

# Shakespeare's Hand, or "the strangers' case": Remediating *Sir Thomas More* in the context of the Refugee Crisis

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## Abstract

Among the literary and artistic responses to the contemporary humanitarian crisis of refuge is *Sir Thomas More*, the late Elizabethan play that Shakespeare had a hand in and in which the protagonist offers a powerful articulation of "the strangers' case." It is the modern uses of this speech that this article focuses on, in particular on digital platforms, and as a response to the contemporary refugee crisis and discourses about migrants. Notable uses of the speech include Ian McKellen's recitations and their remediation on Twitter (with the hashtag #strangerscase) and YouTube (McKellen 2010); the Bell Shakespeare Company, who produced a video featuring "new arrivals to Australia" (Change Media 2011); Stephen Greenblatt's inclusion of it to suggest that Shakespeare is a "cure for xenophobia" (Greenblatt 2017); the Shakespeare Association of America (James 2017), which cited More's words in reaction to Trump's travel ban; and a series of events at Shakespeare's Globe to mark international refugee week (@The\_Globe 2018). Tracking such examples, the article employs theories of remediation and of media flow to examine critically how the More speech, that itself imagines flows of people, circulates as a digital object online, be it in the form of the tweet hashtag #strangerscase, or a YouTube video. It also makes use of the digital affordances of *Borrowers and Lenders*, embedding links and samples to construct a digital archive of the speech's remediation and circulation. These iterations draw Shakespeare, long imagined as a type of transnational traveller, into urgent ethical questions about borders, displaced peoples, and responsibility to the Other, as More's empathetic plea comes to function synecdochally for Shakespeare, the "Hand D" of the play's collaborative authorship. The article explores how a dismembered Bard returns through processes of remediation in digital settings, where unseen or nonhuman agents are increasingly constitutive of the thing we call "Shakespeare." The article deliberately avoids rehearsing familiar debates about Shakespeare's cultural value, however, to address instead the challenges and also the possibilities of applying Shakespeare to humanitarian crises. I suggest that the remediated More / Shakespeare constitute spaces where values of empathy, tolerance, and diversity can find articulation.

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## I. Hands

In Elsinore, Denmark, copper hands have appeared in various locations: at the harbor, the fingers of one hand are visible on the deck, as the other hand reaches for the harbor railing. At another site, this time King Hamlet's grave, fingertips emerge, as if trying to grip the ground and dig out of it. Dubbed the "Hands of Elsinore," the sculptures have been understood as overt reminders about the contemporary refugee crisis, with the group Refugees Welcome International describing the harbor installation as "A Tribute to the #refugees and as [sic] a criticism of the silence of #Europe in the face of this human disaster" (@RefugeesWelco10, Jan 8, 2019). The sculpture has been damaged, with all but one of the fingers cut off, an act of vandalism that the anonymous artist JB reportedly approves of, suggesting that the severing strengthens the original message (Quist 2015). This crisis is, after all, not simply about mass migration as a consequence of wars in Syria, Afghanistan, and other source countries of refugees, but a "crucial matter of life and death" (Papataxiarchis 2016, 6). Hands have been powerfully used in sculpture before, as in Maurice Harron's *Hands Across the Divide* in Derry-Londonderry, to suggest healing and hope in the context of sectarian conflict. They have long signified friendship, help, and cooperation too. More fundamentally, as Farah Karim-Cooper notes, hands are symbols "of our dignity as human, civilized beings" (Karim-Cooper 2016, 3) and, in Shakespeare especially, markers of character and identity. They are a gesture of greeting, as in Hamlet's words to the players: "Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore. Your hands, come, then!" (Shakespeare 2006, 2.2.307-08), but can also be "ungentle," as in the horrors that are wrought on Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* (Shakespeare 1995, 2.3.16) or what Macbeth calls "hangman's hands" (Shakespeare 2015, 2.2.28).

But Shakespeare himself is a hand, in the general sense of the authoring pen, "the hand that so many have desired to see" (quoted in Purkis 2014, 150), as W.W. Greg put it in relation to the manuscript of *Sir Thomas More*, a play that Shakespeare famously collaborated on. As "Hand D," the customary editorial term for the playwright's contribution to collaborative authorship, Shakespeare pens Scene 6 of the play that dramatizes the rise and fall of Thomas More at the court of Henry VIII. In the scene, More, in a powerful display of oratory, puts "the strangers' case" to London's riotous apprentices, who are seeking their removal. Should the strangers be removed, More says, the apprentices will only have demonstrated "How insolence and strong hand should prevail" (Munday et al. 2011, Scene 6, line 92). He asks the apprentices to imagine a future scenario in which they too could be rendered homeless, or in need of refuge:

. . . 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, Spain or Portugal,

Nay, anywhere 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 elements  
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.

(Scene 6, lines 141-56).

