

## ***'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'*** is a systemic take **on Shakespeare's speech for Thomas More to the Evil May Day rioters 1517** from Antony Munday's collaborative play Sir Thomas More (1603)

**The heart of Shakespeare's message to the rioters delivered by More22:** "...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! It cuts through all kinds of blinkers – you see a new world... I imagined stepping into my opponent's shoes – feel what it's like being him. Become him - see the world through his eyes – and my own at the same time. Four eyes...you know...get beyond what divides us! Compassion in action – we are starved for that mutual visibility!"

***The practice of empathy is our everyday chance to create justice and equality – steppingstones towards possible futures***



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/people-protesting-at-brooklyn-bridge-4613879/>

This play invites diverse groups of 'residents and immigrants' to explore obstacles and opportunities for empathic collaboration with other strangers to strengthen inter-personal and community solidarity. Let's embrace our differences and our similarities!

Developed by Michaela von Britzke as **part of the 'Everything to Everybody' project** directed by Professor Ewan Fernie, which seeks to make the historic Birmingham Shakespeare Memorial Library accessible to all: <https://everythingtoeverybody.bham.ac.uk/>

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**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).

**List of Players 2022 and 1517.** They will introduce themselves as part of the workshop, since nobody will be familiar with the scene in 1517. **The players could enter into role: “I am... and then adjust or just read the characterisations.**

**Stage manager introduces the context:** “Five diverse scriptwriters devise a play to show Shakespeare’s relevance for solving serious inter-personal and political problems in 2022. They **may double as Historical Rioters** in 1517.

**Sarah**, 25, black British, Nigerian origin. Shakespeare’s characters serve her need to integrate her mixed heritage. She’s keen to keep alive the conversation about the lasting effects of colonialism and slavery. She supports BLM, alert to the hierarchies we’ve all internalized as children of our time. Hospitality for all is her trademark way of giving what she needs.

**Mark**, 23, white British. Shakespeare’s understanding of the deepest root of our common humanity – that we are all capable of ‘mountainish inhumanity – paradoxically feels deeply reassuring to him. It helps him face Britain’s dirty history. He deals with his ‘White Privilege’ by insisting that the play must use inclusive language and offer projects that serve all.

**Mia**, 24, white, German immigrant, affected by her mother’s Holocaust depression, draws attention to the (often unconscious) trauma later generations inherit, when dirty histories are denied. Only radical equality will prevent those fatal divisions between ‘them’ and ‘us’ that legitimized the Holocaust and slavery. Their play is ‘just a seed’ – and it matters!”

**Pat**, 22, black British, Jamaican origin. He sees Shakespeare through the lenses of critical race theory and his experiences as a child of the Windrush generation who coped with the naked British racism of the 1960ies and ‘90ies. He survived discrimination by a radical conviction of equality that demands ‘doing empathy’ at all times, however hard it is. His commitment to empathy fits him to double as More, if necessary.

**Terry** 27, Irish (Republic). Ireland’s historic colonial entanglement with Britain that became a template for/ of colonization not just for Britain,

commits him to anti-colonial and anti-racist politics. He always searches for community, for belonging. “What else,” he says, “You are just too bloody scared to admit it!”

### **More and his Rioters**

**Thomas More**, Undersheriff of London, humanist and author of *Utopia*, must handle contradictory interests to end the Evil May Day riot 1517. Shakespeare’s More of 1603 craftily subverts the hierarchies of Absolutism by speaking with the rioters, meaning to save them from death or exile. But hierarchy is still alive in the way he uses the hierarchical language of the pulpit. He feels free to tell the rioters off for their failure to accept strangers, the way this speech is still read by those of us not alert to the traces of patriarchy that spoke well to the rioters - but does not wash with us today. More22 is a More for today – a systemic mediator with a commitment to radical equality and empathy. Solving problems is a shared project. Anything to enable collaboration! By using practices of empathy and equality More22 connects to understand and to be understood. All interactions work systemically. Collaboratively they understand everybody’s need to be seen and valued in our common humanity. We all need each other: Death or exile hang over the rebels. More22 enters the fray on the level, needing to connect.....

