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Looking Back at the Audience: The RSC & The Wooster Group's *Troilus and Cressida* (2012)

Abstract: The controversy around the RSC & The Wooster Group's *Troilus and Cressida* (Stratford-upon-Avon 2012) among the spectators and critics in Britain revealed significant differences between the UK and the US patterns of staging, spectating, and reviewing Shakespeare. The production has also exposed the gap between mainstream and avant-garde performance practices in terms of artists' assumptions and audiences' expectations. Reviews and blog entries written by scholars, critics, practitioners, and anonymous theatre goers were particularly disapproving of The Wooster Group's experimentation with language, non-psychological acting, the appropriation of Native American customs, and the overall approach to the play and the very process of stage production. These points of criticism have suggested a clear perception of a successful Shakespeare production in the mainstream British theatre: a staging that approaches the text as an autonomous universe guided by realistic rules, psychological principles, and immediate political concerns. If we assume, however, that *Troilus and Cressida* as a play relies on the dramaturgy of cultural differences and that it consciously reflects on the notion of spectatorship, the production's transgression of mainstream patterns of staging and spectating brings it surprisingly close to the Shakespearean source.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, audience, spectating, British theatre, American theatre, avant-garde, RSC, The Wooster Group.

The RSC and The Wooster Group co-production of *Troilus and Cressida* was probably the most challenging and the most challenged performance at the World Shakespeare Festival in London in 2012. Michael Billington called it "a bizarrely disjointed spectacle" (Billington 9 Aug 2012), whereas Simon Tavener went so far as to say, "it is one of the worst pieces of theatre I have seen on a professional stage" (Tavener 9 Aug 2012). The crushing reviews and the numerous walkouts prompted Andrew Cowie to post a blog entry in defence of this staging, entitled revealingly "Is *Troilus and Cressida* as bad as everyone says?" (Cowie 16 Aug 2012).

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The debate around this production has involved professional critics, renowned Shakespeare scholars, bloggers, and theatre practitioners, and it has revealed fundamental tensions within English-language reception of Shakespeare. The controversy has exposed differences in the staging of Shakespeare between the UK and the US, as well as between classical and avant-garde theatre. The criticism of the performance has brought out the conditions determining the success of a Shakespearean staging for more traditional British spectators and critics, pointing to the ways in which they define the concept of Shakespeare in theatre. Few productions offer thus a better insight into the nature of Shakespearean staging and spectating in Anglophone culture than this one.

Opposite Camps

The very juxtaposition of the RSC actors as the Greeks and The Wooster Group performers as the Trojans in this staging foregrounds the difference between the mainstream UK and the avant-garde US practice along with distinctive models of spectatorship which they encourage. The two companies co-producing *Troilus and Cressida* are emblematic of diverse traditions of English-language theatre that cater for different audiences. Matt Trueman has rightly noted that they “make an unlikely, almost oxymoronic, partnership” (Trueman 1 Aug 2012). Having evolved as contrasting theatre traditions, the RSC and The Wooster Group appeal to distinct audiences, and they do so in a different manner.

The RSC is one of the most famous classical companies, highly respected not only in Britain but also abroad for interpretations of Renaissance drama and newly commissioned plays. It represents the mainstream tradition of text-orientated theatre that tends to emphasize the psychology of the characters, in order to enhance realism in the performance. As Susanne Greenhalgh points out, “The style of acting most associated with the RSC since the 1960s assumes that character and psychology will emerge from rigorous attention to the rhythms and associations of highly-wrought language, the role and narrative coming alive in the act of speaking” (Greenhalgh, 750). In terms of its model of spectatorship, the company strives to imitate the direct, intimate contact between the actors and the audience that is associated with Elizabethan playhouses. As it claims on its website, “Our audiences are at the heart of all we do and we want to challenge, inspire and involve them.” The thrust stage of the newly renovated Swan Theatre, where *Troilus and Cressida* premiered in August 2012, allows the audiences to follow closely the psychological subtleties and speech nuances of the RSC actors.

