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# SOME TWEETING CLEOPATRA

## Crossing borders on and off
## the Shakespearean stage

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The affordances of a global, post-textual Shakespeare network have presented challenges for those who seek out the place of language in appropriation theory. As appropriative critical practice finds itself increasingly oriented towards cultural studies, it becomes necessary to rearticulate the place of the Shakespearean text in such work. Shakespeare studies continues to wrestle with what fidelity might mean; appropriative critical practices increasingly dismiss of visible manifestations of the Shakespeare text. Douglas Lanier's influential application of Deleuzian rhizomatics to appropriation theory recognizes the limits of this approach even as he acknowledges that the absence of a centralized "root" threatens to elide Shakespeare entirely and requires that we "revisit the role of the Shakespearean text and the authority it seems to provide in relation to adaptation" (Lanier 2014: 23). Instead, Lanier proposes that we engage in a process of "selective essentialization," emphasizing a fidelity to the "spirit" of Shakespeare (Lanier 2017: 9), while Desmet, Loper, and Casey suggest that this reassessment "brings to the foreground the relationship between medium and message" (Desmet et al. 2018: 6). Likewise, Julie Sanders's update to her seminal *Adaptation and Appropriation* affirms the need to reconsider the space we allocate to the presence of the text, noting that "in any study of adaptation and appropriation the creative import of the author cannot be as easily dismissed as Roland Barthes's or Michel Foucault's influential theories of the 'death of the author' might suggest" (Sanders 2017: 3).

What this post-rhizomatic uncertainty suggests is the need for an acknowledgment of some form of centralized hub, or core, to "this transmedial set of objects we call Shakespeare" (Lanier 2017: 3), one that articulates a point of convergence where the various inscriptions of a text might make visible the extent to which appropriation exists as a "recursive process of give and take" (Desmet 2014: 43), rooted in shifting understandings of a text in transition. And yet, as long as the Shakespeare text is identified as an object, as something "that we preserve in climate-controlled library vaults" (Desmet et al. 2018: 5), methodologies remain trapped in an "archive-centered" approach (Lopez 2008: 311), and our capacity to fully articulate what fidelity means is limited to a discussion of equivalence. Even though Shakespeare studies strives to move beyond assessing shades of exactness, what constitutes these bonds that hold Shakespeare together, and how they are formed, is overlooked in favor of artifact study – understandably so. Capturing the appropriative process as it occurs is nearly impossible. A more fruitful approach requires an acknowledgment of the Shakespeare text and locates this transmedial set of objects in a borderland as it moves from one form to another.

To account fully for appropriation as a process of transformation requires a network of critical thought that allows appropriation theory to intersect with three adjacent methodologies that affirm the place of the transformative text: Global Shakespeares, performance study, and theories of digital texts. This chapter attempts to centralize the plasticity of text by emphasizing the multiplicity of language, and suggests that Ivo Van Hove's 2012–2018 multimedia production *Roman Tragedies* is an appropriative text that enacted (and continues to enact through its ongoing presence on social media) the borderlands subjectivity that is crucial to appropriation.[1] In *Roman Tragedies*, Toneelgroep Amsterdam creates simultaneous texts that cross linguistic, media, geopolitical, and textual boundaries to illustrate the network of textual variants that characterize Shakespeare when situated in the liminal space between work and event that appropriation occupies. When its fragments of performance, text, technology, and translation coalesce into a singular iteration of Shakespeare, *Roman Tragedies* models the interplay of text, performance, culture, and reception that characterizes appropriation.

