

Charles Marowitz and the Personal Politics of Shakespearean Adaptation

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Abstract

This thesis comprises an exploration of the Shakespearean adaptations created by American director Charles Marowitz while he was Artistic Director of the Open Space Theatre in London, UK. In order of creation, they are: *Hamlet* (1964; revised 1966); *A Macbeth* (1969); *An Othello* (1972); *The Shrew* (1973); *Measure for Measure* (also called *Variations on Measure for Measure*) (1975); and *Variations on the Merchant of Venice* (1977). The central inquiry of this thesis is whether Marowitz's Shakespearean adaptations adhered to his own parameters for such work, and if not, whether his objectives were subverted by other factors, political or psychological, which he unconsciously manifested dramatically within the works. Further, do Marowitz's reconstructions of Shakespeare possibly spring from a latent desire to attack the cultural authority of Shakespeare himself? In order to accomplish this inquiry, the concept of 'personal politics' will be established, this being both the political orientation of an individual in terms of social government, as well as the underlying belief systems and paradigms which influence their perceptions and reactions, as factors influencing Marowitz's adaptations.

In terms of methodology, the author will examine Marowitz's perceptions of Shakespeare's original plays, highlighting the particular concerns that motivated him to create the adaptations under analysis. The validity of these perceptions will then be tested against a precise examination of the play text, and viewed against a survey of scholarly opinion on the original work. Any sociopolitical objectives expressed by Marowitz for the adaptation will be reviewed, then juxtaposed against the historical context in which they were written in order to discern where and how the politics of the period influenced his creative impulse. The collage technique, which characterized many of Marowitz's adaptations, will be explored followed by a discussion of Marowitz's stated parameters for

the adaptation of theatrical classics. His approach to challenging the paradigm of Shakespeare's work will be scrutinized, and an analysis of the adaptation given, as well as a discussion of the effect the changes from the original text might have had on an audience and a survey of critical reaction to the resulting production, based upon reviews in the major publications of the day. At this point, the central inquiry of the thesis will be addressed: to what degree does the adaptation hold to Marowitz's own stated guidelines for Shakespearean adaptation, as well as his expressed objectives for the work in question, and if this degree is slight, what factors might account for this? In order to discern these influences, the adaptations will be examined through the lens of biographical criticism: Marowitz's autobiographical writing, as well as personal opinions and beliefs gleaned from his theatrical reviews, journal articles and texts on acting techniques, will be gathered to shed light on dramatic choices which contravene the expressed intention for the adaptations. Aspects of psychoanalytical criticism will also be referenced, particularly focusing on trends common to the majority of the works which potentially sprang from an unconscious source. Finally, comparable adaptations of the same Shakespearean work will be reviewed in terms of how they differently, and possibly more effectively, redressed Marowitz's stated concerns regarding the original work, in order to highlight why and how Marowitz's personal politics may have overturned his stated intentions.

Detailed synopses of all six plays under examination are provided in Appendix One.

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