In The Wooster Group productions the audience is also central to the staging, however, in ways that are strikingly different from those of the RSC. The New York based ensemble originated from the experimental American

performance scene in the 1970s, which explored modes of involving the spectators to interrogate aesthetic and social issues, while embodying these modes in new spatial patterns of actors-audience relationship. Unlike the RSC that is known for its fidelity to the text, The Wooster Group is celebrated for avant-garde collages of classic plays, which force the spectators to revise their understanding of dramatic works and performance practices. So far, they have staged only two of Shakespeare's dramas, *Hamlet* in 2006 and *Troilus and Cressida* in 2012, yet each time they created groundbreaking performances that have left their mark on Shakespearean stage tradition. Their works are famous for complex images, intermedial effects, and multiple references that challenge audiences and critics alike. According to Bonnie Marranca, "[t]his theatre chooses all species of texts from the cultural heritage, then stages their dissemination in new spaces and environments, generating a multitude of narratives and images" (Marranca 109). The company has made its name among critics and spectators interested in innovative stage practice who are keen on reinterpretations of traditional drama and theatre.

Given the geographical distance and aesthetic divergence, the two companies might have never worked together if it were not for the World Shakespeare Festival, for which they were commissioned to stage *Troilus and Cressida*. The festival run across the UK in parallel to the Olympic Games in London, and its aim was to showcase the work of local and international companies, in order to promote the idea of Shakespeare both as a quintessentially British icon and a truly global writer. *Troilus and Cressida* as a transatlantic co-production was part of this strategy. Rupert Goold, an associate director of the RSC, who set up the project, was initially to co-direct the performance with Elizabeth LeCompte, a founding member and the theatre director of the Wooster Group. However, faced with a scheduling conflict, Goold was substituted by Mark Ravenhill, the RSC's Writer in Residence, who debuted in the role of director. The two companies rehearsed separately and then worked together for a couple of weeks in England. As LeCompte explained, the project depended on the idea of confrontation of stage practices, without an intention of producing a coherent style common to both the groups:

A lot of people think that collaboration means that the two directors have to get together and agree on everything. Mark [Ravenhill] was really great with us on that because he found a style that was really interesting to him for this play, as we did, and then we put the two together and tried not to modify or generalize. (LeCompte 240)

Such working method suggests that the final production was consciously conceived as a clash of distinctive styles in ways that would reflect conflicts in the Shakespearean drama, but even more importantly, aesthetic differences between the two companies.

Stylistic Clash

Rather than glossing over the differences between the UK mainstream theatre and the US avant-garde performance, the production has brought them into sharp focus. *Troilus and Cressida* was shown on a revolving stage with both the companies using minimal sets that could be easily moved around and taken away. This enabled quick transitions between the Greek and Trojan camps and their distinctive settings. The split structure of the performance as well as a diversity of techniques applied by each company revealed a wide range of staging styles and audience assumptions within Shakespearean performance. My account of this production reflects the experience of seeing it live at the Riverside Studios in London on 8 September 2012, as well as watching a recording from The Swan Theatre at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford. The discussion of the show's reception draws on reviews and blog entries written by scholars, critics, practitioners, and anonymous theatre goers.

On the RSC side, Ravenhill introduced elements of psychological drama combined with queer aesthetics. The all-male cast performed Greeks as soldiers in modern British uniforms, which emphasized the military theme in the play, but also introduced references to contemporary war conflicts. At the same time, the portrayal of several characters and their interactions suggested a parody of masculinity. Aidan Kelly in a muscle body suit interpreted Ajax as a simple-minded aggressive wrestler. Achilles (Joe Dixon) and Patroclus (Clifford Samuel) appeared in female clothing, and their capricious, self-indulgent behaviour contributed to the mockery of Greek warriors. The most complex character on the RSC side was Thersites (Zubin Varla), who combined verbal violence with physical vulnerability. Seated on a wheel chair in a drag costume, he continued to scorn his countrymen, while being himself an object of their ridicule and abuse. This parody of diverse models of masculinity was presented in a hospital-like setting suggested by elements of medical equipment. The props introduced a metaphor of the war as a disease, emphasizing a disillusioned and a bitter vision of the world in the play.

