brief. I slipped away from Venice, where I teach in a joint Harvard/Ca' Foscari program, and I only had 24 hours. I stretched it out as best I could – I had an unforgettable midnight walk – but I only had the most superficial encounter. What most struck me was the presence of poets in the national imagination – I'm thinking of the statues in the city and the sense that a significant number of people regarded their poets as crucial figures in their collective identity. As for my talk, I spoke about cultural mobility and Shakespeare, using my *Cardenio* experiment as a model.[17]

Greenblatt's gracious remarks are paradigmatic, uncovering not just the thrust of the entire "Shakespeare Forever" cultural celebration, but indeed Shakespeare's privileged status in Slovenia at that time, a moment of

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16 https://www.cd-cc.si/en/culture/theater-and-dance/jaka-andrej-vojevec-hamlet-and-a-half

17 Personal email, Stephen Greenblatt to James Sutton, 31 January 2020.

simultaneous political upheaval for the tiny nation due to its refugee crisis. Both the title of Greenblatt's seminal biography, *Will in the World*, and his lecturing on Shakespeare's "cultural mobility" in Ljubljana, point to the seemingly global, universal nature of this author, his works, *and* those who profess and/or perform him, who interpret him well. Thus, it was that Professor Greenblatt, justly considered one of our most accomplished contemporary scholars of Shakespeare, came to Ljubljana for an "absurdly brief… 24 hours" to speak on "my *Cardenio*."[18]

In fact, Shakespeare's "cultural mobility" transferred over to Greenblatt; his "passport" into the country was, in a very real sense, Shakespeare. Furthermore, though his visit was very short, Greenblatt's grasp of Slovenia was profound, genuine, authentic, not in the least "superficial": it *is* a nation haunted by, and shaped through, the legacy of its poets, most especially France Prešeren.[19] Such privileged perspectives were probably afforded to all the guests who came to Ljubljana that spring and summer professing or performing Shakespearean mobility: these include Mr. Slinger, Ms. McHale, and to a lesser extent Mr. Rhind-Tutt, who due to his marriage already "knew" the country and its many charms. Furthermore, it is *precisely* this Shakespearean currency, the author's cultural mobility, that literally permitted me to obtain a six-month visa to live and work in Slovenia, and be deeply, profoundly charmed by her, and her people, the following spring. Shakespeare was my "ticket," affording me passage into the halls of learning at the nation's two major universities, and by extension, granting me the freedom to travel widely, uninhibited, without hindrance or limitation, from Piran in the west to Lendava in the east, from Jesenice in the north to Metlika in the south. "Shakespeare Forever": the key to unlock the nation and its charming beauty, a key utterly unavailable to the Middle Eastern migrants and refugees, whose passage into or through the country was most certainly not charming, wholly unlike my experience, or Professor Greenblatt's.[20]

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18 https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~cardenio/index.html

19 As 23 April has come to be a national celebration of St. George and Shakespeare in England, "Prešeren Day," 8 February is a national holiday in Slovenia. This date marks the day of the poet's death in 1849; it is a day dedicated to poetry reading, cultural festivity and national literary awards. Furthermore, as Shakespeare has left his mark in countless ways on the English language, Prešeren shaped Slovene, and the nation-state's identity: his carmen figuratum poem, "Zdravljica," provides the uplifting text of the country's national anthem. The shape of this poem is a drinking glass: both lyric and the anthem proclaim, "cheers!"

20 Worth noting here too are the geographic trajectories of these travels to Slovenia. From Cambridge Massachusetts and then Venice Italy, Greenblatt accesses Ljubljana, the cultural capital. His journey is transatlantic, then trans-Adriatic: Venice washes into Slovenia, via Shakespearean capital. From Miami Florida (and Chicago, where my Slovene-American family lives), through Munich, then

Further evidence of Shakespeare's privileged status in Slovenia in 2016, and in Ljubljana particularly, is plentiful. Three examples—all emanating from major British purveyors of cultural capital, eagerly received in Slovenia—will suffice. First, as part of a global campaign, the British Council, aided by the local UK consulate in Ljubljana, created at least twenty-five short You-tube videos, under the rubric, "Shakespeare Lives in Slovenia 2016," allowing Slovenes to reflect on the author's significance in their lives.[21] Secondly, the BBC created a "New Shakespeare Songbook," "offering today's composers and musicians across Europe, the chance to respond afresh to these timeless texts." The Slovenia Trio Reverie met this call with a new Slovene version of Sonnet 130, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun," whose first line in Slovenian was "Ne, ona nima žametnih oci." The other countries where musicians contributed to the project: Austria, Switzerland, Norway, France, and the UK.[22] Finally, as part of a major venture sponsored by and emanating from the Globe Theatre in London, the so-called "Globe to Globe" *Hamlet*, seen in 197 countries in the span of two years, made its single appearance in Slovenia (performed here as everywhere in English) on 18 April 2016, at Ljubljana's National Theatre. This Slovenian production came very near the end of the global run, literally within its final week. The performance venues just prior to and immediately after this Slovenian production—Vatican City, 13 April; Trieste, 16 April; roman Carnuntum in Austria, 19 April; Elsinore, 21 April; and then back "home" to London for the 400th anniversary of the author's death, on 23 and 24 April 23—underscore how in the spring of 2016 Shakespeare was

