

'Doing Empathy' Shakespeare's Way – Script for a Play Reading Workshop

'Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced'
James Baldwin

Here players and 'participating audiences' get involved with Shakespeare's speech for Thomas More to the Evil May Day rioters 1517 from Antony Munday's collaborative play Sir Thomas More (1603)¹

The heart of Shakespeare's message to the rioters is delivered by More in the heat of the conflict: "...what I hope to offer you – it's the most egalitarian thing I've got – as old as the world and as sharp as a butcher's knife! Just step into another's shoes -we become visible to each other, strangers turn friends!"

The practice of empathy is our everyday chance to collapse divisive hierarchies. It has the power to create systemic change towards equality and justice – possible futures of connecting us beyond borders



This play invites diverse audiences to play and explore obstacles and opportunities for creative collaboration across borders to strengthen the powers of community, solidarity and love - taking joy in our differences and similarities!

The play can be read as a whole or in stages as a more in depth process of exploring and collectively practicing empathy and collaboration for action.

¹ *Sir Thomas More*, ed. John Jowett, Original Text, Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle, revised by Henry Chettle, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood and William Shakespeare (in 1603), 2011/2015, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Developed by: Michaela von Britzke, systemic psychotherapist, MA 1982, Shakespeare MA, 2016. This play emerged in dialogue with friends from the *Everything to Everybody Project* at the University of Birmingham.

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List of contemporary and historical players used to attune readers to their roles (a handout)

A Stage Manager: - reads stage instructions, Act/Engagement headings, context markers to help with orientation as the play's concerns shift and remain the same in times and place from now to 1517 and back.

Five contemporary playwrights

Sarah, 25, black British, Nigerian origin. Shakespeare's complex characters appeal to her need to integrate her Nigerian culture and her British education. She keeps the conversation about the lasting effects of colonialism and slavery alive. The others love her for her hospitality of spirit and her potluck feasts for all the world – a gift and an appeal for belonging.

Mark, 23, white British. He feels that Shakespeare's understanding of the deepest root of our common humanity – that we are all capable of 'the worst and the best – is deeply inclusive, helping him to struggle with his 'White Privilege.' The others appreciate him for holding them to their inclusive standards!

Mia, 24, white, German immigrant, trusts that the practice of empathy will help to shift the fatal division between 'them' and 'us' that legitimized the Holocaust and colonialism and slavery, histories that inspire the play. It is a tiny seed she hopes will take root in the broken ground of our divided world.

Pat, 22, black British, Jamaican origin. He sees Shakespeare through the lens of his experiences as a child of the Windrush generation. He survived discrimination through a fervent belief in radical equality. He resonates to Shakespeare's disciplines of empathy and intimacy: they are his own survival tactics. The others love him for always trying to 'do empathy.' This fits him to double as More23, if required.

Terry 27, Irish (Republic). Ireland's historic entanglement with Britain commits him to anti-colonial and anti-racist politics. He sees that the Irish colonial experience became a template for/ of colonization not just for Britain. He burns to liberate marginalised voices and longs to belong. "What else? Don't we all? You are just too bloody scared to admit it!"

More and four historical rioters in 1517 and 2023

Violence is the rioters' response to pauperization after the King disregarded the historical More's warning not to "conspire with the rich against the poor" (*Utopia*, 1517). The rioters blame the strangers for their poverty, because - blinded by the ideology of Absolutist hierarchy - they can't 'see' the King at the root of their situation. Learning the arts of empathy and equality in their encounter with More23, they struggle for visibility and cross-border collaboration – today carried on by Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Extinction Rebellion (XR) and their rainbow coalitions.

The Mores in play: There are three Mores present in '*Doing Empathy*.'

1. The **historical More** who published *Utopia* in 1517 and attempted to save the rioters by 'words not weapons' but failed in his bold hope to break the rule of violence that imprisons King and commoners alike. He wore a hairshirt under his day clothes to remind him of his shortcomings and the fact that before God all sinners are equal – no hierarchies. His hairshirt kept him aware of the power of humility – that fits the systemic mediator's (More23) one-down position for shifting mountains.

2. **Shakespeare's More** – is a kindred soul whom Shakespeare allows to succeed in saving almost all lives - against historical evidence! He breaks with his culture's hierarchies by passing on the art of empathy to the lowly rioters who are delegated to face the 'mountainish inhumanity' that still divides us. This tough demand gives empathy its true bite for change, just as modern race theorists insist.

3. **More23** steps into the shoes of a modern systemic mediator/coach and his commitment to radical empathy and equality (see the Introduction). He asks to be informed about the history of colonialism and slavery and their persistent effects on inter-racial relations in the present, hoping to make his practice of compassion future proof for our not so post-colonial times.

Four historical rioters

John burns with rage at the injustice of the rioters' lot. He responds to More23 modelling equality. At first, he let the killer instinct rule his response to the strangers, but when More23 offers understanding, not judgement, he can see through his complicity with his system's violence and addiction to scapegoating. Compassion, that More23 enacts with the rioters – allows him to shift positions. He begins to hope for collaborative futures.

Martin – is convinced of the justice of the rioters' cause but responds to More23's challenge to collaborate in 'teaching the King a lesson in compassion' - to save all lives. He feels 'seen' and finally sees the common humanity that citizens and strangers share. He imagines that the activists of the future will see the rioters of 1517 as their true forbears.

David – realises that to unite the rioters had to surrender some of their individual differences to serve their common cause. He is a tough voice in the rioters’ choral performance with More23 - who regains his tenderness when they own their inhumanity. “We never wanted to see that they were human beings - fragile – flowers in winter in need of shelter, just like us!”

Doll - the only woman rioter - is the most articulate voice and often speaks for the rioters. Bold and brave, she embodies the rioters’ desperate hope for equality and freedom from abject poverty and oppression. She realises that in 1517 personal change has been achieved – a necessary condition for structural change in the future. She is in search of justice, not revenge.

{ Naysayers need visual representation in a play reading workshop. It is an important position we have to own:

A group of Naysayers that walk along the stage from time to time with placards and slogans against the presence of strangers.

They represent the more than sceptical, alienated and sometimes fiercely supremacist voice, that cannot hear the need of refugees and migrants in search of a better life. This is a chance to **explore the voice of ‘Naysayers’** - often p disregarded by liberal groups: The group may create an Opening to step into the shoes of Naysayers in a genuine attempt to understand even those we consider ‘antagonists.’ Their positions may actually make perfect sense from their own vantage point, their life experience, their needs and longings. Exploring the position of the ‘other’ we find that voice In ourselves, our own residual racism. The Post Play session offers detailed instruction for an exercise to diminish such common polarisations.

Some suggestions for (mental) scene setting/context:

Stage Manager may ask the group: Remember News programmes of clashes between National Front and groups of immigrants.

Music/Songs: The Marseillaise. The Internationale, London’s Burning.

“We shall overcome...” sung at play’s end with a new text.

We shall live in peace – We shall live with love –

We shall win that joy someday.

Oh, deep in my heart,
I do believe We shall win that peace – someday.

The Workshop

...starts dramatically with

1. 'More' reading....

...selected parts of Shakespeare's Speech for Thomas More from Antony Munday's collaborative play *Sir Thomas More*:

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).