On the other side, The Wooster Group interpreted the Trojans as a pastiche of Native Americans, against a simple set that included a tipi and campfire. Dressed in costumes that combined a Native American garb with a Styrofoam Greek sculpture (costumes designed by a Dutch artist, Folkert de Jong), The Wooster Group represented the Shakespearean characters as a mixture of cultural traditions. The effect of multiplicity and layering was enhanced by the fact that their performance imitated the movements of the actors from film clips projected on the screens that were placed around the stage. The film sequences were taken from *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001), directed by Zacharias Kunuk, *Smoke Signals* (1998), directed by Chris Eyres, and *Splendor in the Grass* (1961), directed by Elia Kazan (The Wooster Group Website 2013). Each

of these recordings introduced nostalgia for simple and innocent ways of living as practiced by indigenous people or Midwestern farmers, as well as a notion of authenticity (LeCompte 238). The mirroring of these clips on stage raised thus the spectators' awareness of the vulnerability of the Trojan tribe, foreshadowing the doom and destruction awaiting this besieged nation. Even more importantly, the clips have enforced a peculiar rhythm onto the movements of the actors and justified their sing-song accent. The involvement of actresses celebrated Off- and off-Off-Broadway: Jibz Cameron, Marin Ireland, and Jennifer Lim has further contributed to non-realistic, non-psychological modes of acting in the Trojan camp.

Highlighting the differences in their performance styles, the RSC and The Wooster Group have achieved an effect of fundamental incoherence and unresolved complexity. Their performance called for a high degree of attention from the spectators as well for the willingness to accept the lack of final answers to the questions in the play. The controversy around this production has made it clear that this *Troilus and Cressida* has challenged traditional modes of collaborating, performing, spectating, and reviewing in a theatrical context. The discussion surrounding this staging has unveiled the underlying assumptions and expectations of spectators and critics, as well as indicated their understanding of the concept of Shakespeare and a successful Shakespeare performance.

The criticism of *Troilus and Cressida* has focused on a few recurrent issues. Writing in defence of this production, Cowie and Greenhalgh (750) have pointed out that the censure of the play concentrated on the experimentation with speech delivery and non-psychological acting (particularly on The Wooster Group side) that have been seen as inappropriate for the rendition of the Shakespearean text. Given the inclination of critics towards realistic performance, the appropriation of Native American customs at the level of language and gestures by the American company has been also condemned as politically incorrect. Moreover, Greenhalgh has noted that the reviewers accused the production of narrative incoherence (750), whereas Cowie observed that they have blamed it for the lack of engagement with themes from Shakespeare's tragedy. All these points of criticism indicate the preoccupation of critics, academics, and spectators with features that they consider crucial for interpreting and staging Shakespeare in contemporary theatre.

Textual Universe

The focus of most reviewers on verse delivery suggests their emphasis on a text-oriented approach, particularly in performances of Shakespeare. Negative responses to the play have focused on the pronunciation and interpretation of the lines, and even critics writing more favourably of this staging have defended it

on grounds of textual intelligibility. The Margate Sounds blogger, for instance, argued that “[t]he distinct and puzzling performance style of The Wooster Group did not come at the expense of clarity. The text was perfectly comprehensible and at no point was the action of their sequences incomprehensible.” The general reception of *Troilus and Cressida* has indicated that for mainstream audiences in the UK fidelity to the playwright is understood as fidelity to the verbal text, which is perceived as a self-enclosed universe with psychologically developed characters and shared human values. The delivery of the text is seen as crucial for the presentation of the protagonists and the interpretation of the play in a way that conforms to psychological and realistic principles.

Responses to the production have revealed specific assumptions as to how the text is to be spoken on stage and what its function in terms of portrayal of the characters is. The reviews have also indicated the extent to which those assumptions are guided by the standards set by the RSC. Among the most revealing commentaries was Kevin Quarmby’s description of The Wooster Group performers as “prancing and grimacing their way through Shakespeare’s text, interspersing their lines with odd guttural noises and animal sounds, all amplified by Britney Spears-inspired face microphones whose power comes from black battery packs strapped to waists (or, more uncomfortably, worn as unfortunate man-bras)” Quarmby 18 Jan 2014). In a similar vein, Billington complained that “however authentic the war cries and dances, the [Wooster Group] actors can’t help resembling extras in a Bob Hope western” (Billington 9 Aug 2012). These and other comments that have criticised the handling of the text in *Troilus and Cressida* have indicated the expectations of critics and audiences regarding pronunciation of the lines, the importance of voice projection, and the role of verse delivery for the portrayal of characters and the interpretation of the play.