The editorial designation Hand D, which has traditionally attended to questions of authorship and bibliography, prompts a consideration of Shakespeare as himself a kind of helping hand, one that reaches out from history as a reminder, as a remedy, and as an empathetic force. This becomes especially evident, this essay argues, when we attend to practices of quotation and also remediation, as More's speech is deployed on social media as a response to the contemporary refugee crisis and discourses about migrants. Notable uses of the speech include star Shakespearean actor Ian McKellen's recitations and their remediation on Twitter (with the hashtag #strangerscase) and YouTube (McKellen 2010); the Bell Shakespeare Company, who produced a video featuring "new arrivals to Australia" (Change Media 2011); Stephen Greenblatt's inclusion of it to suggest that Shakespeare is a "cure for xenophobia" (Greenblatt 2017); the Shakespeare Association of America (James 2017), which cited More's words in reaction to Trump's travel ban; and a series of events at Shakespeare's Globe to mark international refugee week (@The\_Globe 2018). More recently, Shakespeare scholar Ruben Espinosa turned to the speech in response to the horrific mass shooting in El Paso, Texas, on August 31, 2019, in which 22 people lost their lives. "[W]e locate within Shakespeare the compassion we desire in our own world. It is hopeful," writes Espinosa, before noting that "[i]n this moment. . . that hope feels distant," as anti-immigration rhetoric and the "workings of whiteness" in which Shakespeare's works are themselves imbricated continue to designate people of color as a threat, or as of less value than white people (Espinosa 2019).

As these examples attest, there are complex questions and difficulties in arriving at a Shakespeare for our own times. Iterations of the speech draw Shakespeare, long imagined as

a type of transnational traveller, into urgent ethical questions about borders, displaced peoples, race (or rather the phenomenology of whiteness) and responsibility to the Other. Tracking several examples, this essay employs theories of (re)mediation to critically examine how a speech that itself imagines movements of people circulates as a digital object online, be it in the form of the tweet hashtag #strangerscase, or a YouTube video. A curated webpage detailing uses of the speech provides a companion to this article (O'Neill 2019). While the uses of Shakespeare's character Sir Thomas More combine to support claims for Shakespeare as an articulation of freedom, a claim Ewan Fernie has made more broadly for Shakespeare's works (Fernie 2017), "the strangers' case" also highlights the extent to which Shakespeare is never a neutral entity that is produced or adapted from a neutral place. Contending that what we say through Shakespeare is important, this study of #strangerscase contributes to critical work that grants interrogative priority to the present (Hawkes 2003, 22) and emphasizes a Shakespeare for our time (Thompson 2011; Espinosa 2016). In particular, this is a Shakespeare predicated on diversity and inclusivity, and a field of study that, as Ruben Espinosa argues elsewhere, continually works towards "uncovering and discussing social and racial inequalities — in the world of Shakespeare and in our own" in order to "challenge the perceived delineation of Shakespeare's meaning" (Espinosa 2016, 62). This behooves all Shakespeare critics to attend to those moments when appropriations of the works might reaffirm white cultural privilege and, in turn, to acknowledge their own unconscious biases, or potential blind spots. As Ian Smith writes, "speaking about race within the discipline, requires unpacking one's white positioning, which includes making whiteness visible and an object for critical interrogation; checking privilege; and exposing the denials and misinterpretations that, too often, keep race a minority issue" (Smith 2016, 121). The following analysis of the (re)mediated *Sir Thomas More* addresses the racial politics of both appropriated Shakespeare and also Shakespeare criticism. Shakespeare is shown through a critical media analysis to function as a networked affective public where expressions of empathy for refugees sit alongside racist and anti-migrant sentiment where critical claims for Shakespeare's freedom need to be mindful of how freedom might resonate or be experienced differently for people of color in the context of the cultural workings of whiteness.

## II. Quoting Stars

Shakespeare's skill as a dramatist is that he not only affords an audience the opportunity to imagine things from a perspective other than their own, but actively encourages such strange identifications, or so it is often claimed. While this has become something of a generality in Shakespeare criticism — and unhelpfully so because in assuming that Shakespeare espouses liberal

values, it produces a complacency about the politics of quoting him — it may have been one that the *More* playwrights shared. As Jeffrey Wilson argues, Shakespeare's contribution "has the feel of a celebrity script doctor brought in for a moment of artistic virtuosity that, the other authors working on the script seem to believe, only Shakespeare could write" (Wilson 2018, 2). Similarly, and with an eye to the play's generic and political leanings toward the city rather than the court, Margaret Tudeau-Clayton suggests that Shakespeare, "as an outsider to the city, an internal immigrant. . . was perhaps called in to lend a 'hand' to mediate between such a heavily weighted playtext and the court censor" (Tudeau-Clayton 2012, 244). There is further critical consensus that Shakespeare's contribution strikes a different tone to the rest of the play, a kind of "utopic dissonance" (Tudeau-Clayton 2012, 253), especially in the depiction of the strangers. Whereas the play's opening scene attributed to Munday supports the London rioters' fear of the strangers (see Schulting 2013), Shakespeare shifts the "focus of the audience and of the play as a whole *from* a fear of the other to the fear *for* the other" (Lawrence 2018, 2; emphasis added). Without the evidence of Shakespeare's contribution as Hand D, it is unlikely that *More's* speech would receive the level of quotation that it has. Another contributing factor is the British Library, which showcased the text on its website to promote its digitization of the manuscript, thus affording virtual access to Shakespeare's authoring hand (British Library 2016). In an essay accompanying the manuscript, Andrew Dickinson notes how "the scene is powerful even now, and not difficult to map on to refugee crises in the 21st century — whether in the apparently endless exodus seeking asylum from Syria's bitter civil war or the stream of migrants heading overland to Europe from destinations as far-flung as Afghanistan and Eritrea" (Dickinson 2016). He adds, "Migration, as Shakespeare makes plain in this remarkable scene, is nothing new: the important question is how the rest of us respond" (Dickinson 2016). But part of that response is about the language one uses — avoiding metaphors that imply an uncontrollable mass for instance — and a recognition that, as in the case of my present discussion, I am addressing the refugee crisis from a place of privilege and safety.

