

**Such Stuff podcast**  
**Season 5, Episode 3: Love in Isolation**

[Music plays]

**Imogen Greenberg:** Hello and welcome to another episode of Such Stuff, the podcast from Shakespeare's Globe. This week on the podcast we're introducing Shakespeare's Globe's new project: Love in Isolation. It has been created in light of the astonishing circumstances we all find ourselves in, and will be launching on Thursday 23 April, which is of course Shakespeare's birthday.

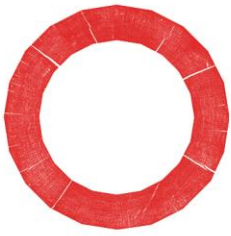
To celebrate the launch of the project, our very own artistic director Michelle Terry spoke to the extraordinary Shakespeare director and scholar Peter Brook to discuss Shakespeare's astonishing sonnets and the exploration of love that runs through them.

Peter and Michelle spoke across two days, with Michelle in London and Peter in France – in this new, isolated world we were thrilled to bring Michelle and Peter together. The audio isn't quite what we'd usually offer you, but do stick with us though, as two extraordinary minds meet to find love – and hope – in isolation.

And a huge thank you to the wonderful Kathryn Hunter who you'll hear performing some of the sonnets that Michelle and Peter discussed.

So, here to introduce Love in Isolation and Peter Brook properly, is the one and only Michelle Terry.

**Michelle Terry:** Hello, my name's Michelle Terry and welcome to Such Stuff and to this very special episode to launch our Love in Isolation series. Love in Isolation gathers together multidisciplinary artists and creatives across the divide to share their favourite moments of Shakespeare from their place of sanctuary wherever they may be in the world. We've also partnered with the Guardian newspaper and their Shakespeare Solos series and on Shakespeare's birthday together we will release three short films:

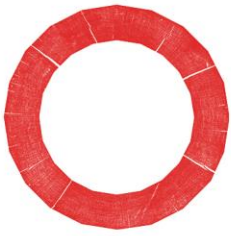


one of Hamlet's speech 'To be or not to be', the second of Prospero's 'Our revels now are ended' speech and finally, Jaques's 'All the world's a stage speech', spoken by people all around the country, a national quilt of voices sharing these incredible words. So, whilst Shakespeare's Globe site may be closed, Shakespeare's Globe, the world he offers to us in these extraordinary plays and poems remains very much open and more available than ever. These enormous works of art can often feel quite overwhelming in their entirety. For many of us our first introduction to them is sat behind a desk at school, forced to read plays that were meant to be seen, heard, experienced live. Now we can't do that at the moment, but the one thing this virus has given us is time to look at moments rather than the whole. Whilst our physical surroundings have been more compact and confined, Love in Isolation is about expanse, about transcending surroundings, exploring fragments, brief moments of the plays and the poems and intimately sharing those moments as we enter the world of our imaginations, those worlds elsewhere that Shakespeare invites us into.

And who better to talk about the poetry and the potency of Shakespeare than the world renowned director Peter Brook. Now Peter has the most incredible and ever-evolving portfolio and he continues to dedicate his life to the art and craft of storytelling, of theatre, the universality, the multicultural endeavour of congregating and sharing stories across space, time and form.

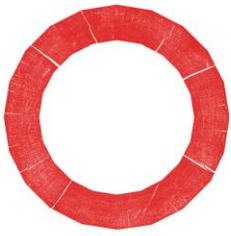
'I can take an empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across the empty space whilst someone else is watching him. And this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged'.

This is the first line of the extraordinary book *The Empty Space*, and it still excites me as much today as it did over 30 years ago when I first read it as a very hungry and divinely dissatisfied teenager. The simplicity, the purity and the enormity of the endeavour was something I knew I would dedicate my life to. But it's Peter's dedication and passion for Shakespeare that ultimately caught my imagination and like so many of us inspired and galvanised in equal measure. His seminal production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for



the RSC in 1970 is still talked about today, his King Lear film with Paul Scofield remains definitive. But it's within his pamphlet *Evoking Shakespeare* that I was truly inspired and ultimately reassured. He says, 'Each line in Shakespeare is an atom. The energy that can be revealed is infinite if we can split it open.' Now that's a seemingly simple provocation but for me, it was the most profound permission to explore, to adventure, to stay curious about the depths of the words of Shakespeare. The pursuit of meaning became an impossibility and a blessed relief. There can be no definitive meaning, it is not our job to find meaning. We make the meaning. So I was instead invited to ask how these words speak to me, right now, which will not be the same for you and neither should it be. And the truth is any resonance I find right now will be the same for me in five minutes, let alone five years. And Peter's words made me feel like that was OK. Shakespeare was allowed to be as epic and cosmic and fluid as I suspected it was and I knew then that I too would dedicate my life to exploring this mirror up to nature.

