

Posudek vedoucí na diplomovou práci Bc. Michaely Válkové

“The Role of Women in Shakespeare’s Roman Tragedies”

The diversity of Shakespeare’s female characters has often been commented upon. The types range from the adventurous clever heroines of romantic comedies, the childlike tragic heroines, female villains, earthy women, passive victims etc. The catalogue could be virtually endless. From the political character of the so-called Roman plays it would seem that women could have very little space there, as they indeed seemed to have both in Ancient Rome and in early modern England. However, just as the example of an England ruled for half a century by a brilliant and glorious Queen Elizabeth I would prove, women in these plays also play an array of roles: from female villains, temptresses, powerful manipulators and, of course, submissive domestic wives. These could also actually make an impression not only in the private realm but also in the public political sphere. As Ms Válková proves in her MA thesis any simple categorization is misleading. She focuses on *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, and looks at the figures of Portia, Calpurnia, Volumnia, Virgilia and Valeria, Lavinia, Tamora and the Nurse, Cleopatra, Octavia and Charman with Iras.

Analysis is built upon a good survey of the complex position of women in early modern England also mentioning a couple of texts engaged in the contemporary querelles de femmes. Ms Válková draws attention to possible alternatives to institutions for public engagement of women, such as “lottery pageants” (page 24), in this specific case unfortunately without explaining them. A footnote would have been appreciated. Also useful seems to be the concept of “minor agency” (page 30), which can provide space for a discussion of limited but influential and important public activities even for powerless women, such as Volumnia, Virgilia, Portia, Calpurnia. Too bad that this concept is not evoked later at all.

I appreciate the fact that much is made of the ways the main source, i.e. Plutarch, is applied in the dramas and how Shakespeare adapts him. The literary and theatrical afterlife of some plays is also taken into consideration, in order to explain the interpretations. Indeed, perhaps a few more comments about the films inspired by Shakespeare’s texts could have been included, at least in footnotes. I have in mind, for example, films based on *Antony and Cleopatra* (the Hollywood blockbuster with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor), one more on *Julius Caesar* with Charlton Heston; also a film version of *Titus Andronicus* starring Anthony Hopkins etc. However, this is not a substantial criticism, only a possible move

towards further inspiration for interpretation. Especially, since the author of the thesis sometimes mentions the need for a final presentation of the understanding of the character dependant on staging.

To conclude, the organization and structure of the thesis is very clear and entirely logical. Formal and stylistic requirements are entirely met. Thus, I confirm that the submitted MA thesis is fully in keeping with the requirements for a work on such academic degree. I recommend it for defence with the grade of excellent (**v ý b o r n ě**).

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