The thread running through these comments is Shakespeare's singularity, which is the quality of a dramatist with a keen or especially empathetic imagination that lends itself to new contexts. The use of "the strangers' case" speech from *Sir Thomas More* reveals the multiple reasons why Shakespeare's singularity is amplified into a cultural phenomenon. These include the displacement of the play by the extracted quotation, its particular association with Ian McKellen, and his status as the quintessential Shakespearean actor. Indeed, it is the alignment of two stars that contributes to the momentum around the stranger's case. McKellen, who played *More* in the Nottingham Playhouse production in 1964, comes to function through his various uses of the speech as a surrogate for

Shakespeare himself, a figure for Shakespeare as a thing that does not so much appear as reappear, a pre-loaded vocabulary that is embedded in culture and history.

This is the quality of the quotation, its capacity to haunt. As Marjorie Garber argues, quotation is "a revenant taken out of context, making an unexpected, often disconcerting appearance — the return of the expressed" (Garber 2010, 69). Coming back, appearing as a fragment of some greater text and its contexts, quotations are displacing, uncanny, and temporally jarring. Yet, they are curiously resonant too: "It might have been written yesterday, might it not?", says John Dover Wilson of More's oratory in the play (quoted in Lawrence 2018, 2), reminding us of how quotations can possess what Walter Benjamin called a "transcendent force" (cited in Bruster 2000, 17). That phrase is especially applicable to Shakespeare, who is "the most quoted English author of all time" (Maxwell and Rumbold 2018, 1), and it also captures the extent to which a quotation contains both a use value (it can be applied to new settings) as well as an intrinsic value (it is already encrusted with prior meaning). That is, quoted Shakespeares "are imbued with the significance not just of their original source in Shakespeare, but of several centuries, and many layers, of subsequent borrowing," which Shakespeare scholars have long been interested in tracking (Maxwell and Rumbold 2018, 22). Inhering in "the strangers' case" speech is an iterability, not least because, to borrow from Douglas Bruster, it "tethers [itself] to the future as well as the past" (Bruster 2000, 3), since the speaker invites his audience, the apprentices of the play's London, as well as the audience of the playhouse that the playwright imagined when penning the scene, to apprehend from their present hostile stance towards foreigners a possible future in which they themselves might become aliens.

More's words speak to a specific context — the May Day riots that the play represents — but the speech's formulation imbues it with wider applications. In the play, the citizens' tendencies to blame their own social and economic deprivations on the strangers resonate with real social grievances in Elizabethan England: "The strangers eat the meat as it were of our English merchants' mouths," claimed John Fabian, a London draper, to Lord Burghley, in 1571, "even at their own doors, greatly enriching themselves thereby" (quoted in Selwood 2010). In Shakespeare's scene, Lincoln complains "Our country is a great eating country, argo they eat more in our country than they do in their own" (6.7-8). These all-consuming non-English, as Lincoln would have it, introduce foreign foods into the English diet — "They bring in strange roots, which is merely to the undoing of poor prentices" (6.11-12) — and implant themselves in English soil. As the apprentices look for the removal of the strangers (6.80-81), it is More who calls out their xenophobia and reminds them that they too could face banishment. He goes on to urge the apprentices to submit to the King's authority (161-65) and bow to his divine right, a deeply ideological position that suggests

the playwright's sensitivity to the limits of dramatic and theatrical representation in the Elizabethan period (Clare 1999, 57).

While these details and contexts locate More's words, they do not necessarily mitigate against the mapping of the speech on to modern cultural politics. In part, this is because the speech generalizes, from More's address to "you," which interpellates or hails its auditors, to strangers, and appeals to a common humanity. The speech further lends itself to quotation and appropriation because it is an appeal to and exercise in argument, as well as a demonstration of logic — "what would you think," asks More, as he exercises the "put case" (Tudeau-Clayton 2012, 242) and portrays the discrimination the rioters exhibit as not just immoral but irrational behavior (Wilson 2018, 5). The speech also encourages "perspective taking" (Wilson 2018, 8), as it invites its audience as presumed insiders to imagine themselves in the situation of presumed outsiders. That is, "the strangers' case" has the force not simply of logical argument and legal status, as it lays claims for the rights of all humans to safety or refuge — "What would you think / To be thus used?" — but also of ethics.

It is perhaps these qualities that appealed to Ian McKellen when he decided to include the speech as a regular feature of his repertoire. From his one-man shows *Acting Shakespeare* (1982) and *A Knight Out* (1994) to the Savannah Film festival in 2010, where McKellen gave an impromptu performance to a group of students (McKellen 2010), the actor has returned to More's words again and again. In 2012, at the launch of a book, *The People Speak: Voices that Changed Britain*, which included an extract from "the strangers' case," McKellen described the speech as Shakespeare's "plea for humanity" (McKellen 2013). An address to the Oxford Union in 2014 becomes more subjective, with McKellen using the speech to talk about his own experiences of homophobia and homophobic violence (McKellen 2014), but it also acquires an association with the plight of migrants, especially those peoples displaced from their homes as a consequence of war in Syria. The image of the body of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy who washed up on a beach near Bodrum, Turkey, is just one horrific and spectacularized example of this humanitarian crisis (Ibrahim 2018), a potent reminder of the other 5,096 people who lost their lives in 2015 trying to make the same journey to Europe as Kurdi's family.