2. Workshop Facilitator (WF) setting the scene – history is now:

“You just heard Shakespeare’s More speaking to the rioters of the Evil May Day in 1517. He means to break the cycle of violence the whole world of Absolutism is trapped. Everybody takes violence for granted to end conflicts. The King does it, the rioters do it, but More has different hopes. He means to use ‘words – not weapons.’ Talk with people. The rioters are up in arms against their local strangers because they believe they got privileges that they’ve lost. More uses this violent scene to seed subversive ideas for turning violence into the power of mutual understanding and civic peace. ’

This speech makes up the backbone of this play about ‘*Doing Empathy Shakespeare’s Way.*’

To really touch his wildly agitated audience - and us! - More gets the rioters to imaginatively experience the fate that is hanging over them: The King – absolutely!!! - denies his role in turning his subjects into paupers and rioters by ‘conspiring with the rich against the poor’ (*Utopia*) threatens the rioters with death or exile. More makes the impending danger *so real – that we all become strangers seeking refuge – longing to belong again.*

We all know how tangible exile is not just in 1517. It’s an urgent reality NOW for refugees from wars and climate catastrophe - and for those of us who are asked to offer hospitality. Some hear it, others have deaf ears! For some, the Government’s idea to send boat people to Rwanda is not a ‘mountainish inhumanity,’ but a pragmatic solution that gets rid of the problem...

This speech and the play are not history – they are dramatic constellations of conflicts that face us daily.

Everything you need to know about the historical situation that got Shakespeare to spell out the conditions for greater equality and justice I hope will come clear as we read the play together.

3.Co-Facilitator: “Now let’s do a **round of introductions with our everyday names.** Tell us where you’ve been coming from today to get involved in *Doing Empathy Shakespeare’s Way...*

INTRODUCTIONS

4.WF - Thanks to all who made this workshop possible, above all readers and ‘audiences.’

5.Special Needs: (Adjust according to requirements) A personal plea: I need you to *do empathy right now before* reading about it. I have sight and hearing difficulties and need your 'kindness to this stranger!' Please let us know if you have similar issues. - "Please, tell us what you need!"

2 6.Co-facilitator: Finding the readers to perform the roles. "In a mil read the story that got Shakespeare to spell out the secret of compassion. But first, let's find the readers we need. Just raise your hand if you are willing to be one of the readers - willing to face this unknown script.

Let's have a show of hands...I suggest everybody uses the **list of players** to choose which role appeals to you this afternoon. (three female roles –six male ones – gender and racial fluidity is taken for granted. Copies of the lists are available). If there's any confusion, it'll all come clear.

Take about 2-3 minutes to go through the list – then we'll negotiate who's who in the play world.

² **How this play came about – the author's report** (leave out or adjust for your own purposes).When I worked on this play's original version, Ewan Fernie, my supervisor, completely stopped me in my tracks, commenting, that I seemed to have an unusual degree of empathy for the rioters. I didn't know what he meant... Then - in a shocking flash – I saw that Shakespeare was using the famous drama triangle of 'Victim', 'Perpetrator' and 'Rescuer' to present More's dilemma and its solution. – Suddenly I saw how this triangle applied to my German family's complicity with the Holocaust... perpetrators/victims... and realised that I was still 'doing More'- trying to ease the guilt and pain my parents had been unable to work through. This family script brought me to England, into therapy and training more than 40 years ago. Like so many - an immigrant in search of a new life.

I saw More stepping down from his privileged position to let his enactment of equality and collaboration break the drama triangle. There is no drama triangle when people see each other eye to eye and with mutual compassion. Shakespeare promises that facing our inhumanities will detoxify the past we have inherited, liberating new energies for a fairer and more equal future ...eventually. This play shows 'Mia's mother' coping with her Holocaust burden as a road to freedom for all of us who must face our dirty histories. Release is possible – and new joy in belonging.

By naming our capacity for 'mountainish inhumanity' Shakespeare paradoxically validates our common humanity. He takes no prisoners. We are all capable of the worst - and the best... I believe we all share these potentials and need to offer each other that deep acceptance - and the sheer blessing of being seen on the level. This More23 you'll meet in the play - I 'translated' Shakespeare's More's language into our modern systemic idiom to show our need to connect for collective well-being in an interdependent world.

Writing this play was a massive challenge – to be open about my personal investment in exploring this speech – and then to invite British friends and strangers to welcome it – warts and all! It's not easy to own our difficult pasts and our shortcomings... But together we have a chance to make the best of our common flawed and wonderful humanity. **End of Author's report**))

7. Next – let’s **introduce ourselves to each other in role**. Just *start with “I am...” and then read the pen picture of your adoptive persona, so we all have an idea of who you are - your voice in this assembly.*

Props: *Ideally, we have hats for either the group of moderns - or the rioters – to help our orientation across time and place, especially if there’s doubling.*

8 Players’ Introductions -

9. Workshop Facilitator final words before play begins : “More’s soliloquy has turned into a play on how compassion in dialogue before common action. You may find yourself in conflict with some of its hopes and dreams. Conflict is welcome here. Empathy is not always sweet in everyday life, but I hope Shakespeare is pleased to see his remedies work. Who knows - he may assist us from another dimension! Above all, do not worry one bit about reading perfectly. This is a place of joyful cooperation - not a reading competition!

Stage manager (SM): *I’m starting us off on Our Play Reading RIGHT NOW!”*

The Play Text of ‘Doing Empathy Shakespeare’s Way’

Stage Manager: *You find yourselves in a sparse workspace. A large poster announces this year’s playwriting competition at the Shakespeare Institute. All contemporary players are on stage.*

Just imagine you are joining these students as they discuss their play writing project. Here they are – Mark, Terry, Mia, Sarah, and Pat.

They are exited, determined to take up the Institute’s gauntlet ...to create a play on a Shakespeare theme that speaks to the widest audience concerned with our wounded world - not just the usual Shakespeare fans. To be delivered by the end of the next term.???

Engagement One: ‘Does Shakespeare have what we need today?’

Mia: *Everybody’s voice must be heard! Count me in if that’s the plan. You know, I’d die for equality and inclusiveness!*

Mark: *You realise, don’t you?! We’d be going where angels fear to tread! Race relations - bridging gaps between residents and immigrants, facing poverty and racism head-on...*

How do you know the audience will come along with us? I'm not so confident that we can bring it off!

Pat: I'm sure Mia's right – radical equality! That's got to be the direction of travel - just the places we must go! - If we get this together – we might do something amazing...!

Mark: But I tell you – your plan to tackle these hornets' nests straight-on is naïve and completely off-putting for half the population! - Except of course, Guardian readers and other Liberals. They'll lap it up! But we'd be making that gulf between 'them' and 'us' even deeper - that birthplace of divisiveness! I thought we meant to get away from such lazy polarizations!? What I'm saying - let's avoid creating a dream script that leaves out all the people that fear immigration. Brexit proved it – open borders – a real bug bear for some! It hits places where Empire still rules okay!

Sarah: I think Mark has a point. It would be doing something *truly* amazing, if we managed to get away from *pretending, we got the answers...* How can we - in this complex world? Let's raise the issues as we see them - find inclusive perspectives - offer them to people ... Then trust the process... I'm sure Shakespeare has a text that shows that joining forces across borders is the only win-win game in town... Anybody?

