

## ***For ‘Doing Empathy Shakespeare’s Way’***

*‘Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed  
until it is faced’* James Baldwin

**‘Doing Empathy Shakespeare’s Way’** – a challenge for inclusiveness – that reframes

**Shakespeare’s speech for Thomas More to the Evil May Day rioters 1517** from Antony Munday’s collaborative play *Sir Thomas More* (1603) for contemporary needs.

**\*Practicalities:** A **play** and a **play-reading workshop** for 10 diverse players or 5 - if doubled. Reading time of the play is about 60 minutes. The **workshop** could have up to 20 members and takes 2 hours or longer. Some parts of the play may be cut - much can be adapted to local purposes.

**Context:** Shakespeare’s speech for Thomas More, Under-sheriff of London and humanist, shows him breaking with his culture’s hierarchies to rescue the Evil May Day rioters from exile and death. He uses the authoritarian language of the pulpit. This does not fit our ideas of egalitarian mediation. **‘Doing Empathy’** challenges class and racial inequalities, the divisive hierarchies of 2022. Shakespeare’s More is re-incarnated as More22, a systemic mediator, who locates the problem not in individuals or part-systems, but in the patterns of relationship and power that generate the problem. Collective solutions emerge from practices of empathy and equality – blaming is a problem, not a solution. To start on an equal footing with the rioters, More22 joins them in the heat of the moment, a first levelling move, that risks being judged by the King’s spies as ‘going native’. More22 hopes to get the rioters to help him ‘teach the King a lesson in compassion’ to shift the culture of violence that rules King and commoners alike. In heated conversations, More22 learns about the rioters’ lives of deprivation, and they understand that he has come to collaborate, not to judge, to move forward to a culture of empathy and forgiveness. More22 speaks with appropriate humility which empowers the rioters. To help all audiences imagine the horrors of exile, he uses Shakespeare’s scare tactics, because “I can’t think of anything else.” The rioters recognize that their collaborative efforts are mutual gifts of empathy and equality. Horizons expand - all are shocked to realize how easy it is to overlook strangers. The work of ‘Doing Empathy’ is a dramatic demonstration of empathy and equality in action that is offered to all audiences who participate in ‘Shakespeare’s Theatre of Equality.’ All of us are challenged to investigate whatever traces of racism and classism we have internalized as children of our time. All are invited to become more competent communicators in a world that demands the capacity and willingness to identify with ‘other strangers’, exiles and immigrants in need of welcome.

\*This play was developed by Michaela von Britzke as **part of the ‘Everything to Everybody’ project**, directed by Professor Ewan Fernie, which seeks to make the historical Birmingham Shakespeare Memorial Library accessible to all: <https://everythingtoeverybody.bham.ac.uk/activity>. For more information and for full texts of the play and the workshop, email [michaelavonb@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:michaelavonb@yahoo.co.uk)

**Selected parts of Shakespeare's Speech for Thomas More** that inspired  
*'Doing Empathy Shakespeare's Way'*:

Grant them removed, and grant that this your noise  
Hath chid down all the majesty of England;  
Imagine that you see the wretched strangers,  
Their babies at their backs and their poor luggage,  
Plodding to the ports and coasts for transportation (Add. II, 6.83-87),

And that you sit as kings in your desires,  
Authority quite silent by your brawl,  
And you in ruff of your opinions clothed;  
What had you got? I'll tell you: you had taught  
How insolence and strong hand should prevail,  
How order should be quelled; and by this pattern  
Not one of you should live an aged man,  
For other ruffians, as their fancies wrought,  
With self same hand, self reasons, and self right,  
Would shark on you, and men like ravenous fishes  
Would feed on one another... (Add. II, 6.88-99).

Say now the King  
Should so much come too short of your great trespass  
As but to banish you, whither would you go?  
What country, by the nature of your error,  
Should give you harbour? Go you to France or Flanders,  
To any German province, to Spain or Portugal,  
Nay, any where that not adheres to England,  
Why, you must needs be strangers: would you be pleased  
To find a nation of such barbarous temper,  
That, breaking out in hideous violence,  
Would not afford you an abode on earth,  
Whet their detested knives against your throats,  
Spurn you like dogs, and like as if that God  
Owed not nor made not you, nor that the claimants  
Were not all appropriate to your comforts,  
But chartered unto them, what would you think  
To be thus used? This is the strangers' case;  
And this your mountainish inhumanity (Add. II., 6.138-156).

---