The McKellen example substantiates the generalizable quality of the More speech already noted, as it affords structural analogies between McKellen's identity politics and his experiences as a white gay man, and the experience of refugees who encounter stigma both in and on their way to Europe. The reception contexts of McKellen's embodied performances before a live audience become more variable, however, when posted on social media or, more precisely, when they become digital objects and hyperlinks. For instance, in a YouTube video

(Purches 2016), McKellen's voice is combined with a still image of Banksy's painting of anti-migrant pigeons, which first appeared in Clacton-on-Sea, UK, in October 2014. It is in the context of digital technologies and social media practices that "the strangers' case" spreads. As videoed performances online, no longer fixed to their original iteration in a particular time and place, McKellen's performance of Shakespeare's *More* can be shared, reposted, and repurposed, thus generating new meanings and audiences in the process. Further, because of YouTube's system of tags and its algorithmic linking of content based on similarity, McKellen's performances become part of a wider network of videos.

### III. (Re)mediation

McKellen's repetition of *More*'s speech can be further understood through theories of remediation (Bolter and Grusin 2000). While remediation has become something of a generic term in media studies, Bolter and Grusin's work remains useful as a theorization of the essential relationality between different media and the human user and for foregrounding the interrelation between medium and context that is crucial to apprehending the reception of a text like *More*'s speech and its changing meanings. Primarily, remediation denotes how a new medium variously refashions, absorbs, and hybridizes an older medium, and how in turn the older forms respond to and also transform an ever-changing media environment. As such, *More*'s speech can be understood as the older technology of expression that is newly rendered on digital platforms such as YouTube and Twitter and hybridized and proliferated to produce a new range of reception contexts. These platforms thus play a constitutive role in how the speech gathers new meanings and audiences.

Bolter and Grusin distinguish between old and new, especially where they historicise remediation through immediacy and hypermediacy. Where "immediacy" is characteristic of "old" media, such as photograph and film, which in their traditional forms strive for the production of unmediated access to the content — or the real — and create the illusion of reality, hypermediacy is associated with "new" media such as websites, where the medium itself is overtly present through a proliferation of windows and the multiplicity of content. In this latter scenario, the interface requires the user's attention in conjunction with the content itself. However, Bolter and Grusin productively disrupt the hierarchy of new to old, noting that older media forms such as Baroque painting, and especially the works of Jan Vermeer, "absorbed and captured multiple media and multiple forms in oil" (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 37); this leads them to suggest that "hypermediacy was the counterpart to transparency in Western painting, an awareness of mediation whose repression almost guaranteed its repeated return" (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 37). Thus, "remediation does not destroy the aura of a work of art; instead, it always refashions that aura in another media



form" (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 75). This is where one might locate the value of the remediation theory to "the strangers' case," which like other Shakespearean texts, comes back, and in the process gains not so much a transcendence, as an uncanny "timeliness" (Garber 2009, 273).

McKellen is a contributing force to that timeliness, but so too is YouTube itself, where his performance of More's lines are remediated. As a hypermedia platform because of its presentation of windows or micro-screens, YouTube hails the user with choice. The availability of more videos similar to the one the user selects and views has the effect of disrupting the immediacy that one might associate with, say, a live performance, or even television. McKellen's More has, therefore, become something else, opened up to new content, some related, some unrelated. The related content includes other appropriations of the text on YouTube, but the unrelated content includes advertisements and commercial content that are, nonetheless, part of YouTube itself: a hybrid platform combining commercial and user-generated content (Burgess and Green 2009, 56; O'Neill 2018, 139-140). This is the logic of hypermediacy, which as Bolter and Grusin argue "expresses itself as multiplicity" (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 33). Crucial to this differentiated media environment are the users, who view themselves as active participants in the production of content through a range of user roles, such as posting, sharing, producing, and commenting. Comments on McKellen's videoed performance are illustrative of such user engagement and shifting reception contexts. One viewer posts "Can someone send this to Trump and see that he sees this?" ("hamadeyalook09" 2017). Here, a video first posted in 2013 takes on a new meaning as it is directed at the anti-migrant rhetoric of the then U.S. presidential candidate. Other viewers, expressing how affecting the lines are, desire a wider audience for them:

Uploaded 3 years ago and still so few views! One of the few times Shakespeare's words have taken a direct hit on my heart and left me trembling [...] Partly because he has made it so relevant, but majorly because of his stunning delivery. Will share this via FB and Twitter, etc., it ought to go viral! ("morganfisherart" 2016)

The post conveys a desire for human input into digital flow, for sharing emotion and affect in ways that, as Zizi Papacharissi has argued, constitute "affective publics." These are "networked publics that are mobilized and connected, identified and potentially disconnected through expressions of sentiment" (Papacharissi 2016, 311). Affect, which Papacharissi defines as "the intensity with which we experience emotion," becomes a way to understand how social media such as YouTube and Twitter provide "a way for citizens to feel their way into a story" (Papacharissi 2016, 318), through posting, commenting, and sharing, although that is not to say that all those operating in these spaces do so equally. In this way, the platform's participatory affordances promote vernacular

forms of media engagement and create the "collaborative storytelling structures" (Papacharissi 2016, 316) that, as in the example above, include the use, or sharing, of Shakespeare, which itself becomes something of an affective public, or a "structure of soft feelings" (Papacharissi 2016, 320) through which people join and interrupt the media flow. As Bolter and Grusin note, remediation "ensures that the older medium cannot be entirely effaced; the new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways" (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 47). The dependency can be at the level of form — so the YouTube vlog or address to camera owes something to the monologue — but content too, since that content is not lost through remediation but transformed; thus, as a text, Shakespeare is extended into new contexts and brought to new audiences. This has important implications for Shakespeare since the works can be made anew, or experienced outside of the more traditional markers or borders of the discipline.

