

TEMPLATE OF THE MINUTES OF THE DISSERTATION DEFENCE

The minutes of the dissertation defence

Student: Saksham Sharda

Date of Birth: 3.11. 1990

Student's ID number: 58245785

Study Programme: TEEME – Text and Event in Early Modern Europe (Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorate) (P7316)

Dissertation Title: “The Shakespeare Salesman”

Language of the Dissertation: English

Language of the Defence: English

Supervisors: Prof. PhDr. Martin Procházka, CSc.; Prof. Dr. Rui Carvalho Homem

External Examiners: Professor Douglas Lanier, PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc., M.A.

Date of Defence: 6 December 2018

Place of Defence: Faculty of Arts, Charles University (nám. Jana Palacha 2, Prague 116 38)

Date of Defence: 6 December 2018

Chair of the Board: Prof. Dr. Sabine Schülting

Members of the Board: Professor Douglas Lanier; Prof. PhDr. Martin Procházka, CSc.; PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc., M.A.; Prof. Dr. Rui Carvalho Homem; Assoc Prof. Dr. Jorge Bastos da Silva

Persons present: according to the attendance list

14:13 The chair of the board, Prof. Dr. Sabine Schülting, started the defence, introduced herself, members of the board, external examiners, and other persons present. Then she introduced the candidate to the persons present.

14:15 – 15:15 **The doctoral exam:** the candidate presented a short lecture on the question assigned by the committee (“What are the major problems of contemporary adaptation studies?”) and answered questions from the committee.

15:15 – 15:20 The committee convened in closed session in order to arrive at a classification.

15:20 – 15:23 The candidate was called back and Prof. Schülting announced the result of the doctoral exam: PASS. She then summarised the next proceedings.

15:25 The supervisors briefly introduced their evaluation of the candidate's progress and dissertation, as given in their written reports.

15:25 – 15:35 Prof. Procházka: The candidate conducted very popular seminars at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, with positive feedback from the students. The thesis developed slowly and there were long debates about the topic, the main thesis of the dissertation, and the material. The thesis went through readings of individual chapters and discussions. The first draft was submitted in July 2017 and re-submitted in early August 2018. The candidate had a very ambitious goal – to provide a general historical genealogy of marketing Shakespeare, focusing on the problem of language efficiency in productions, surpassing the conventional adaptation studies. A compromise was reached between the candidate and the two supervisors concerning the genealogy of *The Shakespeare Salesman* and the candidate agreed to focus on adaptations by Vishal Bhardwaj (a topic which has not been addressed by critics so far). Objections to the structure of the introduction were raised by the supervisors (overlong, retelling of plots). Another problem was the arbitrary choice of aspects of the films analysed (the power of the gaze in *Maqbool*, the issue of race and caste in *Omkara*), while other important aspects were overlooked. Clear distinctions among cultural, political, aesthetic, and social aspects of the film adaptations were not introduced. The dissertation suffers from a number of formal problems. Nonetheless, it consists a valuable contribution to study of Shakespeare adaptations in India.

15:35 – 15:40 Prof. Carvalho Homem: The candidate spent shorter periods in Porto, as agreed, during one of his visits he actively participated in an intensive course for TEEME students and interacted with local students. The supervisory process was intense and complex, there were heated discussions about the candidate's approaches to the material and the productivity of these approaches. A substantial mitigation of the heterogeneous elements and coherence of the chapters was necessary. The candidate was nevertheless seriously committed to the project. Prof. Carvalho Homem recommended to proceed to the viva.

15:40 – 16:00 The candidate presented the propositions of his dissertation to the persons present. He provided an overview of Shakespeare film adaptations by the Indian director Vishal Bhardwaj discussed in the dissertation (*Maqbool* – adaptation of *Macbeth*, *Omkara* – adaptation of *Othello*, *Haider* – adaptation of *Hamlet*) and their most remarkable aspects.

He mentioned the following points:

- 1st chapter – focus on the issue of gaze; 2nd chapter – focus on race and caste; 3rd chapter – focus on politics and terrorism
- the director's attitude to Shakespeare and his reasons for going back to him
- fidelity discourse, proximity to Shakespeare's originals
- the importance of the concept of *Shakespeare Wallah*
- theoretical frameworks employed – Linda Hutcheon, Jacques Lacan

- response of the Indian audiences versus the international Western audiences
- history of Shakespeare adaptations in India
- mapping an early modern text in a postcolonial context
- financial aspect of the adaptations
- Vishal Bhardwaj's own Shakespeare salesmanship

16:10 -16:15 The external examiner, Professor Douglas Lanier, presented the main points of his report and the conclusion, stating that he recommends the submitted dissertation for defence. He put these questions to the candidate:

1. How do you conceptualise the notion of salesmanship and why use an economic metaphor?
2. What does the director mean by the many commercial considerations, why make a difference between the knowledge of Shakespeare in Indian and in Western audiences? Why does he not film a *Romeo and Juliet*, if he wants a commercial hit, or one of the comedies?
3. Is it appropriate to go back to *Shakespeare Wallah* as your starting point? Why use this film as the basis for analysis of twenty-first century films?
4. The question of narrative crisis (a term that comes up frequently in the dissertation) – what exactly do you mean by that? Is it really a productive term?