The reviewers’ responses suggest that despite the growing tendency to include a variety of dialects in Shakespearean staging in the UK, there might be still an expectation that Shakespeare ought to be pronounced in a standard, South-English accent. Thus The Wooster Group’s decision to introduce Upper-Midwestern accent was met with strong disapproval from reviewers, who perceived it as unnecessary and alienating (see for example Prescott 213-214; Quarmby 18 Jan 2014), whereas the introduction of “Irish-American accents” on the RSC side was seen as puzzling and off-putting for the spectators (Tavener 9 Aug 2012). It still needs to be noted, however, that the linguistic experimentation of the RSC was given more approval. Andrew Haydon observed that “the multi-ethnic [RSC] cast reflects both modern Britain and the 400 years of Imperialism which resulted in such a diverse population,” and he claimed that “it’s so unfussily done that you’d have to be a massive racist to be worried by it” (Haydon 3 Sep 2012). Most critics seem to have accepted dialectal diversity on the RSC part as showcasing a multicultural character of the British society, but they have found

it quite problematic that The Wooster Group adopted an accent as a means of exploring the rhythms and images in Shakespeare's script through an American culture. This suggests a certain degree of suspicion on the part of British critics towards the American actors speaking Shakespeare, but also a divergence in the reception of the Upper-Midwestern accent in this production.

Given that the critics perceive the role of the speech delivery as a means of characterising the protagonists in a naturalistic manner, LeCompte's choice of the Upper-Midwestern accent has been discussed mainly on political terms, while its potential to render the rhythm of Shakespeare's language has not been subject of much critical debate. Meanwhile, The Wooster Group actors have adopted the accent primarily for aesthetic rather than political reasons. The performers have explored the musicality of the language far more forcefully than its meaning. This is apparent in the production promptbook, where the RSC part of the text is dotted with names of emotions expressed by the protagonists, whereas The Wooster Group scenes tend to contain information about sounds accompanying the words.

The difficulty on the part of reviewers and spectators with interpreting the patterns of speech and behaviour in The Wooster Group performance might owe to the dominance of psychological modes of acting Shakespeare in Britain and its strong appeal to the audiences. Many have found it hard to accept that rather than imitating the RSC mode of verse delivery, the American artists have chosen the Upper-Midwestern accent to comment on their relationship with British Shakespeare as represented by the RSC. As LeCompte explains, her linguistic choice in the production is "a metaphor for our relationship to another culture, which is Shakespearean British language" (LeCompte 236). In a similar way the company has inscribed the genealogy of great past performances of *Hamlet* into their production of the tragedy, which played against a recording of a 1964 staging, directed by John Gielgud as well as against clips from cinematic versions, directed by Lawrence Olivier, Kenneth Branagh, and Michael Almereyda.

Similarly, the use of headsets in the production was criticised (for example, by Prescott 215; Quarmby 18 Jan 2014), as it has interfered with identification of an actor with the character and with a personal relationship between the actors and the audiences. Preferring live voice over technologically amplified one, the critics have described the use of microphones on stage as a lack of skill rather than a conscious artistic choice. The impression was reinforced by LeCompte herself who has been quoted to say in a post-show discussion that her performers were miked since they were not trained to project their voices, like the RSC actors (Prescott 215). This has led Paul Prescott to "the strong suspicion that the central interpretive choice of this production was haphazard, whimsical, perhaps a little offensive ('oh, those charmingly naïve natives!') and *not* especially profound or witty" (Prescott 215). As a result, the

potential of technology as a device to construct a character conceptually, rather than identify with the character, has not been addressed in general reception of the play.