Mia: I think, I've got an idea! Shakespeare's speech for Thomas More really fits that bill! – I believe it's a blueprint for building bridges. We could give Shakespeare's demand for empathy and inclusiveness the outing it hasn't had in 400 years!

Sarah: That's the problem – nobody knows that speech! ...But you told me, it transformed life for your mother, didn't it?

Terry: I know that the British Library has it – the only surviving document in Shakespeare's own handwriting. It's part of a play by Antony Munday that was never performed.

Pat: But the fact is – it survived when nothing else did! – It's a message – hidden for our time!

Mark: Here you go again – you and your fancy notions! We need something doable – like Mia's blueprint - something that makes a difference to people's everyday life! – helps us through this crisis-of-living disaster. Not to mention climate change. The biggest challenge – ever! I just can't see how to get everybody on board!

Mia: Shakespeare clearly says that abuses of the past stop people from joining forces in the present. Stops empathy! Facing our history – it's arduous – but it's the only solid road to change – to a new community that everybody can belong to! It's tough stuff, but I know it works! My mother was crippled with depression and found that More's work with the rioters gave her the courage to face her German Holocaust heritage. It released her

from the trap of guilt and shame that shuts when history is denied. She came to life again! Believe me, I'm telling her story with complete humility and conviction – *because I saw it working for her!* Her new freedom just *might* encourage more people to face those 400 years of colonialism and slavery.

Pat: It's weird, but it feels to me that trauma *inflicts* and paradoxically *gifts* us a kind of painful equality. I've always known that. It gives us something in common so we can connect...

Sarah: I know what you mean! Shakespeare was an actor. It was his business to step into any characters' shoes so completely, that *he became them – nothing human was alien to him...* His plays – a school of empathy... We see ourselves in the other...!

Mark: Here you go again - promising something that's a million miles away from many people's lives - or their dreams! They are tied up with getting bread on the table – not just during this cost-of-living-crisis! It's *lack* that rules the roost. Who can blame them when they see nothing but competitors in immigrants? This is not a time for bridge-building! Pure wishful thinking!

Sarah: I think the opposite is also true – in times of crisis the need to connect with others burns deeper than ever! Self-reliance – a threadbare garment!

Mia: Let me remind you - we're all born with the power and the need to connect with others. Nobody survives alone. We can't afford to shut our eyes to other people's 'reality'. That's the gist of Shakespeare's story – stop marginalising people just because they are different from 'us'.

Sarah: Have we got the guts to offer a play on these lines, whoever is in the audience?

Pat: YES - one hundred percent yes! Let's try to prove that Shakespeare's empathy is vital for survival – everybody's survival! Let's have the story, Mia! A manuscript from dusty libraries that reveals what might yet save us and the Planet!

Sarah: If this text has flammable material – I'm ready to burn!

Mia: Okay then. Here's the situation to which Shakespeare contributed his speech for Thomas More. Picture the Evil May Day 1517: A lethal riot against strangers rocks civic peace in London. Citizens are hell-bent on arson and murder to get rid of the European competition. They can't begin to imagine that the King in Absolutist splendour overlooks the fact that 'conspiring with the rich against the poor' (*Utopia*, 1517) would turn his subjects into paupers - and into violent rioters - desperate to find a scapegoat to blame for their suffering! The King threatens death or exile for treason to the rebels.

To stop the cannons' bloody work, Thomas More, humanist and Under-sheriff of London, jumps into the fray – with 'words – not weapons.' Hoping to turn the tide of self-interest and violence that rules King and citizens alike, he descends from his pedestal of privilege to see justice is upheld. He steps into the rioters' shoes to see the world from their perspective. Compassion is the road to redemption and inclusiveness. No more lethal division between citizens and strangers. The rioters - eventually - *know* from experience, that enmity dissolves, when they 'see' each other's common humanity beyond cultural differences.

And here's the rub – Shakespeare demands even more than just tender empathy. We must face with courage the abyss of our 'mountainish inhumanity' that cements the differences that keep us apart.

Sarah: I wonder what Shakespeare actually means by that terrifying reproach?

Pat: I guess he means anything that separates us. 'Mountainish inhumanity' could be that daily, casual disregard of our nearest and dearest that disconnects us from feeling at home.

Mia: Yes! ...that and refusing to own our historical legacies – the Holocaust, colonialism and slavery, exploitation of nature – everything that disconnects us from our longest roots!

Mark: You are so irritating – the lot of you! You always get me to bring you back to earth. Demanding this kind of work – its divisive. You'll end up speaking to the converted – again! – privileged people who preach welcoming immigrants and other 'others' - but don't invite them for dinner!

Mia: You are right, Mark. This is tough stuff. If I'm honest, I find it hard sometimes, not to turn away from people that make me feel uncomfortable. We are all trapped in our culture and need a lot of help to break those automatic habits! Me too! Thomas More had to sound conformist to Royal spies But he knew that systemic change was needed. So, in spite of the risks, he got down from his pedestal to do radical empathy – revolutionary and dangerous in his time – and it's not so easy now, either.

Pat: For our play, we'll have to adapt some of that hierarchy stuff that's typical for Shakespeare's time. To get his timeless message across I suggest we change Shakespeare's More into – let's call him - More23 – a kind of modern systemic mediator.

Mia: Yeah! They are change agents that do radical empathy and equality. They collaborate with all that are willing - try to make change as easy as possible. Absolutely no shame and blame games, just responsibility.

Sarah: Yeah, that would help. Shakespeare's More's language is rooted in his pulpit hierarchies and so he thinks nothing of telling the rioters off for persecuting the strangers. But no self-respecting modern audience would buy into being put down like that. It triggers bad memories of being humiliated by those in authority over us at home and at school! We want explanations and understanding! – More23 speak!

Mia: Yes, hierarchies touch very soft spots in most of us. More23 definitely takes the stuffing out of our everyday blame and shame games. They actively maintain inequality.

Pat: I get it, More23 really connects with the rioters by stepping into their shoes. He sees the world through their eyes - not from above. His humility empowers them. Once they feel seen and heard – something changes, they feel mutual compassion. Their 'them' and 'us' thinking melts in the warmth of their encounter. Mark, I hope you are in with this direction of travel - with and without your scepticism?

Mark: I see how we go on! It's such a dilemma... to reconcile opponents - undo injustice! IF we managed to perform our play in a pub – open to the PUBLIC – we'd have to face reactions from people for whom plays are rarely written. That would make a difference to me – we could no longer write and speak just to the elites who have Shakespeare for breakfast!

Mia I think that's great. In his time Shakespeare spoke to all classes – equality of access for all orders...

Mark: The point is – what we call Shakespeare's disciplines of empathy and equality...: It's so big – it all triggers unbearable feelings. Most people would shrink from considering, that they, too, are capable of that 'mountainish inhumanity'...it's too tough!

Mia: It's the hardest thing – and I hope our play will show that it can be done with huge amounts of mutual compassion!

Pat: This story – it's so timely – its uncanny! - great you remembered it, Mia!

Terry: I remember from old history lessons that in 1517 cut-throat Royal self-interest turned citizens and strangers into lethal enemies. Today it's racism and economic inequality that does that job!

