

'Compulsively readable'  
STEPHEN GREENBLATT,  
NEW YORK TIMES



MEXICO



'Truly compelling'  
OBSERVER

UKRAINE

# HAMLET:

## GL GLOBE TO

## GL GLOBE

193,000 MILES  
197 COUNTRIES  
ONE PLAY

# Dominic Dromgoole

'The man who made all the world a stage' *THE TIMES*

## INTRODUCTION

WE PLANNED WITH GUSTO AT the Globe. Some believe that away days should be focused affairs in blank overlit rooms, with PowerPoint presentations, brows so furrowed as to be carved in stone, and bullet points ricocheting off the walls. Others prefer firing middle management through forests on zipwires, or forcing upper management to humiliate themselves on assault courses. At the Globe, we took a different approach – good eating and gargantuan drinking.

2012 had been something of a landmark year. Inspired by the London Olympics, we put together a festival called Globe to Globe. It was a happy, simple and bold idea – to present within a six-week festival every one of Shakespeare’s thirty-seven plays, each in a different language, each by a different company from overseas. We imagined that we would attract student companies and amateur groups, but as the idea spread, it captured the imagination in the way only stupid ideas can, and grew rapidly in scale. Everyone wanted to join in – apart from the French – and we were inundated with enthusiasm from all corners of the globe. We ended up with fifteen national theatre companies, shows from the most distinguished theatres in the world and some of its most distinctive artists. One country, South Sudan, formed a new national company to put on *Cymbeline*. The festival was all we

could have hoped for, a generous eruption of humanity and art and dialogue.

Big ideas like that, once achieved, leave a vacuum. Having ridden in such a balloon of happiness and open perspective, it was hard to land on the ground again. So for a few months after the festival, we wandered around busy but with a listless sense of inactivity in the back of our minds.

We were on a two-day away day. The ostensible task was huge – to plan for a new theatre we were building, an indoor candlelit jewel to complement our outdoor citizens playhouse. It was due to open in twelve months' time. Building it, programming it, managing it, staffing it – everything was up in the air and had to be settled over two days. Day one was Heston Blumenthal's pub in Bray, followed by pints of gin in a shabby railway pub tucked in behind Paddington. Day two began pale and chastened, but settled into a very pleasant lunch in Scott's of Mayfair, a fastidiously minty place that raised its eyebrows above its smoothed hairline at the caravan of bicyclists and mothers with babies and scruffy technicians who tumbled in. We planned well in there and then repaired to a nearby hotel for cocktails.

If all this sounds a trifle *louche*, it was. So before any Colonel Buffon Tuftons or Comrade Mumble Grumbles reach for the 'how-dare-they-do-that-with-all-that-public-subsidy' attitude, it's probably worth mentioning that the Globe got no money from the government, nor from any major sponsors. We worked hard, and we earned all our own money. Although skating on thin financial ice led to a daunting level of high-wire tension, it also meant that, after much of the profit had been given to education, research and the building, we were free to spend the money that remained. Somewhere in that merry drinkathon, within a bleary mayhem of flirt and wind-up and raucous laughter, someone said,

## INTRODUCTION

‘We need another big idea, something like the festival.’ With barely a pause for thought, I said, ‘Let’s take *Hamlet* to every country in the world.’

Such ideas have a peculiar naturalness. They arrive as if they were already in the room. Because they need no explanation, people grab them quickly and enjoy elaborating on them. They’re fertile ground for the contributions of others. Soon everyone was riffing on the idea and starting to work out the mechanics and logistics. Then, almost as soon, everyone was off the subject and back to flirting and winding-up and laughter. But the idea had a simple force which meant that it would stick.

It travelled.

★ ★ ★

*Hamlet* is a unique play in the canon of world drama. Loose, baggy, sometimes unwieldy, constructed from a known story and a previous play, its many details improvised from the pained and beautiful stuff within Shakespeare’s soul, it ranges across a northern European landscape dominated by a gloomy castle and splashed by a cold sea crashing on rocks. It is a landscape struck by more flashes of lightning than any work of art could ever hope to be. Those flashes of lightning come from many directions – linguistic brilliance, psychological insight, political acuity, mythic resonance and simple family truth. Together they combine to create a statement about what it is to be human that has never been surpassed, both in the age it was written for and since.

It is hard to enumerate the number of directions from which it glances at you as you shift through life. The swirling mists of the Olivier film version were my first sustained contact. One of those television events from long ago when the nation sat together

to share public culture. Quotes had been filling my ears from an early age. My parents were both Shakespeareans, my father in a public verse-quoting manner, my mother with greater privacy. There were profuse early readings, where bafflement would be disguised as mystic appreciation. As with many cultural artefacts we are dragged to at an early age, we feign excitement to satisfy the dragger, yet silently resent the difficulty. But buried in the experience, however resented it may be, some small kick of life, some small ignition in a part of ourselves we don't fully know, tells us we must return to witness it again. A silent promise is made for the future.