If, as Joubin suggests, language is "a marker deeply ingrained in identity politics" (Joubin 2014: 192), then Toneelgroep Amsterdam's simultaneous performance texts – the underlying Shakespearean narrative, the spoken performance in Dutch, English surtitles, and concurrent Twitter commentary – identifies alienation, alterity, stability, and narrative inclusion as sites of convergence where the transformative text mutates across media. A six-hour aggregate of three Shakespeare plays – *Coriolanus, Julius Caesar*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* – *Roman Tragedies* defines itself by its ongoing practice of border transgression, creating an appropriation that occurs both in real time and asynchronously, one that begins in the theatre, and continues online as audience members were encouraged to live-tweet the performance using Twitter hashtag #RomanTragedies. *Roman Tragedies* is an appropriation that interweaves the four performance texts of Shakespeare into one singular event, and each point (this is true for at least the performance that I experienced in the United States) is distanced from the experience of the "original" text through a remediation manifest in either language, theatre, or technology. *Roman Tragedies* embodies the contested status of language in a post-textual, postdramatic Shakespeare network, and situates its audience of theatregoers, readers, and social media users between the borders of different encounters, and asks them to create a cohesive Shakespeare experience for themselves. In so doing, it represents the dynamic, transformative text at the core of Shakespeare, eschewing rhizomatics, the performance/print binary, and source-based models of adaptation in favor of a more robust network of associations that gravitate towards, but never settle upon, a fixed notion of the Shakespeare text.

In recent years, performance theory has been dominated by Hans-Thies Lehmann's idea of a postdramatic theatre that consciously shifts away from the *work*, that is to say, text-based dramatic theatre, to a more transitory, and ultimately unrecordable, *event*. In his prologue, Lehmann describes the postdramatic in botanical language that directly undercuts any reliance on rhizomatic structures, suggesting that in postdramatic theatre, "the limbs or branches of a dramatic organism, even if they are withered material, are still present and form the space of a memory that is 'bursting open' in a double sense" (Lehmann 2006: 27). Unlike Deleuze and Guattari, Lehmann recognizes the need for a core even if it is in a process of decay. Although the theatre experience is one that has always embodied "extra-linguistic or at least borderline linguistic semiosis" (Lehmann 2006: 48) the decaying, frayed corpse of the text lingers. Theatre is, as Peggy Phelan notes, always on the verge of disappearance, existing nowhere else but in the moment that it is experienced (Phelan 1993: 146–36), but the text is not so easily discarded, lingering as a ghostly shadow, or as W.B. Worthen suggests, operating as a template from which performance is built (2014).

The emphasis on ephemerality of performance that shapes much postdramatic performance theory allows us new ways of thinking about how engagement with the text might constitute its

own event. By positioning appropriation as a process that crosses the borders among languages, media, genre, and culture, we situate it as a negotiating agent between the book locked in the vault and the ephemerality of text at play. As the plays themselves toy with the borders of the Roman Empire, Toneelgroep Amsterdam's reimagined text rehearses the disorientation that occurs in an event situated at the border between a extant text and its subsequent performance, between languages, and between the live and the digital. *Roman Tragedies* highlights the intermediary and flexible nature of text as a site of transformation and makes visible the processes of appropriation by demanding that the participating spectators (or spect-actors, to use Diana Taylor's term [2015: 73–87]) take ownership of their chosen perspectives. Van Hove's playful perforation of expected textual and theatrical boundaries illustrates the deterritorialization of Shakespeare that occurs in a globalized, multi-media network of performance, critical study, and appropriation, and suggests that fidelity is rooted in an assertive correspondence between the bounded material text and the open-ended network of use engendered by appropriation that we might term "event." For the Shakespeare text to exist in a borderland is for it to exist in a state of perpetual coming into being, and to engage with such an object is to be forced to make decisions and yield to a more participatory engagement. In *Roman Tragedies*, then, the Shakespeare text affirms an "existential border subjectivity" (Birringer 2002: 69) as it oscillates between work and event.

It should be no surprise that global, digital, and performance Shakespeares have bloomed concomitantly as fields of study. The pressures that these fields had previously put upon demands of exactness have since been mitigated by new theorizations about what occurs when we transpose Shakespeare onto new media, cultures, and uses. In particular, translation theory focuses the broad designation of "Global Shakespeares" and establishes a more grounded assessment of the ways in which the texts transverse culture, style, and language. Trans-linguistic acts of appropriation cross borders in obvious ways, but in omitting the larger cultural adaptation and thinking more closely about the act of translation, we can see how appropriation is both a dismissal and an affirmation of the authority of language. In practice, translation threatens to displace the significance of the English language as the primary identifying signifier of the vast network of citations, images, cultural memories and critical histories that we term Shakespeare, and yet, a work cannot fully extrapolate itself from presence of the English language text, as its very identity is built on a the demand for a comparative parallel. Transformations of Shakespeare in non-English languages do indeed highlight "cultural authenticity and alterity" (Joubin 2014: 191), but the study of Shakespeare performed or translated also implicitly asks how "authenticity" might inhabit multiple spaces simultaneously, and subsequently root alterity in the play of language itself. In acknowledging the extent to which a translation "is received by a different community to that which received the 'source text' and will obviously be subject to very different readings to those of the respective foreign language 'source'" (Minier 2014: 23), critical studies of Shakespeare in translation build a complex network of texts bound together by its affiliation as "Shakespeare," making visible both the processes and reception of the appropriated text.

