

Peter Brook

For Jan Kott

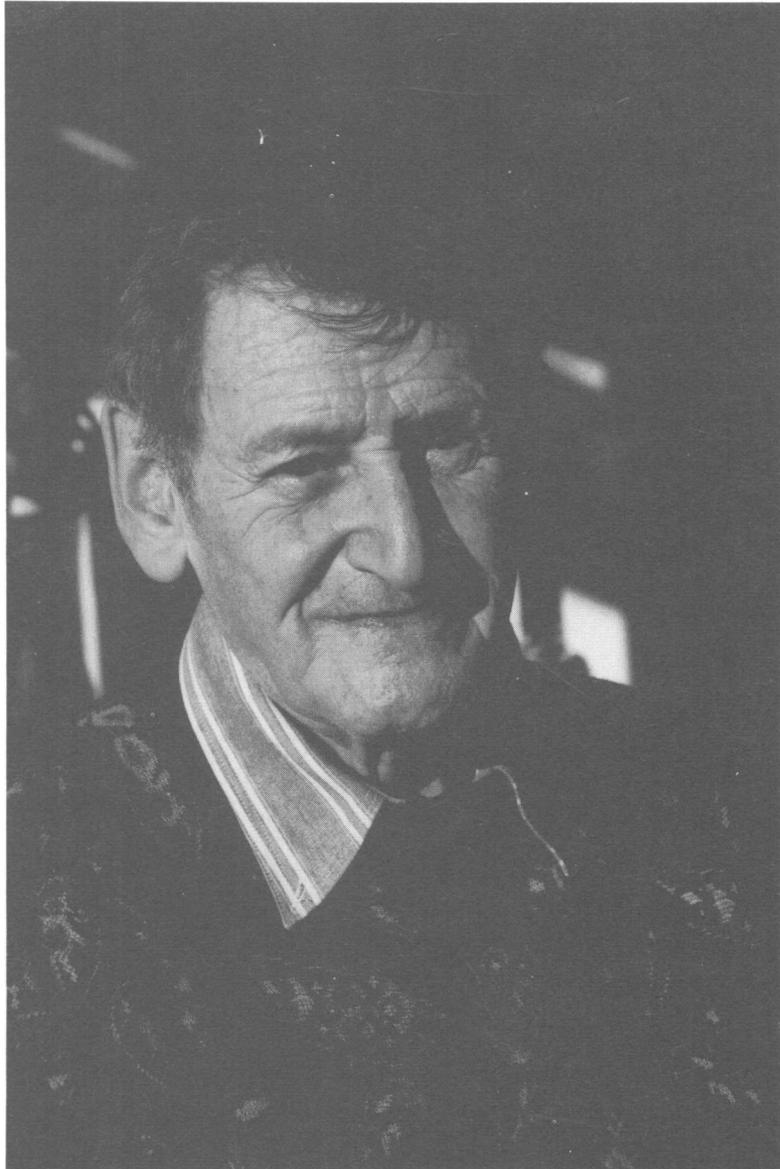
Kott is a razor; Kott is a laser. If his name were found buried in a desert, its sound alone would suggest an impact, a cutting edge. His ideas never originate in the cold laboratory of the mind, they are first experienced in the furnace of his involvement in life, before being forged into piercing weapons by the hard logic of his intellect.

If Kott's influence has penetrated so far and wide, the secret is in the title of the book that first made him known – *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*: the contemporary is Kott himself, and even if everyone else believes that he is inevitably a contemporary of the period in which he lives, it is not true: there are very few who live their time.

Kott was a good friend of mine since we had shared a night trying to extract a harmless but attractive Polish student from the Warsaw police. I read his writings with passionate interest and at the time of preparing *King Lear* it took just one phrase, one image amongst so many, to open a thousand doors. Gloucester hurls himself in despair off a cliff and in his mind his act is totally real: for the audience it is just an actor making an absurd little jump on a bare stage. The theatre allows us to enter into a passionately held belief and exposes to us its absurdity. This is the typical Kott pebble thrown in the pond where the ripples spread and spread helping us to see the relativity of apparently unshakeable convictions.

I am talking about Kott, but for me he is not at all Kott, he is Jan, a Jan of warmth and tenderness, the Jan no woman can resist, nor man either: Jan the friend. Jan and Kott. When added together amount to a great deal: four score and more, far more.

Peter Brook



Jan Kott, 1994. Photo: Monika Krajewska.