**John** - burning with rage at the injustice of the citizens’ unexpected loss of their livelihood, lets the killer instinct rule him. But More coming down from his pedestal of privilege to understand the rioters dilemma, not to judge, allows John to see his blind complicity with his system’s violent scapegoating. Eventually, he is ready to practice the compassion he’s received.

**Martin** – deeply committed to the rioters’ cause, Martin responds to More22 trying hard to see the world through the rioters’ eyes. He understands that all things hang together and that collaborating with More22 to ‘teach the King a lesson in compassion’ entails giving up the untimely riot. This brings about new perspectives on the strangers and themselves. Changes in mindset and behaviour subvert cultural certainties about hierarchical relations, which confirm distancing and prejudice.

Making common cause with More22 generates a felt experience of equality that makes compassionate and egalitarian relations possible.

**David** – accepts, that to unite against the strangers, the citizens had to surrender some of their individual differences to serve their common cause. He is a tough voice in the rioters’ gradually more tuneful choral performance with More22. He regains his tenderness as the process of owning their inhumanity unfolds. “We never wanted to see that they were human beings - fragile – flowers in winter in need of shelter, just like us!”

**Doll** is the most liberated voice amongst the rioters. Bold and brave, she embodies the rioters’ determination to be seen and heard – to gain freedom from abject poverty and marginalised invisibility. She pushes that desire as far as it can be pushed in 1517. She engages with More22 and her comrades in the unfolding search for justice – not revenge! - and longs for that ‘future music of love across borders.’ She demands ‘bread and roses for all – eventually!’

**Stage Manager:** Reads stage instructions, act headings, context markers to place readers and audiences in shifting times and places.

**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 rejecting voice, that cannot hear the need of refugees and migrants in search of a home, of a better life. Perhaps they themselves are economically disadvantaged, marginalised and invisible to the powers that be. They may be identified with a nationalist ideology that provides an ideological backbone and sense of belonging. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Exploring that voice** - often polarised and rejected by liberal groups: either this group can be engaged with in the play by creating an Opening.’ Let’s remember that with a true commitment to empathic attunement to that voice, too, we are likely to find that these positions make perfect sense from their own vantage point, life experience, their needs and longing. Ives. Communicating across borders includes ‘Naysayers’ too! None of us is free from residual racism. It comes with the culture.

**Props:** *Ideally, we have hats for either the group of moderns - or the rioters – to help our orientation across time and place*

**Some suggestions for scene setting:** Videos of clashes between National Front and groups of immigrants and white supporters can be projected as a the backdrop or material for discussion. Likewise, images of demonstrations against white supremacy – after George Floyd’s murder/ and XR demos.

**Music:** Marseillaise. The Internationale (Engagement Two and Three), London’s Burning. (Engagement Four)

**“We shall overcome...” sung at play’s end with this 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.

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## The Workshop

### It all starts dramatically with

#### 1. 'More' reading:

- selected parts of *Shakespeare's Speech for Thomas More*
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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).

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**2. (Adapt as appropriate, perhaps leave out and go straight to Introductions No.3).**

**Workshop Facilitator (WF):** “You just heard Shakespeare’s More speaking to the rioters of the Evil May Day 1517. He means to break the cycle of violence they are trapped in. He uses ‘words – not weapons’ to reconcile citizens and strangers in lethal conflict. Lives are at stake. Under Absolutism, the riot – triggered by the King’s greed - has no chance to succeed. More is determined to prevent the citizens’ protest against privileged strangers, from ending in a blood bath. He uses this unlikely occasion to subvert the absolute hierarchies of their time by seeding ideas of empathy and collaboration. Consistent with the time and the rioters’ expectations he uses the hierarchical language of the pulpit to admonish and threaten - to get the rioters to mend their ways. We like the outcome according to Shakespeare, but his language is the hierarchical language of the pulpit, which doesn’t resonate with us – or it shouldn’t! So this play introduces you to More22, a systemic moderator, who’ll do anything to get onto an equal footing with the rioters. He offers them a shared problem solving conversation, that ends in trying to ‘teach the King a lesson in compassion. The rioters offer him a chance to change the culture of violence into a culture of compassion – a project that is now in our hands. All audiences are invited to take the collaboration between More and the rioters as a demonstration of empathy and equality in action.