At a certain age, the play started to sing. Studying it with a mind less petrified by respect revealed its energies, its defiance and its exuberance. Performances could be relished rather than escaped. Hamlet the character began to take shape, not as a repository of cultural significance and oddly expressed wisdom, but as a sweet-natured and brilliant young man negotiating his way through a domestic and political nightmare. The language started to live with its own punk energy rather than the sonorous authority the Academy stifles it with. Much of the verse became necessary as solace. *Hamlet* has thrived in the public world, but its continuing life in the human heart is what has guaranteed its longevity.

I didn't understand the speech 'To be, or not to be . . .' when I first committed it to memory, and I'm not completely sure I understand it fully now. But it has lived in the larder of my memory for almost forty years, and can still be pulled from its musty recess to provide its familiar quantum of comfort. It offers no answers, nor any facile questions. It simply lets us know the same comforting message we offer our children when they cut themselves on the sharpness of the world. We tell them we suffered

## INTRODUCTION

something similar at the same age. The fact we endured the same, a small act of sharing, washes away a little of the pain. In our worst despair, the fact that Hamlet has shared the like hurt or worse, and that his creator Shakespeare has expressed it with such a perfect dance of thought and word, tells us we are not alone in our sorrows.

Hamlet's journey through the play is specific, but within its broad pattern, and in his detailed responses to its various events, we appreciate a convulsion of the spirit we all know. It is Sartre's nausea and the juddering tears of the junkie begging on the street corner; it is the sobbing of the infant at the most basic injustice, and the articulate despair of the graduate shunted into a world which has neither plan for nor interest in them. It is the confusion we know at all ages – the manifest injustice of the world – that something capable of creating patterns of such beauty is so often inclined to moral ugliness. It is the state of perception we carry within us as a template for understanding our world, yet while grateful for its insights, we live in fear of its capacity, since if indulged it can overtake all other modes of understanding and plunge us into an enclosed state policed by the act of perception itself.

Overwhelmed by these thoughts in that scattered age between eighteen and twenty-five, it was then that *Hamlet* gripped me. Hungry for a path through that maze, Hamlet's story offered a movement towards the light. Towards the play's conclusion, as the young Prince walks towards a trap set by his stepfather, a trap he knows he will not survive, his friend Horatio advises him that he can walk away from his own fate. He replies:

Not a whit, we defy augury: there's a special providence  
in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if

it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all. Since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes? Let be.

Within a play of complicated expression, this section is an oasis of simplicity. Beginning with the first, heavily accented 'if', there are forty-two monosyllabic words in a row, with only one exception – 'readiness'. This extended baldness of expression is exceptional in Shakespeare. For me at that age, the simplicity of this language, allied with the calm at its spirit's centre, its message of transcendent acceptance of all the world had to offer, the good and the bad, served as a mantra.

★ ★ ★

Translated into too many languages to count, and performed more times than Shakespeare ate hot dinners, and cold ones, or drew breath for that matter, *Hamlet* is one of those rare documents that can be said to have brought the world closer together. Audiences all over the planet have shared in its capacity to enlarge the spectator's openness and desire to question. It has not only shrunk space; it has also contracted time. Each person who watches or hears it is telescoped back to the moment in 1601 when an audience in the Globe first heard the opening words 'Who's there?' Just as those first spectators share in every subsequent time those words have begun an evening of queasily soulful entertainment. We all share in the suspended window of time within which a play floats, experiencing our own night of only-happening-now uniqueness and sharing the pleasure with the millions of others who have heard the same words in other times and places.

In 1608, on board a ship called the *Dragon*, *Hamlet* was

## INTRODUCTION

performed by its crew off the coast of Sierra Leone for a group of visiting dignitaries. The crew remembered enough of the play from what they had seen at the Globe to shamble together a show. Within ten years of its first performance, groups of English actors, known collectively as the English Comedians, were performing it across northern Europe in abbreviated, action-packed adaptations. Since then it has played everywhere, in theatres, fields, caves, hovels and palaces.

It has tested thousands of actors and actresses, leaving some exhilarated with triumph and some desolate with failure, and all hungering for more. It has been recorded, televised and filmed over and over and over again. The performances of actors from Sarah Bernhardt to David Tennant, from Mel Gibson to Maxine Peake have been captured for posterity, and the sheer inclusiveness of that brief list says much about the play's openness to interpretation. It is recited in schoolrooms, quoted in boardrooms, mumbled by lovers, pondered on by sages, argued over by critics, passed on from parent to child, cursed by students, and wept over by spectators. In silence, it is stored in the heart as a fortifying secret by millions of us afraid of the bruising world. It is part of the fabric that surrounds us and sits within us. It has become, in large part, us.

