



FACULTY OF ARTS
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IDEOLOGICAL APPROPRIATION: THE TRAGEDY OF *CORIOLANUS*

MA thesis, ÚALK, FF UK, Praha 2023, 121 pp.)

Opponent's review

The thesis offers a comprehensive examination of the evolving responses to and understanding of the nature of the conflict in *Coriolanus* in the period from the late 17th century to the present, treating dramatic and cinematic reworkings, adaptations and stagings alongside critical discourse and propaganda. Chapter 2 is devoted to the *Coriolanus*-based plays by Tate and Dennis. Chapter 3 maps the interwar period, focusing on readings by British critics alongside that by the Soviet critic A.A.Smirnov, noting the controversial production of the play by the Comédie-Française and closing with the use of the play (or its ideological interpretation, rather) by Nazi propaganda. Chapter 4 represents, in a sense, an account of reactions, in the post-WWII period, not just to the play itself, but to its reputation fabricated by that very propaganda. It discusses, on the one hand, the unfinished adaptation by Brecht whose ideological stance opposes the one championed by the Nazis, as well as further reworkings based on his version; on the other, it traces the development of what the author presents as non-ideological, simultaneously more personal and universal dimension of the play's conflict – the tragedy of a soldier unable to cope with civilian life.

It is this last aspect that makes me reluctant to refer to “ideological appropriations” as the focus of the thesis, together with the problematic theoretical grounding of the term as used by the author in the methodological section of the introductory chapter. Though he outlines the distinction between appropriation and adaptation in the work of Julie Sanders, his use of the term “appropriation” seems to replace this with appropriation of the cultural capital, the “auctoritee” of Shakespeare's name. Likewise his use of Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation as the framework for his study appears rather nominal.

The study is undoubtedly ambitious, illuminating, complex and very thorough in its coverage of very disparate material; at the same time, this conscientious approach presents problems in the managing and presentation of the argument. For example, tracing all the contexts of Dennis' representation of the titular character leaves the reader momentarily puzzled as to the relevance of many of the points mentioned; argument development within chapters may appear random, simply additive at places (due to the effort to be exhaustive) but it has to be said that ultimately its larger logic becomes visible. With focus on different type of material in especially the second and the third chapters, each of them might indeed form a core of a separate full-scale thesis. What perhaps represents the greatest problem is the organization of the thesis on a chronological scheme without, nevertheless, an appropriate starting point. Thus the central statement of the ambiguity of Shakespeare's play and its resistance to ideological closure comes only at the end of ch.2, with a survey of the critical reception of *Coriolanus*



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provided in the interwar chapter. Some such introduction, with a focus on a a more recent material, should have heralded the analysis.

In the end, the greatest asset of the thesis is the close reading of the play and its individual reworkings and nterpretations, which shows good ability of critical thinking and a sensitivity to the tensions in both the primary material and its critical reception.

The thesis is competently formulated, with only an occasional error in syntax (dependent questions, throughout) or vocabulary (e.g. “academic and popular discord” for “discourse”, p.8;” “strive” for “thrive”, p. 101).

There are some specific points that the defence might clarify:

- 1) With regard to Hutcheon’s theory of adaptation, would the author perceive some of the changes introduced by Tate and Dennis as motivated by period ideas of dramatic propriety (e.g. the unities), alongside political considerations?
- 2) Could the author explain his statement concerning Dennis’ reworking but given a more general validity, “a personal identification with the mistreated and misvalued hero might function as the lure for ideologically charged appropriative efforts”, when he earlier presents these aspects as being in tension?

In conclusion, I consider the thesis to be fully in conformity with standards for academic work on this level, with a great potential, and recommend it for defence with the proposed preliminary grade of 2 (“very good” –“velmi dobře”).

Prague, 30 August 2023

Mgr. Helena Znojemská, Ph.D.