The negative comments on The Wooster Group's use of headphones on stage clearly suggest a strong preference for live over mediated speech among spectators and reviewers, particularly when it concerns staging Shakespeare. The amplification of voice by digital means has been criticised as damaging the intimacy between the actors and the audience, whereas such intimacy is perceived as crucial in Shakespearean performance. Since Elizabethan playhouses functioned as "instruments for the production and reception of sound" (Smith 207), excellent voice projection is strongly associated with the Shakespearean tradition and thus enjoys the aura of authenticity that is upheld, among others, by the RSC.

The final point with regard to critical reception of language in this production concerns the role assigned by critics to verse delivery as a means of explaining the text in ways that are associated with the RSC practice. The Wooster Group and the RSC approaches to the presentation of the text on stage were condemned as insufficiently illustrative of the character and the plot. Tavener objected that "The Wooster Group [...] really do not meet the standards that we have come to expect on a Stratford stage" in that "they show no real understanding of the language or character" (Tavener 9 Aug 2012). Although he acknowledged that the American actors originate from "a different, more experimental background," he still complained "that it's difficult not to tune out whenever their scenes start" (Tavener 9 Aug 2012). In this controversial co-production even the RSC actors were criticised for their handling of Shakespeare's poetry, with the exception of Scott Handy as Ulysses, who according to Billington was the only performer to speak the lines "with a kind of witty intelligence that we used to take for granted at the RSC" (Billington 9 Aug 2012). Similarly, Tavener described Handy's portrayal of Ulysses as "one of the most intelligent and engaging verse-speaking performances you are likely to see," explaining that the role "requires enormous skill to convey the political, philosophical and rhetorical nuances that the text demands" (Tavener 9 Aug 2012).

The assumption emerging from these observations is that mainstream critics and audiences tend to perceive Shakespeare's plays primarily as literary texts that are to be interpreted with respect for their intellectual and poetic complexity rather than dramatic scripts that might be adapted and altered at liberty for the purpose of a stage performance. Handy's eloquent speeches, in which he used gestures to describe some of metaphorical images, have thus met with great appreciation of the critics. Meanwhile, his self-conscious mockery of stage rhetoric, suggested by the use of an inhaler after particularly demanding lines, has been largely ignored. The meta-theatrical irony in Handy's portrayal of

Ulysses did not resonate with those reviewers whose taste has been influenced by a more literary mode of delivery that tends to be practiced by the RSC.

The discussion around verse delivery in The RSC & Wooster Group *Troilus and Cressida* has thus revealed that psychological, realistic, and literary modes of interpreting Shakespeare's plays tend to be favoured among reviewers and spectators. While for the American, and even more strongly for non-Anglophone audiences, Shakespeare might not be necessarily tied to his language, in British mainstream performance the presentation of the text is at the very centre of stage practice. This explains why the experimentation with Shakespeare's language on The Wooster Group side, and partly also the RSC side, has met with strong criticism as unprofessional and contrary to the Shakespearean theatre tradition. It also explains to some extent why it has been seen by several critics as politically incorrect.

Political Incorrectness

Given the critics' tendency to approach Shakespeare's plays in a realistic and psychological key, LeCompte's decision to adopt elements of indigenous culture was interpreted in a literary manner and thus declared as politically incorrect. Billington observed, "Politically, there is something questionable about modern white Americans appropriating past tribal customs" (Billington 9 Aug 2012), while Quarmby accused The Wooster Group of "a painful parody of this persecuted, misunderstood ethnic group" although he did admit that "no racist slur was ever intended" (Quarmby 18 Jan 2014). Classifying The Wooster Group's appropriation of Native American customs as a parody rather than a pastiche, critics have questioned the interpretative approach of the company.

Many critics have found it difficult to accept that in their search for an alternative means of engaging with Shakespeare's language The Wooster Group adopted the Native American custom as a theatrical device rather than a historically conscious and socially engaged commentary on repressed, colonised nations. Some reviewers have recognised indigenous references as an effort to render "a strange alien culture" and "remind us of the cultural gap between us and the early modern culture that shaped the play" (Margate Sands 22 Oct 2012), in order "to point up a sense of Otherness" (Haydon 3 Sep 2012); most critics have read it, however, as a gratuitous exploitation of indigenous American cultures by white Americans.

