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LIVING THEATRE

MASTER BROOK

Anyone who remembers *The Merry Wives of Windsor*—it is strange how some plays are transiently neglected—will remember the line in which Falstaff says to the disguised Ford, “Good Master Brook, I desire more acquaintance of you.”

I have thought of Peter Brook (now joint director of the Royal Shakespeare Company) as “Master Brook” ever since the night, not so far back, when I went to a revival of Cocteau’s *The Infernal Machine* at a small theatre in Kensington. It was directed with revelling invention upon a stage that lay, apparently, beyond a deep chasm. That was the architect’s design, no idea of the director’s though maybe Brook, if asked, would have found a good many uses for it.

He was 20 then (in 1945), a compact young man of much charm with a smile that flickered mischievously round a pair of alert and good-tempered eyes. At Oxford he had given quite a lot of his time to the theatre and to films. Already he had brought to that omnibus-seat theatre, the Torch, off Knightsbridge, an under-graduate production of *Doctor Faustus* which I did not see, but in which, according to his lifelong habit of going to the best sources for advice, he had asked Aleister Crowley to advise upon black magic.