★ ★ ★

In honour of the transcendent ubiquity of this play, on 23 April 2014, 450 years after the birth of Shakespeare, the Globe theatre, in response to a daft idea floated in a bar, set out on an artistic adventure almost as unique as the play we were honouring. To tour *Hamlet* to every country on earth. All 204. Or 197. Or however many were deemed to be countries at that particular



moment. Unprecedented chutzpah and a healthy quantum of stupidity helped launch the mission. Beyond that, more practical factors made it possible. Over nine years, the Globe had formulated a style of touring as portable as the style in which actors travelled from the first Globe 400 years earlier. We had built up a network of international relationships with the Globe to Globe festival, which meant there wasn't a corner of the world where we could not phone and find a friend. But more importantly, technology had come to a point with air travel and information hyperlinking where it was now possible to move a theatre tour across the globe at a plausible speed and prepare satisfactorily for every arrival.

The marriage of globalisation and modernity sometimes seems to transfer little more than paranoia and violence. But we looked at the possibilities thrown up by that modernity, and instead of saying 'Why?', we thought 'Why not?' Why not use the potential of the world to transport not terror or commodities, but sixteen human souls, armed with hope, technique and strong shoes, their set packed into their luggage, the play wired into their memories, and present to every corner of the world, with a playful truth, the strangest and most beautiful play ever written. Why not?

Exactly two years later, on 23 April 2016, the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, the same sixteen people returned to the Globe, having visited 190 countries and, via a series of performances in refugee camps, the peoples of 197 nations. They had played in amphitheatres, in bars, on roundabouts, in studios, on the shores of oceans, in front of thousands crammed into stadia, and in front of a handful of Romanian children in the rain.

At this moment, it would be appealing to adopt a deep voice, or its prose equivalent, and write: 'This book is the story of that

## INTRODUCTION

journey.’ But it would be misleading. The story of that journey can never be told: it is too big, too profuse. Each gig offered up so much material, so many intersections with politics, culture and history, that each visit could prompt a book. There were 200 of them. It might also be something of an impertinence, as I only visited twenty of the venues, and those who really carry the stories are the company – the twelve actors and the four stage managers. They made the whole journey. They all have remarkable stories to tell. Each of the twenty countries I visited felt like an injection of rich information for the imagination to work over. A theatre company has a special capacity to learn about an area, freely moving from shambolic shebeen to ambassador’s drawing room. Each visit was short but never short on insights. There is much that a tortoise can witness that a swift will miss, but the opposite also has a certain weight of truth.

An exhaustive hoovering up of every detail would be beyond me, but I was fortunate enough to see much that amused and provoked. Always through the prism of *Hamlet*. Each country has thrown fresh light on the play, its large themes and its smaller nooks and crannies, just as this protean play has been able to throw new light on the world and its many faces. The tour changed my view of the play, the play changed my understanding of the tour, and both shifted my perspectives on the world and on myself. I have tried to set down some of this dialogue between the play and the world, to see how each illuminated the other.

This book will tell several stories, amongst others the story of *Hamlet* itself, of how this infinite masterpiece was born, how it grew into the world and how, with its generosity of spirit, it still helps us to understand our changing world. It will attempt to understand how the play has travelled so far and penetrated so deeply. At each moment, my response to the play shifted, with

each insight bringing fresh confusion, each confusion fresh insight, and I try to mark those moments. I do so in the full knowledge that this is only watching a train covering a few stations on a long journey. *Hamlet* will never stand waiting for us; it will always demand fresh understanding. The moment of 'Aha! I've got it!' will never arrive, nor should it.

Everywhere the play visited, it encountered countries of vast difference, caught in contrasting historical and political moments. The performance cannot hold a mirror up to so many forms of nature, but Hamlet, with his restless desire to dream up a new sensibility, speaks to all people in any moment trying to create a better future out of the ashes of a world that breaks their heart. As such, our production spoke to many of the people who encountered it, and learnt from them. Together I hope these stories, and this conversation between Globe and globe, give a little insight into our world as it is now, and also of this extraordinary play which still shadows and mirrors and changes that world.

1 **United Kingdom**, London

*Middle Temple Hall*

**United Kingdom**, London

*Shakespeare's Globe*

18–20 April 2014

23–26 April



## WHO'S THERE?

*ACTUS PRIMUS SCOENA PRIMA**Enter Barnardo and Franciscus two centinels**Barnardo: Who's there?*

THERE IS NO BETTER OPENING line – the simplicity, the affront of it – ‘Who’s there?’ It works purely on its own surface, a nervous soldier on a battlement, in the dark and cold, asking with a shiver who walks towards him. It starts the play at a thriller pace and sets the blood tingling. We opened our production with the cast milling around amongst the audience and belting out a rousing song. It was interrupted the first time for a speech of welcome, with music underscoring, and then a second time abruptly – dead-stopping wandering, singing and music with a barked ‘Who’s there?’ The play was underway, swords were out, tension bristled the air. The first two words are an instant challenge to the theatricality of the event. Unless the director is very eccentric (many are), the old soldier – Barnardo – will be looking out front. The question immediately includes and excludes everyone watching. It makes them participatory because addressed, and shuts them

out because the soldier cannot see, cannot know them – ‘Who’s there?’ Two syllables and immediate unease.