In our contemporary culture of search, synonymous with Google and the myriad social media technologies we use daily, each with their own internal search functions, it is possible to discover and to track how extensively the More speech has travelled. As with other Shakespeare quotations, it is now part of the quotidian flow of digital networked platforms. The network's structuring on hashtags — in this instance, #strangerscase and #mountainishinhumanity — provides semantic links to the range of uses, which can then be archived and curated. For example, the Twitter account @TrueBelieversAU uses the phrase in engaging with an Australian current affairs show, *Q&A*: "#qanda Mountainish inhumanity. I love that phrase. Could it be the basis of a fresh look at refugee policy" (@TrueBelieversAU, Sept 5, 2016). Shakespeare's words act as conduits for opinions and also become catalysts, as we move from the familiar association of the speech with empathy to the suggestion of a principle.

Through Twitter's internal search function, it is possible to track other uses of the speech, such as Samantha Power's in her address to the Lincoln Center's Global Exchange Seminar in September 2016: "@AmbassadorPower implores audience to engage in arts as a means to push back on mountainish inhumanity. #ARTFORGOOD" (@LCGX, Sept 16, 2016). Power, who was US Ambassador to the United Nations at the time, introduces More's speech, which Shakespearean actor Jay O. Saunders performs. Power goes on to note that More's words are "relevant to this day as we are experiencing the greatest refugee crisis since the Second World War" (Power 2016, 8:38-8:44). More, she suggests, provides a response to the xenophobia and isolationism evident in contemporary perceptions of refugees and migrants, but equally "a challenge to us all to find new ways of using the power of art to push back against such 'mountainish inhumanity' and help people see that the case of so many wretched strangers could just as easily be our own" (Power 2016, 23:12-23:29). The call for collective responsibility builds on More's principle of a common

humanity but Power might also be accused of a sleight of hand in disavowing the significant agency of the US government for which she speaks and its capacity to improve the lives of the very immigrants she refers to.

Twitter provides further insight into how the speech is mobilised, and how Shakespeare's authoring or licensing hand is invoked: "As Shakespeare said, 'your mountainish inhumanity' - that of our Govts & far-right grps - must be addressed urgently" (@david\_manne, Jan 23, 2017). Quoting More / Shakespeare becomes not merely a return of the already expressed, but a way to empathize with the oppressed, to face those peoples who find themselves disenfranchised by structural inequalities or war, and to exercise ethical responsibility not to the self but to the other. These identifications with the speech are consonant with recent critical voices on the play. Sean Lawrence reads it, in part, through Emmanuel Levinas' ethics of the other: "instead of imagining a state in which everyone would fear for herself or himself. . . More imagines a situation in which everyone would fear for other people" (2018, 8). Contemporary uses of More's speech importantly disrupt categories of self / other. In 2011, Change Media and Australia's Bell Shakespeare Company workshopped the speech with a group of "new arrivals to Australia" (Change Media 2011). The resulting film short, which features a diverse cast, each reading lines from the speech, contrasts with the singular McKellen performance and his status as the quintessential white Shakespearean actor.

Whereas McKellen's More might trigger memories of his other Shakespearean roles — as well as associations with other Shakespearean actors famous for RP, such as Lawrence Olivier, Derek Jacobi and Patrick Stewart, and thus demonstrate "the implicit whiteness of Shakespearean celebrity" (Blackwell 2018, 9) — this video creates new sound and images for the text. Different voices, rather than the singular, Anglophone, Shakespearean voice, are heard in this video. In addition, each line is marked by a cut to a different face. This foregrounding of people of color who are making their home in Australia has important consequences both for media and for Shakespeare. In the first instance, the presentation of individuals contrasts with media coverage, where "refugees are not regarded as humans with history or biography but as numbers and things" (Khiabany 2016, 758). Media framings and terminology can have dehumanizing effects, and it is important to acknowledge that terms such as "the migrant" and "the forced migrant" that journalists and also researchers discursively employ "are performatively constructed figures with real, material and embodied consequences" (Leurs and Smets 2018, 10). In the second instance, the video produces a new set of histories that extend what Shakespeare is understood to signify and to encompass, in the process disrupting Shakespeare's cultural whiteness. This video could be an important resource to use in teaching Shakespeare, for instance, where it could counter the white,

Anglophone iterations through which Shakespeare is so often filtered. Using this as a resource could prompt students to discuss and reflect critically on their own positionality as it bears on their encounter with a Shakespearean text.