This speech is still highly significant for Shakespeare shining a light on how we share and fail to share out common world. We hear More’s passionate rebuke to avert the dangers of divisiveness, then and now.

‘Exile’ is tangible not just in 1517. It’s an urgent reality NOW for refugees and for those, who either respond with that kindness to strangers that



we all know about, that's hard to activate at times. The Government's idea of sending asylum seekers to Rwanda is not a 'mountainish inhumanity' for some, but a pragmatic solution that gets rid of a morally complex problem...perhaps!

We all know, that this speech and the play are not history – they are dramatic constellations of conflicts that face us daily.

**End of preliminary remarks.** 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.

3. **Co-Facilitator:** "Now let's do a **round of introductions with our everyday names.** Tell us where you've come from today to join us to read '*Doing Empathy - Shakespeare's Way.*'..."
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## **INTRODUCTIONS**

4. Gratitudes - according to who is making the workshop possible, including all 'audiences.'
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The author's gratitude. '*Doing Empathy*' would not have seen the light but for the hospitality of the '*Everything to Everybody*' Project at the Shakespeare Memorial Library of Birmingham, that was initiated by Professor Ewan Fernie who made space for this play seeing the light of day.

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5. **(Adjust according to requirements)** A personal plea: I need you to *do empathy now before* reading about it. I have ...difficulties and need you to elp me out!' Please, anybody with... difficulties - "Please, tell us what you need to be comfortable!"
6. **WF: Finding the readers to perform the roles.** "In a minute we'll read the story that got Shakespeare to spell out the secret of compassion and equality in an interdependent world.

**Co-F:** : - “But first, let’s find the readers we need. Just raise your hand if you are 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. Gender and racial fluidity are assumed. 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.**

Next – let’s introduce ourselves to each other by stepping into our chosen roles: *Just start with “I am...” and then read the pen picture of the character you are adopting. That way, we all have an idea of your voice in this assembly.*

*(Ideally, we have hats for either the group of moderns - or the rioters – to help our orientation across time and place).*

### **Do Players’ Introductions:**

When these introductions are completed, the

**Stage manager (SM):** “Just for clarity, I’m a sort of stage manager. I’ll read the act headings, context markers and stage directions to place us in shifting times and places.

Just to clarify, our impending performance is of course Shakespeare’s More’s soliloquy turned into a play on how compassion works between people who are learning to see eye to eye with each other...in everyday life. It’s always a challenge. You may find yourself in conflict with some of the play’s ideas and dreams. Conflict is welcome and there’s room to talk once we’ve done the reading for about an hour. Then we’ll have a short break and a workshop for you to respond to this experience....

Incidentally, reading an unknown script is a challenge for everybody. Just keep going! This is not a test – just a place for having an experience together.

Finally – we are starting...”

**SM:** *“All contemporary players are on stage – Mark, Terry, Mia, Sarah, Pat.*

*“Just Imagine that this space we’re in (name it) is the scriptwriters’ usual workspace.*

They hope to come up with a play on a Shakespeare theme that speaks to our divided world – not just activists and the usual Shakespeare fans. They grapple with accommodating a range of voices that belong in an inclusive play. The script-writers wonder:

**Engagement One:** *‘Does Shakespeare have that remedy we need today?’*

**Mark:** “You realise, don’t you?! We are about to go where angels fear to tread! Race relations - bridging the gap between residents and immigrants, facing poverty and racism head-on... I’m not sure I share your confidence!”

**Pat:** “I’m convinced - these are just the places we must go! - If we get this together – we might do something amazing...!”

**Mark:** “But I tell you – your idea to tackle these hornets’ nests straight-on is naïve and completely off-putting for many people - except of course - Guardian readers and other Liberals. They’ll lap it up! But we’d just deepen the gulf between “them” and “us” - that birthplace of division! I thought we meant to get away from such lazy polarities!? What I’m saying - let’s avoid creating a dream script that leaves out all the people that have doubts about immigration. Brexit proved it – open borders – a real bug bear for some people!”