But again, as Peter says, 'To show the whole of life is an incredibly task and it demands a form which is incredibly compact. Moment by moment the material is of such enormous density that it demands every resource that language has to offer. This means poetry. Not poetry as prettiness but poetry as compactness, poetry as language charged with intensity'. Now there couldn't be a more intense or densely compact time so what better form to explore, now, than poetry. All the plays are poems in a way but it is Shakespeare's sonnets that speak to a more traditional understanding of the form. Now the sonnet was really popular, especially with Elizabethan writers, and indeed Shakespeare liked them so much that he wrote 154 of them in one series, and this doesn't include the ones that littered so many of his plays. Now many of us will know them independently but of course they can be read as a whole. Peter will articulate their beauty and their journey far better than I can but for a writer who so rarely reveals himself in his plays, the sonnets may well be a glimpse into a mind that we will never really know. Now the sonnet is a 14 line poem written in iambic pentameter. And now that's the de-dum de-dum de-dum de-dum de-dum that we're all familiar with. Now for Shakespeare those



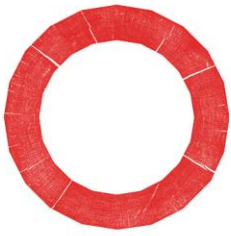
14 lines were often split into three quatrains or three sets of four lines and with one couplet at the end. Now this seemingly innocent couplet is two lines or verse that rhyme and they were so important throughout the canon. The rhyme makes them sound definitive, they give a sense of conclusion. But of course, nothing is ever concluded. There is no definitive. So as every sonnet comes to its seemingly complete end, we are always led on to the next and the next and the next and the next. And even the final sonnet, number 154, ends with the words:

Love's fire heats water, water cools not love.

Now the love that has journeyed its way through the sonnets cannot be cooled and even beyond the sonnet, this love lives on. I'm so proud and so grateful to have had the opportunity to talk about these words with Peter. As I say he is an artist who has dedicated his life to exploring, adventuring, remaining curious about people, about multiple truths, he's not afraid to not know the answer, he's not afraid to take risks, he's not afraid to not be liked. He's not afraid of the power of language, to look at words as a shell that encompass and encase a universe. The word soul is a much maligned word but I think for me, it is soul that sears its way through Peter's work and through his words. Through the soul of theatre, the soul of the word, the soul of art, the soul of Shakespeare, we can transcend the mundane, we can transcend the literal, the petty day to day, and we can allow worlds and portals to open up.

Unapologetically committed to the power and importance of storytelling, to the power of theatre and to the cosmic power of Shakespeare, many of us owe a great debt to Peter. So I hope you enjoy this conversation with him as much as I did, I hope maybe it inspires you to speak even one word of Shakespeare. I also hope it makes us less afraid of the unknown, that it briefly relieves our anxiety to find meaning and offers some comfort and maybe some solace as we all look for moments of love in isolation.

[Music plays]

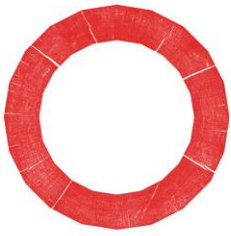


**Peter Brook:** The sonnets are something very unique. In the sonnets, they're the only time when Shakespeare is speaking in his own voice. Marvellously there isn't one character in any of the plays where one would say this is Shakespeare using a character to express his point of view, but in the sonnets he is just opening up to us, starting with the title 'love is my sin', the whole extraordinary range of love life, of personal life, that now he doesn't want to hide. He wants to put it into words. And once again, from the very first word of the first sonnet there is a line that leads to the last line but leads way beyond it, through the complete sequence of sonnets. And wherever it begins... if, for instance, the beginning is this marvellous 'let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments'. And that leading us right to the very, very end to the last words in the last sonnet, but we're here, there's one line that he writes which says, 'If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ, nor so man ever loved'.