Shakespeare remediated becomes itself a form of remedy, as in the etymology of the word, from the Latin, *remederi*, "to heal, to restore to health," through processes of remaking, reimagining and recontextualizing the text. Through a combination of human participation and the affordances of a technology or medium, Shakespeare's *More* provides a poetics of empathy and survival. The key emphasis here is on a triangulation of three agential actors — the human subject or user that shares or participates in the remediated text, the technology, and the text itself — and their location within a media network. Bolter and Grusin's theory of remediation has been critiqued for granting the human too much stability, agency, and sovereignty, "with the media environment," as Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylińska argue, "receding into the role of a background for human engagement with media objects" (Kember and Zylińska 2012, 10). For Kember and Zylińska, Heidegger's understanding of technology as a "world forming process" that combines *tekhne*, or "bringing forth," and *poiesis*, or "presencing," prompts a refinement of remediation as a more complex to and fro between human and non-human. They suggest the term "mediation" to capture this hybrid dynamic, "whereby human creative activity is accompanied (and often superseded or even contradicted by) the work of non-human forces" (Kember and Zylińska 2012, 22). This is not to detract from human interventions and contributions. Their theory of mediation, or the interdependency of human and media actors, attends to precisely the kind of human interventions noted in both the YouTube post and *Change Media* production, when they articulate an ethical commitment to "cut across the flow of media in order to say something about them" (Kember and Zylińska 2012, 27). It is important, however, to recognize how these human cuts are situated within and even constituted by a dynamic media and technological environment. In this way, the thing we call "Shakespeare" is a combination of processes of remediation that involve human users in digital settings and also unseen or nonhuman agents (Desmet 2017) such as algorithms and interfaces.

Interpreting media — a term that itself always already includes the human user — as not simply a stabilization of media flow, but also as a cut or intervention, takes us further in accounting for why *More*'s words keep (re)appearing. In particular, they have been used to intervene in discourse about migrants in a U.S. context and especially regarding the Trump presidency's immigration policies. In 2017, the Shakespeare Association of America sought to take a stand against Trump's executive order that prohibited citizens of seven majority Muslim countries from travelling to the U.S. In a letter to members, SAA president Heather James expressed the organization's commitment to diversity, and concluded with a postscript: "To give the last word to Shakespeare, I provide a link

to Sir Ian McKellen's performance of Sir Thomas More on strangers" (James 2017). Shakespeare comes back here, or rather McKellen and More function as ventriloquists for the authoritative and authorial "last word," to espouse Shakespearean values based on tolerance and a sense of shared humanity. They are values that, one would hope, the network of professional Shakespeareans James's letter addresses share. It would be naïve, however, to think that everyone in the SAA shares these views, or that all members are comfortable with the association's overtly political commentary through Shakespeare.

One does not have to look far into the media flow to find anxieties about the appropriation of the speech and, by implication, the political use of Shakespeare. For instance, the BBC's inclusion of More's "the strangers' case" in *Shakespeare Live!*, its flagship program for the Shakespeare quatercentenary celebrations, generated some hostile reaction in the ideologically conservative press, with *The Daily Express* reporting "[o]utrage as BBC bosses 'use Shakespeare to push pro-immigration agenda'" (Moore 2016). The article quotes Conservative party MP Peter Bone, and his claim that the program makers had "gone out of their way to find a piece of writing which fits the left-wing establishment's pro-immigration agenda" (quoted in Moore 2016).

Notwithstanding Bone's racism and unacknowledged white male privilege, which gets displaced on to and filtered through Shakespeare, perhaps the producers had, quite deliberately, selected the More piece to highlight Shakespeare's relevance to contemporary issues such as the refugee crisis. Other selections might have made for a less liberal Shakespeare. The politics of quoting "the strangers' case" is, therefore, not simply about the appropriation of Shakespeare as pro-immigrant, as Bone alleges, but is also bound up with the BBC's interest in enshrining Shakespeare as singular and enduringly relevant on the occasion of the quatercentenary celebration. The dichotomies of right / left in the media alert one to the challenges of (re)mediated Shakespeare, or any other text that seeks to cut across media flow, to provide remedy. Bone's rhetoric, and the phobic sentiments it activates, are reflective of the right-wing press in the UK, which as a recent content-analysis of media coverage of the refugee crisis suggests, "expresse[s] a hostility toward refugees and migrants which [is] unique" (Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore 2015, 10) in a European context. Nonetheless, Kember and Zylinska's consideration of the cut as a meaningful media intervention provides a theoretical and ethical framework for thinking about the return to the More speech, which, as I have been emphasizing, is a turn to Shakespeare as a vital life source.

The turn to Shakespeare in order to cut into media flow was particularly evident in the coverage of the refugee crisis on BBC Newsnight on March 15, 2016, in the context of news that the number of migrants seeking refuge in Europe had reached 100,000, triple the rate of arrivals over the first half of 2015. The program closed off with actor Harriet Walter delivering

"the strangers' case" live in studio in a specially commissioned performance titled "Shakespeare's take on refugees" (BBC Newsnight 2016). Walter speaks direct to camera against the backdrop of a screen depicting the British Library's digitization of the More manuscript, thereby drawing Shakespeare's authoring hand into the present. As with the McKellen performances, we once again find the triangulation of actor-Shakespeare-technology, with each agent playing a constitutive role in the speech's mediation. However, where comments on McKellen's performance tend towards the empathetic, some of those on the Walter video reveal phobic attitudes to the tenor of the speech, resisting the implied association between More's empathy and the plight of refugees in the present:

They come, they come as helpless immigrants mostly young men unarmed and seemingly harmless. but once here in, they do arm themselves and demand special treatment and immunity from our laws.

to not only give them shelter bit fine homes and furnishings cars monies and when they go to fight against us...we must pay them war benefits, as if they ate our soldiers.

these are not immigrants these, are invaders...and if we do not fight and push them out of our lands we will have no lands...then where will we go [sic?].