**Sarah:** “I think Mark has a point. It would be doing something *truly amazing*, if we managed *not to pretend, we know best...* How can we

be sure of what's best for other people in this complex world? Let's do our best to 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 fits that bill – I believe. It's a blueprint for building bridges. We could give Shakespeare's demand for 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 that it survived, when nothing else did! – It's a message – hidden for our time!"

**Mark:** "Here you go again – you and your fancy ideas! We need something doable – like Mia's blueprint - something that makes everyday life better!"

**Mia:** "Shakespeare clearly says that abuses of the past distort life in the present. Facing our history – it's arduous – that road to a new community! But I know his prescription works! My mother was suffering badly from depression and found that More's work with the rioters gave her the courage to face her Holocaust heritage. It released her from the trap of guilt and shame that shuts when history is denied. Believe me, I'm telling her story with complete humility – *because it works!* Her new freedom just *might* encourage more Black and British people to face those 400 years of Colonialism and slavery. Trauma inflicts and gifts a kind of painful equality that gives us something in common...We all need the blessings Shakespeare offers."

**Pat:** "I know what you mean! He 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're shown what we may be!"

**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 unwanted 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 for connecting with others burns! Self-reliance - a threadbare garment!”

**Mia:** “Let me remind you - we’re all born with empathy in our genes, and this could just be the moment for letting it flow beyond the habitual limits. That’s the gist of Shakespeare’s story – we must connect with people we overlook and exclude, 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 secret is vital for survival – everybody’s survival! A manuscript from dusty libraries that reveals a vital remedy for now...!”

**Sarah:** “I’m in! If this text has flammable material – I’m ready to burn!”

**Mark:** “You are so irritating – the lot of you! You always leave it to me to bring you back to earth! *You are divisive* - you’ll end up speaking to the converted – yet again – privileged people who preach welcoming immigrants and other ‘others’ - but probably don’t socialise with them at all!”

**Mia:** “You are right, Mark. If I’m honest, I find it hard not to polarize, not to respond to fine cultural differences by turning away. We are all trapped in our culture! More certainly had that problem – and decided to get down from his pedestal to do radical equality in his time.”

**Pat:** “We’ll have to adapt much to fit the equality needs of our time – let’s call him More 22 who is completely committed to empathy and equality and has the whole system’s wellbeing in mind.”

**Sarah:** “Come to think of it, Shakespeare’s More still enacts the righteousness of the pulpit – feels okay about telling the rioters off for their anti-alien position. It takes a lot of awareness to get away from such hierarchies, even now. We all have internallised them as part of the culture.”

**Pat:** “I get it, More22 achieves the connection with the rioters. His humility empowers them. They felt seen and heard – eventually! - because he tried to see the world through their eyes - not from above.... with true transformative empathy that shifted their mindsets. We need you, Mark! Your scepticism keeps us real!”

**Mark:** “I see how we go! It’s a very real dilemma...! IF we managed to perform our play in a pub – open to the PUBLIC – we’d have to face potential reactions of 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 a great idea. In his time Shakespeare spoke to all classes – equality of access for all orders... I think this is a good time to tell More’s story as Shakespeare hands it to us. It’s just right for an inclusive project!”

*Mark, Pat, Sarah and Terry nod agreement.*

**Mia:** “Here’s my summary of 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 had officially appointed the strangers to take over their business: In Absolutist splendour the King can’t ‘see’ that this policy turns his subjects into paupers - and into violent rioters in search of a scapegoat! Death or exile for treason awaits the rebels.

To stop the cannons’ bloody work, Thomas More, humanist and Under-sheriff of London, jumps into the fray – with ‘words – not weapons. To

turn the tide of self-interest and violence that rules King and citizens alike, he steps down from his pedestal of privilege to see the world from the rioters' perspective. Compassion becomes the common road to redemption and inclusiveness for all. The rioters - eventually - *know* that enmity between social groups dissolves when they see each other's common humanity beyond cultural differences.