Pat: Our project is perhaps Utopian.... But I'm in - this is our fight for equality and justice. Let's trust and give it a go! – You, too, Mark!

Mark: You know, I've come to realise that perhaps this project does matter! Who am I to say who'll get the message? Our play could become a seed into the broken ground of our world... Let's risk being naive! Where's scepticism going to get us?

Terry: George Floyd's murder – that was the shock that woke us up from our complacency – seeing white privilege and racial discrimination played out on our tv screens...

Sarah with a passion: It wasn't new for people of colour!! – But think of the Corona crisis. That brought to light how many black people died serving white patients – the old master-servant relationship in modern guise! Of course – the official verdict: There's no racism in this country! It's obscene - and utterly predictable.

Pat: Now is the time to push the case for equality with whoever can be persuaded! That's the heart of Shakespeare's demand. Use your imagination, step into other people's shoes - *especially* when it pinches!

Terry: But first, let's look at this text again. I only just remembered that the history books insist, that More never put an end to the riots in 1517 – but Shakespeare's More wins the day by sharing the practice of empathy! He knows he depends on the rioters to help him prove that dream of equality...Shakespeare's promise for the future? These rioters are our forebears!?

Mark: Are you serious?!

Terry: Definitely! Good old Shakespeare – equality – that's his signature tune, and we must use what he offers to suit our needs. Sadly, equality and non-violence are a million miles away from our lives today ...!

Sarah: ...yes - we idealise peace – but we're drowning in injustice and violence. Millions of refugees from Syria and Ukraine and other places... Exiles and migrants urgently need that 'kindness of strangers' More tries to rekindle. We do have that species need to collaborate, share what we've got! I wish he'd speak with our Home Secretary!

Mia: Great idea! But something is weird here. Why does Shakespeare doctor history? What's he *really* after?

Mark (excited): I see it! More²³ knows he depends on the rioters to collaborate in his pet project - and they need him for life itself. They play out interdependence in action – intimacy and not a hierarchy in sight – Everybody wins!

Terry: You got it! They are making common cause against hierarchies. And follow that through - if there's no hierarchy, there's no 'other'! That's what we've got to communicate.

Talking from our hearts to solve our common problems, we get beyond the divisive inhumanities' of past and present - Shakespeare's great secret!

Sarah: More's desperate to get under our skin with his ungentle truth. Our dirty history still colonizes our heads and our institutions. Shakespeare spells out, how to cross cultural power lines! Face the muck of history together, practice compassion, tell our stories! Do you think we can transport this message across the footlights?

Mark: More just lobs it at the rioters – at US! The unadulterated truth...It's a huge challenge – most people simply shut their eyes, do colour-blind and run! – I'm sorry, but here I go again – splitting 'them' and 'us'! I try to be inclusive...Truth is, some people feel secure enough to face this stuff – others need to run right now. How can I judge? *I'm trying not to put people down for disagreeing with me* – but it's tough to respect their freedom, when joining forces matters so much to me!

Sarah: We are always doing value judgements...Trying to step into other people's shoes – that's the only way to open our hearts and minds, actually get to know, where others are coming from – a chance to turn strangers into friends...

Mia: It's true - Shakespeare's remedy both hurts and heals! But for our sanity, we need to connect with love and compassion. Using this power multiplies it. Just look at Poland's hospitality for Ukrainian refugees.

Sarah: More's compelled to mend the broken web... today he'd have to think about reparation...

Mark: That's a red rag to many people! But just imagine that **we** depended on foodbanks. The past of slavery - it's in the fabric of our lives – none of us is innocent. Let's give this play a try!

Pat (to all audiences): Yes, let's hope that '*Doing Empathy*' becomes a place where you feel seen, whatever your views or outlook on life. This is a place, where arguing is an intimate pleasure!

Stage Manager – Now we welcome the Audience.

Sarah: Welcome All! Our new play is ready for you all!

Stage Manager – **Engagement Two: More's challenge - 'what it has to do with us'?**

(Optional – attuning the audience/readers to the atmosphere in 1517 - imaginary time travel:

Imagine the energy and uproarious noise of rioting in the streets of London on this Evil May Day 1517. . Notice the *sights and smells of hot bodies in the heat of this day – feel yourself in a melting pot of feelings – of anger, fear, righteousness, need, desire for change, for ease, for visibility. There’s triumph in the air that the rioters have found unity – broadcasting their demands and their dreams. Here and there torches are raised to fire the strangers’ houses. Nothing matters to ‘us’ but to get rid of ‘them’! Normal self-protectiveness and human compassion for ‘others’ have been exiled in the passion of this moment...*).

Stage Manager: The historical rioters *Doll, John, Martin, David*, are on front stage singing ‘*London’s burning*’ - celebrating their unity. More23 tentatively approaches from the side, humming their tune... Hearing this, the rioters turn to him...

John (historical rioter) ...what’s your offer then, Thomas More?

Doll: Foodbanks? Are you joking? Foodbanks!? We are sick of eating humble pie!

More23: None of that! I’ve come to talk, save us from the King’s cannons! Terrible, all this violence and bloodshed! But there’s hope, I hope! I think I’ve got something to offer you - way better than foodbanks or doing violence. It helped me become a top lawyer in the City! Are you interested?

Stage Manager - *Rioters shrug their shoulders, whisper amongst themselves – they are not impressed.*

Martin (disdain in his voice): You’re just trying to distract us from going after those bloody strangers! It took a lot of courage to unite – speak with one voice! The only thing that matters to us is chasing them out of town! You know us - peace-loving citizens! But now – now we are companions in arms – definitely NOT in misery! They’ll feel what we feel when their houses burn! *Strangers, go home!* – that’s our only chance to get our lives back!

Doll to the other rioters: It’s weird! – More wants to hand us a ‘top method’ that made him a ‘top lawyer’!? ...I bet you, it’s a trick! He’ll turn it against us!

John: Clever Doll! – Even More’s an open book to her!

More23 (with contained passion) The point is: You shout for equality and justice – but your methods are hopeless - crude domination, violence – delusions of power! Just more of the same that got you here! I know you’d die for equality – but that’s pure Utopia now! I should know, I wrote the book! But I’ve got something better - the most egalitarian thing ever! As old as the world and as sharp as a butcher’s knife! *It cures blindness* – you see the world differently – everything’s new and full of promise! That’s what brought me here, right next to you!

Doll to the rioters: He's always been fair to us – we've got nothing to lose! If it's the same old pulpit stuff - we tell him to get lost!

Martin: Doll's right - as ever!

Doll to More23: Show us your secret then, Thomas More – we *might* see...!

More23: In a nutshell: In the most difficult cases, I imagined stepping into my opponent's shoes – feel what it's like being him - with his history and culture. Become him - see the world through his eyes – and my own at the same time. Four eyes...you know...! Compassion in action! – Everybody wins!

Doll: Get on with it then, patience is in short supply!

More23: I really want to show you – but I fear you are still too busy hating the strangers to let this magic do the work... But still - just try to.... **(hypnotically):**

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).

John: What do you mean? Why should we care?!

Doll: What's it got to do with us?!

David: ...Serves 'em right! Good riddance! Just what we hoped for!

