

Methinks the Man

Peter Brook and the Authorship Question

by Don Rubin

Shakespeare's reputation as a producible dramatist – that is, not just a playwright for literary study – has been carried for centuries by his key stage interpreters: directors and actors. They have long been the primary workers who have kept him alive. We aficionados, scholars, academics, and enthusiastic theatregoers just keep him in print. Not a bad thing but secondary no doubt for dramatists, less immediately crucial to the overall reputation than the fact that artists are still doing the damned plays.

So if theatre artists really are the ultimate keepers of the quintessential flame, why have we not turned to them more in our quest to bring light to a benighted public on the long vexing question of who Shakespeare really was? In preparing for new productions and the roles they will play, directors and actors are truly the ultimate students and teachers studying with extraordinary perspicacity such things as period and place, social manners and psychology, biography and history. This is a fact.

While doing research on this paper I asked a number of actors and directors like Hank Whittemore about how knowledge of the life of Oxford might deepen the understanding of the plays of Shakespeare. He said when staging *Twelfth Night*, it would doubtless be helpful for the actors playing Olivia and Feste to know they are representing the Queen of England and her highest-ranking Earl, the latter being the court jester, the truth-teller. It could also help in that play to know that Malvolio is Hatton but, when in the mock “prison,” he becomes Edmund Campion with a very bold jab at the English government for its treatment of him. It's a comedy, but in the beginning it was a court satire.

“It has occurred to me,” added Hank, “that Laurence Olivier would have done well to know that Hamlet was an Oxford self-portrait. He would have found more vitality. Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V* was an extraordinary mirror of Oxford, whether deliberate or not. The banter in the final scene has that light, quick touch of wit, the back-and-forth that must have delighted Elizabeth at the royal court. Staging then can be simultaneously universal and specific, personal and definitely political. This is born out of a need to speak up without getting into trouble, a need to speak the truth to

power.

“When Hamlet tells Gertrude that he would rather sit with his fiancé Ophelia, he says, ‘No, good mother, here is metal more attractive.’ The Court audience would have realized he was playing on the ‘precious metal’ that, in 1583 or so, was to have given Elizabeth the source of eternal youth – and that it had not worked. Even the Queen might have laughed. This was the world where these plays were born, and knowing it could certainly make a difference in production.”

Ron Destro, an Oxfordian who runs a group in New York City called the Oxford Shakespeare Theater Company, works both in the US and in England. When I asked him in an email about the possible value of knowing more about the biography of the author, he said that when he staged *Richard III* on Bosworth Field – a production in which he played the Earl of Oxford – there was a deeper connection with the character, knowing that these events were based upon real incidents.

“In *The Winter’s Tale*,” said Ron, “when Paulina brings the baby out in the basket in front of Polixines, knowing that this scenario was proposed by Peregrine Bertie’s mother adds a dimension that otherwise wouldn’t be there.”

“And all those father-daughter and husband-wife relationships depicted in the plays have a much deeper meaning when viewed through an Oxfordian lens,” he continued. “We once performed *Hamlet* on the banks of the Avon, just three miles from Oxford’s grandmother’s estate, at Billesley Manor, just a mile from where a young girl, Katherine Hamlet, in 1579, drowned in an Ophelia-like way, of what is said to have been a broken heart. So I brought my actors to that location where we picked flowers to use in the Ophelia scenes. It was a much richer acting experience performing near where this all happened. We dedicated our performance to that girl using flowers taken from that same riverside.”

“I think knowing as much about the writer and why he wrote the play, is always (if even indirectly) helpful to the actor. It is certainly useful for the director (and the audience, especially, to help them “get” all the humor!). One gets a fuller meaning that one would otherwise miss – like seeing *The Crucible* but knowing nothing about 1950s blacklists.”

