

THEATRE DES BOUFFES DU NORD
Direction Peter Brook - Micheline Rozan

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The Grand Inquisitor

In *The Brothers Karamazov*

By **Dostoyevsky**

Adapted by **Marie Hélène Estienne**

Directed by

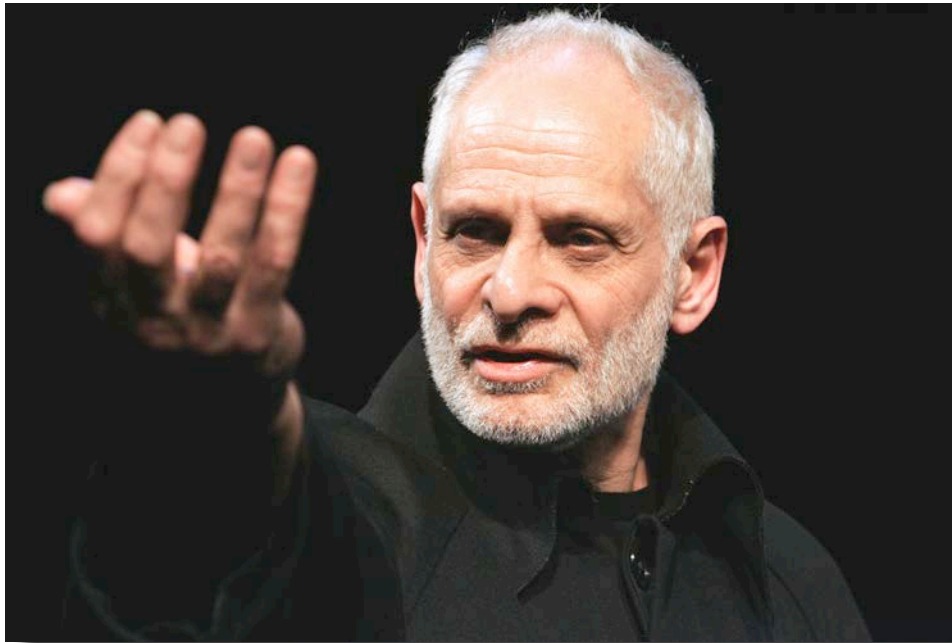
Peter Brook

Light design

Philippe Vialatte

With

Bruce Myers



“- The action takes place in Spain, in Seville during the most terrible period of the Inquisition, when each day fires were lit to the glory of God, and in splendid autodafés monstrous heretics were burnt. Christ comes back to the world of man. -

- At that moment, the cardinal Grand Inquisitor crosses the square. He is an old man, nearly ninety, with a withered face and sunken eyes in which a light still gleams. He points with his finger, ordering the guards to seize Him. The Guards take hold of Him and in a deadly silence lead him away. Then, like one man, the crowd bows down to the ground before the old Inquisitor, who blesses them without a word and goes on his way. The prisoner is taken to the dark old palace of the Holy Office and shut in a narrow vaulted cell. -“

From *The Grand Inquisitor* in *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoïevski

Press:

“Making this passage into a convincing piece of theatre is no easy task. [...] The Inquisitor’s speech has to be brought alive in our own moment of time. And that comes down above all the performance. In Peter Brook’s masterly production of Marie H el ene Estienne’s tight and pointed adaptation, Brook’s long-time collaborator Bruce Myers achieves a clarity and an urgency that make the tale seem utterly contemporary while at the same time preserving its status as a highly wrought fable.

The key, as often with Brook, is simplicity. [...] The governing aesthetic of the piece is that less is more. Christ’s very silence, as the Inquisitor informs him that mankind is too weak for the freedom he tried to thrust upon it and that the Church has long since shifted its allegiance to Satan, says more than the torrent of words.

The same minimalist method shapes Myers’s mesmeric performance. He is a master of economy. He shifts from narrator to cardinal by simple gesture of buttoning up his long black coat, transforming it instantly into a robe. His gaunt, grey-bearded face allows him to become the 90-year-old Inquisitor without the slightest hint of “old man” acting. He has a serenity in repose that magnifies even the smallest expressions of emotion. His voice has an utterly controlled tone that makes any rise in pitch seem monumental. he moves with such calm precision that any large gestures acquire a cinematic scale. Unlike so many one-actor performances, there is no self-conscious attempt to deliver a tour-de-force.”

*Fintan O’Toole in **The Irish Times** October, 12, 2007*

“The sheer weight of ideas in *The Grand Inquisitor* was always going to prevent it soaring. Yet Peter Brook's latest to tour these shores is a worthy pleasure, which occupies the mind and even teases something for the emotions from the dry subject matter.

The tale is from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Set in Spain in the 15th century, it imagines what happens when the eponymous bigwig gets to meet Christ. The Inquisitor (Bruce Myers) also narrates the story, in a space that is close to empty.

On a raised quadrangle, two small chairs are placed a way apart, the second for Jesus, who sits silently staring as the Inquisitor speaks his mind. The Inquisitor is not happy with the "disturbance" of Christ's coming. The church, he says, has been signed up with Satan for centuries now.