**Kathryn Hunter:**

[Performance, sonnet 116]

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove.  
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error and upon me prov'd,  
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.



**PB:** But one of the things that has hung over Shakespeare is that not one play of Shakespeare, not one, has his own views. He has never used any one of his characters as a spokesman for his point of view. And people have tried over centuries to find what was Shakespeare's views on politics, what did he feel about sex, what did he feel about women and men and all that.

**MT:** I know.

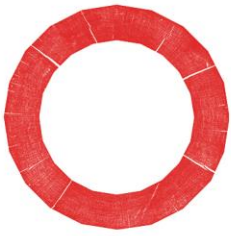
**PB:** You can't. Every character, even the character that's got two words to say, that is a living person, a living human being and Shakespeare, whoever he was wouldn't dream of using it to put over his own ideas and that's why it's so marvellous with all of that, that he felt at some point in his life that he too wanted to give his own views and the sonnets, that's what's so wonderful, the sonnets are as though we had access to his private diary. The sonnets are where he speaks intimately to us and everything in a sonnet is Shakespeare's own personal experience which he is sharing with us.

This extraordinary phrase, 'Love is my sin', it's extraordinary. You have to say, well go on, explain, why. Love is one word that it's impossible to reduce. It is like he is opening a great, beautiful fan and every one of the blades of this fan is a complete world in itself. And yet when you close it, it's a fan and when you open it, it is a world. And that is love. Not only for Shakespeare but for all of us and Shakespeare with its experience of love couldn't not open and open and open and they're such marvellous things.

**KH:**

[Performance, sonnet 142]

Love is my sin, and thy dear virtue hate,  
Hate of my sin, grounded on sinful loving.  
O, but with mine compare thou thine own state,  
And thou shalt find it merits not reproving;  
Or if it do, not from those lips of thine,



That have profaned their scarlet ornaments  
And sealed false bonds of love as oft as mine,  
Robbed others' beds' revenues of their rents.  
Be it lawful I love thee as thou lov'st those  
Whom thine eyes woo as mine importune thee:  
Root pity in thy heart, that, when it grows,  
Thy pity may deserve to pitied be.  
    If thou dost seek to have what thou dost hide,  
    By self-example mayst thou be denied.

[Music plays]

**PB:** Poetry is a string of words, that's all, but the difference between a banal line and a poetic line is inseparable from it's music. You just listen to any line that touches us, you see that within the line, within that line there is a very secret, fine line of melody.

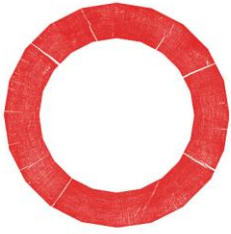
When I did consider everything that grows.

There again, you can't stop there. Go on, go on. 'When I did consider everything that grows' and this vibration, this music, that is just like the very phrase in a beautiful old sonata and it's a little phrase that's just doing... daah de-de, doo diddy-dum. It's dee, dee-dum-dum. 'When I did consider everything that grows', there again if the actor gets in love with his voice and dwells on it and says 'When I did consider everything that grows'. If you see your attention is caught by 'When I did consider everything that grows', it isn't everything, you can't consider everything. But 'When I did consider everything that grows', that is really the opening of a great door and you see a great vista beyond.

**KH:**

[Performance, sonnet 15]

When I consider everything that grows  
Holds in perfection but a little moment,  
That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows



Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;  
When I perceive that men as plants increase,  
Cheered and check'd even by the selfsame sky,  
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,  
And wear their brave state out of memory;  
Then the conceit of this inconstant stay  
Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,  
Where wasteful Time debateth with decay  
To change your day of youth to sullied night;  
And all in war with Time for love of you,  
As he takes from you, I engraft you new.

[Music plays]

**IG:** That's it from Michelle and Peter, but Love in Isolation launches on Shakespeare's birthday, this Thursday, the 23rd April.

As Michelle said, we have partnered with the Guardian to bring you – our wonderful audiences – together with the pros, to record some of Shakespeare's best known speeches. Alongside this, we'll be joined by an extraordinary array of artists presenting their own videos of love in isolation from their places of sanctuary. So check out our social media channels to keep up with this and to find hope, inspiration and love in isolation.

You've been listening... to Such Stuff with me, Imogen Greenberg, Michelle Terry and Peter Brook.

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