We Sit as Kings

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Recommended Citation
WE SIT AS KINGS

by

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Bachelor of Science
Ball State University, 2010

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in
Theatre
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Carolina
2017
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DEDICATION

To anyone ever labeled the “other” based on religion, race, orientation, gender, or nationality.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my teachers Robyn Hunt, Steve Pearson, and Stan Brown who gave me the courage and confidence to share my voice. Thank you to Dimitri Woods, Nicole Dietze, Candace Thomas, Carin Bendes, Rachle Kuhnle, Matthew Cavender, and Benjamin Roberts for being the best listeners and sounding boards for this piece, without which, it wouldn’t have developed as it did.
ABSTRACT

*We Sit As Kings* is a solo performance piece that explores the exclusion of certain peoples in 1515 London, 2015 Europe, and the potential rise of power of those who choose to exploit the inbred fear of these people. The piece uses texts from Thomas More, partially written by William Shakespeare and transcripts from BBC news. The play was inspired by an accidental discovery of Sir Ian McKellen performing the final monologue.
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DEVELOPMENT

Writing my solo show was not something that came easy for me. I knew I’d find it difficult to get behind performing something that I’d written myself. Nevertheless, I loved the class and experimenting with different writing prompts became like a game. I learned so much by having to write- then share- a blurb without forethought or expectation. I learned even more by listening to my colleagues’ excerpts and styles. But still, I struggled to find a topic, on which I could expand. It seems like every week, I settled on a new idea, but as soon as I’d start writing a substantial amount of text, I’d lose interest and return to square one.

Later in the semester I took a day off from class to drive to an audition for a Shakespeare company. The drive was roughly five hours each way, so I chose to pass the time by listening to one of my favorite podcasts, “WTF with Marc Maron.” Mr. Maron interviews a variety of people on his show, his guests usually actors, musicians, comedians, politicians, or anyone with a mild level of fame. Given the nature of my trip, I chose to listen to him interview Ian McKellen, who – as I predicted - spoke at length about Shakespeare and the bard’s universal themes that still remain resonate today. At the end of McKellen’s interview, he insisted on leaving Mr. Maron with a monologue (Mr. Maron had previously shared his lack of exposure to the bard, so McKellen felt responsible for his introduction). McKellen shared a speech from the rarely performed and relatively unknown Thomas More. The monologue, spoken by the title character, condemns the citizens of London for their “mountainish inhumanity” regarding their
exclusive and detestable views on refugees. In the play’s context, the refugees are those of French and Dutch descent who landed in London in 1515. I was floored by the relevance of these themes, for during this time Donald Trump’s candidacy was a far-fetched fantasy that no one took seriously, so national and global news placed significant focus on the Syrian refugee crisis. Many Americans (and Europeans) were vocalizing their fears of allowing refugees to enter the country. I was immediately reminded of the infamous photograph of the refugee boy lying at the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The concept of my solo show began to unfold.

I knew I’d utilize Shakespeare’s Thomas More, including the monologue Ian McKellen recited, but I’d combine it with stories of today’s refugee discussions to highlight the parallels. First, I read Thomas More, or rather the first act. The play is somewhat disjointed, and was actually never finished. In my copy of Shakespeare’s complete works, the Thomas More script had several different notes and fonts, each font depicting a different writer’s contributions, among them William Shakespeare, Anthony Munday, Henry Chettle, Thomas Dekker, and the Master of the Revels, Edmund Tilney. Shakespeare’s contribution to the play, as well as the portions of the plot pertaining to the London refugee crisis, were limited to the first act, after which the play goes on to depict the rise and fall of Thomas More within the monarchy of the fickle Henry VIII. It became apparent that play’s dialogue and themes were erratic due to the multiple voices telling the story, lending to the play’s insignificance.

I chose to limit the excerpts from Thomas More to only those written by Shakespeare to maintain some consistency. Once these sections were chosen and edited so that they could be understood out of context, I focused on how I would incorporate
today’s refugee conflicts. I read several articles from The New York Times, The Guardian, and BBC. In order to uphold a through-line, while also distancing the audience from the action, I decided to narrow my focus to articles specifically out of London (since the piece was performed in the Fall of 2015, it was exactly 500 years after the London riots in May of 1515, when the first act of Thomas More takes place). I settled on an article from BBC in which the reporter, who became a character, explains the UK and European Union’s pressures and proposed responsibility on the matter.

I then felt a need for a moment of humor, and at this time Donald Trump’s proposal for a wall separating the United State from Mexico was also creating a media stir. I took transcripts from Trump interviews in which he labels Mexican immigrants as rapists and murderers. This rhetoric fit seamlessly into the discussion among the fear of “others” infiltrating our domestic borders. I’d end the piece with Thomas More’s powerful monologue that shames the people of London for their “mountainish inhumanity” that I heard Ian McKellen flawlessly orate.