To test this a bit further, I decided to look into the life and work of one of my own

Don Rubin is the General Editor of the six-volume World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre (Routledge) and is the former Chair of the Department of Theatre at Toronto’s York University. The co-founder of York’s MA and PhD programs in Theatre Studies, Prof. Rubin taught a senior-level course there on the authorship question for four years. He has been a long-serving member of the SOF Board of Directors and has published widely on authorship subjects. This paper was first presented at the 2014 SOF Conference in Ashland, Oregon. It has been expanded and edited for publication.

theatrical heroes – the British director Peter Brook. Author of one of the great manifestos of twentieth century theatre, *The Empty Space* was published in 1968; it was a book that demanded a rethinking of the very nature of theatre production, a book which excoriated what Brook called “the deadly theatre,” the literary theatre, the too respectful and timid theatre as being a theatre very different indeed than what Brook called the “rough theatre” of the Elizabethans. Brook hated the prettified nineteenth century theatre which turned so much living Shakespearean production into overdressed poetry recitals.

His *Empty Space* was a book of challenge as well as of theory which inspired theatre people world-wide to explore both more widely by looking into other cultures, and more deeply by looking into alternative ways of seeing. Put another way, for most of the twentieth century and even into the twenty-first, Peter Brook was the *sine qua non* of truth in theatre, truth which reached deep into dramatic text to find new ways of seeing every play he produced, trying to find in them what the French visionary Antonin Artaud once called the fragile fluctuating centre of a work of art, a centre that Artaud believed that forms could never reach.

Who better to look at than Brook – the man who brought Artaud’s ideas to the Royal Shakespeare Company, the man who ran that distinguished company for several years – and the man whose stagings of more than a dozen of the Bard’s plays revitalized Shakespeare production itself in the twentieth century? His work explored the deepest levels of seeming, being, and becoming – the deepest levels of actor interpretations of these classics.

Perhaps Brook’s most famous Shakespeare production was his *Midsummer Night’s Dream* done in the 1970s, a production set, not in some gauzy nineteenth century forest, but in a mystical, magical gymnasium, in a circus-like world filled with trapezes and actors simply being actors. It was not only dazzling but it actually shook the cobwebs off the text and made Shakespeare, as Polish critic Jan Kott once put it, truly “our contemporary.”

One would expect then that Brook himself would be among the first to raise his hand in agreement with us on the truth of who Shakespeare the Man actually was. How disappointing it has been to look into Brook’s writings on that subject and find that he has pretty much hewed to the official party line.

And yet, I have found a tiny reason to hope.

Peter Brook, born in 1925, is now over 90, an age which most of us are either already dead or giving up the good fight. But when he was 89, he published a new book in which he finally began to seriously kick at authorship ideas. Before anyone gets excited here, let me say right off that he ain’t no Oxfordian and he ain’t even a doubter. That’s for sure. But in his book – *The Quality of Mercy: Reflections on*

Shakespeare (2013) – he brings up the authorship issue time and again.

I also examined his 1998 volume, *Evoking (and Forgetting) Shakespeare* – also recently reissued, by coincidence – and I found that despite not being a doubter he couldn't keep away from the subject as far back as 1996. Unfortunately, his conclusion in both was that our question ultimately makes no difference to him in terms of production of the plays.

Clearly, the Shakespeare Authorship Question and the new worlds that I believe it can open for theatre artists, has still not been able to dent the consciousness of even forward-looking directors such as Peter Brook, the grand provocateur of Late Modern theatre. On the other hand, given his constant sniffing and snuffling around the issue for some twenty years or more, it occurs to me that perhaps he really just wants to be challenged a little more. Indeed, he has always liked being challenged. Perhaps his ongoing protests about the authorship are just his way to provoke us into giving him more as a director. For me, all his protestations suggest that he wants us to make it real for theatre people before he goes any further.

That is, methinks he is protesting just a little bit too much in these two books against us and that he really does want to wrestle a bit. So wrestle I shall.