Contesting the accusations of political incorrectness, LeCompte explained that the company sought to "find a kind of analogue to the language that would be a translation" for them (LeCompte 234), "a theatrical mask that liberated the language" for the performers (LeCompte 236). According to the director, the choice of indigenous language has allowed the company to foreground

Shakespeare's ornate metaphors of nature in *Troilus and Cressida* (LeCompte 234). In a similar way, in *Route 1 & 9* that premiered in 1981, The Wooster Group adopted blackface and a Pigmeat Markham routine as a "theatrical metaphor" (Savran 31), which allowed them to explore alternative movement and speech patterns on stage. At the time of its staging, the performance caused great outrage in New York City, which led to the cuts in company's funding (Savran 26-33). As The Wooster Group continued to develop its work over the following decades and established itself on the New York theatre scene, the audiences following an experimental performance practice in North America became more accustomed to its aesthetics and at the same time – more appreciative of its distinctive character.

The discussion concerning political implications of The Wooster Group's cultural appropriation has thus further revealed a significant difference between mainstream British practitioners and avant-garde American performers, which in turn implies diverse audience assumptions. The Wooster Group's application of postmodern pastiche is characteristic of their staging style as well as theatre practice of New York experimental artists – it might be thus expected and more easily accepted by audiences accustomed to such work; critics and spectators in Stratford and London, in turn, have found it more challenging. As it was aptly summarised by an anonymous reviewer on The Margate Sands blog, "Bold theatrical experiments are always welcome. This particular experiment worked well enough but was an acquired taste." The divergence in terms of aesthetic approach and political implications between American avant-garde artists and mainstream British critics and audiences brings to the foreground their difference of taste, which has been produced by differences in theatrical traditions.

Dramaturgy of Contrasts

The final point of criticism around this production that is indicative of the perception of Shakespeare among mainstream reviewers and spectators concerns the overall interpretation of *Troilus and Cressida* in this staging. Inevitably, the key question when performing Shakespeare concerns the way in which a company engages with the play and its theatrical history; however, it needs to be recognized that a theatrical interpretation of both the text and its tradition depends on a dynamic definition of Shakespeare that is negotiated by artists, critics, scholars, readers, and theatre goers at a given historical moment, in a distinctive geographical location, and in specific cultural and economic conditions.

Several reviewers have argued that the RSC and The Wooster Group staging did not offer a new, intelligible interpretation of *Troilus and Cressida*.

Billington stated, “My main gripe about this production [...] is that it does nothing to enhance our understanding of the play” (Billington 9 Aug 2012). This claim seems to imply that a successful Shakespearean staging should offer an interpretation that will shed more light on the problems in the text. Such expectation is in contrast with more pessimistic views on *Troilus and Cressida*; for instance, Jan Kott’s classification of the play as “a sneering political pamphlet” (Kott 63) or Bridget Escolme’s description of this drama as “coherent in that it mourns the loss of coherence” (Escolme 28). Commenting on dissonances in the text, Trueman argued that they call for a stylistically incongruous performance: “The tone changes from page to page. It’s very modern in that way: collage and kaleidoscopic. The challenge is not to try and iron that out into one consistent tone, but to try and respond to the play as it shifts” (Trueman 1 Aug 2012).

The lack of “one consistent tone” in the RSC & The Wooster Group *Troilus and Cressida* might explain the disillusionment of many critics with this performance. If, however, one focuses on the clash of characters and themes that challenges the audience’s expectations towards Greek mythology, one might find the staging strategy of the RSC and The Wooster Group to be surprisingly apt for this play. As Robin Nelson argues, “Those who maligned the Wooster Group/RSC production – and there are many who lamented a discrepancy of treatment and performance style between the two companies – failed to recognise that Shakespeare’s specific dramaturgy mobilises an affordance of cultural contrasts” (Nelson 8).