The only thing that was missing was the viewpoint of the refugees, themselves. From the suggestion of my mentor, I added silent episodes manifesting the great feats refugees conquer to escape the bestial circumstances of their homeland. I found photos from across the internet that show’s refugees (men, women, elderly, children, even babies) climbing barbed-wire fences, crammed in boats to cross the Mediterranean, standing in lines in early 20th century Ellis Island, etc…

Now the piece had it’s material and I began to shape and edit what I’d gathered. It became a cycle; beginning with a silent episode, then hearing from the reporter, then
witnessing the May Day crisis in 1515 London, and back to a silent episode. Trump was added in during the last cycle, right before Thomas More’s chastising speech.
DESIGN

Obviously the design of the piece was heavily influenced by the space in which it would be performed, and with the knowledge that the space would be shared by seven other performance pieces. Therefore, the set needed to be easily assembled and dissembled. The only major set pieces became a ladder that would act as a fence I’d climb during one of the silent episodes, a bench where Thomas More would sit, but also act as a boat during a silent episode, and also a pedestal for Donald Trump to stand on. The set was littered with several pieces of luggage and bags from different times, bundled and nestled wherever the silent episodes would begin.

Lighting became important to shift from the different sections, indicating various locations. Each section maintained the same lighting throughout, i.e. the reporter’s was always lit with small focus to indicate a cameral light and the silent episodes were all backlit so drastically differentiate between the sections with heavy debate and dialogue. A camera flash was also utilized in the midst of the silent backlit moments to do homage to the photographs, from which the images were taken. I found it somewhat disquieting seeing the horrific images and knowing someone was standing by to snap the photo.

The costume was neutral, jeans and a grey shirt. I wanted a simplified silhouette that could loosely suggest things people could where in 1515, but also today. I wanted the piece to move quickly and didn’t want to waste any time changing clothes. The only place I felt the piece suffered because of this, was when we see Donald Trump. If I were to do this again, I’d add a jacket and tie to the ensemble for this part.
**SCRIPT**

**Prologue**

*Lights fade in. A woman (perhaps backlit) in a refugee camp with a baby enters from upstage right. She’s been walking for days and will continue for days more. Once she arrives down stage center, she stops, stares out. Click*

*She crosses to Stage Left, sets down the baby and luggage. In one fluid motion, she turns out, lights shift, she is now James Randale, a news reporter.*

**Scene 1**

**REPORTER**

Good evening. It’s Thursday, October 1, 2015. I’m James Randale, political correspondent, *The People’s News*. Tonight I’m reporting from the House of Commons, where the United Kingdom has claimed to take in 1,000 Syrian refugees by Christmas, according to Prime Minister David Cameron. About 260 refugees have already arrived in the United Kingdom as part of the government's scheme to relocate 20,000 people from Syrian camps by 2020. The government has also provided £1 billion in aid, with an extra £100 million given to charities to help thousands displaced by the conflict. The UK has been under pressure, however, to take in more people from Syria and other neighboring countries as Europe struggles to deal with a huge influx of refugees. As we reported earlier this week, on Sunday, it emerged 84 Church of England bishops had written to the Prime Minister urging him to accept at least 50,000 refugees. But speaking in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister said the bishops' position was "wrong". He suggested they should press other countries to fulfill their aid commitments. He said quote: "I think the right thing to do is to take 20,000 refugees from the camps. If you become part of the mechanism of distributing people around the European Union, then you're encouraging people to make that dangerous journey."

Now the point he and others make, is that Europe has an external border and needs to prove it in order to make sure people don't believe that it is a risk-free easy journey to the European Union. Speaking outside The Commons, the Prime Minister's official spokeswoman said the figure of 1,000 Syrian refugees arriving in the UK by Christmas was "an ambition we are working to achieve" and that the Prime Minister wanted to "step up the pace" of the resettlement program. The government will issue a progress update after Christmas. I’m James Randale, *The People’s News*
He crosses upstage around bench

London,

1515

As he continues around the bench, lights shift (or maybe not) and he’s crossed into 1515, London.

STRUMP:

It is hard when Englishmen’s patience must be thus jetted on by strangers,

STING:

Let’s beat them down, and bear no more of these abuses.

STRUMP:

Peace, hear me! He that will not see butter at eleven pence a pound, meal at nine shillings a bushel, and beef at four nobles a stone, list to me.

STING:

It will come to that pass if strangers be suffered. Mark him.