More23: Remember, the King's second name is violence. You are playing his game!

John: We'd rather dance and sing right now – there's joy in joining forces!

(Sound of the Internationale from afar)

David: To hell with hospitality for strangers – we haven't received any. We can't conjure it from nothing!

More23 aside: I must drop this mantle of privilege – I'm not getting my words right! Hierarchy and pulpit - begone... *I AM* trying to see the world through their eyes – correct my patriarchal bias, speak '*on the level*' to reach their hearts!

Martin (in a visionary tone): *I guess you hope that we, your Invisibles in 1517, will help you teach the world about kindness to strangers that we haven't got. How can we become those untimely liberators that'll inspire the future!?*

Doll: What future? Let's hope people like us won't be reduced to foodbanks!

Stage Manager: *We'll have an Interlude: More is introduced to the ongoing impact of Colonialism and slavery on the world in 2023.*

The Moderns move to front stage

More23: True! I wonder how the world goes after my death!? How can I know that my ways of compassion are future proof? I need help to figure this out!

Sarah: Asking for help - that's equality in action! A great start! We'll give you an idea of England's history, after you were sacrificed to the King's desires.

Mia: We desperately need your magic in our post-colonial world. Doll was wrong – in 2023, foodbanks are everywhere. Poverty is alive and well! Material inequality – soul-destroying! Racist divisiveness stops communities from cohabiting in peace. Sharing resources equitably - Utopia! – but in the pandemic...

Mark (to the audience): Listen up, everybody! Hear our Black and British history! - a chance to learn what we all need to know!

Terry: Since your day, dear More, massive historical developments have created tough barriers between black and white people. England turned itself into a world power and became an overwhelming economic success on the back of slavery and colonialism. Unspeakable crimes were committed through insatiable greed - for MORE OF EVERYTHING...not just sugar! Greed for power and domination! - supported by superior - created the Industrial Revolution and enduring economic power of the West.

Sarah: Racist theories were conjured up to justify 400 years of slavery. Our very culture is blind to its deep-rooted racism – questions are not welcome!

Mia: We all suffer from trans-historical trauma - whether we know it or not. Each time ex-colonisers and ex-colonised meet something raises its ugly head – there's discomfort we can't name that makes us turn away... Officially we hear that the cruelties of the past should be forgotten now!

Pat: The past is never gone! History has manacled us together – we could not belong together more tightly. Only compassion – talking together intimately will sever those unholy bonds. A new freedom to love each other then becomes possible!

More23: Your problems are probably even more complex than the challenges we faced in 1517! Your dirty history makes accurate perception between people of different colour a mammoth undertaking. The only remedy: Step into each other's shoes and *know* that *we are nothing without each other...*

Stage Manager: *Engagement Three: Then shall I see everything through your eyes!*

: All rioters are singing and dancing – the Moderns are ready to support More23 in the work of creating common understanding

More23 to the rioters: You are still dreaming of the power to get rid of what irks you, aren't you?! Are you feeling Royal now? – I'm sorry, but I got to burst that bubble! Your violence makes you complicit with the very system that's killing you! Let's be Shakespeare's mouthpiece for compassion, not the King's cat's paw for violence!

Mia: I think I understand what's going on with you rioters! Clinging to stories of violence to justify your riot... Your fantasies of murder and mayhem help you deal with feeling so bloody impotent. We all do it. It's human to make up stories to ease rage and pain.

More23: But doing violence – it'll kill you. First your system turns you into victims when change hits you out of the blue. In desperation you blame the strangers – who are actually in cahoots with the system, power-sharers! Actually, you can't touch them with fire and knives. That won't shift the structures of domination in our world.

Mark: It breaks my heart to see how you'll pay for your lethal ambitions. The Kingfish will eat you for breakfast!

John (taking up the challenge): You just don't get it, do you, More? Our lives aren't exactly a bed of roses! A bit of power...

More23: ... yes, I understand. I know that sudden taste of power – better than booze on a Friday night! But – (**urgently**) all order will be lost – Might will rule over Right!

John: Ha! Might – Right?! This is your little joke, is it?! You imagine that dreadful disorder will come with our victory... Truth is, we are powerless, invisible, eaten by loan sharks and feeding from foodbanks - NOW! We must have CHANGE – whatever the cost!

David: You predict that 'none of us will live to be an aged man.' Quite right!! –It's poverty that shortens lives. It's so obvious that the Moderns had to invent statistics to believe it! We are as poor as church mice, bound for an early grave – riot or no riot.

Martin So what's there to worry about? Uniting against oppression brings us a glimmer of hope! We must tell our dreams – even if nobody hears us now...

Doll: One day people like us will shout it from the roof tops –

FREEDOM – EQUALITY – BROTHERHOOD!

Stage Manager: Everybody! Sing *the Marseillaise* until it peters out...

Stage Manager: Engagement Four: 'Everybody Longs to Be Seen'

All players on stage. A change of mood is palpable. No more triumphalism – exile is pending. The threat of Royal retribution is sinking in.

More23 to the rioters - urgently: Now! - Be nimble on your feet! Listen up! Use your imagination – you're next in line for *EXILE!*

Sarah with anxious compassion: Exile! I tell you! Losing your home - it's living death. You're alone – you've got nothing to make this alien world feel safe and familiar – everything you took for granted – it's gone – people - gone. Nothing to call your own. People's compassion? – You've got hopes, but nothing is certain! Exile strips you of everything that tells you who you are. Outside your home-world – you are Nobody, a number in cold offices... You'll be lost without the kindness of strangers.

More23: I fear you know little about the kindness to strangers – yet! You think I'm just using scare tactics. You are right – I can't think of anything else – I'm desperate to help you realise that NOTHING is more world-shattering than losing your home! You taught me to see your lives - it's no bed of roses. But exile - pure thorns – not a single bloom!

Mark (speaks for a Modern refugee): I speak from bitter experience. I came here as a refugee from war and persecution: I felt vulnerable – just like More's new baby, I was dependent on strange people for everything. Shocking – such dependency – the pain of waiting for a smile... It breaks my heart to think about you enduring what I suffered. Losing my home, my family, my language, even the food I loved. Everything gone. Nothing but memories to keep me warm in the cold night of exile.

More23 to the rioters: We all long to be seen with eyes of love! When you used the strangers as scapegoats, you became strangers to yourselves... Believe me, I'm trying to help you make the best of a horrendous situation that's not entirely your fault.

John: You never let on that we had a point...You never came that close and intimate...

Doll: ...or were our ears blocked?

More23: We're in this together – right up to our eyeballs. I admit it was hard for me to 'get on the level' with you at first! Privileges! Power! Hierarchy! Please forgive me for being slow to tell you that I completely depend on your help to teach the King a lesson in compassion.

Mark to More23: Humility and honesty! Just what we need.

More23 aside: *Necessity is the mother of invention* – I must be a vehicle for social change, so help me God!

Mia: It took my mother ages to face the ‘mountainish inhumanity’ of the Holocaust. Shakespeare’s prescription is no easy remedy! Let’s help each other through this bitterness. Tell our stories! Unless we bring them to each other, they will destroy us!

