

Abstracts for SAA 2013, Performing Shakespeare in Europe, Seminar 54

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Epic Shakespeare: Ivo Van Hove's *Roman Tragedies*

One of the most important European Shakespeare productions of recent years has been *Roman Tragedies*, Ivo Van Hove's epic conflation of *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* for Toneelgroep Amsterdam. Originally premiered in 2007 at the Holland Festival, it subsequently played at the Avignon Festival in France, the Barbican Theatre in London, the Festival Transamériques in Canada, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music in the USA. *Roman Tragedies* is characteristic of a European propensity for epic Shakespeare productions—epic both in the sense of large-scale and political, and in the sense of reflecting the ongoing importance in European theatre of the theories of Bertolt Brecht. It is also a dynamic contemporary piece of theatre that involves its audience directly, engages with social media, and responds in a very immediate way to current historical events. Using a chic, flexible setting of modernist sofas and flat-panel TVs, with live video feeds, news tickers, and audience tweets projected during the performance, *Roman Tragedies* presents politics as a slick media spectacle. The sudden irruptions of violence within this elegant high-tech world are deliberately suggestive of, and responsive to, events in European politics today. This essay will give an account of *Roman Tragedies* in its recent performance in New York City, and will reflect on its significance within the world of contemporary European Shakespeare production.

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Intermedial Shake-shifts

Jan Kott famously proposed that cinema, not the theatre, best conveys the fluency and rapidity of action of Shakespeare's plays. Paying particular attention to recent productions of Shakespeare's Graeco-Roman political plays (Toneelgroep The Roman Tragedies; Wooster Group/RSC Troilus and Cressida; National Theatre of Wales Coriolanus) this contribution to the "Performing Shakespeare in Europe" seminar addresses treatments which substantially deploy new media technologies. In so doing, it touches on questions about the contested site of 'Shakespeare' in the context of innovative production in the

twenty-first century, exploring the ‘tensional relationships’ involved in the mixing of modalities in new contexts. In specific, it probes how the new media technologies are used in relation to the script in the treatments and with what political impact. It ultimately contends that intermedial culture may have an even greater reciprocal affordance with at least some of Shakespeare’s plays than cinema in Kott's seminal account.

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European Spectating or Who Moves?

This paper explores the possibility that rather than ‘European Shakespeares,’ there are European styles or modes of reception. To do this I suggest a theory of spectating as a practice, as one we write about in certain ways, as one not unlike performance practice. In the second section of the paper I look specifically at Mats Ek’s *The Merchant of Venice* when it travelled to Rome in 2005. The paper operates as a provocation about categories, our dependence on them and how this effects how we see and write about Shakespeare.