

POSUDEK DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

Jméno a příjmení studenta: Bc. Lucie Krautová
Název diplomové práce: Alienated Heroes of Edward Albee's Theatre Plays
Vedoucí diplomové práce: PhDr. Kamila Vrankova, Ph.D.
Oponent diplomové práce: PhDr. Christopher Koy, M.A., Ph.D.

- I. Cíl práce a jeho naplnění: 1. Cíl práce byl stanoven a naplněn v souladu s tématem
- II. Struktura práce: 1. Logická, jasná a přehledná
- III. Práce s literaturou: 1. Výborná: zvoleny a použity vhodné prameny v patřičném rozsahu, přesná práce s citacemi, kritická analýza zdrojů
- IV. Prezentace a interpretace dat: 1. Systematická, logická prezentace, originální a důsledná interpretace
- V. Formální stránka: 1. Odpovídá všem stanoveným požadavkům
- VI. Jazyková úroveň práce: 1. Výborná
- VII. Náročnost zpracování tématu: 1. Velmi vysoká
- VIII. Přínosy práce: 2. Práce je v daném oboru přínosná, ale neobsahuje originální a nová zjištění

Vyjádření oponenta diplomové práce*:

Ms. Krautova has written a very long and very admirable master thesis on quite a difficult topic, and has commendably done so with clarity, proper structure and a thoroughgoing analysis, though not properly integrating much of the multitude of existentialist philosophers (presented in the first half) into the analyses of the four selected Albee family plays. Her English is quite excellent, though not flawless, as will be remarked below (i.e., avoidable errors).

At the onset I wish to point out a possible little problem with the title of her master thesis. Her title in English is **Alienated Heroes of Edward Albee's Theatre Plays**. Pretty quickly, namely on the bottom of p. 16 of her thesis, however, Ms. Krautova informs us that,

“...there are no villains or heroes in Albee’s plays...” It behooves an American reader at least to ponder how one is to analyze (alienated) heroes of plays of which Ms. Krautova clearly indicates there are none. Her statement is all the more confusing (or self-contradictory) as just in the middle of the previous page, Ms. Krautova writes, **“Depending on the plays, they all point out that Albee’s heroes and audience can be more honest...”** (p. 15). Neither quote appears from a directly cited scholar, though I guess she might be following critical/scholarly opinions of others in both cases. Ms. Krautova, I would suggest, should indicate what opinion she herself holds when there seems to be no consensus among top Albee scholars she appears only to echo. All too often in the thesis I can read via footnotes what Albee critics or academic scholars have written, without Ms. Krautova indicating if she agrees or not with them, and she presents these contradictions without comment (perhaps without even noticing them, i.e., taking them at face value). It is not only pp. 15-16 where she presents conflicting opinions on Albee. Again, scholars often disagree in their interpretations or even designations of literary works – so she should really express her own views based on her readings now and then.

A humorous writing error occurs in this passage: **“...the bond between a wife and a husband and exploring other destructive relationships...”** (pp. 16-17). Just my personal point of view. Allow me to gently suggest to Ms. Krautova that not all marriages are destructive relationships. Albee should not make you sour on marriage!

I would prefer Ms Krautova to strongly hedge on her position that Albee’s plays aim to open eyes **“...for profound and life-altering influence on his audience.”** (p. 16). Albee’s direct addressing may aim to make his audience think at the moment of watching the play, but Albee is really not naïve enough to think that, after the New York audience steps out of the theatre and walks on Broadway off to a club for a drink, that they will alter the rest of their lives just because of viewing his play. Albee is certainly not Bertold Brecht, whose plays aim to turn audience members into Marxists and convert them like some religion’s evangelical missionaries.

A poignant aspect Albee’s plays address is what Ms. Krautova correctly designates **“...half-conscious lives...”** or **“...inauthentic human experience...”** (both p. 21). It may be interesting to note that over 150 years earlier the transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau urged people to stop gossiping and reading newspapers and to live authentically (he wrote “live deliberately”) by going back to nature in his nonfiction book *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854). Ms. Krautova writes on p. 23: **“Theatre of the Absurd presents the world as absurd, striving to answer what we should do to deal with the absurdity of our existence and how to make our lives more meaningful rather than asking why our lives are that way.”** However, unlike Thoreau’s calling us back to nature, the Theatre of the Absurd offers no solution to the absurdity besides recognition of it. From what I can read in this thesis, there is in fact no answer to the pestering question, “What should we *do*?”

The list and remarks about other famous Theatre of the Absurd playwrights follows, with the notable absence of the former Czechoslovakian and Czech Republic president. This is followed by a list of philosophers with uneven attention paid to various existentialists, with Camus and Sartre falling into both categories of playwrights and philosophers. It is uneven that, for instance, one paragraph is all that Martin Heidegger’s philosophy gets while six full pages are dedicated to Karl Jaspers.

In the play analysis (misabeled as chapter 1 instead of 5), the heroes of each play are not only analyzed (as the title of this magist DP indicates) but it seems all of the characters appearing in each of the four plays get examined by Ms Krautova, including minor ones. This should be criticized, for only it can be the only explanation why *The American Dream*, a lesser-known one-act play, gets more pages of analysis than even the most famous of

Albee's dramas, the full three-act play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The four plays are autobiographically linked to the adopted author, who was himself a "monstrous creature," drastically and repeatedly misbehaving in school.