Transcultural, translinguistic Shakespeares highlight the paradox at the heart of the debate over the constituency of "text" – it is at once identifiable, yet subject to communities and networks of use. Critical explorations of Shakespeare in diverse global communities suggest a crossover point at which culture, language, and affective memory manifest "new interactive possibilities within Shakespearean language, meaning, and context" (Singh and Arvas 2015: 184), but again, the critical recognition that this is a task that is fraught with discourses of colonization[2] that resonate through language use as much as it does through circulations of cultural capital. As Derrida and Venuti note, within the act of translation exists in an "economy of in-betweenness" (Derrida and Venuti 2001: 179) that is both "appropriating and appropriate" (178) and the

fragmentation of the "unity of the word" (181) that occurs in acts of translation creates a liminal space that requires the reader's participation in negotiating multiple cultures and languages simultaneously. Alfredo Michel Modenessi goes further and claims that "a translation is an *event*, evanescent by nature, like a performance, and it will not usually become fixed and translatable" (Modenessi 2015: 75). In seeking out difference, the process of translation seeks out the "spirit" of Shakespeare, wrangling with the possibility that this spirit is found in language itself. For critics working with Shakespeare, this economy of in-betweenness is already expounded by Shakespeare's place as both the embodiment of intellectual imperialism and as a site of resistance.

Performance studies has undergone a similar shift away from a reliance on textual similitude as a means of understanding Shakespeare in motion and remains understandably reluctant to cede a more dialogic perspective on performance. Like appropriation theory, performance studies has found it necessary to shift away from affirmative assessments of the value of the Shakespearean text in theoretical practice, in order for a performance text to be understood as its own entity. Performance's conscious dismissal of a mimetic theatre practice is akin to translation's movement away from equivalence and carries the burden of representing Shakespeare, whose authority is traditionally rooted in language (and, by extension, print), in diverse cultures and forms. In spite of the rise in original practices, both as practice and as a source of scholarly authorization for "authentic" Shakespeare, it seems to me that in the twenty-first century, to continue to affirm the "aesthetic and ideological persistence of realist 'objectivity'" (Worthen 2014: 93) of the Shakespearean text is critically irresponsible. As Worthen has repeatedly pointed out, performance transforms the text, often repositioning Shakespeare as a medium in itself and, yet, even in this productive approach, retains a tendency to isolate and dismiss the work that risks throwing the baby out with the bathwater. For Worthen, Shakespeare is an intermediary presence, navigating between the notions of a literary construction of "text," and the more performative idea of "event," and if this is the case, then it is our responsibility to look to appropriation as a means of straddling this divide. The advent of postdramatic performance theory has resulted in a significant shift away from a methodology rooted in dramatic literature, in favor of the study of an ephemeral moment that is permeable and embedded within its context. As a result, performance theory recognizes that Shakespeare becomes "necessarily transformative" (Iyengar 2017: 6) every time it is used, which poses a particular set of challenges for Shakespeare studies, whose practices depend upon a recognizable and stable canon. Certainly, due to the endurance of that which we term "play," most contemporary Shakespearean theatre would fail to meet the criteria for postdramatic inclusion because of the cultural ubiquity of the Shakespearean dramatic text. Shakespeare, textual or post-textual, cannot simply "recede from the theatre" (Lehmann 2006: 49), but it can exist in transformative borderlands, becoming a locus for new meanings, methodologies, and practices. Transformative Shakespeares are a conduit for transmutations of media and new cultural practices, building on Kidnie's seminal assessment of appropriation as a process (2009: 30), becoming an embodied "event" that captures a greater "density of intensive moments" (Lehmann 2006: 83). Even as he advocates for the expiration of script-based dramatic theatre, Lehmann finds himself unable to leave the work behind and defines Shakespearean theatre as a "disorderly knot, *containing words*" (Lehmann 2004: 105, my italics). Ideally, Lehmann envisions Shakespearean stage as "a world without borders, even if sometimes cloaked in fog, or surrounded by prison walls" (104), and appropriation's transformative use of Shakespeare is a tool with which we can continuously remap the limits of such a world. Appropriation signals the space in between "work" and "event," "text" and "performance," and appropriation becomes the convergence point through which the transition from work to event is made visible. We might push Lehmann further and suggest that appropriated Shakespearean text is a borderland "with no restrictive unity of style, no atmosphere without ambiguity" (104).