Top of the Frequently Asked Questions as we set out on this adventure was ‘Why *Hamlet*?’ We flirted with other titles, but in our bones knew we were circling around and always returning to *Hamlet*. We had done two small-scale tours of *Hamlet*, in 2011 and 2012, so were confident that it worked, though we did cast our eyes along the waterfront. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* has an unsurpassable flight and grace, but an actor squeezing into a tattered fairy costume a year down the road might have been disheartened; *Twelfth Night* is not robust enough of tone to survive the exigencies of touring; and *King Lear* is just too dark. *Romeo and Juliet* was a clear candidate because of its iconic status, but the play is structurally broken-backed. Packed with beautiful poetry and a searing story, it loses its way after the death of Mercutio and never quite regains it until the end. Carrying that Fourth Act around the world would have been dispiriting. Also, and this was the weightiest problem, *Romeo and Juliet* reveals its own meanings after a brief search. Six months in, and the company would have uncovered its secrets. They would have known what they were playing, which is fatal. If the tour was to be a valuable journey for the company, and thus for audiences, the play had to remain elusive. This was guaranteed with *Hamlet*. *Hamlet* is beautiful, a necessity, it is ram-packed with iconic moments which translate across cultures, a necessity, but most important of all it is mysterious, the greatest necessity.

The protean nature of the text was as important as its elusiveness. We were visiting a vast variety of cultures, of peoples caught at disparate political and historical moments. There is something about the kaleidoscope of possible responses to *Hamlet* which suited a journey of such rapid and extensive change. *Hamlet* can

inspire and it can challenge; it can provoke and it can console; it can rebuke and it can comfort. We needed to travel with a story that could talk to people in all these ways. It also needed to talk with purpose. Not with a message, God help us, but with a voice that had energy and purpose in its pulse. *Hamlet* is often given an obscuring energy as prescribed by a Victorian idea of tragedy – ponderousness and pain suffocate it with a pillow of self-glorifying glumness. We didn't do glum at the Globe – the sheer glee of the room would not allow it. *Hamlet* has a gleaming energy, and through its bright and shining leading man it has its eyes on the horizon of the future.

As well as talking with variety, and with purpose, it is most important that *Hamlet* talks openly. It is not a muttering play, a manipulative play, nor a dishonest play. In its heart, and through the soliloquies which stud its progress, it is open. The paradox of being freely open and freely mysterious is a Shakespearean paradox. The man in the corner at a party, all dark and silent and brooding, is nine times out of ten not a man of mystery; he's a man with not much to say. It is perfectly possible to be garrulous and to conceal. This play manages to be naked and invisible at the same time. A paradox contained within those opening words, 'Who's there?'

So having decided on the play, we had to work out how to do it. Then the question 'who's there?' developed a new pertinence. Who was there to help?

★ ★ ★

To focus our brains, we kicked off the same way we had our 2012 festival, by throwing a big breakfast for all of London's ambassadors. This served as a mark in the sand, a way of getting



ourselves organised and a way of making connections. The plan was to introduce ourselves, explain our plan and plead for help. A hundred ambassadors in a room at nine o'clock in the morning is a bizarre sight. Because of the variety and the early hour, everyone exaggerates their own distinctiveness, playing up their national stereotypes. A South American ambassador threw about extravagant Latin charm; the French representative looked unimpressed; the Scandinavians were blonde and kind, looking after the shy wallflowers in the corner; the Russian representative looked suspicious; a representative from the Far East boggled us with their efficiency. The event started to look like an oversized xenophobic sitcom.

Tom Bird, our executive producer, a warm and scruffy presence, made a great speech, then we led everyone from our restaurant into the theatre and onto our stage. This was a calculated thrill: standing on the Globe's oak boards is a privilege and never failed to give a jolt of energy. I stood in front of a map of the world and talked everyone through the journey. With outstretched finger, I outlined our imagined route across a beautiful map set up on an old wooden easel. From Europe through North America, Central America and the Caribbean, South America, West Africa down to the South, then across to Australasia, all around the Pacific Islands, and then working slowly back from the Far East and finishing with East Africa before heading home. With a few detours to avoid war and epidemics, this was pretty much the route we ended up following. There was something antiquated, of course, about a man standing beside a map of the world and pointing out how we would chart a course through distant lands. It was an irony we were aware of and played up.