I want to see what Peter Brook actually says in these books about the authorship question in the hopes of learning how we as authorship people might respectfully push back, how we might even dent the consciousness of such an esteemed director. What a public relations bonanza it would be for us to start to turn directors like Brook toward our camp making Oxford – I mean Shakespeare – our contemporary in a whole series of new ways.

Certainly Brook understands that actors are deeply involved in performance research. In *The Quality of Mercy*, he writes that “A word is like a glove – an inanimate object to be admired in a shop window or even in a museum. But life is given by the hand that fills it – every shade from banal to expressive.” And those hands are the actors. He is saying that we need to get to the hands that make Shakespeare come alive.

So how do we do that? We go back to Brook's two books on the subject.

The first book, *Evoking (and Forgetting Shakespeare)* is, at just 40 pages, an edited transcription of two talks Brook gave in Europe, one in 1996 in Berlin to a German-speaking audience and another two years later to a French-speaking audience in Paris.

It is essentially an introduction to the 2013 book, *The Quality of Mercy: Reflections on Shakespeare*. This book (at 116 pages) is Brook's ruminations on specific aspects of the thirteen Shakespeare plays that he has directed (some more than once) ranging

from *King John* and *Love's Labour's Lost* to *Lear* and *Hamlet*.

Both books, precious stuff for actors and directors, are certainly accessible to anyone interested in the general subject of Shakespeare in production. And both make it clear that he has been reading up on the authorship question for a lot of years. Unfortunately, it seems to be Stanley Wells' version of the issue that he seems to have been reading, using terms like "Shakespeare haters give that game away early."

But if Brook is so curious about the authorship to actually read all this, what is it that stops him from climbing aboard our train? First, I think it is a general distrust of scholars. I'll deal with that one later. Second, I think he is deeply attached to the community of Stratford-upon-Avon. Nothing we can do about that. He has worked there a lot and he has great nostalgia for the place. Lastly, he prefers the magic of the unknown to the concrete reality of the known.

To deal with the latter first, for Brook, the whole of Shakespeare's oeuvre is ultimately about the struggle of humankind with "not knowing," the struggle of order with chaos, of understanding with anarchy. He likes the tension. As he puts it in these recent books, Shakespeare's plays show that "the chaos of fire is not in contradiction with the understanding of the flame." So let's look there for an opening into Brook and the authorship question.

In *Evoking Shakespeare*, Brook starts by asking why "a page of Shakespeare written hundreds of years ago" is still important today, more important certainly than say a page from a daily newspaper. He then suggests the answer will not be found in speculating on the authorship issue, in trying to find out whether or not "Shakespeare was more interested in going to bed with a boy than with a woman" since such research doesn't "in any way open up to us the true mystery of the phenomenon of Shakespeare," adding, too casually, that even when one puts "other names in the place of 'Shakespeare' – Bacon, Marlowe, Oxford....you [simply] change the name, that's all. The mystery remains...." Clearly Brook is aware of the history of the authorship question. One doesn't drop names like Bacon, Marlowe and Oxford out of the blue.

He goes on to speak of a visit he made to Russia where someone made a tongue-in-cheek comment that Shakespeare had to have come from Uzbekistan "because the [word] 'Sheik' is an Arab term and a 'peer' is a wise man, so Shakespeare must have been a code name for "a Crypto-Moslem living in a Protestant country where Catholics were being prosecuted." Brook asks his audience if having such personal information on this artist really helps us "enter into the Shakespeare enigma?"

Clearly, Brook prefers enigma and myth to facts. He certainly prefers the myth that Shakespeare came from the boonies, was a poor boy who went to the local school but who was "Genetically speaking... a phenomenon." He even suggests rather

oddy, that “the bald head we have seen on so many pictures had an amazing, computer-like capacity for registering and processing a tremendously rich variety of impressions,” meaning that Shakespeare was a poet and that poets are different than the rest of us. “The absolute characteristic of being a poet,” he says, “is the capacity to see connections where normally, connections are not obvious.” (*Evoking Shakespeare*, 10)

Within the plays Shakespeare wrote, says Brook, “there must have been about a thousand characters. That means that in his plays, Shakespeare did something unique in the history of all writing. He managed moment after moment to enter into at least one thousand shifting points of view.” Brook then adds, “it is almost impossible [therefore] to discover a Shakespeare point of view, unless you say that being Shakespeare he contained in himself at least a thousand Shakespeares” (16).