And here's the rub – Shakespeare demands even more than just empathy. We must face the abyss of our 'mountainish inhumanity' that cements such differences. You'll wonder '**What does he actually mean by that terrifying reproach?**' I think he means anything that separates us. 'Mountainish inhumanity' is that daily, casual disregard of our nearest and dearest that disconnects us from feeling at home. But it's also refusing to own our historical legacies – the Holocaust, colonialism and slavery - that disconnects us from our roots!"

**Mark:** "This is so big – it taps into unbearable feelings. Most people would shrink from considering that they, too, are capable of your 'mountainish inhumanity' ...it's too tough!"

**Mia:** "It is the hardest thing – and I hope our play will show that it can be done with compassion all round!"

**Pat:** "This story – it's so timely – its uncanny! - great you remembered it, Mia! I recall 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! More's project is perhaps Utopian.... But I'm in - this is our fight for equality and justice. Let's trust in our common humanity – you, too, Mark!"

**Mark:** "You know, I think that maybe this project does matter! Who am I to say who'll get the message? Our play could become a seed into that broken ground... Let's risk being naive! What choice do we have? 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:** “...The Corona crisis 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 all who 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 – with ‘words, not weapons!’ He knows he depends on the rioters to help him prove that dream of equality...a promise for the future? They are our forebears!?”

**Mark:** “Are you serious?!”

**Terry:** “Definitely! Good old Shakespeare – equality – that’s his signature tune and we must adapt what he offers to 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 - not just in the rioters. We have an inbuilt need to respond to need, share what we’ve got! I wish he’d speak with Priti Patel.”

**Mia:** “Great idea! But something is weird here. Why is Shakespeare doctoring history? What’s he really after?”

**Mark (excited):** “I see it! More22 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 – words and not a hierarchy in sight – everybody wins!”

**Terry:** “You got it! They are making common cause against the hierarchy. And follow that through - and there’s no hierarchy, no enemy! That’s what we’ve got to try for! Talking on the level they get beyond the ‘mountainish inhumanity’ of the past. 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! – And here I go again – splitting! I’ll try to be inclusive: Some people feel secure enough to face this stuff – others need to run. 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 it all matters so much!”

**Sarah:** “We are always doing value judgements...Trying to step into other people’s shoes – it’s the only way...”

**Mia:** “It’s quite 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 restitution...”

**Mark:** “That’s a real red rag to many! But just imagine, **we** depended on foodbanks! The past of slavery - it’s in the fabric of our lives – none of us is innocent! Let’s give it a try!”

**Pat (to all audiences):** “Yes, let’s hope that our play becomes a place where you feel seen, where you are welcome, whatever your views or

background - a place, where arguing together may become an intimate pleasure!" .

**SM – “Now we welcome the Audience”**

**Sarah:** “Welcome All! Our new play is ready!

**SM – “Engagement Two presents: “More’s challenge – What’s it got to do with us?”**

**SM** – “In this play of More’s collaboration with impoverished rioters, voices from 1517 and 2022 intermingle.”

**(Use or leave out!) Audience attunement to More and the rioters**

- **imagine** the energy and uproarious noise of rioting in the streets of London on this Evil May Day in 1517. . Notice the *sights and smells of hot bodies in the heat of this day* – A melting pot of feelings – of *anger, fear, righteousness, need, desire for change, triumph in collective unity*. *here and there torches are raised... “Nothing matters to “us” but to get rid of “them”! Normal self-protectiveness and human compassion have been exiled in the heat of this moment...”*

**SM:** “*The historical rioters Doll, John, Martin, David are on front stage singing ‘London’s burning’ - celebrating their unity. More22 tentatively approaches them 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!”

**More22:** “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?”

**SM** - *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 – NOT in misery! They’ll feel what we feel when their houses burn! *Strangers, go home!* – it’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 is an open book to her!”

**More22 (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! 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 More:** “Show us your secret then, Thomas More – we *might* see...!”

**More22:** “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!”

**More:** “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 them right! Good riddance! Just what we hope for!”

**More22:** “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!”

**More 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. I’ve got to 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 that kindness to strangers that it so desperately needs. 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!”