The morning was a success. It galvanised us into action, though less than a tenth of our eventual relationships would come from

this route. Governments can be useful, and they can be a burden. We were at pains to point out, from the beginning and throughout, that we were not going anywhere to play to local dignitaries or to be an extension of a diplomatic garden-party circuit. That we wanted to meet people and to play to audiences of people. In this we were 95 per cent successful. The number of countries we travelled to where tickets were free and where the audience was generously inclusive was one of the joys of the enterprise. There were a handful of cases where we felt we were being exploited and manipulated by a government to serve a purpose, and we pushed back. But in the vast majority of cases, we encountered innocence and enthusiasm. So the breakfast worked, and set a number of global hares running for us to chase. Business cards were collected in prodigious numbers, and the phones started to buzz.

★ ★ ★

The next big challenge was to announce the project to the press. This was ever a delicate business, since the dangers were twofold. First, that they would ignore it completely; second, that they would seek out ways to ridicule the whole thing. Why this is their collective first instinct is beyond me, but there you go, we get the press we deserve. We knew that we needed an endorsement of some sort, from a source of unimpeachable integrity. We put out many virtue-seeking feelers and felt we were drawing a blank, then, just as we were about to send out a press release, an email came through:

The six simplest words in the English language are TO BE OR NOT TO BE. There is hardly a corner of the planet where these words have not been translated. Even in English,

those who can't speak the language will at once recognise the sound and exclaim 'Shakespeare!' *Hamlet* is the most all-encompassing of Shakespeare's plays. Everyone, young or old, can today find an immediate identification with its characters, their pains and their interrogations. To take *Hamlet* in its original language around the world is a bold and dynamic project. It can bring a rich journey of discovery to new audiences everywhere.

This comes with every wish for all your projects.

Ever,  
Peter

This was a boon. Peter Brook, the great director and visionary of internationalism, was the right person. He is a sage soul who has long since reached a place of international respect. His words were dropped into the press release, and out it went.

All on that front was going well, then two weeks before we went into rehearsals we were approached by the *Sunday Express* asking how we felt about going to North Korea. We explained that we were going to every country in the world, that everyone deserved *Hamlet*, and that North Korea was full of human beings. They started talking about how Kim Jong-un had killed his uncle and had him fed to the pigs. It was clear their agenda was set. The journalist was an intern working part-time there and (fair play to her) was the only person who had worked out there might be a story in this. We discovered that she had got a condemnation out of Amnesty International. I had been a fully paid-up and admiring member of Amnesty for many years and was miffed that they hadn't contacted us about it. I rang their press officer,

who had made the statement to the freedom-fighters of the *Sunday Express*. He was quick to make his feelings clear: 'We believe North Korea is an oppressive regime, with no respect for human rights, and that it is wrong for you to stage *Hamlet* there.'

'Well, we see the point on human rights, but we are taking this show to every country in the world, and North Korea is a country—'

'You're doing what?'

'We're going to every country in the world.'

'Are you?'

'Yes, did you not know that?'

'No, I thought you were just going to North Korea.'

'Well, we're stupid, but we're not that stupid.'

'No, really, every country in the world? Wow, great idea.'

'Yes, that's the only reason we're going to North Korea. Does that change your opinion now you know why we're going?'

A long pause. Then . . .

'We believe North Korea is an oppressive regime, with no respect for human rights, and that it is wrong for you to stage *Hamlet* there.'

The story ran. It made a minor splash in itself, but it set a ball rolling that followed us around the world, and the North Korea question popped up with deadening frequency. We were able to hone our response early – that we were travelling to play to people; that we were not there to defend any regimes, we were there to defend *Hamlet*; and that we believed that every country was better off for the presence of *Hamlet*. This response became practised, maybe over-practised. It would have been great to say more. That aside from North Korea being a murderous and mad dictatorship, which is a given and a disgrace, it often seems that if it wasn't there, people would invent it, since it fulfils a function

that the rest of the world needs. Every playground looks to find one kid to ostracise, every village needs to choose one family that it treats as beyond the pale.

★ ★ ★

Our first *Hamlet* tour, before we decided to go global, had begun in Margate in 2011. We had such fun doing it, and audiences lapped it up so greedily, we toured it again the next year, with a large section in the USA. No one ever felt it was definitively this or that, but it felt fit for purpose. The second tour I wasn't free to direct, so asked Bill Buckhurst, an actor transitioning to directing, and doing so well, to take the model I had created – same set, same text and same music – and to make it better. He went with the brightness and energy of our approach, and filled it with a greater urgency and need to tell itself. For the round-the-world tour, I asked Bill to work on it with me, so that we might have the best of both productions. Happily, he agreed.

