

Barbora Mašková
Shakespeare's Drama and Homosexuality
(ÚALK, FF UK, Praha 2013, 60 pp.)

Supervisor's review

The title, reflecting the original conception of the project as envisaged in the assignment, does not do justice to the much more nuanced theoretical foundation which informs the final shape of the thesis. Queer theory as a point of departure for the analysis of the text of selected plays *and* their recent stage productions has the distinct advantage of accommodating both aspects – it avoids the anachronism of applying the dichotomous categories of straight or gay to Shakespeare's text, embracing also alternative constructions of sexuality relevant for the period when the plays were written. The interpretation of the textual evidence is judicious and avoids simplifications. The confrontation with recent and contemporary productions which use homosexual / homosocial relationship as an interpretative key then illustrates how the current conceptualization of sexual behaviour determines the direction in which the ambiguous scenes, passages etc. will be realized, as it traces a development from relatively "monochromatic" homosexual interpretation to a more indeterminate, fluid portrayal of sexual identity. In this way the thesis shows very clearly that queering Shakespeare's plays does not mean bringing alien elements into them, but rather revealing the changing potential of specific textual features to resonate with the various transformations of the concept of sexuality.

As the opponent's review provides a number of suggestions and issues to be addressed in the defence, I will limit my commentary to just two observations:

- 1) I agree with the opponent that the theoretical part of the thesis would benefit from including a brief overview of the most relevant early modern ways of constructing gender and sexuality; this would, for example, allow for a better informed interpretation of Richard's "effeminacy" in *Richard II*.
- 2) Is there a likely reason why this line of interpretation is relatively underrepresented on the Czech stage beyond the suggested homophobic attitudes of Czech society?

Conclusion: I recommend the thesis for defence with the preliminary mark EXCELLENT (výborně).

Prague, 17 June 2013



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