**SM:** **“Interlude: More is introduced to the impact of Colonialism and slavery on the world in 2022.**

*The Moderns move to front stage”*

**More22:** “True! I wonder how the world goes after my death? Are my ways of compassion future proof? I need help to figure it 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 2022, foodbanks are everywhere. Poverty is alive and well! Material inequality – soul-destroying! Racist divisiveness that stops communities from cohabiting in peace...!”

**Mark (to the audience):** “Listen up, everybody! Hear our Black and British history! - a chance to learn something new!”

**Terry:** “Since your day, dear More, massive historical developments have created sky-high 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 weapons.

**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 what the psychologists call ‘a trans-historical trauma’ - whether we know it or not. Each time ex-colonisers and ex-colonized meet something raises its ugly head – there’s discomfort we can’t name. 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 fill that unholy gap between us – then racism may no longer keep us apart!”

**More:** “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 *less* without each other..."

**SM:** "Engagement Three: *"Then shall I see everything through your eyes!"*"

*"All rioters are singing and dancing – the Moderns are ready to support More22 in the work of persuasion"*

**More22 to the rioters:** "You are still dreaming of power, 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! Making up stories 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."

**More22:** "But actual 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! You can't touch and shift the structures of domination in our world of 1517. But listen to this: I received some instruction about the future: I see strangers of a different kind: post-colonial immigrants and refugees that are even more vulnerable than you are now, just as vulnerable as poor working-class citizens in 2022. They are more lost in exile than you are lost in your delusions of power!"

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

**SM:** "This time John takes up the challenge:"

**John:** "You just don't get it, do you, More? Our lives aren't exactly a bed of roses! A bit of power..."



**More:** “...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 must be your little joke! You imagine dreadful disorder following our victory... Truth is, you conjure up exactly what we suffer NOW! We are powerless, invisible, eaten by loan sharks and feeding from foodbanks! 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!”

**SM:** “**Everybody! Sing the Marseillaise until it peters out...**”

**SM:** “**Engagement Four: ‘All Residents, Exiles and Immigrants Long to Be Seen’**”

*All players on stage. A change of mood is palpable. No more triumphalism – exile is pending. The reality of Royal retribution sinks in. The rioters face their ‘mountainish inhumanity’ and discover that we all equally depend on each other for being seen in a world marked by very selective perception*

**More22 to All audiences:** “No matter how long this play takes - by the END everybody must have better eyesight – eyes sharpened by compassion and equality! We need new heads and hearts to imagine a

new world – that’s what Shakespeare’s after. Without this - no systemic shift!” <sup>2</sup>

**More22 turns to the rioters with urgency:** “Now! - Be nimble on your feet! Listen up! Use *your imagination – you’re next in line - EXILE!*”

**Sarah:** “Exile! 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.”

**More22:** “I fear you know little about the kindness of 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 – no blooms at all!”

**Mark speaks for 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!”

**More22 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...”

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<sup>2</sup> **Possibly Opening:** “What about your stories around blaming and being blamed as a strategy for change? What’s it like to step into your ‘opponents’ shoes – really let yourselves feel where they are coming from? This means, assuming that from their life context their position makes sense...rather than insisting on your position - trying to convince them of their errors?”

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?"

**More22:** "We are in this together – right up to our eyeballs! I admit it was hard for me to 'get on the level' with you! 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 More22:** "Humility and honesty! Just what we need!"

**More22 to himself:** "*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 simple remedy! Let's help each other through this bitterness. Tell our stories! Unless we bring them to each other, they will destroy us!"

**More22:** "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 simply doesn’t see us!”

**Martin:** “I think More wants to help!”

**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 news for real. Nobody knows the difference: false stories to stoke up conflict between residents and immigrants - for political gain!”

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

**Doll:** “No way of knowing. I’m really scared. Our dream – it must 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 when we are lost 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...! *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 - a mirror to our actions!?”

**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... That must be the heart of ‘mountainish inhumanity.’ We didn’t *want* to see that they desperately needed us to see them in their human need!”

**Doll:** “But I wish he’d admitted 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 More22 for Modern immigrants:** "In 2022 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!"

<sup>3</sup>**Mark for a Modern Resident:** "It's true, that 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."