More23: There’s no escape! It’s compassion or being stuck with ‘mountainish inhumanity!’ Take your pick! Here’s what Shakespeare says about the danger to exiles in a nation displaying your kind of:

...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
O(n)wed 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).

John: What did he say? I didn’t get it... Is he for us or against us?!

Doll: He wouldn’t bother with all this talk if things weren’t getting really hot! Do you think we have a real choice? The King just doesn’t see us.

Martin: I think More wants to help and asks us to help him!!

Doll: He knows how people in foreign places hate strangers. We’d be completely unsafe.

John: That’s it – wherever... no abode on earth... nobody would offer us a home!

David: No one would see what we suffer... - And not a penny in our pockets!

John: This is getting to me. No homes, no friends. Their language – a closed book. They’ll think our customs weird – they’d shrink from us!

Martin: We believed the rumours! Never asked questions.

Terry: Let me tell you from the 21st century: People take fake any news for real. Nobody knows the difference: plenty of false stories stoke up conflict between residents and immigrants – there’s political mileage in it!

Martin: I wish More had come clean about the politics behind our downfall. Do you think he knew?!

Doll: No way of knowing. I just know I'm scared to death. Our dream – it might come true in the future... But now? What chance have we got?

Martin: Becoming strangers - that's us in a minute! – We'll die with fear in foreign places – no longer home and safe. Just imagine... it'll happen to us – a nightmare!

Doll: Fear drove us... Home was home no more. No safety net – just foodbanks and the poorhouse...! I know it's true: *Fear eats the soul!*

Martin: No shred of warmth or welcome...prejudice everywhere... just as we treated them – (**rebelliously**) and as we were treated...

Doll: More warned us! We became exiles when we thought we were better than them!

David: It's true! – we are reaping what we've sown. We overlooked them – put them down as aliens – dangerous...

John: We never saw them as human beings just like us. We disregarded them – until they were handy scapegoats when we lost our trade. We felt justified – wanting to wipe them off the face of the earth – oh God!

Martin: Suddenly I'm not sure that this isn't another bit of fake news. – Were we right to blame them for this mess? – I can't tell anymore....My brain's in a fog!

John: ...When we no longer felt secure about our work - poor, invisible - it brought out the killer instinct! They were the easiest target, easy to blame for everything... We'll be in for the same abuse!

Martin: Now I feel what being excluded does to you. It's death, death of hope, death of joy. They copped what we suffered!

Doll: More – he talked about the foreigners sharpening their 'detested knives against our throats' – really, he spoke softly and with love – but he says the harshest things – about us?

John: Come on, let's do it! Let's face his most terrible challenge! - What did you make of him accusing us of 'mountainish inhumanity'?

David: I thought he was right – and not right. We never bothered to imagine what it's like to be strangers in a strange land – nobody welcoming you – everything foreign - suspicion round every corner... Cruel neglect – that was us! We never wanted to see that they were human beings - fragile – flowers in winter in need of shelter just like us... That must be the heart of

‘mountainish inhumanity.’ We didn’t *want* to see that they desperately needed us to see them - their human need!

Doll: But I wish he’d admit that offering hospitality is easier when you’ve received it in the first place. We were dirt poor. We never got ANY attention, until he listened with compassion – love even! Now I wish we could meet the strangers - with words - not knives and torches. We needed this meeting with More to understand about mending what’s broken. Of course – no excuses, really! – But meeting them... I know, that’s future music. Just as he said - but...!

Terry speaking to More23: In 2023 we still have that terrible rift between residents and incomers – maintained by a government that refuses to connect Immigration with Britain’s colonial inhumanity. Just think of their recent plan to send boat people to Rwanda...

Sarah: And think of austerity – the rich person’s solution to all social ills. They are not affected! It starves poor people and feeds racist discrimination. Anti-alien sentiment is flammable material. Memories of Britain’s so-called ‘glorious’ past still shrinks our horizons.

OptionJ: Chorus of naysayers walks along behind the players with placards that say: **Strangers go home – we don’t want you!**

Mark (for a Modern Resident): It’s true. Many local residents feel hard done by! If your larder is empty, you shut your door to anybody who knocks. You feel... resentful - ashamed that being so poor you have no choice but to refuse help... It’s not racism that shuts my door – it’s de-industrialisation, austerity, political disregard. Some of our kids turn to crime – It’s not good, but I can’t blame them. I just wish I could work and provide like I used to.

More23 aside: Yes indeed! We are screwed without a level playing field.

David: We bad-mouthed them – ‘cause we believed they got what we were starved of!

Mark impassioned: This myth that immigrants get preferential treatment - Governments have done nothing to undo it! The horrific discrepancy between rich and poor! There are ways to level it! Then justice might mean something. A basic income for everybody – that would sweep away the stigma of ‘*welfare*’!

All: Hear! Hear!

John: More got it. We felt helpless, impotent - and turned it all into rage against the strangers. Next step – ‘mountainish inhumanity’! Alas! Now our eyes are open - we cannot *not* see what we’ve done. We’ll be in their shoes as fast as the King bats an eyelid – and revenge is served...!

Doll: Yeah – but what about justice?

David: There's no justice for our cause in 1517! I guess, we better calm down...

Doll: Are you sure? Just eat humble pie - again? Give up this sweet solidarity of ours? I know our lives are at stake... But to end up with empty hands - again? It makes me furious! Let's become martyrs for our cause – let's die proclaiming justice and equality! Equality – that's our cause – and More's!

John: Dear Doll! I'm just as disgusted as you are, that the King can exile us at the drop of a hat! Its him who forces More to keep us in line with scare tactics... More's got the noose hanging over him, or rather the sword ...He needs us to save everybody's life – even if it has nothing to do with justice! We got to help him push this deal over the line – for Life's sake!

Doll: I admit - there's something comforting - to think of love without borders - it has a ring to it – lovely future music. If only we could hear it NOW!

David: Is that the place beyond 'mountainish inhumanity'...?

Pause

John: We've got much to worry about... Never thinking of the strangers as human beings... It's terrifying how easy that is! I wish he'd acknowledge that we only planned murder and arson when we were at our wits' end – nothing to lose...

Martin: Except our human decency! What matters now is, that we collaborated with him. Something has changed in our heads! Perhaps the King 'got' that lesson in compassion that we are showing him... We did equality together. Let's try to do without excuses. We planned what we planned...I want More to win his case for non-violence, OUR case for inclusiveness that the future will claim as their right. A dream of rainbow coalitions... Let's drop this riot. We can't change the world and its power structures in 1517.! We trust the future will see us as their forbears - continue the change we started!

Terry: Who was it who said: Food first, morality after? You're doing the best you can!

Martin: In the end we exceeded Brecht. We faced the moral struggle before we saw any bread on the table! Instead - a cauldron of change that's hot with tears, remorse, and hope...

Doll: I hope there will be bread - bread and some roses – eventually! It's not asking a lot – the future will take it for granted, I hope! .

Stage Manager: Engagement Five: *'At End of Play – It's Obvious. We Can't Thrive without Mutual Compassion'*

Let's hear 'The Scriptwriters questioning More's moral position' – followed by The Rioters' Journey from 'Innocence to Experience

The script writers are on stage with More23

Mia aside to More23: You delivered a hard blow when you asked your rioters to face their 'mountainish inhumanity'. They are doing the best they can... It's *your* integrity I worry about! You feed them very bitter medicine – but their violence was triggered by a system that squeezes the life out of them. And you, you knew all along that their riot was set off by the King 'conspiring with the rich against the poor' – your warning in *Utopia*. Why for God's sake, did you never really come clean?!