Trying so hard not to engage in authorship issues – while clearly engaging in authorship issues – Brook goes on to look at the dysfunction of the Elizabethan court, the sense of danger around every corner for writers and artists in this spy-filled early modern world. “For Shakespeare,” he says with British understatement, “there was a lack of complete security . . . an order that had nothing to do with political order” (19). And returning to his comparison between a Shakespearean play and a contemporary newspaper, he concludes by stating simply: “The article in yesterday’s newspaper has only one dimension and it fades fast. Each line in Shakespeare is an atom. The energy that can be released is infinite – if we can split it open” (25).

That is, of course, what we as skeptics have been trying to do for decades – to split it all open. Can we make Brook an ally in that struggle?

Brook is actually suggesting that for directors like himself and actors everywhere there is the surface truth in the plays and there is a deeper truth, a truth that directors have always sought to find. This level of research often requires a juxtaposition of past and present, a key part of Brook’s own richness and genius as an iconoclastic artist. Yet in this crucial area, he keeps walking over to our discoveries and then turning away, preferring to leave the poet a mystical figure, the “atom” maker staring vacantly into space.

Brook gives us several examples of his extraordinary text work with actors. He quotes, for example, the last speech from *The Tempest* (which he suggests “may be the last words Shakespeare ever wrote” [32]). He says that the first phrase is very simple for most actors. It introduces a theme that everyone can understand at its most basic level.

My ending is despair
Unless it be relieved by prayer

Taken on its own, he says, “the thought is banal . . . In any little English boarding house you could see this written on the wall on a little card saying, ‘My ending is despair unless it is relieved by prayer.’ If the actor says it like a homely motto, he is ignoring the fact that the phrase ends not ‘by prayer’ but ‘by prayer which’ and ‘which’ is a moment of suspense. He goes on to ask the actor: what follows the ‘which?’ The line is:

Which pierces so that it assaults
Mercy itself

“You can always see in Shakespeare’s writing,” says Brook, “that, as he writes, when his hand comes back to the beginning of a new line there is always a special force . . . like an upbeat in music that’s leading to – what? – suspense. And the word that follows is ‘mercy.’ Now,” asks Brook, “can we understand a prayer that not only ‘penetrates’ but also can ‘assault’ mercy? . . . There is something tremendously powerful not only in the words but in the image, the image of something abstract and vast called mercy being assaulted like a citadel.”

Brook the director here is brilliantly trying to open up for the actor that “we are in front of something, which we cannot ever finally understand Shakespeare acting turns around the question of when you have the right to be absolutely sure and when, on the contrary, your only true position is one of open questioning . . . I don’t believe that there is a theological authority today.” This is Brook speaking, as if to an actor – “who can tell us with absolute certainty what it means to say: ‘a prayer which pierces so that it assaults mercy.’ I think,” says Brook, “that this is deliberately written by a poet not to encapsulate an understanding but to open a burning mystery. And you see that it carries on by saying that if that incomprehensible act happens, it leads to freedom.”

and frees all faults
As you from crimes would pardon’d be

– very strong word ‘crimes’ –

Let your indulgence set me free.

Brook ends by telling his actor – and us – that we can draw out of this analysis a chain “and the chain is: despair-prayer-assault-mercy-crime-pardon-indulgence-free.” He adds: “If an actor or if a director take this to be a happy ending you can say they haven’t bothered to listen to the words . . . None of the words . . . stands in isolation. The passage leads inexorably to the last word of all, and the questions it evokes are truly for today, wherever they are spoken.”