STRUMP:

Trash, trash. They breed sore eyes, and ‘tis enough to infect the city. For these bastards of dung – as you know, they grow in dung – have infected us, and it is our infection will make the city shake. We will show no mercy upon the strangers.

STING:

No doubt but in the morning we’ll go forth revolting, and make it the worst day for the strangers that ever they saw. How say ye? Do ye subscribe, or are ye faint-hearted revolters?

*He shifts as if immediately burdened by the citizens’ angst and becomes Thomas More. He crosses downstage of the bench and sits.*

MORE

My searching eye did never entertain

A more distracted countenance of grief

Than I have late observed
In the displeased commons of the city.

The city in an uproar, and the King

Is threatened if he come out of his house.

Interlude

More remains seated, he turns to face Stage Left. He retrieves a basket from under the bench, as he sits up. lights shift and he becomes...

A boy sitting on a boat (perhaps backlit), packed with people. He sits, his space limited. At last, he sees land ahead and stands. He waits for the right time, and then grabs his bags, jumps into the water, and wades with his bags on his head. Once on land, he collapses with relief. He praises God, then looks out. Click.

He then realizes his journey is not over. He picks up his things, and continues toward Stage Left. He sets down the basket, and in another swift motion, he turns out, lights shift, and he’s James Randale.

Scene 2

REPORTER

Good evening. I’m James Randale, political correspondent, The People’s News. A panic swelled over many US governors and Congressmen Monday regarding immigration and border security in light of the recent attacks on Paris. Over half of the US governors have rallied to exclude the entry of Syrian refugees into their states – a poignant act of defiance against the President’s plan to resettle 10,000 refugees from camps. The US has already welcomed around 1900 people over the last four years, many of which having found refuge within the states whose governors nor refuse further entry.

In a related story, presidential hopeful Donald Trump responded by saying that if he were president, he would strongly consider closing all mosques in the US. He said quote: absolute hatred is coming from these areas. The hatred is incredible.” We’ll continue this coverage and report any breaking developments.

He crosses behind the bench, lights shift (or not) and he reenters London, 1515

STING:

Come, come, strangers rule the roast? Yes, but we’ll baste the roast.

Come gallant bloods, you, whose free souls do scorn

to bear th'enforced influx of Aliens.
STRUMP:

Add rage to resolution,

Shall these enjoy more privilege than we

In our own country? Let’s then become their slaves.

Since justice keeps not them in greater awe,

We’ll be ourselves rough ministers at law.

STING:

Use no more swords,

Nor no more words,

But fire the houses,

STRUMP

Ay, for either the men of law will hear our cries or we may as well make bonfires on as at Midsummer. We’ll alter today in the calendar, and set it down in flaming letters.

STING:

We shall be heard or

Let some of us enter the strangers’ houses,

And, if we find them there, then bring them forth.

Dutch or French,

So it be a wench,

I’ll upon her

Burn down their kennels! Let us straight away,

We march to make our cause be heard today.

*Again, he shifts as if immediately burdened by the citizens’ angst and becomes More. He crosses downstage of the bench and sits.*

MORE

The captains of this insurrection
Have ta’en themselves to arms.

O power, what art thou in a madman’s eyes!

Thou mak’st the plodding idiot bloddy-wise.

**Interlude**

*He stands, lights shift, and he becomes…*

*An elderly man beneath a border fence (perhaps backlit). He gathers his luggage beneath the fence, and begins climbing. He ascends, and then descends with great care and difficulty. Once down, he continues moving around downstage of the bench. He looks out. Click.*

*He continues Stage Left, sets down his luggage, and in another swift motion, looks out, lights shift, and he’s James Randale.*

**Scene 3**

**REPORTER**

Good evening, I’m James Randale, The People’s News. As we previously reported, in light of recent terror attacks, many countries contemplate closing their borders to Syrian refugees. Political analysts are now coming forward claiming these actions are rash and could potentially lead to an increased radicalization among those denied entry. They add that these exclusions directly enforce the Islamic State’s narrative that Western culture is at war with Islam. Again we will continue this coverage.

*As he turns upstage, applause fades in. He steps onto the bench and has become Donald Trump. As he moves downstage on the bench, the applause fades out.*

**TRUMP**

They’re bringing murderers…rapists pouring across the border, our money going out and their people coming in ‘cause our leaders are stupid. Our politicians are stupid and the they’re much smarter, much sharper, much more cunning and they send the bad ones over because they don’t want to pay for them, they don’t want to take care of them. Why should they, when the stupid leaders here will do it for them? And that’s what’s happening, whether you like it or not.

