



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Opponent's Report:

Jaromír Moravec, "The Madness of Adaptation: Analysis of Film Adaptations of Alan Bennett's *The Madness of George III* and *The History Boys*" BA thesis

Choice of Topic:

The subject area of this thesis is a potentially productive one for a BA level project. The thesis proposes a comparison of the two works in its title and explores the reasons why the film adaptation of *The Madness of King George III* was more successful than the film adaptation of *The History Boys*. There are some issues with this approach, namely that the criteria for 'success' are not established in a convincing manner and remain somewhat subjectively evaluated throughout the discussion, while other outcomes of the adaptation process are inadequately addressed.

Thesis statement / aims and objectives:

The project has a clearly articulated, somewhat descriptive agenda – to show the ways the films changed their source texts and the outcomes of those changes.

Structure and development:

The core schema of the thesis is a comparative, evaluative analysis of the film adaptations of the two plays. While the methodology of the thesis is briefly described in the opening chapter, it is regrettable that it only loosely follows the conventional logic of comparison i.e. that the subjects under scrutiny are discussed on a shared set of points. In consequence, chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to identifying many very specific differences between each play and its film version, but communicates little concerning the differing contexts for these works, while the comparison of the adaptation processes of the two films is abruptly compressed in three and a half pages in chapter 4. In addition, as regards methodology, it might have been useful to identify the criteria for evaluating success/effectiveness. Is success to be measured in terms of plot coherence and, if so, who is the judge of this? Is it assumed that viewers of the films are already acquainted with the stage version or the play text? Is success measured financially? In terms of audience response? On the basis of a couple of reviews? What were the respective budgets of the films? Were they both made for general release in cinemas? How does casting contribute to the end products? What was the time line of production? Was Bennett solely responsible for both screenplays? What about context? Time and place of original theatre production? First broadcast/release of film version? Box office? Viewer figures? Without establishing the co-ordinates of evaluation and specifying some of the assumptions embedded in the methodology, the logic of comparison is rendered only tenuously plausible.

Mr Moravec clearly has considered these films in great detail and is well versed on all the changes that have been made between the play and screenplay. However, he might have done more to contextualise his material at the beginning of the main chapters, sometimes he leaves



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the reader lost in a mesh of highly specific detail with little overall sense of the plot. It seems strange that Bennett's position as a British writer or where his work sits in the general context of British theatre is never presented. There is also a niggling sense of a limited understanding of what theatre does, that seems to come from a combination of the Linda Seger text and, perhaps, an acquaintance with Bennett's plays only on the basis of their texts. Mr Moravec takes it for granted that theatre is "dialogue-based" while film is "image-based" (p.4) which is an extremely simplistic view at best.

Another issue that might have been brought forward more effectively was how the adaptations reorient the focus and meanings of the plays. Mr Moravec is clearly aware of these reorientations, for instance in section 2.5 when he describes the ways the film version of *The Madness of King George III* vastly diminishes Bennett's dramatization of 18th century British politics and amplifies a more digestible personal story of triumph over adversity. Yet he stops short of analyzing the political implications of this adaptation decision. Similarly, in chapter 3 it is not particularly clear what is at stake in the transformation of play into film. Neither chapter offers any substantial conclusion synthesizing the minute details so meticulously assembled.

Despite the wide and interesting array of scholarship on the topic, the thesis offers no conceptual framing or understanding of adaptation or intertextuality. Linda Seger's book seems to be a handbook for aspiring script writers and thus offers few tools to think about adaptation at a more theoretical level. Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* might have been more fully discussed in the opening chapter but is only used in the lightest fashion. The other texts that might have informed the discussion: Julie Sanders *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2015), Katja Krebs *Translation and Adaptation in Theatre and Film* (2013), Colin McCabe et al *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity* (2011), Deborah Cartmell et al. *Screen Adaptation: Impure Cinema* (2010), Thomas Leach *Film Adaptation and its Discontents* (2007), or Phyllis Zatlin *Theatrical Translation and Film Adaptation* (2005) to name but a few of the most obvious.

Research:

The thesis demonstrates limited skill in searching, selecting, and evaluating sources to meet the needs of the topic. Mr Moravec's bibliography is weak; of the 15 secondary sources listed, 12 are journalistic. Given the wealth of material on theories of adaptation, British theatre and British film, the research for this project is remarkably slight.

Use of sources:

The use of secondary sources is clear enough, though references to examples from the films are piled up in list fashion in a manner that assumes the reader will orientate themselves in the finer details of the adaptations with little assistance from the author. Few serious ideas about adaptation or the differing aesthetic requirements of theatre and film, or indeed about the differing audiences of the plays and their film versions are investigated and integrated. Secondary sources are used in a simple, descriptive manner, with minimal sense of critical



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evaluation or a range of views. Since many of the sources are merely reviews from magazines and websites, there is little room for more complexity. At times, one reviewer's perspective is taken as sufficient evidence for the evaluation of the play or film as a whole.

Stylistics and language:

The work is clearly written with few problems with grammar or syntax. There is a reliance on a relatively simple vocabulary and the use of contractions signals a more informal register than is appropriate for a piece of formal, scholarly writing.

Occasionally there are unfortunate typos such as:

Seeger, Linda. *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fat and Fiction into Film*. New York City: Henry Holt and Company, 1992.

Format:

The text is consistently formatted; footnotes generally follow the departmental guidelines, but should be in the same font style as the main text. Some entries in the bibliography are missing data i.e.

Bruff, Andrew. "Character Analysis." *The History Boys* 158.

and

Sumner, Bernard, et al. "Blue Monday." 1983.

A hanging indent is needed throughout the bibliography.

As a BA thesis, this work demonstrates the candidate's ability to write in English and to pay attention to detail. As mentioned above there are more serious deficits in terms of conceptualizing, logically developing and adequately researching the chosen topic.

I propose to grade the work "GOOD" / 3.

14.1.2020

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