Turning then to *Hamlet* as another example of eternal mystery, the eternal not

knowingness of Shakespeare's words, he quotes

You would play on me. You would seem to know
My stops. You would pluck out the heart of my mystery . . .

Brook wonders here what one can say "to a young actor about to tackle one of these great roles. Forget Shakespeare. Forget that there ever was such a man. Forget that these plays had an author . . . Just assume . . . that the character you are preparing to play really existed . . . This leads to realizing that only once in history did such a person as Hamlet exist, live, breathe, talk. . . Thanks to this belief, we begin to long passionately to know such an unusual person. Does it then help us," asks Brook, "to think at the same time of Shakespeare the author? To analyze his intentions, the influences on him of his time . . .? To examine his verse techniques, his methods, his philosophy? However fascinating this may be, does it help? Or does it help more simply, more directly to approach the play in the way that Irish actors work on Irish plays? . . . As Synge suggested, the author is, as it were, lying on the floor in the attic, listening to real speech, unique real speech, coming up to him through a crack in the ceiling below . . . The actor's task is not to think of words as part of a text, but of words as part of a person whom we believe actually minted them in the heat of the moment." (*Evoking*, 43)

Brook turns to *King Lear* as a third example, the moment when Lear says to Cordelia

And take upon 's the mystery of things
As if we were God's spies.

"What sort of man," asks Brook, "could – off the cuff, when being led away to prison after a cruel and violent battle – improvise such words? We feel a need to know what extraordinary experiences had made up his life, what moments of deep searching, what special sensitivity could have given this apparently tyrannical king such a dense and fervent inner activity?"

How desperately, my friends, does Peter Brook want to know more about our Shakespeare? Yet he seems determined to keep his cries bootless, by retreating from enquiries into the life by saying (with just a touch of sadness) that there is only text. "Our way into the character must be through recognizing that the words he uses show us who he is" (45).

Brook's final words here are really quite revealing. "Shakespeare," he says, "never intended anyone to study Shakespeare." And then he adds: "It is no accident that he made himself so anonymous."

Suddenly Brook is back to the author. And who is he? A man who wishes to remain anonymous. But why? Again Brook approaches and then backs away.

With the investigative instinct of a Thomas Looney, the poet-director Brook tells us right off all about his Shakespeare: someone who “touches on every facet of human existence. In each and all of his plays the low – the filth, the stench, the misery of common existence – interweaves with the fine, the pure, the high.”

We begin to see a portrait through Brook’s words. But again he retreats. “How could one brain encompass so vast a range?” Brooks asks. “For a long time this question was enough to rule out a man of the people. Only someone of high birth and superior education could fit in the scale. The grammar-school lad from the country, even if gifted, could never leap over so many levels of experience. This might make sense if his were not a brain in a million.”

Next Brook drags out the dreaded ‘G-word.’ “All talk about Shakespeare must start from the recognition that this is a case of genius . . . Genius can arise in the humblest of backgrounds.”

He goes on to argue – Stanley Wells fingerprints are again everywhere – that “the level of education in Elizabethan times was remarkably high.” He even quotes “a statute of the school in Stratford” which says ‘All sorts of children [are] to be taught, be their parents never so poor and the boys never so inapt.’

Brook also finds time to praise James Shapiro for “bringing to life the taste and the throb of the time.” Brook even buys into the “let us imagine” motif. “We can imagine,” he says, “the young man from the country on his first days in London, walking the noisy, bustling streets, sitting in the taverns, and peering into the brothels, his eyes and ears wide open, receiving impressions of travellers’ tales, of rumours of palace intrigue, of religious quarrels, of elegant repartees and of violent obscenities. . . . It is not surprising that on the outside he was seen as a quiet man.”

We know where Brook gets all this – the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust – but why on earth does he buy into it? What are we doing wrong? Brook even goes so far as to say that the man from Stratford must have learned so much while in the theatre. “Theatre is a community, and it is only within the life he lived day after day that all true investigation can start.”