Together with its designer, Jonathan Fensom, we had come up with a loose aesthetic that resembled a 1930s socially progressive touring company, like Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl's Theatre of Action outfit. Donning a cloak here or a hat there, the company could quickly acquire the shapes and silhouettes of Elizabethan clothing. Over the two previous tours, working with two composers, Laura Forrest-Hay and Bill Barclay, we had put together a suite of music and songs which helped define the evening. Warm folksy songs to relax the air and dispel the Shakespeare/*Hamlet* fear; and utilising the skills of the actor-musicians, a bit of everything else – some fanfare music, some atmospheric scrapings for the Ghost, some keening violin work to skim across transitions, a gentle pipe tune to introduce Ophelia,

drums to punch the urgency along. Everything played live, and everything in sight. No concealment at the Globe: a show was a show.

At the end, as in all Globe shows, an eruptive and joyous jig, choreographed by the jig-meister Siân Williams. Every show at the first Globe – even a tragedy – would end with a jig, where the whole company danced together. In the original Globe, they would interrupt the dance, and the comedian in the company would tell jokes. We didn't go that far, but we did enshrine the spirit of jiggling. It is a wonderful way of cleansing the theatre after the emotion spent in it, of letting the air in the room shrug off any residual pain with good grace. In the jig for *Hamlet*, the dead bodies left sprawled across the stage – Gertrude, Claudius, Laertes and Hamlet – were one by one finger-clicked back to life, with an invitation to a dance. They rose to join. Many interpreted this as a message about bringing the dead back to life, but in fact it was just a solution to the perennial problem of how to get dead bodies off a stage. The jig started slow and then accelerated to a thigh-slapping, hand-clapping frenzy that never failed to raise a joyous cheer. These were the bare bones, and they were bare indeed, of the production we had made. At the end of the first half, we did the dumbshow which the text demands. It started with two of the actors lowering two planks to meet each other. Written on them was 'TWO PLANKS AND A PASSION', an old actor's phrase defining all you need to make theatre happen. That was the spirit of the show. Now we needed actors to flesh it out.

★ ★ ★

Casting was always going to be the biggest challenge. Peter Brook

says that casting is 80 per cent of what he does, and he spends careful years doing it. He invites potential colleagues to hang out and befriends them, long before he thinks of offering them a role. We didn't have that amount of time but respected the care in the process. When people asked, I said we were looking for 'actor-astronauts', people of balance and strength who could float out in space for a couple of years. Actors who could keep themselves steady, take good care of each other and keep their minds on the task in front of them.

Everyone's definition of good actors is different. I favour those who bring energy to the room, who bring wit to the language, who have heart but don't show it off, and who are steadfastly and uniquely themselves. Many directors want actors who erase their individuality to conform to the director's idea of a synco-pated uniformity. I like individuals. Uniformity on stage breaks my heart; it is not a suitable response to plays or a world full of dappled things.

Above all else, the actors must be kind. When we were casting at the Globe, we always enquired around about how an actor was to work with. The Globe was reliant on actors – not on directors or designers. Trust and goodwill, as well as quality, were paramount. Trust that your actor would show up on time, cover your back and give you what you needed on stage was at the heart of our work. The importance of trust, and goodwill, were maximised on this tour by the many other potential difficulties involved. We needed great actors, but beyond that we needed great people. Luckily, we got them.

There is a magical section – a montage – in the film *The Sting* when Paul Newman wanders around putting his old team of conmen back together. He surprises them in their present place of work, be it a bank or a bookies, and, appearing discreetly at

the back of a crowd in their eyeline, touches his nose lightly or tips his hat to them. They immediately drop what they are doing, whatever it might be, to come and work with him. It is a witty visual hymn to the never-diminishing bonds of the team. The early part of our casting became a little like that, as we gathered together a core of trusted old friends. To share between them the senior roles – Claudius, Polonius, Gravedigger, Ghost, Priest, First Player and sundry old soldiers – we recruited three old friends who if not grizzled were battle hardened – John Dougall, Keith Bartlett, and the king of the Maori acting community, Rawiri Paratene. To play the several lines of younger men – Laertes, Marcellus, Horatio, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Osric and Fortinbras – there were two actors who had played already in our previous *Hamlet* tours of 2011 and 2012, Tommy Lawrence and Matt Romain, and another who had spent several summers with us, Beruce Khan. An actress who had played a previous tour, Miranda Foster, a thoroughbred, was keen to play Gertrude, the Player Queen and Second Gravedigger. Two further friends, actresses of enormous promise, Amanda Wilkin and Phoebe Fildes, came on board to play the Gertrude line, and the Ophelia line, and to cross gender lines as Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Horatio. Four stage managers – Dave McEvoy, Adam Moore, Carrie Burnham and Becky Austin – miracles of industry and phlegm, were prepared and happy to put life on hold for a couple of years.

All these old allies had hard questions about the working of the tour, about the pay and the conditions and the security and the time off, which we answered. But given the length of the commitment, and the hole it would punch in their lives, the amount they took on trust was affirming. They knew it was an adventure, they trusted us, we tipped our hat to them, and they



came on board. There was something magical in their leap into the dark, something close to the heart of being in the theatre. Running away to join the circus is a cliché, but it has an application beyond Pinocchio – freedom, movement and independence are its essence.