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the Austrian Alps, down into Slovenia: my journey is also transatlantic, and then trans-Alpine, emulating another transit route for Shakespeare into Slovenia. Our journeys are relatively easy, light. The Syrians, they walk or trudge, burdened with memory and pain, across Turkey and Bulgaria, into Serbia and then Croatia, onto Slovenia and Europe: a trans-Asian path, full of obstacles and hardship. Shakespeare is indeed *not* their passport.

21 See https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/press/shakespeare-lives-2016; on 15 November 2015, at the height of the refugee crisis, the British Council Slovenia posted on its Facebook page the following message: "Shakespeare lives! In 2016 we invite the world to participate in a year-long celebration of Shakespeare's work on the 400th anniversary of his death. Throughout 2016, the Shakespeare Lives programme will bring together all areas of the organisation to create a truly worldwide celebration of his works. Find out more at http://www.shakespearelives.org#ShakespeareLives." To see the videos, confer https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCW253C2lGmg2XSkLmRluy8g. I have not had the opportunity to review these videos carefully.

22 See http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1xGm88lzDdNMnDdgL5qbD5v/new-shakespeare-songbook-slovenia. The song and video production are stunning, yet the company kept here is also telling: through Shakespearean appropriation, the Slovenia Trio Reverie signals their affiliations with *northern* Europe.

employed to connect Slovenia directly to the power-centers of northern Europe (Dromgoole 2017: 363).

Next Steps and New Directions

As an American academic who was responsible for, and deeply invested professionally in, an extensive Shakespearean festival in Miami and throughout South Florida occurring during spring 2016, it would be hypocritical for me to too aggressively criticize and attack what happened "around Shakespeare" in Ljubljana at the same time.[23] Indeed, Shakespearean "cultural mobility" in 2016 was a global phenomenon, radiating out from Stratford-upon-Avon and London to all corners of the world. Nevertheless, critique and examination of the ethical and political dimensions of such cultural festivals, as they (fail to) respond to local and temporal needs and realities, seems especially urgent, not least because 2023 (the quadricentennial of the publication of the First Folio) looms ever closer.[24]

In this regard, it seems that the "Shakespeare Forever" cultural festival in Ljubljana, and other events celebrating Shakespeare in Slovenia in 2016, mostly or entirely failed to engage with the most pressing political issue of the day, namely the plight of Syrian and other Middle-Eastern refugees passing (invisibly) through the country, or marginalized and interred at makeshift camps proximate to the country's borders. Transalpine and thoroughly European, the supposed universal humanity of Shakespeare was embraced, while the transit of the Mediterranean migrants was inhumanely thwarted.

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23 *First Folio!: The Book that Gave us Shakespeare* was a national tour organized jointly by the Folger Shakespeare Library and the American Library Association. Throughout 2016, one of the many copies of the First Folio owned by the Folger was exhibited at a single site in each state, for a period of one month. Following a competitive bidding and selection process in 2014-2015, my University was chosen as the Florida host of the exhibition, scheduled for February 2016. Complementing the museum display of the Folio, shown everywhere under glass and opened to *Hamlet*, Act 3, scene 1 ("To be or not to be"), my team organized a wide-ranging program of associated events, activities and lectures, both at the University and throughout Miami and South Florida.

24 To this end, I hope to author a (self)critique of the First Folio exhibition in Miami in the very near term, as the final chapter of a scholarly monograph considering the importations and appropriations of Shakespeare within Miami and South Florida. That examination, and the monograph as a whole, will turn upon issues of Shakespeare and engagement with local identities and cultural affiliations, and questions of race, immigration and exile—some of the same questions at play within this essay addressing Shakespeare within a very different, yet comparable geographical and cultural space.