More23: I know it smells of bad faith in 2023 – but our Royal spies suspected all along that I'd gone native. I had to sound fierce and conformist - as if I embraced our systemic inequality. I knew I had no chance to change the King and the world of affairs in 1517! But my *faith – I do believe in miracles!* I 'saw' that a great shift in the smallest places – people's heads – might move that resisting boulder of change – in time. The rioters were stuck in 'us and them' thinking. I tried to come down from my pedestal to speak to their situation and to their hearts - to show that level playing fields are possible. I dreamed that activating our joint energies would free hope for possible futures. It wasn't about me – no heroics! Please, see my dilemma – and my secret hope to change the whole system!?

Mia: I think I see where you were coming from! I'm amazed by your vision across time!

More23: Just picture me on that stage: Of course, I had to wear the coat of hierarchy to undermine hierarchy. My so-called 'charity' consisted in knowing the limits of my position with the King - and so I banked on the power of sympathy with the common people. We always talked together! Not showing up when the riot was getting lethal – that would have betrayed my integrity. Staying away would have made me party to a system without mercy.

Sarah: I think I've understood something: The kind of compassion you favour – well, it's egalitarian and serves all, including you! In your books, giving and receiving are equally blessed, no hierarchy!

More23: Any transaction without hierarchy – that's the art I cherish!

Terry: ...and having to clean up the King's dirty business...that became a strategic advantage for you! You demonstrated that collaborators can achieve small changes with explosive potential!

More23: Believe me, I had to play my part just right in my temporary role of Universal Rescuer. I tried to get away from dividing people into victims and perpetrators, even while the King insisted on a scapegoat - somebody to blame. That does nothing but trigger unending cycles of accusation and defensiveness. I stepped down from my high pedestal to show that this cursed drama

triangle actually dissolves, when we meet as equals to solve our conflicts together – no blame, no shame, no hierarchy! The only way to make space for miracles.

Pat: This is revolutionary – Shakespeare’s vision of the future! He let you accomplish some temporary damage limitation in Munday’s play. But existentially you showed that only compassion will get us into gear for system change.

More23: Actually - some of it was fun! The historical prop box provided authentic riot gear for our citizens. All of us were perfectly kitted out for exposing patriarchal abuse while seeding new ideas. We played a great game of masques that pushed us beyond divisive customs and habits.

Mia: I understand now - you *had* to restore an unjust order that had generated nothing but disorder – to hint at completely new orders. ‘Words spoken on the level – being present when your citizens needed you most – that was your bid for ethical freedom in the tightest of situations.

More23: I like to think, that Shakespeare enjoyed collaborating in Munday’s anti-alien, anti-royal play, because he was well used to act in ambiguous situations. The Censor kept hoping to finetune Munday’s play to prop up the system, but I like to believe that Shakespeare appointed me to prop up our shared future vision – empathy, equality! I still HOPE this play sends a message to the future ...?!

Mia: Yes, most of my friends think it does. - Martin Luther King followed your direction for change.... But why did you imply that the burden of ‘mountainish inhumanity’ belonged to the rioters alone? Is that fair?

More23: Speaking as a philosopher – everybody must acknowledge that we all have the capacity for evil – and for true grace! – But specifically - the King demanded a scapegoat. What could I do? – I kept it open, so everybody will think I mean them! I DO!

Mark: Perhaps we’re trapped and not trapped in our own time, our history and culture. It’s hard work to see through unexamined beliefs. We try the best we can. Some people are better equipped than others! We all need to be seen and understood!

More23: You updated me on your post-colonial situation: I see that black and white people struggle to throw off the shadow of the past. The split between ‘them’ and ‘us’ seems to affect all relationships. So many lethal divisions...

Mia: I believe people will play damaging distancing games until Shakespeare’s tough and tender disciplines have been adopted as *the* strategy for all kinds of encounters.

More23: Yes, that makes sense to me! Empathy may eventually transform our hornet's nests of inequality. Seeing each other 'feelingly' – that's Shakespeare for change! I kept it general to make it future proof!

Mia: Compassion on the level – it's the only way to end the shame and blame game of victims and perpetrators... I think that's your greatest gift to us. Getting close is difficult between black and white people – unless we face our dirty histories with compassion for all... I can't see another way to approach our future... but... Compassion isn't sweet, is it?

More23: No, it's tough and demanding! If you think Shakespeare's words for his More were harsh - they had to be to cut through the rioters' self-centred defensiveness. – Self-centredness separates us at any time. Your play changed my words for contemporary ears. But whatever the language - it's compassion that will open a chink in our habitual armour. Without something cracking, no light floods in.

Pat: Removing those masques of prejudice and stereotype – it's hard work. We need each other to keep going!

More23: The citizens and I acted in common – in your play we practiced tough and tender conversations that will begin to make things even... Perhaps I only covered over the abyss between rich and poor, citizens and strangers, the powerless and those that manipulate them. I was the servant of two masters, everything had to be hush-hush. We had to keep our *Utopia* below official sightlines! Innocence – not really! The hairshirt under my livery – it keeps me humble – the only way to undermine mountains.

Mia: ...We knew that there was practically no room for liberation of any kind in your Absolutist world. But somehow, working together, mindsets changed, yours too! You didn't just *do* equality, you *became* equality and taught by example. Shakespeare did a great thing when he let you win the culture war with your desperate companions.

More23: But now, let's ask our friends how they fared...

Stage Manager: And now, let's join '*The Rioter's Journey from Innocence to Experience*'

All players are on stage – the rioters in the foreground.

John: It was terrifying to realise that we were caught – both victims of the system and perpetrators of harm against the strangers that hurt our own integrity. We talked and talked and realised that blaming or claiming innocence just doesn't make sense.

David: Grief made us naked – *masques fell off – no more citizens and strangers - no more 'them' and 'us' – just human beings in need of each other.*

John: Scales fell from our eyes – .

David and Martin in unison: ...suddenly we *knew*, that the future will carry on our struggle. We had done our bit ...

Doll: Just imagine, people will tell stories of the bad old days of 1517, when changing our minds was the limit of what was possible – but collaborating with you, More, it opened windows, new perspectives!

More23: Let's hope that this *realisation* inspires the future to communicate on the level - storytelling to ease the way forward!

Martin: We thought we could change our world with violence - like other Russian children playing with fire right now. But when you saw us with real understanding, with eyes of love and justice - something changed! Let's hope we can do your practice in our daily lives – change the world in tiny steps!

John: It was a revelation to see you come down from your pulpit because you felt for our suffering.

Doll: You were right - compassion – it's a real eye-opener! We tried to step into the strangers' shoes – eventually. It hurts to realise what it takes to see strangers as needy human beings, just like us, all searching for that common home. Working together was tough and sweet, dear More! – and it did work wonders. But I insist - rebelling against oppression is justified and necessary!

David: I learned that it's 'love that moves the sun and other stars...' We moved each other!

