In 1575, when William Shakespeare was eleven, he could hardly have envisaged his eventual career as actor, theatrical investor and the greatest playwright of all time. Yet the next year saw the construction of the Theatre at Shoreditch and the outburst of playhouses in and around London – and the world of drama would never be same. A whole new cultural niche was filled by the newly created Elizabethan drama the best example of which is the Bard himself. The power of Shakespearean drama comes from a number of related factors: characters who give an impression of interiority, a rich variety of styles, functional dramatic conventions, meaningful and coherent structure, generic innovation, and a willingness to engage social and political issues. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics have used different theoretical languages to insist that a character is a text-effect, a discursively produced subject. Among these rank the manifold productions with characters cast across genders. The interpretation of such performances of the plays by Shakespeare is the topic of Ms Mašková MA dissertation.

Cross-gender casting is not always gender-blind. It does matter and does bring into focus new alternative readings of the plays, drawing out multiple meanings and enabling ambiguities to emerge. The key unlocking the underlying hypothesis of this MA dissertation is probably the quotation from Judith Butler when she claims that drag need be subversive, yet later refutes it and draws attention to its “mere” ambivalence (see page 21). Although such casting may not always be ideologically motivated, bring a politically conscious reading, it should always bear in mind a possible message. It is upon such like premises that the submitted BA thesis written by Barbora Mašková has been built.

The thesis is only slightly marred by several errors in spelling or word order, which, despite no doubt careful proof-reading, still found their way into the text - occasional slips in spelling, capitalization etc. (e.g. Čunoherní) in the Czech abstract. But what I miss most is the exact date of the film starring Asta Nielsen.

The readings are sound and perceptive, the choice of material is well justified. The dissertation displays a keen sense for logical organization and development of argument. Language and style is fluent and quite appropriate. I find the readings of individual plays very perceptive and clear. The structure is sound and cogent. Nevertheless, I perceive a certain fall in the force of argumentation in the final chapter. Although the language is very vivid and colourful, even metaphorical – exactly in what ways is gender the same as and different from...
the green apple on a black stage (page 87)? Is not gender more than a matter of perception? And can we again, in the conclusion at least (because it has been rather forgotten after chapter 1), relate back to the methodological chapter – why do Bodies … Matter?

In conclusion. I must praise the amount of reading that went into the production of the thesis – the list of bibliography is truly admirable. And, as supervisor, I must also appreciate the fact that Barbora Mašková has managed to splendidly combine her education at the Academy of Arts (especially, it seems, in the field of the history of drama production) and our department at Charles University (her expert literary analyses).

I find the submitted thesis fully in keeping with the standards. I certainly recommend it for defence with the preliminary suggested grade of excellent to very good (výborně až velmi dobře).


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ÚALK