Of course, the argument that text is a site of interpretive play has been well made by poststructuralism. But the prominence of digital textuality has made the multiplicious nature of text more apparent, and in the case of *Roman Tragedies*, gives continued life to the text in cyberspace, sustained by its existence in hyperlinks, snapshots, videos, and recollections shared on social media. Twenty-first-century reading practices have changed the materiality of text, and the "hypertextuality of the Internet forces the reader/user into active constructions of the text's boundaries" (Sandvoss 2017: 33). Firstly, the digital world has destabilized the notion of printed text as something that exists through a Cartesian "ritual iteration" (Schalkwyk 2010: 72); instead, text exists in a medium that empowers the user to overwrite the extant linguistic signifiers at any point. In a digital world, the mutability of text is foregrounded and this makes explicit text's dependence on its medium – as it is fragmented, disseminated, and appropriated, text becomes, to poach the popular phrase, spreadable (Jenkins et al. 2013). Secondly, the increasingly common global circulation of mass media, and the ostensible collapse of markers of cultural hegemony, subcultures, and geo-temporal organization that comes with the accessibility and movement of text, performance, and image through social media, blogs, and webpages, dismisses the notion of the stable text as an essentialist, purist artifact as not only fallacious, but elitist, instead offering up the text for widespread consumption. Digital media, fan practices, and an increased sophistication in the technology we use, continues to entangle Shakespeare in cultural context, breaking the notion of "text" down to a raw metadata in a process that draws attention to the ongoing need for curation.[3]

In short, the organizational demands that digital media place on the text makes that text ephemeral. Encountering the text – finding it, contextualizing it in its new platform, following hyperlinks, ignoring or following tabs, or screen pop-ups that co-exist in digital space – becomes an event. The simple act of loading a page becomes both an act of translation, as the text is translated from XML code to readable text, and an act of performance, as this particular text exists ephemerally at the demand of the reader/user, and thanks to advertisements, adjacent webpages, potential bugs or errors in connectivity, proffers a different experience with every load of the page. Moreover, as establishment institutions such as the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Globe, and the Shakespeare Institute reach out on social media and draw in creative, amateur iterations of a text, the notion of Shakespeare as stable text is imbued with a catalogue of interpretive variants is drawn further into doubt. To build on Worthen's view of Shakespeare as a medium in itself underscores Desmet's suggestion that we cannot but be faithful to Shakespeare because the text is activated into a perpetual state of becoming by the processes of consumption-as-production that appropriation engenders.

Shakespeare's Roman plays themselves explore the ways in which constant, shifting geopolitical boundaries impact nationalist identity and draws attention to how shifting conceptions of Rome activate the semiotics of honor. These plays punish characters who are static and challenge characters who mistakenly believe that their own blood's merit is equivalent to the value of Roman soil by remapping Roman politics to exclude such characters when they assume they are most safe. The characters who invest in the stability of Roman honor are most harshly treated, and key to political survival is a character's understanding of language's multiplicity. Characters who thrive in Shakespeare's Rome do so because they are adaptable when they find themselves on the outskirts of Roman political intrigue and of the geopolitical Roman empire, and Van Hove's fidelity to historical chronology emphasizes both the advantages and dangers inherent in a borderlands existence.

