

Bc. Anna Malá

***Political Rhetoric in Shakespeare's Drama***

(MA thesis, ÚALK, FF UK, Praha 2019, 92 pp.)

Supervisor's review

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The thesis investigates the rhetorical strategies and core recurrent images in the political speeches in Shakespeare's histories and Roman plays. In one respect the title is strictly descriptive, referring to the choice of textual material for analysis: addresses by figures of political importance in highly charged situations vital for the subsequent fortunes of the state. In another respect, it also highlights the twin focus of the analysis: how the speeches work in terms of rhetorics – in the larger sense of art (or technology) of persuasion (1<sup>st</sup> chapter); and how their imagery is informed by Elizabethan political theory (2<sup>nd</sup> chapter). The third chapter combines those perspectives with a more detailed and technical rhetorical analysis (identification and commentary of the use of tropes and schemes) in a comprehensive reading of selected passages, presented as case studies.

Anna Malá's forte is undoubtedly a close attention to and sensitive reading of the primary material; thus she is able to develop a largely independent typology of the strategies used in the technology of persuasion, following the inner logic of the argument presented in the speeches rather than stemming from existing models. This approach has its virtues – the originality of perspective – but also its weaknesses – a rather insufficient work with secondary sources. In an ideal case, the independent description should be developed in dialogue with period views of rhetoric and existing scholarship. In this respect, the chapter devoted to the analysis of imagery (body of the ruler and body politic) is presented in a more comprehensive manner.

Although the emphasis is on textual analysis of the dramatic text, the introductory chapter relates the comparative nature of the study to a larger context of the political and cultural contexts of the period. The results are important for the interpretation of the political and historical dimension of the Roman plays, with the introduction outlining a number of possible perspectives: as well-informed, historically conscious renderings of familiar and culturally important subject matter (the speeches reflecting what the Elizabethans perceived as “real” Roman politics and rhetorics); as commentaries on contemporary politics and organization of the state (contrastive – stressing the Romans' alterity – or analogical – stressing the similarities); or as explorations of the “democratic” component in contemporary English social and political structure (monarchy / commonwealth). In the end, the outcome tends to show the fluid and flexible nature of the representation of the Roman state in Shakespeare's plays, assuming various functions in various plays while maintaining certain stable characteristics which distinguish it from the picture presented in the histories. However, the introduction should also offer at least a minimal outline of the state of current scholarship on the Shakespeare's political rhetoric, the absence of which is probably the most important formal flaw of the thesis.

With regard to the above reservations, I recommend the thesis for defense, the suggested preliminary grade being VERY GOOD.

I propose that the defense could address the issue of the various models of classification of Shakespeare's plays – the overlap among the terms “history play”, “Roman play” and tragedy and their relation to Elizabethan politics, as the binary distinction between histories and Roman plays adopted for the thesis is by no means a self-evident one.

Prague, 3 September 2019

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