Here, those with pre-conceived ideas might see a satirical rant from a totalitarian murderer. But Dostoyevsky didn't get where he is today by being so one-sided. For the Inquisitor, Christ saves only the few with the strength and means to be good.

The church's oppressive rule is a gift to the many. By ruthlessly limiting their freedoms, she saves their souls from the anguish of moral choice. Interesting as this is, it's pretty heavy stuff. A fine performance sweetens the pill.

The Inquisitor calls the masses his children, and indeed Myers' speech has the lilting, kindly quality of the very best bedtime storytellers - the same ability, too, to draw his audience's rapt, slightly baffled attention, though some line errors mar the effect on occasions.

It is hard, of course, to stay paternal when you are advocating the burning of heretics, but even here Myers achieves the artful effect of embodying both martyr and monster while never swinging between extremes. As mouthpieces for political philosophy go, he's a remarkably convincing human being.

A shame that the chance to see him is all but gone - the show sold out in advance. When Peter Brook is involved, it seems people manage to expect the Spanish Inquisition."

Kieron Quirke in ***The Evening Standard***

"Peter Brook coined the term Holy Theatre. And, for all its anti-clerical nature, evenings don't come much holier than this: a 50-minute version of the Grand Inquisitor's speech to Christ from *The Brothers Karamazov*, played on a grey platform. But, although Brook's production and Bruce Myers's performance have an austere grandeur, the evening lacks any visible context.

In Dostoyevsky's novel the speech is part of an ongoing debate between the intellectual Ivan and the saintly Aloysia. Here we get the bald text which Ivan's imagined Inquisitor delivers to the captive, returned Christ in 16th century Seville. And its burden is that Christ, by rejecting the temptations in the wilderness, has saddled mankind with freedom of choice. The Catholic church, however, has corrected Christ's error by offering a confused populace the miracles, mystery, and authority it craves: above all, authority which the church exercises with tyrannical power in the name of the common good.

Marie-Helene Estienne's version faithfully synopsis a great speech; and phrases leap out with undiminished power. "Why have you come to disturb us?" the Inquisitor asks, sounding like Koestler's commissar confronted by the yogi. He also talks of "man's need for someone to worship", implying that the spiritual vacuum will be filled with secular powers. And, chillingly, he tells Christ, "We are not working with you - we are working with him"; meaning the church has allied itself with the devil.

Brook sees the speech as prophetic: a vision of 20th century authoritarianism. While that is a viable reading, it omits the human and dialectical context of Dostoyevsky's novel. In Paris the show was staged as part of a trilogy including *The Death of Krishna* and *Tierno Bokar*, which together offered a more complex confrontation of flesh and the spirit. In isolation, the speech becomes a rhetorical tour de force.

As such, it is delivered by Myers with panache. An impressive figure, with his grizzled countenance, he runs the emotional gamut from angry accusation to forensic analysis of Christ's own words. Surveying the audience with a direct gaze, he also unnervingly asks, "Who have you raised to your level?" Through his very stillness, penetrative gaze and final compassionate kiss, Rohit Bagai as Christ also suggests the real power lies with the silent victim. But, while the brief evening has a stony severity, it is not one that admits of argument or dramatic debate."

Michael Billington in **The Guardian** Wednesday February 22, 2006

Biographies

Peter BROOK

Peter Brook was born in London in 1925. He directed his first play there in 1943. He then went on to direct over 70 productions in London, Paris and New York. His work with the Royal Shakespeare Company includes *Love's Labour's Lost* (1946), *Measure for Measure* (1950), *Titus Andronicus* (1955), *King Lear* (1962), *Marat/Sade* (1964), *US* (1966), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1978).

In 1971, he founded with Micheline Rozan the International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris and in 1974, opened its permanent base in the Bouffes du Nord Theatre. There, he directed *Timon of Athens*, *The Ik*, *Ubu aux Bouffes*, *Conference of the Birds*, *L'Os*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Mahabharata*, *Woza Albert!*, *The Tempest*, *The Man Who*, *Qui est là?*, *Oh! les Beaux Jours*, *Je suis un Phénomène*, *Le Costume*, *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, *Far Away*, *La Mort de Krishna*, *Ta Main dans la Mienne*, *Le Grand Inquisiteur*, *Tierno Bokar*, *Sizwe Banzi is dead*, *Fragments*, *Warum Warum* and *Love is my Sin* – many of these performing both in French and English.

In opera, he directed *La Bohème*, *Boris Godounov*, *The Olympians*, *Salomé* and *Le Nozze de Figaro* at Covent Garden; *Faust* and *Eugene Onegin* at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, *La Tragédie de Carmen* and *Impressions of Pelleas*, at the Bouffes du Nord, Paris and *Don Giovanni* for the Aix en Provence Festival.

Peter Brook's autobiography, *Threads of Time*, was published in 1998 and joins other titles including *The Empty Space* (1968) – translated into over 15 languages, *The Shifting Point* (1987), *Evoking (and Forgetting) Shakespeare* (2002), *There are no Secrets* (1993) and *With Grotowski* (2009).