**More22 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!"

**Sarah for a local activist - 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

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<sup>3</sup> **Chorus of naysayers** walks along behind the players with placards that say:  
**"Strangers go home – we don't want you!"**

*Option – respond to or disregard them/their message. They try to stir up trouble between residents and immigrants.*

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 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 our lives – 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... 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 what 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!” .

**SM:** “Engagement Five: *‘At End of Play - Hope and Trust in Compassion’*”

**First - ‘The Scriptwriters question More’s moral position –**

- ***followed by “The Rioters’ Move from ‘Innocence to Experience”***

***The script writers are on stage with More22***

**Mia aside to More:** “You delivered a hard blow when you asked your rioters to face their ‘mountainish inhumanity’. They are doing okay... 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 this 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?!”

**More22:** “I know it smells of bad faith today – 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 push 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!”

**More:** “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! Giving and receiving are equally blessed, no hierarchy!”

**More:** “Any transaction without hierarchy – that’s the art I cherish!”

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

**More22:** “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 an unending cycle 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 collaboratively – no blame, no shame, no hierarchy!”

**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.”

**More22:** “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 masks that pushed us beyond our 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’s was your bid for ethical freedom in the tightest of situations.”

**More22:** “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 – 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?”

**More22:** “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:** “ We’re all trapped in our own time, our history and culture. Its hard work to see through unexamined beliefs. We try the best we can. Some people are better equipped than others! We all need understanding!”

**More22:** “ You all updated me on your post-colonial situation: I see that black and white people are delegated to represent (and re-enforce?!) the split between ‘them’ and ‘us’, the racist division that you tell me is such a problem in your time.”

**Mia:** “I believe people will play damaging distancing games until Shakespeare’s practice of empathy and equality has been adopted as a strategy for all intimate encounters.”

**More22:** “Yes, I think so, too! 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?”

**More22:** “No, it’s tough and demanding! If you think Shakespeare’s words for me were harsh - they had to be to cut through the rioters’ self-centred defensiveness in 1517 – self-centredness separates us at any timme. Your play adapted 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 masks of of prejudice and stereotype – it’s hard work. We need each other to keep going!”

**More:** “The citizens and I acted in common – in your play we practiced tough 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 the sightline of the king! 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.”

**SM:** “Now we’ll have

***The Rioter’s Account - From Innocence’ to Experience’***

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

**More22:** “But now, let’s ask our friends how they fared...”

**John:** “. It was terrifying to realise that we were caught in merry-go-rounds of victims and perpetrators. Blaming or claiming innocence no longer made any sense – *all masks fell off – no more citizens and strangers - no more ‘them’ and ‘us’ – just human beings in need of each other.* Scales fell from our eyes - we knew that the future will carry on the struggle for justice and equality. We had done our little bit.”

**Doll:** “People will tell stories of the bad old days of 1517, when we had to accept that changing our minds was the limit of what was possible. But our encounter with you, More. made a difference that changed everything!”

**More22:** “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 love something changed! We’ll do compassion with you, Thomas More!”

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

**Doll:** " You were right -empathy is an eye-opener! I believe our vision has improved through doing compassion, just as you promised, dear More. But I insist - rebelling against oppression is justified and necessary – it's hard to know, when the time is ripe ...! "

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

**More22:** "This is the great struggle – to actually step into other people's shoes. See them as a gift - not 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 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. We 'saw' the strangers in their humanity - because he 'saw' us as we are, human and not just rioters."

**More22 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 are enormous – crossing the distance between More and ourselves did something to the way we felt. Much was achieved between us by letting go false differences - hierarchies... We became friends. Wide-reaching structural shifts – that's the stuff of the future. But they owe us some gratitude. We learned to do compassion and equality. Good luck to them – to us for whatever is 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!"

**More:** "Yes, and a hair-shirt – for humility!"

**SM:** “Now the **Epilogue** for handing on the baton:” David steps forward: “Our play is ended – and it has ended on a note of hope – hope for a future that will no longer have the power to silence protests....’ We needed that upbeat ending that wasn't possible in 1517, nor when in 1603 Shakespeare doctored history to point to possible futures. Our present? Can we be confident about real gains in equality in these mixed-up days of ours? Hardly! We’ve just asked you to contemplate and perhaps even come to grips with the enormous personal and structural challenges we have to face on this unending road to equality. But change does happen... We all need some encouragement to keep going! Think of this ending as a surge of hope and trust - a guiding star to cheer us on our journey.