Jumping over Jack/Gillian to the analysis of Mrs. Barker, a married woman providing adoption services, Ms Krautova describes her and her profession as **"...a part of the cycle of preventing individuals from living an authentic experience and fulfilling a prescribed role in society"** (p. 61), linking this character critique to French existentialist Gabriel Marcel's philosophy. I cannot grasp how her profession prevents authentic experience unless Ms Krautova believes living in an orphanage or keeping parentless marriages childless constitutes more authentic living. The fact is that Albee is once again sticking it to his own adoptive parents with Jack and Gillian representing them in *The American Dream*. I wonder how these real adoptive parents felt watching their son's plays performed on stage.

Perhaps her busy, successful actions in society outside of her profession make Mrs. Barker worthy of criticism of inauthenticity. If we may again reconsider Albee's autobiography further, Albee drank and wrote less productively after receiving very harsh reviews and criticism (after great initial success), as Ms. Krautova presents earlier in the thesis. Hence, Albee himself sought out approval (the American dream) from the Broadway powers („society“) so to flee his failure on Broadway, he sought escape through inebriation. This behavior only reinforces my contention that the existentialism-inspired Theatre of the Absurd platform describes the problems of life's absurdity but never offers any solutions. Arguing that an adoption service provider prevents authentic living seems unfair and ungrounded on the face of it.

The dismembered child – I wonder if in an altered stage performance of *The American Dream* the dismemberment might occur on- rather than off-stage. In Shakespeare's *King Lear* Gloucester's eyes are both plucked out on-stage, and, while horrific and disgusting (special effects are obviously employed), it is quite powerful. Likewise, the on-stage disembowelment of Madama Butterfly is a shocking conclusion. However, with Albee we can possibly conclude (though not discussed by Ms Krautova) that this violence is meant only metaphorically. Certainly the violence not on display, constitutes violence/killing though curiously Ms Krautova never links this to the philosophy of E. Levinas. Again, the unfair fate (as an adopted child) the playwright personally felt may be the source of Edward Albee writing so harshly and in this way.

The second subchapter on *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the wife is again childless but instead of formally adopting an orphan, Martha fantasizes or just dreams up a perfect child. The overly domineering wife humiliating George might reveal Albee's own mother, since the dominating wife is a repeated motif in Albee's works (except for his imagined teenage parents in the final analyzed drama *The Play about the Baby*). Americans Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Sam Shepard, Tennessee Williams etc all projected autobiographical elements into many of their plays, so Albee is not unique.

Martha and George may be more authentic than Gillian and Jack regarding their marital relationship since the former couple fell in love while the latter (as well as Nick) married for money or advancement in society. Yet Martha pounds George for not taking over his history department, and classifies him as a person overall and repeatedly as weak. Weakness in the male personality (a repeated motif even in the final play) may again reflect Albee's adoptive father. There is neither a linking of male masculinity (or lack thereof) nor female domination in any of the many existentialist philosophers Ms Krautova liberally presented, even though domination is clearly an existential characteristic or power in marital relationships so strongly featured in many Albee plays: I think the wonderful Czech term *podpantoflak* may be relevant here.

In *The Play about the Baby* the immaturity of Boy and Girl may be associated with being teenagers. Albee does not designate them "young man" or "young woman" so they are not even 18 or 19, perhaps they are 15 or so, and operate as their age and maturity level allows. Thus, with young bodies maturing faster than their brains, it is probably too harsh or an overstatement to write that their love is "superficial" (p. 92) or "submerged in fantasy." It may be Albee's imagined biological parents he never could meet that he imagines in this play.

The conclusion does not compare the four analyzed Albee plays but briefly repeats what was written in the thesis. I regret that Ms. Krautova treats each play in isolation, treating each episode and "hero" without linking them to other Albee plays (and possibly revealing a development of thought in Albee's representation of women or men).

Finally, some English errors I will briefly mention though as stated above, Ms. Krautova has in the main written excellent English:

- Spelling "...contemning reviews..." p. 10 → condemning
- Repetition "...was accused of was accused of..." (p. 10)
- Not an English verb "signalizes" (p. 19) → signals
- Not an English noun "automatism" (p. 21 and p. 38) → automation
- Wrong word "inside" (p. 54) → insight
- Noun "domineering" (p. 68) → domination
- Bad quote "...nodding he head" (p. 69) → nodding her head
- Wrong English noun "witness the reveal..." (p. 71) → revelation / secret

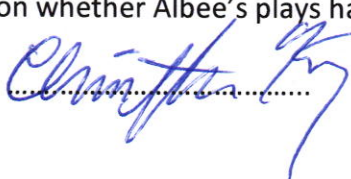
To be sure, the English written here is really fine, and I feel Ms. Krautova has done a thorough job covering Albee's difficult plays. It is an excellent effort.

Práce splňuje základní požadavky kladené na tento typ prací, a proto ji doporučuji k ústní obhajobě.

Navrhovaná známka: **výborně**

Otázky k obhajobě:

1. Besides recognizing the absurdity of our existence, what solution is offered to Albee's audiences to live more authentically and not „semiconsciously“ in any of the four plays you analyzed.
2. Ms. Krautova mentions something I did not know early in the Albee biographical section, namely that one of his grandparents owned vaudeville theaters. Do you think there is a link between Theatre of the Absurd and vaudeville's message in its entertainment?
3. Can you take your own position whether Albee's plays have, or do not have, heroes?

Podpis oponenta diplomové práce*: 

Datum: 16. 8. 2023

*nehodící se škrtněte