His films include *Lord of the Flies*, *Marat/Sade*, *King Lear*, *Moderato Cantabile*, *The Mahabharata* and *Meetings with Remarkable Men*.

Marie-Hélène ESTIENNE

Marie-Hélène Estienne has taken part in many theatre and cinema projects as author and production assistant. While a journalist at *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, she became Michel Guy's assistant, working on the programming of the Paris Festival d'Automne.

In 1974 she worked on the casting of Peter Brook's *Timon of Athens*. She joined C.I.C.T. in 1977 for *Ubu aux Bouffes* and has since been production assistant for all the Centre's work.

She was also Brook's assistant for *La Tragédie de Carmen* and *The Mahabharata* and artistic collaborator for *The Tempest*, *Impressions de Pelléas* and more recently *The Tragedy of Hamlet* (2000). This collaboration developed to include dramaturgy for *Woza Albert !*, *The Man Who*, and *Qui est là ?*. She co-authored, with Peter Brook, *Je suis un Phénomène*, presented at Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord (1998). She was the author of the French language adaptation of *Le Costume* ("The Suit") by Can Themba, created in 1999 at Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord as well as *Far away*, by Caryl Churchill in 2002.

She collaborates on all the aspects of the work and together with Jean Claude Carrière has signed the texts of *La Tragédie d'Hamlet* (2002) and *La Mort de Krishna*.

She recently made the French adaptation of *Ta main dans la mienne* by Carol Rocamora, signed in 2003 the theatrical adaptation of *Le Grand Inquisiteur* by Dostoïevski and in 2004, *Tierno Bokar* from Amadou Hampaté Bâ's works. She lately adapted to French the play *Sizwe Banzi is dead* by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona.

Bruce Myers

Bruce Myers was born in England, studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, then worked with the Liverpool Everyman for three years.

He was a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company from 1967—1970, and was an original member of Peter Brook's C.I.C.T., participating in most of its productions including *Orghast*, *Timon of Athens*, *The Iks*, *Ubu*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Conference of the Birds*, *The Mahabharata* (play and film), *The Tempest*, *The Man Who* (on tour), *Qui est là ?*, *Je suis un Phénomène*, *The Tragedy of Hamlet* and *Tierno Bokar*.

In 1979, he performed in *The Dibbouk* at New York Public Theatre, then created his own version, *Un dibbouk pour deux*, in Paris. In 1992, he directed *Le Puits des Saints* and in 1993, acted in *Quelle Tristesse / La Fin de l'Allée*, both in Lausanne.

He has acted in many television and feature films. In 1995, he directed Leivick's *Golem* at the Hamburger Kammerspiele.

Bruce Myers also regularly gives workshops around the world.

Tour dates 2007

South America

19-21 January

Santiago Chilli, Festival Stgo a mil

Europe

23-24 February

St Pölten, Austria

27-28 February

Seville, Spain

16-18 May

Athens, Greece, Theatre Ilisia Denisi

3 June

Varna, Bulgaria

5-6 June

Sophia, Bulgaria

9-13 June

Moscow, Russia, Festival A. Tchékhov

20-21 June

Hradec, Czech Republic

25-28 June

Praha, Czech Republic, Archa Theatre

South America

2-3 October

Quito, Ecuador, Festival Internacional de Quito

Europe

10-14 October

Dublin Festival, Ireland

17-20 October

Napoli, Italy, Galleria Tolledo

24-25 October

Linz, Austria

31 Oct.-4 Nov.

Madrid, Spain, Festival de Otono, Teatro Abadia

7-8 November

Madrid, Spain, Festival de Otono, Teatro de Alcala

16-17 November

Prato, Italy

7-9 December

Wroclaw, Poland

Tour dates 2008

Italy

5-7 January

Catania, Teatro Angelo Musco

Roumania

2 May

5,6 et 7 May

Craiova, Light Opera House

Bucharest, The Odeon Theatre

Syria

9-12 June

Damas, Damas 2008, The Multi Purpose

Australia

19-26 July

Brisbane, Australie, Brisbane Festival 2008

Italy

21 - 24 August

Andria, Pianta Castello

Brazil

14 - 16 September

Porto Alegre, Teatro do CIEE

Mexico

20 - 22 September

25 September

27 September

Mexico

Queretaro

Leon

United States

1er - 3 October

10 - 11 October

15 - 19 October

23 Oct - 23 November

Washington, University of Maryland

Middletown, Wesleyan University

Philadelphia, Annenberg Center

New York, New York Theatre Workshop by TFNA

Estonia

28 - 29 December

Tallin, Midwinter Night's Dream International Theatre Festival

Tour dates 2009

Lebanon

12 – 14 February Beirut, Theatre Monnot

Tour dates 2010

Italy

26 October Asti, Teatro di Dioniso

Tour dates 2011

United States of America

24 March – 3 April Boston, Paramount Black Box
7 – 10 April Santa Monica College Performing Arts Center