



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Supervisor's Report:

Natálie Horká, "Recitation, Reference, and Reworking: Literary Allusions in the Plays of Eugene O'Neill" BA thesis

Choice of Topic:

The subject area of this thesis is a productive one for a BA level project. The thesis explores the role of intertextuality in four plays by Eugene O'Neill: *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, *Desire Under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*. There is a great deal that might be done with notions of originality, borrowing, dissemination and the death of the author (to reference Barthes) and Eugene O'Neill's theatrical oeuvre. The thesis addresses some of those dynamic possibilities, but is hampered by limiting its attention to characterisation and plot.

Thesis statement / aims and objectives:

The project has a clearly articulated, if somewhat descriptive agenda – to show the ways intertextuality functions in O'Neill's drama to elaborate character and to develop plot. The opening chapter works actively, if slightly repetitiously, to map the project as a whole and justify the organizational schema developed to analyse the plays. One question that might be addressed at the defence might be about the selection of plays – why were these chosen and not others?

Structure and development:

One of the strengths of the thesis is its organization into three interlocking modes of intertextuality. Recitation, Reference and Reworking indeed have an eloquent ring to them. However, the chief difficulty that arises is the ambiguity, in particular, of what is meant by reference. Are not recitation and reference both just forms of allusion? What is gained by separating them here? Ultimately, it might have been theoretically more coherent to have selected from the tools offered by Gérard Genette and Graham Allen detailed in chapter 2. Chapter 2 maps the history of the term intertextuality and sketches some of its theoretical contours quite well. Although much of this comes filtered through Graham Allen's 2006 introduction, it shows a valid initiative to engage with key terminology and concepts. Unfortunately, this effort seems largely disconnected with the three main chapters that follow. Chapter 3 spends most time with *Long Day's Journey into Night* and ways characters (re)cite various canonical texts. Ms Horká, throughout, largely treats O'Neill's characters as real people who are but partially aware of what motivates their actions, rather than as literary or dramatic constructs created and manipulated by O'Neill. Chapters 3 and 4 in part reiterate the same points about characterization and plot development with some variation. These are certainly of relevance, but often do not attain much nuance. In addition, as is admitted in these chapters, *A Moon for the Misbegotten* does not yield the same results, when treated in this manner, as *Long*



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Day's Journey. The approach to the plays sometimes also gives rise to rather confusing, contradictory statements; for instance on page 26 it is suggested that "The autobiographical aspect of the play somehow resonates with its intertextuality, as O'Neill himself – as previously mentioned – was a passionate reader. Therefore, it seems reasonable that most autobiographical plays will also display a higher number of quotations." This assumption seems a challenge to logically sustain if applied more generally. At the same time it is argued that characters' habits of quoting are distancing devices. Could this point be clarified? Having spent two chapters wrestling with two plays, chapter 5 turns to *Desire Under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Here some kind of return to the critical terminology of chapter 2 is partially supplied. Both plays could be discussed more fully, many of the points made come largely via secondary sources. However, questions of adaptation begin to be addressed here in a more productive manner via the work of Linda Hutcheon. Besides the looseness of some of the terms used in chapters 3-5, there is also the question of literary/dramatic terminology and approach. Ms Horká treats these plays as simply literary texts as opposed to dramas that have a life on stage. Especially when it comes to notions of recitation, multiple layers of performance and interpretation are at play when the work is staged. Perhaps this decision may be discussed further at the defence.

Research:

The thesis demonstrates adequate skill in searching, selecting, and evaluating sources to meet the needs of the topic. Ms Horká has assembled a good bibliography.

Use of sources:

The use of secondary sources is generally clear and stylistically well framed. Some ideas are investigated and integrated. Research materials have been cited appropriately throughout. Secondary sources are used in a simple, descriptive manner.

Stylistics and language:

The register of the work is acceptable. There are some grammar, word choice and expression problems.

Format:

Consistent use of appropriate format.

I would note that this work was not presented for sufficient consultation during the composition process, and seems to have been completed hastily to meet the deadline for submission. Nevertheless, I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade the work "GOOD" / 3 or "VERY GOOD" / 2 depending on the performance at the defence.

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