By the same token, many reviewers have found it difficult to accept the lack of closure in the interpretation of *Troilus and Cressida* by the two companies. Prescott suggested, for instance, that the production might be unfinished and, therefore, unsuitable for a paying public: “if the point was to give us not a production but rather a work-in-progress, then ticket prices should have been cut, expectations managed and the contract between artists and spectators redrawn” (Prescott 217). The comment reveals some important points about the audience’s expectations concerning the process of staging that are guided by significant differences in the artistic practices of mainstream and avant-garde companies. It also denotes a clear preference for finished work, which reflects the production patterns in British and American mainstream theatre, where companies rehearse over a period of few weeks, showing their work in a performance run that might be equally limited to less than a few months. Meanwhile, The Wooster Group as an experimental ensemble with a relatively stable funding enjoys long periods of rehearsals and long showing runs, in which it continues to change the work. The difference between The Wooster Group and the RSC in terms of their staging processes was pointed out by Kate Valk, one of the founding members of The Wooster Group and an Associate Director in this production, who revealed that while the American

performers were keen on altering the performance during the run, the RSC actors were not used to working with the director after the opening of the show.

The discussion concerning the lack of clarity and closure in this co-production has thus indicated their importance for mainstream audiences. Even though *Troilus and Cressida* has been recognised as a problem play in the Shakespearean canon, there is still a general consensus that a successful staging of this play should offer a coherent and developed interpretation of the characters and their actions. This is fully consistent with the aforementioned assumptions concerning the perception of the text as an autonomous universe guided by realistic rules, psychological principles, and immediate political concerns.

Conclusion

When *Troilus and Cressida* was selected as a play for a transatlantic co-production, the reason behind this decision was clearly pragmatic – the split structure of the play with the scenes divided between the Greeks and the Trojans was to allow the two companies to work separately and develop distinctive performance styles. At the same time, however, the choice of this play has made it possible for the RSC and The Wooster Group to reinforce its reflexive treatment of spectatorship. Johann Gregory argues that “[w]hat seems to be most groundbreaking is the play’s relationship with its audience” (Gregory 100), as it “turns the audience’s gaze back onto itself” by “staging the troubles of the Trojan War as a profoundly Elizabethan problem” (Gregory 101). This particular production has brought the key element of this drama into the foreground – in turning the gaze of contemporary audiences on themselves, the RSC & The Wooster Group co-production has powerfully exposed their assumptions and preferences.

Epilogue

In January 2014, The Wooster Group opened a revised version of *Troilus and Cressida*, this time without the involvement of the RSC and with the focus on the Trojans. *CRY, TROJANS! (Troilus and Cressida)* premiered in their performance space in New York City, the Performing Garage in Soho. In February and March the company takes this production to Redcat, an arts centre in Los Angeles. Since the preview performances are not open for reviews, it is too early to discuss the reception of this revised production in the US. One is yet to see the reactions of critics and spectators on the East and West Coast, though they are likely to be more favourable.

Most of the spectators who are going to see *CRY, TROJANS! (Troilus and Cressida)* will be probably more acquainted with the work of The Wooster Group and their New York collaborators than the Stratford and London audiences. At the same time, the notions of verbal fidelity, political engagement, and dramaturgical coherence of the play are likely to be addressed differently in the US, where Shakespeare's status is less solidified than in the UK. American audiences have less contact with Shakespeare's dramas – they see them performed less frequently and in a more limited repertoire. The New York-based Theatre for a New Audience despite its remarkable efforts to stage Shakespeare for Off-Broadway spectators does not enjoy the financial stability, artistic prestige, and international recognition comparable to the RSC. In these circumstances, the American audiences will not be prompted to measure the success of the The Wooster Group experiment against the text-oriented tradition of staging Shakespeare in Britain, in which the RSC, the National Theatre, and the Globe continue to set standards for critics and audiences.

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PRODUCTION IMAGES



The Wooster Group's CRY, TROJANS! (Troilus & Cressida) Pictured: Scott Shepherd Photo: © Paula Court



The Wooster Group's CRY, TROJANS! (Troilus & Cressida) Pictured (l-r): Casey Spooner, Suzzy Roche, Gary Wilmes, Ari Fliakos Photo: © Paula Court