Brook suggests again that if the country bumpkin Will wasn’t the real writer but was only standing in for someone like Oxford, he could not possibly have participated in the give and take that is, and always has been, the rehearsal process. “Imagine a fake Shakespeare put on the spot. He has to rewrite and add a new scene. He ponders a while, works out how long it would take for a man on horseback to ride perhaps to Oxford or to York, wait for the secret writer to give him his papers and then to return.”

Could this, asks Brook, have gone on year after year? “No one smelt a rat amongst all those spiteful and jealous rivals? I’m sorry, academics – if you’d been part of any

rehearsal process you would think differently Even today . . . the cast would notice and gossip about the fact that every time you ask for something, the author slips into the wings with his mobile phone.”

But perhaps this anachronism reveals the real problem. Brook is enormously suspicious of academics and for some reason he thinks that it is traditional academics who are pushing the authorship issue. As we know, it is not traditional academics who are doing so but the iconoclasts, the true lovers of knowledge, the true amateurs in this area who are the ones standing up for facts and research. The traditional academics are the ones telling Galileo to toss away his science and accept church dogma.

Or is Brook really suggesting that the authorship issue has been about nothing more than envy over the size of Shakespeare’s pen. “Shakespeare’s time,” says Brook, “was seething with dramatists good and bad, generous and spiteful. Most of them died poor. Shakespeare was one of the very few to retire with enough money to buy land. There was every reason for envy” (12).

But no, says Brook. That couldn’t have been it. If envy had been the issue, why are “there . . . no existing documents to denounce this fake actor-manager pretending to write and publish these very successful works under his own name?” His sort-of orthodox conclusion: “We must never lose touch with the communal nature of theatre. Theatre people often refer to themselves as a family. In a family all the secrets and lies are known to everyone.”

He then notes that there are some seventy “pretenders to the Shakespeare throne. There is even one woman, a Spanish/Jewish lady who is said to be the Dark Lady of the Sonnets. And there’s a rumour that Queen Elizabeth wrote the plays in collaboration with an illegitimate son in an incestuous relationship!” He adds that there seems to have been no authorship question until “Delia Bacon woke up and decided that it must have been her great-great-great-grand uncle who’d written the plays. And so the Imposter Industry started rolling.”

Oh my friends, I have come here today to praise Peter Brook, not to bury him. But he doesn’t make it easy.

He is clearly on his soap box crying out to all who will listen that arguing about the authorship is actually a good career move for scholars. It has, he says erroneously, given “tenure to professors, advances to those who want to challenge the latest publication, and [has been] a boon to publishers with their attendant trades of printing, copy-editing, binding, distributing and bookselling. And of course critics now have a vested interest – like bankers – in keeping the ball rolling.” And then the unkindest cut of all: “If one of the first anti-Shakespeareans carried the God-given name of Thomas Looney, we can allow ourselves a smile.”

Oh my dear Peter. How could you sink so low? He even adds that if any claimant were to be proven the real author, the consequences would be disastrous. “At once the birthplace would move ... and Stratford would crumble. And its three theatres and restaurants. And the Shakespeare Hotel and all the others. And the tourist buses and the gift shops . . .”

“In [say, St. Albans], the Town Council celebrates, money is already rolling in. A fresh generation of actors, directors and architects discuss the new Festival theatre. Flags, banners, T-shirts and pins are ordered. The Bacon Industry is under way and the scholar who has at last blown the whistle is knighted. Only the Marlowe Society is plunged into gloom.”

Too bad for Stratford, Mr. Brook. If it has been living on a lie for centuries, perhaps it is time to say that the emperor is not wearing any clothes. Are we really interested in truth, Mr. Brook, or are we suddenly on the board of the Birthplace Trust?