However, rather than pointless, self-righteous hand-wringing about missed opportunities *then*, instead I wish to propose a new and fresh course of Shakespearean study, one that could be instituted at either the University of Ljubljana or the University of Maribor, or both, with relative ease. This course would pointedly attempt to link the study of the author's plays to questions concerning the "neighbors" amongst us. Such connections would be forged in three distinct modalities: first, and primarily, through intentional and deep classroom engagement with Shakespeare's Mediterranean plays; secondly, via guest lectures given by Slovenian professionals conversant with either Shakespeare or immigrant communities; and finally, through tactical "service" work in and with the community, asking students to encounter Shakespeare and/or the "neighbor" in their everyday lives.[25]

The envisioned course would be grounded upon a sustained involvement—through close reading, lecture, and discussion—with those plays that "swim" in the waters and lands of the Mediterranean. Although comedies such as *Love's Labor's Lost, The Merry Wives of Windsor, As You Like It,* and *All's Well that Ends Well* are magnificent, they are too thoroughly English or French to be of much use, to resound, in contemporary Slovenia. Precisely the same problem attends all the so-called "English" history plays.[26] And despite their inexhaustible brilliance, I assert that three of the four great tragedies as per A.C. Bradley—*Hamlet, Macbeth* and *King Lear*—should be set aside, for now, in Slovenia. It's time for something new: a fervent consideration of those plays that most urgently confront otherness, those plays where difference—racial, religious, sexual, cultural, linguistic, or

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[25] This course would be a mirror image of a course I have developed, and taught, at my home institution, at both the graduate (MA) and undergraduate levels, since returning from Slovenia in fall 2017. "Shakespeare and Miami?" explores the relevance and meanings of Shakespeare in the local context of South Florida through a) deep engagement with the oceanic and Mediterranean plays; b) incorporation of guest perspectives from others in the community who are "at work" with Shakespeare, whether in high-school or middle-school classrooms; on local stages, as directors, actors or creatives; in courts of law; or elsewhere; and c) required extramural work that propels students to take the course's questions and preoccupations outward into the community.

[26] In my Spring 2017 Shakespeare course at the University of Maribor, I was required to teach one course from each of the four major genres. Thus, *Richard III* was the first play the students encountered. Although many of them loved it, talking about it and writing on it throughout the semester, their engagements did not hinge upon questions of identity or difference. Like most students of the play, they were intrigued by its portrayal of villainy, and its representation of a form of *realpolitik* as prevalent now as when Shakespeare wrote the play. Arguably the greatest problem with the course I propose here is its necessary purgation of all the English history plays, a lacuna that exposes the course's overt preference for considerations of the topical and socio-culturally immediate over the generic and historically distant.

geographical—prevails and permeates every page. These plays are Shakespeare's oceanic plays, his multi-generic Mediterranean drama, plays of travel and resulting travail.[27]

Thus, the course would open with comedy, exploring in succession *The Comedy of Errors, Twelfth Night,* and *Merchant of Venice*. If time permits, we might also read and discuss *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*[28] Each of these three plays confronts alterity directly, and in each case, alienation is exacerbated by sea-faring. Travel and travail go hand in hand, and the comic ends of each play are at best, contrived, at worst, painful and pernicious. These plays' locales are also "close at hand" for Slovenians, especially Illyria—well-known to virtually all Slovenes as the Dalmatian coast of neighboring Croatia where so many of them spend one or two weeks at the seaside every summer—and Venice, three hours distant from Ljubljana by car, two hours by ferry from Piran to La Serenissima. When I taught *Merchant* in Maribor, my students—twelve Slovenes, eight young women from China, one Bosnian, one Montenegrin, and one young woman from Turkey—reacted strongly to the play's portrayal of religious intolerance, and several of them, unprompted, took weekend trips specifically to see the Rialto, the Piazza San Marco and the Doge's Palace, and most especially the Jewish ghetto.

Having broached the subject of religious cruelty and anti-Semitism, we would then move immediately to *Othello*, the central tragedy calling out for consideration in contemporary Slovenia, and literally the centerpiece of the course. In my experience, race and racial difference in homogenous Slovenia still go largely unnoticed or ignored, though there are some black and brown people living there.[29] I would also seek to complicate the students'

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27 For considerations of Shakespeare and the oceanic imagination, see Brayton (2012) and Mentz (2009). Confer de Sousa (2018) for an understanding of these plays and the kinds of cultural work that they perform that accords well with my own views. De Sousa was one of the lead scholars participating in the SAA seminar from which this piece grows.

28 Due to time constraints, we will not consider *Taming of the Shrew, The Two Gentleman of Verona,* or *Much Ado about Nothing*. Though broadly speaking these are "Italian" plays and thus might be considered Mediterranean, they are enveloped in a peninsular perspective. Difference is defined (weakly) by city of origin; in *Shrew*, for example, outsiders come from Florence and Pisa to study and court in Padua. There are no, or limited, oceanic views occasioned in these plays, no strangers washed up on shore in new and unsettling climes.