We had three more members of the squad to find – a further young actress, Jennifer Leong, who came recommended by a brilliant Cantonese company we had worked with from Hong Kong. And our two Hamlets. We explored a number of options in our heads for who to go after, but finally resolved that discovery would be the best route, to find young and new actors. Unknown quantities who would bring the excitement at being there and the openness that was at the heart of the show. We met a few, and were beginning to worry, when Ladi Emeruwa, an actor recently out of drama school, sent in a tape of himself doing a speech of Brutus. It was clear, and it was eloquent, and he was alive within the thought. He was soon on board. Naeem Hayat had played at the Globe in our Sam Wanamaker Festival, with a short chunk of *Richard III*. There was something indefinably compelling about him – he seemed to be able to sit in the middle of the maelstrom of the role and to be at the same time on a mountain looking down on it. We met him, he read beautifully, and he was in. The fact that both our Hamlets were not white, the fact that half the company were non-white, occasioned some comment but for us was as natural as walking into a brighter room.

All groups that set out on any journey in the cause of Shakespeare live in the shadow of one set of names. In the First Folio, in a loving act of remembering and claiming, one of the early pages is headed *The Names of the Principall Actors in all these Playes*. An act of remembering, because many of these actors had

died by the time the Folio went to press, including the author, Shakespeare, and the company's brightest star, Burbage. An act of claiming, because the Folio was put together by two of that company, Heminges and Condell. Their loyalty for their old muckers breathes through the list. Those names – solid, yeoman English names, sturdy as the oak of the Globe – are: William Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, John Heminges, Augustine Phillips, William Kempe, Thomas Pope (unfortunately spelt Poope for posterity), George Bryan, Henry Condell, William Sly, Richard Cowly, John Lowin, Samuel Cross, Alexander Cook, William Ostler, Samuel Gilbourne, Robert Armin, Nathan Field, John Underwood, Nicholas Tooley, William Ecclestone, Joseph Taylor, Robert Benfield, Robert Gough, Richard Robinson, John Shanke, John Rice. A different England talks through that list – fields and woods and cooks and tailors and early churches and market crosses – and through those tough Anglo-Saxon consonants. These are not names from the upper classes either; these are from trade and from soil. The names that have adorned playbills and programmes ever since are many and various, but we were happy that our list of names reflected a modern and a changed England. In no particular order, they were Amanda Wilkin, Becky Austin, Beruce Khan, Keith Bartlett, Rawiri Paratene, John Dougall, Adam Moore, Ladi Emeruwa, Carrie Burnham, Jennifer Leong, Tommy Lawrence, Phoebe Fildes, Naeem Hayat, Dave McEvoy, Miranda Foster and Matt Romain. A different world, and worthy names to send out into it.

★ ★ ★

The meet-and-greet before the first day of rehearsals was aglow with excitement, the company and the Globe staff giddy with

the future. With many of these large ideas, no one ever quite believes it is going to take place until you gather together in a large room and it becomes intimidatingly actual. The feeling of jumping off the cliff into the unknown promotes a sort of hysteria, like a children's birthday party after the lemonade has been guzzled. I do my bit with the world map and say some words. After most of the staff have gone, I invoke the old Russian habit of a moment of silence before a long journey. We sit in a circle, quiet in our thoughts and starting to register the size of what is ahead of us. Nothing particularly magical happens, but it is a sound way of expelling some of the hysteria and settling people back into themselves before rehearsals begin.

Five weeks later, and *only* five weeks to rehearse a host of different versions of the casting, plus a lot of music, plus a dumb-show and a jig, five weeks and we were ready to do our first performances at the Middle Temple. This ancient building, in the heart of legal London, was the room where the first recorded performance of *Twelfth Night* took place in 1602. We thought it a propitious place to preview the show before starting in the Globe. It proved tougher than we would have hoped. The room has a gravy brown-ness which makes it feel like acting in soup, the acoustic is rough, and we had to play in a very odd traverse shape, which made it hard to know where to pitch the play. The response from the audience was a bit ho-hum. This disheartened some of the company, who I think had assumed the quality of the show would automatically mirror the ambition of the endeavour. The one doesn't necessarily follow the other. However, I was heartened. The show was there, the story was told, and it had a gracious modesty in the world. Too great an immediate success would have induced a grandiosity, which would have been a nightmare to tour. 'See, see how great we are' is not an attitude

to take on the road – it's not an attitude for anything really. We wouldn't want to, in that acerbic Dublin phrase, 'Give ourselves a big welcome'. The tread of the show along the road needed to be gentle and hopeful.