In *Julius Caesar*, Antony moves from spectator to player when he invigorates the masses, even before they have beheld "Caesar's vesture, wounded" (*Julius Caesar*, 3.2.194). Later, Antony falls when faced with the limits of his authority because he relies on the weak assertion that "I am

Antony yet" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 3.13.98) to affirm his autonomy. Coriolanus is trapped by his inability to recognize his own borderland identity when banished from Rome, thinking that his honored name is meaningful enough to eviscerate his city when he announces "I banish you!" (*Coriolanus*, 3.3.123). Cleopatra ultimately triumphs over both Antony and Octavius because of her willingness to exploit her borderlands subjectivity, both in terms of her geographic location and her relationships to men of political power. Consistently on display in these plays, and emphasized through the authority (real and perceived) of names, are the limitations faced by characters who assume a semiotic fidelity to the labels applied to them when the political climate is constantly shifting.

Van Hove's production was recognizably Shakespearean in its narrative form. The narratives were streamlined but left structurally consistent with the print editions, and the play was staged in a modern television news office with the small company of actors performing in contemporary formal business wear. The stage was divided into two generic, IKEA-style news offices and center stage, a small alley was established by glass walls that enclosed the abutting rooms. This no-man's-land was a purely theatrical space, off-limits to the spectators who were invited to leave the auditorium and roam around the stage throughout the show, and every death was staged in this area. Multiple large television screens were placed at different points across the set, and the off-stage areas, such as the make-up table, were also visible. The televisions situated around the stage screened both contemporary news footage and the live-streamed the action on the stage, allowing audience members to watch themselves watching the drama. Situating the tragedies in a contemporary global newsroom allowed Van Hove's production to amplify the geopolitics of the text in a twenty-first-century global community as the actors performed among flat-screened televisions that "served as breaches where the history of the 20th and 21st centuries invaded that of Rome" (Ball 2013: 166).

By relocating the drama to a site of news commentary, the characters in *Roman Tragedies* were thematically moved into the same space of the audience themselves: marginalized, operating as both makers of action and spectators. Caught between enactment and reportage, *Roman Tragedies* reaffirmed the blurred boundary between public and private that is present throughout the Roman plays, amplifying the affective construction of character that is so prevalent in both Shakespeare's Rome and contemporary media culture. Multi-media production choices mirrored the denial of private space by staging intimate scenes, such as Coriolanus's submission to Aufidius in the style of a talk-show, with the actors sitting in two comfortable chairs, facing outwards towards the auditorium, and immediately following the scene with a screened news interview – a staged television program that then ran intermittently throughout the show. The setting of the production trapped the characters in a theatrical borderland, both performing the roles of participants and chorus, caught between watching and doing, externalizing the processes of the characters and putting it on display alongside the receptive process of the audience. The production choices, which "immediately inscribed onto the spectator's consciousness a troubling tension between the real and the fictionalized" (Collard 2013: 8) makes explicit the blurring of the boundaries between "real" and "fictional," between "live" and "digital," and forces the spect-actors to participate in a public act of reception.

As is consistent with Toneelgroep Amsterdam's output, the text was translated into Dutch, but designed to tour worldwide, and sought to linguistically maintain the geographic placelessness that the set was designed to reflect. Two sets of surtitles remediated the performance further, and it is this attention to the continual fragmentation and reconstitution of Shakespeare language that makes visible appropriation's borderland identity. A large screen above the stage showed scenes that took place too far upstage to see and even when dark, continued to translate the spoken lines into English. The words were not modernized, nor was any translation adapted

to Dutch vernacular, suggesting that the remediation lay in the larger consumption of the text, marking the production as a conduit for language's permutations, rather than a receptor in its own right. Below the screen, a red LED board intermittently ran lighthearted, notices across the top of the playing space, announcing breaks, presenting responses that were entered by audience members at the computer station in the lobby outside, and running countdown clocks on major characters' deaths – *The Guardian*'s theatre reviewer, Lynn Gardner, advised her London readers that as the show counts down to the death of Caesar "you calculate whether you can fit in a toilet break" (Gardner 2017). Overhead spoken announcements during the scene reinforced the understanding that we were experiencing an event by continuously drawing attention to time. The announcer counted down each set change, explained to the audience any cast doubling, and reminded the spect-actors that they had time to purchase snacks or change their location on or off the stage. The text was never far from the production, however, as the surtitles and the announcer's self-consciousness about the impending dramaturgical timeline kept the text at the foreground of the performance. Moreover, the audience's prior textual knowledge of the plays' narratives supplemented the experience of the event, giving the audience members time to locate themselves in proximity to a particular moment that they wished to encounter close up (or avoid, should that be their preference).