Near the end of *The Quality of Mercy*, Brook asks again about the mystery man: “Why didn’t Shakespeare teach his daughter to read or write? Why did he not leave behind him any manuscripts?” He then concludes – as Stanley Wells says all the time – there are certainly gaps in what we know about Shakespeare, adding – lest we think it is better with any of the others – “there are as many or more gaps in each one of the other pretenders” (*SOF Newsletter*, vol 51, n 3, p 1. 2015).

Prof. Wells has his words locked deep into Peter Brook’s curiosity on this one. Brook says “There will always be new claimants and new mysteries. In the end, simple common sense must prevail.”

By this point he is rolling off the rails as he says things like “Shakespeare was a very modest man” without offering any proof. “He does not use characters to speak his thoughts, his ideas” Well, if we don’t know his identity how do we know no character is speaking for him? “Shakespeare was unique. He never judged – he gave us an endless multitude of points of view with their own fullness of life . . . It is only in the privacy of the Sonnets that he speaks personally and even recognizes the eternal value of the words that emerge from his pen. He was and is for all time completely self-effacing.”

Peter Brook’s errors of interpretation here are surely not worthy of so great a mind, a mind here apparently over-thrown in the presence of Stanley Wells. Most of Brook’s assumptions are simply untrue. His information is out of date. His research has not taken him into the authorship world of the 21st century. Brook, like so many, is trapped intellectually in 19th century research and 19th century belief systems. This great theatrical mind of the 20th century, I am deeply saddened to say, is simply out of date in this area of interest.

In staging so many brilliant productions of the Bard, Brook says that he has often

felt “a mysterious figure on one side, silently watching the revels....[a] Shakespeare [who understood] that lightness needs the shadow of darkness to make it real.... summer giving way to winter.” Brook clearly does not feel comfortable with the light of 21st century doubters being shone on these dark corners. That may be romantic as a vision but Peter Brook is supposed to be suspicious of such forms.

But surely his actors can get inspiration and understanding from that biography of the Bard written by Mark Anderson, *Shakespeare By Another Name*, and from filmic representations of the life done by the Wilson Sisters and by Cheryl Eagan-Donovan. Just a slight push to the left, Mr. Brook, and new insights are there for the taking by you and your actors and insights into the plays and the lives behind many of the characters.

Ask Mark Rylance what authorship insights have given to him as one of our most brilliant Shakespeare interpreters. Ask Michael York what insights could be gained. Ask Vanessa Redgrave what could be gained when connections are made to a real life.

Directors and actors do read biographies and they do research on the characters they create and play. Do they have anything to gain by connecting moments in the plays of say Ibsen or Strindberg to insights gained by looking into the many well-documented biographies of those great authors? Does an actor lose something to understand that Strindberg’s powerful creation of Miss Julie was connected to a real woman named Siri Von Essen or that Hedda Gabler and Nora Helmer were based on real people as well?

Let me conclude by again quoting Brook who says in discussing *King Lear* (62) that the words ... “never, never, never never...” are actually suggesting not an end but rather “an opening to eternity.” I suggest to Peter Brook, with the deepest respect, that he must stop saying “never, never, never, never” to the bringers of light – that is, to Oxfordians, he must actually look at our work as another real connection to eternity and that he might well think about turning his Never into Ever, and Ever into E.Vere.

We have probably seen Brook – as theatrical elder statesman – go as far as he will go in his own research. But there is certainly room to bring other younger directors and actors along. These are the people we need to get to look at our research. We need to inspire them with the new truths we are finding. Once convinced that both we as individuals, and the realities of our research are honest, a whole new future world of possibilities will truly lie before them and the theatre they will create.

Works Cited

Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. London: McGibbon & Kee, 1968. Reprinted: Penguin, 1990.

_____. *The Open Door: Thoughts on Acting and Theatre*. New York: Theater Communications Group, 1995.

_____. *The Quality of Mercy: Reflections on Shakespeare*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2013.

_____. *Evoking (and Forgetting!) Shakespeare*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2002.