29 In my American poetry seminar at the University of Ljubljana, also taught during the Spring 2017 semester, my seven Slovenian students were at turns bemused, befuddled or just bored by the permeation of our national literature with questions about and conflict around race. They felt distant from the issue: race was our uniquely American problem, not theirs. The course I propose, and *Othello* in particular, would confront such attitudes.

reading of the play's central relationship, the marriage of Othello and Desdemona, by asking them to compare this treatment of interracial union to that imagined so frequently within their own national literature, within the *Lepa Vida* ("lovely Vida") theme that emerges in their folktales, and the poetry and fictions of authors such as Prešeren and Cankar, among others (Avsenik Nabergoj 2007).

Othello, the course's central provocation, will lead on elsewhere: to *Antony and Cleopatra*, and further explorations of the oft-troubled encounter between the European and the African; to *Timon of Athens*, manifesting again the life-altering nature of sea voyaging; and perhaps to *The Winter's Tale,* reworking *Othello* with a difference mediated through pastoral and a plethora of time, and whose secondary setting in a coastal Bohemia (which cannot be the land-locked Czech lands) might as well be imagined as the seashore and karstic hinterlands of western Slovenia.[30] The class would conclude with an appraisal of Shakespeare's final Mediterranean (perhaps Caribbean) play, *The Tempest*, which encapsulates and brings to a crescendo the course's prevailing concerns with oceanic alterity and troubled contacts between "neighbors."

The second element of the class design opens the lecture hall to outside perspectives. Who? Slovenian theater-makers and other creatives—directors, actors, dramaturgs, artistic directors—who have worked on translating Shakespeare to the local stage. Instructors at local primary schools (in Ljubljana for example, at leading *gimnazije* such as Bežigrad, Vič, and Poljane), most likely alumni of either the University of Ljubljana or the University of Maribor, who upon occasion teach Shakespeare in their advanced English classes. Radio personalities, who speak English (and German and Slovene) daily, to a national audience on *Radio SI*. Visitors from either the British or American embassies in Ljubljana, who can speak about the place of Shakespeare in their homelands. *And*, moving toward the course's other pole, professionals who have worked with Syrian and Middle Eastern immigrants, such as health-care providers, lawyers, human rights activists, and officials in NGOs.[31] Finally, if permitted to do so within the context of university and state mandates, I would ask my students to trail one

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30 *Antony and Cleopatra* is the major Roman tragedy demanding attention in the course, due to its incessant Mediterranean horizons. The other three Roman tragedies, *Titus Andronicus, Julius Caesar,* and *Coriolanus* are in fact too Roman, too Italianate, to demand our attention in this course. Also left out: *Romeo and Juliet*, which is also too peninsular, too much contained in, and defined by, its northern Italian contexts, shuttling betwixt and between Verona and Mantua.

31 The footnotes of this article provide a useful outline for such potential classroom guests. Why not invite dramaturg Tomaž Toporišič, artistic director Uršula Cetinski, Peace Institute director Neža Kogovšek Šalamon, and even philosopher Žižek to visit my class and lecture to my students?

of these visiting theater-making experts back out into the community, in order to make contact with local and living Shakespearean appropriations on the street, in the theatre, in the classroom, perhaps in Metelkova or along the banks of the Drava, during the Lent festival in Maribor. Or, if possible, I would encourage—not require—volunteer work at a health clinic, the Peace Institute, or a school or place of worship where informal and respectful encounters with "neighbors" might ensue, where conversation and story-telling between Slovene and Syrian might productively and respectfully occur.

In this manner, through deep classroom encounters with the Mediterranean plays, through consideration of Slovenian appropriations and adaptations and translations of Shakespeare, and through contacts forged with Syrian and other immigrant communities, and those who are working with them, my students and I could begin fashioning, on a very small scale, a useful bridge between Shakespeare and the Syrian, the (trans)alpine and the (trans)Mediterranean, on Slovenian soil. And thus, if in 2023, when the First Folio will celebrate its 400th birthday, more Shakespearean luminaries from around the globe should appear in Ljubljana to consider the author's cultural mobility, his work's seeming universality, perhaps then, Syrians and other immigrants will be invited to join in those festivities, claiming their rightful place in the theater of Shakespeare's globe.

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POVZETEK

SLOVENIJA, SIRCI IN SHAKESPEARE: NARODNOST, PRISELJEVANJE IN SHAKESPEAROVSKA PEDAGOGIKA NA MEJAH EVROPE

V prispevku obravnavamo praznovanja 400. obletnice smrti W. Shakespeara v Ljubljani, in sicer v luči sočasne krize, ki so jo povzročile migracije Sircev v Slovenijo in širše Evropo v letih 2015 in 2016. Na podlagi primerjave toplega kulturnega sprejema Shakespeara na eni strani, kar obenem kaže na univerzalnost njegovega dela, ter političnega in družbenega zavračanja migrantov na drugi strani, v prispevku predstavimo nekatere nove vidike za poučevanje Shakespearovih del na univerzi. Glavni namen je soočiti bralce s tem navideznim neskladjem.