The surtitles offered the audience a stability to cling to in the face of an potentially impenetrable language (assuming that the majority of the New York audience with whom I shared the experience with were not sufficiently fluent in Dutch to fully comprehend the spoken language). The surtitles offered the audience Shakespeare, both through translation of the lines into English and by drawing the audience's attention to what was coming in the marathon production. This moment hints at further textual multiplicity, as the audience member reading along is encountering an adapted, rehearsal-room edited, and possibly twice-translated text. The anticipation of signifiers (in this case, staged deaths) stood as a marker of time passed, narrative cohesion, and Shakespearean tragedy – the audience would have its promised end. Not only were eyes divided between text and performance, but audience members also found themselves free to choose their subjective position – they could stay in the house and read the text, framing themselves as viewers, or go up on to the stage and watch the actors closely, live or on screen, turning away from embodied performance to watch one of the television sets. They were also free to supplement the experience by following or posting to the Twitter hashtag #RomanTragedies.

Therefore, in spite of multiple screens across the stage, the show rejected spectacle in favor of an emphasis on the mutability of language – a bold choice for three plays that explicitly engage with the power of spectacle. There was no place for blood in Van Hove's bland corporate office space, and as a result, Coriolanus became a failed politician, forcing the audience to rely on the narrative of his deeds, rather than bear witness to Caius as a "thing of blood" (*Coriolanus* 2.2.109. Antony revealed a photograph of Caesar's body, which he then marked up with red pen, and when death occurred, it came not through the high Roman fashion – stabbing – but by an actor assuming a position on the movable block in the liminal space between rooms and rolling backwards underneath a bird's eye camera that could then display their corpse on screen from above. These were bloodless revolutions, and they were televised, presenting war as a sinister green light, but omitting the carnage.

The choice to avoid bloodshed in *Roman Tragedies* is a curious disembodiment of these very corporeal play texts that resisted the ambiguity of the semiotic body, a particular concern to both *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*, and reaffirmed the production's commitment to language as the foundation for this appropriation. There were obviously practical reasons for such an omission – I am reasonably sure that no theatre-goer would have wanted to walk through the

remains of Caesar – and yet these omissions forced a greater reliance on the linguistic markers, both within the text (such as Antony's speech to the mob) and beyond the text, through the surtitles. The production was forced into a discursive zone, and the lack of spectacle ultimately reduced the theatrical power of the event, instead, favoring a work that was not only read across texts and platforms, but transcended the event's temporality, becoming accessible outside of theatre when it gained life on social media.

*Roman Tragedies* not only violated traditional boundaries of theatrical space by inviting the audience to roam around the auditorium, but also by encouraging social media documentation on twitter, via the hashtag #RomanTragedies, allowing the gaze to move from actor to audience participant, from stage to device, integrating reading, participating, and viewing as a means of experiencing *Roman Tragedies*. Alongside the stage production itself, Twitter might have merely offered an alternative performance, one that transcends the five-plus hour traffic of Van Hove's stage, but the *Roman Tragedies* advertised its own commentaries, including a digital comment box by the snack bar that would then appear in the running commentary on the LED board. At its most fundamental level, the hashtag #RomanTragedies allows audience members the opportunity to validate their experience, identify and interact with other audience members, relive the experience, or catch up on what might have been missed (and with a five-and-a-half hour run time, Twitter offers a valuable opportunity to stay plugged in to the performance during Gardner's recommended bathroom break). For the aspirational audience member unable to attend a performance, the hashtag offers a sampling of the experience, and a partial reconstruction of an experience curated by an audience member, affirming Van Hove's aspiration for a subjective performance event.[4] More cynically, Mancewicz (2014) suggests that ultimately the effect of the intermediality in *Roman Tragedies* is "a bitter comment on the inactivity of citizens in contemporary democratic societies" and suggests that "the production reflects on a mediatized world in which social networks give a mere illusion of civil action" (144). I disagree. *Roman Tragedies* suggests that, in borderlands, new methods of communication can yield new strategies for participation. The adjacent Twitter performance contributes to the overall appropriation and embodies the reception processes that Desmet sees as essential to the understanding of Shakespearean appropriation. Moreover, as Danielle Rosvally suggests, Twitter offers opportunities to engage in a digital form of Marvin Carlson's "ghosting" palimpsest (2003), in which the memories of the audience haunts contemporary performance. Applied online, ghosting expands so that the practice of crowdsourcing active definitions of Shakespeare "creates access points for knowledge economies" (Rosvally 2018: 151). The hashtag, which transcends time and distance, thus makes an already inter-cultural and translinguistic appropriation a deeper global presence by existing across temporal-spatial boundaries, linking together prior performances, their contexts, and other ephemera, through the authority of written word, staged as it is, on Twitter.