The internal examiner, Dr Soňa Nováková, presented the main points of her report and the conclusion, stating that she recommends the submitted dissertation for defence. She put these questions to the candidate:

1. Could you comment on the use of the term “half-cast” (conflating caste and race)?
2. It might be productive to narrow down the broad term “Shakespeare Salesman”, as the range of the applications is also broad in the dissertation. What would be your subtitle – the most important element of the director's salesmanship?
3. Which political issues (local, broader) does the director address in your opinion and what is the relevance for the audience?
4. It has been noted that some directors, such as Akira Kurosawa, are able to “convey Shakespeare” without using a word of the original play – what aspect of Shakespeare is the director trying to convey and why? Is that relevant at all?

16:15 The candidate reacted to the supervisors' comments:

Prof. Procházka's comments:

- The overlong introduction – the candidate acknowledged the point and tried to give it a clearer structure; the chapters are very diverse and each of them demands its own

approach – the analytical approach thus matches the contents of the chapter and these had to be explained in the introduction.

- The lack of proper analysis establishing the distinctions between the various aspects (social, cultural, political, aesthetic) of the films – this was partly caused by the newness and sheer diversity of the material (the last film appeared when the candidate started to work on the dissertation).
- The approach diverts attention from serious political issues – the candidate maintained that the issues he decided to examine are in his opinion just as politically important.
- The arbitrary choice of issues examined – the candidate defended the interrelatedness of the three main issues chosen for the three chapters. He felt there was no need to impose an overarching narrative on the thesis.

Prof. Carvalho Homem's comments:

- The chapters are too heterogeneous and a great evenness of tone would be welcome – the candidate maintained that the heterogeneity corresponds to the heterogeneity of the material and thus could not be helped.
- The problems of the introduction – already addressed

16:25 The candidate reacted to the examiners' comments and their questions.

Prof. Lanier's comments:

- The strained overarching term “narrative crisis” – it is not merely a narrative crisis and the term is not completely appropriate, but it was still the best term the candidate was able to find for capturing what happens in all the three films.
- The problem of the director acting as an unelected representative of the communities he is trying to represent – the director has asked writers from the communities involved to co-author the script with him.
- The definition of the gaze – starting with a general discussion, narrowing it down through *The Empire Writes Back*.
- The development of the director's strategies of adaptations in order to respond to the response from critics and audiences – cooperating with other scriptwriters, anticipating possible criticism and using it as a marketing tool; the series of Shakespeare films is not finished yet, so it is difficult to find an overarching approach.
- Using more critical theory (for example on the question of fidelity discourse) would help – the candidate admitted the point and tried to remedy this in his presentation.
- The dissertation would benefit from more engagement with narrative theories (in relation to the narrative crisis) – the candidate mentioned using *Shakespeare Wallah* and *The Empire Writes Back*.
- Conceptualisation of salesmanship – this was included in the original version of the introduction and the conclusion; the candidate then decided to address this issue through *Shakespeare Wallah*; the outlook could have been more specific.
- The repeated use of certain quotations: the thesis is about those quotations and that is why they appear so often, the candidate wanted build a nodal structure by means of the quotations, to put them into a context and let them reveal more about themselves and about the films discussed in the dissertation; the repetition is a theme of the dissertation.

- Why not an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* (in search for commercial success) – there are already numerous Bollywood adaptations of the play, so it would not be so attractive.

Dr Nováková's comments:

- The use of the term “half-cast” – the candidate was not aware of the different meanings of the term and appreciated the comments in this respect.
- The possible subtitle – anything would subtract from the diversity of the approaches and of the films; possible change: “A Shakespeare Salesman” instead of “The Shakespeare Salesman”.
- What are the political issues addressed in the films: mixed marriages, terrorism, misogyny; the candidate did not attempt to write a general introductory companion on Bhardwaj but wanted to look on specific issues.
- Conveying Shakespeare in Bhardwaj's films – Bhardwaj conveys Shakespeare through the visuals: working with colour in *Omkara*; working with the eyes and the gaze in *Maqbool*; the beauty of Kashmir contrasted with the main character's mind in *Haider*.

17:00 The external examiners and the supervisors commented on the performance of the candidate and the chair of the board opened the discussion:

Prof. Carvalho Homem: You mention “enthusiastic and bold liberation from Shakespeare” in the dissertation which would suggest that the director releases himself from something no one imposed on him in the first place. Shakespeare is often seen as an oppressive force but at the same time used for empowerment – what are your thoughts on this?

The candidate: the director himself perceives the tension in his approach to Shakespeare (bravado in the dismissal of everything, the newness of the adaptations and their originality; using the name “Shakespeare” in order to attract international audiences).

Prof. Schülting: You employ questions and concepts, from postcolonial studies – is it still productive and appropriate now? Is it possible to write for anything but a global audience?

The candidate: It would be beneficial to move away from them, but at the same time, since Shakespeare is not translated, post-coloniality still continues in India.

17:15 The chair of the board closed the discussion, ended the defence itself, and the board initiated a private meeting on classification of the dissertation defence.

The chair of the board announced to the candidate and persons present the result of the defence: the board voted by raising hands, number of the members of the board 6 – number of the members of the board present 6 – positive votes 6, negative votes 0. The dissertation defence was classified as PASS.

Recorder: Petra Johana Poncarová



Name and signature of the chair of the
board: PROF. SABINE SCHÜTTING



Name and signature of another
member of the board: PROF. MARTIN PROCHÁZKA