("Tanya Masters" 2016)

#mountainishinhumanity seems a suitable response to such sentiments. A further counter is Stephen Greenblatt's claim that Shakespeare is a cure for xenophobia (Greenblatt 2017). In a personally reflective essay, largely concerned with *The Merchant of Venice*, Greenblatt describes Shakespeare's works in distinctly humanist terms: they are, he writes, "a living model not because they offer practical solutions to the dilemmas they so brilliantly explore but because they awaken our awareness of the human lives that are at stake" (Greenblatt 2017). Such claims are exemplary of "the impossible ethical gravity with which we have charged these texts and, in particular, this author," writes Emma Smith, making Shakespeare "like Plato's or Derrida's pharmakon. . . both disease and cure" (Smith 2017). Greenblatt wonders at Shakespeare's "extraordinary life-making" capacities, a gift to us not just of imagination but of empathy, of humanity, and, by way of a concluding illustration, quotes "the strangers' case":

The lines speak movingly to one of our most pressing contemporary dilemmas. . . . Such language isn't a substitute for a coherent, secure, and humane international refugee policy....Yet these words do what they can to keep before our eyes the sight of "the wretched strangers / Their babies at their backs and their poor luggage, / Plodding to the ports and coasts for transportation." For a long moment in dramatic time, the

distance between natives and strangers collapses; walls wobble and fall; a ghetto is razed. (Greenblatt 2017)

A constellation of tolerance, plurality, and diversity, Greenblatt's Shakespeare is culturally progressive, but not fully political, and speaks to and for an imagined global collective. If there is a turn to traditional formulations about Shakespeare's humanism here, coupled with an undifferentiated sense of Shakespeare's audience or indeed Greenblatt's own readers, and how some of them might experience xenophobia directly rather than abstractly, it is one that might be worth endorsing, not least in the way that Greenblatt uses "the strangers' case" to disrupt a binary of insider (Shakespeare) and outsider (the refugee, or other). What emerges in Greenblatt's use of the speech is Shakespeare's authorial hand, which itself becomes a figure for, or a recognizable referent to, an earlier moment in history when English and / or British — and metonymically Western — identity was subject to (re)negotiation in relation to the presence of refugees or "foreigners" within England. Shakespeare becomes a shorthand for prior histories of identity formations that belie a simplistic binary of us and them.

#### IV. Humans

The turn to Shakespeare's *More* in the context of the refugee crisis and on social media provides an especially interesting case study of Shakespeare's ongoing cultural currency. How Shakespeare is being valued and is functioning is more readily visible than before because social media platforms variously accelerate, visualize, and compress connections between people and ideas. In the context of the refugee crisis, however, this Shakespearean emphasis is potentially problematic. Instead, the emphasis needs to reside on people, not some abstract hermeneutical fetishizing of Shakespeare. As one Twitter user posts, "We shouldn't need the cultural capital of 'Shakespearean' verse to #StandWithRefugees but if it helps, it helps, & he hits the nail on the head with our 'mountainish inhumanity'" (@justgenerally 2018). In other words, the generic quality of Shakespeare, in the context of current nativist and far-right discourses across the world, warrants emphasis; indeed, it may be the thing, above all else, that we value as Shakespearean. As Ewan Fernie has argued, the history of Shakespeare's value, which for him is the history of the plays' collective expression of freedom, invites us to interpret Shakespeare as part of a complex transaction between equal agents rather than some tradition laden, iconic presence that is bound to one nation (Fernie 2017, 45) that obliterates the cause or feelings it is facilitating. As persuasive and attractive a formulation as it is, however, Fernie's claims need to be supplemented with a Shakespeare criticism attentive to the range of identity valences in play in the construction and experience of Shakespeare's works,

especially as these have historically been shaped by the phenomenology of whiteness. Ruben Espinosa gives expression to these issues when he searches for hope in More's words in the context of the anti-immigrant shooting in El Paso and Trump's undergirding of white supremacy:

I thought of all the whites in Shakespeare whose value is set against those darker of skin. After all, it isn't really my brown skin that makes me vulnerable — it is the workings of whiteness that imagines me as a threat because of my skin and thus threatens my very existence. It is your mountainish inhumanity that haunts me. And standing here amid that barbaric wall and the open wound of this borderland community, I urge you not just to stand with refugees, immigrants, and those dark of skin, but to stand against white supremacy by committing to antiracist efforts any time you sit to read, sit to write, or stand before your students who are seeking to make sense of the world around them. (Espinosa 2019)

Espinosa's personal tone is a powerful reminder of the potential, as well as the challenges, of a transaction with Shakespeare — he is both present, the enabling hand as it were, and absent, a conduit for affect, for sharing feelings and articulating empathy in ways that can resonate quite differently depending on the context in which they are used and on the individuals who appeal to them. In short, Shakespeare's freedom or cure for xenophobia can seem a white one, so as critics and students of the works, we need to move toward a disruptive use of Shakespeare, one where Shakespeare's canonicity recedes into the background and where the human actors, in the media flow that is the refugee crisis, are brought to the fore. I want to conclude with some recent uses of the speech, two of which were produced to mark World Refugee Day, that I think exemplify this approach.