#RomanTragedies is a vast and varied set of affiliated tweets, ranging from the real-time experience of audience members, to the utterly inexplicable – one user attached the hashtag to a retweeted video of a man proposing to a woman in a Chick-Fil-A restaurant in Austin, Texas, for example. Much of the commentary, however, is from people experiencing the show, such as @blancanyon's (Añón 2012) interpretive observation that in "#RomanTragedies strobe marks death!" Many tweets illustrated the platform's capacity to place the spect-actor "simultaneously inside and outside the performance" (Calbi 2013: 140) and included filmed moments, such as @desavisdia's (Desavisdisa 2017) clip of Coriolanus in the marketplace, as a taster "avant ma critique de ces époustouflantes #RomanTragedies." Other comments were deliberately intertextual in nature, such as @polyg's (Gianniba 2017) light-hearted personal update: "#DonJuaninSoho tonight. Is it unreasonable to expect as much snogging as in Antony and Cleopatra? #romantragedies." Tweeter @eoin_price (Price 2017) complained that "everyone I know is

at #romantragedies," suggesting that his sense of missing out is underscored by his ability to somewhat share the experience that his own personal network is having by skulking on Twitter. Elsewhere, @jimdougan (Dougan 2017) gives a warning: "for anyone there, the best bit of #romantragedies is coming up," and @Millymelon (Melon 2017) posts a list of "some of the questions Ivo Van Hove wants us to think about" alongside a photograph of the PowerPoint slide that closed the production with a list of discussion prompts, such as "when do principles become unreasonable?" Although the language of the tweeter, the date, and the occasional inclusion of the performance location (e.g. @BarbicanCentre) can help us separate out the discrete events, Twitter's own organizational algorithms offers the social media user the opportunity to sort tweets by "top," "latest," "people," "photos," "video," "news," or a now defunct category named "periscope."

As the tweets become ever more detailed in their referents and cross-linking, the hashtag #RomanTragedies throws the discourse communities that surround our knowledge of Shakespeare into further relief by drawing attention to work that identifies itself as part of a hub of Shakespeare activity. These links are indicative of the diverse associations that build a complex network through which we encounter Shakespeare when caught between work and event. It embodies the paradox of simultaneously stable and unstable language, becoming a node that both directs the reader directly to the intended object of intellectual desire, and immediately diverts attention to a subjective, unexpected, and unintended association. Through the various forms of language at work in *Roman Tragedies* and its ongoing afterlife on social media, the dialogic processes of appropriation are actualized in the movement between work and event. Such a performance challenges the rhizome by returning appropriative acts to their central root, or trunk, and identifying this crossing space as a borderland where the spirit of Shakespeare exists in media res. As Twitter user @Franciska_E (Ery 2017) notes, "once again Ivo Van Hove only leaves in the essentials. No fake blood. No cliche [sic] costumes. Only text. And the human. #romantragedies."

## Acknowledgments

## Notes

1 The production began life in 2007 and, at the time of writing, continues to tour. Performances are scheduled until June 2018.
2 See Poonam Trivedi (2011).
3 To affirm this point, XML files are available on Open Source Shakespeare, the Folger's Digital Texts database, and the University of Toronto's expansive Shakespeare's Contemporaries website.
4 It should be noted that, due to the wealth of material out there, the dedicated #RomanTragedies hunter might be able to assemble a significant portion of the event, should they wish to do so.

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