The next week we opened at the Globe, and the first performance on 23 April went through the roof. The first show of a Globe season always has a giddiness, and with the prospect of the journey beyond, it went into overdrive. Hysterical laughter, rounds of applause and a huge shout-out at the end. In truth, the show was still rocky, and the actors didn't quite know how to handle the enthusiasm sweeping the room. They played three more at the Globe and were able to wrestle it into shape. They were also able to store within themselves the nuclear-strength goodwill that the Globe is able to generate, a radioactive glow that would keep them warm for months ahead. The show was not perfect, but it worked. It told the story, it carried the language and delivered it, and it presented the life within the story. This is not always what people mean by theatre these days. There is a difference between a car that works, and an exploding car with balloons on it. A car that works ferries people from A to Z, conveying them from where they begin to a different place, and along the way it shows them scenery, whether beautiful, sad or strange. A lot of theatre these days seems to be watching a car festooned with balloons explode, then bursting into applause and waiting for a blogger to deconstruct the event. Having been taken nowhere. Our show didn't dazzle or explode, but it worked.

And it felt ready to wander.

★ ★ ★

The other question thrown up by those two words, 'Who's there?',

is of course one of identity. That felt more pertinent than ever as we headed out into the world of 2014. We were walking into a world of awkward and uneasy identity. In the West there was a blaze of issues and confusions around identity politics. These sometimes seem like the invention of a crisis by those who have too much time to invent crises, and sometimes seem like the freshest political thinking in the world. Beyond the West, it seemed that everywhere was re-inventing itself, that the spread of lifestyle and choice and ideologies promulgated by the internet was eroding old distinctions. Beyond the ambassadors appearing at our breakfast and exaggerating their own differences, it felt like the broader population were starting to melt theirs, to share and to collaborate in creating new personal choices. There are minorities who cling all the more fiercely to their distinctive identities, white supremacists and Islamic jihadists most noticeably, but they often seem to cling to anachronisms so fiercely because they can see the tide flowing so ineluctably in the opposite direction.

Stephen Greenblatt in his brilliant *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* discusses the cultural moment both before and during Shakespeare's life when the idea of a 'self' began to be considered, and the modes within which it was influenced. While recognising that the Renaissance period experienced a change in social and psychological structures, he throws a spotlight on how structures of power worked to impose forms of control on people as they were attempting to forge their own identities. In his pursuit of how identities are formed, he asks to what degree we are autonomous in the fashioning of our selves, and to what degree we are in thrall to the social contexts which surround us. The writing of his book was informed by the pessimism of America as it recovered from the Vietnam War, from Watergate and from the overwhelming sense that government and the corporate powerful

were attempting to control the nature of individuals' selves. His conclusion was that no matter how much control we think we have, our identities are formed through culture, its hierarchies, its systems and ideologies. Autonomy is denied: 'in all my texts and documents, there were, so far as I could tell, no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity'.

How much more is this the case now? The internet, and particularly social media, often appears to be one big forum for bullying people into shapes. Personality itself sometimes seems to be little more than a fashion, an aggregation which changes daily of what it is to be cool and in the moment, an aggregation which changes with such swiftness that to swim within its swirling currents is a deadly business. The only law within this shifting norm is that you have to stay within it, however its styling may change from one moment to the next. And that anyone will be punished, and publicly, for stepping outside its crushing conformities. The speed with which the crowd punishes those who do not share those norms is terrifying, even though the very nature of self surely demands their rejection.

How positive it felt, then, to send Hamlet out into this environment, a young man, under pressure, frantically trying to forge a new identity in opposition to the context that surrounds him. To send him out into a world of queasily shifting identities, the hero of all heroes who worried most consistently over the ongoing creation of himself. Not to provide any answers but to keep asking the question, 'Who's there?'

- |    |  |                  |
|----|--|------------------|
| 2  | <b>Netherlands</b> , Amsterdam<br><i>Stadsschouwburg</i>       | 29–30 April 2014 |
| 3  | <b>Germany</b> , Bremen<br><i>Bremer Shakespeare Company</i>   | 2 May            |
|    | <b>Germany</b> , Wittenberg<br><i>Phönix Theaterwelt</i>       | 3 May            |
| 4  | <b>Norway</b> , Tromsø<br><i>KulturHuset</i>                   | 6 May            |
| 5  | <b>Sweden</b> , Ystad<br><i>Ystads Teater</i>                  | 8 May            |
| 6  | <b>Finland</b> , Turku<br><i>Åbo Svenska Teater</i>            | 10 May           |
| 7  | <b>Russia</b> , Moscow<br><i>Mayakovsky Theatre</i>            | 13–14 May        |
| 8  | <b>Estonia</b> , Tallinn<br><i>Linnateater</i>                 | 16 May           |
|    | <b>Estonia</b> , Tartu<br><i>Vanemuine</i>                     | 17 May           |
| 9  | <b>Latvia</b> , Rīga<br><i>Dailes Teātris</i>                  | 19 May           |
| 10 | <b>Lithuania</b> , Vilnius<br><i>Palace of the Grand Dukes</i> | 20 May           |