More23: This is the great struggle – to actually step into other people's shoes. See them as a gift - not as a threat. We saw the world through each other's eyes - and won the day - in spite of our doubts and fears!

Mia (fervently): In the end, our dirty histories will become the raw material for our plays and fairy tales... 'Once upon a time in 1517...' Just imagine!

John: But let me straighten things out for the history books! It was only *thanks to our riot* that More became compassion itself and we had the guts to face our 'mountainish inhumanity' together. We 'saw' the strangers as ourselves - because he 'saw' us as we are, human and not just rioters.

More23 to all audiences: Nothing is ever lost. All experiences make up the curriculum for those that come after. We pushed the limits - for God's sake!

Martin: The steps we took towards equality seem tiny, but they felt enormous. It took trust to cross the distance between us and More – a leap of faith that changed the way we see the world.

Terry: You let go of your habit of taking hierarchies for real... We've all become friends doing this play. Wide-reaching structural shifts – that's the stuff of your future, our present.

Doll: But the future owes us rioters some gratitude. We learned to do compassion and equality. Good luck to us all for whatever comes next! We are companions of the road across time and place. We need each other like daily bread...

John: ...and a mug of beer, if possible!

More23: Yes, and a hair-shirt – for humility!

Stage Manager: And Now - The 'Epilogue for handing on the baton'

Pat steps forward: Our play is ended – and it has ended on a note of hope – hope for a future that will no longer silence protests.... We players needed that upbeat ending that wasn't possible in 1517, nor when in 1603 Shakespeare doctored history to point to possible futures. To our present? It's hard to believe... But unexpected things happen. Young people demand that we face the Planet's emergency. We've shown, how More23 and the rioters expanded the circle of empathy beyond individual selfishness. Change *is* possible. Now is the time to join forces to save the more-than-human world. Together we can! – Imagine - that together we *are* facing our mountainish greed – to mend the connection we've broken with the natural world. The Planet's emergency is a strict teacher who - like More descending into the heat of the riot - is bringing us together despite our resistance! Our common home is burning and needs all hands to the rescue. Hope and trust are our guiding stars.

Sarah: And with that, my friends, we thank you for your gracious cooperation and fellowship. Farewell. All of you, and all of us. Fare well!

Alternatively, An Epilogue as an OPENING into the future.

A player: The dream of equality that fired Shakespeare's imagination and generated this play reminds us that hope for equality has never been silenced for long. It has accompanied humanity throughout history, spawning riots and revolutions, taking different shapes as it gives birth to greater collective thriving. We often exile this dream - but we cannot rest in our search to balance the scales of justice. Hope sustains us in the darkest places. It 'gives wings to our imagination and keeps our eyes raised to the stars, while we face our despairs and anxieties'. Hope re-orient us to the dream - whenever we forget that it's the obstacles that show us the way.

Stage Manager: All Players and audiences sing:

*We shall live in peace
We shall live with love
We shall win that joy someday!*

*Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe We shall win that peace one day.*

Stage Manager: This is the End of this Story – and the beginning of taking the message into our daily lives.

End of Play Workshop - sharing and exploring responses

- (to be adjusted to the needs of the group, available time and whether the play has been read as a whole or in stages as an ongoing process of exploring and collectively meditating on the issues of the play).

“Thank you everybody, it’s great to hear the play read. We have a little while/an hour or so now to talk through this experience. But let’s start with a five-minute break – take a stretch, visit the loo, help yourselves to water – and be back here by ... (name time).

1. So... any immediate responses to having read the play through together?
What comes to mind immediately?
2. Does Shakespeare’s image of our ‘mountainish inhumanity’ speak to you?

(Give people a chance to talk – briefly – emphasise that all responses are ok – we are all so different, as well as so similar etc etc. It is fine to participate without speaking – feel free to join in at a level that’s right for you.)

3. After a short time in the whole group, **move on to PAIRS or THREES** – to begin to share whatever the play has brought up for us (2-3 minutes each).

Back to whole group: “We haven’t time to hear from everyone, but perhaps one or two of you would like to tell us briefly what came up for you in your small group?”

4. Go again into **another Pair or Threes** for sharing experiences and telling stories related to 'immigration' – being an immigrant/receiving immigrants (Give timings according to how much time we have for this workshop).
5. Brief feedback in the Large group. Then ask: “We wonder if there’s been a time when **you had an explicit experience of ‘stepping into another person’s shoes’ where you had to make an effort to** see the world from their perspective? This might have been **with a stranger – or someone you know well, a friend**, a family member, when there’s been conflict between you. What did it feel like to move from holding on to your own perspective to shifting into their shoes to solve your conflict and truly seeing this other human being and their position (in the conflict)? Did you succeed in really understanding where they are coming from/What was difficult, if anything? What helped?

Try and ensure everyone has a chance to speak – give overall time - ask people to time themselves – take equal time..

6. We’ll again come **back into the whole group** and hear from some of you about the joys and difficulties of really trying to understand someone else’s perspective.
7. **(This exercise takes time and may have to be left out, or replace other exercises, but it is powerful) - Whole group and solo work: Investigating the stereotypes we as pro-immigrants tend to hold about people who don’t share this outlook.’**

We all know how hard it is to move beyond simplistic ‘them-and-us’ divisions. We know we often **are in danger of polarising, of ‘othering’ people who hold an anti-immigration position - just as they distance immigrants and people who are in favour of immigration. It’s useful to test our commitment to empathy by trying it ‘them.’**

We need to understand that some of the objections some people raise against immigration are rooted in difficult social conditions, which pro-immigrants equally want to see changed.

To help with identification and stepping into the other person's shoes you might like to use the

Sufi practice for becoming familiar with parts of ourselves which we tend to project onto others, because they are uncomfortable:

"This, too, is me."

"Use this little sentence whenever - in imagination - we find ourselves rejecting aspects of reality – not just 'anti-immigrant.'

Instructions:

- Change position in the room.
- Think of or imagine one particular life and how their kind of experience could lead them to develop anti-immigrant sentiments.
- **Imagine a specific character** whom you will introduce to the group, saying:
'I am'
- Draw out feelings - including disappointment, anger, fear, helplessness. Take about **3 minutes to prepare.**

Back in the large group:

- a. **How did this exercise of identification with somebody 'other' affect you?**
- b. **How much of your creation is a stereotype?**
- c. **How much of yourself do you recognise in your description?**

(About 10-15 minutes or more))))

6. Take a minute now, let's have some **silent** time, to **think about ONE do-able thing that you might do to help us to connect across borders, to help our hope for justice and equality** to flourish in our society and in our own life. We won't ask anyone to share this – this is just for us as individuals – private reflection.

Closing:

The last word goes to Shakespeare – let's hear them as if for the first time:

“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).

Let's live in hope that we flawed and beautiful human beings will be able to offer the kindness to strangers that our times so urgently need. And to know that this kindness has to be shown to ourselves as well as to others.

And with that, dear friends, we thank you for your company. Farewell. All of you, and all of us. Fare well!

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This play/workshop was trialled successfully at the FOLIO Shakespeare Festival – as a Play Reading Workshop at a Shakespeare Pub in Sutton Coldfield, 27th April 2022.

An Evaluation Form is available if desired.