



POSUDEK OPONENTA DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

Studijní obor: **Bohemistika—Anglická a americká literatura**

Název práce: **Forming Identity in Jennifer Egan's Novels**

Autorka práce: **Bc. Tereza Kouklíková**

Vedoucí diplomové práce: **doc. PhDr. Ladislav Nagy, Ph.D.**

Oponentka diplomové práce: **doc. PhDr. Mariana Machová, Ph.D.**

Short characteristics of the thesis

Tereza Kouklíková's diploma thesis focuses on the issues of identity in the works of one of the major contemporary American novelists, Jennifer Egan (b. 1962). After a general discussion of the question of identity in literature seen in a broad context and from various perspectives, and an explanation of the "post-postmodern" context of Egan's works, Tereza Kouklíková offers an examination of four of the author's novels: *Look at Me* (2001), *The Keep* (2006), *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010), *Manhattan Beach* (2017). The main focus is on the characters and their dealings and struggles with their identity, demonstrating that the issues of identity are central to Egan's novels.

Overall assessment

This is a fine work which beyond any doubt fulfills the requirement for an MA thesis.

Among the things that must be appreciated in this work is the choice of the topic – Jennifer Egan is a major author representing an important trend in contemporary American fiction, and her novels deserve detailed critical attention. The focus on the questions of identity is also fortunate and it has enabled Tereza Kouklíková to offer an insightful and complex reading of most of the author's oeuvre (one small complaint one might have here is that the thesis covers four of the five novels by Egan, but hardly mentions her first novel, *The Invisible Circus*, at all – and when it does, once, the definite article in the title is missing...). The readings of the novels are detailed, clear and well argued, the topic of identity is steadily followed throughout the different readings and different works. The student demonstrates her ability to choose relevant secondary sources and to use them helpfully to support her readings and arguments. It is obvious that Tereza has put a lot of time and effort in her work on the thesis, it is well researched and clearly structured.

That said, there are some points I find problematic. These can be summed up into two main issues. One is the rigid and – to me, at least – annoying separation of the "theoretical" part from the readings themselves. Professional academic work should incorporate "theoretical" premises and contexts into the analyses of the literary works. As it is, the reader doubts whether the very general (and at points vague) introductory chapter is in fact necessary at all. This doubt is made stronger by the fact that the chapter feels slightly chaotic, shifting from one perspective to another, not creating a clear line of argument from the start to the end, and failing to make the reader aware of a clear coherent connection between the general statements in this chapter and the close-readings of the novels.



The second issue I need to mention is the language and the style of the thesis. There is quite a lot of mistakes in English (articles, punctuation, word order, etc.), and while most of these are minor errors, there are simply too many of them to allow for comfortable reading. This is stressed by the clumsiness of style, which sometimes reaches the point of making the sentences difficult to understand. This could be illustrated by many examples, I will only cite a few randomly chosen ones from the first chapter:

“the stories bring to the surface an important question: what is our contemporary identity? And should we be concerned with it at all? Since it is clear that it is through identity that we function in the world, it is nearly desirable that we deal with it in some way, or at least examine its shape, dimensions, boundaries, or limits, just as the characters in her novels do, and which can help us with this task.” (p. 7) – Not only does the sentence seem a bit too vague and naïve for an MA thesis level, but the long sentence also doesn’t quite hold together syntactically (syntactically, I cannot figure out the “and which” here), and “nearly desirable” is not very clear either.

“Mostly, they relate to, say, the type of above-mentioned national identity” (p. 8) – the “say” here is colloquial, it makes the sentence fall apart, it’s unnecessary, not appropriate in academic style; definite article missing before “above-mentioned”.

“In his publication that introduces us to the different angles one can address the concept of identity in literature, Florian Coulmas notes that [...]” (p. 8) – the sentence does not hold together, there seems to be something missing there (a “from” perhaps? But then “address” would not be the best word), and perhaps “angles” is not the most fortunately chosen word here (points of view?); the sentence, like many others, needs to be rephrased.

“The entrance of author’s persona to his work and specifically his characters have been doubted and disproved as irrelevant many times, however, as the examples above have shown, in some cases, it is hardly separable from it.” (p. 9) – there’s an article missing before “author”; in contemporary academic English it is not common to refer to a general, unspecified author with a masculine pronoun (they or s/he is the standard, in the case of a text that deals with a female author, “she” could be used in the general sense as well); a reference to a relevant source is missing here (“it has been doubted many times” – where? when? by whom? – such claims need to be supported by a citation in an academic text); the sentence is slightly confusing, the last clause in particular (the referents of the two “it’s” are not clear).

Unfortunately, there are too many issues of this type throughout the text of thesis, and for that reason I suggest that Tereza Kouklíková’s thesis be graded as **very good** (velmi dobrá).

Práci **doporučuji** k obhajobě.

Navrhovaná klasifikace: **velmi dobře**

25. 8. 2021

Datum

Podpis