

**2017 SAA Seminar: Shakespearean Migrants, Immigrants, Exiles, and Refugees Abstracts  
Leader: Scott Oldenburg, Tulane University 1**

**Kevin Chovanec, University of North Carolina,**

***Esther* and Exile: The Travelling Players and Performing across Cultural Borders**

The English travelling theater of the early modern period, once a subject of critical disparagement, has enjoyed reinvigorated interest and a buoyed reputation. Instead of focusing on the problems of this theater – the linguistic incoherence, the bawdy performance, the ‘mangled’ play-texts – scholars have begun trying to explain this (as Anston Bosman articulates it) “unexampled success” in the “history of cultural relations.” This paper participates in the critical reevaluation of this theater by focusing on *Esther*, a play in the repertoires of the travelers that was printed in *Englische Comedien und Tragedien* (1620 and 1628). The play reveals several of the player’s strategies for performing solidarity, particularly their use of the theme of exile, which was central to the biblical account of Esther. I argue that the text consciously employs a shared, Protestant typology of the Old Testament story to facilitate identification between the English players and their German audiences.

**Ton (A.J.) Hoenselaars, Utrecht University,**

**III May Day 1517: 500 Years On**

In recent months, *Sir Thomas More* has been appropriated to comment on the current refugee crisis. Studying a number of these examples, we are struck by a number of inconsistencies between the text and its application. The most frequent inconsistencies concern (1) the historical shift involved in the representation of early and late Tudor foreigners in London; (2) and with this shift, the suggestion that the play itself is a plea for refugees in 1590s London. Such appropriation of the material sends us back to the text of the play. A rereading of the play teaches us that: (i) there is very little in the play that refers to ‘refugees’. It is ‘strangers’ mainly, with economic interests, not religious refugees; (ii) the references to ‘refugees’ are few and far between. They may be found in the revised sections that survive in Thomas Heywood’s hand, and in Shakespeare’s hand. If the ‘refugee’ issue came in with Heywood and Shakespeare, it also came in during the revision of the play. This implies that during the revisions the alien issue was not defused – as Edmund Tilney demanded – but made more current. The general vagueness (though certainly not the absence) of the refugee issue in the play explains the liberty with which the modern media have been able to use it for their political agenda. This same vagueness could also explain the apprehension of the early modern censor, since also during the early modern period could this state of affairs lead to undesirable analogy and interpretation, and to political action with the play as its frame of reference.

**Michael Shumway, Wayne State University**

**Looking Outward: Refashioning Difference in the Urban Cultural Landscape**

As early as the 1530s, England began to embrace new policies regarding immigration, trade, and social welfare in an attempt to police the freedoms and mobility of the nation’s increasingly diverse population. Throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century, poor laws limited access to

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England's cities by discouraging migration and criminalizing unauthorized travel. Meanwhile a series of acts and proclamations sought to insulate the economy from the potentially destabilizing influence of foreign labor by assimilating immigrant workers into the nation's markets. The result is an urban/rural divide organized around the disparate treatment of country migrants and immigrant workers. Out of this dynamic emerge new genres that reify the exclusivity of urban spaces and, in so doing, fashion a regional identity defined by points of cultural intersection and shared experience rather than nationality and citizenship. City comedies and cony-catching pamphlets in particular establish an urban popular culture by celebrating the similarities between skilled immigrant workers and urban citizens while victimizing the unskilled migrant poor. This reorganization of colonialist self/other binaries contributes to the formation of a more localized sense of Englishness that has the potential to subvert the foundations of larger canonical nationalist projects. In this paper I argue that Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* and Robert Greene's *Disputation Betweene a Hee Conny-Catcher and a Shee Cony-Catcher* establish the foundations of this urban identity by celebrating the victimization of the country migrant and his incompatibility with urban culture.

**Amy L. Smith, Kalamazoo College**

***Hamlet* in “the jungle”: Representing Shakespeare in the Calais Refugee Camp”**

In two interviews with Syrian refugees, Hamlet is mentioned, and Globe actors performed Hamlet at a refugee camp in Calais. This paper explores the role of Shakespeare in the current Syrian refugee crisis. Why is Shakespeare playing a role in understanding the crisis and supporting those in the midst of it? Is Shakespeare connected to social justice for Syrians and/or outsiders witnessing their crisis? If so, why? What does it mean for a western theater troupe to offer Shakespeare to people desperate for solace--and material aide?

**Susan G. O'Malley, Graduate Center, CUNY,**

**Response**