Just to sum up. I would do various things very quickly. I would build a great wall; and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me. And I’ll build it very inexpensively. I will build a great wall on our southern border and I would make them pay for that wall, mark my words.
You have people coming through the border that are from all over. And they’re bad. They’re really bad. I’ve spoken to border guards and I’ve said, “How bad is it?” and they say, “Mr. Trump you have no idea how bad.” You have people coming in that are killers and rapists. I mean they’re coming into this country.

I don’t think it’s a small percentage. Look, you force them to build the wall because we give them a fortune. A wall is a tiny little peanut compared to the kind of money... I would do something very severe unless they contributed or gave us the money to build the wall. I would build it. I’d build it very nicely. I’m very good at building things.

*Applause fades in.* As Trump turns upstage, *applause cuts out, lights shift* (or not) and we’re back in London, 1515. Strump begins his lines while still on bench. He steps down.

**STRUMP**

Now listen you who preach the law of London

Since we are over the bank of our obedience

Thus will we bear down all things.

**STING**

Speak Sheriff More, you’ve heard our cause. Speak, speak!

*As before, he shifts as if immediately burdened by the citizens’ angst and becomes More. He crosses downstage of the bench and sits.*

**MORE:**

O what a rough and riotous charge you have.

Good masters, hear me speak.

You wish removing of the strangers then?

Grant them removed, and grant that this your noise

Hath chid down all the majesty of England.

*He stands, begins to work the room.*

Imagine that you see the wretched strangers,

Their babies at their backs, with their poor luggage,
Plodding to th’ ports and coasts for transportation,
And that you sit as kings in your desires,
Authority quite silenced by your brawl,
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 selfsame hand, self reasons, and self right,
Would shark on you, and men, like ravenous fishes,
Would feed on one another.
Let me set up before you thoughts, good friends,
One supposition, which if you will mark
You shall perceive how horrible a shape
Your innovation bears. First, ‘tis a sin
Which oft th’apostle did forewarn us of,
And twere no error if I told you all
You were in arms ‘gainst God.
Yea, certainly you are.
For to the king God hath His office lent
Of dread, of justice, power, and command:
Hath bid him rule. What do you, then,
Rising ‘gainst him that God Himself installs,
But rise ‘gainst God? What do you to your souls
In doing this? O, desperate as you are,
Whose discipline is riot,
Wash your foul minds with tears, and those same hands
That you, like rebels, lift against the peace,
Lift up for peace; and your un Reverent knees,
Make them your feet and kneel to be forgiven.
Tell me but this: What revel captain
As mutinies are incident, by his name
Can still the rout? Who will obey a traitor?
Or how can well that proclamation sound
When there is no addition but ‘a rebel’
To qualify a rebel?
Alas, alas! 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 harbor? 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? What would you think
To be thus used? This is the strangers’ case,
And this your mountainish inhumanity.
My lords and brethren, what I here have spoke,
My country’s love and more the people’s care.

_He turns upstage, he picks up his luggage, lights shift and he’s a young man (perhaps backlit) arriving at a border. He sets his luggage down and takes off his hat. He waits. He steps. He waits. He steps. He waits. He steps. Lights fade._
INSPIRATIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS
ANALYSIS

In creating the piece I was glad to have a time restraint. Encouraged to keep the pieces between 15 and 20 minutes, going beyond that would’ve been considerably more daunting. After all, it was only me up there. But in retrospect, I think I could add a sizeable amount of material, while keeping with the theme. I quickly became reminded of several other historical events in which people have been labeled “the others” and punished for it. If I were to pursue this project again, I’d be compelled to incorporate sections about the Jews in fascist Germany, Japanese-Americans in World War II America, African Americans during the slave trade, homosexuals during the Stone-Wall Riots, Communist allies in Cold War America, etc… The list goes on and I’d have to be careful of writing an eight-hour play.

I’ve also been extremely interested lately in the idea of fear and how it’s been used as the best instrument for expressing “mountainish inhumanity.” I’d explore how to drive the piece with fear playing the role of the villain, even personifying it. Fear seems to be the root of all our actions of hate and exclusion. I’ve thought that if I could accurately portray fear and it’s repercussions, maybe I could start a conversation on how to not let fear influence our choices and opinions.

I’ve also been compelled for the first time to revise the piece given the current political climate, i.e. a potential travel ban and white supremacy in the White House. When the piece was originally performed the Trump monologue was a moment of levity that allowed the audience to exhale from the tense subject matter fed to them. However,
now it’s all too real. With Trump actually in the White House and these far out ideas becoming realities, the humor has been stripped from the monologue. This will need careful consideration and perhaps a reformatting of the play as a whole.
REFERENCES