Shakespeare's Globe profiled a film, *The Strangers' Case*, on its Twitter account, as part of a series of events to mark Refugee Week (@The\_Globe 2018). Created by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the film opens with Kim Cattrall on the Globe stage — thus returning us to associations with the white, star actor McKellen — but adopts the same device as the Bell Shakespeare production, with a succession of voices and faces delivering lines from the speech. The camera circles around the actor's body on the stage and links the individually performed lines visually to the experience of refugees by interspersing the performances with images of refugees from television news. Indeed, the editing, especially the use of jump cuts, lends the video the feeling of a news report, or news editorial film, so that the film becomes yet another layer to media coverage of the refugee crisis. But having foregrounded the actors and the human stories of refuge that get subsumed into narratives and media frames, the film ends with grey text on white background: "This is Shakespeare's rallying cry for humanity. Now it's your turn" (@The\_Globe 2018). The



Globe film politicizes Shakespeare, who becomes a catalyst for an affective public, with viewers invited to "Share now and #StandwithRefugees" (@The\_Globe 2018). While this call avails of Shakespeare's cultural authority and plays into the Globe's own brand and the cultural cachet of the assembled actors, the use of the hashtag also promotes the IRC's work and imbricates Shakespeare into a network, so that it too becomes a hashtag to be followed, or pursued.

Another production that employs #StandwithRefugees is the film short, *The Strangers' Case*, directed by Peter Trifunovic and starring Ibrahim Knight as the Thomas More figure. The film remediates Hand D's scene, relocating it to a busy pub in Leeds (Trifunovic 2018). Unlike other productions, this film places the speech into the context of the fuller scene: it opens with the apprentices, here imagined as the locals in a pub, talking about strangers, but the mise-en-scene is further modernized through the incorporation of current news coverage about migrants. Media frames, from the rolling news that runs in the background, to the newspaper held up in front of the camera, are understood as shaping the phobic attitudes that More, played by British Asian actor Ibrahim Knight, enters into the scene to argue against. The film uses sound and score to create a menacing tone that heightens the hostile atmosphere that More seeks to quell. Knight's performance is passionate, yet it ends on a note of exasperation, with the final lines "This is the strangers' case / And this your mountainish inhumanity" prefaced with a sigh, or a search for breath. The pathos of those lines is complemented with a physical gesture, as the citizens lean in to lay a hand on More's shoulders, forming a tableau that remediates the scene as a Renaissance painting. The Shakespearean hand is here multiplied and hybridized into a collective.

The film, that is, imagines the kind of affective publics that iterations of "the strangers' case" constitute. To recall, these networked publics "emerge when people feel part of a story that develops, and to which they too contribute their own expressions, through words, pictures, or videos, thereby also taking the story further" (Siapera et al. 2018, 3). Comments on YouTube provide ways that future viewers might engage with the film: "Absolutely brilliant, and so moving and thought provoking" ("Karen Dodgson" 2019). Similarly, the Globe film generates affect and forms points of connection between people: "Shakespeare never brought me to the brink of tears before" (@MyCatsOutlook 2018). In the context of the phobic attitudes and anti-migrant sentiment noted earlier, these contributions, however performatively articulated, nonetheless help to counter the dehumanization and spectacularization of refugees and migrants in media discourses, and help to "emphasize they are fellow human beings with aspirations" (Leurs and Smets 2018, 10). However, there is also only so much that consciousness-raising exercises can realise. A big data analysis of Twitter's role in the mediation of the refugee crisis concludes that while humanitarian oriented hashtags such as #safepassgae and #letthemstay "indicate a concern with the hardships

imposed on refugees," these are modest in number, suggesting that "the refugee story is more about politics than about humanitarian responsibility" (Siapera et al. 2018, 7). Realizing real change to the lives of those designated refugees requires collective political action, not just in Europe, but globally, and a commitment to refuge as a "principle that when people face serious harm at home, they should be allowed to flee and receive access to a safe haven, at least until they can go home or be permanently reintegrated elsewhere" (Betts and Collier 2017, 3). It is a principle that also underwrites the rhetoric that Shakespeare gives his Sir Thomas More.

This essay has explored how a speech that imagines the migration of people itself has become part of media flow and, as #strangerscase, part of affective publics online. In addressing Shakespeare's hand in all of this, the limits of "the strangers' case" or indeed any other Shakespearean quotation to equip us with the vocabulary to grapple with humanitarian crises, or to function as a conceptual tool for negotiating racial politics, become all too apparent. In the first instance, there is the sheer magnitude and complexity of the refugee crisis. In the second, there is Shakespeare's cultural heft, and the traditional legacies of white privilege that accumulate around it. As we have seen, some appropriations of More feature white actors who avail of their cachet as Shakespeareans and as celebrity actors to persuade normatively raced audiences at home to welcome the non-normatively raced migrant in the context of the familiar, assuring and authoritative imprimatur of Shakespeare. But equally evident are the opportunities that reside within the remediated text and the ghostly presence of Shakespeare that it produces, as creative productions, quotations, and appropriations disrupt raced ways of seeing, explore the responsibility of self to other, and articulate the relationality of citizen to stranger. What emerges are striking conjunctions between the immediacy of a human news story, the affective power of More's rhetoric, Shakespeare's cultural capital, and the affordances of social media technologies. #strangerscase is a gift; digital media, its conduit; and Shakespeare, its enabling agent that, from a set of prior histories, pleads for tolerance now, and turns attention to those people seeking refuge across the world. "Shakespeare is no cadaver" here, to borrow from Orson Welles and Roger Hill, but "a living, vibrant entity that has the power of grasping us by the hand" (quoted in Haughey 2018, 133). This is not to conclude with some naïve idealization or fetishizing of Shakespeare but rather to recognize that Shakespearean texts are one of the layers to this human story, which in turn shapes the Shakespeare we make in and value for our times. #letthemstay #standwithrefugees #strangerscase

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