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.**

“The dream of equality that fired Shakespeare’s imagination and motivates this play shows, that hope has never been silenced for long. It has accompanied humanity throughout history, has spawned revolutions and rebellions. It will continue to take different shapes, giving birth to greater collective thriving. We often exile the dream - but we cannot rest in our search to balance the scales of justice. Hope sustains us in the darkest places. It ‘must give wings to our imagination and keep our eyes raised to the stars, while we face our despairs and anxieties.’ Hope is the Pole star for orientation whenever we forget that it’s the obstacles that show us the way. Help is always at hand!”

**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.

**SM: “This is the End of this Story –  
and the beginning of taking the message into our daily lives.**

**Some Post Play Explorations** - to be adjusted to the needs of the group of readers, available time and whether the play has been read as a whole or in stages - as an ongoing process of collectively exploring the provocations the play delivers.

**Facilitator:** “Thank you everybody, it’s great to hear the play come alive with your breath Shakespeare would say. We have a little while/an hour or so now to talk this experience through, but let’s start with a five-minute break – take a stretch, visit the loo, help yourselves to water – and be back here by ... (say time).

When people are gathered: “Just very briefly – Ground rules: All responses are ok – we are all so different, as well as so similar, we are bound to see things differently. By the way, it is fine to participate without speaking in this session – feel free to join in at a level that’s right for you.”

1. “So... any immediate responses to reading the play through together? I realise it’s difficult to sift from immersion to critical distance. Take your time...
2. Does Shakespeare’s image of our ‘mountainish inhumanity’ speak to you? What do you make of it? How does it relate to you and your relationships, if at all?

Give people a chance to talk – briefly – avoid long responses back – to encourage responsiveness. After a short time in the whole group, **move on**

**into PAIRS or THREES** – to begin to share whatever the play has brought up for us particularly (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?”

3. We wonder if there’s been a time when **you had an explicit experience of ‘stepping into another’s shoes’** – seeing the world from another 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 conflict to truly seeing this other human being and their position (in the conflict)? Did you succeed? What was difficult, if anything? What helped?

Ask people to time themselves.

We’ll come **back into the whole group** and hear from some of you about the joys and difficulties of really trying to understand someone else.

4. Back into **another Pair or Three** for sharing experiences or stories related to ‘immigration’ and exile – perhaps triggered by the play or everyday life – 3 minutes each (This exercise should be checked out with the group – how hot is this topic for some? Do people want to go into ‘same’ or different pairs? Timing depends on how much time we have for this workshop):  
Large group sharing – 5-10 minutes. Keep it flexible depending on what has come up

5. **Whole group and solo work: Investigating the stereotypes we as pro-immigrants tend to hold about people who don’t share our pro-immigration outlook’**

We all know how hard it is to move beyond simplistic ‘them-and-us’ divisions. We know we often **are in danger of ‘othering’ people holding an anti-immigrant position - just as they distance immigrants and people who are in favour of immigration.**

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 when** - in imagination - we place ourselves in an anti-immigrant person's shoes....

**Instructions** (to be given out as hand-out):

- 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: 'Do your self-presentation as anti-immigration person**

**Have people perform their characters and ask:**

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

**(About 10-25 minutes) depending on the size of the group**

6. Take a minute now, let's have some **silent** time, to **think about ONE do-able thing that you might do to help this cause of justice and equality** 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 to Shakespeare – hearing it 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 we all so desperately 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!

*This play-reading/workshop was trialled successfully at the FOLIO Shakespeare Festival – a Play reading Workshop at a Shakespeare Pub in Sutton Coldfield, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022.*

An electronic Evaluation Form is available if desired.

This play and the workshop were developed by Michaela von Britzke as part of the ‘*Everything to Everybody*’ project, directed by Professor Ewan Fernie, which seeks to make the historic Birmingham Shakespeare Memorial Library accessible to all: <https://everythingtoeverybody.bham.ac.uk/>

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